

# The Complex Families of *Filipina* Immigrant Nurses and Garment Workers in Manitoba in the Sixties

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## Inception

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## Abstract

This paper adds to the critique of the thesis that the nuclear family was normative in Western society by describing the “complex” families that *Filipina* nurses and garment workers built when they immigrated to Manitoba in the 1960s. Upon their arrival in Manitoba, these *Filipinas* formed substitute sibling families that served as natural support systems. Then, after having settled in the province, they took on parental roles toward the kin they had left behind in the Philippines *as well as* fellow Filipinos who had immigrated to Canada after them. Finally, they sponsored close relatives to join them in Manitoba when Canadian immigration policy became more open. However, the socio-economic stratification within the Filipino community in Manitoba during its first decade in the province affected the ways nurses (among other professionals) and garment workers (among other working-class individuals) respectively built these “complex” families from different perspectives and with different approaches.

The Filipino community in Manitoba can trace its roots to the Filipino immigrants who started immigrating to the province in the late 1950s. Previous attempts to explore the experiences of these first Filipino immigrants to Manitoba have found that there was socio-economic stratification between the professionals who arrived via the United States in the early part of the 1960s and the working-class individuals who arrived directly from the Philippines in the latter part of the decade. Another feature of the early Filipino community in Manitoba was gender imbalance. Prior to 1971, *Filipina* immigrants in Manitoba greatly outnumbered their male counterparts.

In this essay, I aim to add to the literature on the first Filipinos to come to Manitoba by describing the families and family-like structures that *Filipina* nurses (who represent the professionals) and garment workers (who represent the working class) built during the 1960s. I used the testimonies that the Manitoba Filipino Writers' Guild gathered in 1999 from Filipinos who arrived in Manitoba prior to the enactment of the 1976 *Immigration Act*. My approach was informed by the previously documented socio-economic stratification and gender imbalance within the Filipino community in Manitoba in the 1960s as well as Nancy Christie's historiography of the "conjugal family." Christie critiqued the nuclearity thesis, which argued for the normative nature of the nuclear family in Western society and marginalized kin outside the conjugal household, by suggesting the existence of "complex" families. The families that *Filipina* nurses and garment workers built in the 1960s and into the 1970s were, indeed, more complex than the simple families that the nuclearity thesis suggests was the dominant form of the social unit. Also, class caused variations in the nature of these immigrants' complex families.

## ***Previous Works on Filipinos in Manitoba***

In 1990, sociologist Anita Beltran Chen published the results of her survey of 43 works on Filipinos in Canada. She found that the corpus that existed in the late 1980s was “scanty and fragmentary” and that most of it was “anecdotal and narrative in style.”<sup>1</sup> Chen did find a dozen studies that were empirical rather than anecdotal.<sup>2</sup> One of these was Cleto Buduhan’s 1972 master’s thesis “An Urban Village.” Buduhan, himself a Filipino immigrant to Manitoba, studied the first waves of mostly female garment workers that arrived in Winnipeg from the Philippines beginning in October 1968. He theorized that the effects of migration would be “much more pronounced among these garment workers than among the Filipino educated immigrants known as ‘professional’” such as the nurses who arrived in the city in the late 1950s after having worked in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Buduhan concluded that the *Filipina* garment workers in Winnipeg had been “broadly prepared in their migration by the western influences resulting from both Spanish and American colonial contact in the home country” and that their prior experience moving from their rural origins to Manila, the Philippine capital and urban centre, had “sufficiently equipped them to relate themselves to the Canadian working system.”<sup>4</sup> However, he was also able to recognize the socio-economic stratification that existed between the professionals and the garment workers by differentiating the professionals’ “assimilation” orientation and the garment workers’

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<sup>1</sup> Anita Beltran Chen, *From Sunbelt to Snowbelt: Filipinos in Canada* (Calgary: Canadian Ethnic Studies Association, 1998), 48-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

<sup>3</sup> Cleto M. Buduhan, “An Urban Village: The Effect of Migration on the Filipino Garment Workers in a Canadian City” (master’s thesis, University of Manitoba, 1972), 2-3. Accessed April 10, 2017, <https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/handle/1993/3305>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-24. Here, Buduhan described his “fieldwork,” which included working for five months in a garment factory as a “bundle boy” (i.e., someone who carries things around the factory).

“class identity” orientation.<sup>5</sup> This divide, Buduhan claimed, came from the working-class Filipino’s view of America as the “image of the ultimate good life”:

America is the home of the rich and intelligent people. The American enjoys a high prestige among the populace and his services and patronage are preferred. The Filipino who has been to America shares in this image and prestige. The Filipino who has studied in America is considered more intelligent and efficient than the locally educated. The Filipino who has reached America has proven his wealth.<sup>6</sup>

In the Philippines, the word “America” immediately conjures thoughts of the United States due to a half-century colonial entanglement between the two countries, but Buduhan extended the meaning to Canada, particularly to Winnipeg.

Chen’s survey provided adequate foundation upon which scholarly understanding of the Filipino immigrant communities in Canada can be built. After praising the pioneers such as Buduhan, Chen challenged future researchers to “begin looking at Filipino Canadians as a distinct ethno-cultural group with an identity of its own” and to “move away from impressionistic accounts to scientific empirical research well-grounded in theory and method.”<sup>7</sup> One of the responses to Chen’s proposal to have an “identity” focus, but one that still used the “impressionistic” style, was the Manitoba Filipino Writers’ Guild’s oral history project on the first Filipino immigrants to Manitoba. In 1999, the guild collected testimonies from Filipinos who came to the province between 1959 and 1976. The findings of the project, along with further data collection beginning in 2004, served as foundation for a report that the guild

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Chen, 55.

released in 2005, a report that mostly recapitulated the experiences that the Filipino immigrants talked about in the interviews that the guild had conducted. The guild organized the report without an underlying analytical framework but, nevertheless, crystallized Buduhan's finding that there were two distinct generations that arrived in Manitoba in the 1960s—the professionals and the garment workers—and that there existed social stratification between the two arising from differences in educational attainment and economic standing.

The Manitoba Filipino Writers' Guild conceded that their report was "not an exhaustive work" and, echoing Chen's challenge, encouraged others to pursue more comprehensive projects on Filipinos in Manitoba.<sup>8</sup> One such project was "From Manila to Manitoba," a 2010 exhibition at the Manitoba Museum. Second-generation Filipino immigrant Darlyne Bautista built the exhibition around interviews that she conducted in 2009 and 2010. Once again, it highlighted the class divide in Winnipeg between professionals and garment workers in the 1960s and then followed the evolution of the Filipino community in Manitoba up to 2009.<sup>9</sup> Historian Jim Mochoruk praised the project for being "more than just a triumphalist narrative of those who have succeeded in their adopted home" and for also posing questions about culture and identity.<sup>10</sup> In "*Bayanihan* and Belonging," a work in two parts published between 2014 and 2015, Asian studies scholar Alison

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<sup>8</sup> Gemma Dalayoan, Leah Envarga-Magsino, Leonnie C. Bailon, and Romulo F. Magsino, *The First Filipino Immigrants in Manitoba, 1959-1975* (Winnipeg: Dept. of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Government of Manitoba, 2005), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Alison Mayes, "Exhibit shines light on Manitoba's Filipinos," *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 17, 2010, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/entertainment/arts/exhibit-shines-light-on-manitobas-filipinos-96545849.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Jim Mochoruk, "Review: From Manila to Manitoba," *Oral History Review* 38, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2011): 195.

Marshall posed questions of her own about the culture and identity of Filipinos in Manitoba. She answered these questions in terms of the “positive socio-cultural values” that she found to be central to the Filipino-Manitoban narratives that arose from her research.<sup>11</sup> Marshall, however, “was not interested in exposing community disunity” and, thus, avoided revisiting the socio-economic conflicts and divisions among the first Filipinos in Manitoba that earlier works had revealed.<sup>12</sup>

### ***The Legal and Demographic Context***

The existing historical and sociological literature has not placed a lot of emphasis on the evolution of immigration policy, which, indeed, shaped the Filipino experience in Canada. The initial group of Filipino professionals who immigrated to Manitoba arrived via the United States after the Progressive Conservative government of John Diefenbaker had begun a review of immigration policy in the late 1950s. This review culminated in 1962 with the introduction of new immigration regulations that eliminated overt racial discrimination from Canadian immigration policy and that elevated technical and professional skill as the main criterion for determining admissibility into Canada. The provisions of the 1962 regulations that were most pertinent to the composition of the Filipino community in Canada in the early 1960s were those in Subsection 31(a), which specified preference for “a person who, by reason of his education, training, skills or other special qualifications, is likely to be able to establish himself successfully in Canada” and had “sufficient means of support to maintain himself in Canada until he has so established himself.”<sup>13</sup> The core group of Filipino professionals in Winnipeg in

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<sup>11</sup> Alison Marshall, “Bayanihan and Belonging: Filipinos in Manitoba,” *Manitoba History* 77 (Fall 2014): 12-13.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> “Immigration Regulations, Order-in-Council PC 1962-86, 1962,” Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, accessed April 10, 2017,

the early 1960s was already a reflection of these provisions even before they were enacted.

When the Liberal government of Lester B. Pearson came to power in 1963, it sought to respond to the increasing demand for skilled workers. In 1966, the *White Paper on Immigration* foresaw that Canada “will gain from an increased supply of people to adapt to the demands of an increasingly complex society in which accelerating technological change is reshaping the world of work more and more rapidly.”<sup>14</sup> This opened the door for working-class Filipinos such as garment workers to come to Canada. The Department of Manpower and Immigration, which was formed in 1966, counted Filipino immigrants in three different ways in the statistical reports produced after the release of the *White Paper*. Between 1956 and 1964, there were 864 immigrants to Canada who were born in the Philippines regardless of their citizenship or their place of residence immediately before entering Canada, 770 who were citizens of the Republic of the Philippines regardless of their place of birth or their last place of residence, and 666 who came directly from the Philippines regardless of whether they were Philippine-born or had Philippine citizenship.<sup>15</sup> The 1.30 ratio over the period of 1956-1964 of the 864 immigrants who were born in the Philippines relative to the 666 who came directly from the Philippines indicates the extent to which Filipino professionals coming to Canada by way of the United States was happening at the national level. By contrast, in 1965 and 1966,

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<http://www.pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/immigration-regulations-order-in-council-pc-1962-86-1962>.

<sup>14</sup> “White Paper on Immigration, 1966,” Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://www.pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/white-paper-on-immigration-1966>.

<sup>15</sup> “1967 Immigration Statistics,” Department of Manpower and Immigration, accessed April 10, 2017, [http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/202/301/immigration\\_statistics-ef/mp22-1\\_1967.pdf](http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/202/301/immigration_statistics-ef/mp22-1_1967.pdf), 19-21.

the ratio was only 1.02 (4,230 Philippine-born immigrants relative to 4,141 immigrants who came directly from the Philippines), showing a shift in the demographic profile of the Filipino population in Canada even before the release of the *White Paper*.<sup>16</sup> Manpower and Immigration only retroactively reported the number of Filipino immigrants who entered Canada between 1956 and 1966 in its report for 1967, wherein the department finally established Filipinos as a separate immigrant group. This change reflected the prior preference that Canadian immigration policy, as embodied by the *Immigration Act* of 1952, had for immigrants coming from Britain as well as the growing number of the Filipino immigrants coming into Canada by the mid-1960s.

The door opened even wider for Filipinos to immigrate to Canada with the implementation of the immigration regulations that took effect in August 1967, which eliminated the remaining elements of discrimination from Canadian immigration policy. The regulations removed restrictions on sponsored immigration, reduced the discretionary power of immigration officials, and established a “points system” that gave preference to immigrants with occupational skill and a number of other categories.<sup>17</sup> From 1967 to 1969, 954 Filipinos immigrated specifically to Manitoba.<sup>18</sup> This included the 298 garment workers who arrived in Winnipeg as landed immigrants during the summer of 1969. They, along with the 114 others who had arrived with work visas in October 1968 and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “Immigration Regulations, Order-in-Council PC 1967-1616, 1967,” Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://www.pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/immigration-regulations-order-in-council-pc-1967-1616-1967>.

<sup>18</sup> These figures for 1967 to 1969 are aggregates of figures obtained from the reports published by the Department of Manpower and Immigration for each of the three years. See [http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/202/301/immigration\\_statistics-ef/index.html](http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/202/301/immigration_statistics-ef/index.html).



who had not been counted as immigrants, were predominantly women.<sup>19</sup> The gendered nature of garment work certainly drove this gender imbalance, but, even at the national level, three of every four Filipino immigrants to Canada from 1967 to 1969 were women.<sup>20</sup> Manpower and Immigration did not present a gender disaggregation of the number of Filipino immigrants prior to 1967 but the 2006 Census and the 2011 National Household Survey found that 80% of persons living in Manitoba during the time of the censuses who were born in the Philippines and who arrived in Canada before 1971 were women.<sup>21</sup>

Several works have put into context, if not necessarily explained, this gender imbalance in the early Filipino immigrant community in Manitoba. They varied in both scope and in approach. Shirley Camia, for her master's research paper "Stitching History," conducted interviews of *Filipina* garment workers who arrived in Winnipeg between 1968 and 1974. The Manitoba Filipino Writers'

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<sup>19</sup> Buduhan, 69-70.

<sup>20</sup> These figures for 1967 to 1969 are aggregates of figures obtained from the reports published by the Department of Manpower and Immigration for each of the three years. See [http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/202/301/immigration\\_statistics-ef/index.html](http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/202/301/immigration_statistics-ef/index.html).

<sup>21</sup> "Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 97-557-XCB2006008," Statistics Canada, last modified July 17, 2014, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/tbt/Rp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=1&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=1&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=89425&PRID=0&PTYPE=88971&S=0&SHOWALL=No&SUB=0&Temporal=2006&THEME=72&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>; "Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-010-X2011026," Statistics Canada, last modified February 14, 2017, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=105411&PRID=0&PTYPE=105277&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2013&THEME=95&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>.

Guild had already interviewed several of these women in 1999, but Camia's innovation was to frame her findings with a labour perspective. She concluded that while both the garment factories and, indeed, the Canadian government exploited *Filipina* immigrant workers, the women, for their part, "saw themselves as taking advantage of an opportunity that offered them more money than they were making in the Philippines, and were happy and proud of the fact that they were not only able to support themselves, but their families back home."<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Glenda Tibe Bonifacio, in her book *Pinay on the Prairies*, examined the experiences of *Filipina* migrants to Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta from a socio-cultural lens. She argued that "culture is not an impediment to Filipino women's migration; instead cultural mores actually encourage them to sustain the household economy and the nation."<sup>23</sup> Finally, Denise Cruz, in her book *Transpacific Femininities*, analyzed English-language Philippine literature produced by *Filipinas* during the early- and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. She found that "the dominant representation of the *Filipina* [italics are mine] was not that of a woman bound to the land, but that of a transgressive woman who flouted norms, spoke multiple languages, traveled, and was both the product and producer of a nation and culture in flux."<sup>24</sup> Whatever the reason might have been for the gender imbalance that characterized the first decade of the Filipino community in Manitoba, such imbalance would come to shape the families and family-like structures that *Filipinas* established in the province.

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<sup>22</sup> Shirley Camia, "Stitching History: Filipina Garment Workers in Winnipeg" (master's major research paper, Ryerson University, 2012), 52. Accessed October 22, 2017, <http://digital.library.ryerson.ca/islandora/object/RULA:1533>.

<sup>23</sup> Glenda Tibe Bonifacio, *Pinay on the Prairies: Filipino Women & Transnational Identities* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 35.

<sup>24</sup> Denise Cruz, *Transpacific Femininities: The Making of the Modern Filipina* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 19.

## **Complex Families Manifested Three Ways**

Against the historiographical, legal, and demographic backdrop, I will now contrast the “simple nuclear” family model to the complex families of the *Filipina* nurses and garment workers who immigrated to Canada during the 1960s. This delineation between “complex” and “simple nuclear” families draws on Nancy Christie’s 2004 historiography of the family. Christie critiqued the nuclearity thesis, which argues that the nuclear family was, historically, “irrevocably normative in Western society” to the detriment of kin who are “outside the demographic measure of the conjugal household.”<sup>25</sup> I will add to this critique the non-kin but, nevertheless, sororal households that the nurses and garment workers found themselves in and the parental dynamics between the professionals and their more working-class successors. I will then take Christie’s findings that “though one might inhabit a nuclear household...one’s cultural and social world may be characterized by contacts with a range of kin, both close and distant,” and that “systems of familial obligation were so strong that they straddled vast distances” and relate them to the experiences of Filipino immigrants in Manitoba supporting kin in the Philippines and eventually sponsoring them to come to Canada.<sup>26</sup>

### **1. *Ina at Bunso*: Substitute Sibling Families**

Fe Ryder and Melba Rous were two of the first *Filipina* nurses to arrive in Manitoba and they found themselves in the province

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<sup>25</sup> Nancy Christie, “Introduction: Interrogating the Conjugal Family,” in *Mapping the Margins: The Family and Social Discipline in Canada, 1700–1975*, ed. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 3-24.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

following almost identical paths from the Philippines.<sup>27</sup> Both studied and practiced nursing in Manila and then applied for a nurses' exchange program to the United States. It was Fe's "dream to come to [the] United States" and she recalled that her father had promised to send her there if she finished her nursing degree.<sup>28</sup> Melba, on the other hand, wanted to go abroad to further her nursing career. Fe and Melba worked together in Rochester, Minnesota, and, when their work visas were about to expire, Fe and Melba considered going back to the Philippines. However, a nun told Fe that Misericordia Hospital in Winnipeg badly needed nurses, so Fe immigrated to Canada instead. She took a train from St. Paul, Minnesota, and arrived in Winnipeg in November 1959. At Misericordia Hospital, she discovered that five *Filipina* nurses, by way of Chicago, were already working there. After a few days in the city, she started renting a floor of the house of a Hungarian-Canadian family on Furby Street. In February 1960, Melba also immigrated to Canada. She worked with Fe at Misericordia Hospital and lived with her and two other *Filipina* nurses—Cora Laygo and Purita Bamba—who had also moved from Rochester to Winnipeg.

Each of these women were the first of their families to go abroad and were all single during their first years in Winnipeg. As such, these *Filipina* nurses became a substitute family for one another. For instance, Fe used sororal terms to describe her relationship with Melba, Cora, and Purita: "We were like sisters. There were four of us that stuck together."<sup>29</sup> The idea of single women forming

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<sup>27</sup> Fe Ryder, interview by Leah Envarga-Magsino, June 29, 1999, interview 10, summary, Manitoba Filipino Writers' Guild oral history project records, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB; Melba Rous, interview by Leah Envarga-Magsino, July 7, 1999, interview 12, summary, Manitoba Filipino Writers' Guild oral history project records, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB.

<sup>28</sup> Fe Ryder, interview by Leah Envarga-Magsino.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

households outside the nuclear family model has some historical precedent. Historian Michelle Stairs studied bachelors and spinsters in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Prince Edward Island and found that one of every five spinsters in the province who were reported in the 1881 Census of Canada lived in a “sibling family”. Using the stories of Lucy Maud Montgomery, Stairs characterized some of these spinsters as independent women who lived comfortably.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, Fe, Melba, Cora, and Purita were young enough to find partners and get married. As such, they might not so easily be classified as “spinsters” according to the definition that Stairs used. However, *Filipina* nurses in Winnipeg in the early 1960s do, in many ways, fit the profile that Stairs found in Montgomery’s writings. They lived comfortably as substitute sibling families after having worked in the United States and earning nurses’ salaries in Winnipeg.

Fe, Melba, Cora, and Purita interacted with the more “simple” nuclear families of Filipino professionals who had also moved to Winnipeg. In doing so, they extended their substitute sibling family. Melba recalled that, by 1963, the group of Filipino professionals that she was a part of—a group that earned the appellation “the St. James Group” due to the fact that most of them lived in more affluent neighbourhoods of Winnipeg<sup>31</sup>—was composed of about 10 people. This included Pat Bigornia, who first worked as a nurse in New York City from 1955 to 1958.<sup>32</sup> Like Fe and Melba, Pat was planning to go back to the Philippines. However, a physician in a hospital in Winnipeg convinced Pat’s husband, Gerry, to come to Manitoba so

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<sup>30</sup> Michelle Stairs, “Matthews and Marillas: Bachelors and Spinsters in Prince Edward Island in 1881,” in *Mapping the Margins: The Family and Social Discipline in Canada, 1700-1975* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 254-256.

<sup>31</sup> Dalayoan, Envarga-Magsino, Bailon, and Magsino, 59.

<sup>32</sup> Pat Bigornia, interview by Leah Envarga-Magsino, July 13, 1999, interview 15, summary, Manitoba Filipino Writers’ Guild oral history project records, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB.

that he could continue practicing medicine and Pat could continue working as a nurse in North America. Driving from New York, Pat and her family arrived in Winnipeg in July 1960. Pat worked for a series of hospitals, including Misericordia Hospital, gaining a lot of experience and meeting a lot of people along the way. When the Bigornias arrived in Winnipeg, they did not know any other Filipinos in the city, but Pat eventually met Fe and Melba after asking fellow church-goers one Sunday where she could find babysitters for her children. It is not surprising for this first encounter between Pat, Fe, and Melba to happen at church due to the central role that religion plays in Filipino life, even outside of the Philippines. Cleto Buduhan, for example, instinctively knew to visit churches—among other places “where one’s reason for being there is taken for granted”—to find his research subjects.<sup>33</sup> Alison Marshall, for her part, expressed surprise over how the Filipino immigrants she studied “spoke with enthusiasm about faith” in contrast to Chinese immigrants who kept their religion more private.<sup>34</sup> Soon enough, the nurses (like Pat, they were usually female) and physicians (like Gerry, they were usually male) who had come to Winnipeg with families of their own became the extended family of the nurses on Furby Street. Melba summed up the nature of the St. James Group: “It’s really actually one whole family.”<sup>35</sup> She recalled the “weekly ritual” of the men in their group bringing groceries to the places of residence of the women “without invitation” so that the women could cook and everyone, together as one big household, could eat as much Filipino food as they could as often as they could.<sup>36</sup> She summarized the nature of this ritual as “brothers and sisters giving each other moral support.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Buduhan, 19-20.

<sup>34</sup> Marshall, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Melba Rous, interview by Leah Envarga-Magsino.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Dalayoan, Envarga-Magsino, Bailon, and Magsino, 59.

Filipino garment workers came to Winnipeg in the late 1960s under very different circumstances. Tessie Mendoza arrived in Winnipeg on October 1, 1968, with the first group of 30 Filipino garment workers, while Celing Buduhan arrived a week later with another group of 30.<sup>38</sup> By the end of the month, 114 Filipino garment workers were in Winnipeg, all but eight of whom were women.<sup>39</sup> Tessie was studying business administration in Manila when she heard news from the workers in her aunt's business that agents of Canadian garment firms were in the Philippines to recruit workers. Celing, who had only started high school, heard the same news from a co-worker at an undergarment factory in Manila. She recalled being reluctant to go through the recruitment process because she did not want to miss a day of work. She was also cynical of the news because she had "educated and moneyed" (my translation<sup>40</sup>) cousins who were trying to immigrate to the United States but had still not gone. Yet, she was intrigued by the idea of going abroad: "When I was I kid, my dream was to ride on an airplane. If I was doing laundry and a plane was passing by overhead, I would say 'when am I going to ride one

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<sup>38</sup> Teresita Mendoza, interview by Leonnie C. Bailon, July 26, 1999, interview 16, summary, Manitoba Filipino Writers' Guild oral history project records, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB; Marcela Buduhan, interview by Gemma Dalayoan, June 13, 1999, interview 5, summary, transcript Manitoba Filipino Writers' Guild oral history project records, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB. Marcela (Celing) Buduhan would meet Cleto Buduhan a year after her arrival in Winnipeg and they would marry after a year of courtship.

<sup>39</sup> Buduhan, 69-70.

<sup>40</sup> All quotes in this essay from Celing Buduhan are translated from Tagalog. The density of Celing Buduhan's account of her experiences as an immigrant to Manitoba (i.e., amount of information relative to time) far outstripped those of Tessie Mendoza and many of the other immigrants that the Manitoba Filipino Writers' Guild interviewed. This was, in no small part, due to her interview being conducted in Tagalog. Wanting to make the interviews more accessible, the Manitoba Filipino Writers' Guild missed a great opportunity to get more information from its subjects.

of those?”<sup>41</sup> Overcoming any reluctance and cynicism they may have felt, Tessie and Celina took advantage of their experience in the garment industry and decided to take the steps that would bring them to Winnipeg. Celina recalled the recruitment process that eventually brought her to Winnipeg. After Celina passed a sewing machine test, an agent of the garment factories asked her why she wanted to go to Canada. She responded in what she admitted to be the little English that she knew at the time: “I want to help my family.”<sup>42</sup> This primarily economic motivation to support kin in the Philippines was ubiquitous among the garment workers, but not necessarily among the nurses and other professionals. Carmen-Litta Magnus reported for the *Winnipeg Free Press* on this contrast in December 1968, two months after the arrival of the first wave of Filipino garment workers in Winnipeg. She found that, while many Filipinos come to Canada for economic reasons, “[m]any come because of the academic advantages and others for adventure.”<sup>43</sup> Fe and Melba confirmed this in their interviews with the Manitoba Filipino Writers’ Guild three decades later. Fe was very open when talking about her desire to go abroad for “[a]dventure and to further [her] experience in nursing.”<sup>44</sup> Melba did say that “financial” reasons played a part in her going abroad but quickly added that it was “to have more experience, too, outside of [the] Philippines.”<sup>45</sup>

Despite the differences in their pathways to Canada, the garment workers also found themselves living with substitute sibling families of their own. Cleto Buduhan found that the garment workers lived in groups that averaged five members, with the eldest of the group taking on the role of *ina* (literally, this term means “mother,” but, in

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<sup>41</sup> Marcela Buduhan, interview by Gemma Dalayoan.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Carmen-Litta Magnus, “Filipino adjust to Winnipeg life,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 12, 1968.

<sup>44</sup> Fe Ryder, interview by Leah Envarga-Magsino.

<sup>45</sup> Melba Rous, interview by Leah Envarga-Magsino.



this context, it is closer to “eldest sister”) and the youngest taking on the role of *bunso* (youngest sibling).<sup>46</sup> Tessie and Celina were among the *bunsos*. There were cultural and economic factors that influenced the formation of the households of the garment workers. Franca Iacovetta, in her book *Gatekeepers*, explored how the Canadian state’s health and food campaigns during the Cold War asked immigrant women to “abandon their folkways for ‘modern’ shopping and homemaking techniques.”<sup>47</sup> However, unlike the nurses who adapted more readily to the culinary environment that they faced, the garment workers did not heed the prescriptions of the state, as Cleto Buduhan wrote: “Rather than change their taste, the immigrants look for a ‘full’ house [of Filipinos] ‘where nobody interferes.’”<sup>48</sup> Estrelita Alipio, Rebecca Lapid, and Rosario Siasat lived in one such “full” house. The three arrived in Winnipeg in June 1969 and lived in a three-bedroom apartment on Mulvey Avenue along with three other *Filipinas*. They quickly discovered that Canadian food was not “fried enough” and, thus, frequented Winnipeg’s Chinatown “to buy the kind of food [they] like,” that is, those with rich and spicy ingredients.<sup>49</sup> The garment workers were also not as prosperous as their nurse counterparts; they were only paid between \$1.20 and \$1.50 per hour.<sup>50</sup> They would therefore pool money with their housemates to buy their groceries. Tessie and Celina both recounted contributing \$5 dollars to a weekly fund, which, if there were five in a household, would be enough to fill a shopping cart. The garment workers saw a \$25 weekly budget for groceries and, indeed, life in Canada as *sagana* (“abundant” or “abundance”). With this *sagana*, they eventually made good on their promise to help their families by sending back money to the

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<sup>46</sup> Buduhan, 104.

<sup>47</sup> Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 138.

<sup>48</sup> Buduhan, 105-106.

<sup>49</sup> “Filipinos Call City ‘Maganda,’” *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 1, 1969.

<sup>50</sup> Marcela Buduhan, interview by Gemma Dalayoan.

Philippines, something that the nurses neither needed to do nor mention in their recollections.

The substitute sibling families that *Filipina* nurses and garment workers formed typically dissolved when a member got married or moved away. For example, when Melba went back to the Philippines in 1963 and Fe got married in 1964, their “family” had to break up. Among the garment workers, Celeng moved to an apartment after marrying Cleto Buduhan in 1970 while Tessie left her sibling family after marrying Pedro Mendoza in 1971. Despite their transitory nature, these substitute sibling families were natural support systems for the first Filipino immigrants to Manitoba.

## **2. *Ninang at Inaanak*: Converging into a Filipino “Family”**

The provisions of the 1962 immigration regulations that had allowed Filipino professionals to enter Canada sooner than their working-class counterparts, along with Buduhan’s “image of the ultimate good life,” ensured that there would always be a certain parent-child dynamic between the first two generations of Filipino immigrants to Manitoba. Whereas the professionals described their relationships with each other in sororal and fraternal terms, the ties between them and the working-class immigrants were more parental. Tessie Mendoza recalled arriving in Winnipeg to the welcome of officers of the Philippine-Canadian Association of Manitoba (Fil-Can).<sup>51</sup> Filipino physicians, both male and female, founded Fil-Can in 1962 with the aim of helping Filipino newcomers to “adjust to the Canadian life.”<sup>52</sup> During her time as president of Fil-Can, Pat Bigornia worked in partnership with the federal government to initiate the process of helping garment firms in Winnipeg to recruit workers from the

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<sup>51</sup> Teresita Mendoza, interview by Leonnie C. Bailon.

<sup>52</sup> Rolando Guzman, interview by Leah Envarga-Magsino; Paulino Orallo, interview by Leah Envarga-Magsino; Dalayoan, Envarga-Magsino, Bailon, and Magsino, 72.

Philippines. This opportunity arose from her term as president of the association and coincided with changes to Canadian immigration policy in the mid-1960s. As Pat recalled, Fil-Can also fulfilled more practical parental duties on the home front: setting up housing for the new immigrants, buying them kitchen and bedroom articles, referring them to doctors, consoling those who were feeling lonely (even at “two o’clock in the morning”), phoning the garment factories to ask them to be more accommodating of the needs of the garment workers (like giving them “more time to drink their coffee),” and encouraging the workers to take advantage of opportunities to upgrade their education and training.<sup>53</sup> Alison Marshall studied the *bayanihan* that sustained the Filipino community in Manitoba in the more recent past. However, Pat’s recollections of the activities of Fil-Can indicate that this communal spirit was already active as early as the mid- to late-1960s.<sup>54</sup> The *Winnipeg Free Press* even presaged how the professionals would react to the arrival of the garment workers. In January 1959, the paper published an excerpt of the novel *The Ugly American* wherein Filipinos showed hospitality to U.S. Air Force Colonel Edwin Hillandale.<sup>55</sup> Then, in December 1963, an article appeared wherein villagers in Panay (an island in the Philippines) built a house for Peace Corps worker Silvia Boecker for a mere \$20.<sup>56</sup> Finally, in December 1964, John Kirkwood called *bayanihan* “[t]he most popular export from the Philippines.”<sup>57</sup> The parental duties that Pat relayed to the Manitoba Filipino Writers’

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<sup>53</sup> Pat Bigornia, interview by Leah Envarga-Magsino.

<sup>54</sup> See Alison Marshall, “Bayanihan and Belonging: Filipinos in Manitoba,” *Manitoba History* 77 (Fall 2014): 11-18; and Alison Marshall, “Stories of Bayanihan and Belonging: Filipinos in Manitoba, Part 2,” *Manitoba History* 78 (Winter 2015): 13-22

<sup>55</sup> William Burdick and William J. Lederer, “Enter the Rag Time Kid,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 24, 1959.

<sup>56</sup> Jennifer Webster, “House comes cheap – \$20,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 14, 1963.

<sup>57</sup> John Kirkwood, “Bayanihan is Philippines’ most popular export,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 19, 1964.

Guild concretized for the larger Manitoba public what had previously been just stories in the local newspaper.

It was the practice of godparenting, however, that epitomized the parental link between professionals and the garment workers. Professionals served as *ninongs* and *ninangs* (“godfathers” and “godmothers”) of their working-class *inaanaks* (literally “quasi-children”) who were getting married.<sup>58</sup> In the Filipino tradition, not only are *ninongs* and *ninangs* supposed to be older—and presumably wiser—than their *inaanaks*, they are also, by necessity, higher up in the socio-economic ladder. The nurses and physicians and, later on, other professionals like teachers, lawyers, and engineers were well-equipped to take on this parental role because they had higher levels of education than their working-class successors, had already settled in Winnipeg, had better paying jobs, and were, thus, relatively more prosperous. The Filipino immigrants who came to Winnipeg after the initial group of professionals felt that the patronage relationship brought on by the *ninang-inaanak* arrangement was causing tensions within the Filipino community in Winnipeg. They responded by forming splinter organizations with their own parental objectives. Fundador Serrano, one of only eight male Filipino garment workers to arrive in Winnipeg in October 1968, founded the Filipino Garment Workers Association of Winnipeg (“Garments”) in order to “profile the contributions of garment workers in the economy of Manitoba.”<sup>59</sup> Younger professionals who arrived in Manitoba after those in the St. James Group formed the *Kayumangi* Association of Manitoba with the aim of maintaining Filipino cultural heritage in contrast to the more assimilationist aims

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<sup>58</sup> Dalayoan, Envarga-Magsino, Bailon, and Magsino, 72-73.

<sup>59</sup> Fundador Serrano, interview by Leah Envarga-Magsino, July 27, 1999, interview 17, summary, Manitoba Filipino Writers’ Guild oral history project records, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB; Dalayoan, Envarga-Magsino, Bailon, and Magsino, 74.

of Fil-Can.<sup>60</sup> In this regard, Franca Iacovetta again provides context. Canadian citizenship officials dealt with “ethnic elites...who were expected to influence the rest of their lot” and used ethnic organizations as “tools of integrations in that they cushioned the shock of migration.”<sup>61</sup> Whatever the possible class tensions between the professionals who came early in the 1960s, the professionals who followed later, and the more working-class immigrants, the St. James Group and Fil-Can were clearly essential in smoothing the immigration pathways for the garment workers.

### 3. Nag-sponsor at Ini-sponsor: Expanding the Family

While the *Filipina* nurses and garment workers who arrived in Manitoba during the 1960s were building families in their new home, they continued to fulfill familial obligations to their kin in the Philippines. However, the nurses’ commitment to these obligations and that of the garment workers were not necessarily uniform. Working-class immigrants had to continue to financially support their kin in the Philippines. The professionals may well have done the same, but, as the accounts of the nurses like Fe, Melba, and Pat have shown, the economic imperative was not as pressing for them and they, instead, funnelled their “parental” energies towards helping newcomers to settle to Canada. For the unmarried garment workers, their sending back money to the Philippines was, essentially, their “parental” role. Such a role, Shirley Camia claimed, “instilled pride” in the garment workers. She found from her research concrete examples of how the remittances improved the lives of kin in the Philippines. The parents of one garment worker were able to install a water pump so that they would not have to fetch water from

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<sup>60</sup> Dalayoan, Envarga-Magsino, Bailon, and Magsino, 73. *Kayumangi* is term that Filipinos use to describe the color of their skin (i.e., brown) and there was a clear ethnic element to this choice of a name for the organization.

<sup>61</sup> Iacovetta, 62-63.

a river, while the mother of another garment worker was able to build two houses.<sup>62</sup> Then, once Canadian immigration policy became more open to non-British and non-European newcomers, both the nurses and garment workers, along with many other Filipino immigrants, expanded the nuclear families that they had started in Manitoba by sponsoring relatives from the Philippines to come to Canada. Among the nurses, Fe sponsored a nephew while Melba sponsored a sister and a brother. Pat brought her six siblings to Canada, all of whom started families of their own and sponsored even more relatives. Gloria Peñaflorida—a nurse who immigrated to Canada in 1963, after having also worked under a nurses' exchange program—sponsored her husband in 1969.<sup>63</sup> Among the garment workers, Celina sponsored a sister who, then, took over the responsibility of sending money back to their family in the Philippines. Many other garment workers took advantage of the opportunity afforded them by the loosening of racial restrictions to sponsor relatives to come to Canada. Among the 412 who arrived in Winnipeg between 1968 and 1969, 137 sponsored 160 relatives from the Philippines to come to Winnipeg by September 1971, an average of 1.16 relatives per garment worker. Out of these 160 relatives, 84 were sisters (53%), 41 were brothers (26%), and 29 were either boyfriends or husbands (18%).<sup>64</sup>

The arrival of sponsored relatives affected the two salient features—gender imbalance and socio-economic stratification—of the steadily growing Filipino “family” in Manitoba, but in contrasting ways. On the one hand, the influx of brothers, boyfriends, husbands, and other male relatives that the garment workers sponsored to Canada reduced the gender imbalance in the province. This shift also

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<sup>62</sup> Camia, 47.

<sup>63</sup> Gloria Peñaflorida, interview by Leah Envarga-Magsino, June 17, 1999, interview 7, summary, Manitoba Filipino Writers' Guild oral history project records, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB.

<sup>64</sup> Buduhan, 72.

occurred at the pan-Canadian level. From 1967 to 1969, 74% of Filipino immigrants to Canada were women but from 1970 to 1976, the average proportion had been reduced to just 55%.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, while a significant number of the 160 relatives sponsored by the garment workers had attained a higher level of education than their sponsors, they did not shift the socio-economic profile of the latter generation of Filipino immigrants to Manitoba closer to that of the St. James Group. The main barrier was that the newly-arrived relatives had trouble finding employment in their area of training.<sup>66</sup> This difficulty in getting recognized for skills that they had obtained in the Philippines—something that the nurses generally did not experience—manifested itself in the national statistics, where the proportion of Filipinos immigrating to Canada as “professionals” dipped below 20% in 1971 after a steady decline from 74% in 1966.<sup>67</sup>

Denise Cruz found that the nurse trained as part of exchange programs in the United States was an icon in literary representations of transpacific *Filipina* in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>68</sup> Some of these nurses eventually found themselves in Winnipeg. However, Cruz acknowledged that this model was elitist and that it marginalized *Filipinas* of rural, working-class and, indigenous origins, from where many of the garment workers I discussed in this essay came.<sup>69</sup> Thus, not only has Cruz explained the gender imbalance in the early

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<sup>65</sup> I derived these percentages for 1967 to 1976 from figures in the reports published by the Department of Manpower and Immigration over the ten years. See [http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/202/301/immigration\\_statistics-ef/index.html](http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/202/301/immigration_statistics-ef/index.html).

<sup>66</sup> Buduhan, 71.

<sup>67</sup> I derived these percentages for 1966 to 1971 from figures in the reports published by the Department of Manpower and Immigration over the six years. See [http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/202/301/immigration\\_statistics-ef/index.html](http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/202/301/immigration_statistics-ef/index.html).

<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 5 of Cruz's *Transpacific Femininities*.

<sup>69</sup> Cruz, 9.

Filipino community in Manitoba, she has also provided context to the class-based differences between *Filipina* nurses and garment workers, be it in terms of their entry into Canada, their settling into substitute sibling families, or their engagement in the dual familial obligations of financially supporting kin in the home country and sponsoring relatives to come to the new country. In return, I hope to have extended Cruz's narrative beyond the 1950s by providing concrete examples of the impact of the marginalization of the working-class *Filipina*, like garment workers, vis-à-vis the elite's model of the transpacific *Filipina*, that is, the nurse.

## **Conclusion**

In this essay, I described the “complex families,” as opposed to “simple nuclear” ones, of *Filipina* immigrants who arrived in Manitoba in the 1960s, particularly those of the nurses who arrived early in the decade and of the garment workers who arrived a few years later. The complexity of these families was salient in three distinct ways and, even within these three, there were variations due to differences in class. First, before getting married and starting nuclear families of their own, *Filipina* immigrants—both the nurses and the garment workers—built substitute sibling families. These substitute families tended to dissolve once one of the members got married. Second, each group took on atypical “parental” roles with regards to other Filipinos, but there were also class-based differences in the roles that the nurses and garment workers played. During their first few years in Manitoba, the garment workers continued to support their kin in the Philippines by sending back money. This is the working-class immigrants' main motivation for going to Canada. On the other hand, the nurses wanted adventure and professional experience and did not need to financially support their families in the Philippines. Instead, they took on parental roles to help their successors—including garment workers—settle into their new lives. Third, both the nurses and the garment workers sponsored relatives to come to Canada, who then built families of



their own and sponsored even more relatives. When the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, the questions that these complex families and, by extension, the larger Filipino “family” in Manitoba faced evolved to ones about cultural expression, but, in their first decade in the province, maintaining a sense of family took precedence.

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