

The Filipino Diaspora: A Historical and Critical Perspective

By Jaime N. Soriano¹

Introduction: The Diachronic Setting

Ancient Greece pioneered early civilization and culture long before the advent of Christianity and the Roman Empire. Some historians say that in the 4th century BC, it had the most advanced economy in the world.

With increasing population and limited territorial domain, the Greeks, particularly during the time of Alexander the Great, pursued expansion efforts by annexing, settling and occupying neighboring lands as colonies. To facilitate colonization, citizens of a grand city were asked to migrate to conquered lands to ease assimilation of every colonized territory into the Greek empire. And these ancient Greek migrants were referred to as '*Diaspora*'.

They say that the original concept of '*Diaspora*' changed later when the Old Testament was translated to Greek to refer to the Jewish population exiled from Judea by the Babylonians and Jerusalem by the Roman Empire.

Now the generic term '*diaspora*' has reference to any people or ethnic population forced or induced to leave traditional ethnic homelands and resettle or take refuge in other communities. For centuries after the collapse of the kingdoms of ancient Greece, world history is a living witness to the present-day context of the global *diasporas* arising from expulsion, slavery, racism, war and other conflicts, or even by reason of natural disasters or poverty and severe economic conditions in their home states.

Generic *diaspora* is a compulsive phenomenon and involves massive movement of people seeking safe haven from adverse conditions.

Pre-Historic Times to 1898: From Boatmen to Boat Workers

Before Ferdinand Magellan laid claim of the Philippine islands for Spain in 1521, the country was already a favored destination for habitation first by the Aetas or '*Negritos*' (the Spanish term for small black people), then by the Austronesians that originally came from southern China, next by the Majapahit

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Empire of India, and later by Islam through the Arab merchants that did business in certain parts of the archipelago.

According to Spanish conquistador Miguel Lopez de Legaspi, who incidentally founded the first colony in the Philippine islands in 1565, he discovered the existence of relatively small coastal communities called '*barangay*', a term derived from an ancient Malayo-Polynesian boat called '*balangay*'. It is believed that during the pre-colonial times, these coastal communities were formed by settlers from other places in Asia who came into the country's islands by boat and decided to permanently settle here.

In short, the islands of the Philippines were a favorite destination of migrants then coming from other parts of the world.

There were tales that Enrique of Malacca, who accompanied Magellan when he circumnavigated the globe, was a Filipino from the island of Cebu. This was the assertion of Filipino historian Carlos Quirino and Laurence Bergreen in his book: "Over the Edge of the World: Magellan's Terrifying Circumnavigation of the Globe".

They say that Magellan bought Enrique from the slave market in Malacca when he was about eighteen years old. Allegedly, Magellan was able to communicate with the natives of *Homonhon* and became friends to *Rajah Kolambu* of *Limasawa* and *Rajah Humabon* of Cebu because of Enrique's native tongue.

Italian navigator Antonio Pigafetta, who accompanied Magellan during his voyage, said that Enrique was even named in Magellan's last will and testament. And after Magellan's death in the hands of Lapu-Lapu during the Battle of Mactan, Enrique became a free man.

If this account were true, Enrique would have been the first recorded Filipino foreign employed seafarer. But he was not the last.

For nearly three centuries lasting until 1815, Spanish trading ships known as the 'Manila Galleons' sailed the Pacific Ocean to bring goods from Manila to Acapulco (in present-day Mexico). Filipino crew members on board these ships were known as the "Manila Men" or the "Luzones Indios".

Aboard these ships also were Filipino natives, who were transported to American shores, that included chieftains accused of insurrection or sentenced with separation from their followers, young women servants accompanying merchants and paying passengers aboard the galleons.

Eloisa Gomez Borah in her work “Chronology of Filipinos in America Pre-1898” said that Filipinos, known as Luzon Indians, were among the crew and the landing party of the Spanish galleon, *Nuestra Senora de Buena Esperanza*, with Captain Pedro de Unamuno landing in Morro Bay, along the central coast of California on 17 October 1587. Filipino sailors were also aboard the *San Agustin* commanded by Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeno when it shipwrecked near Point Reyes by the mouth of San Francisco Bay, California on 6 November 1595. Francisco Flores of Cebu arrived in Texas in 1822 aboard a freighter on which he served a cabin boy and settled and died there at the age of 108.

There were reports of Filipinos jumping ship upon reaching the high seas or the shores of foreign territories because of the very hostile conditions they had to bear on board these Spanish vessels.

All these details would show that, by force of event and circumstances, the first job of the Filipino as an overseas worker was as a mariner.

During the Spanish regime, some illustrious Filipinos also traveled abroad for various reasons but not to work in a foreign land or for their colonizer, or to escape a difficult and oppressive life in their own country.

For at least three centuries, Filipinos suffered much discrimination, abuse and exploitation in the hands of their colonial ruler. They were made to work in big tracts of lands, or from place to place, as slaves to produce cash crops and other products for Spanish trade.

Instead of avoiding their oppressors by seeking sanctuary somewhere else, the Filipino people endured and later found themselves engaged in an underground struggle to overthrow the Spanish colonial regime and forging an unholy alliance with another colonizer, the United States.

1898 to 1946: The Realization of the American Dream

The declaration of war by the United States against Spain in 25 April 1898 abruptly ended centuries of Spanish domination of the Philippines but only to fall into the trap of serving another colonial master for the next forty-eight years.

The American era in Philippine history did not exactly result in a *diaspora*. But it did open the eyes of some Filipinos that social, economic and even political opportunities abound in the so-called land of the milk and honey. In short, migration was viewed as an option and not as a matter of need or survival.

They say that the first Filipino immigrants who set foot in the US mainland were children, of influential Filipino families with close affinity to US officials, They were called '*pensionados*' because they were enticed to study in American schools at the expense of the US government, obviously to serve and propagate American culture, influence and interests in Philippine soil.

There were also some Filipinos who volunteered and served the American armed forces during the First World War and opted to stay in the US soil after the armed conflict.

Sometime in 1906, there were reports that a group of 15 Filipino men, who hailed from rural areas in northern and central Philippines first arrived in Hawaii to work in sugar plantations. They were referred to as '*sacadas*', who may be considered as the first batch of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) that left the country officially to work abroad.

They were recruited by the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association, who could easily qualify as the country's first overseas employment provider.

The first law in the country that sought to regulate overseas employment was passed by the American controlled Philippine Legislature in 1915, Act No. 2486. The law provided for the appointment of a commissioner to look after the welfare of Filipino workers overseas. This law was amended in 1924 with Act No. 3148. In 1928, Act No. 3957 was also enacted to regulate the operations of private recruitment agencies not covered by Act No. 2486.

They say that as of 1930 there were at least 150,000 Filipinos who served as contract workers in sugar and pineapple plantations in Hawaii. After their labor contracts expired, some of these workers returned to the country while other went to the US mainland to work in canneries in Alaska or as farmers in Washington and fruit pickers in California.

During this time also, some Filipino students of poor families also tried their luck in the United States to pursue their education and for which they had to mortgage family properties to cover their fares and initial subsistence. While in America, many of them had to accept and take menial jobs just to continue supporting themselves.

The Great Depression that began in 1929 also resulted in the repatriation of more than 7,000 Filipinos for lack of work, despite the fact that theoretically they should be deemed as American nationals after Spain ceded the Philippines to the US by virtue of the Treaty of Paris of 1898.

The great debate though as to the application of the US Constitution to the annexed territories that included the Philippines led the US Supreme Court to rule in the so-called 'Insular Cases' in the early twentieth century that full constitutional rights did not automatically extend to all areas under American control.

Consequently, the 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act, officially known as the Philippine Independence Act, was enacted into law. This effectively stripped Filipinos of their status as US nationals. The law reclassified all Filipinos that were living in the United States as aliens for purposes of immigration to America. Filipinos were no longer allowed to work legally in the US, and a quota of 50 immigrants per year was established.

In the early forties, there were reports that some 70,000 Filipinos were staying in the US as migrant workers.

American rule had to be interrupted for a few years though because the country became a casualty of war in the hands of the Japanese Imperial Army as a result of World War II. Filipinos fought the Japanese soldiers side by side with their American counterparts.

After the brief Japanese conquest and following the declaration of Philippine Independence in 1946, the US immigrants' quota for Filipinos was increased to a hundred per year. At this time though, many of the Filipino immigrants in the US were war brides under the 1945 War Brides Act.

In 1952, former US President Harry S. Truman signed into law the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. This statute allowed Asian residents to apply for American citizenship. Filipinos who served in the US military for three years including the members of their families were accorded a similar privilege.

In 1965, former US President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Immigration and Naturalization Services Act of 1965 that abolished the national-origin quotas. The law called for an annual limitation of 170,000 visas for immigrants from Eastern Hemisphere countries with no more than 20,000 per country. By 1968, the annual limitation from the Western Hemisphere was set at 120,000 immigrants, with visas available on a first-come, first-served basis.

From 1946 to 1965, records indicate over 34,000 Filipinos leaving for the US to work and emigrate.

With the liberalization of US immigration laws, the influx of Filipino professionals emigrating to American soil began but not in droves as it is now.

There was a clear intent on the part of Filipinos and their families who chose to go to the United States then to abandon Philippine residency permanently and this desire was not simply driven by the need for foreign employment or the scarcity of domestic opportunities.

1946 to 1972: The Failed Promise of a Great Republic

With its rich, vast and abundant natural resources, the Philippines would always be an ideal, if not a perfect, colony to any foreign power.

Proof of this was the controversial Bell Trade Act of 1946 that gave US citizens and corporations equal access to the country's natural resources. This was later revised in 1955 by the Laurel-Langley Agreement that gave Americans the same rights as Filipinos within the Philippines, even long after the US officially yielded Philippine sovereignty.

Within the decade following the declaration of Philippine independence, there was a time when country's economic performance was second best in Asia, next to Japan.

In the fifties, Filipinos started to find job opportunities in other Asian countries as barbers, artists, musicians and contract workers. It was also during this period that the Philippine government signed what could be considered perhaps as the first bilateral labor agreement with the United Kingdom for 25,000 Filipinos to work for five years in British colonies in North Borneo (now Sabah and Sarawak).

In the sixties, Filipinos worked in logging camps in Kalimantan in Indonesia. Construction workers were recruited for the US military in Vietnam, Thailand and Guam. Filipino artists started performing in Asian capitals. Canada also started to recruit some Filipino women professionals.

In 1969, 3,694 Filipinos, most of whom were blue-collar workers, started their exodus to the Middle East because of the massive infrastructure and development projects being undertaken in the countries of the that region as a result of the spiraling crude oil prices.

Although some says that the export of Philippine labor really began in the sixties, still there was actually no real pressure for Filipinos then to seek

greener pasture abroad to earn a decent living and leave behind their families momentarily.

But over time the country's economy started to slow down.

In 1961, former President Diosdado P. Macapagal upon the suggestion of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) introduced tariff reductions to ensure the free inflow of imports and free repatriation of dollar profits of foreign investors. This measure, according to Ricco Alejandro M. Santos in his virtual work 'Martial Law in Retrospect', set the economy into a tailspin, wiping out more than 10,000 businesses in the process.

The result was the resurgence of anti-imperialist movements that eventually led to the formation of the Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People's Army and the surge of the so-called First Quarter Storm in the late sixties to the early seventies.

1972 to 1986: The Beginnings of the (D)iaspora

With a languishing economy aggravated by socio-political upheaval, President Ferdinand E. Marcos placed the entire country under martial law. The administration of former US President Richard M. Nixon hailed the Marcos initiative and expected a growth in foreign investments in the country.

Santos observed that: "With the nationalist trend on a roll, perpetuating colonial privileges for foreign interests as the Laurel-Langley Agreement and Military Bases Agreement soon to expire were in dire peril. For the powers-that-be, it was time to cut short the growth of the anti-imperialist movement responsible for the nationalist mood in the streets as well as in the halls of government." And martial rule was the answer.

As if these sad developments were not enough, an oil crisis eventually hit the world in 1973 as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict. With the dependence of industrialized nations on oil from the Middle East, prices increased, production cut, and the embargo of crude oil shipments to the West suppressed economic activity and resulted to dramatic inflation in the economies of the targeted countries that included the United States. As an American ally, the country was not spared.

To top it all, the country's external debts were growing by leaps and bounds. By 1976, the Philippines was among the top 15 heavily indebted countries of the world.

At the same time, the Marcos administration was also hounded with issues on behest loans, crony capitalism, budgetary deficits, and charges of corruption. Under these conditions, how would President Marcos keep the economy at least intact?

When martial law was declared in 1972, the total deployment of Filipinos abroad was only 14,366 with 38% going to the US and trust territories while 26% were working in high seas as seafarers. In 1973, total deployment reached 36,418 and in 1974, 33,157.

Meant as a stop gap, short term measure, Marcos' longest serving Labor Minister, Blas F. Ople, proposed and officially began the Philippine overseas employment program in 1974 with the enactment of a presidential edict known as the "Labor Code of the Philippines" and by successfully negotiating a labor market for Filipinos workers to work in oil fields and construction sites in Saudi Arabia and other Middle East countries. Years of efforts though to formalize these labor agreements with host countries like Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Oman were not successful.

The Middle East was a strategic target for Filipino workers and contractors then because most of the Arab nations had huge cash surplus as a result of the 1973 Oil Crisis that were readily allocated for huge construction and infrastructure projects.

The biggest recruiters at that time of Philippine labor were Philippine firms like the state-owned Philippine National Construction Corporation (PNCC), Engineering Equipment Inc. (EEI) and Land Oil Resources Corporation that bagged million dollar contracts during the era of the Middle East construction boom. Private placement or recruitment companies hardly play a vital role.

During the Marcos years, the Philippine government also entered into bilateral labor agreements with other countries one after another, notably with the following nations: Iran (1975), Nauru and Nigeria (1976), Libya and Papua New Guinea (1979), Qatar and Jordan (1981), Iraq (1982) and Liberia (1985).

The government also established its first Philippine embassy in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in 1973. And this was followed with embassies and consulates in Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and Israel.

Initially, Ople formed the Overseas Employment Development Board (OEDB) and the National Seamen Board to implement overseas employment as a

government priority program. During its seven years of existence, OEDB sent more than 77,000 workers in 112 countries and opened up 52 new labor markets.

Later, Ople reorganized these government agencies and spearheaded the creation of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), the Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration (OWWA) and later the Commission on Filipino Overseas (CFO).

But many Filipino entrepreneurs also foresaw the good prospects of the overseas employment industry and thus an initial group of private fee-charging recruitment agencies began opening up for business in the seventies.

For a while in early January 1982, government suspended the issuance of new licenses to recruitment companies except to construction companies with foreign projects provided that they do not charge any placement fees.

By the end of the year 1982, however, there were already 748 authorized recruitment agencies that increased to 1,023 in 1983, this time deploying 95% of all Filipino contract workers

Recruitment companies then started organizing their respective overseas employment industry associations both for the land-based and sea-based sectors. Organizations like PASEI, OPAP, ASCOP, ASPROE, FAME, COMMA, PAMDEL, PILMAT, PHILAMKOR, PEEPA, CALEA, APRADA, AMOSUP, UFS, MAMAP and similar other associations were born.

Between the years 1975 to 1994, the overseas employment program generated more than seven million jobs, half of which were contracted between the years 1990 to 1994.

The move also generated substantial foreign exchange remittance that helped shore up the country's economy. From 1975 to 1994, official foreign exchange remittance totaled 18.1 billion US dollars, representing 14.59 % of total exports and 3.17% of gross domestic product during the same period.

The vision though of Ople for the transfer of technology into the country via the contract workers who would come home bringing with them new skills they learned from abroad remained amiss.

By the end of the Marcos regime in 1986, gross deployment from 1975 hit 2,372,506 contract workers.

1986 to 1992: Enduring Women Power After People Power

The bloodless People Power Revolution in February 1986 toppled the strong-man rule of former President Marcos.

Hopes were high for a new beginning and for the economy to finally recover and take off after years of doldrums.

But after EDSA 1, the exodus of Filipina workers destined to work in foreign countries as domestic helpers, entertainers, caregivers, nurses, sales and office workers and as professional or technical employees also began.

In 1986, the Japanese government granted the Philippines a special annual quota consisting of thousand of visas for Filipino entertainers as its contribution to the country's economic recovery program. From 1998 to 2003, over 360,000 Filipinos left to work in Japan, the bulk of them are female entertainers. The trend only stopped after the Japanese government imposed stricter visa requirements on foreign entertainers in late 2004.

The demand for Filipina domestic helpers also grew by leaps and bounds, especially in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain) and neighboring Asian countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia.

In 1988, POEA saw a market potential for Filipino workers in Taiwan and actively pursued jobs that involved female workers.

Demand for domestic helpers doubled in 1989 from 1988 in Hong Kong.

By 1987, Filipina women already accounted 48.2% of total overseas deployment. And by 1993, the ratio increased to 55%, 64% by the year 2000, and 70% by the year 2003. Most of the deployment was for the so-called 'vulnerable skills' and the bulk of these women were single, some of whom even ended up as victims of physical and sexual abuse, trafficking mysterious deaths and other unfortunate fate.

In 1988, President Corazon C. Aquino imposed a global ban on the deployment of female workers to force host countries to negotiate for better terms. Immediately, countries like the US, Canada and some European states sought, and were granted, exemption. Saudi Arabia, as an act of implied retaliation, slowed down visa releases until after the lifting of the ban. Singapore was the sixteenth county to have the ban lifted in only six months after its imposition.

But like her predecessor, President Aquino also embraced the overseas employment program to salvage a battered economy brought about by persistent coup attempts from the military establishment and a debilitating power crisis. She acknowledged their invaluable contributions by referring to them as the '*modern-day heroes*'.

Various measures were implemented, and continue to be implemented, if only to protect the country's labor sector abroad ranging from a more active consular involvement in host nations, to pre-employment seminars, adoption of workers' welfare and insurance programs and assistance, and other similar incentives, if only to strengthen, and ensure the continuity of, government's overseas employment agenda.

The public consciousness and awakening on the pitiful, lowly, and helpless plight of many Filipinos abroad workers resulted in the pro-active involvement and mushrooming of civil society groups dealing with advocacy, research, support, assistance, programs involving or affecting migrant workers. Organizations like Migrante, Akbayan, CBCP-ECMI, PMRN, and Scalabrini were born.

The Gulf War caused by the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces in 1990 resulted in a decline of deployment in the Middle East. Necessarily, government had to take advantage of the opening of the labor market in the Asian region, notably for the country's female workers.

A year before President Aquino turned over the presidency to Fidel V. Ramos in 1992, news headlines were frenzied on the mysterious death of a 20-year old Filipina entertainer working in Japan, Maricris Sioson. This incident prompted the institutionalization of the so-called 'Artist Record Book' (ARB) but more significantly it brought back to the public consciousness the issues of abuses being suffered by Filipina workers abroad.

On the domestic front, the campaign against illegal recruitment and illegal exactions victimizing gullible Filipinos in dire need of foreign jobs abound and continue to abound despite the stiff penalties and stringent administrative regulations imposed by various laws.

Just to stress the importance of the overseas employment program in the national economy, some forms of illegal recruitment are even considered until this day as a crime of economic sabotage.

In a span of six years, the administration of President Aquino deployed a gross total of 2,546,467 Filipino contract workers, more or less.

In 1991, the labor export of the country finally went passed beyond 600,000 Filipinos for the first time.

1992 to 2001: From Contract Workers to Migrant Workers

With President Fidel V. Ramos at the helm of political leadership, the country's economy started to move upscale. Momentarily, the economy enjoyed a period of growth and stability.

On the eve of President Ramos' 67th birthday in March 1995 and while on a foreign trip, Flor R. Contemplacion, a domestic helper, was hanged in Singapore for killing another Filipina domestic worker, Delia Magat, despite persistent government's official representation not to with no less than Singapore Prime Minister Go Chok Tong.

The incident led to the resignation of President Ramos' labor and foreign affairs secretary and several other government officials. Diplomatic relations with Singapore were suspended. A special probe body known as the 'Gancayco Commission' was formed to look into the case. Meanwhile, the streets of Manila were again haunted with almost daily mass actions and protests that hugged media attention for quite sometime. The popularity of the Ramos government suffered an all time low.

As part of the effort to repair the damage to his regime, President Ramos facilitated and rushed the passage of Republic Act No. 8042, also known as the 'Migrant Workers Act of 1995'.

The said law defines a 'migrant worker' as a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which he or she is not a legal resident to be used interchangeably with overseas Filipino worker.

In the meantime, another Filipina working in the United Arab Emirates also as a domestic helper, Sarah Balabagan, had a death verdict in September 1995 for the murder of her abusive Arab employer. Fortunately, through diplomatic channels and negotiations, Balabagan was finally released in August 1996.

Despite the initial growth in the economy, President Ramos never abandoned the overseas employment program. He personally labeled the Filipino overseas workers as “*our citizens of the world*”.

As the term of President Ramos was about to end, a period of economic arrest denominated as the ‘Asian Financial Crisis’, that begun in Thailand in July 1997, struck the economies of Asia. The crises hurt the Philippine economy and caused the peso-dollar exchange to fall drastically from P26 to P38 in the year 2000 and finally to P40 when the crisis was over before the expiry of the Ramos’ presidency.

To take advantage of higher and better income opportunities, especially with a deteriorating peso, hundreds of thousands of Filipinos continued their pursuit for overseas employment during the Ramos administration.

As proof, by the time President Ramos handed over the presidency to President Estrada, his administration deployed, more or less, a gross total of 4,235,481 overseas workers.

And the pattern of massive deployment of overseas Filipino workers continued even during the regime of former President Joseph E. Estrada in 1998 that unceremoniously ended with the so-called ‘People Power 2’, just right after his impeachment trial on charges of corruption began.

Even with his short-lived term of three years, his government’s gross deployment still hit approximately 2,094,470.

2001 to 2005: From Economic Policy to Foreign Policy

After the reigns of political power was physically handed over to President Gloria-Macapagal Arroyo in 2001, the overseas employment program became more aggressive and was pursued as a development strategy.

It was not only a centerpiece of President Arroyo’s poverty alleviation program but also the ‘*pillar of the government foreign policy*’.

With almost a third of the country’s labor force being unemployed and underemployed and with unemployment and underemployment rates reaching record levels in 2005, which was aggravated by successive hikes in the prices of fuel and power, the economy became more and more beholden and dependent to the foreign exchange remittance of Filipinos working abroad.

Employment contracts abroad exceeded the one million mark in 2005, with a total deployment of 1.2 million Filipinos for overseas jobs in over 180 country destinations.

The bulk or 95% of all deployment by the Philippines to foreign employees, were at the instance of 1,363 licensed recruitment agencies, 1,028 of them were land-based, and the remaining 335 were sea-based, despite the ‘Hard to Enter, Easy to Go’ policy of the POEA that saw a 19% decline in the issuance of new license in 2005.

Foreign remittance reached an all time record of US\$10.7 billion in 2005, or 25% higher than the year previous, or almost 9% of all the remittances for the last fifteen years. And this accounts only for remittances through the banking channels. Interestingly, 60% of these total record-breaking remittances came from Filipinos in the US, with Filipinos in Saudi Arabia contributing only almost 9%, as far second.

No wonder, the country now ranks fifth in the ranking of World Bank of countries based on overseas workers’ remittances. Notably, the peso-dollar exchange rates strengthened from a high of P56 to a little less than P50 in recent weeks because of these remittances.

So far the only incidents that almost threatened or derailed the overseas employment program under the Arroyo regime were the epidemic of the ‘severe acute respiratory syndrome’ (SARS) that hit China, Taiwan, Canada, Hong Kong and Singapore in 2002-2003, the US-led Iraq War that began in 2003, and the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah Conflict.

The nation mourned when Blas F. Ople died on 14 December 2003, while serving as Foreign Affairs Secretary of President Arroyo. Interestingly, he died of heart attack while taking part in the annual Muslim pilgrimage to the cities of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.

Ople was extolled and hailed as the acknowledged “Father of Overseas Employment” by Filipinos here and abroad, and even by foreign dignitaries. The POEA headquarters at the corner of Ortigas Avenue and EDSA in Mandaluyong City was renamed in his honor immediately after his death.

Just like in previous regimes, the bulk of Filipinos seeking foreign employment are skilled workers and those in the ‘vulnerable’ sectors. During the last several years, the pattern has slowly shifted to the professional sector particularly on nurses, caregivers, teachers and highly skilled-workers.

Between the years 1994 to 2003, more than 85,000 nurses had left the country and they say that at least 15,000 are leaving annually nowadays, which is just more or less in the vicinity of those who passed in every licensure examinations. Even medical doctors and other non-medical professionals have shifted into taking a nursing course to find better opportunities abroad.

Thousands of school teachers also left the country either to pursue their profession in foreign schools or to work as caregivers or domestic helpers. This holds true also for commercial pilots, aircraft mechanics, air traffic comptrollers, plant engineers, and other very specialized skills.

The stock estimate of Filipinos overseas prepared by the Commission of Filipinos Overseas as of December 2004 would show the following:

1. The total number of 8.08 million Filipinos abroad is over 9% of the total estimated population of 86.24 million as of July 2004, or almost 23% of the total 35.83 million in the labor force during the same period.
2. Of the total number of 8.08 million Filipinos abroad, 3.59 million, or 44%, are contract workers expected to return to the country upon the termination of their foreign employment; 3.18 million, or almost 40% are already foreign immigrants; while 1.29 million, or 16%, are undocumented and overstaying in their host countries. If the statistics of overstaying-undocumented Filipinos have no intention of returning home, the country stands to lose 60% of all Filipinos overseas to their host countries.
3. Of the contract workers, 1.4 million, or 39%, are in the Middle East, 1.0 million, or 28%, in various countries in Asia, and the remaining 33% are scattered in different parts of the globe.
4. Of the Filipino foreign immigrants, 2.27 million, or more than 71% are in the United States, and the rest of the 29% are permanently living in all other countries but with heavy concentration in Japan, Canada, Australia and European nations.
5. Of the undocumented Filipinos abroad, 27% are in the US, 34% are in Asia with a very heavy concentration in Malaysia, 11% in Europe principally in Italy, almost 9% in the Middle East, and the remaining 19% residing in different parts of the world.

The foregoing statistics are consistent with the assumption that many of the Filipino professionals who leave the country day-in and day-out particularly for countries like the US, Canada, Australia, and the nations of Europe, eye foreign

employment in the short-term and permanent migration, or even foreign citizenship, for themselves and their families in the long-term. Others who do not qualify for foreign residency for lack of qualifications would rather overstay and outwit immigration officials of their host countries.

Certainly, this paradigm shift in orientation from being contract workers to foreign migrants, or from deployment to emigration, would result to brain drain and a sad flight of Filipino human capital.

For the years 2001 to 2005 alone, the Arroyo government had already deployed a total of approximately 4,765,926 OFWs.

Summarizing the overseas employment program based on yearly deployments from 1972 until 2005 would show the following:

PRESIDENT	REGIME	YEARS	TOTAL	% SHARE	RANK
Marcos	14 yrs	1972-1986	2,456,447	15	Fourth
Aquino	6 yrs	1986-1992	2,546,467	16	Third
Ramos	6 yrs	1992-1998	4,235,481	26	Second
Estrada	3 yrs	1998-2001	2,094,470	13	Fifth
Arroyo	4 yrs	2001-2005	4,765,926	30	First
TOTAL	33 yrs	1972-2005	16,098,791	100	

(Culled and extrapolated from statistics of the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration)

2005 Onwards: Impression

What was intended as a temporarily economic relief for the country in 1974 has now become a vital and almost permanent economic policy of every political administration, as it was in fact a critical strategy for more than three decades to keep the economy afloat.

With the strengthening of overseas deployment under the Arroyo administration, it would be extremely difficult to veer away from the overseas employment program as a poverty alleviation measure even until her term expires in 2010. To do so would result in serious dislocation of and jeopardy to the present state of the economy.

The Filipino *diaspora* is certainly not in the context of the ancient Greek Diaspora for the Filipinos to become the conquistadores of the world in this modern age.

Unlike the *Hijra* of Prophet Muhammad and his followers to the City of Medina in 622 that sealed the global phenomenon and strength of the Islamic faith, the emigration of Filipinos as FVR's *citizens of the world* might just surrender and put to oblivion what is little left of their identity and culture in favor of the countries where they sought or are seeking economic refuge. Brain drain always benefit the country of destination, not the country of origin.

And it is all because the Filipino *diaspora* is understandably driven by necessity and the need to survive domestic poverty brought about by the economic failures of every political leadership whose socio-political survival ironically is also badly dependent on the same Filipino workers driven away from home.

Hopefully, the rest of them who would rather take the path of being Tita Cory's *modern-day heroes* would provide the economic miracle and panacea the country badly needs, by translating or converting the fruits of their labor from the statistics of domestic spending into Adam Smith's factor of production called 'capital'.

Not until then can the Filipinos be proud as a country and people of a '*Diaspora*', with emphasis on capital 'D'.

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