Puñeta: Political Pilipinx Poetry

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Puñeta
Political Pilipinx Poetry

Edited by Eileen R. Tabios

Locofo Chaps
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ABOUT THE POETS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Michelle Bautista

FLOW

Mg Roberts

notes from the gyre,
an excerpt from Anemal Uter Meck

this sky inverted in blue, in red, in white nesting into handcuffs, into the heavy of a thing now residual, endless.
drawn against continent we are like a sad imitation of bird noises:

a flock

a population

a country
Kimberly Alidio

I was born for a stricter regime

than this loose place of acoustic guitar mass and grape juice

trained long before birth to be a soldier of something

a wife of someone’s
a link to some underground
      a constellation

ready for the call          exiled from the cell
embedded                   missing you
dreaming the word
a passkey                 magic safe entry

haunting corners          scanning my papers for fraud
flushing myself out
terror is the mainstream’s peace

I will be truthful         I am lost
the mall is starting to make me forget

the prophecy fulfilling    itself
a manifesto

in one line indigene       in the next struggling
    with addiction

in each wife and nun
a hand of unraveled threads a bomb blast awhile ago
violence in the soft core
paratroopers I am running out of writing implements
they want to know how I run
When we were young my family displayed wood carvings of headhunters on the end tables in our living room. The headhunters portrayed in the carvings were from somewhere in the north on the island of Luzon in the Philippines. I was five or six and my favorite was the tall, stately one with the narrow strip of multicolored cloth that was wrapped around his waist then tucked between his legs to cover his private parts, though most of his buttocks were still exposed. I was slightly embarrassed that we had this carving of a man with his ass hanging out on display in our living room, but what made up for it was his face, long and tight lipped, bearing a look of determination, and of course the head he held in his right hand, just off his hip. He was what used to be commonly called an Igorot though the better term was a Bontoc, from the Mountain Province, and he carried the head so casually that it seemed that it was no big deal for him, that he’d captured many heads before this one, and that even though the journey ahead was long—and through blinding, unbreatheable heat—the future was bright with many
more heads to come. I wasn’t quite sure what message my parents were trying to give visitors or what mood they were trying to create. I was born in the States, and while like other families we had a wooden bowl full of plastic fruit, we also had paintings of grass huts on our walls, and a carving of a beast of burden called a carabao on our coffee table, all of which to me seemed to say we weren’t from here, we were from somewhere far away and backwards, and when I was young that wasn’t where I wanted to be from—why couldn’t we have been from England like that cute girl from the apartment upstairs, or from France like that woman my Mom sewed for?—and besides all the other things in the living room just seemed to lead one’s eyes back to the wooden headhunters that stood guard on either side of the plastic-covered sofa. I wondered if they might be our relatives back in the islands—cousins or uncles I’d never met who had somehow missed their chance to come to the States. Did they live side by side with my Mom and Dad or maybe it was an uptown/downtown sort of distance, or maybe they were our neighbors “out in the country”? Maybe I thought the answer would
be too scary, maybe I didn’t want to know but
I never asked where we stood with them or what we
shared
even though as a child there were so many things I
didn’t know about headhunters. So I learned by not
living with them, how they were merciless like the
monsoon
rain, how determination begins in the home

as years gather like rings on trees and jungles grow
dense
in a distance too far for me to sense, but close enough
for me to know. And it turned out some of them had
made it to the States and were displayed in a human
zoo
at the St. Louis World’s Fair, 1904, for America
to watch and gawk at and maybe this is what
Mom and Dad meant to say, that when you look at us

we’re looking at you, we’re paying attention to your
moves, your strange, exotic speech and your skin
a color
you can only see in our teeth and our eyes when we
look
at you and smile. We’re nice and kind and polite and
we like
to cook and entertain, but cross us and there’s no way
for you
to know if it’s daytime or nighttime or heaven or hell
and time for us to start collecting heads again.
I'm sick of white people from Baltimore talking about Baltimore I'm sick of leftists who left Baltimore talking about their comrades in Baltimore I'm sick of people who aren't from Baltimore talking about Baltimore I'm sick of the New York Times mapping the incident and the CVS looting in Baltimore I'm sick of the Washington Post reporting on Baltimore I'm glad for Ta-Nehisi Coates' piece in the Atlantic starting off with his growing up near Mondawmin Mall But I'm sick of people living in Cambridge and San Francisco posting on their hometown of Baltimore I'm sick of protest images of Baltimore being used to recycle debates over calling it a riot or an uprising I'm sick of your friends in Baltimore commenting on your post that people! are being hurt! by the riots! I'm sick of anyone's message to anyone to stay safe in Baltimore I'm sick of the sense of danger in my body about Baltimore I'm sick from the statistics I've always known but never knew I'm sick of the danger that is the city and not the county I'm sick of the danger that is the county which is whatever passes for my hometown I'm sick of the white people who always speak for Baltimore I'm sick of the white people I grew up having to listen to about Baltimore I'm sick from not really being from Baltimore I'm sick from the danger I was always warned about which is not quite the danger I grew up with which is a danger known in my body a danger which is not quite the danger of the places I passed through and is the danger of the cop car and police van anywhere in this country but first and foremost in my body about Baltimore I'm sick of being adjacent to and complicit in and ignorant of and complacent about and witness to and terrorized by and subject to what is said about and done to Baltimore
Luisa A. Igloria

PEOPLE LIKE US

We were talking to a man we knew at a cafe, who had just come back after several months overseas.

He had been away at the time of the election, and spoke of how unsettling it was to view the aftermath from afar—in a country where he was born but where he could not, after so many decades, feel he completely belonged.

He said for the first time it felt physically as if he was between two places, with nowhere now to go.

His first week back, he could hardly bear to get out of bed, to walk around as if the world were still normal. But at least this is a university town, he said—I suppose there’s something still to be said about what this means? Maybe we can still feel some semblance of safety here?

To understand such feelings is to understand the history of all others like us who have always been singled out as expendable, who will always be the first to be pushed to the front of the line :: to take the fall :: to bear the brunt :: to feel the weight :: and still articulate, in representation of.

Also, everything we ever learned about resistance will have to be reinvented.

What kind of stance is best, to adopt for the hard years ahead?
The Thinker rests one hand on his cheek, supporting the head, symbol of rational life and thought. The hand rests on the opposite knee. But he is sitting on a surface providing ballast, providing gravity.

If there is a chair this is obviously a kind of privilege.

And obviously this will not be enough.

So in turn I am reminded of the place I come from—where village elders hold council or simply smoke their pipes or carefully arrange pieces of betel nut leaf and lime to chew.

They squat in a circle and note the time of day. They may say something or nothing, like It is noon. It is night. It is the next day. They can do this for long periods of time, with long silences between.

How long can they hold this position?

Somewhere between abjection and the moment before the spring fires the calf muscles forward for the sprint.

Neither a cowering nor a complete sinking into the earth but the vigilance of a wire pressed for the moment into a form biding its time.
The F Word

Do you want to throw down some major shade.
Trash talk publicly.
There is a dirty F word
Dirtier than fuck.
Oh, hell, if someone said, “F*ck you!”
I'd be like: “Here? Now?!”
F*ck is not as bad as this other F-word.
That word is “frack.”
Fracking is when they blast water and chemicals to get oil out of the ground.
If someone said to me, “F*ck you!”
I'd be like, “Hell no!”
My home would have water that would burst into flames straight out of the faucet.
So, if you have an enemy such as the shareholders, CEOs, board of directors, owners of oil companies
You might want to say “FRACK YOU!”
To give them a taste of their own medicine.
Can you imagine their mansions being fracked.
So let's say it all together “FRACK YOU!”
Chevron, FRACK YOU
Exxon, FRACK YOU
Rex Tillerson, Trump-appointed Secretary of State, CEO Exxon-Mobil
Shell, FRACK YOU

Raise your hand if you have someone or something in mind to say FRACK YOU

TRUMP is a stockholder, Sunoco an investor in the Dakota Access Pipeline

- GT Velasco January 9, 2017
- Innovations revised January 11, 2017
Barbara Jane Reyes

Prayers of Petition

1. To the Patron Saint of Husbandry and Harness Makers
   With Arlene Biala, Veronica Montes, and Jay Santa Cruz

Please do not shush her when she speaks.

You nitpick every little thing; you make her small.

Please do not tell her she doesn’t know anything.

You are not pleased; she does nothing right.

Please do not tell her she should smile.

You are her master; this is tradition.

Please do not tell her her skin is too dark.

You pull her hair; you throw her to the floor.

Please do not tell her she is a fat cow.

You do what you will; no one will stop you.

Please do not leer at her body parts.

You beat down the door when she changes the locks.
Please do not leer at her daughters.

*You own her; everything she has is yours.*

Please do not grab at her body parts.

*You make her suffer; you knock out her teeth.*

Please do not grab at her daughters.

*You promise to change; next time will be different.*

Please do not block her with your body.

*Your home and your castle, your family values.*

Please do not cut off her hair.

*You shoot, you strangle, you beat her up.*

Please do not tell her to calm down.

*You bludgeon, you burn; you serve no jail time.*

Please do not pretend she did not say no.

*You are not to blame; she stays, doesn’t she.*

Please do not stab her, then call her your soul mate.

*You don’t need to change; the laws favor you.*

Please do not tell her it will be OK.
You turn on the charm; you know she’ll come back.

Please do not tell her not to tell anyone.

You take away her money; she has nothing without you.

Please do not tell her not to make a scene.

You break her spirit; you tease her with hope.

Please do not tell her she’s crazy.

You grip your pistol, your fist, your baseball bat.

Please do not incapacitate her.

You know she will stay, for better or for worse.

Please do not lock her in your closet and starve her.

You post bail easy; it’s always this way.

Please do not penetrate her against her will.

You drink, and you fuck her so hard, you rip her.

Please do not impregnate her against her will.

You punch her first trimester belly, this is not your problem.

Please do not set her body on fire.
You dump her body — trash, woods, don’t matter.

Please do not blame her for her death by your hands.

You are a disease; we will eradicate you.

2. To the Patron Saint of Encumbered Wives

Hija con la barba, pray for us
Bearded maiden of the cross, we have
Many stake claim upon us
No sanctuary from the fathers’ will
Santa Librada, crucificada
Our husbands’ whims, and our sons
This burden of patriarchs
Ravaging the sad vessels of namesake.
Hija con la barba, virgo fortis
Bearded maiden, they say you are myth,
Corseted messiah, bogeywoman
They brand us cult of hysterical girls,
Sacrilegious sister, que bárbara
They smash our faces with their fists
We are the encumbered wives
They shove our bodies, they spit on us.
Hija con la barba, cut us loose
Bearded maiden, we are ungraced
Unwive our brutish husbands
We are wretched bitches, we are used.
Santa patrona de la tribulación
We will be a woven phalanx of women,
Wild-haired protector, we stand
With you, interlocked. With you, holding.
JOSE PADUA

Seven and Seven Is

The young thug from my neighborhood who whipped my older brother Tony with a car antennae outside our house, and the man who was both former governor and senator from Virginia, and whose 2006 campaign to regain his senate seat was derailed when he used a racial slur while speaking to an Indian-American tracker from his opponent’s camp, were both named George Allen. This is not an attempt to point out the oddities and ironies of life, this is simply the way things happened. My brother was thirteen and I was nine, and George Allen, the young neighborhood thug, laughed maniacally as he whipped my brother over and over with the shiny metal car antennae. Later, I imagined that if I’d had a baseball bat I could have sneaked up from behind and swung like Frank Howard, home run hitter for the Washington Senators baseball team, and killed George Allen, but I didn’t have a bat, and I didn’t have the home run power, so I didn’t kill him and when it was over my brother slowly walked into the house crying in pain and all I could do was yell or try to yell.

George Allen was the first and probably the only person I ever really imagined killing, and when I was young I didn’t understand that killing
him would have changed my life in ways I can’t imagine.

George Allen, candidate for the senate, was the son of George Allen the famous football coach, and went to high school in Palos Verdes, California, drove a Ford Mustang that had a front license plate holder that was adorned with the Confederate flag, and wore a pin of that flag for his official yearbook photo. George Allen, California fan of the Confederacy, went to the University of Virginia when his father became the coach of the Washington Redskins and stayed on there to get his law degree, and
got married, got divorced, got married again and had three children and now lives in a wealthy neighborhood near the first president of the United States George Washington’s Mt. Vernon estate. George Allen, neighborhood thug, was black and didn’t have a famous father and didn’t have a fancy car, and was a skinny, kind of weird looking guy who after he’d whipped my brother would always laugh at us, and everyone in the neighborhood, black or white or any other color, knew that one day he would end up in jail, and when he did go to jail for armed robbery we never saw him again, never got whipped or laughed at or threatened by him again and his story like so many others just sort of ends, like a film with no plot, a film that ends with a sudden cut to black. And there are so many ways to react to getting beaten down like this, and
too many people would take the neighborhood thug and anyone who looks like him and lump them all together like horrible monsters, like the landlord I once talked to on the phone about renting an apartment in New York and who suddenly said he had nothing available when I told him my name was Jose, and I later found out that ever since a Puerto Rican employee ripped him off he doesn’t trust anyone he thinks is Hispanic, like me with my Hispanic sounding name, and this doesn’t make the landlord a poor, sorry, fearful, and fragile guy whose apprehension is understandable, it makes him an asshole goon.

My brother got beaten and got better and got over it, and I try to imagine what it was that made George Allen, asshole candidate for the Senate, give so much glory to the Confederacy, what could have filled him with so much backwards shit—did he learn it, did it beat him within a sliver of the heart beneath his bleeding white skin? When George Allen, thug, was beating my brother I was full of fear and anger and revenge, but when I saw George Allen, the candidate, so casually use that word, that slur that was meant to lay another man down to some lesser place, I just felt helpless, like in a dream where you want to run but you can’t, where you want fight back, but your arms won’t rise to shelter the color in your face, and you can’t cut to black.
Where is the land that is mine?
A place I gave birth three times
But not where I was born?
Because I planted my feet here
Half fate, half destiny, all luck
I meld into the crowd
Hoping not to be seen
A ghost caught in between
Life & death
How wonderful
It feels not to hide, not to
Whisper in dark corners
Wonder if I would be
Whisked away in the dark, too

The cries of the fallen echo
Muted, buried within my youth
When in another land
I am safe from dictators
Now familiar panic set in
Of bus loads pulled over,
Lined up, gunned down
Unnamed back then, but how
I remember it so well:
Frayed fabric, forever
Unraveling—just like
My ancestors’ spirits
That followed me here
By thread of my hair
Just to repeat the trek
Up the mountains
& into the sea

Cristina Querrer

LINE THEM UP
Angela Peñaredondo

RETURN

I didn’t go back to reawaken or recover the relics, nor puzzle what I’d become if left behind. I did not grow old with the banyan’s hollows or pray soft to them before pissing on their leaves.

Sometimes I wish them gone as if I were floating a thousand feet off the ground. The haunting of sexless ghosts when I was child of broken bridges & metal fences outlining this portrait of birth.

I came back not to regret or ask the particulars of why I left. When a tree falls, its roots aim jagged, pointing in all directions like a chapel buried up by the sea, hiding from any marriage of light. Her cross poking out of waves covered in nothing but a green flesh.
Jean Vengua

SEPTEMBER 5, 2013

No regard
for the moon

Mosquitos
silently alight

A deer looks up

Crow’s black
unfolding departure

Syria’s
held breath
Aileen Ibardaloza

APOLOGY

"Apologies are critical for resolving disputes and repairing trust between negotiators."
—William M. Maddux et al

Let us settle
finally and
irrevocably

the issue of
our murky
history.

I regret deeply
and without
defense

past offenses and
take the
indignity

of your oppression
with the
realization

that I am
still not
defenseless

enough to be
absolved fully
or
irrevocably. But here
    I am,
        heart

in hand, in
    hopes of
        being

heard as I
    say without
        defense

how I have wronged you.
We survived / We are still here / It is enough, isn't it? // The past matters / A world was formed by those who did things ... / Words matter / We were called "little brown sisters and brothers" as if we benefited from the best of both worlds // Enough of that story / It doesn't work anymore / No more old stories that overstay their welcome / No more lies that blind us to what matters // I say, it matters that we are no longer the willing receptacles of projection // You call us "small" / You say our canoe is sinking and we have no rudder // Let it sink then / Let's get lost in the ocean of smallness / Let the boat sink // We will be found in a thousand years as strata of underwater mountains / Then we will not be so small / We would have been food for those breathing through water: of value / We would become found objects for future archeologists: worthy of being seen
Angela Peñaredondo

WHAT SHE WILLS [THE TREES BEHIND]

With all the danger involved
at least you know the missing
is not a blank letter or diminished
garden, instead your mouth full
of such shattering sea
and the peninsulas ravaged
like the lean flesh of a neck.

How many times
barefoot and without map, you must
have told God through the slim crevasse
of both palms, you were ready
to let go of all that water.

The wax-like geography of a country
and grandmother finally buried
in Laguna, its quiet shrine
as close to infinity as a small
planet gleaming.

Each summer you take what little
money to escape, eager
for the pulpy bits of yourself
moving, no longer cut in half
but some bandaged organism
with each opening of dark

an easy
compartment without clinging rope
or barricade, not any exotic brand
or objet trouvé like Laurencin’s dancers
rather from clouds an animal forms,
a wild cat slipping inside an oblong hole.
You think of the different places
now washed over by rain,

  very well,
they tell you under fractions of sky,
because they've watched all things lose
thousands and thousands of times.
Mg Roberts

from a scar mosaic,
an excerpt from Animal Uter Meck

a verb lays waste

in a throat—on a page

in an abandoned city

lot edged in chain link

lots edged in chains

link that learn history

learn empty mouth

learn whose song?
Eileen R. Tabios

... from the MDR Poetry Generator: “Pilipinx”

I.
I forgot how perfume cannot obliterate.
I forgot children softening harsh wool with thin fingers in exchange for broken rice kernels.
I forgot discovering the limited utility of calm seas.
I forgot the World War II concentration camp where amnesiacs tortured by tying together the legs of pregnant women.
I forgot how Beauty dislocates.
I forgot that sense of approaching a labyrinth.
I forgot the ripped edges of fabrics still mustering to cover the shoulders of non-retired warriors.
I forgot that if you call an island “Isla Mujeres,” half of the population will be anguished.
I forgot there is no cavalry.
I forgot how to heal face blindness by introducing context.
I forgot electronic ghosts snooping on our passions.

I forgot defining ambition as the helpless compulsion to write songs for women who refuse headscarves.

I forgot rough skin was a map.

I forgot you losing all Alleluias.

I forgot the musk of a stolen wool coat.

I forgot she became the wind after losing all misgivings at drying my feet with her hair.

II.
I forgot steel will bend to form a heart.

I forgot wax will freeze to form a heart.

I forgot ink will flow to form a heart.

I forgot cantaores drowning in their own blood to sing one last letra.

I forgot a body drowning in light as a hand wrote. I forgot eyes leaking flames.

I forgot Derrida hunched as I was then over an antique desk scribbling past egregious back pain, “There is speech. / There is phenomena.”

I forgot wondering if sweat can be dishonest.
I forgot true love is never chaste.

I forgot imagination cannot alchemize air into protein.

I forgot the Sphinx’s unasked riddle:

“Which is more powerful?
   A moon so bright it erases night
   or
   A sun so bright it darkens vision?”

I forgot the anguish of knowledge.

I forgot sickened oceans vomiting dead fish and dumped sewage from every myoclonic jerk.

I forgot that rare poem all too aware that no one else can be the sentry watching over your life—only you can judge when you have absconded from your distinct possibilities.

III.
But I will never forget we walk on the same planet and breathe the same air. I will never forget the same sun shines on us. I created my own legacy: No one is a stranger to me.
ABOUT THE POETS

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Jean Vengua: http://www.local-nomad.net/
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Locofo Chaps

2017

Eileen Tabios – To Be An Empire Is To Burn
Charles Perrone – A CAPacious Act
Francesco Levato – A Continuum of Force
Joel Chace – America’s Tin
John Goodman – Twenty Moments that Changed the World
Donna Kuhn – Don’t Say His Name
Garin Cycholl – Country Musics 20/20
Mary Kasimor – The Prometheus Collage
Gabriel Gudding – Bed from Government
Eileen Tabios, editor – Puñeta: Political Pilipinx

Poetry

More information on Locofo Chaps can be found at
trained long before birth to be a soldier of something
-- Kimberly Alidio

your arms won’t rise
to shelter the color in your face, and you can’t cut to black.
-- Jose Padua

worthy of being seen
-- Leny M. Strobel

Kimberly Alidio
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Cristina Querrer
Barbara Jane Reyes
(with Arlene Biala, Veronica Montes, & Jay Santa Cruz)
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