

A Manufactured Culture: A Look Into How U.S. Imperialism Coerced The Philippine Economy Into A Culture of Migration

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Part I: Introduction

Emigration from the Philippines has been seen by many as road to economic prosperity. The Philippines is considered a third-world country, so it is no surprise that there are few job opportunities that provide a livable wage. Filipinos have been going through labor brokerages as a mode for employment sending Philippine nationals across the globe. I will be evaluating the driving factors that caused this cultural shift within the Philippines through the question: How has American imperialism steered the Philippines towards a culture of labor emigration? Through this research question, we will be investigating to better understand how the Philippines came to this predicament.

We will also be looking at socioeconomical factors that may have caused a shift into this culture through questions such as: When did emigration start? Did American occupancy and propaganda encourage or manipulate Filipinos to emigrate? Did any internal cultural conflicts cause Filipino emigration? Where do Filipinos emigrate to? From where in the Philippines do they emigrate from? How has labor brokerages affected the economy? We will also look at the demographics of those who emigrate because it gives a crucial perspective on how certain groups may have been treated through a socioeconomic lens. This topic is significant when discussing the Philippines because this culture of labor migration is what helps drive the domestic economy through remittance.

Part II: Definitions

Before discussing the cultural theorists and literature, we must define key terms that will be used in this essay. Cultural imperialism is when a dominant or wealthy nation imposes their ways of life (culturally, economically, politically, and other aspects of their culture) onto a less developed or colonized nation. This term will be brought up multiple times because it is an important aspect of

determining how the US steered the Philippines into a manufactured culture of labor migration. Americanization is another term that is closely related to cultural imperialism. Americanization are “activities that were designed to prepare foreign-born residents of the United States for full participation in citizenship” (*Britannica, 2021*).

Remittance is when a citizen or native is exported for labor and they send money back to their family for financial support. It can also apply to former citizens from said nation who has emigrated to another for work. This money is then flushed back into the native economy. Remittance is a driving factor for many developing nations’ economies and especially the Philippines. Remittance is the second highest source of income for the Philippines and accounts for “29.9 billion US dollars” in 2020 from emigrants and OFW’s (*Statista, 2021*). In 2011, Filipinos remitted “20.12 billion US dollars” which shows a sizeable increase in just 8 years (*Statista, 2021*). A study from the Philippine Statistics Authority shows that in 2019, there were “2.2 million” Filipinos working abroad at a single time (*Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020*).

Emigration is when someone permanently leaves their native country. This is a term least commonly used. For example, in the US we have immigrants, but a native would refer to another native who immigrated to the US or another country as an emigrant. Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) is a common term used to describe a labor migrant from the Philippines. To be considered an OFW, one must retain their Philippine citizenship. OFW’s are commonly found in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia while emigrants commonly reside in the US and Canada.

Part III: Cultural Theories

Chapter 1: Introduction to Cultural Theories

Dorfman and Mattelart’s, *How to Read Donald Duck*, analyzes the issues of cultural imperialism that the *Donald Duck* comics convey. The natives are often depicted as “mentally underdeveloped and physically overdeveloped” (*Dorfman and Mattelart 49, 1971*). Though this book aims to criticize how Disney has changed the public’s perception of South American natives

and their culture through a mass medium, I will be using the prevalent stereotypes and conflicts in this book and parallel it to US imperialism in the Philippines. These comics are littered with examples that embody the motivations and attitudes of colonizers. For example, “some trinket, the product of technological superiority (European or North American) is exchanged for gold (spices, ivory, tea, etc.)” (*Dorfman and Mattelart 49, 1971*). The natives are no longer able to build any sort of economy of their own because their natural resources are stripped in these one-sided exchanges of goods.

Another example from this book I will be using is the idea of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ foreigners. The ‘good’ foreigners are described as ““under their ethical cloak, win the native’s confidence” (Dorfman & Mattelart, 53). The ‘bad’ foreigners are “villains: coarse, vulgar, repulsive, out-and-out thieves” (Dorfman & Mattelart, 53). Dorfman and Mattelart argue that the ‘bad’ foreigners are expendable pieces used to reveal the ‘good’ foreigners as “defenders of justice, law, and food for the hungry” (Dorfman & Mattelart, 53). These examples will be used to examine Charles Bartholomew’s, *Cartoons of the Spanish-American War (1899)*.

Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi’s *Many Faces of Cultural Imperialism* discusses multiple aspects of how imperialism affects the ‘dominated’ countries. I will be focusing on education, language, nation building, and briefly touch on tourism. Tourism is a smaller factor when talking about the culture of emigration, but I will be looking at the 3 S’s, “sun, sea, sex” (*Mohammadi 64, 1997*). The Philippines; 1. is a tropical island 2. Manila became the sex capitol of the world at one point. Mohammadi argues that language has the biggest cultural impact because the imperialist imposed their language on these societies. The Philippines is currently ranked fifth highest in number of English speaking-population (*Wikipedia, 2021*), which is attributed to American colonialism. Mohammadi’s theories pair well with Lasker’s book, which is examined in the next chapter, and the Americanization of the education systems within the Philippines then later the American installation of the first Philippine government.

David Held’s *Cultural Politics in a Global Age* explores two views of globalization of culture; a ‘clash of civilizations’ and the “erosion of values and life ways” (*Held 1, 2007*). Held argues that

culture is a key factor in mobilizing globalization rather than succumbing to it. This ties in really well with my research on labor brokerages because with the formation of a culture of labor migration in the Philippines, it put globalization into hyperdrive seeing that the Philippines is one of the world's largest exporter of labor. Throughout this research, these cultural theories will be revisited due to the impact they have on helping answer the research question.

Part V: Literature Analysis

Chapter 2: US Colonialism

The Spanish-American War was a pivotal point in Philippine history. As of the result of this war, world powers transitioned from Spain to the US along with the colonial jurisdiction of the Philippines. Bruno Lasker's, *Filipino Immigration 1969*, gives great historical context of who, where, when, and why early Filipinos emigrants came to the US. In 1969, there were only around "56,000" Filipino immigrants living in the mainland US, which were heavily concentrated on the Pacific Coast compared to "5,603" in 1920, according to reports from the Bureau of Insular Affairs and the United States Immigration Service in Hawaii (*Lasker 21, 1969*). The composition of these early immigrants was nine-tenths male, which will drastically change over the century. Lasker also looks into the points of origin of these labor immigrants. An overwhelming majority of early Filipino emigrants came from provinces that are more rural, poor, and farther away from the Philippine capitol of Manila.

Early Filipino emigrants first came to Hawaii to work for the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association. Hawaii had a total net gain of "56,591" Filipinos from 1907-1929. (*Lasker 31, 1969*). Before this period, Hawaiian plantation workers were made up of Japanese and Chinese citizens. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 had little effect on labor shortages for the sugar plantations, but a "Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan, in 1907, forced sugar planters ... to look for a new supply of labor" (*Lasker 28, 1969*). Filipinos were convenient because they were considered nationals to the US due to its territorial status at the time.

The Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association (HSPA) is responsible for the early immigrants into Hawaii. The HSPA had now discarded their aggressive recruitment tactics because of a steady flow of Filipino workers, but "it cannot be denied that methods used in the past and now discarded still are effective in the minds of the people" (*Lasker 204, 1969*). These tactics include, exaggerating benefits of coming to the US and going as far as claiming that there was "no unemployment" in the US. (*Lasker 206, 1969*). Lasker also claims that a high government official in the Philippines showed propaganda films, that featured scenes of American businessmen handing out checks, "is entirely responsible for starting the emigration movement. It advertised the glorious adventure and the beautiful opportunities that would be offered" (*Lasker 204, 1969*). Out of all the labor migrants who came to the US and Hawaii, around 45,000 Filipinos returned to the native land. They brought back "new tastes, possessions" and tell all about the "new worlds" (*Lasker 219, 1969*).

Lasker describes the early Filipino school system as "the main channel of Americanizing influences" (*Lasker 221, 1969*). These school systems used American history textbooks, taught patriotism, and were taught by American teachers brought to the islands. English was taught from the first grade on and was considered necessary. Though these early education systems had everlasting effects on many Filipinos, Lasker acknowledges that the current system teaches Philippine folk tales and history. But history is taught the same way Americans teach their history, with a strong sense of patriotism. The press and the moving picture are another crucial source for Americanization. In 1928, a number of Filipino emigrants sadly passed away while aboard the *President Cleveland*. The *Free Press* news company used this situation to advertise pictures illustrating "the joys of the voyage from Manila to Hawaii" (*Lasker 227, 1969*). This piece was also used as an advertisement for the HSPA. Lasker notes that since the press only reached a minority of Filipinos, Hollywood's lure "led hundreds of emigrants" (*Lasker 229, 1969*). Hollywood didn't have the only influence towards emigrants, the HSPA showed many propaganda and educational films when the emigrants arrived. Lasker's book reveals a large part of American influence within the Philippines. These sections illuminate the capitalist interest that in part steered Filipinos towards emigration.

My next analysis discusses the study of labor brokerages in the Philippines. Labor brokering is the practice of exporting or importing labor where companies contract labor brokers who provide 'casual' or 'temporary' work. A lot of developing nations economies rely on the export for labor because of remittance. Many nations natives' view this as a bandage to high unemployment rates in their respective countries because it doesn't fix the problem but rather delays it. Robyn Rodriguez's, *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World*, explores the Philippine labor brokerages that send their citizens across the globe for work due to high unemployment domestically. Rodriguez emphasizes that labor brokerages and the export for labor generates the second largest source of income for the Philippine economy due to remittance. Rodriguez pulls data from the Philippines National Statistics office showing that Filipinos remitted "US \$16 billion" in 2008 alone (*Rodriguez xiv, 2010*). This is only one set of data that she uses in her book. Rodriguez gives more statistics showing a trend that remittance has consistently been on the rise since the early 2000's.

When the Philippine president, Gloria Arroyo, visited the US in 2003, she encouraged US businessmen to employ Filipinos to fill their labor needs. Here she claims that the Filipino workforce is a "global enterprise" (*Rodriguez x, 2010*). Many Filipinos are ready to be exported due to high unemployment but in Arroyo's speech it is suggested that employers can save money "because Philippine workers are a temporary workforce ostensibly less able or willing to demand wage increases and better benefits over time" (*Rodriguez x, 2010*).

Rodriquez claims that the labor brokerage system is "in large part a result of the US colonial legacy in the Philippines" because we can track the "institutional precursors of this system" and "US colonialism and neocolonialism has had deep lasting consequences". (*Rodriguez 1, 2010*). She provides key examples of institutional precursors to the labor brokerage system. One example was the introduction of public health in the 1940's where trainees were sent to the US to become nurses. She also mentions labor recruiters associated with the HSPA around 1910-1930. Anti-Filipino sentiment had spread across the US and the "government was forced to curtail the immigration of Filipino workers through the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934" (*Rodriguez 8, 2010*).

This prompted the independence of the Philippine nation which was widely supported by US citizens due to the anti-Filipino sentiment. Filipina's were exempt so that they could study nursing and Filipino men were granted an opportunity to serve in the US military. Rodriguez further claims that the participation of Filipino in the US Navy "beginning in the 1950's in many ways marked the beginning of the globalization of Filipinos" (Rodriguez 9, 2010). The Presidential Decree 442 in 1974 started the state's institutionalization of labor migration which Rodriguez attributes to the nursing programs. This book offers the perfect look into answering my research question. Though this is only part of my research we will be looking at some consequences of US occupation in the Philippines in the next chapters.

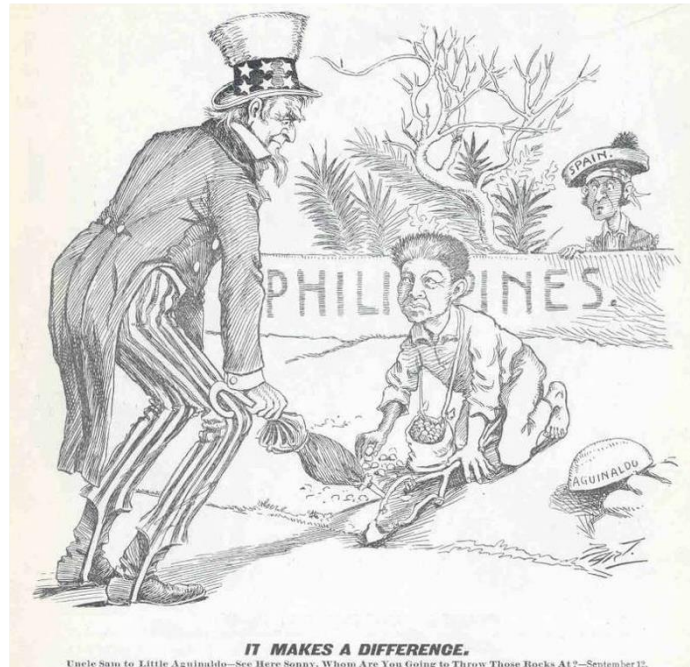
Chapter 3: US Propaganda in the Philippines

This section will be dedicated to contextualizing three cartoons from Charles Bartholomew's, *Cartoons of the Spanish-American War (1899)*. I say contextualize because I cannot say how these pieces affected the minds of Filipinos, but rather analyze what they are implying.



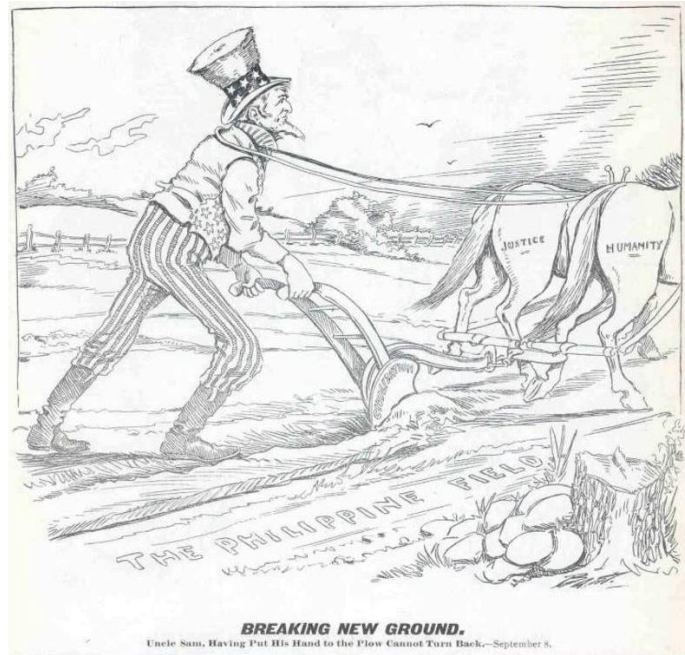
(Cartoons of the Spanish-American War by Charles Bartholomew, 1899)

This first piece depicts a Puerto Rican and a Cuban in 'civilized' clothing standing behind Uncle Sam. The Cuban is holding his national flag with "Independence" printed onto it. The Filipino is dressed in "savage" or "primitive" like clothing. The text at the bottom shows dialogue of Uncle Sam saying, "Well sonny, what is it?" and the Filipino responds "Where do I get in on this?". This piece implies that with the help of the US they can become civilized and independent.



(Cartoons of the Spanish-American War by Charles Bartholomew, 1899)

The second propaganda cartoon I am analyzing shows Uncle Sam standing over a Filipino farmer asking, "Whom are you going to throw those rocks at?", while a man from Spain sits behind the wall of the Philippines. I believe this is referring to the Philippine-American war in 1899, where Uncle Sam is implying to not throw the rocks Americans but rather at the Spanish. This closely relates to Dorfman and Mattelart's idea of the 'good' and 'bad' foreigner. The 'good' foreigners are the Americans who will bring them independence while the 'bad' foreigners are the Spaniards who were there to steal their resources.



(Cartoons of the Spanish-American War by Charles Bartholomew, 1899)

The last cartoon I am contextualizing is the most powerful one of them all. Uncle Sam is depicted to be tilling the Philippine fields with a “Civilization” printed onto the till. It is powered by two horses named Justice and Humanity. This directly implies that the Philippines was an undeveloped, unjust, inhumane, and savage nation who needed someone like the US to develop it. Again, this conceptualizes Dorfman and Mattelart’s idea of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ foreigner. The US is there to bring civilization, justice, and humanity but at what expense?

Chapter 4: Internal Conflicts in the Philippines

With a large part of early history of American imperialism out of the way, I will be analyzing the internal relationships in the Philippines. In many parts of the next few literatures, American occupation will be brought up as a source of many problems. That being said, Neferti Tadiar’s *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Making of Globalization 2009*, heavily focuses on the feminization of the Philippines and their work, accompanied by other progressive Filipino scholars and artists, towards shaping the social, political, and economic fabrics of the Philippines and understanding globalization. I will not be using majority of this book, but there are key theories and historical implications that I will be connecting to other pieces of literature

to further my research and theory of how American colonialism shaped the Philippines. The chapter I am focusing on occurs within the Ferdinand Marcos era of the Philippines (1965 – 1986). In 1965, the 10th president of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos, started his corrupt authoritarian regime. Marcos set to urbanize the Philippines by making progressing infrastructure, agriculture, and education but had many troubles with urban guerilla groups in the country. In 1972, Marcos declared martial law due to the violent nature of these guerilla groups which gave him an extraordinary amount of power over the country. He used this time to further benefit his regime by jailing his political opposition and appointing industry members into office.

Tadiar speaks of a “crisis of culture” emphasizing that Philippine culture in itself is “defined by crisis” (*Tadiar 26, 2009*) due to its long history with colonization. During the Marcos era, there were two crises at play. Marcos had a healthy relationship with the United States due to his ideological standing and manufactured the crisis of a communist threat in the Philippines. On the other hand, anti-imperialist nationalists claimed that “Philippine’s culture was suffocating under the weight of western powers” brought by the colonial mentality from Marcos and his supporters, all in the expense of the people (*Tadiar 26, 2009*). This crisis of culture led to the downfall of many citizens economically and culturally, which disproportionately affected the women of the Philippines, forcing them into prostitution, later earning Manila the title ‘Sex Capitol’ of the world. Tadiar quotes a ‘bad joke’ making rounds during the Marcos era saying “Gas, rice, sugar – everything is going up! The only things coming down are panties!” (*Tadiar 25, 2009*). The sex workers were heavily concentrated around American military bases in droves ranging from “three hundred thousand to five hundred thousand” (*Tadiar 25, 2009*). This links to Mohammadi idea of the 3 S’s; “sun, sea, sex” (*Mohammadi 64, 1997*). Mohammadi explores the different ways imperialism affects a culture and, in this case, tourism. Sun, sea, and more importantly sex, are major proponents of bringing tourism to a country. In the 70’s, sex became a staple to the Philippines and Tadiar directly links it to American occupation in the archipelago.

Before diving into gender politics and labor exports, I will briefly discuss some problems within the Philippine economy illuminated by Peter Krink’s, *The Economy of the Philippines 2002*, which analyzes the economic disparities among Filipinos. Each region had a role in the economy, but the

development across the country has been alarmingly uneven. The farmlands and rural areas produced most of the exports under Spanish rule but when the Americans took jurisdiction, infrastructural development became concentrated in Manila. This connects to Lasker's book and how an overwhelming majority of immigrants came from the rural regions far from the nation's capital. The Philippines was "the first East Asian colony to gain independence peacefully" and became one of the first to industrialize after Japan. (*Krinks 1, 2002*) The economy grew at an exceptional rate until a deep economic stagnation took place in the 1970's. A lot of this is blamed on Ferdinand Marcos's poor policies and corruption. Many problems still persisted after his claim to power due to political problems and "seven attempted military coupes against President Aquino" (*Krinks 2, 2002*).

Foreign investors eventually felt confident enough to start investing again which helped revive economic growth. This helped the Philippines somewhat survive the East Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 which was attributed to "strong competition from China in export markets, growing current account deficits, and increasing use of short-term foreign loans by corporations and banks" (*Krinks 55, 2002*). This caused the devaluation of the Philippine Peso to drop about "25%" of its worth which caused manufacturers and employers to reduce work hours for more than "200,000 employees" and many salaries of the employees were froze (*Krinks 57, 2002*). Changes in the economy from the 1960's and forward stopped the export of a substantial amount of natural resources like timber so it can be used for the nation. This led to labor brokerages and labor exports which have been a pivotal for the Philippines since American imperialism but has been ramped since the 1970's.

Chapter 5: Gendered Politics of Labor in the Philippines

A large part of the internal conflicts in the Philippines are studied in a gendered scope. Tadiar focuses on cultural relationships, but Elizabeth Eviota, *The Political Economy of Gender: Women and the Sexual Division of Labour in the Philippines 1992*, focuses on labor done by women in the Philippines. I will also not be using majority of this book, but a large section is dedicated towards American rule. She explores how Spanish colonizers, then later American colonizers, had the

same goal towards global capitalism, which “stated motives were clothed in altruism” (*Eviota 63, 1992*). Altruism is the practice of moral concern of another person or people. This again closely parallels Dorfman & Mattelart idea of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ foreigners. The ‘good’ foreigners come to the lands under an ‘ethical cloak’ and are there for justice and serve food for the hungry but have other motives at play. When the US took over, they geared the Filipino economy to fit their needs for natural resources, labor, and sex work. The US did establish the first Philippine Republic but was short-lived because it “reproduced the same instruments of dominance and control as that of the colonial power” (*Eviota 63, 1992*). In modern history, the Philippines only knew colonization, which is reflected by Tadiar’s ‘culture of crisis’.

Though the Philippines had female leaders within their ranks, they were often relatives of other male leaders and faced sexual abuse and scrutiny. Women did partake in the economy and labor by working in small scale farms and fished but there was very little opportunity for all and very little diversity in work seeing that the Philippines was infrastructurally underdeveloped as a nation. Eviota uses the 1903 census report showing that “30 percent” of the female population were in “gainful employment” compared to the “58 percent” of males (*Eviota 65, 1992*). Gainful employment means employment that allows self-sufficiency. Eviota suggest that these numbers show that women primarily engage in housekeeping work because at the time, housekeeping was not considered gainful work. Women also engaged in the industrial military reserve, but as American intervention increased, women were “forced to withdraw exclusively to reproductive work” (*Eviota 64, 1992*). Reproductive work is domestic housework that includes caregiving, cooking, cleaning, and anything that is unpaid. This is where Western ideals start to navigate into the Philippines, with the ‘traditional household’ mindset of a stay at home mother for the purpose of reproductive work while the father is the breadwinner.

In Lasker’s, *Filipino Immigration*, men made up about nine-tenths of labor exports. Rhacel Parreñas’s, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work 2015*, highlights that the gender disparity has evened out over the century, with females dominating in domestic labor. Parreñas uses data from 2008 that shows women accounted for “57,354” migrant domestic labor exports compared to “2,835 men” (*Parreñas 3, 2015*). Domestic work is work within a household

via nannies, caregivers, and housecleaners. This links to Eviota's book and her claims that women forced into reproductive domestic work early in its history with US colonialism. Labor exports from the Philippines is only increasing by the year. This "is not a historical accident but emerged from the state's promotion of migrant labor exportation" (*Parreñas 4, 2015*). In 2008, there were "60,000 migrant domestic workers", and that number bumped up to "80,000" the following year (*Parreñas 3, 2015*). For clarification, these numbers only account for domestic work and not any other type of work that other men and women engage in. This manifests Held's idea that culture mobilizes globalization. In this case, a manufactured culture of labor migration has set globalization into hyperdrive now that Filipinos and Filipinas have been sent to at least "160 destinations" (*Parreñas 4, 2015*).

Part VI: Conclusion and Findings

I have discussed an abundance of evidence pointing towards the effects that American colonization had on the Philippines. American colonization seems to be the root cause of labor brokerages and a manufactured culture of labor migration. Americanization through education and media also played a massive role into pushing Filipino's into a 'western' mindset. Labor brokerages have been traced all the way back to the early 20th century from the HSPA and eventually the nursing programs that the US offered to Filipinas. Culture was another huge aspect affected. Because of the development of these labor brokerages, Filipino's are sent across the globe for temporary work in order to remit money back into the Philippine economy. Remittance has become the second largest source of income for the nation and has been steadily increasing since the 1970's. The labor brokerage system is only a crutch for the time being until the Philippine government can create new domestic jobs but that doesn't seem to be the case because of the increase in labor exports over the years. This culture of labor migration in the Philippines manifests Held's idea of culture being the driver of globalization. Today, Filipinos and Filipinas are sent to 160 different destinations for work. I wouldn't say that the Philippines is the main driver of globalization, but they are definitely a key part in the voyage towards globalization.

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