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***Pinay* on the Prairies**
Filipino Women and Transnational
Identities



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Abbreviations

CARNA	College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta
CCR	Canadian Council for Refugees
CenPEG	Center for People Empowerment in Governance
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CFO	Commission on Filipinos Overseas
CMA	census metropolitan area
CRNE	Canadian Registered Nurse Examination
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
ECCC	Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary
FIDWAM	Filipino Domestic Workers Association of Manitoba
FILCAS	Filipino-Canadian Association of Saskatoon
FNAA	Filipino Nurses Association in Alberta
HRSDC	Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
ICMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
IMF-WB	International Monetary Fund and World Bank
IWAM	Immigrant Women's Association of Manitoba
LCP	Live-in Caregiver Program
LSIC	Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada
NAPWC	National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada
NAICS	North American Industry Classification System
NOC-S	National Occupation Classification for Statistics
NSO	National Statistics Office
OFW	Overseas Filipino Worker
OPA	Overseas Performing Artist
PAM	Philippine Association of Manitoba

PAS	Philippine Association of Saskatchewan
PCCM	Philippine Canadian Centre of Manitoba
PCW	Philippine Commission on Women
PNP	Provincial Nominee Program
POEA	Philippine Overseas Employment Administration
TESDA	Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
TFW	temporary foreign worker

Introduction

Kumusta (How are you?) is a familiar word among Filipinos. It is a sure way to connect with Filipinos scattered across more than 150 countries and territories, traversing busy airports, crowded shopping malls, isolated bus stops, and fast food outlets, and even hunkering down in the most unlikely of cold winter havens. *Kumusta* evokes not only joy and comfort at meeting a *kababayan* (compatriot) in a strange land but also sadness in recognition of sacrifices made. Tears flow in brief conversations, with shared stories of children left behind, of struggles to survive in hostile communities, and of people building new lives on their own. *Kumusta* fosters relationships among strangers drawn together by migration; it defines the experiences of Filipino women, also known as Filipinas and colloquially referred to as *Pinay*, who have become quite visible in the global labour diaspora of the twenty-first century.

I left the Philippines in March 2000 to take up a PhD scholarship at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia. As a university student, I had travelled intermittently in many parts of Asia, Australia, and Canada for various youth leadership activities sponsored by the Asia Alliance of YMCAs, YMCA International, and the Philippine government, but came to truly sense a community of Filipinos only when we – my husband, five young daughters, and I – settled in the beautiful south coast city of Wollongong. When I first met my longtime friend Zenaida in one of the nearly deserted small thrift stores on the Princess Highway, our conversation began with a single word – *kumusta*. It turned out we both came from Tacloban City, and Zenaida had a younger brother who happened to be a former student of mine at the University of the Philippines Tacloban College. Meeting Zenaida and many other Filipino women while doing research in New South Wales transformed our temporary physical sojourn into a permanent space of *Filipino-ness* where food, companionship, and rituals bound all of us together in a society where whiteness was the norm.

We moved to Canada in September 2003. Flying through Seoul on our way from Sydney to Toronto, I must have heard *kumusta* a thousand times that single day. It reverberated in the air among throngs of people lining up with passports and luggage in tow. Today, after a year in Mississauga, Ontario, and nearly six years in Lethbridge, Alberta, the same connectivity is still forged by *kumusta*. Being Filipino is “identity becoming” beyond national borders – that distinct sense of who we are away from home.

This book is inspired by these encounters. Filipino women are, undeniably, the most visible mobile group of temporary foreign workers in Canada and elsewhere today. They are also the most highly socially integrated group of women from Asia due to intermarriage (Hunt and Collier 1957; Cahill 1990; Constable 2003) and a Western colonial legacy. Over 300 years of Spanish rule and 50 years of American tutelage have made the Filipinos “little brown Americans” (Wolff 1992), whose use of the English language, practice of liberal-democratic politics, and adherence to Catholicism shape their trajectories as “citizens of the world” (Ang 2005, cited in Docot 2009, 129) and as preferred non-white workers and immigrants in Western societies, “at home in the world” (Aguilar 2002).

Over 8 million Filipinos live outside the Philippines. The two major groupings of overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) by Philippine government agencies – land-based workers (such as nurses, domestic workers, and caregivers) and sea-based workers (such as ships’ crews) – demonstrate a gendered topographical occupation distribution. Filipino women comprise the majority of land-based OFWs, whereas Filipino men predominate among sea-based OFWs. A gendered approach necessitates the inclusion of Filipino men in exploring the particular subjectivities of Filipinos in migration. I acknowledge the significance of Filipino masculinity in the comparative relational construct of Filipino women in the global labour diaspora, an important subject area in Philippine migration studies. This book, however, focuses on the lives of Filipino women for several reasons. First, Filipino girls and women comprise almost half of the Philippine population as of 2010 (45,368,660 females and 46,459,318 males) (NSO 2013), and more women than men leave the country as OFWs and registered emigrants combined: 206,299 Filipino women compared with 202,767 Filipino men in 2008 (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration [POEA] 2008; Commission on Filipinos Overseas [CFO] 2011). Permanency of migration has been greater for Filipino females than Filipino males since 1981; for example, the gender ratio of Filipino emigrants in 2010 was 73 males for every 100 females (CFO 2011). This gender disparity needs closer examination relative to migration as the labour productivity of the female Philippine population tends to be directed outside the country, with significant social consequences. Second, Filipino migrant women in host societies such as Canada tend to initiate the process of reunification. More importantly, it is the

construct of “Filipino women” that shapes the ideas about this group of racialized immigrants in Canada. This does not mean, however, that Filipino men are not included in the discussion in appropriate contexts in the chapters that follow.

This book explores the migration, identity, and community of *Pinays* in Western Canada, particularly the Prairie provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. Although Filipino women have become the mainstay group for case studies on the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) in Canada and its consequent phenotypical constructs of the “nanny,” “caregiver,” and “domestic worker” (Pratt 1999), I extend the prevailing dominant discourse of their positioning as “servants of globalization” (Parreñas 2001a) to the grounded experiences of community participation, activism, volunteerism, and negotiation of multiple identities in discerning the meanings of their quotidian transnational lives. I embark on a new path by presenting Filipino women of different migration statuses together in this book, thus shifting away from the usual research projects where temporary foreign workers, permanent residents, or citizens are studied separately in Canada or elsewhere. In the ordinariness of life, Filipino women become a collective, with shared experiences of migration. Their migration status (temporary or permanent) is an important indicator of their different paths of integration, however, and will be highlighted whenever necessary in subsequent chapters. For example, migrant workers with temporary status have different access to services, rights, and class position than permanent residents in Canada.

The economics of migration provide the impetus for many Filipino women to start anew in Canada. Their migration and community participation outside the three metropolitan census areas of Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver are underexplored, however, and have not been treated as significant areas of interest by mainstream migration scholars. Of course, these cities, with their high concentrations of diverse ethnic groups, are the favoured destinations of immigrants, including Filipinos, but their predominance in scholarly work obscures the experiences of migration in other parts of Canada, which can be quite variable. A cross-provincial study of Filipino women leads to a deeper understanding of their ways of belonging, and to the finding of similarities and differences in their civic engagements as immigrant women, mothers, workers, and citizens. Particularly in the era of globalization, their lives deserve further scrutiny beyond their market value as contributors to the annual billion-dollar remittances to the Philippines, or their hapless struggles as commodified subjects of corporations and middle-class employers around the world. A nuanced approach to how racialized Filipino women negotiate the limiting social structures of inclusion will lead to broader appreciation of the meaning of migration in their lives, and better treatment of historical patterns of Filipino migration to the Canadian Prairies.

This book explores the ways in which migration shapes identity and community participation among Filipino women in Canada. It is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 places gender in migration studies in context and pushes for the recognition of *Pinayism* or *Pinay feminism* in Filipino women's transnational studies using feminist perspectives. It presents the approaches, methods, and challenges of doing feminist research with immigrant and migrant *Pinays* in the Prairies. A profile of the participants in my research is included to show the diversity of Filipino women's education, occupation, regional origin, language abilities, age, and migration status in Canada.

Chapter 2 outlines the migration trajectories of Filipinos to Canada and the rest of the world. It highlights the destination, occupation, and migration status of Filipino women from a global perspective, and the demographic profile of Filipinos in Canada and in the Prairie provinces. Their exodus from the Philippines in the second half of the twentieth century was influenced by increasingly intertwined global economic networks and domestic politics. Personal motivations to leave their country and families behind in search of better opportunities in foreign lands are based not just on practical reasons but also on a complex combination of compelling cultural, economic, and political factors, including gender roles.

Chapter 3 examines the relationship between space and meaning, and how place of migration creates new meanings in the lives of Filipino women. Envisioned as a multicultural society, Canada presumably offers a "welcoming space" to newcomers that encourages many Filipinos to carve a niche for themselves in the community. This chapter explores three areas in which "welcoming Prairies" manifest during the initial stages of settlement: seeking employment, housing and accommodation, and social interactions in the community.

Chapter 4 examines the formation of Filipino identities in the cultural matrix of Canada. While Filipino is a national ethnic identity, it does not encompass all identities among Filipinos. In this chapter, the negotiation of multiple identities of Filipino women – as *Pinay*, wife, citizen, immigrant, migrant – combined with known social categories based on class, religion, ethnolinguistic origin, and sexuality are explored. Identities shape the meanings attached to migration, settlement, and belonging of Filipino women in Canada, particularly their perceptions of Filipino Canadian identity and Canadian citizenship under the rubric of multiculturalism. In constructing new meanings of "Filipino womanhood," this chapter presents the perspectives of changing gender role expectations brought about by migration.

In Chapter 5, I analyze *Pinay* activism in the Prairies through personal politics and grounded volunteerism rooted in their experiences of migration, settlement, and integration. The categories of grounded volunteerism include those motivated by faith, work, professions, schools, community building, social justice, and even pure circumstance. Noted *Pinay* community leaders

are included in the discussion to provide concrete examples of grounded volunteerism and *peminism* in diaspora, demonstrating how these leaders' contribution and involvement in community organizations ultimately enable them to build links with the larger society. The role of women in Filipino community associations and changing ideas about gender and leadership in the context of migration and cultural values are also explored in this chapter.

Finally, Chapter 6 offers the notion of “vested transnationalism” in the lives of Filipino women. This means that transnational practices are vested in personalism and a sense of community, essentially translating into a symbolic attachment to an “imagined” nation (Anderson 1991), both in Canada and in the Philippines. Whether members of the immediate family or members of the extended kinship system, including associational relations through the patronage system, many are the beneficiaries of the personal and collective activities of the hometown associations and local churches through which Filipino women traverse transnational spaces. This chapter also explores the forms of Filipino transnationalism – as seen in families, remittances, *balikbayan* (returnee) goods, media and popular culture, dual citizenship, and absentee voting – and *Pinay* transnational practices in Canada, emphasizing their multiple levels of belonging, such as philanthropy, mission work, and advocacy.

A concluding chapter reviews the major points raised in each of the earlier chapters and provides a synthesis of how gender, migration, identity, and community impact the lives of Filipino women outside the immigration hubs in Canada. It interweaves an exploration of the gendered nature of quotidian expressions of identities and practices of Filipino women's migration to Canada, particularly in the Prairie context, in the era of heightened globalization and increasing transnationalism. Included are insights into resistance, common bases of civic engagement, and empowerment in the lives of Filipino women trying to make Canada their home, which provide a general synthesis of *Pinay peminism* in local and national spaces. This is our springboard towards a holistic understanding of *Pinay* migration and the Filipino community in Canada.