

MASAKO ISHII, NAOMI HOSODA, MASAKI MATSUO, & KOJI HORINUKI, Eds., *Asian Migrant Workers in the Arab Gulf States: The Growing Foreign Population and Their Lives* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019). Pp. 266. €99.00/\$120.00 cloth. ISBN 9789004393363.

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Asian Migrant Workers in the Arab Gulf States: The Growing Foreign Population and Their Lives, originally written in Japanese and published in 2014,¹ was recently translated into English as part of “The Intimate and the Public in Asian and Global Perspectives” series by Brill. This volume focuses on migration in the Arab Gulf countries and is devoted primarily to discussing the situation of Filipino migrants in the region. However, other national groups are also discussed, such as Bangladeshi and Goan migrants. The editors and authors of this book include “scholars on Asian sending countries and on Arab Gulf host states and conducted joint field studies” (vii); therefore, the book provides a deep analysis and discussion of the migration phenomenon in the region from a multiplicity of perspectives.

From a methodological perspective, “the book adopts [a] multi-dimensional and multidisciplinary approach: [it] mix[es] quantitative and qualitative approach[es] and tries to provide new perspectives on the segregated socioeconomic spaces of the Arab Gulf states” (vii). This mixed method strengthens the book because it conveys a convincing interpretation of how migrants and nonmigrants interact in the host countries. This approach is further supported by the inclusion of tables and figures which serve to demonstrate authors’ arguments and perspectives. Furthermore, most chapters rely on ethnographic research and on multisited ethnography conducted especially between the Philippines and the Gulf countries, with one chapter based on the personal experience of an Indian expatriate in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

From a theoretical perspective, *Asian Migrant Workers in the Arab Gulf States* makes a valuable contribution to scholarship on segregation and social integration in the Gulf countries. Rather than viewing the exclusion and the lack of integration policies as a constraint and from a disadvantaged perspective, the authors “unfold the region’s segregated socioeconomic space and new forms of networking and connectedness to understand how the various people coexist” (3). In other words, this book contributes to the debate on social practices and networking deployed by migrants in light of segregation and exclusion towards foreign workers which seem to prevail in the Gulf countries. Therefore, this volume effectively illustrates how migrants explore and develop different cultural, religious, and social practices to foster a sense of belonging.

Several chapters discuss specific practices and modalities of belonging. For example, in chapter seven, Hosoda focuses on Filipino workers in the UAE in order to unpack “the everyday practices and types of networks and communities that offset the legally and socially constrained environments” (173) like those existing in the Emirates. Based on her field research in Dubai and Abu Dhabi between 2009 and 2014, Hosoda highlights Filipino religious communities and associations in order to emphasize that these organizations facilitate the Filipino migrants’ construction of a sense of belonging to the UAE society and add “new meaning to the lives of migrant workers living there by allowing them to find and form relationships with fellow Filipinos” (189).

Similarly, in chapter eight, Watanabe discusses the conversion of Filipino migrant workers to Islam in the UAE and Qatar. In particular, “the chapter notes how the multi-hierarchic situations in the Arab Gulf society impinge on the formation and reformation of relationships” (194). The author presumes that “becoming a Muslim would be a catalyst for a migrant worker to gain entry into the majority society in the UAE and Qatar, where Arab Muslims predominate” (195). However, Watanabe illustrates that conversion to Islam does not erase the hierarchies and segmentation existing in the UAE and Qatar. In other words, “Filipino migrant workers’ embracing Islam did not necessarily seem to bring them into the majority society, nor did it necessarily seem to create a ‘coexistent’ community that surpasses the borders of nationalities” (213). It is evident that conversion to Islam represents a different modality of belonging, albeit circumscribed to their working environment and personal and emotional sphere.

In conclusion, *Arab Migrant Workers in the Arab Gulf States* presents a detailed discussion of migration in the Arab Gulf countries and thus contributes to a better understanding of migrants' strategies, living conditions, and different modalities of belonging experienced in the Gulf region. The book's theoretical framework makes a notable contribution to existing scholarship, starkly contrasting with most of the literature on migration in the region, which considers segregation, subordination, and discrimination as pivotal in the management of the relationships between nationals and migrants. Instead, the book adopts a different perspective, which, regardless of the segregated socioeconomic spaces, seems to enhance the proactive role of migrants, who, through cultural practices and consumption, explore different modalities of belonging.

This volume offers a new outlook on migration in the Gulf countries and, as such, it is relevant to scholars, policy makers, and international and civil society organizations insofar as it helps to better understand relationship dynamics, policy implications, and coexisting strategies adopted by migrants. In the editors' words, *Asian Migrant Workers in the Arab Gulf States* "is written to be useful not only for students concerned with migration to the Arab Gulf states but also for a wider audience of governments, practitioners, policy makers, decision makers, non-governmental organization (NGO) activists" (7).

NOTES

¹ This "book is the translated and updated version of *Wangan Arab Shokoku no Imin Roudousya: Tagaikokujin Kokka no Shutsugen to Seikatsu Jittai* (Migrant Workers in the Arab Gulf States: Growing Foreign Population and Their Lives) which was published in 2014 from Akashi Shoten in Tokyo, Japan" (vii).