JoAnna Poblete

Islanders in the Empire: Filipino and Puerto Rican Laborers in Hawai'i. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014. x + 227 pp. (Cloth US\$55.00)

In 1898 the United States annexed Hawai'i as a territory and acquired the colonies of the Philippines and Puerto Rico. This created a new context for labor migration to the plantations in Hawai'i. First, upon annexation the federal laws of "Chinese Exclusion" went into immediate effect in Hawai'i, shutting off the abundant supply of labor migrants from China. Second, Puerto Ricans and Filipinos became, after some legal wrangling, "U.S. colonials" with the right to move to the United States including its colonies and territories.

The term "U.S. colonial" is a convenient, albeit imprecise, term that refers to the various peoples considered dependents or wards of the federal government as "nationals" rather than citizens. In this parlance, "intracolonial" refers to those nationals who migrate from one colony to another within the same imperial regime. *Islanders in the Empire* focuses on Filipino and Puerto Rican labor migrants to Hawai'i, the latter understood correctly as a colony as well. However, these colonies were not of the same status. Hawai'i at this time was a white settler colony and, from a legal point of view, an incorporated territory of the United States. As unincorporated territories, both the Philippines and Puerto Rico were colonies of a different sort and yet they were not exactly the same as each other. These differences in colonial structures would impact the processes of labor recruitment, class struggle, and mediation on the plantations.

JoAnna Poblete's book is a work of rigorous comparative sociology as applied to historical materials, both primary and secondary. Carefully divided into comparative chapters (three for Puerto Ricans and three for Filipinos), she systematically compares the processes of recruitment of laborers from the colonies and their accommodation in Hawai'i, the labor conflicts and methods of dealing with labor complaints, and the functioning of the "ethnic intermediaries" who represented, often simultaneously, the plantation owners and the workers. She enriches the comparisons with vignettes of the leading actors, whether workers, labor leaders, or intermediaries, though at times the prose seems as if it were derived directly from a table of comparisons.

Poblete concludes that, relatively speaking, the recruitment of Puerto Rican plantation laborers was a failure in that only around six thousand were recruited during two short periods (1900–01, 1921). In contrast, beginning in 1906 Filipinos supplied a steady stream of laborers, often moving back and forth between Hawai'i and the Philippines. By 1922, Filipinos constituted the majority of plantation workers, numbering almost 20,000. This difference is

attributed to the opposition to labor migration on the part of migrants as well as workers and local elites in Puerto Rico. In contrast, Filipinos were offered better conditions (for example, financial assistance for return migration and family unification), and labor migration, including a system of recruitment, circular migration, and remittances by workers, soon became a part of the social and economic fabric of the Philippines.

Labor complaints were also managed in different ways. Puerto Ricans had few channels to voice their complaints and negotiate better conditions. They directed their letters of complaint to government officials in Puerto Rico which then relayed them to Washington DC, where they filtered through various agencies before reaching Hawai'i. Puerto Ricans were most often left to their own devices, moving from plantation to plantation or to urban centers. Filipinos, in contrast, could count on local labor organizers and official representation in the form of labor commissioners sent by the colonial government of the Philippines. Poblete attributes this difference to the distinct systems of colonial governance; while the Philippines was treated as a colony in transition to a foreign country, Puerto Rico, as a colonial possession, lacked any kind of official representation in Hawai'i.

Finally, both Puerto Rican and Filipino workers counted on unofficial "ethnic intermediaries" who attempted to balance the interests of the plantations and the workers. While Puerto Ricans counted on labor agents, the Filipinos were served by Protestant pastors. In both cases, the intermediaries were hired by the plantations. Even though they strived to prove their relevance to the workers by negotiating improved conditions, they were beholden to their employers.

This book contributes to the recent scholarship that goes beyond the study of areas (such as the Caribbean) or states (such as American Studies) in order to consider the more complex constitution of empires across regions. Unique in its comparative focus on labor migration among U.S. colonies, it is essential reading for those interested in the Filipinos and Puerto Ricans in Hawai'i during the first four decades of the twentieth century.

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