Book Reviews

Megha Amrith

Caring for Strangers. Filipino medical Workers in Asia. Copenhagen: NIAS, 2017, xlvii + 226 pages. ISBN 9788776941925, price: GBP 50.00 (hardback); 9788776941932, 18.99 (paperback).

Caring for Strangers offers a multi-sited ethnography that traces the labor migration of nurses and other medical professionals from Manila to Singapore and beyond. It offers a truly global perspective on the contemporary outmigration of Filipino nurses and shifts from the dominant literature as it takes our gaze from the past singular focus on the United States as the destination of such migrants to their multiple destinations that include developed economies in the global south. This ethnographic study illustrates the fissured negotiation of class and status by medical workers who go abroad to secure mobility but face the challenges of racial and national hierarchies in their destinations including the dominant perception of Filipinos as domestic workers and the lesser value placed on educational degrees from the Philippines.

Chapters 2 and 3 of the book provide a macro-perspective on the supply and demand for medical workers, illustrating what Amrith calls a ‘cartography of care’. As reflected in the ‘migration imaginaries’ of aspiring Filipino migrants, the demand for medical workers covers the entire globe as it extends from the Middle East and Singapore to Australia, New Zealand, North America, and Europe. The book then proceeds to describe how medical workers navigate this cartography, taking us specifically to the destination of Singapore. In Chapter 4, Amrith describes various setbacks against their aspirations and perceptions of mobility including the blurred boundaries between skilled and unskilled duties in their job responsibilities and the occupational segregation, specifically of men, in nursing homes, which effectively signals the exclusion of men from higher-paying jobs in government hospitals. Chapters 5 and 6 then describe the relationships that medical workers develop, first with their patients (Chapter 5) and second with other members of the migrant community (Chapter 6). Chap-

ter 5 describes the navigation of intimate relations with patients and illustrates how perceptions of race and nationality affect their performance of care work. Chapter 6 then situates the migration of medical workers in the larger context of the Filipino community of Singapore, describing the spatial and temporal segregation of medical workers from the much larger group of domestic workers to illustrate the boundaries that medical workers construct as a status shield. Chapter 7 then turns our attention to the constitution of home and offers a closing discussion on mobility. Migrant medical workers look not only at their future mobilities in destinations that offer higher wages or in better paying positions in Singapore but in the mobility they achieve in the Philippines, which remains home to many.

Caring for Strangers compellingly illustrates the jagged mobility of medical workers, their negotiation of the haunting racialization of Filipinos as maids and the national hierarchies that delimit the recognition of their educational qualifications. A thicker description of the daily struggles of medical workers would have sharpened the book's arguments. For instance, an account of how race shapes the dynamics of bodily proximity in the intimate space of the workplace would have enhanced the discussion of care work or a description of the corporal strategies medical workers deploy to cultivate boundaries and distinctions between them and domestic workers would have thickened our understanding of migrant socialities. Overall, this book offers a welcome addition to the literature on labor migration from the Philippines. It should be adopted for courses on Southeast Asian studies, globalization, and labor migration.

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