



Kimberley Society

Book Note

Re-imagining Australia: voices of Indigenous Australians of Filipino descent by Deborah Ruiz Wall with Christine Choo. Published by Keeaira Press, Southport, QLD, 2016. Soft cover, 160 pages, 215 x 210 mm, grey-scale photographs & maps, bibliography, ISBN 978-0-9923241-5-5.

Available online from [Keeaira Press](http://www.keeariapress.com.au). RRP \$30.

A compilation of stories mostly narrated as oral history by Indigenous Australians of Filipino descent in the Kimberley and Torres Strait. In the Introduction, the authors clarify the terminology that was used to refer to Asian men who came to northern Australia from the late 19th Century to work in the burgeoning pearling industry. Only a minority of those men came from the islands of the Philippines. They were known commonly as 'Manilamen', even if they did not originate from Manila, and sometimes by the more generic term 'Malays' which included people from modern-day Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and East Timor. A distinction there was that many Manilamen were Catholic while the Malays' religion tended to be Islam. We also learn that in the 19th Century the term 'Filipino' technically referred to Spaniards born in the Philippines whereas the Spaniards called the natives of that country 'Indios'. Many Manilamen married local Aboriginal women and most of their descendants identify as Indigenous Australians, while continuing to acknowledge and celebrate their Filipino inheritance.

The book is divided into three parts:

Part 1 Filipino Descendants Speak has stories narrated by 11 people from the Kimberley area (mainly Broome but also some from Beagle Bay, Lombadina and Derby) and ten from Torres Strait. Those people are descendants of early Filipino settlers in the various localities.

Part 2 Salient Themes discusses three themes arising from the recorded narratives:

- the impact of Australia's policy on naturalisation;
- the contributions of Filipinos to social and economic community building; and,
- 'Belonging' and identification as Australians with diverse ancestral heritage.

Part 3 History of Filipino Pearl Divers in Torres Strait and Broome

There are many interesting accounts of the early life, difficulties, and significant contributions made by people regarded as 'aliens' until quite recent times. The contribution these people made to the early community in Broome is especially noteworthy. The narrators who hail from and/or speak about Broome are Kevin Puertollano, Mitch Torres, James Frederic Jahan, Miguel Castillon, Sally Bin Demin, Elsta Foy, Mary Manolis (deceased), Evelyn Masuda (deceased), Ellen Puertollano, Anthony Ozies (deceased), and Magdalene Ybasco. This book is a valuable resource for people researching this poorly appreciated part of northern Australian history and, in accounts such as the one from Miguel Castillon, we can see how the involvement of Filipinos in the pearling industry gave rise to strong links between families from Broome, Darwin and the Torres Strait.

Mike Donaldson