

Review: A Timely Recording of Winnipeg's Filipino Voice

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Darlyne Bautista. *Winnipeg's Filipino Health Professionals (c. 1950-1970)*. Vol. 1 of *From Manila to Manitoba: Celebrating 50 Years with the Filipino-Canadian Community in Winnipeg*. Winnipeg: ANAK Publishing Worker Cooperative, 2012. 44 pp. ISBN: 978-0-9878567-1-5

There is a remarkable dearth of scholarship on the history of the Filipino-Canadian community, particularly in Winnipeg, so the appearance of Darlyne Bautista's oral history volume is a timely and much needed contribution to Canadian ethnic history. This book is part of a broader oral history project of the Filipino youth group *Aksyon ng Ating Kabataan* (ANAK).¹ In addition to an accompanying museum exhibit held in 2010, ANAK plans to release a total of five volumes of oral history from the Winnipeg Filipino community. This book, the first in the series, should catch the attention of those interested in Canadian immigration, Winnipeg's ethnic history, the formation of transnational communities in Canada, and the global Filipino diaspora.

Darlyne Bautista, one of the founding members of ANAK, is a second-generation Filipina-Canadian and was the lead researcher and curator of the *From Manila to Manitoba* exhibit held at the Manitoba Museum from June 18 to September 26, 2010 in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Filipino community in Winnipeg. Currently, she is a community advocate and a Winnipeg school trustee. ANAK was formed in 2006 by a group of 1.5² and second generation Filipino students and professionals in Winnipeg. Describing themselves as "concerned young Filipino-Canadian[s]," their aim is to "bridge the cultural, generational, and social gaps found both in and outside of the Filipino-Canadian community in Winnipeg."³ The museum exhibit *From Manila to Manitoba* was designed by members from ANAK as part of the same oral history project as this book. In addition to this oral history project, ANAK performs its mandate by offering scholarships to high school students going on to university or college, an in-school mentorship program that is meant to help newcomers explore their

¹ This translates to "Our Youth in Action." The acronym ANAK is significant, too, as it is the Tagalog word for "child."

² A 1.5 generation individual is one who was born in their home country and emigrated before or during their early teen years. The term suggests that, unlike those who are adults upon immigration or are born in a new country, 1.5 generation individuals maintain cultural characteristics from their home country while still integrating significantly in their new society.

³ ANAK, "About," *Aksyon Ng Ating Kabataan (ANAK) Inc.*, last modified 23 March 2009, http://anakinc.blogspot.ca/2009/03/about_23.html.

new cultural surroundings while encouraging their Filipino heritage,⁴ and offering active support to university-sponsored academic projects such as the “Filipino Youth Transitions in Canada” project led by geographer Philip Kelly at York University.⁵

This book uses the life story of Dr. Jose Belmonte, a medical doctor who emigrated from the Philippines in the 1950s, as a case-study to describe the first wave of Filipino immigrants to Winnipeg, many of whom were largely medical professionals (x-xiii). The book’s forty-four pages are organized into a forward, preface, three sections, suggestions for further research, endnotes and a short bibliography. The structure of the sections is pertinent to ANAK’s goal of emphasizing both the Filipino *and* Canadian in Filipino-Canadian. The first, “‘But my dad never got into politics’,” discusses Dr. Belmonte’s life in the Philippines and what led him to immigrate to Canada and practice medicine. The second section, “Politics and Opportunity in Post-war Philippines,” gives the reader the historical context of Dr. Belmonte’s life and some of the political considerations of professionals in the Philippines at the time. Finally, the third section “Canadian Medicare and the Demand for Doctors” places Dr. Belmonte’s experience as a doctor in Canada within the context of the development of universal healthcare under Tommy Douglas. In the short space of this text, Bautista effectively demonstrates a few key points: first, Dr. Belmonte and others like him needed political connections to have successful professional careers in the Philippines; second, Filipino medical professionals were involved in discussions surrounding the implementation of publically funded health care in Canada; third, and most importantly for oral historians, Bautista is able to show how historical experiences in Canada and the Philippines concurrently shaped the life of Dr. Belmonte.

Through Dr. Belmonte’s life story, Bautista destabilizes some assumptions of immigrant communities in Canada. She demonstrates how Dr. Belmonte’s decision to immigrate to Canada was not based on a lack of job opportunities in the Philippines, but rather a desire to maintain his professional identity (4-5). In the Philippines at the time (c.1950s), it was difficult to set up a successful medical practice without the patronage of a local politician, which entailed a certain kind of reciprocity. Not wanting to become a client in this way, and refusing to change his profession, Dr. Belmonte decided to leave for Canada. Thus, his was a decision motivated by professional identity and not economic rationality, a discourse that has long been prominent in labour migration research.

This book, and the broader oral history project in general, speaks volumes for the potential of community-generated scholarship and, I believe, in “sharing authority.”⁶

⁴ ANAK, “Projects,” *Aksyon Ng Ating Kabataan (ANAK) Inc.*, last modified 23 March 2009, http://anakinc.blogspot.ca/2009/03/projects_23.html.

⁵ Filipino Youth Transitions in Canada, York Centre for Asian Research, accessed 29 April 2013, <http://www.yorku.ca/ycar/fytic.html>.

⁶ Steven High, “Sharing Authority in the Writing of Canadian History: The Case of Oral History,” in *Contesting Clio’s Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History*, ed. Christopher Dummitt and Michael Dawson (London: Institute for the Study of the America, 2008): 21-46.

There are a few existing surveys of Filipinos in Canada (and one on the Winnipeg community),⁷ but this series by Bautista and ANAK promises to make a significant contribution. The goal of this series is to present the Winnipeg Filipino community's history since 1950 and to introduce "parallels found between generations, waves of immigration, and Canada's immigrant communities (both recent and established)" (vi). Unlike some ethnic community histories, the series "represents a grassroots perspective of a shared common experience. There are no celebrations of politicians or community 'firsts' written here" (xi). While this volume in particular focuses on the first waves of Filipinos into Canada, the larger project will offer a more inclusive history of the community, including memories of the Philippines upon departure, the first memories of Winnipeg, and the "imagined memory" of 1.5 and second generation Filipino-Canadians (xi). In the spirit of ANAK's mandate, Bautista states that "with the outlook of a new emerging generation of Filipino-Canadian youth, this discussion [of a shared immigrant narrative] is evolving" (xi). Part of this evolving discussion includes a strong emphasis on youth and on being Filipino-Canadian: in addition to "exert[ing] our experiences as Canadians," this project aims "to strengthen inter-generational unity among Filipino-Canadians" by pairing younger interviewers with older informants (xii).

This pairing of youth volunteer interviewers is a unique aspect of the larger project. A random selection of twenty-three interviewees attained through advertisements and the Philippine Heritage Council of Manitoba were paired with Filipino youth who had volunteered for the project. These pairings were along the lines of shared experiences of immigration, done to encourage deeper discussion during the interview and to foster community unity through shared experience (vii). In the case of Dr. Belmonte, Bautista herself followed up on an original interview with additional, more in-depth questions (3). Bautista and her research team appear to be aware of many issues of performing oral history and collaborated with the Oral History Centre at the University of Winnipeg to create an oral history handbook for their volunteer interviewers. To contextualize these narratives, archival research was done. Because the scholarship available on the Winnipeg Filipino community is lacking, my one wish with this volume is that it had been larger and that more room was given to the oral history component. While Bautista is able to effectively use the space available to her, more of the oral testimony from Dr. Belmonte would have enriched this historical narrative. Regardless, Bautista creates a rich and informative historical narrative that creatively melds community history and personal testimony, and places it within the broader context of both Canada and the

⁷ Eleanor del Rio-Laquian and Aprodicio A. Laquian, *Seeking a Better Life Abroad: A Study of Filipinos in Canada, 1957-2007* (Manila: Anvil, 2008); Gemma Dalayon, Leah Enverga-Magsino, and Leonnie Bailon, *The First Filipino Immigrants in Manitoba, 1959-1975* (Winnipeg: Government of Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage, and Citizenship, 2005). For a status paper on Filipino-Canadian studies, see Tom Lusic, "Filipino Immigrants in Canada: A Literature Review and Directions for Further Research on Second-Tier Cities and Rural Areas," (8 February 2009), <http://geography.ryerson.ca/hbauder/Immigrant%20Labour/filipinoSettlement.pdf>.

Philippines. The embeddedness of individual migrants in the land from which they came and the society to which they are entering is aptly demonstrated.

Bautista's academic training (along with the members of ANAK) lends a strong research and methodological approach to this volume, while the community driven nature of this project has produced a study that is deeply personal. This project arose out of more than just an academic curiosity, beginning as a series of questions within a community about its own past that had not been sufficiently answered. Herein lies the promise in melding personal or community history with academic studies. In introducing a recent video documentary on the Winnipeg Filipino community, the *From Manila to Manitoba* website asked the question: "What do you do when 'mainstream' academia has yet to recognize your own history?" This project – including Bautista's book – is a direct reflection of the answer: "You ask questions."⁸

⁸ "Oral History as Family Story," *From Manila to Manitoba*, posted 11 July 2012.
http://manila2manitoba.blogspot.ca/2012_07_01_archive.html.

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