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## **A Space in Social Memory – Filipina/o American Migrants as Community Historians, 1906-2010**

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# A Space in Social Memory – Filipina/o American Migrants as Community Historians, 1906-2010

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## *Series Editors*

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the Filipina/o American activists' crusade to have their own histories included in the mainstream white American historical accounts. It argues that Filipina/o American migrants and their descendants have taught themselves to become historians and custodians of their particular past as part of an overall project to make themselves visible as an important ethnic group that has made a significant contribution to American society. Given the activist agenda of these histories from below, the story of Filipino/a America that is presented by these migrants as historians has a distinctive interpretation. This interpretation, what I label the heroic narrative, represents Filipinos in the United States as hard working laborers who suffered terrible racial discrimination, relentless exploitation, and extremely harsh environments that often involved physical violence. My reading of these histories written from the perspective of these migrants and their descendants is that their ancestors had struggled and yet survived against the odds, but that their hard work has never been acknowledged by the host society or the homeland. Therefore the writing of these specific histories is a very unique form of social activism to call attention to their own ethnic group that in their view has so far been ignored (read invisible) and to empower this group by giving them a place in social memory.

## Key words

Filipino, Community Historians, United States, Migration, Heritage Sites, SoMa, Little Manila

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## Introduction

In section 42 of the Stockton California rural cemetery, the descendants of Policarpio Pete De La Cruz (1904-1994) of the Rubianes family inscribed the following words in their father's gravestone:

“Rest dear Daddy, your journey is over. You left the Philippines at age 17 in search of riches and adventure, but discovered a lifetime of backbreaking poverty and prejudice instead. In other people's fields you trudged, pausing only long enough to love and nurture the family you started so late in your quest.”

The brief poignant biography of the deceased told the sad story of a Filipino male migrant who came to the United States probably as one of the first wave of labor migrants that arrived in the early twentieth century to work on the agricultural fields of California. The life story on the tombstone made references to several of the well-worn themes depicted in the plethora of community histories published by Filipina/o Americans: the hard physical labor that their ancestors performed as ‘stoop labor’ as the migrant mobile labor force that was the backbone of the agricultural industry in the US West coast, the discrimination endured by these young men who were marginalized in the white communities who made sure that ‘no Filipinos were allowed’ in their public spaces while anti-miscegenation laws deprived these men of having families until after the war, and finally the continuing poverty that haunted these intrepid migrants whose struggle for survival continued until death. That the children of the deceased felt the need to inscribe this story publicly in this tombstone illustrates the intense desire to commemorate this particular interpretation of the Filipino migrant's history in the United States.

Policarpio Pete de la Cruz's experience of hard work, struggle and survival—what I call the heroic narrative—defined the Filipino American story. The project of publicizing this heroic narrative has been an important enterprise for Filipina/o American migrants and their descendants who want their contributions to both the host society and the Philippines acknowledged and appreciated. This campaign for a space in social memory; for a place in the national, transnational and international histories is much more than cultural activism. As chroniclers of their own past, Filipino migrants and their descendants use this history of struggle, survival and contribution –this heroic narrative—both as a powerful legitimizing discourse for social inclusion, and as an important rite in performing migrant identities. This heroic narrative needs to be deconstructed, analyzed, and critiqued as an interpretation of the migration experience and as a legitimizing discourse for migrant advocacy.

This paper focuses on the Filipina/o American activists' crusade to have their own histories included in the mainstream white American historical accounts. It argues that Filipina/o American migrants and their descendants have taught themselves to become historians and custodians of their particular past as part of an overall project to make themselves visible as an important ethnic group that has made a significant contribution to American society. Given the activist agenda of these histories from below, the story of Filipino/a America that is presented by these migrants as historians has a distinctive interpretation. This interpretation, what I label the heroic narrative, represents Filipinos in the United States as hard working laborers who suffered terrible racial discrimination, relentless exploitation, and extremely harsh environments that often involved physical violence. My reading of these histories written from the perspective of these migrants and their descendants is that their ancestors had struggled and yet survived against the odds, but that their hard work has never been acknowledged by the host society or the homeland. Therefore the writing of

these specific histories is a very unique form of social activism to call attention to their own ethnic group that in their view has so far been ignored (read invisible) and to empower this group by giving them a place in social memory.

Filipina/o American studies reached a critical mass at the first decade of the twenty first century with major studies published in social history, cultural studies, and gender studies.<sup>1</sup> The literature, much of it excellent, has documented the social history of both men and women of the first and second generation Filipina/o Americans including their participation in the Asian American movement in the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> In addition, there have been some excellent studies in the social science disciplines on the Filipino communities in the United States including cultural practices such as debutante balls and Pilipino Cultural Nights performed at California college campuses.<sup>3</sup> These studies used methodologies appropriate to the historian or social scientist using archives, newspapers, interviews, focus groups and field work. But another archive exists created by migrants themselves who have been meticulously compiling, preserving and telling their stories in public. This paper has a very specific focus—the migrant as historian—and will use for the first time, what I call the very prolific and creative ‘migrant archives’: primary sources collected, published, performed or exhibited for the purpose of presenting their stories in a public forum. At least one physical archive already exists: the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) has the National Pinoy Archives in Seattle. In addition, there are books (autobiographies, memoirs,<sup>4</sup> essays, poetry, art, documentary films, conference papers, community and family histories), produced by the migrant communities and their descendants.

This research is located in the field of Filipina/o American studies and contributes to that scholarship by giving a one century perspective. It is the first to focus on migrant historiography. After all it is not only academic historians who have been writing about the history of Filipina/o migration to the United States. Migrants and their descendants trained themselves to become community historians (they are autodidacts in this sense, they do not enroll in post-graduate or undergraduate history or oral history courses, but while one or two academics often are consultants, it is the migrants themselves who document, research and write their own histories). The body of work they produce can be considered an example of a history from below. Since the production of migrant community histories is fast becoming an industry, it is important to analyze why Filipina/o Americans are preoccupied with the documentation, preservation and dissemination of their usable past. This paper thus complements the previous scholarship in Filipina/o American studies by introducing the concept of migrant historiography and a deconstruction of the heroic narrative as a major interpretation of the migration experience. The migrants’ and their descendants’ interpretation of their own history which I label ‘The Filipina/o American Story’ must be analyzed and critiqued. In this sense, my work will give the migrants’ own perspective of their past history, and will underscore the importance of history particularly oral history.

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1 See Bonus (2000); Burns (2013); Choy (2003); España-Maram (2006); Fujita-Rony (2003); Gonzales (2009, 2012); Gonzalves (2010); Habal (2007); Kerkvliet (2002); Espiritu (2003); Mabalon (2013); Manalansan (2003); Mendoza (2002); Tiongson, Gutierrez, & Gutierrez (2006) and Vergara (2009)

2 The recent excellent historical accounts include Choy (2003); España-Maram (2006); Habal (2007) and Mabalon (2013).

3 See in particular Bonus, (2000); Burns (2013); Gonzales (2009); Gonzalves (2010); Espiritu (2003); Manalansan (2003); Rodriguez, E. (2013) and Vergara (2009).

4 There are over two-dozen memoirs and autobiographies by Filipina/o Americans.

For the purpose of this paper, I also wish to make an artificial distinction between the work of the academic historians (professionals) and the community historians. While the professional scholars in Filipina/o American studies have sometimes blurred this linear distinction by working as consultants of the various chapters of FANHS, publishing high school textbooks (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2009), or participating in heritage projects such as the Manilatown Heritage Foundation or Stockton's Little Manila Foundation, my sources will largely come from the cohort of histories produced by the migrants who are not professional historians. This artificial line becomes blurred because academics in the field of Filipina/o American studies, many of them anthropologists and historians have maintained close links with the communities they studied and collaborated with them in the project of documenting the past history and preserving and/or performing cultural practices. By community histories I refer to the cohort of publications, performances, films and documentaries produced by Filipinos in the United States.. I use the term 'community histories' because a majority of these texts (and I include performances, dress, festivals, historic tours, calendars, films, and street murals as texts), focus on local histories or the history of the Filipino community in one particular geographical location or the life stories of migrants. The many chapters of FANHS published a number of these histories some under the Arcadia *Images of America* series.

In this paper the word migrant also refers to the descendants of migrants even though some of the migrant identities have morphed into the hyphenated or compound identity of Filipina/o American. Migrants' descendants are proud of their Filipino ancestry; second generation Filipina/o Americans (referred to in their own community histories as the 'bridge generation' bridging the first and the third generations) for example, although they were born in the United States acknowledge their parents' migration as critical to their identities. Third generation and young fourth generation Filipina/o Americans perform the joint histories of the Philippines and Filipino America in their Pilipino Cultural Nights (hereafter PCNs) across college campuses (Gonzalves, 2010). Oscar Camponanes objected to the word 'migrant' to refer to the Filipino 'nationals' (see below next section) who arrived in the United States (between 1906-1945) because as citizens of an American colony they could not be technically seen as migrants (Tiongson, 2006, p. 21-22). For the purpose of this paper, I apply a very elastic and flexible use of the term migrant preferring to refer to the subjects moving away from the geographical borders of the Philippine islands and their descendants.

Note: The term Filipina/o American has undergone several permutations. Scholars Rick Bonus and Maria Root claim the label as a work in progress (Tiongson, 2006, p. 169) while scholar Oscar Campomanes maintained that the term "is a redundancy (and not just an apparent oxymoron)" because "to be Filipino is already, whether you move to the United States or remain where you are, to be American" (Tiongson, 2006, p. 42), highlighting the connections between imperial America and colonial Philippines. Feminist scholars in Filipina/o American studies prefer to use "Filipina/o American" rather than Filipino American or Filipino/American or Filipino-American to remove the patriarchal connotations of the label particularly since they were writing 'women' into the history of the pioneer generation at a time when perceptions of their past were dominated by the mistaken view of a 'bachelor society'. A group at the University of California Berkeley coined the term Pin@y in order to engender the slang "Pinoy", the word Filipino Americans used to describe themselves before World War II. I will use the term Filipina/o American

because it is rapidly becoming the preferred choice used by scholars. Filipina/o Americans writing about their identity are very inclusive in the way they define the term.<sup>5</sup>

## Short History of Filipino Migration to the United States, 1906-2010

The Philippines became an American colony at the turn of the twentieth century and from 1906 until the 1930s many young Filipino men became the pioneer migrants providing the mobile labor force that worked in the sugar plantations of Hawaii, the Alaskan salmon canneries and the agricultural fields of California. More than 100,000 Filipinos went to Hawai'i and the US mainland by 1946 (Mabalon, 2003, p. 250). This pioneer generation (mostly from the Ilocos province in the Philippines) was later called the *manong* generation since *manong* was an Ilocano term of respect for male elders. From 1903-1911 around 289 Filipinos also arrived as *pensionados* (government scholars) to study in tertiary institutions all over the United States. Many Filipinos who joined the United States navy also chose to make the US their home (Baldoz, 2011, p. 46). Filipino women were not excluded from entry into the United States and Filipina nurses were an important group of professionals who began to migrate to North America soon after they graduated from the nursing schools established by Americans in the colony (Choy, 2003).

Because of the unique position of the Philippines as a colony of the United States, these labor migrants until 1935 were given the status of 'nationals'; an ambiguous category classifying them as neither citizens nor foreigners. The status of national meant that they were not subjected to the draconian 1924 Immigration Act, which barred foreigners from entering the United States. This special status facilitated the massive immigration that brought thousands of Filipinos first to Hawaii and Alaska and then to the West coast (Mabalon, 2013, p. 27-28). But despite their status as 'colonial wards' they were prohibited from naturalized citizenship until 1946 regardless of whether they were 'nationals' or 'aliens'. Once the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1914 was passed promising Philippine independence after a ten year Commonwealth period (1935-onwards but it was disrupted by the Japanese Occupation), Filipinos lost their special title of 'nationals' and were reclassified as 'aliens' restricted to an immigration quota of only 50 a year.

Filipino migration to the United States was a product of the entangled histories of the American empire and its colony. The first batch of workers was recruited to work in the sugar plantations of Hawaii. American policy makers believed that Western style military training was an important part of the colonial project and Filipinos who joined the US military and US navy ended up settling in the US (Baldoz, 2011, p. 46). Accounts of the first generation of migrants often mentioned the influence of American colonial education and particularly American teachers in the Philippines in their decision to try their luck in the United States. American teachers painted a glossy picture of America as the land of democracy and affluence where money could be easily earned. Many memoirs from the migrant archives tell the familiar story of a young boy travelling to the United States

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<sup>5</sup> Maria P.P. Root says "As editor, I have taken the liberty of defining Filipino American in the most inclusive sense. We are immigrants-now-citizens, American born, immigrant spouses waiting eligibility for green cards, mixed-heritage Filipinos, students or workers on visa, *tago ng tago* (undocumented), and transnationals moving between the Philippines and the United States. Thus, Filipino American is a state of mind rather than of legality or geography." (Root, 1997, p. 14). In an informal chat before I interviewed FANHS co-founder Fred Cordova, I asked him who he considers Filipina/o American and he responded facetiously with: "one drop of *bagong* (shrimp paste) and they are ours!". This confirms the very inclusive approach they have for this label (Cordova F., 2009).

hoping to earn a college degree while working part time. But all of the stories underscored their disillusionment when they experienced the harsh life in the plantations, agricultural camps, or cannery factories, and encountered the brutal effects of white racism. Many failed to realize their dreams of completing their education as they focused on sheer survival. There was hardly any motivation to earn university qualifications since racial prejudice prevented even the most highly qualified from every acquiring jobs beyond the lowest paying, lowest status employment (Fujita-Rony, 2003). Since the first wave of Filipino migration to the United States peaked in 1929 coinciding with the advent of the Great Depression, the economic downturn further ruined their dreams for upward mobility.

Anti-miscegenation laws prevented this group of mostly men from marrying whites. Only those relatively few men who were able to marry Mexicans, Native Americans, African Americans or other Asians, or win the hand of a much coveted rare Filipina could form families. These harsh laws and the unusual demographic of between 20-47 Filipino men to 1 Filipina, prompted white Americans to label the Filipino community a ‘bachelor society’<sup>6</sup>; one of the classifications Filipina/o American migrants’ histories hoped to dismantle. It was only after World War II, and only after Filipinos in the United States fought alongside American soldiers, that they were granted citizenship rights. Some of these bachelors, already in their 40s and 50s went back to the Philippines to bring back ‘war brides’, while some never married.

This social situation was not peculiar to the Filipino Americans. Other Asian Americans particularly the Chinese Americans had similar experiences. The one sole difference was that Filipinos as colonial subjects were given the status of ‘nationals’ at least until the passing of the Tydings-McDuffie Act. But the Chinese whose immigration to the United States predated the Filipino one by more than fifty years reproduced the same demographic of a ratio of 14 men to one woman in the late 1860s (Takaki, 1998, p. 121). One difference from the Filipinos was the large number of Chinese prostitutes in the early years (the 1870 census claims 61% of 3536 Chinese women in California held the occupation of ‘prostitute’) (Takaki, 1998, p. 121). The term ‘bachelor society’ was coined originally to describe the Chinese American social situation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They faced racial discrimination and ethnic segregation (living in the Chinatowns or Oriental Quarters of the city) and denied citizenship rights including the right to own property until World War II. The Chinese contribution to the Great War eventually resulted in the repeal of the exclusion acts and provided an annual quota for Chinese immigration and more important, extended the right of naturalized citizenship to Chinese immigrants (Takaki, 1998, p. 370-378). In this sense, the Filipino migrant history in the United States from 1906 until the early post-war era was quite similar to the history of the American Chinese and the experience of the Koreans, Japanese and Indians who had families with them.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The term ‘bachelor society’ was used to describe the Chinese American context in the pre-World War II era; referring to a migrant group that was predominantly male creating its own social and leisure world. Some scholars like Jennifer Ting raised the problematic nature of the label because of the negative connotations of deviance (Ting, 1995, p. 271-279). This phrase was often applied to the Filipina/o community during the same period. Fujita-Rony (2003, p. 11-13) notes the limitations of the term and suggests that it is more useful and accurate to imagine Filipino migrants recreating families with more male members as ‘uncles’. This interpretation has resonance with the Filipino American. For example voices from the migrant archives led by second generation Filipina/o American Dorothy Laigo Cordova, co-founder of the Filipino American National Historical society, criticize the label because it ignores the existence of the few all Filipino families and mestizo families that were their parents and grandparents (Cordova D., 2009).

<sup>7</sup> For a seminal comprehensive history of Asian Americans see Takaki (1998).

The next wave of Filipino migration to the US happened after 1965 when professionals such as doctors, nurses and teachers moved to the United States. By the 1960s and 1970s too, the second generation of Filipinos born in the United States joined the Civil Rights Movement and began to use the term Filipino American as a self-referent. By the 1980s there were two types of Filipinos in the United States: those that were born there and were second or third generation descendants of immigrants, and those that had just arrived “fresh off the boat” (called FOBs). While the two groups experienced tension and conflict in the 1990s, there is some consensus that this has abated as of the present writing (2014) (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2009). Filipinos continued to migrate to the United States in huge numbers (they are currently the largest sending country to the US after Mexico and China), so that a decade after the 21<sup>st</sup> century the newcomers outnumbered the generations born in the United States. The continuous migration can be partly explained also by the colonial past. The impact of the American educational system, the English language, American media, and post-colonial ties (major United States military bases remained in the Philippines until 1991), nurtured an image of America as the ideal country to visit, study or live in. The United States is still the most popular destination for Filipinos wanting to study or migrate permanently. Currently there are over 3 million Filipinos in the United States. In contrast to the first generation of mostly working class laborers, the majority of the post-1965 migrants who came as professionals quickly became part of America’s middle classes. The median income for them in 2010 was \$51,668, with 7.3% living below the poverty line and 37.9% holding at least a bachelor’s degree (Rodriguez, 2013, p. 11). Hence, the stories of this most recent migration contrasts with the first wave of migrants because of vast class differences. With an estimated disposable income that is higher than the average American this most recent group can live a much more privileged life than the *manong* generation, many of whom died poor.

## The Filipina/o American Story

The Civil Rights movement in the 1960s started the process of fashioning the new identity Filipina/o American. The descendants of the pioneer generation of Filipino migrants caught up in the ‘heady times’ joined the Asian American movement, participated in the rallies and demonstrations demanding affirmative action for minority groups, and the university students’ demands for the teaching of Ethnic studies and minority histories in the college curriculum. Scholar Leny Strobel traced the origins of the sudden interest in all things Filipino to the “Born Again Filipino Movement” and the process of mental decolonization that critically reflected on the ‘colonial mentality’ that relegated Filipino culture as inferior to all that was American (Strobel, 1996, 2001). Strobel’s research informants were post-1963 immigrants from the Philippines and their children. But the process of decolonization she described including the rediscovery of one’s Filipino roots could apply also to the second and third generation of American-born Filipinos. N.V.M. Gonzalez, a fiction writer, observed that Filipinos (whether or not they were migrants) were inflicted with “cultural Alzheimer’s disease” (Strobel, 2001, p. 98), meaning they had virtually no knowledge of their past. To become ‘born again Filipino’ meant understanding the colonial heritage and rediscovering one’s cultural and historical past. Leonard Andaya who grew up in a Hawaiian plantation, the son of Ilocano immigrant parents captured this sentiment when he reflected on his metamorphosis from “American Filipino” to “Filipino American”:

“Those aspects of my identity linked to Hawai’i and America were ones that I believed to offer future promise because they were my home. Filipino culture, on the other hand, I saw as the culture of my parents and their friends.” (Andaya, 1996, p. 100).

Determined to embrace their ‘Filipino-ness’, a select group of Filipina/o Americans from both groups of post 1963 immigrants and second and third generation American born, embarked on a project of remembering the past and learning Filipino cultural traditions. Filipina/o Americans learned the ancient pre-colonial writing called *alibata* (now forgotten in the Philippines), practiced the indigenous martial arts of *arnis* (also known as *escrima* or *kali*), wore ethnic jewelry and sported tattoos from the Cordillera, with the young teenagers dancing the *tinikling* (bamboo dance) and the *pandango sa ilaw* (a folk dance that required the delicate balancing of glasses with lighted candles inside). Pilipino Cultural Nights (PCN) at college campuses in California became institutionalized in the 1980s depicting Philippine and Filipina/o American history in theatre, song, music and dance annually at college campuses (Mendoza, 2002, p. 152-154).

The writing of Filipina/o American history became a critical project for these migrants and descendants of migrants. Researching, documenting and writing their histories became a collective project for this ethnic group. The first historical association founded was the Filipino American Historical Society of Hawaii (hereafter FAHSH) formed in 1980 and incorporated in 1982 as a non-profit organization under the name Filipino Historical Society of Hawaii (Office of Multicultural Student Services, circa 1982). The organization’s aims were to initiate and sponsor “various activities such as community forums, workshops, exhibits, audio-visual presentations, performing arts, research and documentation, and the publications of books and manuscripts” (Office of Multicultural Student Services, circa 1982). When Dorothy and Fred Cordova founded the Filipino American National Historical Society (hereafter FANHS) a year later<sup>8</sup>, they found fertile ground for it to prosper and by 2012 there were 30 chapters all over the country, each with its own local community history projects. The biannual conferences ran by the organization nurtured a plethora of research topics with panels on ‘growing up brown in America’, and roundtables on ‘who/what is a Filipino American’. Conferences were also venues for training future historians with seminars on ‘how to write journals’ and ‘how to create an archive without money’. A lecture series labeled ‘TFIF: Thank God I’m Filipino’, a play on the American colloquial expression ‘Thank God It’s Friday’, celebrated ethnic pride (FANHS, 1988, 1994, 1996 and 2000). Local chapters became proactive in publishing their own local history books and videos, with some of them launching heritage projects that included the restoration of ‘Little Manila’ in Stockton, and the Manilatown Heritage Foundation in San Francisco.

A tidal wave of publications began to appear including reflections on ‘growing up brown’, community histories about the Filipino American presence in Vallejo, Stockton, Los Angeles, San Diego, Puget Sound, Chicago, Alaska, East Bay, San Francisco, Hawaii. By 2012 there were 14 histories of Filipino Americans in various parts of the country published under the *Images of America* series alone. The time, resources and effort put into the production and performance of these various types of community histories was enormous. Theodore Gonzalves called attention to the hours and hours of time devoted to the rehearsals for the annual Pilipino Cultural Night (PCN) held at several Californian college and university campuses every year (Gonzalves, 2010, p. 11, 89). There apparently was no such thing as a ‘small’ PCN night with a cast of hundreds entertaining audiences in a spectacle that lasted more than six hours (Gonzalves, 2010, p. 11). Over 25 years an estimated 60,000 college youth across two dozen campuses each invested over a hundred hours of their time for rehearsals (Gonzalves, 2010, p. 89). Similarly, the production team or crew of the oral histories published by the FANHS chapters was staggering. Teams of volunteers conducted interviews and transcribed them. For example, the book *In Our Uncle’s*

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<sup>8</sup> FANHS was conceived in 1982 but was not incorporated until 1985 (Cordova D., 2008).

*Words* had an oral history team of around 48 volunteers and a transcribing team of about 31 people. There were video committees, technical staff, and even a ‘glossary committee’ (FANHS Hampton Roads Chapter, 2006, p. 215-218). Even after publishing the book of oral histories of women in Hampton Roads, the team of high school interviewers dramatized these oral histories on stage for the Virginia Beach Contemporary Arts Center (Salcedo, 2004, p. 12). A two volume syllabus designed by the group calling itself Pin@y Education Partnerships, for use in teaching Filipina/o American studies in high schools, was put together by a team of no less than 58 teachers! (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2009). Around 400 FANHS members meet every other year at their own expense, at a different American city to present papers on their local histories or share their skills about preserving and documenting the past, or tell their stories.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the telling and retelling of the history of Filipina/o America has become such an enterprise that one of the books in this genre described the voluminous publications of community histories as a “perpetual anthology”. (Bergamo, 2004, p. 9).

Why have Filipina/o American migrants invested (and continue to invest) an enormous amount of time and resources towards the reproduction of their own past? Theodore Gonzalves suggested one possible answer when he argued that Pilipino Cultural Nights were part of the sacraments of Filipina/o American identity. (Gonzalves, 2010). While I do agree that a shared history was critical to the process of fashioning new identities I also suggest that these community histories had more ambitious aims: Filipina/o Americans aspired to have their histories included in mainstream American history textbooks. This was a highly ambitious objective given that Fred Cordova confessed in his presentation to the 1994 FANHS fifth National Biennial conference that he was still ‘smarting’ from a 1981 pronouncement of the Academic Senate of the University of California in Berkeley, that denied accreditation of Filipina/o American history as a fulfillment to the United States history requirement because “Filipinos have not made enough major contributions in building this nation” (Cordova F., 1996, p. 13). One of the aims for writing Filipina/o American histories therefore was to dismantle this assumption. At the opening credits of the seminal documentary produced by FANHS on the history of Filipino America, Fred Cordova addressed the audience with a question:

“What do the average Americans know about the Filipinos who have been here for over 400 years and who have helped in the advancement of this nation? Men, women and children, it is a story that has never been told and a story that should be told” (FANHS, 1994).

A sense of urgency about the need to document the past was fuelled by a crisis discourse that threatened the ‘disappearance’ of their ethnic group. Two seminal books written by Bridge Generation authors were entitled: “Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans” (Cordova F., 1983), and “Vanishing Filipino Americans” (Jamero, 2011). Dorothy Cordova, one of the cofounders of FANHS, has written that Filipinos were “a minority within a minority”, while Lily Mendoza reminded us that Filipina/o Americans were designated as “the invisible minority” (Cordova, D. 1874, Mendoza, 2002, p. 173). Scholars also appropriated this crisis discourse with Oscar Campomanes speaking about “the new Empire’s forgetful and forgotten citizens” subject to all kinds of ‘institutional invisibility” (Mendoza, 2002, p. 12) while an anthology by scholars in Canada published as late as 2012 was entitled “Filipinos in Canada: Disturbing Invisibility” (Coloma, McElhinny, Catungal, & Davidson, 2012).

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<sup>9</sup> Note that I am only discussing the histories and this does not include the voluminous Filipino American fiction, theatre, the visual and performing arts that also reflect on Filipino American history in various ways.

Even though Filipina/o Americans succeeded in writing their histories in their own voices, the history that they wanted included in mainstream American histories was a very specific interpretation of the past. It was a story that underscored the migrants' tenacity to survive against the odds, and to make the best of their challenging situation. In all the historical accounts, Filipina/o Americans were not victims but agents who worked hard and overcame these great odds to survive. While all pioneers in these community histories were admired for their tenacity, the heroes in this historical narrative were clearly people like Pablo Manlapit who led the sugar strikes in Hawai'i, Philip Vera Cruz, Pete Velasco and Larry Itliong who were pivotal in the United Farm Workers Movement in the United States West Coast, and Virgil Duyugan, Gene Viernes and Silve Domingo important leaders in the Alaskan cannery union. The Filipino community was often mythologized as providing the necessary support in the absence of family by establishing fraternal lodges, sponsoring queen contests and sports tournaments, and lastly by building community centers. For example, Filipino communities especially in the pre-war era were often represented as a united positive force helping each other contrasting sharply with the more balanced scholarly accounts that highlighted the highly fractured nature of Filipino communities in the United States (Bonus, 2000 and Mabalon, 2003).

All the published accounts described the first generation of migrants as 'hard workers'. Plantation workers in the sugar cane fields of Hawai'i worked long hours, for very little pay and were subject to the harsh rules of the managers, and the racial segregation of the workers. Agricultural workers in California were described as enduring the hot sun, the peat dust (for asparagus workers), the difficult manual labor, the long hours, for a dollar a day (Cordova F., 1983; FANHS, 1994; Dunn and Schwarz 1984, Filipino Oral History Project, 1984). The experiences of Alaskan cannery workers focused on the substandard conditions of their housing and food and the gap between the wages and food of white or non-Filipino workers (Buchholdt, 1996; Filipino Oral History Project, 1984).

"Working to survive was real hard work in the Alaskan cannery. At the time there was no machinery and much of the hauling was done by pure manual labor. Ours was the work of a mule. The work schedule was indefinite and hours were long. You need will and strength to keep up with the work in those early days." (Filipino Oral History Project, 1984)

Social exclusion was epitomized by the signs outside restaurants and public places that declared "Positively No Filipinos allowed" and the anti-miscegenation laws that prevented the mostly male population of Filipino migrants from having families. Narratives stressed the great disillusionment pioneers felt when they felt betrayed by American ideals of democracy and equality they learned at school taught by American teachers in the Philippines and the reality of racial discrimination. Carlos Bulosan's succinct statement "In America it is a crime to be Filipino" was a constant theme permeating the oral history accounts that recounted the daily traumas of work, leisure life (as Filipino men were beaten up by white men who objected to their association with white women in taxi dance halls and as romantic partners), and the poverty that made every day a challenge to survive. (Bulosan, 2006; Cordova F., 1983; Felipe, 2002; Filipino Oral History Project, 1984; Jamero, 2006; Scharlin & Villanueva, 2000).

In these accounts Filipino labor was isolated as an important contribution to the United States. The prologue to Lilo Bonipasyo's autobiography quotes him saying "With my bare hands I helped build Hawai'i. I plowed lands for the cane fields with mules, I cut cane, I *hapaiko*, carried cane and watered sugarcane" (Felipe, 2002, p. 19). Fred Cordova stated in the documentary *Filipino Americans Discovering Their Past for Their Future* produced by FANHS: "All throughout Filipinos have always cleaned America, cooked for America, and they've

always harvested for America. And that to me is a tremendous contribution. It may not be so dramatic, it may not sound so world-shaking but nevertheless that is how America survived.” (FANHS, 1994). The message was that although Filipinos were relegated to the underclass, their labor was an important yet unacknowledged contribution to America’s prosperity in the twentieth century.

This history of struggle and triumph —what I call the heroic narrative —defines the Filipina/o American story. I deliberately used the singular (read story rather than stories) because this metanarrative is firmly embedded in the popular histories and was very difficult to challenge. The absence of a single debate between community historians further entrenched this single narrative. A potentially controversial issue such as the actual date when Filipina/o American history ‘began’ managed to avoid contentious debate when FANHS succeeded in its lobby to have October proclaimed “Filipino American history month” by no less than Congress House Resolution 780 in 2009 (FANHS, 2009, p. 4-5). This date endorsed October 18, 1587, the day a landing party from the Manila Galleon sent a group of Spaniards and *indios* (the name Spaniards used to refer to natives of the Philippines) on shore in Morro Bay near San Luis Obispo (Cordova F., 1983;FANHS, 1994). Alternative dates could have been 1763 when the first Filipino settlement was founded in New Orleans, Louisiana or 1906 when the first workers landed in Hawaii to work in the sugar plantations there or 1903 when the first Filipino *pensionados* (government scholars) went to the United States to study. Scholar Oscar Campomanes critiqued the way this starting date was never problematized or even posed (Campomanes in: Tiongson, 2006, p. 40) ! But in choosing the earlier date, Filipina/o Americans could claim that the long history of migration legitimized claims for recognition in the mainstream society (read Filipinos were in North America even before the Plymouth landing).

The lack of debate has not gone completely unnoticed by the Filipina/o American community itself. Tongue in a Mood, a theatre group, has satirized the PCN’s historical presentations as “predictable” and “ossified” (Gonzalves, 2010, p. 140), with scholar Theodore Gonzalves observing that “critics have argued that the PCN genre reinforces static constructions of Filipina/o American identities and that the origins of the folk forms need to be more concretely historicized or subjected to experimentation and play” with some even going to the extent of labeling it “Orientalizing” (Gonzalves, 2010, p. 123-124). Despite the repetitive nature of the singular Filipina/o American story, it would be difficult to produce an alternative when the re-enacting of this particular metanarrative was so crucial to the performance of Filipina/o American identity and ethnic pride.

On the positive side, Filipina/o American story has been able to achieve its aims of making Filipina/o Americans visible and affirmed the entangled histories between the Philippines and the United States. The community histories began with America’s colonial empire in the Philippines and highlighted the importance of the Filipino-American War. This was incredibly important because these texts ran counter to America’s denial of empire. In this sense, they are counter-narratives. The Philippines was ever present in the memoirs, autobiographies and oral histories published by the Filipina/o American communities. Life stories included a segment about their lives in the Philippines prior to migration to the US, while those born in the US discussed their various trips to that country. In autobiographies and travel accounts of the second generation and children of the post 1960s migration, the trip to the Philippines assumed the status of a pilgrimage to that sacred place called ‘home’; a necessary journey taken in order to connect with one’s culture and one’s extended ‘family’ abroad. Memories of that sojourn were recalled in sentimental terms complete with the naïve joy of ‘discovering’ the original versions of the Filipino/regional food they ate,

and the relatives they never met before. There was little engagement with the actual political, economic and social conditions of the place or the hardship, poverty and complex lives of the (90 million) inhabitants who were not family, or community. Theodore Gonzalves pointed to one essential element of the script of the Filipino Cultural Night wherein the narrator took the characters back to ‘the Philippines’, as an example of ‘reverse exile’ required to ‘discover’ their identity:

“For young characters, ‘something’ was missing; that which was replaced by an imagined return to the Philippines where the ‘crisis’ of Filipino American identity could be resolved. ‘Reverse exile’ was bracketed here to call attention to the problematic of American-born Filipinos who do not ‘go back to a place where they have never been.’” (p. 121).

In PCN productions ‘the Philippines’ remained an idyllic place.<sup>10</sup> Representations of history in theatre and in painting reproduced these entangled histories by having distinct segments designated as Philippine ‘space’ and Filipina/o American ‘space’ (Gonzalves, 1998). However, the Philippines in the Filipina/o American metanarrative was romanticized and mythologized (with the exception of those Filipino Americans who volunteered as interns to work in Philippine NGOs and lived among the lower classes for an extended period of time).<sup>11</sup>

It was also very interesting that with the small exception of the memoirs of those who became successful in political publics like former Governor Ben Cayetano (2009) or Bob Santos (2002), or those who intermarried white Americans, I rarely saw a white face appear. The FANHS sponsored publications, the documentary films, the street murals, the PCN performances, all tell the exclusive story of a Filipino American community *sans* white Americans. In the memoirs of Philip Vera Cruz, Pablo Manlapit, Peter Jamero, Angela Monrayo’s diary, and the community histories, the few white Americans that were mentioned were one-dimensional characters. Perhaps this was due to the fact that Filipina/o Americans have been ostracized from white society for most of the twentieth century, compelled to socialize only with each other barred from being accepted as equal members of white society. This exclusion from white society extended to second generation Filipina/o Americans. Peter Jamero’s seminal account of the Bridge Generation revealed that as young teenagers in the 1940s and 1950s they were more or less compelled to socialize with each other since they were not included in mainstream white society (Jamero, 2011). In his memoirs he confessed that as a small boy growing up in an agricultural camp, he thought that the world was composed of Filipinos and that the world outside was foreign (Jamero, 2006 and 2011).

These community histories had an impact because they have begun the process of revising popular perceptions of Filipino history in the United States. Led by FANHS founders Dorothy and Fred Cordova, community historians challenged the androcentric representation of the migrant group as a ‘bachelor society’ emphasizing the important role of the few Filipino women in the first half of the twentieth century. Starting from Fred Cordova’s seminal book *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans*, many of the community histories had a chapter on women with the Hampton Roads FANHS chapter producing a book “In our Auntie’s Words” highlighting women’s contributions (FANHS Hampton Roads Chapter, 2004). Local histories also challenged the stereotype that all Filipino migrants of the pioneer generation were agricultural workers, janitors, bus boys, waiters or Alaskan cannery

<sup>10</sup> “In a familiar “quest” motif, the characters meet guides—elders, spirits, or parent figures—who “transport” them from safe, privileged, and increasingly suburban and apolitical settings to an idyllic Philippines” (Gonzalves, 2010, p. 120).

<sup>11</sup> For a chapter on Filipina/o American volunteers in the Philippines see Mendoza (2002, p. 187-194).

workers. FANHS publications called attention to the fact that these intrepid boys and men were also part time students, many of them working in order to pay for their education only to discover that even with a college degree racial discrimination and their accents prevented them from gaining professional employment (Cordova D., 2009; Philippine Historical Association; Scharlin & Villanueva, 2000).

“I don’t think there were opportunities. I only recall that when I graduated from UCLA, the dean of women called me and said that if I wanted a job, a professional job commensurate to my education, I could go to Hawaii.....Why is that America would educate the minority and not give them an opportunity to use this education? Why is it that they need a college education to be a dishwasher?” (Filipino Oral History Project, 1984).

Finally, although these ‘community histories’ became predictable, they clearly started the project of staking Filipino *place* in the locations they wrote about. The volumes produced proclaimed that Filipinos were, are, and will continue to live all over the United States—from San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, Chicago, East Bay, Vallejo, Puget Sound, Hawaii, Louisiana to Alaska. Filipinos of both sexes, and a variety of occupational sectors have been honored—as Alaskeros, farm workers, sugar plantation workers, union activists, nurses, doctors, navy men, and politicians. The next stage in the project of staking a place in social memory was to have actual physical heritage sites. The struggle for heritage sites will be discussed in a section below.

This training to become historians and custodians of the past is an excellent example of a history from below. In this case, migrants who are perceived to be marginalized actors (invisible) in mainstream history undertake to write their own histories doing their own training, research and documentation. Not only do they produce new narratives or alternative histories with themselves at the center of the story, they do this with an autonomous voice of their own independent from the academy of professional historians. This new history from below differs from the previous ‘old’ history from below in that the actual members of the lower classes are no longer an anonymous mass of people. Instead, it re-evaluates individual experience, it lets us hear the personal and private voices of the common or ordinary people (unmediated), and sees these community historians as active agents of change.<sup>12</sup>

## The Struggle for Heritage sites

Since the aim of the migrant histories was to make themselves visible, the struggle for heritage sites or at least the marking of physical structures and places as ‘cultural preservation districts’ to commemorate Filipino migrant space past, and present, became an important activist strategy. Since migrants were excluded from prime public spaces with outright signs that declared “positively no Filipinos allowed” in the streets of California in the 1930s and 1940s, the contest for “Filipino space” in the center of the city has been one of the challenges for Filipino migrants over the last hundred years.

In the South of Market district in San Francisco, it was observed that the community was ‘disappearing’. Because there were so few physical structures that could be labeled as heritage sites that needed to be marked as “Filipino historical space”, migrants became involved in cultural activism to mark the streets, and parts of the city as parts of their heritage. In this way, in reclaiming public space as ‘Filipino space’ Filipina/os participated

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<sup>12</sup> I owe this discussion of the new history from below to Martyn Lyons (2010).

in the project of making themselves visible in public spaces in response to the crisis discourse that they were disappearing.

I will discuss two historic tours run by Filipino migrants in the recent years. These projects were important not only because they called attention to the contribution of the migrant group but also because they revised the local mainstream histories. They reinvented the trope of historic tours—by ‘marking’ sites where the Filipino community was quite literally disappearing and through commentary, revising mainstream histories and inviting audiences to join in their crusade of remembrance. The two tours are non-profit tours run by volunteers who have an activist agenda: to lobby for markers to be placed on streets or sites that were important in Filipino migrant history. The tours I discuss are MC Canlas’ ethno-tour of the South of Market (hereafter SoMa) district in San Francisco and Little Manila Foundation’s tour of Little Manila Stockton.

### *SoMa Filipinas*

Since 1999 MC Canlas has been running two Filipino ethno-tours of the SoMa (South of Market) district in San Francisco (Canlas, 2012). In the last decades of the twentieth century the Filipino population moved to the suburb of Daly City where they are the fastest growing ethnic minority constituting 32% of the population (Canlas, 2012; Vergara, 2009, p. 2). Out of Daly City’s total population of 103,621, there are 32,720 Filipinos (Vergara, 2009, p. 2), making it arguably “home to the largest concentration of Filipinos outside of Manila” (Gonzales, 2012, p. 55). In Serramonte Center, Daly City’s premiere shopping mall, one in three persons were of Philippine descent with one half of employees in Target of Filipino ancestry and where Philippine-based businesses such as Bench (an apparel store) and Filipino fast food can be found in the court (Gonzales, 2012, p. 71). But according to Canlas, although Daly City has the Filipino population it lacked ‘the Filipino character’ and hence one could not claim Daly City as Filipinotown in the same way as there is a Nihonmachi (Japantown) and Chinatown (Canlas, 2012). Research conducted by Canlas and his associates uncovered “the importance of South of Market as a center of gravity for the Filipino people living throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. We learned about the cultural significance of structure and space to Filipinos” (Canlas, 2002, p. 9). For Canlas, the most important landmarks for Filipinos in SoMa were St. Patrick’s church and Yerba Buena Gardens where Filipinos congregated (Canlas, 2002, p. 74). SoMa was also important because of the history of Filipino activism that was intimately connected to preserving the Filipino community there. In the 1970s out of an estimated population of 17,000, 5000 were Filipinos mostly of the working class (since the middle class professionals moved to Daly City) (Canlas, 2002, p. 60).

The Pilipino Organizing Committee (POC) was born in 1972 with an operating facility called *Gusaling Pilipino* which Canlas translated as “Pilipino people’s space” (Canlas, 2002, p. 60-64). The POC and the activism of the Tenant-Owners Organizing Against Redevelopment (TOOR) hoped to ‘save the neighborhood’ from ‘redevelopment without planning’ and invented the concept of ‘social heritage’ as a discourse invoked in their plea for the preservation of important landmarks relevant to particular communities who lived in the SoMa district (Canlas, 2012). Since there was a shortage of actual physical structures that they could target as heritage structures, activists coined the term ‘cultural preservation districts’ and ‘social heritage sites’ as legitimizing discourses for reclaiming (and marking) sections of the city as “Filipino spaces” (Canlas, 2012). According to Canlas, the Planning Department generally used that term “historical district” to refer to architectural structures. In the absence of distinctive buildings, the coining of the term “cultural

preservation area” allowed activists to expand the concept of heritage sites to include places that once were important to Filipinos even though Filipino presence was slowly disappearing. The Planning Department was familiar with the term ‘special use district’ allowing banners to be placed to mark “Little Saigon” for example in the place where Vietnamese restaurants abound, but this did not protect the assets of the buildings. In the absence of legislation that ensured that every Filipino business which left the area would be replaced by a Filipino-owned establishment, Canlas feared that “we might vanish from the neighborhood” (Canlas, 2012) – the crisis discourse again.

The two ethno-tours of Filipino SoMa neighborhood were originally designed by Canlas to target fundraisers to view SoMa as a social heritage district dubbed “Munting Pilipinas” (miniature Philippines) (Canlas, 2002, p. 101-103) in the plans to redevelop the area. Canlas used the Tagalog framework of ‘*tabi tabi po*’ (the phrase one says to ask spirits permission to walk past their area) because he said that this told all and sundry Filipinos had ancestors who lived there for a long time (Canlas, 2012). The claim to make SoMa Filipino space is not about the present. Instead it was an attempt to underscore the point that Filipinos were there a long time ago.

I had a privilege of being taken to a personally designed tour that was a combination of two tours, the Neighborhood Heritage Tour and the Filipino American Tour of History (hereafter FATH) in July 26, 2010 and I did a follow up interview in July 11, 2012. The itinerary of the tour sites showed a close connection between activism on behalf of claiming or reclaiming Filipino spaces in the district. In 1979 O’Doul Lane became Lapu-Lapu Street, Shipley street was renamed Bonifacio Street, and Alice Street changed to Mabini street – all names referring to Filipinos who resisted Spanish and/or American rule (Canlas, 2002, p. 101-102, 198). Two other streets in the same location were given Filipino names— Rizal Street and Tandang Sora Street (Jose Rizal is the Philippine national hero whose novels inspired the revolution against Spain, and Tandang Sora is the nickname of Melchora Aquino, the female elder who looked after Filipino revolutionaries in the 1896-1898 revolution against Spain) (Canlas, 2012). In 2005, Filipino university students presented testimonies urging the Mayor and Board of supervisors to support the initiative to name the former Bessie Carmichael Elementary School site as Victoria Manalo Draves Park. Filipina American youth were looking for role models and they found one in Draves who they learned about in their Asian American and/or Ethnic Studies courses as a Filipina American who became the first female diver to win two gold medals at a single Olympics (in diving) (Canlas, 2002, p. 196; Gonzales, 2009, p. 123). The students were successful in their campaign and the Victoria Manalo Draves Park was opened in 2006 (Gonzales, 2009, p. 146). Other important landmarks visited in the tour included the site of the Grande Oriente building (one of the few actual physical buildings bought in 1952 by the fraternal lodge Grande Oriente), and street murals depicting Philippine and Filipina/o American history analyzed for audiences by Canlas during the tour (Canlas, 2012). The Neighborhood Heritage Tour took students audiences to see the renamed streets, the Victoria Draves Park, the Bessie Carmichael School (that has a significant number of Filipina/o students), the Tutubi Park (*tutubi* is the Tagalog word for Dragonfly), at least one Filipino street mural in the area, the Grande Oriente Building, the Filipino Education Center, St. Patrick’s Church and the Dimasalang House now called the San Lorenzo Ruiz Center in honor of the first Filipino saint. The participants were briefed in the Bayanihan Filipino Center at 6<sup>th</sup> and Mission streets, once the site of the Delta Hotel where many pioneer Filipinos lived before the 1970s redevelopment. Note that most of the sites (with the exception of the Grande Oriente and the San Lorenzo Ruiz Center) were reclaimed Filipino spaces.

The Filipino American Tour of History (FATH) added a couple of monuments to the itinerary but what distinguished it from the other tour was Canlas' commentary. In his own words, he hoped to begin a 'counter-narrative' by giving alternative interpretations to the texts that accompanied these monuments. For example, the visit to the Dewey Monument in Union Square that celebrated the American Victory in the Spanish American War was reinterpreted as a symbol of the beginning of the American colonization of the Philippines. The visit to the Presidio army post to see the Spanish cannon brought to San Francisco by the American army from the Philippines as a war trophy allowed Canlas to relate how Filipinos in the United States successfully lobbied to change the accompanying text about the Filipino American War of 1898-1902. Instead of depicting Filipinos who fought against Americans as 'insurrectos', the term was changed to Filipino 'nationalists'. In addition, Filipinos insisted that the textual commentary next to the canon should include statistics of Filipino casualties of war (Canlas, 2012). Canlas' tour was a version of American history from a Filipino perspective reclaiming a space in social history by presenting a new narrative of the past (Canlas, 2012).

### *Stockton's Little Manila Tour*

The city of Stockton became the hub for itinerant Filipino farm workers in the 1920s to the 1970s (Mabalon, 2003, p. 1). Located between the Alaskan salmon canneries and the agricultural fields of California including the San Joaquin valley where Filipinos became the largest ethnic group in farm labor in the 1920s, Stockton was the ideal meeting point and the natural place for this group to congregate between the seasons (Little Manila Foundation, 2008, p. 7; Mabalon, 2003, p. 1). Local statistics confirmed the importance of that small city for Filipina/o Americans since "by 1930 there were more than 30,000 Filipinas/os in California, and approximately 10,000 lived and worked in and near Stockton"(Mabalon, 2003, p. 75).

By the 1970s the Filipino community moved out of the downtown area of Stockton. Only three dilapidated buildings remained where once a 4-6 block street area boasted a plethora of Filipino owned businesses from restaurants and pool halls to barbershops. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was difficult to spot any traces of the once thriving ethnic community. The Little Manila Foundation of Stockton California was founded in 2002 by historian Dawn Mabalon (PhD in history from Stanford University, is an Associate Professor at San Francisco State University) and Dillion Delvo, precisely to advocate "for the historic preservation of the Little Manila Historical Site in Stockton, California and provides education and leadership to revitalize our Filipina/o American community" (Little Manila Foundation, 2012). Inspired by their motto "to remember & reclaim", one of its major activities is the Little Manila Stockton tour run by volunteers of the foundation. I had the privilege of participating in one of the tours especially organized for my visit by Dawn Mabalon, Jessica Hernandez, Elena Mangahas and Anita Navalta Bautista in July 2012. The tour took me to downtown Stockton at the intersection of Lafayette and El Dorado streets where once a 4-6 block Filipino community thrived and where many Filipino farm workers spent their leisure hours, and The Filipino Center built in 1972 which featured low income housing, social services and retail space for displaced businesses which had to make way for the superhighway in the late 1960s. The tour included a visit to the Daguhoy Lodge of the fraternal organization of the *Legionarios del Trabajo* to view a little exhibit that recaptured the living quarters of Filipino farm workers who worked in the asparagus fields. With only three dilapidated buildings left of the original site, the tour was really a history lecture. Although one was presented with special computer generated maps of the changing ethnic composition of Stockton's downtown over the years with a special emphasis on Filipino

presence, visitors who were expecting a typical sightseeing extravaganza will be greatly disappointed. But, this shortage of heritage sites is precisely the rationale for such a tour. The Little Manila Foundation's *raison d'être* is to ensure that Filipino historic presence in downtown Stockton is commemorated and remembered despite the fact that hardly any physical remains could be seen today. One must not dissociate the historic tour of Little Manila with the Foundation's activist arm. For example, together with FANHS-Stockton chapter, the foundation successfully lobbied the Stockton City Council for historic site status for the Little Manila area in 2000 (the first city-designated Filipina/o American historic site) (Mabalon, 2006, p. 89). Little Manila Foundation's aims included educating Filipina/o Americans about the history of Filipinos in Stockton. In addition, the foundation succeeded in placing official markers and photographic banners on the actual sites where important Filipino landmarks once stood even though no physical remains exist. One example is a banner with the photo of the Lafayette counter, a popular Filipino restaurant with its owner/chef prominently featured. The markers, clearly visible in downtown Stockton, displayed Filipino presence and succeeded in reminding visitors and residents that the area was significant to that particular ethnic community.

The Stockton Little Manila tour is also about reminding Filipina/o Americans about the consequences of apathy and lack of interest in one's history. The tour is a first step in jolting young Filipina/o Americans of the need to preserve their past or else risk becoming invisible as a minority group (the crisis discourse again). A clip of the tour can be found in documentary produced by the Little Manila Foundation about Filipinos in Stockton. A film byte shows tour conductor Dawn Mabalon addressing the audience of young Filipino Americans with:

“Do you want to bring your grandchildren and into an empty lot and say ‘this is where an important strike was planned’? Because what does that say about what we think about ourselves and how we value our long history? Because if we allow our historic places to become parking lots what does that say about how we think about ourselves of how we value our long history in the United States?” (Mabalon in: Aroy, 2007).

Mabalon's comments communicated the message that pride in one's ethnic heritage was a barometer for how they valued themselves as a migrant group. The tour becomes a call to arms to participate in the campaign to claim a space in social memory. At its core, the Little Manila Historic tour is about the sins of forgetting, and invites its audiences to participate in the ethnic groups' project of remembering and preserving their past, of marking the streets where they once occupied the center of the city.

## **Conclusion: Every Migrant a Budding Historian?**

I opened this paper with an inscription in a gravestone. This inscription was an abridged version of the heroic narrative produced by migrants. The inscription already broke the migrant's silence on the public acknowledgement of their difficult past. But it also communicated the desire to possess the authorial voice. Former FANHS president, the late Terri Jamero declared in her presidential address (and later reproduced verbatim in a FANHS community history of East Bay):

“If we do not tell our own story, then others will tell it for us—as they interpret it—and we will risk losing the essence and the truth about the Filipino American experience. That history could fade from memory, and one day our children's children could be asking, Who were our ancestors? What were they like? What did they do? And there could be no one to answer and nowhere to look.” (Buell, Luluquisen, Galedo, & Luis, 2008; FANHS, 1992).

Migrant's anxiety about having their voices heard was obvious from the titles of their publications: *Voices A Filipino American Oral History*, *In Our Uncles Words*, *In Our Aunties' Words*, to name a few (FANHS Hampton Roads Chapter, 2004 and 2006; Filipino Oral History Project, 1984). After a long history of exclusion, it is understandable that migrants would like to have control over the way their stories were told and interpreted. This project of making migrants visible transformed migrants into historians and underscored the importance of the discipline of history, especially oral history.

So far, the history projects were highly effective in making Filipina/o Americans visible. Filipina/o Americans led by FANHS succeeded in having the month of October pronounced as "Filipino American history month" in legislation passed by the Senate and Congress in the states of Hawaii and California. During this month FANHS chapters and affiliates launched various activities celebrating and commemorating Filipina/o American history and culture from photograph exhibits to dances, Filipino food, book launches, film screenings, and lectures. Filipina/o Americans were visible in the sites of memory: a permanent exhibit of photographs of Alaskeros is in the Wing Luke Asian Museum in Seattle's International District, there were two travelling Smithsonian exhibits on Filipino American topics, a one room permanent exhibit honoring Carlos Bulosan in Seattle, and a special exhibit about Filipino farm workers in the 1930s exhibited in the National Steinbeck museum in Salinas, California in 2012.<sup>13</sup> FANHS and the Stockton Little Manila Foundation produced two documentaries shown in high schools and universities (Aroy, 2007; FANHS, 1994). Some streets have been renamed to acknowledge Filipino presence there and markers laid at important Filipino sites. The Little Manila Foundation and the FANHS-Stockton Chapter succeeded in having the area of Little Manila designated as a Filipina/o American historic site in 2000 even though Stockton's premier historian Dawn Bohulano Mabalon argued that "Little Manila exists only in the memories of the early immigrants and their descendants. It has literally disappeared from the physical landscape of Stockton." (Mabalon, 2003, p. 2). Just last August 20, 2013, the Little Manila Foundation and the FANHS, the Inosanto Academy, and Bahala Na Filipino Martial Arts in partnership with the San Joaquin County named a new street the "Leo Giron Drive" to commemorate a veteran of the famous 978<sup>th</sup> Filipino Commando unit handpicked by General Douglas MacArthur to lead the return of Allied troops to the Philippines (Somera, 2013). Manilatown Heritage Foundation (hereafter MHF) in San Francisco located in the site of the former International Hotel sponsored regular activities about Filipina/o American culture and history, particularly the activism of the 1970s during the fall of the I-Hotel (once the living quarters of retired pioneer generation Filipinos that fell victim to developers). The MHF also has a small electronic archive. The Filipino American Historical Society of Hawaii (FAHSOH) has an eFIL project to digitize Filipina/o American newspapers, and interview transcripts with Filipinos in Hawaii, and make them available in their website. These achievements attested to the coming of age of the Filipina/o American migrant as community historian. But they also underscore the effective strategy of using the heroic narrative and the crisis discourse to legitimize the demands for a space in social memory. The use of historical evidence to prove the Filipina/o American consistent contribution to the society over a long period of time

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<sup>13</sup> The Smithsonian exhibits were: "Through My Father's Eyes: The Filipino American Photographs of Ricardo Orceto Alvarado (1914-1976), shown at the American history museum in November 21, 2002 - March 31, 2003, and "Singgalot: Ties That Bind--From Colonial Subjects and "National" to Citizens, A Century of Filipino" May 18, 2006 - August 20, 2006. The description of the latter exhibit is that "The exhibition highlights their contributions to the development of Hawaii, the agribusiness industry on the West Coast, the seafood and cannery industries in Alaska, the U.S. military, public service, literature and the arts, sports, and health care." (Smithsonian Museum, 2012).

despite being subjected to exploitation, discrimination and exclusion has won them some recognition.

Further research needs to be conducted on the historic tours and their impact on those who take the tours and both the Filipina/o American and white American communities. For example, there is another historic tour of Los Angeles's Little Manila that I have as yet not been able to do. The migrant archives are also very much California-centric or US West coast centric. The most active FANHS chapters are also in the West coast of the United States. The FAHSOH in Honolulu ensures that Hawaii is present in the production of Filipina/o American histories but it would be worthwhile to investigate why there are less histories published by Filipinos in the East coast, particularly in New York where there is also a sizeable Filipina/o American community. It might also be useful to compare this case study of Filipina/o American community historians with other Asian American communities. Do the Chinese American, Japanese American and Korean Americans also struggle for a space in social memory? I suspect that Chinese, Japanese and Korean Americans were probably more visible in mainstream American history than Filipina/o Americans and so this might mean that activism for heritage sites and an inclusion in mainstream histories would be slightly different. Khatharya Um is currently working on transnational activism of Cambodian Americans but while there may be similarities with the Filipinos regarding their visibility in the dominant histories of the United States, in other ways Filipina/o American history is closer to that of Mexican Americans than it is with other Southeast Asian migrants to the United States (Um, forthcoming). Filipino/a American studies is currently located in Asian American studies and the specialists in that field have already raised this problematic positioning and the need to consider ties with Mexican American studies (Tiongson, 2006, p. 162-171 and 26-42). While Filipinos arrived in the United States shortly after the Chinese and Japanese labor migration and whereas their experiences as male dominated ethnic enclaves parallels the early histories of Asian America, by the mid-twentieth century, Filipina/o American labor history becomes entangled with Mexican American history epitomized by their connections in the United Farm Workers' Movement in the West coast.

In an anthology about Filipina/o American studies/history, scholar Dylan Rodriguez referred to the late Fred Cordova<sup>14</sup>, co-founder of FANHS as the “venerable ‘pioneer’ and self-appointed guardian of Filipino American history.” (Rodriguez D. , 2006, p. 146). The allusion and the terms “self-appointed guardian” hinted at a disapproval if not mild scorn, of Cordova's presumptuousness in making that claim. Yet the audacity exhibited by the Cordovas (husband and wife team) and the growing cohort of migrant community historians is testimony to the empowerment of this self-described marginal group in the project of documenting, preserving, and disseminating the migrant's stories. Filipina/o Americans and other Filipino migrants exhibited great pride in their ancestral heritage linked to lower class migrant labor. This was unheard of in the Philippines where the common reaction was to obscure one's humble origins. This is also a direct contrast to the shame second and third generation Filipina/o Americans once felt about their ancestors who spoke heavy accented English. At the same time, becoming a community historian — joining FANHS, publishing books, performing in PCNs, lobbying for historic sites, painting historic murals, or becoming tour guides—has transformative power as ordinary migrants become custodians of their own past, a project that fills them with pride, and self-esteem.

The enormous interest in Filipino migrant history is extremely important particularly because Filipinos in the Philippines are generally not interested in their own history. The

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<sup>14</sup> Fred Cordova passed away in December 2013.

blossoming of Filipina/o American studies in the United States, and the success of FAHSOH, FANHS and its chapters, the continuing production of migrant memoirs and stories (some reproduced in popular culture through diasporic film) are evidence of the fashioning of the Filipina/o migrant as historian. Beyond their role in documenting the past, these Filipinos also support the research and publishing of Philippine studies and Philippine migrant studies and are currently among the most enthusiastic patrons of Philippine culture and history. In their drive to be recognized and to have control over the representation of their past, these migrants have not only marked themselves as the new custodians of Philippine history and culture worldwide, they have also rejected their status as marginal actors, and substituted this with a narrative in which they clearly are the heroes and heroines.

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