

From Manila to Manitoba: family history and Filipino migration to Winnipeg

Darlyne Bautista and Janice Udarbe,
University of Winnipeg

Abstract: The “life-history” method has been used by social historians and historical geographers in the study of migration and settlement in an attempt to overcome the sterility of immigration history based solely on official census returns. A case study of regional and global migration patterns of Filipinos is presented here through the life-history of two Winnipeg Filipino families: the Ubaldo/Bautista and Udarbe families. They migrated to Canada in the later half of the twentieth century, but they did so at different times and under different circumstances. The migration histories of the Bautista and Udarbe families are broadly representative of the experiences of thousands of other Filipinos who have immigrated into Canada since 1960. Their experiences were similar in that inter-regional migration preceded emigration to Canada, but the role of chain migration in Filipino immigration is difficult to ascertain if we are to judge from these two family histories. The settlement of other Filipinos in Winnipeg helped dispel some of the anxiety from moving into a new social and economic environment, so this sense of community eased the transition into Canadian life. Yet, immigration to Canada is still a difficult experience for people coming from the less developed regions of the world.

Introduction

People migrate in response to push and pull factors. They are pushed to move by dissatisfaction with their social, political or economic situations; they are pulled to specific destinations by better opportunities for employment, education, and improvement in living conditions. The story of human history is one of migration.

Patterns of global migration have shifted over the last century. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries movement was from the industrialized heartlands to rural hinterlands as migrants sought agricultural land in lands opened to European colonization. In the last half of the twentieth century local migrations were rural to urban and global migration patterns were from the third world hinterland regions to the industrial heartlands of the developed nations.

It has been said that the greatest export of the Philippines is its people, who have pursued their economic goals through internal and international migration (Aranas 1983). By 1996 there were 234,195 Filipinos residing in Canada, mostly in the major urban centers of Toronto (99,115), Vancouver (40,715), Winnipeg (25,715), Montreal (14,383), Calgary (11,795), and Edmonton (10,495) (Statistics Canada 1996). With about four per cent of its population Filipino, and with almost eleven per cent of the total Canadian Filipino population, Winnipeg is an important center of Filipino life in Canada.

This paper analyzes aspects of both the regional and global migration patterns of Filipinos through the life-history of two Winnipeg Filipino families: the Ubaldo/Bautista and Udarbe families that migrated to Canada in the later half of the twentieth century, but at different times and under different circumstances. The "life-history" method in the study of migration and settlement has been employed by social historians and historical geographers in an attempt to overcome the sterility of immigration history based solely on official census returns (Eyles and Perri 1993; Lehr 1996; Le Bihan 1997; Lehr and Picknicki Morski 2000). Life histories capture some of the uncertainties of migration, an event that, for most participants, was the most important decision of their lives. Whereas there is a considerable literature devoted to the pioneer period of migration and settlement in Canada, and a growing literature describing the immigration of more recent arrivals, the immigration of Filipinos, who arrived in Canada following a change in Canadian immigration policy in 1962, has not yet received much attention in the academic literature (Avenuey 1995, Hiebert 2000). Certainly there has been little attempt to employ the life-history method to illustrate the diversity of experience encountered by

Filipinos immigrating into Canada. This paper attempts to fill this void.

The Ubaldo/Bautista Family

Delia Ubaldo [now Bautista] lived in Angono, Rizal. This town lies within the national capital region of Metro Manila. In 1975, Angono's population existed at 17 thousand people; Metro Manila then had a population of nearly four million (Figure 1) (United Nations 1986). Born in 1949, Delia Ubaldo was the fourth child of her family's eight surviving children.¹ Her mother, Juana, was a housewife and caregiver. Her father, Victorio, was a hired seasonal rice farmer and fisherman. Necessities such as food and shelter took most of his earnings. High tuition fees put secondary school beyond the reach of his eldest children, including Delia. Nevertheless, Delia taught herself English by reading English language magazines with aid of a dictionary. At the age of 16, she applied for a job as a seamstress in a Chinese-owned local garment factory in order to supplement the family income. Technically employees were required to be eighteen or older, but her "mature appearance" enabled her to pass herself as eighteen after misrepresenting her age on the application for employment. As a seamstress she earned four pesos a day, (twenty five cents Canadian at the current rate of exchange), but then enough to purchase a simple meal of fish and rice sufficient to feed a family of eight for an entire day. That same year, the rice field on the outskirts of Angono, on which her father worked, was sold to a subdivision developer for the expansion of the town. The loss of her father's income put the family under economic pressure.

Changing jobs in 1969 at age twenty, Delia continued to work in the garment industry at a factory in Pasig, Rizal. Here she first learned about Canada through a co-worker. At the time, Canadian Immigration and Manpower was recruiting garment workers to fill labour demands in a growing sector of the Canadian economy (Bellan 1978). Since the Canadian dollar was, and still is, significantly higher in value than the Philippine peso, Delia believed that working abroad was the most effective way to help support her



Figure 1: Location of Angono, Philippines.

family. She traveled to Makati, Rizal to obtain an application for immigration from the Canadian Embassy in 1972.

The application and screening process was quite rigorous and certainly seemed unhurried, since over six months elapsed before a response was forthcoming (Hiebert 2000). Inviting her to a series of several interviews with Canadian consular officials. Immigration officials were most concerned about linguistic ability, level of education, and the type of occupation sought in Canada. Delia referred to her first interview as “pleasant” and the Canadian consular official as “very considerate” speaking “Taglish,” a mixture

of Tagalog and English, when quizzing her about her motives for migration and her intentions in Canada. Following this interview Delia, along with fifteen other aspiring immigrants took a garment-sewing skill test. Her test required her to successfully create three circles on three separate sheets of paper using three levels of high-speed factory-style sewing machines with Canadian garment-factory recruiters looking on.

Her notification of success on the test informed her that she was selected for employment with the garment industry in Winnipeg. She was required to attend another meeting with the Canadian consular official with whom she had initially met. He informed her of her requirements before entering Canada, such as a medical examination, passport, and N.B.I. (National Bureau of Investigation) clearance. After completion, Delia found that she lacked the money to purchase a plane ticket to Canada. Accordingly she applied for a “fly now pay later” travel plan created by *CP Air Manila* and *Canadian Pacific Airlines*. The Canadian embassy supplied a list of legitimate travel agencies who offered this plan, and emphasized that all services through the embassy were free of charge.² Finally, near to her departure date, along with other recruits she attended an orientation meeting at the Canadian embassy. Through films, they were introduced to Winnipeg’s cold climate and general appearance. On May 3, 1974 Delia and approximately twenty other garment industry recruits from throughout the Metro Manila area, departed from Manila International Airport to Winnipeg via Hong Kong and Vancouver.

Delia arrived in Canada on May 3, 1974. Arrival in Winnipeg was filled with a mixture of excitement and fear. The Filipino workers were met at Winnipeg airport by a representative of *Midwest Garment Industry*, the company that had recruited them. He informed them of their new workplace, its location, company expectations and its work hours. The representative also arranged accommodations for immigrants who did not have a place to stay. Delia stayed with acquaintances from Angono who had previously immigrated through garment industry recruitment in 1969, though they had not influenced her decision to migrate. She lived on Bannerman Avenue, east of Main Street in the West Kildonan area of Winnipeg. She found the area as multicultural with Italian,

Chinese, and Filipino immigrants. Within the workplace she felt comfortable since most of the workers at *Sylpit Industries*, a division of the Canadian-owned *Midwest Garment Industries*, were immigrants and all “pretty much the same,” in that they shared the same fears and problems. Her only complaint about Canada was the homesickness she felt.

She recalls the factory as a “nice working environment” where she was paid \$2.35 an hour, the minimum wage at the time. They were also given pay incentives for their piecework if they produced more than the factory quota. Delia was able to easily adjust to Canada since she spoke English and worked in a multicultural environment. In order to provide her family with better opportunities in Canada, and to fill the social void she had felt when isolated from her family Delia sponsored her younger siblings in 1977. They were later denied, due to changing requirements in the Canadian immigration system. As a landed Canadian immigrant, Delia returned to the Philippines later that year where she married Eliodoro F. Bautista. In 1978, she sponsored him and became a Canadian citizen. Eliodoro was accepted into Canada, and immigrated in 1978 where he also worked in the garment industry.

The Udarbe Family

In 1970-1975, there were approximately 263,058 in-migrants into Metro Manila (United Nations 1996). As elsewhere in the less-developed world, large cities attracted people from the rural areas and smaller towns, offering the prospect of better access to jobs, educational opportunities and entertainment facilities. In the outlying rural areas inadequate water supplies, medical facilities and access to consumer goods in rural areas pushed people to the city (Lewis 1982). The migration history of the Udarbe family reflects these regional trends and also illustrates a new phase of Filipino trans-national migration.

Born in Cordon, Isabela Province in 1953, Naomi Mariano moved to Manila in 1969 at age 16 to pursue higher education at the Philippine School of Business Administration. Her future husband, Steve Udarbe had migrated from Vigan, Ilocos Sur Province to Manila, a few years earlier, to finish elementary, to

attend high school, and eventually, to attend the University of Santo Tomas. After finishing their university education, both found employment: Naomi as a secretary in the Media Department at the Baptist Mission, Steve as a Medical Representative/Field Trainer with Zuellig Pharma Corporation, Wander Division in Makati, Metro Manila.

Naomi and Steve married in 1977 and then moved to Quezon City, one of the cities within Metro Manila. Two years later their first child was born and Naomi left her job at the Baptist Mission for a higher paying position as a Registrar/Secretary with the Philippine Christian University.

In 1983 Steve went to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to work for two years as a Medical Sales and Marketing Specialist and Bio-Medical Engineer, before accepting a position in Manila with Wisconsin-based Swan Sales Corporation where he was employed as an Area Manager for the Philippines and Pacific. In 1986, after the birth of her third child Naomi left her job to care for her children. In the next few years, she had a further three children.

Disputes within the Udarbe extended family in the mid-1990s changed the social dynamics of the family, causing Steve and Naomi to relocate within Quezon City. After this, Steve decided to explore emigration to Canada. His motives for this decision are unclear but it is probable that his previous experience working overseas had broadened his horizons and eroded any reluctance to relocate abroad in search of economic betterment. He had first learned about the opportunity of migrating to Canada from a close friend who had migrated to Winnipeg several years earlier but his attention was caught by advertisements in the local newspaper by *Immigration Network Services* [INS], which offered to facilitate the application process for entry into Canada.

For a fee of about \$38.00 Canadian (970 pesos) Steve and Naomi viewed tourism films and videos about Canada and were given a preliminary assessment by INS. Eventually INS compiled, processed, and submitted the family's papers to the Canadian embassy. These processing and consultation services cost more than \$2,800.00 Canadian, with no guarantee that their application would be successful.

The Udarbes' application for independent immigrant status was approved in 1996. Before their landed-immigrant visas were issued, Steve and Naomi had to attend orientation sessions at the Manila office of International Organization for Migration to prepare them for life and work in Canada. All family members were required to register with the Commission on Filipinos Overseas and attend its pre-departure orientation seminars after they had undergone a full medical examination. Although the family applied together, Steve left for Canada alone, early in March 1997. On July 20, 1997, after the end of the school year, his family followed.

Winnipeg was chosen as a destination likely because of kinship ties. Although the family had no blood relatives in Winnipeg, they had friends there. Upon arrival, they stayed in a rented house on Morley Avenue, which was located near schools and their Filipino friends. Having close family friends in their neighborhood eased their apprehensions and helped with their adjustments. After two years, the property was sold by its owners, and the Udarbes relocated into a townhouse in a different area of Winnipeg.

Like many other immigrants, the Udarbes faced many difficulties including securing employment at a level commensurate with their education and skills. Their Philippine education and training is not immediately recognized in Canada. Many Filipinos accept jobs either in "lower categories" of their profession, or jobs that are totally unrelated to their field (Aranas 1983, Buduhan 1972). Steve had difficulty in finding employment related to his sales profession. In order to provide for the family, he took low-paying jobs and endured substandard working conditions working as a Telephone Representative, a convenience-store clerk, and finally in 1999, as inventory clerk at a Pharmaceutical Company. Presently, he is a full-time student, studying computer engineering. Naomi worked as a health care aide before becoming a medical secretary at a private clinic.

Conclusion

The migration histories of the Bautista and Udarbe families are broadly representative of the experiences of thousands of other Filipinos who have immigrated into Canada since 1960. Their

experiences were similar in that inter-regional migration preceded emigration to Canada. In the case of Steve Udarbe, this was temporary residence overseas. In both cases, motives for migration were primarily economic. It is safe to say they were pulled into Canada rather than pushed out of the Philippines. The labour needs of Canada, specifically the demand for skilled workers in Winnipeg's garment industry clearly played a vital role in the Bautista migration. It was Canada's changing labour demands that denied Mrs. Bautista's younger siblings immigrant status. The Udarbe family, on the other hand, had a less difficult, yet costly time applying for immigrant status. At the time of their application, there were professions or skills outlined by the Canadian Embassy that were in demand. This included sales, which in Steve's case, was his forte. Despite their high level of education in the Philippines, the Udarbe family was unable to find their qualifications accepted as equal to those granted by Canadian institutions.

The role of chain migration in the Filipino immigration appears cloudy if we are to judge from the family histories reviewed above. Although migration was not undertaken to join relatives already settled in Canada, the example of others who preceded them made the decision to migrate easier. The presence of other Filipinos in Winnipeg helped dispel some of the anxiety from moving into a new social and economic environment. This sense of community eased the transition into Canadian life. The path of migration and settlement in Canada over the past century has clearly changed little. Despite greater involvement from the government in almost all stages of the migration process, it is still a difficult road for those coming from the less developed regions of the world.

References

- ARANAS, M.Q. 1883 *The Dynamics of Filipino Immigrants in Canada*
Canada: Coles Printing Co.
- AVENUERY, D.H. 1995 *Reluctant Host: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc.
- BAUTISTA, D.U. Pers. Comm., 24-26 February 2000, Mrs. Bautista is the mother of the co-author Darlyne Bautista
- BAUTISTA, E.F. Pers. Comm., 24-46 February 2000, Mr. Bautista is the

- father of the co-author Darlyne Bautista
- BELLAN, R. 1978 *Winnipeg First Century: An Economic History* Winnipeg: Queenston House Publishing Co. Ltd.
- BRAUN, B.P. Spring 1998 *Images of Winnipeg's North End* B.A. (Honours) Thesis, The University of Winnipeg
- BUDUHAN, C.M. 1972 *An Urban Village: The Effects of Migration on the Filipino Garment Workers in a Canadian City* M.A, Thesis, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Manitoba
- CARTER, T. 1996 "Winnipeg: Heartbeat of the Province" *The Geography of Manitoba: Its Land and its People* edited by J.E. Welsted, J.C. Everitt and C. Stadel, Canada: The University of Manitoba 136-149
- EYLES, J. and PERRI, E. 1993 "Life history as method: an Italian-Canadian family in an industrial city" *Canadian Geographer* (37) 104-119
- HIEBERT, D. 2000 "Immigration and the changing Canadian city," *Canadian Geographer* (44) 25-43
- HILL, L. 9 September 1983 "Filipino Immigrant Skills 'Wasted'" *Winnipeg Free Press* 3
- LAQUIAN, E.R. 1973 *A Study of Filipino Immigration to Canada, 1962-1973* 2nd Pub. Canada: United Council of Filipino Associations in Canada
- LE BIHAN, J. 1997 "Enquete sur une famille bretonne emigree au Canada (1903-1920)" *Prairie Forum* (22) 73-102
- LEHR, J.C. 1996 "One family's frontier: life history and the process of Ukrainian settlement in the Stuartburn district of southeastern Manitoba," *Canadian Geographer* (40) 98-108
- LEHR, J.C. and PICKNICKI MORSKI, J. 2000 "Global patterns and family matters: life history and the Ukrainian pioneer diaspora" *Journal of Historical Geography* (25) 349-366
- LETT, D. 29 June 1995 "Future Bright...For A Price" *Winnipeg Free Press* B3
- LEWIS, G.J. 1982 *Human Migration* London: Croom Helm Ltd.
- MANITOBA GOVERNMENT 15 May 1990 *Manitoba's Policy for a Multicultural Society: Building Pride, Equality and Partnership, Part One and Two* Winnipeg
- PORTER, G. and GANAPIN, D.J. 1988 *Resources and the Philippines' Future: A Case Study* Washington: World Resources Institute
- STATISTICS CANADA. 1996 *Profiles Philippines: Immigrants from the Philippines in Canada* Minister Supply and Services Canada
- STYMEIST, D.H. 1989 *A Selected Annotated Bibliography on Filipino Immigrant Community in and Canada and the U.S.*

UDARBE, N. Pers. Comm., 28 January 2000, Mrs. Udarbe is the mother of the co-author Janice Udarbe

UNITED NATIONS DEPT. OF INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS 1986 *Population Growth and Policies in Mega-Cities: Metro Manila* Population Policy Paper No.5. New York

End Notes

¹ Six children in the Ubaldo family died in infancy and youth to various illnesses including pneumonia.

² Some travel agencies added additional illegal charges. Delia received an invoice for her plane ticket three months after arriving in Canada (August 1974). She made installment payments to her local bank, where it was then forwarded to *CP Air Manila* in the Philippines.