

# philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

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## Book Reviews

**Roland Sintos Coloma, Bonnie McElhinny, Ethel Tungohan,  
John Paul C. Catungal, and Lisa M. Davidson, eds.**

*Filipinos in Canada: Disturbing Invisibility*

Resto S. Cruz I

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## **Filipinos in Canada: Disturbing Invisibility**

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 441 pages.

As the first edited volume on Filipinos in Canada, this collection of essays, poems, and artworks on Filipino Canadian lives rightfully claims for itself a “landmark” status. First presented during a symposium held at the University of Toronto in October 2009, the contributions to this volume include those of Filipino Canadians as well as Canadian scholars working on the Philippines and/or Filipino Canadian studies. There is also a good mix of more senior academics and postgraduate students, as well as artists, activists, and community organizers. What unites the various contributors is their abiding attention to how the hypervisibility of Filipinos in Canada—as nannies, caregivers, and more recently as gangster youths—renders homogeneous a putative Filipino Canadian community, hence eliding differences that are structured by, among other things, gender and sexuality, class, and generation. The contributors also situate this paradoxical situation (and the attendant promises and problems of representing an immigrant community) within another paradox, namely, Canada’s official celebration of multicultural diversity while privileging whiteness and adopting a utilitarian approach to immigration and racial otherness.

Resonating with migration studies in the Philippines and elsewhere in the Filipino diaspora, several contributors draw attention to the plight of nannies and caregivers. Eleanor Ty rehearses the by now common argument that postindustrial economies, such as those of Canada, are marked by a demand for emotionally intensive service jobs that for historical reasons have been identified with women from the South. While Filipino immigrants experience and reproduce this identification in their everyday lives and interactions with Canadians and other immigrants, academic work too plays a role because, by focusing on Filipino nannies and caregivers, it feeds on and into this dominant representation. Ty thus underscores the need to examine other aspects of Filipino Canadian life, without losing sight of the difficulties faced by care workers. Drawing from the work of Nancy Fraser, she also makes the case for linking representational struggles with struggles for distributive justice, and for interventions that link the experiences

and concerns of Filipino Canadians with those of other ethnic groups in Canada.

In their chapter, Philip F. Kelly and his colleagues delve into the process of deprofessionalization among post-1980s Filipino immigrants. Adopting a transnational perspective, they argue that deprofessionalization results from the confluence of several factors, including the middle-class origins of many Filipino immigrants (which implies limited financial means upon arrival and thus an urgent need to find jobs), the immigration programs availed of by Filipino immigrants (i.e., the Live-in Caregiver Program or LCP and family reunification), the valuation of education and work experiences in the Philippines, and the “cultures of work” identified with Filipinos in Canada (83–86). These factors make the entry into service and care work of immigrant Filipinos—many of whom come from professional backgrounds in the Philippines—possible and in many cases necessary, if not unavoidable.

In order to arrive at a more nuanced understanding, some chapters examine the immigration trajectories of Filipino nannies and caregivers in Canada and their practices of agency. Valerie Damasco focuses on the recruitment of healthcare professionals in the 1960s, partly in order to highlight the role of Canadian institutions, organizations, and individuals in instantiating immigration flows from the Philippines to Canada, but also to retrieve the stories of a generation of immigrants who have been erased from dominant narratives that trace the arrival of Filipinos to Canada to the 1980s, not as healthcare professionals but as nannies and caregivers. Josephine Eric meanwhile compares the experiences of earlier cohorts of Filipino immigrants with those who arrived in Canada under the auspices of the LCP. The importance of temporality—in the form of cohorts or generations—is foregrounded here in understanding continuities and disjunctures in the experiences and representations of Filipino Canadians. Earlier cohorts that arrived in Canada as landed immigrants (often with no work experience outside the Philippines) were more economically secure upon arrival, usually immigrated with their families, and reported feelings of belonging to Canada. In contrast, later cohorts arrived on temporary work permits (and often with work experiences in other countries), had more precarious labor conditions, had to endure longer periods of separation from their families, and experienced deprofessionalization as well as discrimination and nonbelonging in Canada.

Studies of migrant care workers often proceed from cultural and juridical differences between employers and employees. In her important contribution, Lisa Davidson takes a different approach by examining the experiences of those who entered Canada as nannies and caregivers of immigrant kin, such as siblings, in pursuit of a better life. For Davidson this constitutes a strategy outside the parameters allowed by Canadian law (i.e., family reunification as only for members of nuclear families) for the reconstitution of kinship ties ruptured by immigration, and indeed may be motivated by memories of the amity of such ties. However, new immigrants working for their now Canadian kin have to contend with the erasure of boundaries between work and nonwork, which in many cases imperils the very ties that motivated immigration to take place. Faced with such an erasure of boundaries, new immigrants strive to enact quotidian strategies meant to nurture their feelings and practices of hope as they seek a better future in Canada.

Other contributions, such as those in part three, broaden the focus of the book by discussing representational practices other than those pertaining to care workers. Bonnie McElhinny provides a fascinating discussion of the 2008 reexhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum of artifacts first displayed in the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. While the reexhibition sought to problematize the colonial ethnological project within which the original exhibition was embedded, it nevertheless reproduced the logic of the Fair. The reexhibition, for instance, represented the Philippines as "primitive," overemphasized the Igorot, and blurred the distinction between the ethnographic present of the original exhibit and the present of the contemporary Philippines. It also equated the Philippines with indigenous groups in Canada, hence reinforcing the dominant narrative of Canadian multiculturalism.

Roland Sintos Coloma peruses recently published Canadian history textbooks to demonstrate that Filipino Canadians are largely excluded from the historical narratives contained in these books. To the extent that they are included, they are often presented as mere statistical figures, as "late arrivals" in a benevolent multicultural (i.e., white) society, as desirable only insofar as they contribute economically to Canada, or are conflated with other Asian Canadian groups. Coloma accounts for the erasure of Filipino Canadians in history textbooks and its consequences before identifying strategies for redressing the abjection of Filipino Canadians, and ends his contribution

on a reflexive note by questioning precisely the desire to be included in official historical narrations. Together the contributions by McElhinny and Coloma underscore the richness of insights that may be generated by attending to the material dimensions of representation. These contributions also demonstrate the need to embed our understanding of contemporary migration flows within broader temporal horizons.

While many contributors to this volume attend to the past, some contemplate the future through their analyses of Filipino Canadian youth. Maureen Grace Mendoza's chapter on Filipino Canadian university students provides an interesting discussion of an understudied aspect of Filipino Canadian life. Filipino Canadian students appear to be in a bind as they are underrepresented in tertiary education, while at the same time are considered as elites within the Filipino Canadian community. This situation has considerable emotional repercussions as the students have to contend with isolation and insecurities in the university as well as considerable pressure from their parents and their peers. Mendoza in fact draws attention to how the intergenerational transmission of memories and experiences of the past (i.e., of parents prior to immigration) contributes to additional pressure for Filipino Canadian students, even those who have no direct experience of the Philippines. For university students, their parents' past haunts their present and their future.

Conely de Leon brings to the fore cleavages among Filipino Canadian youth by focusing on "colorism," or the construction of an intragroup hierarchy on the basis of skin color. Through conversations with her research participants, De Leon explores how skin color is articulated with class, space, and gender and sexuality. Those who reside in Mississauga, a suburb of Toronto that is considered as affluent and privileged, emphasize their lighter skin color and perceive those who reside in Scarborough as having darker skin and as belonging to the working class. The latter take pride in their darker color and ghettoized identity, which they articulate with hypermasculinity, in contrast to the former whom they describe as "soft" and "wussies" (389). Here the future appears to be fractured by hierarchies shaped in part by Canadian and Philippine pasts.

Throughout this volume, the shadow of the United States looms large. In their introductory chapter, for example, the editors draw from the germinal work of Oscar V. Campomanes on Filipino Americans and American imperial amnesia to frame the issue of Filipino Canadian invisibility

("Filipinos in the United States and their Literature of Exile," in *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*, edited by Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling, 49–78; Temple University Press, 1992; "Afterword: The New Empire's Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens: Unrepresentability and Unassimilability in Filipino American Postcolonialities," *Critical Mass*, 1995:145–200). The editors also compare the belated emergence of Filipino Canadian studies with the more established field of Filipino American studies. Canadian multicultural politics is also compared in several chapters with the "melting pot" paradigm of the United States. The legacy of American colonialism in the Philippines is taken too into account by various authors.

This emphasis on the United States is justifiable given the historical entanglements between the US and the Philippines and the former's geographical and political relations with Canada. As several contributions to this volume demonstrate, the emphasis on the US can be productive analytically. At the same time, one wonders whether this emphasis can also be limiting. This is glaringly apparent in De Leon's discussion of colorism, which she traces ultimately to the racial discourses during the American colonial period in the Philippines. This unfortunately renders pre- and post-American-period antecedents of Filipino Canadian colorism invisible and inadvertently flattens racial dynamics during the American colonial period. Meanwhile, Davidson's otherwise gem of a chapter could have benefited from an engagement with recent ethnographic work coming out of the Philippines on the salience of siblingship on Filipino kinship and migration. Quite tellingly, while many of the chapters in this volume take on a transnational optic, not one chapter presents ethnographic or archival data generated in the Philippines. Very few chapters also engage with either Philippine studies literature published in the Philippines or studies of diasporic Filipinos outside of North America. Future Filipino Canadian studies scholarship will do well by broadening its theoretical and empirical engagements, and thus escaping the confines of an hegemonic but insular academic formation.

**Resto S. Cruz I**

Social Anthropology, School of Social and Political Science,  
University of Edinburgh  
<R.S.Cruz@sms.ed.ac.uk>

KALE BANTIGUE FAJARDO

## **Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization**

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011; Quezon City:  
University of the Philippines Press, 2012. 251 pages.

Since the globalization of the maritime industry in the late 1980s, the Philippines has remained the world's top supplier of seafarers. As such, various studies have examined the adverse effects of economic globalism on Filipino workers and how they contend with new and morphed forms of exploitation in various spatial and temporal circumstances. However, because radical ideas and actions are proven to harm, even alter, the capitalist hegemonic agenda, resistances against and subversions of economic globalism are suppressed. These silences, if broken, may fill in some gaps in globalization studies. Spaces *in between* are usually overlooked as discourses locate places and people in the center or on the fringes. But in *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization*, the overlapping, liminal, and simultaneous are foregrounded in analyzing the complexity of seafaring and masculinities in the context of globalization.

The author of *Filipino Crosscurrents*, Kale Bantigue Fajardo, is an associate professor of Asian/American Studies at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. He was born in Malolos, Bulacan, and raised in Portland, Oregon. Fajardo completed his undergraduate degree at Cornell University and obtained his MA and PhD degrees in cultural anthropology from the University of California, Santa Cruz.

The crosscurrents framework of this book has four elements: (1) oceanic or maritime border zones; (2) oceanic trajectories of seafaring, sea-based migration, maritime trade, and global shipping; (3) alternative temporalities and spatializations of globalizations; and (4) heterogeneous masculinities (23–24). Through this framework, Fajardo argues that Filipino/a seafaring and seamen as key masculine cultural and economic spaces and figures are a result of neoliberal economics, capitalist globalization, and overseas migration. The author also makes a case that this heteronormative representation of maleness and manhood is produced and reproduced by the government, but Filipino seafarers find alternative spaces and nonconventional ways of defining masculinities. Through interdisciplinary ethnography, the author