

# philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

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## Book Reviews

**Kale Bantigue Fajardo**

*Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization*

Joanne V. Manzano

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“Filipinos in the United States and their Literature of Exile,” in *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*, edited by Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling, 49–78; Temple University Press, 1992; “Afterword: The New Empire’s Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens: Unrepresentability and Unassimilability in Filipino American Postcolonialities,” *Critical Mass*, 1995:145–200). The editors also compare the belated emergence of Filipino Canadian studies with the more established field of Filipino American studies. Canadian multicultural politics is also compared in several chapters with the “melting pot” paradigm of the United States. The legacy of American colonialism in the Philippines is taken too into account by various authors.

This emphasis on the United States is justifiable given the historical entanglements between the US and the Philippines and the former’s geographical and political relations with Canada. As several contributions to this volume demonstrate, the emphasis on the US can be productive analytically. At the same time, one wonders whether this emphasis can also be limiting. This is glaringly apparent in De Leon’s discussion of colorism, which she traces ultimately to the racial discourses during the American colonial period in the Philippines. This unfortunately renders pre- and post-American-period antecedents of Filipino Canadian colorism invisible and inadvertently flattens racial dynamics during the American colonial period. Meanwhile, Davidson’s otherwise gem of a chapter could have benefited from an engagement with recent ethnographic work coming out of the Philippines on the salience of siblingship on Filipino kinship and migration. Quite tellingly, while many of the chapters in this volume take on a transnational optic, not one chapter presents ethnographic or archival data generated in the Philippines. Very few chapters also engage with either Philippine studies literature published in the Philippines or studies of diasporic Filipinos outside of North America. Future Filipino Canadian studies scholarship will do well by broadening its theoretical and empirical engagements, and thus escaping the confines of an hegemonic but insular academic formation.

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KALE BANTIGUE FAJARDO

## **Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization**

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011; Quezon City:  
University of the Philippines Press, 2012. 251 pages.

Since the globalization of the maritime industry in the late 1980s, the Philippines has remained the world’s top supplier of seafarers. As such, various studies have examined the adverse effects of economic globalism on Filipino workers and how they contend with new and morphed forms of exploitation in various spatial and temporal circumstances. However, because radical ideas and actions are proven to harm, even alter, the capitalist hegemonic agenda, resistances against and subversions of economic globalism are suppressed. These silences, if broken, may fill in some gaps in globalization studies. Spaces *in between* are usually overlooked as discourses locate places and people in the center or on the fringes. But in *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization*, the overlapping, liminal, and simultaneous are foregrounded in analyzing the complexity of seafaring and masculinities in the context of globalization.

The author of *Filipino Crosscurrents*, Kale Bantigue Fajardo, is an associate professor of Asian/American Studies at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. He was born in Malolos, Bulacan, and raised in Portland, Oregon. Fajardo completed his undergraduate degree at Cornell University and obtained his MA and PhD degrees in cultural anthropology from the University of California, Santa Cruz.

The crosscurrents framework of this book has four elements: (1) oceanic or maritime border zones; (2) oceanic trajectories of seafaring, sea-based migration, maritime trade, and global shipping; (3) alternative temporalities and spatializations of globalizations; and (4) heterogeneous masculinities (23–24). Through this framework, Fajardo argues that Filipino/a seafaring and seamen as key masculine cultural and economic spaces and figures are a result of neoliberal economics, capitalist globalization, and overseas migration. The author also makes a case that this heteronormative representation of maleness and manhood is produced and reproduced by the government, but Filipino seafarers find alternative spaces and nonconventional ways of defining masculinities. Through interdisciplinary ethnography, the author

unfolds his arguments in four chapters, each part contributing to new ways of understanding gender and maritime issues.

Commencing the narrative with the Manila–Acapulco Commemorative Regatta (also known as The Race of the Century) in 1998, Fajardo illustrates the government’s effort to reenact the glorious past of the Manila–Acapulco galleons and regain Manila’s reputation as one of the principal ports of world commerce. Fittingly the regatta symbolizes a more aggressive economic agenda in the race for the world’s investments, a year after the Asian financial crisis. He then validates the state’s active role in emphasizing heteronormative citizens who are perpetually indebted to the nation. For example, promotional campaigns like *Tagumpay Nating Lahat* highlight masculinities that are based on fulfilling obligations to the family and nation according to the norms and policies set by the state, even as resistance is policed through watch lists and blacklists. Implicitly obedience and compliance remain among the criteria to become an exemplary overseas migrant. However, seafarers can also challenge the discourse: some of them “jump ship,” or fail to report for duty when the ship sails, and escape from state-sanctioned economic and cultural impositions. Tired of sending money to family members and the government, seafarers run away and seek new employment on foreign soil without legal documents. Citing various ethnographic and historical data, Fajardo regards this act as courageous and a subversion of the colonial construction of “utang na loob” (debt of gratitude).

The second half of the book focuses on the different perspectives of time, space, and masculinities in the global economy. The ethnography on land and at sea reveals concepts of time that are different from Harvey’s generalized analysis of the annihilation of space by time. I agree with Fajardo that persons, groups, and nations have different capabilities in conquering space as a result of uneven economic development. Through the high speed of ultra-large carriers that sail on the world’s oceans, increased containerization, and other advancements in shipping technology, time is made faster for capitalists. Modern machines discharge and load freight in just a few hours so that the vessel can again sail immediately. The crew is forced to deal with fast-paced operations because profits increase when shipments reach their destinations at the shortest possible time (i.e., the conquest of space). However, seafarers describe their time at sea as monotonous and boring, while they regard the ship as a prison where life is nonexistent (“walang buhay dito”). Similarly unemployed seafarers who linger along T. M. Kalaw

Ave. in Manila experience time moving slowly because of the vast surplus of labor, excessive training requirements, and the bureaucratic drawback that prolongs their jobless state. Ship owners, charterers, manning agencies, and governments can be in control of time, while seafarers from underdeveloped nations are trapped on the vessel and on land.

Fajardo also directs the reader to various forms of subversions that take place on the vessel. Despite stringent situations on board to regulate seamen’s activities, they still find time for recreation in watching movies, eating Pinoy food, and sharing stories. Aside from constricting working conditions, the heteronormative culture of seafaring is also subject to contestations. On the one hand, gathered narratives on ship reveal traditional masculinities, which hold for example that only real men can withstand conditions in the deep blue sea. On the other hand, Fajardo interrogates dominant gender representations through the ethnographic accounts of seafarers who have “intimate relationalities” with Filipino tomboys. Tomboy as defined in *Filipino Crosscurrents* “broadly refers to Filipino masculine or male-identified fe/males who generally have sexual/emotional relationships with feminine females . . . and can also be understood as a form of transgenderism or transexualism where tomboys enact or embody transgressive sex/gender practices and/or identities” (153–54). Critiquing the essentialist figure of the tomboy as biologically female, Fajardo contends that the tomboy can be a symbol for masculinity, manhood, or *lalaki*-ness as narratives from seafarers suggest. He advances his argument by using the transportation framework, which presumes that travel/movement/voyage contains culture as it relocates subjects to another space or place and suggests sex/gender fluidities, inclusiveness, and nondualities.

Fajardo is particularly compelling in underscoring constructs and realities and their overlaps and contradictions. Through various media, the government is primarily responsible for the representation of the Filipino seaman and of seafaring as masculine. As “bagong bayani” (modern hero), migrant workers contribute millions of dollars to their families and to the Philippine economy by valiantly enduring the challenges of their profession. But amid free trade in a borderless world, the Philippines remains weak, disempowered, and “feminine” (in a colonial and orientalist perspective) under the control of imperialist nations. To promote its workers to foreign shipping lines, the state reinforces the discourse of the Philippines as having a cheap and docile labor market similar to those of other underdeveloped countries with a large labor surplus. The government is also complicit in

propagating the idea that oceans are an abstract quantity of distance and time, thus obscuring the social relations that happen at sea. Furthermore, the seafarers are treated as spectators instead of active participants in the maritime enterprise, Filipino identity formation, and nation building.

The material reality of the maritime industry, nonetheless, is beset by conditions that breed subversion, which Fajardo brings forth in and through the narratives. One of the strong points of the book lies in the accounts of the author and the seafarers that disclose personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences. These serve as a counterdiscourse to the states' and corporations' prevalent, and at times erroneous, representation of seafarers. By foregrounding the multifaceted discourses in globalized maritime and gender studies, the author succeeds in interrogating beliefs regarding history, culture, and gender that privilege particular representations and constructs.

The study clearly delimits its scope, and perhaps the subsequent discussions may not be within range; however, "oppositional masculinities" may also include more upfront contestations against injustices like genuine unionism and labor strikes. I believe that these actions fall within the spectrum of masculinities that denounces colonial, capitalist, racist, misogynistic, heteropatriarchal, and heteronormative masculinities, even if they are traditionally depicted as solely political and "male." I also believe that, by the "feminine" asserting himself or herself in various ways, she or he may also be able to liberate identities and discourses. For so long as discourses and movements challenge conformity and passivity, they can be regarded as nonconventional and nonnormative.

The cultural critique that Fajardo employs can be expanded in future research to include how critical assessments translate to the actual transformation of unequal political, economic, and cultural systems in global capitalism. It will be relevant, for instance, to do an in-depth study on the concept of tomboy-ness as "pagkalalaki" or manhood and its role in the current neoliberal system. Hopefully, his call for dialogue and debate leads to a richer exchange in gender and maritime scholarship. In conclusion, *Filipino Crosscurrents* may be one of the first erudite publications on seafaring and heterogeneous masculinities in the Philippines and a significant contribution to the existing literature on maritime and gender studies.

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OONA PAREDES

## **A Mountain of Difference: The Lumad in Early Colonial Mindanao**

Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2013. 195 pages.

It is no secret that Philippine history tends to be Manila- or Tagalog-centric and relegates other regions such as Mindanao to a peripheral position in the national narrative. Among the various groups in peripheral Mindanao, Muslims gain the most attention in historical studies. If Muslims of Mindanao occupy a footnote in traditional Philippine history, the Lumad or indigenous peoples of Mindanao are the footnote to the footnote. The Lumad groups enter Philippine history only with the arrival of the Jesuits in 1859, because the former are usually portrayed as previously living in ahistorical isolation from the rest of the world. Oona Paredes tries to redress this neglect by showing the agency of the different Lumad groups in their contacts with Spaniards ever since the early seventeenth century. One reason for the ahistorical portrayal of the Lumad prior to 1859 is the overreliance on Jesuit sources that typically downplay the role played by the Recollects in northern and eastern Mindanao in the earlier centuries. The ace up Paredes's sleeve is her access to the Recollect archives, which are notorious for being closed to outside researchers. Thankfully Paredes does not let the opportunity go to waste by extracting as much anthropological insight from the interactions between Lumad groups and the Recollects from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century.

Unlike most historical works, the book does not attempt to convey a single narrative with a unified start, middle, and end. The author chooses particular episodes in Lumad history from different ethnic groups and time periods, and analyzes each of them in the light of current anthropological theories on Southeast Asians. While the first few chapters are dedicated to the theoretical framework and the historical context of Spanish colonialism and evangelization, the succeeding chapters discuss distinct case studies, such as the Kagayanon conversion in the 1620s; the Caraga revolt in 1631; three separate petitions in 1722, 1838, and 1839 when Lumad datus requested Spanish presence in their settlements; and the Lumad's appropriation of Spanish colonial symbols of power, such as the golden cane and military titles. What ties these disparate chapters together is Paredes's overall attempt to explore the "curious relationship" (21) between the Lumad groups and the Recollect missionaries.