GABRIELA'S DAUGHTERS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

ENGLISH

MAY 2013

By

Amalia B. Bueno

Thesis Committee:

Susan M. Schultz, Chairperson
Craig Santos Perez
Craig Howes
Lilia Q. Santiago

Keywords: Poetry, Filipino, Home, Prison, Body, Hawai'i
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface ................................................................. iv

Home Remedies
Daughters ................................................................. 2
Home Remedies ......................................................... 3
Apo Baket ................................................................. 4
Shame ................................................................. 6
Swearing to God ......................................................... 7
Maybe ................................................................. 9
Summer Awakening ...................................................... 10
Cursing the Moon ...................................................... 12
Me and Jurison ......................................................... 16
No Michael But Worth It .............................................. 18
The Tita Princess ...................................................... 19
When Doris Tells a Story .............................................. 20
Chewed Up .............................................................. 21

Time Served
Home ................................................................. 23
Home as Other Four-Letter Words ................................ 24
Multiple Choices ....................................................... 25
At Her Mother’s ....................................................... 26
More Sanity Than Addiction ........................................ 27
Grace Outside ......................................................... 28
#61354218, C. Mendoza ............................................. 29
Caterpillar Arms ....................................................... 30
Conversations Between Ahiki and Maunawili ................. 31
Kimberly “Dawnie” Tamashiro ..................................... 33
Larain: No O, No E .................................................... 34
Crystal Leilani Maria Clara Javier Mendoza .................... 35
Rachel ................................................................. 36
The Sex Was Consensual ............................................. 37
No Such Thing ......................................................... 38
The Guardian ......................................................... 39
Scared ............................................................... 40
Anna in the Garden ................................................... 41
Maunawili Cafeteria ................................................ 42
[re]Leased ........................................................... 43
True or False ......................................................... 44
From a Native Hawaiian Woman Shipped Out to Oklahoma Because of Prison Overcrowding in Hawai’i ............... 45
Extra Credit .......................................................... 46
The Daily Head Count. ......................................................... 47
Time Served. ................................................................. 49

(dis)Place
Tongue Lashing ................................................................. 51
I Stay Wid Herman's Bones. ............................................... 52
Our Father ................................................................. 53
Heroes in the Attic. ...................................................... 55
Empress, Lucena, Me ..................................................... 57
Wha You From ................................................................. 58
Four Ways to Get There. .................................................. 59
At Cebu Pool Hall. ............................................................ 60
Apo Lakay ................................................................. 61
Tree Talk ................................................................. 62
Filipina ................................................................. 63
Marriage Contract .......................................................... 67
On Hearing My Mother Call Out To Our Neighbor Over The Courtyard Fence. .... 68
Balikbayan ................................................................. 69
On San Pedro Street ....................................................... 70
Bebot ................................................................. 71
Moth Greeting ................................................................. 72

Notes ................................................................. 73
PREFACE

Introduction

I came to writing poetry via non-fiction and short story. As a reporter in the 1980s for a Filipino community newspaper, I covered social issues such as abortion, youth gangs, hotel worker strikes, institutional racism and the impact of legislation on the community. In the course of documenting people’s lived realities through news stories, I sometimes played with the completed news articles, rewriting some of them as poems. This personal pastime was an educational form of entertainment and a way to keep literature within my working life, which lacked opportunities for creative writing. In addition to the freelance news reporter job, I worked as a full-time information specialist in Governor John Waihee’s office, writing policies and procedures for volunteer programs in State government and summarizing events for various print media. The government writing was boring, straightforward and did not leave any room for creativity. News writing offered some creativity, but not enough. Having dropped out of college during my junior year, I longed to use my imagination for close readings of novels and discussions of poems. I wanted to play with words.

One afternoon, after interviewing the mother of a 16-year-old boy who was beaten to death with a baseball bat in a gang-related fight in Waipahu, I could not write the story as news. Facts seemed inadequate. Paragraphs were deficient. It was not enough to tell the truth; I wanted to tell it slant.¹ I turned to poetry, playing with line and breath, mixing imagination with possibility. After writing several poems, I was able to write the story in a news format to my satisfaction. I had found a way to get the news from poems.² I continued to sustain my need for poetry as a secret endeavor because I deemed my poems “too ethnic” or “not complex enough” or “not pretty enough.” I had never read any Filipino poets; thus, had no role models to compare how they treated “ethnic” content. But non-fiction was my home base. I was attracted to its form as a type of testimony. This nurtured my affinity for writing poetry of witness and protest poems.

A second entrance I found into poetry comes by way of the short story. Because I was born into generations of storytellers, loud women who dramatized their lives with voice and gesture and ingrained in me a strong connection to family and community, I
would entertain myself by committing their textured voices and quirky mannerisms to the page. My first published creative piece was a short story. I am still drawn to the power of a storyline and the beauty of sentences. I believe this grounding in fiction led to my propensity for writing narrative poetry.

This poetry collection reflects those journeys to community and self within a social and political framework. It is an act of finding important news and significant truths in the lives of women who are at home in real or imagined communities. The work navigates place as a physical and psychic state and explores the lyrical notions of body and time.

Poetics

James Baldwin notes that “people are trapped in history and history is trapped in them.” I see my poetics as using history to connect persons, ideas and places in formal and informal ways. Poetry is not separate from culture, place or politics. Just as history is imbedded in our bodies, so too is poetry a part of everyday life, where a mundane conversation, a political forum or an autobiographical confession can be turned into a poem. The poems in this collection bear witness to the various jobs I have held, places I have lived, and people I have admired or despised. The poems come out of a historic panorama of ethnic and geographic identity. They touch on the negative effects of colonialism in the Filipino mind and body. They welcome and abhor Western culture and ideals. The poems also examine ways in which women are represented in the media and their communities, because I am interested in seeing how poetry can be used to tell a story in multiple ways through images, documents, conversations, lists, photographs, memories, letters, questionnaires. The poems are rooted subconsciously, I believe, in a Philippine oral culture, where poetry began as prayers recited to an animist cosmos asking for a favorable harvest, as praise songs celebrating birth, and as myths and folk tales explaining values and morals. Scholar and ethnomusicologist Grace Nonó, in her book The Shared Voice, Chanted and Spoken Narratives from the Philippines, discusses aspects of the experience of oralists (which she defines as “singer-rhetoretician or poet”) as having to do with identity, life story, values, knowledge, relations and processes. Many of the poems in the collection deal with the aspects Nonó identifies. The poems
also employ fundamental concepts of orature and mythology such as incantation, larger-than-life characters, and didactic overtones.

Despite the serious or traumatic subject matter of the poems—such as intimate partner violence, sexual and child abuse, poverty, incarceration, alienation, loss, helplessness and hegemony—there is an element of play found in the text. This notion of play can be contextualized in German philosopher Friedrich Schiller’s essay, essay “On the Aesthetic Education of Man,” where he presents three human impulses. Schiller discusses a sense impulse as having to do with the sensual and material, a form impulse involving rational thought and morals, and a play impulse that “operates both in combination, [and] makes both contingent.⁵ He elaborates:

“So the play impulse … will compel the mind at once morally and physically; it … annuls all mere chance, annul all compulsion also, and set man free both physically and morally. When we embrace with passion someone who deserves our contempt, we feel painfully the compulsion of Nature. When we are unfriendly disposed towards another who commands our respect, we feel painfully the compulsion of Reason. But as soon as a man has at once enlisted our affection and respect, both the constraint of feeling and the constraint of Nature disappear, and we begin to love him—that is, to play [my emphasis] at once with our affection and with our respect.”

If Schiller’s hierarchy of human impulses is to be believed, and play indeed results in freedom from the material and the moral and synthesizes and transforms trauma, then poets who play with words are writing against sensory and rational experience. This element of play—of word play, of oftentimes shocking humor—is rampant in works by contemporary Filipino American poets R. Zamora Linmark, Gizelle Gajelonia and Barbara Jane Reyes. Similarly, this kind of word play and humor is evident throughout many of the poems in this collection. While the poems’ narrators distance themselves from social misfits and undesirable circumstances, they often show an underlying affection, respect or compassion for the subject in spite of being humorous or playful.
The Poems

In his December 7, 1992, Nobel lecture, Derek Walcott discussed an expansive sense of place, a deep history, and an epic memory involved in poetry making. Walcott described the process of making poetry as a “…remaking; the fragmented memory, the armature that frames the god, even the rite that surrenders it to a final pyre; the god assembled cane by cane, reed by weaving reed, line by plaited line…” Walcott further likened poetry making to reassembling a broken vase, gathering broken pieces and cracked heirlooms to restore “shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent.”

Although he was speaking of Antillean art and literature, Walcott’s process resonates with me for personal reasons. When I began to write poetry openly about eight years ago, it was after experiencing loss and silence. In 2004, my mother passed away from breast cancer. She was the last connection between three generations of culture bearers for my extended family. I had written about her illness, continuing up to the last months of her life when I was her caregiver. I wrote profusely, much like a news reporter would, using facts, referencing documents and notating observations. After she passed, I was surprised that I could not write anything. A year later, still undergoing writer’s block, I enrolled in a Scriptotherapy class at Na’au, which was taught by Lois-Ann Yamanaka. In retrospect, the writing classes at Na’au cemented my association of poeisis with trauma. Like Walcott’s description of art as bringing together broken pieces, I was remaking, as best as I could interpret the world, through poetry. In terms of voice, Yamanaka’s poetry has guided the development of my own voice. Yamanaka’s Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre had a profound impact in shaping my thoughts on what was possible with language, form, and meaning.

Walcott summarizes that “There is the buried language and there is the individual vocabulary, and the process of poetry is one of excavation and of self-discovery.” As a Filipino poet writing in America, specifically Hawai‘i, which possesses its own variations of vocabulary and language, I am interested in using poetry to “excavate” and engage in “self-discovery” in a process that encounters a Filipino sensibility, if there is one. This manuscript attempts to find one, beginning with the manuscript’s title, Gabriela’s
Daughters, a reference to a quasi-mythical heroic figure in Philippine history. Maria Josefa Gabriela Carino Silang was an intriguing female figure, taking on a variety of roles typically—and not so typically—associated with Filipino women of her time.

Gabriela Silang (1731 - 1763) was the first heroine of the Ilokos region in the Northern Philippines and the first Filipino female to lead an uprising against a foreign power. She was born to an Ilokano father, a peasant, and an indigenous Itneg mother, a house maid. She was given by her father to a wealthy entrepreneur who was also a Spanish friar, Don Tomas Millan, so that she could be raised as a Christian. Millan eventually adopted her and when she turned twenty, he married her. It is not certain whether she married Millan freely or if her father forced her to marry a rich older man who died of old age after three years of marriage, leaving all of his wealth to her. They did not have any children.8

Described as an attractive, pious widow, she remarried two years later. Her husband, General Diego Silang y Andaya, was a young insurgent who conspired with British forces to overthrow the Spanish. They lived happily for five years and did not have any children. Gabriela played the role of the woman behind the successful leader who was quickly emerging as a liberator. She became one of his closest advisors and a major figure in her husband’s collaboration with the British during their brief occupation of the Philippines and the short-lived expulsion of Spanish officials from Vigan, Ilocos Sur, where the Silangs lived. The young couple also shared a vision of an independent Ilokano nation.

In 1762, General Silang proclaimed the independence of his people and declared the city of Vigan the capital of Free Ilokos. He was assinated five months later by two of his closest Ilokano friends who had conspired with the Spanish. The people turned to Gabriela, widowed a second time, to assume leadership of her dead husband’s army and carry on the war against Spain. She accepted the challenge and began recruiting fighters. She launched sorties against garrisons on coastal towns. Her war policy was so successful that she was feared by many, especially by Ilokanos who were conspiring with Spain to end the rebellion.9 There is an account of Gabriela’s brutal harassment techniques toward captured anti-revolutionary soldiers. But she is also characterized as a compassionate
“Joan of Arc of the Philippines” and was referred to as “generala,” a lady general. She amassed 2,000 men and fought alongside her troops for four months.

When she was driven out of Vigan, “The Generala” set up a Free Ilocos government-in-exile in her mother’s mountain hometown of Abra. She then led the march to retake Vigan, but her army was badly beaten against 6,000 Spanish defenders. A few days later, she ordered a second attack, but was forced to retreat to a nearby province. The Spanish military pursued her relentlessly and were joined by a contingent of native Apayao tribesmen. Neighboring villages were promised a reward for information that would lead to her capture. Gabriela and 80 of her loyal soldiers were captured in the Abra mountains and brought down to the Ilokos seacoast. They were hanged, one by one, at various towns along the Ilokos coastline to serve as an example to those who would defy Spain. Gabriela was hanged last so she could witness the hanging of each of her men. She was brought to her home town of Vigan before a crowd of Spaniards and Filipinos who were in a festive mood and cheering for Mother Spain. Gabriela was 32 years old when she died; her final resting place remains a mystery. There is a Manila-based organization advocating women’s rights that bear her name, GABRIELA Women’s Party. The acronym stands for General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership and Action. She is not well-known or highly venerated in the Philippines and is generally remembered as Diego’s wife and a woman general who took over when he died.

Like many of the women portrayed in these poems, Gabriela is a fascinating and multi-faceted woman. It is important to note that Gabriela’s physically mutilated body becomes the signification of the many ways in which representations of women’s bodies in this collection are damaged or abused. Women’s bodies are a recurring image in this poetry collection as symbolic sites of resistance to authority. As the physical body houses memory, embeds history, and produces language, a woman’s body is also a space from where one can interrogate social custom and tradition.

The poems here are populated by a variety of women’s bodies: mean grandmothers, kind mothers, rebellious daughters, playful adolescent girls, enduring victims of domestic abuse, adventurous aunts, female prisoners and inmates, and even a skirt-wearing pathetic fallacy of a marunggay tree. The first poem in the collection,
“Daughters,” references Gabriela as the namesake of a long line of women. The poem was inspired by the sentiments in Lucille Clifton’s *Book of Light*. I like to think that the women in these poems capture Gabriela’s spirit and are, in a poetic sense, Gabriela’s descendants and progenitors carrying a genealogy and mythology of The Generala.

**Home Remedies**

This section began as a stack of poems about Hawai‘i and the experience of living in an island environment. During the editing and sequencing process, the poems began to reflect a female-centered sensibility, one that considers multiple voices and forms to illustrate the diverse effects of time and memory on girls and women while exploring the themes of home and body. There is an assortment of bodies and body parts that are subjected to birthing, physical violence, child rearing practices, menstruation, teenage pregnancy, heart failure, freckles, skin color, coming of age rituals and the aging process. Thematically, this section is a play on the body as poem and the poem as body. The physical setting is domestic, specifically living rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, and outside under a mango tree in the front yard. Home is where women usually rule, where they provide instructions, prescribe solutions, and concoct home remedies.

**Time Served**

I worked for the Department of Public Safety for six years in various capacities, including grant writer, educator and trainer, program coordinator, executive assistant and media spokesperson. My tenure spanned the terms of two very different administrations, with the governors and department directors presenting distinct philosophies about the governance of prisons. I kept a journal of my observations, as well as the various documents and materials I used during the course of my work. The core of this section contains the poems I wrote about incarceration in Susan Schultz’s Documentary Poetry class in Spring 2012. Writing poems about prison was an uncomfortable experience, initially fraught with much apprehension and resistance. I felt like I was co-opting a story that was not mine to tell. I was anxious about getting the story right. I was concerned about mythologizing, exoticizing, or demonizing the inmates. I was ambivalent about crossing confidentiality and professionalism. However, after reflecting on my intention to
“put a human face” to the stereotypical criminal and my desire to bring about an awareness to social and economic issues surrounding incarceration in Hawai‘i, I adjusted to the poems’ narrators assuming personas. Many of the poems are based on my observations of inmates, staff and administrators I worked with during my employment in Hawai‘i’s prison system.

As I added documents and commentaries about the prison system, I still harbored residual angst regarding the truth of what I was writing. James Woods refers to a third category of reality, the “plausibly hypothetical” in his review of two historical fiction novels. In reviewing Hilary Mantel’s Bring Up the Bodies and Wolf Hall, Woods talks about “authorial proximity” that make Mantel’s work “novelistically intelligent” because Mantel reaches for the “plausibly hypothetical.” Woods admires Mantel’s use of these techniques because her writing brings everything to a “suspenseful risk.” Similarly, describing what might happen versus what actually happened was a helpful guidepost I used when writing about incarceration. I reviewed photographs, incorporated documents, made lists, remembered personal experience. I also read C.D. Wright’s poems in One Big Self, a photographic essay about prisoners in Louisiana. I considered Wright’s poetry that accompanied the photos as a touchstone for what I was trying to do. I was also interested in educating readers, and initially included the actual tests and quizzes I had administered when I taught a class to new correctional officer recruits. I decided to rework the tests, mess up the language to disassemble choices, and transform the experience of the reality of the documents.

(dis)Place

What begun as an interiority of the self and body in “Home Remedies” and progressed into a broader definition of home and community in “Time Served” concludes with poems that address a local, national, and diasporic assemblage in “(dis)Place.” The poems in this section play with history and language in the form of Hawaii Creole English, imitated English and mistranslated English—sets of vocabularies that resist the shattered histories through the act of writing in non-standard English.

I am interested in linking Hawai‘i and the Philippines through its parallel economic and military relationship with the United States, its trade and commerce
exchanges with the Pacific and Asia, and its reclamation of native and mother tongue languages. In particular, the poems rendered in pidgin or ungrammatical English resist a hegemonic history and the capacity to be trapped in history, as Baldwin has stated. Moreover, I deliberately frustrate the meaning and structure of standard English. The poems’ narrators in this section use the language of the colonizer as a reworked tool, an adapted version that does not necessarily make communication readily effective or clearly successful.

The Filipinos and Filipino Americans referenced in this section range in age, socioeconomic status, gender, site of residency, and political orientation. They have in common, however, a sense of family, strong community ties, and a vocabulary that gathers pieces of history and language to orient them to a place. That place is a site of production called home. And, home is a play on the pidgin phrase “dis place” and the verb “displace” to indicate that home can be simultaneously situated in the imagination, lodged in the past, or currently lived out in the present.

This collection of documentary poems, too, has tried to compress the gaps between history, language and time. Physical and psychic wounds are laid bare. Historical trauma and place-based stories are addressed with a poetics that engenders, endangers, as well as memorialize through a lens that examines concepts of body, home and identity.
Home Remedies
Daughters

You are the fire in us
the dark streak that runs through us.

You are the poem in us
passed on from our namesake Gabriela.

You are the gubat guerilla in us
that resurrects the insurrectionist in us.

You are the island in us
your extraordinary dazzling daughters in us,

your hips, your lips, your Book of Light
passing through
passing down
to flow low for us
and for us
to keep
keep the stories
keep time
keep us.
Home Remedies

Take this ginger root, its sharp
sharp bite overpowers
but is strong, familiar.
It clears motion sickness
dissolves blood clots.
Slice it thin, swallow good, and close
your eyes to go home.

Take this, a whole head of garlic.
Salt it, smear the old wives tale
of home remedies, of blue bruises,
deep wounds, broken bones.
Garlic tears help fight infection.

And these, these green, these white flowers
from the sweet onion plant. Crush
the petals for when the healing starts
and keep rubbing until the cuts turn to scars.
And last, a bundle of ampalaya, its tiny fruit
wrinkled and pungent you save for tomorrow.

Pluck the fresh leaves today and make
a bitter home-brewed tea.
Apo Baket makes her own cigars, smoothing the dry leaves like leather, rolling sweet pungent sheets into not-too-tight spirals then knotting its thickness with black thread.

She trims, twists and snips the ends clean. She tucks the secret stash in a wooden drawer of her ancient Singer sewing machine. These hidden treasure sticks she'll share with friends and neighbors.

Apo Baket smells like the homemade coconut oil she awakens from its solid white sleep. She scoops a dollop onto her warm palms, then massages the glow into her thick hair falling on shoulders, down to hips.

Oiled and coiled, round and round, she forms the classic Filipino grandma hairdo, a gray bun against the nape of her neck, held hostage by an arched tortoise shell comb, its translucent golds and deep browns passing for sunshine, earth.

In the narrow halls of Apo Baket’s home she walks hunched and soundless on black velvet slippers, its gem-splashed embroidery shiny with beads. Like a snake turning her head side to side she slinks up on us with mean, squinting eyes ready to pounce, never missing a single detail of proof we were up to no good.

She takes her whiskey straight, swigging Seagram’s from a bottle kept safe in the gun metal gray dresser keeping company with other medicines—the overused Tiger Balm, White Flower, Salonpas for her aching bones.

Dr. Ramos asks if she’s been taking the pills he prescribes. He also tells her she smokes too much, drinks too much, and to please, for her gout’s sake please, stop eating tomatoes, patani, dinardaraan and shellfish.

She hisses at the kind doctor, asking what kind of Filipina can live without tomatoes, mongo beans and blood,
then spits out a stream of phrases—lateg mo,
I am too old, leche, cannot change now, puneta—
her cussing worse than a longshoreman.

It was at Cousin Bino’s house when I first saw her pluck out
a good-sized bisukul, a freshwater black snail
floating in a soup of tomatoes and onions.
She held the snail up between her thumb and pointer,
tapped its back end with a spoon quickly, just once,
crushing the shell at its most fragile point
then sucked the meat out from the front with such gusto
I felt sorry for the snail, all of its body gone so suddenly.

Apo Baket outlives her only son, wearing black
for 365 days, becoming harder, more bitter
striking out and recoiling at loved ones.
She outlives her husband and decides
not to leave her house for one year.

She outlives her friends, then her neighbors
and relatives one by one. I remember her sadness,
her open palm revealing shriveled fingers pressed
against her forehead, her eyes scanning the street for visitors.

I watch from inside the screen door and see her profile puffing
that familiar Ilokano toscani, her cheeks sucking air,
the tabako’s fiery end inside her mouth, a habit of survival
to withhold any glowing red light from wartime Japanese.

She nods to passerbys at dusk, her quiet exhale
A solemn recognition. Resigned, she spits
Now and then into a plastic wastebasket
Lined with shredded newspaper by her feet.

Her calm breath relaxes her face, shadowed
in the twilight beneath the bittersweet street lamps.
The cigar smoke curls and twists above her,
disappearing with the memories of loved ones,
bending and sliding like the wisps
of her long past, unwinding away from her
the white smoke trailing slow, moving up
toward the rafters of the darkened porch.
Shame

Your father, he one drunk like me.
He one good for nothing son.
Your mother, she stubborn like me.
She one good for nothing daughter-in-law.

You one lazy stupid child. Yeah, you.
Uki ni inam. Vagina of your mother.
Nobody going marry you when you grow up.
Anak ti diablo. Child of the devil.
You one good for nothing family.

Welfare, welfare, go get your welfare.
Your father come Hawai'i, he cannot work.
Nobody in my family going on welfare.
So we feed you, let you live with us, help you.

Your father, he drink too much. That’s why he get stroke.
Your mother she think she too good for clean toilets.
What, too proud for get her hands dirty?
That’s why she get two jobs.
Cut pineapple, clean fish, come home all stink.

That’s why I take care of you stupid children.
Hey, you! Uki ni inam. Vagina of your mother.
Five children. Uki ni ina yo. Vaginas of all your mothers.
Shame on your father for giving me this load on my back.
Shame on your father, for leaving me and coming home all drunk.
Shame on you, and shame on your brothers and sisters
For making life hard for me.
Shame on all of us.

When you grow up, you going be just like your father.
Come here! Yeah, you. The one who don’t know how to listen.
Arrogant eyes like your stubborn mother. Come here!
I going whip the devil out of you with this hanger.
You think you better than me?
You think you better than everybody else?
Come here so you can think again!
Swearing to God

My brother Joshua always tells me,
"I swear to God
that’s what happened!”
My Auntie Lei says,
"I swear to God,
cross my heart
and hope to die.”
Why do people swear to you?

My 5th grade homeroom teacher,
Sister Josephine, says it’s because you
know everything,
hear everything,
see everything.
How can you see everything
in the world all at the same time?
Are you a giant who is bigger
than the entire planet Earth?
Where in the heavenly sky do you live?
Is your heaven bigger than the whole universe?

My mom says if I remember you
every night before I go to sleep,
then I’ll be good to go until morning.
I can still see you when I close my eyes.
Can you still see me? Can you hear me
when you’re asleep?
Where do you lie down?
On the clouds? Between the stars?
What time do you go to bed?

Can you hear each one of my prayers,
even those that I whisper?
Can you understand everybody’s prayers
from all of the different countries?
How will I know it’s your voice
when you answer me?

Do you still like when we don’t go
to church on Sundays anymore?
Does it make you mad when I don’t
read the Bible at home, only in school?
My grandma has a picture of you
with your heart
all stuck with pointy thorns
and blood dripping from the bottom.
Did that really happen inside of you?
How come you’re still alive
if your heart was dead?

My Apo Lakay’s heart stopped beating
and then he died. He was 97.
My Apo Baket missed him so much
she died nine months after.
Then my grandma, she died last year
because of breast cancer.
Why did you make them die
one after the other?
Where is the better place that
my grandma is at?
Does she like it there?
Are all of them with you?

If you know when I feel sad,
why do you let my sadness stay?
Do you want me to be sad until
you’re ready for me to be happy?

Well, I’m ready now.
So I’ll be waiting.
Maybe

My rabbit wen’ die ‘cause I dunno,
maybe I wen’ forget to change the newspaper
where had all his dodo on the bottom,
black pellets kinda stink smell
like old crack seed or something.
Nah, I dunno why wen’ die.
Nobody was playing wid’ em maybe.
Maybe got lonely.
Maybe neva like live already.
Maybe.
‘Cause my fadda, he said,
if he was going get me one rabbit,
I had to take care of ‘em.
Feed ‘em, clean ‘em, play wid ‘em.
And I did.
And I wen’ stop ‘cause afterwards,
I neva like play wid ‘em any more.
Was boring.
Would only look at me.
And would only jump little bit
and run little bit.
I wanted ‘em for run fast
And jump high and
do plenny other stuff,
not just sit there and look at me.
So I neva feed ‘em,
I neva play wid ‘em.
Was lonely, I bet, so wen’ die.
Maybe wen’ know I neva like ‘em any more.
Yeah, I neva like play wid ‘em any more.
Was ugly.
Was boring.
Was too soft.
Was too cute.
So I wen’ make ‘em die.
Summer Awakening

I wish I had a best friend
to hang out with and laugh
about my brother Joshua
who saw me naked by accident
and was looking at my small developments
when I was changing in our room.

How come Mama looks so sad
ever since she got sick?
I have to help her with things
in case she might get another stroke.
Daddy’s happy smiley every Friday night
when he’s drinking red wine
and Mama goes to bed early
because work made her tired.

I am eleven
and I hate my stupid freckles.
Why do I have to be the only one who gets up
eye early on Saturdays to make my own
Portuguese sausage and eggs?
Then I play with Brownie, my guinea pig,
and watch my favorite Teen Titans cartoon,
and read my Ella Enchanted book,
and scratch my ugly freckles,
then hang out and wait for somebody
to take me to ukulele practice
at Roy Sakuma’s Kāneo‘he.

This summer I want to surf at Ali‘i Beach Hale‘iwa,
shop for play clothes at Savers in Kalihi,
hang out on vacation in Paris
with my Aunty Lei and Aunty Doris.
I want to write short poems that rhyme nice
paint the stars blue, yellow and silver
sing on the American Idol show
play the ukulele solo
with lots of people watching me
in the middle of Kapi‘olani Bandstand
at the International Ukulele Festival.
The truth is I am Filipino haole
and I hate my stupid freckles.
When people find out what I am
they are surprised because
they couldn’t figure it out before
and now they know.

Last summer when I went to visit
Grammy Gracie in Pennsylvania
everybody in the shopping mall
was staring at me and Joshua.
This girl came up to me
and asked if I was Mexican or Black.

Nobody in my class
at St. Anthony School is like me.
But at Kalākaua Summer Fun
I met Adrienne and she is the same.
She has long, straight brown hair
and she has ugly freckles, too.

We’re both eleven
and we hate our stupid freckles.
Cursing The Moon

Don’t eat sweet.
Don’t eat sour.
Don’t drink hot.
Don’t drink cold.
And do not wash your hair!

But you go wash your face.
Put leelah bit blood
on the white washcloth
and mix in the soap and water.
Rub on your cheeks
like that.
Scrub your forehead
good.
And your chin, too.
Dass enough.

Clean yourself now.
Wash your face good.
Skin so smooth and clean.
Do this every month
when your moontime comes
because you are dirty, dirty, dirty.

That’s what my best friend Perla
told me her mother said
when she got her period.
Because you have to wash away your sins.
Because you have to clean and purify yourself,
dirty girl, she learned from reading Saint Augustine.

Her sister Virgie said
because of the blood
don’t eat sweet, don’t eat sour.
Her auntie Gloria said
because of the pain
don’t drink hot, don’t drink cold.
Her cousin Luzviminda said
because of the shame
don’t ever go into the kitchen
when they are eating dinner,
but snack is okay.
Her grandma Lola said
because you are cranky
don’t make the rice
or else it will be not good.
And for God’s sake, they all said
do not wash your hair!

I remember all of this, alone
when my moontime comes
quick, like a sudden inhale
of cold sharp pain
my insides turning and twisting,
between my thighs hot and wet.

I want to talk to my mother
who will soon be dead,
my Tita Maria keeps saying
any day now she’ll die because
of the cancer eating and turning
inside my mother’s stomach.

Quick, come now. No more time,
get out of the bathroom now.
Hurry up, I said. Get in here.
Dear sister, your daughter is here.
Come, you, come by the bed.
Your mother wants to tell you
something important
so be quiet and listen.

I don’t hear anything
because my mother’s tired eyes
are looking right through my body.
I want to tell her I promise
not to eat any sweet or any sour.
I want to tell her I will try
not to drink anything hot or cold.
I want to shout to her
I will never wash my hair!

But I just blink
while she says I am not
as pretty as my sisters
so I have to use my head
and study hard instead
and make something of my brains
because my face and body
will not carry me
high and well.

Her eyes burn into my cheeks
when she says I am the eldest
so now I have to be the mother
and to always, always,
listen to my father.

My stomach hurts so bad
and my ears burn
and I have no voice
so I talk inside my head.
Nanay, I got my moon time, my monthly.
Simmangpet ti binulan nga bisitak, nanang.
What shall I do with the blood?
Adda-annakon, nana.
What shall I do at 12 years old
now that I am a woman like you?
Inang, agreglaak.
Why are you leaving us?
I will take care of the children.
But who will take care of me?

I pray to Saint Augustine, make me clean.
I pray to Mother Mary, don't leave me.
I pray to Saint Teresa, make me well.
I pray to Ave Maria, napno ka ti gracia.
I pray to my Nanay in her coffin laid out
on the bamboo floor put on display
since yesterday, mourning the noisy grief
of clans, relatives, townmates, visitors.

The underhouse beckons quiet safety
so I bury my panty, stained dark blood
scary smelling like moss and mushrooms.
Brown slash line smeared, squeezed on white cotton
I roll and wrap in my mother’s embroidered handkerchief.
Bury the blood deep, cover it with dirt handfuls.
Bury my mother, too, through blurred slow tears oozing.

I curse you, moon, fat round pearl
for taking my mother away, demanding the blood price
and bringing my moontime like a hostage.
Every time I bleed I will see you, my moon, my mother,
your roundness like her face, a monthly imprint.
On the first day I washed and cooked the rice.
Then I ate green mango sprinkled with salt.
On the second day I lit a candle on my mother’s altar
and took sweet mochi cakes to eat in bed.
Then I waited and slept and bled and bled.
On the third day I couldn’t stand it anymore.
I got up and washed my hair.
Me and Jurison

I was a Rent to Own girl YES when I spread the Colortyme on me and gave him all Payday Loans YES and let Levi’s climb my thighs YES but no more, when Hope Chapel West O’ahu found out and Waipahu Free Will Baptist, who heard from another and from my mother, who worried about Motherhood Maternity but not for me I said not me. Even though she knew him, Jurie him, YES handsome sweet treat like meat him YES keeps going dental on me, and all over me YES and I mean like YES Smile Dental and Family Dental YES and Gentle Touch Dental. YES darling, I told him no worry about protection. I know all about it YES.

But finally I announced this is where The Poke Stop(s).

And no I didn’t mean forever YES Because he was on Shaka Auto Repair pilot and I was on high and Lowe’s two or three times a week. I tried so hard. I did the cold turkey YES City of Refuge Christian Church helped YES but not for long, no, because we started up again.

And on the point of no return, I mean, all out to the Max’s (The House That Chicken Built) and we promised each other YES to just continue meeting and pulling YES so now we Lazy Skate in time and rhyme, and Jurie he only want to, he only want to Highway Inn into me forever and ever YES but in a Safeway kind of way YES.

So Jurie YES that’s his real name, who is like my Don Quijote and Foodland forever and ever, and my man for all Times YES he feels my underarms all deodorant Longs Drugs and puts his mouth on me like mad YES and breathing hard that I need to see Perlita Lampitoc, M.D. who refused to give me anything, but I found some, YES on the side streets at Elena’s, Thelma’s, Kristen’s, Jimmy’s and Flo’s and even at Tanioka’s YES, last name, last time amen YES thank you God!

They and everybody else already heard YES but all of them decided to help and YES did they ever.
After that me and Jurie, we were okay for awhile
but we had to Poke Stop again YES but only
for a little bit YES cause me and Jurie, me and Jurie
can’t help it no. No can help and nine months later
YES I have a boy named Jurison’s
and Jurie’s not around much now
but I don’t care because next time
I want a girl YES. I already got a name for her
Juridette for a girl.
No Michael But Worth It

You go to your first concert at fifteen
and you’re going to sit in the lodges
until your sister says its called loges, dummy.

You’re up high, and worth it because
the Jacksons are at the Blaisdell
even though there’s no Michael anymore.

You are wearing a new wrap-around dress
in lavender, sleeveless, because you forgot
to tell your mother the concert was this Saturday

so she just turned the armhole facings under.
Everyone thinks you bought it at Liberty House
and you smile and your sister doesn’t say anything.

It’s the first time you see so many drunk people
in one place, advertising beer in plastic cups
and such long, long, long lines for the bathroom.

A fight breaks out between an angry Samoan
who has given the stink eye to a wild Tongan.
Their blalahs from Waianae and cousins from Laie

jump in to break it up. You are secretly thrilled
to witness the violent stupidity and think the adults
could have planned better for more bathrooms.

Your sister gets your cousin to buy beer
for both of you and the joints get passed around.
The giddy sensation of standing on your seat

and dancing to music that you know
all the words to even without Michael
makes you feel absolutely lovely.
The Tita Princess

Don’t bother the tita princess who lives on Jack Lane. She is doing her nails and thinking about what to wear tomorrow. If she sees you watching she will belch at you. Then she’ll say excuse me, this is what happens when I drink soda. Then she’ll burp loudly again, because she does.

So you must say, “That’s an interesting color you have on you fingers and toes!” Then she will say, “It’s called mauve. It matches the green and purple pantsuit I’m wearing tomorrow at breakfast.” Then at breakfast she will ask you, “Did you notice how color coordinated I am?” She’ll turn up her palms and spin once around on her heels. She will smile sweetly at you.

The tita princess is lots of fun. But she is spoiled, spoiled, spoiled. She used to drive a cherry apple red BMW convertible. Now she drives a dark green Honda with polished walnut interior that she details every month because, as she says, she wants the valet to have a pleasant experience.
When Doris Tells a Story

This is the way I heard it, so this is the way I’m going tell it to both of you. Maybe you heard something else, but this is what my cousin told me and he wouldn’t lie. You want to hear it or not? Okay. You know the Peralta family, right? Up the street, the big house on the left? Yeah, them.

Well, one day, all the aunties and uncles were in the living rom. All nine of them. And you couldn’t tell that all of them were there because you couldn’t hear them. Nothing. You would think that the room was empty because it was so quiet. But there they were, some sitting on the couch, others on the love seats, and the rest in mismatched chairs pulled up around the coffee table. Yeah, I know. They could have sat in the dining room instead, meeting around the huge dining table, but all the party food was piled on top of that table, yeah? So never mind, stop interrupting me. Eh, you like hear the story or what? Okay, then.

So where was I? In the living room. Okay, there was this silence that hung in the middle of the circle they formed. The silence was so thick you could walk up to it and break it with your hands if you wanted to. I no kid you, brah. It was that bad. So they were all waiting for the silence to be broken.

But nobody spoke up.

The oldest sister, Maria Conchita Peralta, was looking at her feet. She had her hands on her lap, her fingers all intertwined li’ dat, kinda calm but kinda expecting something, too. One of her brothers was staring ahead. His eyes were fixated at the large antique clock, you know which one I talking about? What you mean you don’t know? You been in the house, right? The big black clock, the one with the black face and white Roman numerals and the skinny white hands. Yeah, that one. Where the hands look like your palms, like human hands with the palms open and face up, the fingers pointing to the numbers. Yeah, I know it’s kinda spooky because it looks like your hands stay cut off and the buggahs stay moving by themselves.

Anyway, stop interrupting me. You like hear the story or what? Okay, okay, I’ll just tell it then. You would think that on this day, on this real special occasion, that at least the main family members would be happy and stuff. But no. My cousin told me that all nine brothers and sisters had something important to talk about. But they wasn’t gon talk until they were ready. So I guess they wasn’t ready yet, yeah?
Chewed Up

Wrinkled, tough old hag, 
rolling her own cigars 
with her big hands 
under the mango tree.

She wraps the spit wet 
chewed-up leaves around 
my bleeding small toe.
Time Served
Home

Home is just another four-letter word.
Just another cell, maximum.
Just another cell, sentence with a period.

Open 10 with five minimum.
Lock down until next rec and feeding.
Bars doors automatic close.
Full double triple bunking.
Wait class, work, medical.

Home is just another four-letter word.
Just another cell, maximum.
Just another cell, sentence with a period.
### Home as Other Four-Letter Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wish</th>
<th>Stay</th>
<th>Gone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Away</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>Cell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shit</td>
<td>Crap</td>
<td>Funk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Sigh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junk</td>
<td>Funk</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head</td>
<td>Body</td>
<td>Feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Hate</td>
<td>Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dumb</td>
<td>Hole</td>
<td>Will</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Multiple Choices

How many female offenders are in Hawai‘i’s jails and prisons?
(a) Filipino  
(b) Samoan  
(d) Chinese  
(c) Hawaiian or part-Hawaiian

How old is the average female offender?
(a) Property offenses  
(b) Drug offenses  
(c) Murder  
(d) Property and drug offenses

The ethnicity of most female offenders is:
550, 170, 743, 31

The majority of female felons are incarcerated for what crimes?
1. 25  
2. 30  
3. 35  
4. 40

How many prison(s) for women are there in Hawai‘i?
True  
False

More than half of the women in prison have at least one child under the age of 18.
Yes, there are no women’s prisons in Hawai‘i; there are only jails  
No, there is a women’s prison on each island  
Maybe 1  
Definitely 3
At Her Mother’s

“Her sister called her a bitch
for choosing drugs
over her babies.”

Nobody called him a bastard for his drugs and violence.

“Both of them were just druggies.”
But he was dealing, she wasn’t.

“Well, he’s out.
He could afford
an attorney.
She couldn’t.

And where’s she at? Women’s in Kailua?

“Yeah. 10 years.”
Where are the kids?

“At her mother’s.”
More Sanity Than Addiction

I am sick and
tired of people
calling it
a drug problem.

My life was
the problem. Drugs
was the solution.
"Do you know how she’s doing?" Grace picks at a loose thread at the hem of her blouse.

“She didn’t really say.”

“Did she say where she was living?” Grace fishes out miniature scissors from her seemingly all-purpose purse.

“Nope.”

“Did she say anything about where her daughters are? After all, they are my nieces,” Grace says, as she snips the hanging thread and drops it on the ground.

“No. We didn’t really get into anything like that,” Darlene replies, swigging her beer.

She runs her pointer through the condensation beads and wipes her finger on her jeans.

“Did she ask about me?” Grace asks.

“Nope,” Darlene replies, quick and flat.

“Crystal was mostly asking about Daryl and me, and the kids. She sounded good.” Grace tried to remember the last time her sister sounded good.

“Like she was straight,” Darlene continued, draining the Bud Light with a final sip and throwing the empty bottle in the trash. “Like, she was clean.”
Crystal’s pre-teen belly button
looks up from her cropped top.
Her hands, shoved careless in jeans
match her shoulder slouch cool.
Her half-closed eyes belong to
an unblinking chameleon taking
all things in, giving nothing back.

Crystal, crystal, her name took her away.
Crystal sparkle, crystal clear.
Crystal’s trapped in a hot glass pipe.

Runaway girl on Hotel near Four Jacks
selling her assets for the sleepless high.
Nana’s etched Hawaiian heritage bracelets, gone.
Tata’s jade ring, gone. Billyboy’s Ipod gone.
Legal now, she’s Chinatown homeless
sleeping in doorways between rehab
and relapse, but the rock keeps calling her
to jail then bail, back in and out again.

Crystal, crystal, her name took her away.
Crystal sparkle, crystal clear.
Crystal’s got a lei around her neck.

#61354218. C. Mendoza, suicidal
in prison and taking pre-natal meds.
#61354218, she kisses her newborn goodbye.
#61354218, she breaks down, again tries to die.

But now she’s Maria Clara Mendoza and clean—what
nobody could believe happened in prison.

Maria Clara, quiet and compliant.
Crystal no more, Crystal not here.
Just Maria Clara, MC for short.
Yeah, churchgoing saint.
For how long she gonna stay?
I guess until she goes back.
Caterpillar Arms

It's a long walk between Ahiki Dormitory and Maunawili Cafeteria: three gates, two snaky sidewalks, and a three-inch thick steel security door. Some of the other women are hardly awake, loping along in their white sock-covered feet, their big toe jammed into black rubber slippers, looking like modified tabis. They are clad in identical short-sleeved dark blue tops, with WCCC—short for Women's Community Correctional Center—in black capital letters stenciled on the right side, right above the chest pocket. Underneath their blue tops they wear standard issue, long sleeved, light gray knit shirts. On their matching cotton pants is another WCCC stamped vertically, just above the knee, the front of their left pant leg branded like a deformed athletic stripe. The uniformed collective making its way to Maunawili to eat breakfast looks like an oversized caterpillar with multiple two-toned arms, propelling its insect body forward in a haphazard line.
Conversations Between Ahiki and Maunawili

Tomorrow morning’s going down.
Dawnie not eating any more shit.
Told me she going shank her
coming back from morning feeding.
Spreading rumors that Dawnie’s man outside
going roll on her some more cause he got better stuff for do
than wait for Dawnie get out and screw him over again.
Dawnie going give that bitch exactly what she deserve.

Kimmie’s back in and warden got eyes for her again.
He stay all lit up when she pass by and whack him
with her Colgate smile and sweet lips.
At least dass da only ting she gotta do.
Spider Man wen sen one kite to Lareia.
He stay ready with his web and all she gotta do is show up
in the bathroom behind Central Control
for the soft, quiet deal and everybody’s happy.

Shawn stay lock down in admin seg again.
Good her husband still rotting, smiling up
at the stars flat on his back six feet under.
She shoulda killed him long time ago.
Woulda save the kids from his frickin’ prick.
At her parole minimum yesterday, stupid was
out of control swearing, kicking, screaming
over and over no, she not sorry
no, he deserved to die
that pilau dog had it coming
no, after what he did to the kids
yes, she would kill him over again.
Then she went wild, started swinging
at the staff and they had to take her down.
Now they going send her Oklahoma next week.

You know Leilani, the one who was on suicide watch
After Kelly went break up with her?
Said she never like play house any more.
Told Lei she found somebody else
to kiss her pain and rock her to bed.
Lei no could eat, sleep or cry for three days.
She died last night at Castle emergency
belly full of downers and no heartbeat.
Saw Anna in medical yesterday.
Told me when she was
Kailua Beach community service
this one cute guy was checking her out
the second time he went jog by.
Buff chest, tight butt and short shorts.
They all the same when they notice us.

They only see the trash, the weeds
the black garbage bags and then
our red tee shirt stencil W triple C.
They make the connection only
when they spock the single
blue corrections uniform.
And dass when they like
pat us on the head, say good job
keep it up pay your debt to society.

Screw that long, feel sorry for you stare
Like, they, really, give, a, shit. I like yell out
Yeah, Take A Good Long Look At Me because
I could be your auntie, your neighbor, your niece.
I already somebody’s sista, daughta, wife
and you know, I could, right now, just so
happen for be your classmate or cousin, asshole.
Kimberly “Dawnie” Tamashiro

You see the one by the door.  
That’s Dawnie.  
Short, Japanese, real talkative  
Her tita mouth always twitching

Like one nervous bird moving  
Her neck and head to match  
Her shifty eyes always watching

Sly like she’s looking for something,  
Or someone to come from behind  
To rush in from the side.

She looking at you right now, left, then right.  
Her real name is Kimberly. Tamashiro.  
And she’s Okinawan, not Japanese, she said.

I don’t know when she named herself.

Oh yeah, I remember now.  
Akemi Dawn is her middle name.  
That’s why she’s Dawnie.
Larain: No O, No E

Over next to Dawnie is Larain.
Larain with two a’s.

Only one R, no O.
And no E.

La, like da note that comes after so.
Then rain, like you need one umbrella.
Don’t you forget it, she tells me.

Larain’s the real serious one in here.

Before that she was Serena.
I don’t know why.

I think because she changed so much
she deserved a new name

for putting her guts back inside her belly.
She’s a new person now, no cutting her arms
or bleeding herself dry.
Crystal Leilani Maria Clara Javier Mendoza

That one.
Crystal Leilani Maria Clara Javier Mendoza.
Crystal because she’s sweet
and sparkling like sunlight
through clear water.

Leilani. Because Leilani is da
All purpose Hawaiian name.

Maria Clara. For the butterfly sleeve dress
not the lady hero in dat Jose Rizal book.

Javier. For her mother’s maiden name
because that’s how, Filipinos.

Mendoza. Like the Spanish word
for lies, she tells some good ones
sometimes. Fo’ real.

But this year
she like everybody
call her
MC
for short.

That’s right.
MC.
Like the hammer.
Rachel

in belly chains is led outside
from the hole. One hour to kill
on the cold, stainless steel bench
in the empty courtyard.

Black eye busted lip
broken jaw skinny hungry kid
too scared to say anything
when there’s only cold beer
on the kitchen table.

Her uncle’s whispers inside
“Nobody going believe you
if you tell our secret.”
His fingers, mouth in dark
places hurt her body, sore.

Sneaking back home late from the dance,
her stepfather kicking her ribs and yelling
“Don’t ever show your face
in my house again, damn whore!”

She’s got no friends of her own
when her boyfriend forbids
her to work, dosing out ice
and beatings until marriage.

Straight and clean, her new husband
sneers, “let’s give away this baby
if it’s one more girl.” It cost
her a life sentence to state
lock up for good.

The prison guard commands
“Hey you, time to get your ugly ass
back in. Then it’s on to medical
for your mental health pills.”

She has run out of time
to forgive herself.
But she knows the routine
and it comes in slices.
**The Sex Was Consensual**

Female inmates from Hawaii will remain at a privately run women's prison in Colorado where five officers face sexual misconduct and contraband charges, Hawaii officials said yesterday.

A visit to the prison by state monitors last month shows Hawaii does not need to transfer its inmates to an alternate facility, said Richard Bissen, interim director of Hawaii's Department of Public Safety.

"Incidents like this happen at facilities," Bissen said. "But that place is being more closely monitored than ever, and the women themselves say they are safe."

Three prison officers had sex with a total of four Hawaii inmates, two Colorado inmates and one Wyoming inmate, according to Alison Morgan, a spokesperson for the Colorado corrections department. Two of the officers have resigned, and a third is on administrative leave.

Investigations show the sex was consensual, said Gil Walker, founder and chief executive of Tennessee-based GRW, which owns the Brush Correctional Facility for Women, located in Colorado.

* * * *

Hawaii prison officials said Tuesday that all of the state's 168 female inmates at a privately run Kentucky prison will be removed by the end of September because of charges of sexual abuse by guards.

In July, Gov. Linda Lingle of Hawaii, a Republican, said that bringing prisoners home would cost hundreds of millions of dollars that the state did not have, but that she was willing to do so because of the security concerns.

The pay at the Otter Creek prison is low, even by local standards. A federal prison in Kentucky pays workers with no experience at least $18 an hour, nearby state-run prisons pay $11.22 and Otter Creek pays $8.25. Mr. Friedmann said lower wages at private prisons lead to higher employee turnover and less experienced staff.
No Such Thing

The substance abuse counselor looks horrified, her eyes wide open, round, on fire.

A correctional officer recruit has just asked “What if it’s consensual sex, that’s not rape, right?”

BCT-99-03 and CFT-99-03, the year’s third batch is packed with ripe new bodies, cross hatchlings of eager, apprehensive, cocky.

You tell them slow: There is no such thing as consensual sex between a correctional officer and an inmate.

You tell them again: There is no such thing as consensual sex in jail or prison.

You tell them to write it down, to underline the words no, such, thing, as, consensual, sex.

You say it is a felony to have sex with an inmate.

You read them the riot act.

Three or four of them look confused.
The Guardian

Her real name is Upolu. Upolu Teegarden.
Yes, Teegarden. T-E-E garden.
She shortened Upolu to Upo.
Then she changed Upo to Ulu

because it’s better
to be Hawaiian than Samoan
in here. That way she doesn’t have to join
the Daughters of Samoa who are
meaner than Halawa’s Sons of Samoa.

I heard her father is German,
the kind from Germany kine.
Her mother is supposed to be
the village chief’s first daughter from

Upolu—Western, not American—Samoa.
On paper she’s Upolu Tiergarten,
which turned
into Ulu Teegarden,
which turned
into The Guardian.

Yeah, she’s real big like
Kamekona on Hawaii 5-0,
Bolo head. Real strong.
Good heart. Really nice.

But don’t make her mad. She’s called
The Guardian for a reason.
Scared

“I have been in prison so long that I cannot imagine what it will be like when I get out.

I will have to start again completely poor, without a job, and no place to store my artwork and supplies.

To tell you the truth, world,

I’m scared.

I’m scared if I make it

and scared that I won’t.”
Anna in the Garden

Anna’s among the dirt and plants
Making her apron brown.
Buzzing between the weeds and seeds
Showing off her gap-toothed smile.

What else does she need
Besides gloves and shears?
What ever will she do when it’s time
To leave and start over out there?

Anna’s a loyal old soul, but will not go alone.
There’s nobody out there to care for her
Nobody out there that she loves.
So when she’s up for parole
She’ll break a rule because
Prison doesn’t scare her.

Anna’s got time, got life for murder.
She stabbed her husband in 30 places
In self defense, she did.

Anna’s among the dirt and plants
Making her apron brown.
Buzzing between the weeds and seeds
Showing off her gap-toothed smile.
Manunawili Cafeteria

Anna pulls out the same chrysalis again from her pocket. “Take a look,” she says. Crystal doesn’t.

“When the caterpillar can’t stand it any more, it makes a cocoon. When the cocoon is ready, it turns light brown then becomes transparent when the time comes. I know you understand it’s a slow and painful process, Crystal.” Crystal nods and puts her head down to stare at her white socks.

“You’ll know what to do. Everyone needs time to grow, to become, to bloom, whatever, your destiny, yeah,” Anna intones dreamily. Crystal follows Anna’s intense gaze toward one of the cafeteria windows. Screen meshed and iron barred, the high window is located right below the ceiling. Anna starts her weird breathing again and Crystal focuses on the floor. As she looks up she sees Anna take the green chrysalis and drop it into her coffee cup. Crystal gasps as Anna drinks the hot, dark liquid.

“It won’t grow any more, see? It can’t survive without attaching to its home branch on the mulberry plant out there. Maybe some can, but most cannot.”
Governor John D. Waihee III tried to save the State of Hawai‘i from another lawsuit so he sent 75 inmates out-of-state.

That worked out well.
A year later 300 more inmates were shipped out.

For the next 18 years the next three governors exported more bodies.

[re]Leased them from double or triple bunking in a built-for-one cell.
[re]Leased them from blood and roots.
[re]Leased them from salt Hawaiian, salt tears, salt ocean.
[re]Leased them to faraway places where low wages, low overhead, low everything were plentiful.

Embraced by depressed economies, the commodities rented beds slept.

Bodies banished to:
  Crystal City, Texas
  Appleton, Minnesota
  Newton, Texas
  Whiteville, Tennessee
  Brush, Colorado
  Wheelright, Kentucky
  Florence, Arizona
  Sayre, Oklahoma
  Kickapoo, Oklahoma
  Tutwiler, Mississippi
  Eloy, Arizona
  Littleton, Texas
True or False

Female offenders are three times more likely than male offenders to have been physically or sexually abused as children.

Female offenders are more likely to be convicted of non-violent crimes compared to male offenders.

95% of the female offender population has a substance abuse problem.

Hawaii’s male offender population has doubled in the past 20 years, while the female offender population tripled in the past 20 years, and is expected to continue growing.

Female offenders often find it easier to ask for help than male offenders.

Staff who have worked with both male and female offenders often prefer to work with male offenders.

They say the women are too emotional, the women are too manipulative, the women are too vocal, the women are different, and can be difficult.

The women are different.

Security policies and procedures apply to all offenders regardless of gender.

All of the above.
From A Native Hawaiian Woman Shipped Out to Oklahoma Because of Prison Overcrowding in Hawai‘i

1. I died three years ago.
2. If you want to know about my crime, ask the City Prosecutor.
3. If you want to know how much cash and drugs I had on me, ask my husband.
4. If you want to know where my husband is, ask his attorney, the guy who plea bargained so the State could net bigger fish.
5. If you want to know why the dealers don’t get caught, ask my cousin at W triple C who’s also a mule like me.
6. If you want to know why my cousin is a drug runner, ask her boyfriend who threatened to kill her if she didn’t do it.
7. If you want to know where my daughters Liana 6, Shawneen 10, and Cody 14 are, ask Child Protective Services.
8. If you want to know why I was moved from Women’s in Kailua to O triple C in Kalihi, ask the suicide watch supervisor.
9. If you want to know why I got shipped thousands of miles away from home, ask the case worker who recommended me because she said I wouldn’t be a management problem there.
10. If you want to know what the first Oklahoma winter was like, I never been so cold in my life I thought I was going to die.
11. If you want to know why me, a kanaka maoli is just one of all the Hawaiians in prison, ask the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.
12. If you want to know why I had to leave the only place I’ve lived, ask governors Waihee, Cayetano, Lingle and Abercrombie.
13. If you want to know if I still get family visits like before, the answer is no.
14. If you want to know if I’m allowed weekly phone calls to my daughters like before, the answer is no.
15. If you want to know if I’m off the waiting list and got into required substance abuse treatment class, the answer is no.
16. Sometimes when you are in a paper outfit you just can’t wait to get off suicide watch.
17. Sometimes I think no one remembers the mothers and daughters who’ve gone away.
18. You don’t see us unless we escape.
18. I don’t want to think about it any more.
20. Will you tell my daughters I’m sorry, that I couldn’t wait anymore.
Extra Credit

Your sentence is three life terms.
You commit suicide.
Discuss the philosophy behind sentencing a person to more than one lifetime.
The Daily Head Count

Count six pairs of socks, six panties, four shirts, four pants you are allowed.
Count the eight numbers on your inmate ID.
Count the minutes it takes to line up for head count.
Count the countless times you feel regret, shame and anger.
Count seven seconds before the steel door clicks and lets you into the cafeteria.

Count the basketball bounces at mandatory recreation.
Count the punches to the face Dawnie received last night.
Count the days LaRain is in lockdown for fighting.

Count the days until Easter.
Count the weeks until Thanksgiving.
Count the months until Christmas.
Count the days until Mother’s Day.
Count the times your arms held your daughters.
Count the pretend candles on their imaginary birthday cakes.
Count on your grandmother.
Count on God.

Count the one cigarette you bum off and repack into three.
Count three baby birds that nest in the razor wire.
Count on seeing the monkeypod tree way beyond the perimeter fence.
Count the three hundred fifty-two words you write in your journal.
Count your blessings.

Count the hours until Children’s Day visits start.
Count two hours later when Children’s Day visits end.
Count on your left hand the number of visits you’ve had from your family.
Count every head count at lights out at twenty-one hundred hours.

Count every night you don’t cry.

Count every night you do cry.

Count on bed space opening up at Ka Hale Hoʻāla Hou No Nā Wāhine.

Count on the good graces of the Watch Commander.

Count every moment before you fall asleep.

Count the years until your next parole hearing.
**Time Served**

Although some offenders will remain in prison for life, the majority will serve their sentence and be released and returned back home to serve time out of sight, out of home to their communities. but their children, their families, have served time, too.

*The will of the public*  
*Wants the body that’s caught*  
*To stay in prison and jail*  
*Or [re]leased to a corporation*  
*To serve time out of sight, out of home*
(dis)Place
Tongue Lashing

From brown colony settled
on my mother’s broken tongue,
spoken in cash and gold, you
forbid me to speak native.

Root words are crucial, they say.

Know where word connects
to the land, how word binds
to blood, and when word
shifts and shapes the trees.

Translate with consent.
Give credit when borrowing.
Keep to the power of the story
but update for content,
father tells you.

He pulled her lips to correct
the air coming in, kept the core
white washed with foam
then god blessed America
because it’s our home.

He penetrates the roof of her mouth.
She licks the tip of his tongue.

Obliterate.
Twist a knot at our root.

Transliterate.
Torch every word.

Translate.
Lash it tight.
I Stay Wid Herman's Bones

(with mahalos to Hart Crane's "At Melville's Tomb")

Undahneet da watah get plenny dead man's bones.
I wen see em pile up, den go back undahneet.
Had so plenny bones da wave wen take 'em,
den bring 'em back on da shoa, den go back out again.
Had uku pile bones wen come up, den go back,
come up, go back, until I no can see any of 'em anymoa.

Dis kept going and going, plenny bones from da shipwrecks
dat nobody notice stay piling up. Maybe da ocean
like us know dat we all going die, cause da ocean
stay holding all doze bones. Maybe da ocean
stay telling us "you gotta watch out, you bettah
read da signs, da signs dat stay inside the shells,
da mana dat stay inside da bones."

Den, just li'dat da ocean got all quiet.
Da waves was all calm. But den, ho, da ocean got mad
or something, cause da waves got all kapakahi li'dat
cause da waves wen go shraight up, all da way up,
up to da sky (fo' real kine) and I felt, I felt
all spiritual li'dat, like I was at church
and errybody stay quiet. I wen look up
at da stahs, and dass wen, inside the stahs
I seen all da ansahs to erryting.

My fren Herman, he not evah
going know dat more people going die.
Way up in the high blue waves
my fren Herman, he not going wake up.
Nobody's voice, nobody's poem, nobody,
not one person, dey not going bring him back.
But da ocean, da ocean stay keeping him.
Da ocean lucky, cause she going keep
Herman fo' evah. Cause only da ocean can.
Our Father

I. Las Islas Filipinas

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Give back the land in my name.
Your king comes, wills himself on me,
On earth, and sends my spirits to heaven.
Take back this day, your daily trespasses,
Which I remember to eat as bread and salt.
Lead me, tempt me, consider me evil, deliver me
Up as heathen, ravish your heaven on earth.
For my body, my power, my glory
Are yours, your kingdom, for ever and ever.
Amen.

II. The First Republic

Our Father, where the hell are you?
I took the hallowed back in your name.
Will you be there when Aguinaldo comes?
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
You gave us Legazpi, governor-generals,
Encomenderos, the dons, donas and illustrados.
The sanglays, the jesuits, when we just
Want our daily bread. No more forgiveness.
No more love for the trespassers.
This is war. We will lead ourselves.
We will deliver our country.
Amen.

III. The American Commonwealth

Our Father in heaven, I should have known.
Your kingdom came, your will was done.
You sailed into Manila Bay, made it3. your own heaven.
Gave us trinkets, took our land, gave us military might,
Took our land, gave us books, dentists, jeepneys,
Our daily bread, took more land. Occupied us,
 murdered us, fucked us, hated us. We forgave your sins,
As we forgave those who sinned against us. Save us
From the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and all the best lands,
Are yours now and for ever.
Amen.
IV. The Third Republic

Our Father, how we love your white skin
Your thick tongue entangling our seaweed hair.
O Father, take away our sins, our dictators, our snakes
But we'll still have Charice and the PacMan.
Gloria, Gloria, Gloria to heaven. Have her, have her.
Heaven help us. Heaven help us.
For ever and ever.
Amen.
Heroes in the Attic

In Cebu a man in a dark blue suit hides
Kali’s blade. He has just missed
The Kissing, a strange time
when the solemn lantern maker
waltzes with the dictator, when
the rainbow goddess wept and raised
twenty-five chickens and a pig
for a bride, and when America
is in the heart.

On bridgeable shores the man named Ben
thinks of killing time in a warm place.
He knows that Pinoy poetics will
soon be returning a borrowed tongue.

Meanwhile, a woman catches
a furious lullaby sounding
like my American kundiman
wrapped in a star-entangled banner.
She sees five faces of exile within
the eye of the fish floating
by a brown river, white ocean.
She embraces her wild American self.
She is afraid of one tribe
of screaming monkeys.

No one explains why
the matadora’s zero gravity
leavens the bread of salt or why
the gangster of love—famous
as a dogeater—escapes danger and beauty
emerging from the dream jungle.

The cockfighting stories in the hilarious world
of Nestor D, remind us of when the elephants dance.
The animals are not home, but here.
At dusk, Nestor sees the forbidden book
and I ask him to catch me a firefly
released by the woman who had two navels.

I ask my brother, Gagamba the spider man,
why we are poor and why we are hungry,
but to no avail. He is one of the pretenders
in Villa Magdalena in Ermita. My brother, my executioner, keeps heroes in the attic.

From Africa to America I have come to terms with the voices of Filipino women overseas who are primed for life, these women on fire! In our image against the unbending cane they copy the witch’s dance while rolling their r’s, summoning prime time apparitions, and patiently awaiting the evolution of a sigh. In a field of mirrors they are woman enough.

At the drive-in volcano they conjure seasons by the bay, give life to the oracles, and foment revolution in the hall of cracked mirrors. This is the umbrella country, baby. Here, the gods we worship live next door.

And in the company of strangers, you get the lowest blue flame before nothing. Here in the homeland, a visitor can have a room of her own, can come full circle with reproductions of the empty flagpole.

Only the anchored angel makes things fall away from the seven card stud with seven manangs wild. The Jupiter effect on ginseng, the mayor of the roses, and 55 Jose Garcia Villa poems terrorize Manila like the mananaggal.

But this is a strange time indeed when mothers like elephants are going home to a landscape before the night descends to that great Philippine jungle energy café.
Empress, Lucena, Me

1 Dear Lucena,
*********
Barefoot red dirt Ewa Elementary School. But third grade had to stop because. Go back, go back, shame. But that’s okay because. Too much hapai, that’s why hard. Only work, no can help. No can eat, not enough for everybody. Hard life over here. Big boss say can, and can give money if you like. Go back you like. Pau your contract. Can, go so you all go. (Did I get that right?)

Yours,
Me

2 Dear Manang Lucing,
*********
I hope this letter finds you well and sees that God has given you many blessings. The German nun who is my teacher writes this letter in English for me. Her name is Sister Freida and she wants me to practice my speaking and thinking correct. They changed my name to Impress because they said that is the correct way. Impress. I like it. I learned that it means imprint or stamp or to leave a mark. Thank you for the birthday money you sent. It keeps me well at Saint Joseph and pays for my books and medicine. Next year I will go into the grade 7. I hope to see everyone soon. I know it is hard to come to Manila. And it is hard for me to go all the way to the province on the bus. I was glad to hear that everyone with the help of God is doing good. Please give my regards to Nanay and Tatay and all of the family. With the grace of God, I remain,

Yours,
Impress

3 Dear Empress,
*********
You still Empress to me. Did I ever tell you why Empress is your name? That’s because the boat is named Empress. Our mother give birth in the boat. You are born on the boat after 26 days we go back to the Philippines from Hawai‘i. We don’t arrive in the Philippines yet. The one that own the boat, the captain or the nurse or whoever said, “That one, that the name is Empress.” You are the number 7 of the family. I am 8 years old when you born. But unfortunate. We leave you in Manila because you are sick. You are small. Hard time to travel. We go back to the province where there is our house. We grow rice, we grow mango, we grow banana. You never see us again before you die. Only twelve years old, sayang di ba, so young. I never ask before, but you get hard time because your name Empress? I think maybe that’s why they change to Impress. Now too late to see you. But I send this letter by and by. I hope Sister Freida is reading.

Yours,
Lucena
**Whea You From**

I'm from soft, fan-shaped brooms, 
from Ajax, vinegar and salt. 
From the daddy avocado tree 
and the mommy mango tree 
and their children the eggplant plants, 
tomato seedlings and jabong branches 
with strong sharp thorns that got you 
When you weren't careful.

I'm from bibingka and a curved tortoise shell comb, 
From Eugenia and Alejo and Florentina and Placido. 
From you have no shame and go fix your things 
And go ask your lola and aye, de goddamm 
You are not using your coconut shell.

I'm from Ilocos province and crowded Quezon City 
and Palama Street in bad reputation Kalihi where 
even the fried fish has hard eyeballs 
and the stinky bagoong releases its patis on top.

From Zamboanga Theatre to Hall Saimin 
between dusty Book of Knowledge encyclopedias 
old now among yellowed photo albums, and albums 
and albums of dreams distilled, of hopes captured 
on our chain link corner of Honolulu.
Four Ways to Get There

Where Hall Saimin was, next door is Zamboanga Theatre. Happy’s Drive Inn had 15 cents hamburger, 10 cents soda. Next to the school, Kai’ulani by Tamashiro, big red crab. Ask the old man at OK Grocery on Palama Street. If you get lost, he knows everybody. Where Hall Saimin was, next door is Zamboanga Theatre. Happy’s Drive Inn had 15 cents hamburger, 10 cents soda. Next to the school, Kai’ulani by Tamashiro, big red crab. Ask the old man at OK Grocery on Palama Street. If you get lost, he knows everybody.

You gonna see Dyke’s Market on Republican Street. On Homerule Street, Ze Craft sells kukui nut lei to halau. Just behind Democrat Street, which has all repair shops. Independent and Libertarian no more awreddy. Asagi Hatchery, the chick and egg place on Nimitz. If you get lost, stop and ask the Asagi sisters.

After Liliha Library, McDonalds is across the freeway. The iso peanut place, don’t go past Naka’s Travel. Jane’s Fountain, shave ice, Tongan church, cannot miss. Red hibiscus hedge. Ask the St. Theresa school office lady if you get lost, she knows everything, even da #2 bus schedule.

You wanna go Kaumakapili Church? Go back on King Street. From King you go left, then follow the road. Keep going south, but look for 766 North King. Remember, from King you go Waikiki not Ewa bound. Keep going, Kai’ulani School then Tamashiro Market. If you get lost, just go on Google maps. You can find everything over there.

(Zahm bo ahng gah) (25 cents for all that) (Tamashiro, big red) (OK Grocery) (Fo’ real, you know) (Home. Rule. Kukui) (Yeah, democrat.) (You just kidding,) (Asagi, chick and egg) (The freeway, okay) (Naka’s, went too far) (Jane’s cannot miss) (Office lady, St.)

(Home. Rule. Kukui) (Yeah, democrat.) (You just kidding,) (Asagi, chick and egg) (The freeway, okay) (Naka’s, went too far) (Jane’s cannot miss) (Office lady, St.)
At Cebu Pool Hall

after Gwendolyn Brooks and Terrance Hayes

1955

When Mrs. Sato says our shorts too boy-crazy tight, we
cruise Hotel Street anyway and sway in front the manongs, the real

men muscled brown arms in undershirts keeping cool.
The gold-toothed one winks and I pretend not to see as we
turn and stare at starched white shirts. We sway left
at a Navy man whose liquor breath whispers to school
girl me and I blush at his hey beautiful drawl. We
pull into the pool hall. They drink, then lurk

for the gambling happening day and night, late.
Mommy asks you want in now, or what? We

hold the front down, the pool balls strike
red white blue they all hit straight.

Mommy leaves Bill Haley and the Comets so we
rock round the clock and let me go, lover. We sing

our hearts, we cash our dreams, we sell our island sin.
We wanna salute statehood and dance off this rock. We
do the honi honi, talk good English, make aloha sexy body thin.
Whistling between pointy yellow teeth, the ensign slips me some gin.

He say he take me away see the wide, wide world. We
laugh at “how wide do you like it, sailor.” I’m jazz-
ing his ukulele strumming his A major cool as a pina colada in June.
We talk, we walk, we drink, da-drink-a-drink-a-drink, until it’s time we

swoon at Aloha Tower moon, ride a high tide life, and I tell him I’m dy-
ing, stuck on this rock, flippin’ on men, gonna shrivel up soon, real soon.
Apo Lakay

He married her
because she was pregnant.
No one in the village knew
the real reason he left
Barangay #16 for Hawai'i
only one month after
his son was born
to teeth white smiles
approving his farm worker status
as a sakada, contract laborer to cut
sugarcane he was told—stories
of riches, of beauty, of sunshine
familiar, of blood brothers never hungry.

He carried onboard a calabash hat,
a homemade guitar hidden
in its sound hole a pack
of dried marunggay seeds
to plant new roots, and a finger
of ginger for seasickness in steerage
on the SS Roosevelt steamship
in steerage below.

A wide back and a head full
of dreams at 18 years old
he stood, sakasakada amin kunada
(but actually with shoes on) at the Honolulu dock
with a lock of his wife’s wavy black hair
sewn into a square cloth patch
secured on a string
safety pinned
to the inside
of his shirt
to ward off
any possible bad spirits
inside and out.
Tree Talk

Kalamunngay,  
Malunngay,  
Marunngay,  
Moringa Oleifera,

will you tell me your story again?  
Start from when your ancestors 
crossed ocean, hidden inside  
a poor man’s guitar, him singing 
about never going hungry again.

Gather your roots like skirt folds  
and show me where you broke  
the red dirt when you first resisted  
thirst far from a familiar home.

I’ll sit and listen for your white flower 
clusters singing soft like tiny yellow birds  
on the delicious winds that ruffle  
your feather branches.

Who wanders here to feed you fertilizer pearls 
so your fruit pods can hang tough outside?  
Do you wonder about the delicate flesh  
fitted tight within your embryo kernels  
of generations.

Have you found the browns and whites  
of your starry-eyed seeds dried  
and restless as monkeys in the boondocks?  
Tell me they did not flee stray bullets  
and typhoons only to find home is still  
a hand to mouth existence.

Where is your kin  
and what is your kind?

How do they grow overseas,  
misplaced and sprinkled among,  
together and throughout.
Filipina

Primordial, practical, generous woman
in a fast, hardwood canoe
leading Malay warriors screaming
bloody murder in native tongues
past intruders who dare
to cross her jungle territory.
She terrifies them
with black fire in her eyes,
bile in her belly,
dagger at her side,
and her tribe of strong brown men,
wrapped in color-striped loincloths
charging into sharp battle.

I am her bloodline, Magandang of Cebu,
who hurled the pointed javelin
that slit his foreign enemy white throat.
They said she was deeply loyal
to her family and her village.
I am her sister, Luzviminda of Intramuros,
living 400 hundred years inside
a walled, colonial convent
imprisoned by Spanish hypocrisy, but saved
by the conquistadors’ Jesus-loving souls.
She survived those fearless, oily friars
who grabbed as much peasant lands
as they could fool our mothers into giving
and could talk me into spreading
my legs for them in the name of God.

I am her cousin, Gabriela of the Arayat hills
sheltering ragtag bands of insurgents
one after the other doggedly fighting
the Americans who promised my freedom,
but snatched it for themselves
then winked at the tribe of us
little brown monkeys,
their white man’s burden.

I am her anak, Orlina of Olongapo,
embracing 40 years of Hollywood imperialism,
kissing GI Joes who were throwing easy money
on streets paved with Hershey chocolate bars
and canned Spam, canned tuna, canned Similac
and evaporated milk on top
of roads lined solid with concrete tons
of almighty military dollars.
White was always better than brown
so the clan flocked to town.

I am Filipina.
Of Apolonia, the wise, haughty mestiza
not quite white and not fully brown,
pushed upward by relatives
to the highest bidder, her granddaughters
gracing cherry blossom magazines,
forming friendships with girls who swirl
in the Asian shame of sex, pleasure and abortion.
Of Sing Loy, the sari sari store owner
borne of the Chinese mercantile class
bargaining always for the dearest price
despite personal wealth amidst widespread poverty.

Of Maria Clara, class-conscious and ornamental,
adorned in finely woven pina cloth
dabbed with Parisian perfume,
rolling by in the family limousine
past my neighbors’ shirtless, barefoot
and swollen stomach hungry children,
whose big, sad eyes stare out
from cardboard box homes
topped with salvaged tin can roofs.

I am of Remedios, tight-lipped, God-fearing,
Sturdy, frugal countryside Ilocana
coaxing life from fickle heartlands
of garlic, tobacco, peanuts and sweet potatoes
left behind in hard scrabble Laoag, Isabela,
Sarrat and the newly named Marcos Town,
chest swelling, homegrown, stubborn, defiant pride
but it was the lucky ones who went away
to Hawaii, planting pineapple
to Alaska, gutting salmon
to California, cutting asparagus
to Washington, picking strawberry fields in heaven.

Of Valeriana and her love of fiesta and music,
her alluring mystic ways, mish-mashed with
animist magical spirits and bahala na
nestled in secluded, sensational luxury hotels
made accessible by the extraordinary
Samar-Leyte bridge strangely misshapen
in its violent clash with centuries old shorelines
now twisted by the grace of suspended stainless steel.

Of Paramisuli’s circle of indigenous Moros
and Muslims resisting colonizers, cutting off
the heads of leaders, the good fight spurred
by independence denied
and violence justified
again in the name of God,
praise Allah and his bloodshed
for a united Bangsamoro nation,
amen and awomen.

I am Filipinas.
A sprinkle of islands of nationalists,
separatists, communists and sexists.
A swath of farm workers tilling the land
like serfs chained to the fertile earth
owned by the spoiled offspring
of generations of landholding senators
inbred with corporate greed,
pervasive with swollen corruption.
I am from a lesson book of monarchs
and dynasties of paternalistic government
providing safe harbor for untrammeled power
that lined the way for horrific adoration
of a supreme father—this bloodless,
ruthless, pangulo dictator expelled
by reform-minded people power replete
with idealistic moral virtues placed inside
a gentler, more hopeful, feminine motherland leader.

I am from a flow of escapist movies
created by a testosterone-laden malapropism joke
of an actor savior presidente swaggering in
to rescue the troubled from themselves,
but rejected again for a daughter of politics,
armed with a doctor of economics,
tasked again with giving birth
to a re-emerging country struggling
now like an awkward adolescent
wanting so much to wrest free
from imbedded social bonds that cut
and deep kinship ties that bind
at every folded corner.

We are Filipinas, bound by blood and skin
to overseas contract workers—
nannies in Hong Kong,
maids in Rome,
nurse’s aides in Guam,
housekeepers in Canada,
sex workers in Japan,
food servers in New York,
janitors in Chicago,
anywhere there is supply
and demand, all faithfully
sending envelopes of money
back home every month,
serving up solace
buying some comfort,
conveying books, shoes, food
to hands, feet, heart, mouth
giving relief, if only for brief
sweet moments of happiness
lifting spirits higher, over and beyond
the dull shine of hoping
for a better life
for 8 million souls
scattered
throughout the world.
What is your name?
What kind of job did you have before?
This one pays minimum wage.
How much money do you have?
Sign here and then there.
Who else owns this house?

What kind of insurance did he have?
Who is the next of kin? Who has power
of attorney?

Are you the widow?
Are you the caregiver?

Do you have a pastor? There are no openings at the hospice.

Where are you from?
When were you born?
Legitimate or illegitimate?
Where are your parents now?
When did you marry?
Your husband is a soldier?
How many children do you have?
Why do you want to come here?

Where are you going to be?
Where school did you go to?
You speak English so well.
Where did you learn to speak English?

Are you happy?

Everything is under your name.

Were you happy?
On Hearing My Mother Call Out To Our Neighbor Over The Courtyard Fence

"Hoy, what you cooking for dinner tonight? I can smell the vinegar and peppercorns from your pork adobo coming into my house. Here, I bring Hayden mango for you. I have extra. I peel one right now so you can taste how good. My husband? He okay but he no stay. Friday night drinking with his barcada. Your oldest still in Los Angeles? Still no more children yet? Pobre, what can we do if they no like. Just like me, I tell you. My six children, four of them stay married, Santa Maria! But nobody get children yet. Pobre. Aysus! I am waiting and waiting.

This fruit taste sweet, heh? Stay good now, plenty now but less and less every time Maybe next year stay all gone. Juicy, eh? Better enjoy now, bumbye no can taste this kind anymore. All this one, and this big one here I get from my manugang who live down the road over there.

Ay, comare, look all this— kamatis, tarong, patani, paria, sibuyas, camote, marunggay. Plenty life and plenty fruit over here. Lucky you come Hawaii. You can eat, you can work You can stay with your family and friends.

We just wait little while more for our grandchildren to come."
the Marcos regime in 1973 for U.S.-based Filipinos returning to the motherland and witness its vast improvements attributed to martial law. 2. Unwittingly brought by the homeland returnee to Balikbayan: humongous box stuffed with all kinds of spasm and omiyage brought by the homeland returnee to the homeland economy, like the OCWs.

Q: How is the balikbayan box like American Express to Filipinos?
A: Because they never leave home without it.

25 American-made Coach brand coin purses, 1 Coach handbag for the matriarch
Non-dairy creamer Non-dairy creamer Non-dairy creamer Non-dairy creamer
Cheap&ugly (but new) boy’s shoes, cheap&ugly men’s slippers, Bayer aspirin
Mango cucumber hand soap, Cherry ginger lime anti-bacterial cleanser, Vitamins
Skin whitening cream and oil, Skin lightening lotion, Skin whitening moisturizer
PERSONAL SIZE TOILETRIES FROM ALL THE HOTELS YOU STAYED AT
PERSONAL SIZE TOILETRIES FROM ALL THE HOTELS YOU STAYED AT
PERSONAL SIZE TOILETRIES FROM ALL THE HOTELS YOU STAYED AT
CORNED BEEF CORNED BEEF; VIENNA SAUSAGE VIENNA SAUSAGE
SHEETS PILLOWCASES PILLOWS MORE SHEETS HAWAYANO-
STYLE QUILTS MADE WITH ALOHA PRINT SCRAPS TEE SHIRTSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS
On San Pedro Street

Manila is up in arms about martial law imposed again for ends and means, the family matriarch declares holding court for her circle of poets and expats.

I, an extreme American an arm’s length from her arc, am in the homeland by choice by chance in Davao City, the massacre in Ampatuan town 10 days fresh memory now a mere province away.

I cannot understand and wonder if I ever will. The quiet strength of the old woman’s declaration kills me,

I’m happy the president declared martial law. I’m glad she finally did something about it.

They do not live here, the idealists who don’t know what it’s really like.

You should see the Ampatuan family’s houses, my God! and their power my God! it is too much.

Tell the critics to come live here and see. They do not know what they are saying.

They do not know what they are saying.
Bebot

You American insane
man crazy white love.

You show off, GI worship
and dry vomit
orgasm for money.

You skinny brown
bad teeth nice smile
pollution. 70 million

poverty city exhaust.

You nightmare cold
pregnant dream.

Why people think you crazy?
Moth Greeting

A small gray moth came calling at the window screen and I guessed it was supposed to be you because my temple skipped a pulse and my chest got warm. I never know how far to invoke the babaylan and her mystic, mouth my greetings, update my absolutions, or whether I should merely

- smile polite
- smile sincere
- smile nervous

or have simple faith it is your spirit inside that furry body. Instead I just

- nod quiet
- sit still
- pay homage

just in case indeed all of you are in there, distilled

- sentinels watching, testing my manners.
NOTES

1 The reference is to Emily Dickinson’s poem that begins, “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant-- / Success in Circuit lies / Too bright for our infirm Delight / The Truth’s superb delight.”

2 The reference is to William Carlos Williams’ poem, “Asphodel, that Greeny Flower,” excerpted “…it is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there.”


4 Nono, Grace. The Shared Voice, Chanted and Spoken Narratives From the Philippines. (Pasig City, PI: Anvil Publishing, 2008). 31-32. Nono defines oralists’ identity not on notions of national or cultural identity but on “personal signifiers” such as ethnicity, language, religion, ancestry, gender, class, education, generation. She clarifies relations to mean interaction between oralists and their communities, which include audiences, fellow oralists and other support systems, and the natural and the spirit worlds.


7 Ibid.


