analysis, which necessarily presupposes not only the historicity (as in the past *qua* past) of the violence that the New Order had inflicted on the public but also the stability of the analytic yardstick that he utilized.

The apparent seeds of contradiction embedded in the book should not be construed as weaknesses. Perhaps they are necessary for studies that dare cross the epistemological divide separating poststructuralism, on the one hand, and those that subscribe to realist epistemologies, on the other. To Indonesian and political studies, in general, Heryanto's book is a very important contribution. I hazard a view that it will, in time, be recognized as pathbreaking. It is a must-read for anyone concerned about Indonesia, comparative politics, as well as those interested in how poststructuralism, in hybrid form, may be employed in sociopolitical analysis. —**Rommel A. Curaming,** *Postdoctoral Fellow, La Trobe University-Melbourne.*

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Rey Ventura. 2006. Underground in Japan. Quezon City: ADMU Press. 162 pp.

About 8.1 million Filipinos either work or live abroad—nearly 10 percent of the Philippine population as of December 2004. In 2005, a Pulse Asia survey found evidence that an increasing percentage of the populace agrees with the following statement: "I would emigrate to another country and live there." The same sentiment is not limited to adults alone. In an earlier nationwide survey (2003), 47 percent of children aged ten to twelve wished to work abroad someday, and 60 percent of the children of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) expressed the same plan. The reason: the benefits of working abroad far outweigh the benefits of living in the country.

Rey Ventura's *Underground in Japan* is a moving narrative of well-webbed life stories of people who belong to the ever-growing number of Filipinos seeking greener pastures abroad. The book narrates the lives of illegal migrant laborers in Japan, illegal in that their existence is unaccounted for in the official national statistics, whether of the sending or receiving country. With poignant sympathy, the book intimately presents the everyday lives of these migrant aliens, from the more mundane and minute details to norms that constitute emerging moral unities far from those held dear at home.

The story revolves around the exploits of "standing men" set in the Koto (short for Kotobukicho). The narrator, Rey, is a former exchange

student turned standing man. Standing man is a descriptive label for Koto's day laborers, taken from the manner by which workers gather at the center of Kotobukicho while awaiting the day's work—standing. Instead of describing the daily routine, the narrative was made more interesting by Rey's interaction with the different intriguing characters of the underground: the *sachos*, who recruit and give out jobs; the heads of the various gangs; the rest of the standing men of different nationalities; and, of course, their Japanese colleagues. By conversing with these people, the book takes the reader inside nooks and crannies, alleys and passageways, producing a strange familiarity with the edgier side of the Filipino migrant experience.

To look for a job is no easy feat. If lucky, the standing man finds work under hazardous conditions, like in "some dangerous construction site or chemical factory." Rey describes his experience with agony: "the place felt like a concentration camp ... the day that has begun at five ended at three the next morning." Adding to the burden is the discrimination and humiliation that the standing men experience in the hands of their Japanese bosses and colleagues: "Every day begins with (this little) humiliation."

Life for these illegal workers may be difficult, but it also has its lighter, humorous side. According to the narrator, churchgoing in Koto is much like the usual practice in the Philippines. On Sundays, the faithful don their best attires and accessories in an ostentatious display of affluence. The irony, however, is that this newly acquired affluence is illegally derived:

> If you want to go to church in Yokohama you would want to display the fruits of your illegal labor: gold chains, bracelets, rings, leather jackets, signature clothes both real and fake ... The older men from the Koto would get there before Mass, and would be boasting of their new acquisitions as they came out of the service ...

Days off of work could also be rewarding in a sense, but the standing men pursue leisure to the extreme: night out with girlfriends—not completely unbeknown to the wives back home, cruising, drinking, sex bars and shows, parties till dawn. As the narrator remarks: "They all have wives and children in the Philippines, and they all have lovers here. And there is no secret about it." Romance is never in short supply in the underground—"this was one of the activities in which Koto excelled," not just for the standing men but also "for bored, lonely Filipina brides."

In the book, women are as much a pillar of the Koto underground as the standing men. The Queen of Koto and the Missionary have not only added life to the narrative, but played significant roles that complete the character of the underground. The *Japanera*, the women performer in Japan, is far more complex character. She is capable of enduring the hardships of the life in Koto as anybody else, yet she is not a pitiful victim nor a damsel in distress. The Japanera is able to exploit and benefit from the seduction of the life underground.

The sacrifices and struggles for survival, the hope to provide for the needs of those they left behind in the Philippines, and the ways they cope with anxiety and distress caused by physical and geographic separation from family, friends, and community back home constitute the core of the immigrants' moral unity. The complexity of this balance, needs, purposes and values is woven in their relationships.

Of a more immediate concern for them is to survive each day in Koto. These illegal workers are well aware that they have to satisfy their needs within the bounds of what the Koto underground could offer. Often, however, their survival strategies are practices likely to be frowned upon in the Philippines. Even if they are still unfree on account of their undocumented status in Japan, and moreover the nature of their work, these standing men nevertheless have "found freedom from their own native morality and culture." Such freedom "was the charm of Koto, the lure." No judgment is passed on them. They can walk the streets without fear of getting arrested. Hence, it is not surprising that they can candidly recount their experiences to Rey.

The book has its twists and turns, secrets revealed, realizations triggered by certain events, and a closure that is as much an opening. Its end signals another beginning, the setting for Ventura's second installment[1]. As is, there is already much to ponder.

In general, the book is an engaging read. The style, however, might limit the reader's full appreciation of the work. Even if the book claims to be based on real-life experiences, the narrative may lead readers to think differently, for the highly moving biographic prose could pass as fiction.

With all its intimations, insights, and interpretations of the lives of Filipino TNTs[2] in Japan, the book is a good preliminary resource for those who would embark on the study of emerging Filipino immigrant culture. Life underground outside one's country, with its ups and downs, reservations, and excesses are matters of utter secrecy. Ventura's work has

pried open a reality not yet carefully examined in the literature and discourse of migration.

Underground Japan is not the typical OFW story. As the book's introduction by James Fenton says, "We do not often find descriptions of pioneer immigrant societies in the making" The book invites many a reader to explore this unique and intriguing migrant community. — **Benjie Zabala,** *Master in Community Development student, University of the Philippines-Diliman.*

Notes

1. As of this writing, Rey Ventura's *Into the Country of Standing Men* (2007), a sequel to this volume, is off the press.
2. In the Filipino idiom, TNT is short for *tago nang tago*, which literally means always hiding. As far as Filipino migrants are concerned, TNT is another label for illegal workers who have to resort to low-profile living and covert tactics to elude authorities and prevent themselves from getting deported back to the Philippines.