

# philippine studies

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## Editor's Introduction

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Literary discourse, nationhood, and international relations intersect at several points in this issue. Representations of the Philippines and Japan, covered in the first two articles, are central in constituting the flows of peoples between the two states. Convinced that movements of peoples outweigh trade and official ideologies, Lydia Yu Jose argues that migratory flows speak of the importance of non-state actors as shapers of sociocultural ties and bilateral relations. Jose thus rectifies the conventional emphasis on states as the only important agents in international relations. Based on a broad historical examination, Jose hypothesizes that Filipinos, rather than Japanese nationals, are the principal conduits for the spread of Japanese culture in the Philippines, with no hint of them becoming any less Filipino.

Caroline Sy Hau delves into the contradictions of one such migrant's portrayal of his life through an analysis of Rey Ventura's *Underground in Japan* (1992) and so provides an incisive perspective on Jose's migratory flows. For the carriers of Japanese culture in the homeland are marginalized elements in Japan that, like the Philippines, treats migrant workers as mere labor-power to meet the interests of both state and capital. Ventura's title embodies the irony that, by fleeing from the Philippine Left with which he once was associated, to live "underground" as an "illegal" worker, Ventura was far from being "undocumented" for the Japanese state was fully complicit in his supposed underground status. Japan, like other labor-strict countries, deliberately widens or tightens the gates of entry depending on the need for specific types of migrant labor. Hau's exposition of Ventura's account suggests that Overseas Filipinos, by their structural position as well as the cultural practices that travel with them, unsettle dominant views of nationhood in both origin and destination. The shaping of bilateral relations by migrants is, consequently, a very complex field.

A fresh look by Charlie Samuya Veric revalorizes the work of Edith L. Tiempo, whose poetry was once said to have been devoid of nationality.

Tiempo's use of English is not seen as a stumbling block to her acclaim as the first female National Artist for Literature. If anything, her mastery of English and its poetic form makes Tiempo the exemplar of a specifically Philippine creativity. Tiempo emblemizes the pervasive wedding of the "foreign" to the national. Veric also reads in the "alien" form of Tiempo's poetry a passion for national politics. Veric thus argues against the dichotomy between form and content. Relatedly, the *loob-labas* binary opposition can be said to be needless. But when the question of one's physical location vis-à-vis the national territory is raised, reconciling one's being spatially outside (*labas*) Philippine territory while remaining a national at heart, in one's *loob*, has not been easy. Migrants like Ventura live with this tension, and one wonders about its seeming absence in Tiempo's fusing of English to "native material."

Physical and imaginative journeys through foreign lands give rise to accidental encounters that, as Vicente Rafael points out, served as impetus for many an academic to devote one's life to the study a part of the world other than one's own. Rafael applies the notion of contingency to area studies in the United States, where Philippine studies finds one of its most fertile grounds. Area studies practitioners in the U.S. are indelibly marked by a double identity. Given the ineluctable presence of the foreign in the nation, and nationalism's cosmopolitan and plural origins, such double identity is, not surprisingly, shared by migrants and the homebound Tiempo.

Stewart Lockie reflects on the discourse the Philippine government has deployed in objecting to Australia's use of strict quarantine standards to block the entry of Philippine agricultural exports. Not only has Australia violated World Trade Organization rules but its action, according to the Philippines, has been inimical to political stability in Mindanao. Are not the two countries partners in the fight against global terrorism? Lockie unmasks the Philippine government's nationalist position as covertly promoting large, even foreign, plantations in Mindanao, and asserts that the trade dispute has no direct bearing on the food security of the Philippines' poor. However, other issues remain to be examined, including the "real" beneficiaries of Australia's protectionism.

Finally, a *mea culpa*. In our eagerness to get the previous issue out, we failed to identify Jonathan Chua as the author of the memorial on Doreen Fernandez. Jonathan, please forgive our oversight.