Monica Anne Batac, PhD Candidate
McGill University, School of Social Work
monica.batac@mail.mcgill.ca

Working Title: Diasporic workers in settler colonial Canada: A de/colonizing auto/ethnography with Filipina/x settlement, social service, and community workers.

Abstract: My dissertation project engages theories of Asian and Filipino diaspora, decolonization, and settler colonialism through an auto/ethnographic study of Filipino labour in the Canadian settlement (or immigrant-serving) sector. The project is currently titled Diasporic workers in settler colonial Canada: A de/colonizing auto/ethnography with Filipina/x settlement, social service, and community workers. This work critically explores how Filipina/a/x social service practitioners engage with the Canadian non-profit social service, settlement, and voluntary sectors to serve their own communities. It highlights the de/colonial imperatives of this labour participation.

Purpose and Research Questions: My work explores the perspectives and lived experiences of Filipina/x-identified social and community workers and service providers working with Filipino populations in Canada in order to better understand how their migration journeys connect to: their labour experiences; involvement in Filipino groups, organizations, and communities; and engagement with the Canadian nation state. This de/colonizing auto/ethnography with exploratory methods from Sikolohiyang Pilipino (or Filipino psychology) has one main objective: to center the diverse knowledges of these Filipina/x workers who have chosen to work with the Filipino community. Such knowledges include their personal and/or familial migration journeys to Canada, their conceptualizations of their roles in the workplace and Filipino communities, and their understanding of Filipinos as settlers.

Through the de/colonizing methods employed in this project, I strive to articulate a model of theory-practice that centers Filipina/x knowledges, lived experiences, and ways of practice. Given this, my research asks three questions: How do Filipina/x settlement / community / social workers describe their work and experiences in providing settlement support to Filipino newcomers and immigrants in Canada? What understandings do they hold regarding the reasons Filipinos migrate to and settle in Canada? And lastly, what connections, if any, do these workers make with various forms of colonialism, including settler colonialism?

Framework: Theoretically, this research engages with the politics of diaspora and Asian settler colonialism through the specific example of the Filipina/x settlement worker in Canada. As settlers of colour, Filipinos hold a distinct place in Canadian settler society as the Philippines has undergone centuries of colonization under Spain, then occupation by Japan and the United States. Tools of global capitalism, imperialism, and settler colonialism, they continue to be dispersed all across the globe mainly through low-wage care, service, or physical labour, often with conditional citizenship. In Canada, Filipinos who then take up work in state-funded, community-based, and non-profit settlement services are paid to support the integration of Filipinos in this nation state, that is, to support settlement on stolen or occupied land. I maintain that a critical engagement with the provision of social services to newcomers and immigrants
helps to illuminate our various positions—including our awareness, complicity, resistance, and response—in the settler colonial logic inherent and assumed in Canada’s immigrant settlement project.

**Methods:** I am currently conducting fieldwork, aiming to interview 15-18 Filipino settlement, social service, and community workers in three geographical areas, as defined by provincial/territorial borders: Ontario, Manitoba, and Yukon. My research leverages five data sources of auto/ethnographic data: 1. Pagdalaw-dalaw, informal visits and pakikisangkot (deeper involvement) 2. Individual interviews, 3. Focus group discussions 4. Member checking (using focus groups and community presentations) and 5. auto/ethnographic / reflexive writing. I introduce de/colonizing methods as described by Indigenous and diaspora scholars, highlighting current tensions and complications in engaging with Filipino-identified Indigenous or de/colonizing research methods in the diaspora. I then introduce auto/ethnography as a contemporary methodological innovation, an explicit anti-racist and queer response to and engagement with both ethnography and autoethnography.

**Results / Potential discussion:** As this research is currently underway, I cannot provide a summary of the findings. To frame the discussion, I will emphasize the relevance of Filipino diaspora as a critical theory and analytic that attends to “historical and cultural specificity” (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p. 3), and engages with internal and external differences (Ponce, 2008). More pointedly, Cho (2007) describes diaspora as “one powerful way of thinking through the displacements engendered by colonialism… which enables connections between the traumas of colonialism even as it marks distinctions,” (p. 13). I summarize how this work illustrates theoretical, onto-epistemological, methodological, and empirical engagements of de/colonizing Filipino diaspora through research with Filipino/a/x social service workers.

Note, later in the summer, I will be presenting a specific manuscript from this dissertation at the ISTR 2021 conference, titled: Survival and sustainability in Asian non-profit social service organizations: examining leadership and labour through the politics of volunteerism

**Keywords:** Newcomer settlement, immigrant integration, community organizations, non-profit management, settlement/immigrant-serving sector, critical social work, feminist social work, decolonizing service practices, racialized labour, immigrant labour, third sector labour, decolonizing methodologies, Filipino diaspora

**Bibliography (partial)**


Key Questions for Discussion

1. How have others accounted for and worked around methodological challenges / data collection concerns and issues in this time of COVID-19?

2. What suggestions / strategies can other students offer regarding creating and refining conceptual models / visuals to illustrate the theoretical, substantive, and/or methodological contributions of their research?

3. What are some approaches to simultaneously building one’s academic CV while keeping attuned to post-PhD career opportunities in third sector research?

Motivation to Participate

I am currently conducting fieldwork, analyzing data, and writing emerging findings for an article-based dissertation. I am focused and motivated to participate in the PhD Seminar as I am looking to dialogue and build community with interdisciplinary scholars, especially during this challenging global pandemic. My plans for data collection and program completion have been delayed since the start of the pandemic, yet I am motivated to continue my progress – the seminar’s supportive space will help build this momentum towards completion. I have been looking towards this PhD seminar since learning of this opportunity last year. Ill-timed then, this year is an opportune time as I look towards manuscript submission, post-doctoral fellowship exploration, and the academic job market. In networking with senior scholars and fellow doctoral students, I see meaningful reciprocal benefits in participating in this Seminar.