

# Immigrant Filipino Nurses in Western Canada from 1950 – 2000

An Oral History Study



Charlene Ronquillo  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Geertje Boschma

# Outline

- Background
  - Filipino immigrant nurses in Canada
- Literature and guiding frameworks
- Demographics
- Interview themes
  - Pre-migration
  - Transition period
- Conclusions



# Filipino nurse immigrants in Canada

- Little Canadian data available
- Majority arrived from 1970s onwards
- Philippines as the leading RN donor country internationally
- The first steps toward examining this history in Canada



# What does the literature tell us?

Two major perspectives:

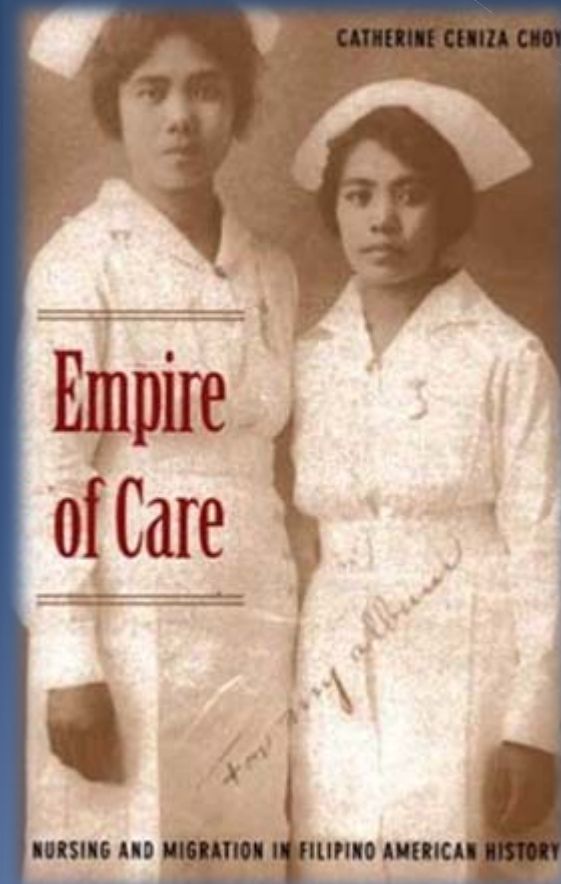
1. Economic
2. Health policy

Choy's work in the US as leading authority on this topic

➤ Relationship between US and Philippines, 'culture of migration', reconceptualization of temporal origins

➤ Going beyond dominant economic perspective

➤ Life stories important in understanding experiences



# Research Questions

1. What do the oral histories tell us about the context and larger influences at play in the decision to emigrate?
2. How were the motivations to migrate and transition experience to life and work in Canada remembered?
3. What was the relationship between larger influences and migration trends in the literature, and each individuals' experiences of immigration?

# Participant demographics

- Nine female registered nurses currently practicing in Calgary, AB or Vancouver, BC
- Early 30s to late 50s
- 7 baccalaureate degrees, 2 hospital-based schools of nursing
- Entry to Canada
  - > 2 through Live-In Caregiver program
  - > 5 through sponsor (either family or recruitment agency)
  - > 2 independent immigrants
- Arrival in Canada
  - > 1 in early 1970s
  - > 1 in early 1980s
  - > 2 in 1990s
  - > 5 from 2000 to 2007

# Pre-migration Themes

## Background - Culture of migration



- Philippines' long history as a "sending nation"
- Establishment of Western nursing education and promotion of immigration
- Coupled with overseas labour export as official government policy

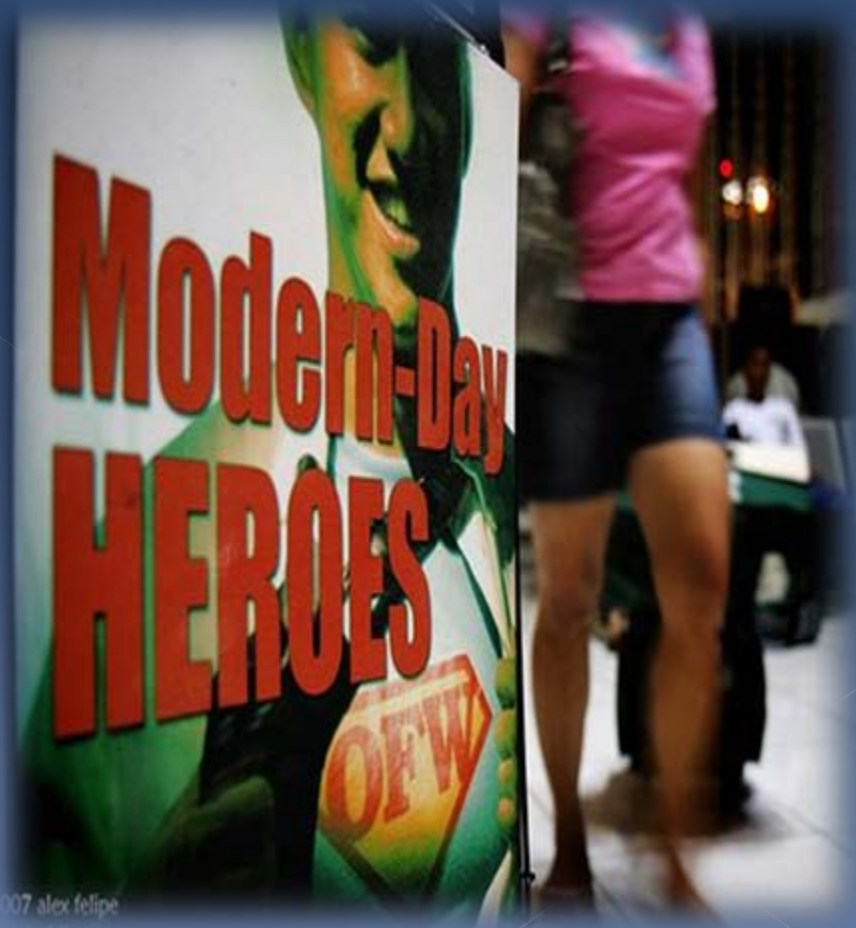
# Pre-migration Themes

## Culture of migration

### Internalized desire to migrate

R: "In the Philippines, the US is very popular, and wanting to go to the US. Why do you think that is, kind of, a lot of people's first choice is to go to the US? What's your opinion on, why that is?"

P: "Hmm...it's, I think, it's the status? Or like, I don't know, because people there in Philippines...like when I was in college, all we knew is only America. I want to go to America."



© 2007 alex felipe

# Pre-migration Themes

## Nurse volunteers

“... you have to volunteer. You’re already practicing as a nurse, RN, you have already the patient assignment, you work 8 hour shift regardless of day, evening, or night shift, but you are not paid”

Home > Nation > Top Stories

### DOH urged to shut down hospitals found exploiting nurses

AIE BALAGTAS SEE, GMAnews.TV  
09/02/2008 | 11:15 PM

Email the Editor Print This Share This 0 tweet

Recommend 14 people recommend this. Be the first of your friends. Share 10

**MANILA, Philippines** - Senator Pia Cayetano on Tuesday called for the shutting down of government and public hospitals engaged in the alleged exploitation of new nurses.

This was after the Philippine Nursing Association (PNA) exposed the practice of several hospitals of hiring only interns instead of permanent nurses and asking them to pay P3,000 to P3,500 for their internship fee.

“Not only is it demeaning to these exploited nurses and students, but to the entire nursing profession in the country,” Cayetano said.

In her report in GMA’s 24 Oras, Sandra Aguinaldo said that instead of employing permanent nurses, some hospitals would rather take in interns or volunteers who work for free.

- Fierce competition for jobs
- “Volunteering” to gain work experience and entry point to institutions
- More recently: nurses paying hospitals

# Pre-migration Themes

## Family dynamics

**“Basically it was not my dream...it was a dream of my mom...”**

### Sense of obligation

- Some not given a choice – it’s nursing or nothing!
- “Owed” to parents
- Nursing - the ticket to success
- Providing familial financial support

### In retrospect, not a source of regret

- Seen and done things otherwise not possible
- Gained independence
- Now living lives that would have been unattainable otherwise

# Transition period themes

## Four prominent themes in the transition period:

- 1) Opportunistic pursuit of migration
- 2) Family cohesiveness
- 3) Training vs. expectations
- 4) Proving self and perception of racism



# Transition period themes

Pursuing opportunities – Get in where you can

“In March we graduated. After that, we went to Manila in May to take the board exam. And June I think, we left. It was too fast!”



- Destinations unimportant initially but desire for “settled” migration eventually
- Information about opportunities from fellow nurses, relatives, social networks, and recruitment agencies
- Different immigration experiences: recruited vs. individual

# Transition period themes

## Family cohesiveness

"I work the night shift and then I will only sleep for a couple of hours after. I cook dinner so when the kids come home they have something to eat. Then by one o'clock I'm at the library "

- Family as loyal, cohesive unit as a central cultural value and central to migration decisions
- Sacrifice – family first, nursing later
- Juggling roles and responsibilities

# Transition period themes

## Nursing in Canada & different expectations

**"Back home, doctors, they're like gods. You can't be on a first name basis. Here, they treat nurses with respect. They accept suggestions and you know you could tell them what you're thinking. Back home we can't do that. "**

- ◉ Less hierarchy, greater expectations – welcome changes
- ◉ ...but not for everyone, one saw decreased autonomy

# Transition period themes

## Proving self and perceptions of racism

**“You're working in a foreign country, so what do you expect? You have to live to their expectations. You have to prove yourself all the time, because you're not "a graduate here" or something like that. ”**

- Mixed perceptions of racism – echoes from the past
- Feeling judged and proving self, but it's not racism
- Workplaces as important source of support

# Conclusions

- Importance of oral histories
- Memories in the voices of the nurses themselves
- Pre-migration
  - › Culture of migration
  - › Volunteer nursing
  - › Cultural pressures and constructs
- Post-migration
  - › Chasing opportunities
  - › Family cohesiveness
  - › Expectations of nursing in Canada
  - › Proving self and racism
- Experiences linked to deep historical roots

# References

Choy, C. (2010). Nurses across borders: foregrounding international migration in nursing history. *Nursing History Review* 18(2010). Hannah Keynote lecture (delivered June 5, 2008 as part of the CAHN/ACHN International Nursing History conference)

Kingma, M. (2006). *Nurses on the Move: Migration and the global health care economy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press

Image from Reuters, UK. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1085807/Pictured-Maternity-unit-Philippines-style-Church-takes-government-contraception.html>