

***AFFECT, NARRATIVES AND POLITICS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN MIGRATION BY
CARLOS M. PIOCOS III***

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Southeast Asia displays a dynamic migration flows, especially since the 1970s. The economic transformations and industrialization in Asian Tigers, coupled with neoliberal adjustments, have led to significant waves of migration across the region. Notably, intra-regional migration from countries like Indonesia and the Philippines to wealthier destinations such as Singapore and Hong Kong have been prominent. This movement, predominantly involving the participation of local women, middle-class mothers, and wives in the workforce, has created a demand for feminized labor, particularly for child and elderly care as well as domestic services. Consequently, governments in these destination countries have sought helpers and domestic workers from neighbouring nations. During this period, Indonesia and the Philippines faced issues like domestic poverty, widespread unemployment, and internal crises, prompting the development of labor export programs. These programs served both as a political administrative tool and a means to address escalating employment and fiscal crises. Hong Kong and Singapore emerged as major hubs for domestic workers from Indonesia and the Philippines. The migrant workforce has made significant contributions to the national economies of Hong Kong and Singapore, and their home countries have benefited from foreign exchange remittances, helping to alleviate domestic unemployment. In recognition of their contributions, the governments of the Philippines and Indonesia and media called these migrant workers as heroes (modern-day heroes and foreign exchange heroes respectively). However, the official narratives promoted by these governments do not effectively address the real-life challenges faced by domestic workers, including discrimination, abuse, and exploitation. Filipina and Indonesian domestic workers often experience marginalization, discrimination, and social exclusion, shaping their precarious living conditions. These challenges are vividly portrayed in literary and cinematic narratives, highlighting the workers' experiences of discrimination, victimization, and the sacrifices they make for their home countries.

The author concentrates on cinematic and literary works depicting Filipina and Indonesian domestic workers, examining recurring themes such as belonging and displacement, shame and desire, vulnerability and resistance, sacrifice and grief. The objective is to comprehend how the emotional connections of migrants to labor migration shape the experiences of women migrants and how these experiences are portrayed and understood in cultural texts (p.5). The author seeks to bridge the gap between the migrants' personal understanding of their experiences and the discourses that present them as subjects of abuse or social exclusion, as well as the ideas that define their claims for social justice, national development, and building. Drawing comparisons between the experiences of Filipina and Indonesian domestic workers, the author explores how their similarities and differences manifest in global Asian cities. In doing so, the author elucidates how the emotions of Filipina and Indonesian women are intertwined with the developmental strategies of nation-states and the global politics of labor diaspora, presenting them as embodied expressions that challenge and complicate prevailing discourses (p.6).

Carlos Piocos explores the impact of the emotional dimension in feminized labor, specifically examining affect, emotions, and feelings in influencing discussions on women's subjectivity, labor, and mobility within the Southeast Asian context. Piocos adopts Sara Ahmed's concept of the "affective economy" to analyse the circulation and influence of emotions in the representations of Filipina and Indonesian domestic workers in print and visual media. The emotional content of texts is considered a way to describe how texts move or generate effects (p.9). Piocos examines nine short stories, seven independent documentary films, two novels and one photography project for this book.

The initial chapter addresses the complex nature of transnational domestic work and its impact on Filipina and Indonesian domestic workers. It provides a summary of the politics of hospitality in Singapore and Hong Kong while scrutinizing the inherent contradictions in the social exclusion of migrant women within their social spheres (pp.21-23). Piocos analyzes Anthony Chen's film "Ilo Ilo," Oliver Chan Siu-Kuen's film "Still Human," Xyza Cruz Bacani's photographs in her book titled "We are Like Air," and the short story of Indonesian migrant worker-writer Susie Utomo within this chapter. These texts contribute to understanding the limitations of hospitality, issues of social exclusion, and the inner world of migrants, showcasing how intimate labor transforms politics in Hong Kong and Singapore (p.20). Filipina and Indonesian women are chosen by employers in Hong Kong and Singapore due to their lower cost and easy distinguishability from fairer Chinese households. The skin colour of migrants serves as racial boundaries that distinguish them from their employers (p.21). Governed by cost-benefit considerations, migrants lack access to citizenship, permanent residency, or the right of abode. They are also not covered by the Employment Act in Singapore, which legislates standard employment terms such as working hours, minimum pay, and paid leave (p.22). The Hong Kong government enforces the two-week rule to prevent migrant maids from changing jobs quickly, leading migrants to fear of job loss, repatriation with debts, and additional expenses for another deployment cycle (p.23). Migrant domestic workers establish emotional closeness and personal familiarity with their employers due to the intimate nature of their work. This results in affective bonds with the families that employ and welcome them into their homes and private lives (p.25).

The second chapter delves deeper into the discussion, exploring how Southeast Asian migrant bodies experience feelings of shame due to problematic discourses surrounding sexuality in transnational spaces. Carlos Piocos investigates the anxieties about mobility and shame emotions of Indonesian and Filipina domestic workers within their own cultural contexts. The terms "malu" and "hiya" (Indonesian and Filipino expressions for shame) exemplify the gendered moral discourses imposed on migrant women's bodies, amplifying their precarious position in both their home and host countries (pp.50-51). Piocos analyses various emotions, including love, romance, and desire, as portrayed in the short stories of Erfa Handayani, Maria Bo Niok, Juwanna, Susana Nisa, and Tiwi, as well as in the film "Remittance" by Patrick Daly and Joel Fendelman, and documentaries like "Mengusahakan Cinta" [Effort for Love] by Ani Ema Susanti and "Sunday Beauty Queen" by Baby Ruth Villarama. Carlos Piocos concentrates on the self-representation of migrant workers in short stories written by Tiwi and Arista Devi, focusing on themes of victimhood, social exclusion, and shaming, along with the negative impacts on migrant workers in the chapter three (pp.86-88). This chapter probes stories illustrating how Indonesian women, such as Indira Margareta and Etik Juwita, reimagine vulnerability. These narratives highlight the intricate nature of victimhood and agency that Indonesian migrant women grapple with and negotiate in their daily lives, drawing strength from vulnerability and the virtue of patience (p.100).

Chapter four delves into the hardships faced by Filipina domestic workers and their portrayal as economic heroes through the lens of sacrifice. Pocos illustrates the discourses surrounding sacrifice by examining how the nation-state and cultural texts utilize its meaning as enduring suffering for the sake of others, shaping the description and expectations of Filipina migrant women in transnational labor (pp.106-112). The author analyses how the Filipino government perpetuates and disseminates the image of Filipina domestic workers as virtuous and sacrificing mothers, daughters, and wives, using this discourse as part of its nation-building project. Pocos scrutinizes works such as Mes de Guzman's "Balikbayan Box," Zig Madamba Dulay's "Bagahe," and Daly and Fendelman's "Remittance" to illustrate how Filipina women, in their familial roles, are intricately tied to the Philippine state's objectives in the nation-building process.

In chapter five, Pocos investigates the politicized grief surrounding the dead bodies of migrant women and its impact on the affective economy. The author explores texts like Jose Delisay's "Soledad's Sister" and Rida Fitria's "Sebongkah Tanah Retak" [A Lump of Cracked Land]. These works demonstrate how mourning processes reproduce and circulate emotions of grief, rage, and sympathy, fostering a sense of community that can either contribute to or hinder political action (pp.140-154). The book concludes by exploring the impact of emotions on political and transformative forces, particularly in the context of community building and solidarity (pp.156-167).

Affect, Narratives, and Politics of Southeast Asian Migration provides a comprehensive analysis of gendered labor migration in Southeast Asia, with a specific focus on the representations of Indonesian and Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore. Pocos examines a total of 19 texts in his book, offering detailed ethnographic research on the emotional experiences of migrants. The author presents a robust analysis of how emotions contribute to the nation-building process, shaping migrants' self-representations. The book provides valuable insights into migrants' vulnerability, experiences of social exclusion, and women's subjectivity, exploring various emotions in depth. Furthermore, Pocos effectively illustrates how nation-states implement their governmental agendas within the gendered labor diaspora and examines how migrants are influenced by transnational emotions. The book encourages a reconsideration of politicized grief and the treatment of migrant workers' bodies within the frameworks of necro politics and biopolitics of labor. Additionally, it sheds light on the restrictive practices imposed by governments on migrant domestic workers, opening up novel discussions on governmentality within the context of Southeast Asian migrant labor.

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