

**Kerima Lorena Tariman's *Sa Aking Henerasyon:*
*Mga Tula at Saling-Tula***

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State capture of artistic and cultural production is a key tactic of fascist rule. Following past regimes—notably Marcos Sr., whose court poets and pet intellectuals manufactured mythologies for the dictator—the current Marcos-Duterte regime continues to weaponize art and culture in service of the elite, most recently distorting history in Darryl Yap's fictitious *Maid in Malacañang* and enlisting their latest spin doctor, film producer Paul Soriano, for the newly created position of Presidential Adviser for Creative Communications. In the context of a regime built on systemic historical revisionism, rampant disinformation, and nostalgia for fascism, revolutionary art is a necessary practice of resistance in countering the co-optation of art and in shaping a new liberatory culture. By crafting a practice of art as one collectively shared and produced by and with the people, revolutionary artists actively seek to disrupt and transform the world through collective struggle. *Sa Aking Henerasyon: Mga Tula at Saling-Tula* (2022) exemplifies this artistic practice, illuminating the ways in which revolutionary poetry can offer glimpses into another possible world, one beyond the everyday violence of neoliberal capitalism.

Sa Aking Henerasyon is a posthumous collection of the poetry of Kerima Lorena Tariman, revolutionary and poet who dedicated her life to ceaseless service to and with the peasantry, and who embodied, until the very end, a liberatory spirit committed to the emancipation of the most oppressed. Published by feminist small press Gantala Press, the collection is comprehensive; it compiles Tariman's books and chapbooks, in particular *Biyahe* (Laguna, Philippine High School of the Arts [PHSA], 1996), *Pag-aaral sa Oras: Mga Lumang Tula Tungkol sa Bago* (Metro Manila, High Chair, 2017), and *Luisita: Mga Tula* (Gitnang Luzon, 2021), as well as other poems featured in publications such as *Philippine Collegian*, PHSA literary journal *Dagta*, and *Anahaw: Mga Tula at Awit* (Palimbagan Kuliglig, 2004). Likewise included in the collection are Tariman's Filipino translations of poetry written by activists through history and across the world, from Wislawa Szymborska to Roger Felix Salditos, positioning her work in conversation and continuity with past revolutionaries. Notably, Tariman's poetry is buttressed by the essays that bookend the collection: a foreword and three introductory essays, closing with an article written by the poet herself. To read her

work in such a form—comprehensive, compiled posthumously, and situated within specific frameworks—underscores the intimacy with which her poetry is linked to her life's work as a revolutionary, an argument she later forwards in the concluding essay. Tariman's collection of poetry, aptly addressed to her generation, emerges as a call to action, steadfast in its dedication to the people's struggle.

The book opens with a foreword by the poet's father. In "Remembering Kerima," Pablo Tariman sketches a brief portrait of his daughter as poet, comrade, friend, and cultural worker. He notes the many names under which she wrote and lived: as Marijoe Monumento, she wrote book and film reviews; as Ting Remontado, she published songs and translated poems that circulated underground; as Ka Ella, she was comrade and friend to revolutionaries in the country and abroad; and, as Kima, she was a beloved part of a family. The foreword weaves Tariman's various identities into the whole of a life, demonstrating how her writing is intimately tied to her everyday work as an activist—both imagine the possibility of a new culture, one wherein there is justice and liberation for all.

The introductory essays of *Sa Aking Henerasyon* provide the crucial framework for reading Tariman's work, contextualizing her poetry within Philippine literature and the long tradition of revolutionary art and literature. Noting the brilliance with which Tariman utilizes formal elements of rhyme and meter, Marra PL Lanot's "Introduksiyon: Kerima Lorena Tariman" praises how Tariman incorporates Marxist teachings into her poetry without losing wit or humor. Meanwhile, "Ang Mga Espasyo ng Digma sa Panulaan ni Kerima Tariman, Babaeng Makata" by Joi Barrios recognizes Tariman's contributions to women's writing in the Philippines, particularly as one of the few Filipina poets who wrote and published in Filipino, and charts the various spaces that Tariman's personas disrupt in order to reimagine ordinary life through the lens of revolutionary practice. As Barrios notes, Tariman eschewed the traditional pathways of Filipino writers—it is away from contests, writing workshops, and the academe that she remapped "nasyon, asyenda, bundok, at sonang gerilya" in poetry, "upang mailahad ang katwiran ng himigsikan" (29). Neferti Xina M. Tadiar's "Poetry and Revolution" similarly places Tariman in conversation with revolutionary writers like Nicaraguan poets Rubén Dario and Ernesto Cardenal. The significance of the historical and international context provided by Tadiar cannot be understated: what Tariman's work represents is no less than the continuation and expansion of a repository of revolutionary poetry that bridges past and future in a present moment of world-making. Tariman's poetry, and the worlds she imagined through them, live on to bring "powers of radical rupture and creation in concerted action against an entire social order" (38).

Across the entirety of Tariman's work, one can trace the formation and development of a revolutionary consciousness. The opening poem "Introduksiyon" puts it aptly, speaking of poems "[na] sa simula'y gumagapang,/ Makakakita't titinding, makikinig

at tatapang, / Tumatanda, may alaala at may tiyak na asinta” (41). In “trip,” the young persona observes the urban lives she encounters while riding a jeep, questioning others and herself, unsure and restless: “ewan ko rin sa 'kin, / kung sinasadya ko ang manibago” (234). The poems are attentive to the many ways in which human lives in the city are treated as disposable; in “view,” the speaker knows the dead child “sa gitna ng kalsada” will be forgotten and “di na pag-iisipan / kahit kailan” (239). Forceful in their observation of everyday objects and surroundings, Tariman’s personas grimly catalogue the daily ills and injustices of capitalism in a process of ‘pagkamulat’: “(Sayang lang ang pera kong pambili ng lobo),” the persona says wryly in “Gen Ek,” “Pumuputok ang mga bula / Sa harap ng mata ko” (254).

The speaker becomes decisive and brave in “Pag-aari Ko ang Aking Sarili.” Mapping the inevitable future that awaits her under the neoliberal currents of capitalism, the persona arrives at the conclusion of service and struggle in rhythmic free verse that mirrors her determined tone:

ako ang mapagpasya
 kapag pinipili ko’t pinag-iisipan
 ang susunod kong mga hakbang
 pipiliin ko kayang umalis na sa ’skewla
 o kaya mamawis pa ng dugo sa akademya
 para naman maibenta pati thesis ko
 para naman MNC na ako magtrabaho
 at kapag pinili ko na hindi matanggap
 kahit kontraktwal sa pagawaan
 doon lamang ba dapat na mawala ang alinlangan
 na ibahagi ang sarili sa sambayanan? (54)

“Pag-aari Ko ang Aking Sarili” frames activism as a conscious choice one makes every day, over and over again. It is a choice that dares to imagine futures beyond the school and the corporation, beyond capital and the slow violence it inflicts upon bodies, and it is through this decision that the persona reclaims herself, a sense of autonomy and personal dignity that capitalism seeks to erode. Similar threads of determination and decisiveness weave through “Mga Sulat mula sa Lambak ng Cagayan,” a brilliant three-part poem written in the midst of revolutionary work in the countryside. The persona is at ease, humorously taking note of her back pain (“Madalas kung sumakit itong likod ko”) and resolutely happy: “Masayang-masaya ako at ako ay nandito” (129). Most strikingly, even in the aftermath of an encounter with state forces, she remains firm in her decision to join the revolutionary struggle, meeting her mortality clear-eyed and head-on:

Wala tayong ugnayan,
 at nag-aalala ka ngayon.

...
Hindi totoong ako'y bihag
ng mga berdugo't salarin.
Narito ako sa piling
ng aking pagkiling,
at alam kong alam mo
kung saan ako hahanapin. (130)

As revolutionaries, the personas in Tariman's poems confront a myriad of problems that cross the overlapping terrain of the personal and the political. In "Sa Apat na Sulok," the speaker addresses her fellow political prisoners, remembering the world beyond the bars in vivid imagery: "Ipaalala mo sana ang init at sariwang hangin, / Na hinahagip-hagip ng bagwis ng lawin" (77). The vastness of the world imagined by the persona stands in stark contrast to her surroundings, "[na] nais kong kalimutan." What the persona seeks to remember, moreover, is not simply an abstract sense of freedom, but freedom rooted in land that is collectively tilled:

Ipaalala mo sana na walang sulok ang daigdig.
Ipaalala mo sana ang alab ng ating pag-ibig—

Na sumusunog sa ating balat,
Habang binubungkal natin ang lupa.
Upang pagbabago ay maipunla. (77)

As Barrios notes in her introductory essay, Tariman's prison poetry is part of a long tradition of writing produced by political prisoners, which include Jose Ma. Sison, Mila Aguilar, and Angie Ipong (23). Tariman's work is particularly remarkable for her attention to the minutiae of her everyday surroundings ("Hunyo 12, sa Kulungan"), her penchant for satire ("the bored's prayer"), and the resolute hopefulness that runs throughout her prison poetry. This sense of determination and hope appears even in poems that tackle ordinary days. A series of five haikus, "Tibak" opens with a moment of despair:

News Update
Tanghaling tapat—
Nakakawalang-gana
Ang bagong ulat.

...

Operation Pinta
Pinturang pula
Sa malamig na pader:
Bagong propeta (59)

In the first haiku, the news cycle brings disheartening reports, as is often the case, underscoring the banality with which horrific events become news headlines. Yet the persona continues her daily work, and in doing so recovers a sense of determined optimism and committed hope. “Pinturang pula / Sa malamig na pader” becomes a way of resisting the terrors implied within “ang bagong ulat,” whereby it is transformed by revolutionary work into “bagong propeta,” another rupture with which to glimpse another world. Tariman’s use of the haiku, moreover, lends a measured and rhythmic quality to the piece, and it is a testament to the poet’s skill that a poetic form that demands restraint becomes the means through which the persona communicates the possibility of liberation.

The play in contradiction we see in “Tibak” is another hallmark of Tariman’s poetry. “Saranggola,” a poem visually arranged in the shape of a kite, teases out the ironies in what constitutes ‘freedom’ under neoliberal capitalism, asking if we are “malayang nakatali” if “sumu / su / nod / naman / tayo / sa / ba / wat / hi / la” (225). Tariman further wields contradiction as a poetic technique in “Aralin sa Ekonomiyang Pampulitika,” which explains Karl Marx’s classic theory. Yet the persona’s voice is not lost in theory, reappearing at the end: “Kaya’t kinakalkula ko muna, / Samantala, kung ano ang mahalaga / Para sa araw-araw nating gawain. / At kung gaano kahalaga, / Mga kasama, ang pagkakaisa sa atin” (68). In bridging theory with the collective work needed by the revolution, the poem foregrounds a practice of activism rooted in the everyday and each other, one that seeks to remake the world by changing socio-economic relations from the ground-up.

It is the collection *Luisita* that most clearly showcases the urgency and significance of activist work. A collection of poems that testifies to the lives and brutal murders of peasant workers in the Cojuangco- and Aquino-owned Hacienda Luisita, *Luisita* lays bare the state’s violent suppression of farmers and peasants in what is now known as the Hacienda Luisita massacre. It closes with poems dedicated to each of the farmers martyred during the massacre, namely: Jhaivie Basilio, Jhune David, Jessie Valdez, Adriano Caballero Jr., Juancho Sanchez, Jaime Fastidio, and Jesus Laza. As Tadiar observes in her introductory essay, in preserving through poetry the moments before, during, and after the massacre, *Luisita* foregrounds the key role revolutionary art plays in producing popular memory, as well as the ways in which it can be wielded as a force for collective resistance to dominant processes of subjugation and dispossession. It is likewise remarkable for the intentionality with which the poems largely relegate the “ako” and “akin” (in English, the “I”) popularly associated with poetry to the background, bringing to the fore the figures of the peasantry.

The collection opens with the poem “Sakada,” which frames the hacienda as a site of Philippine society’s core ills, and in doing so situates farmers and peasants at the

forefront of revolutionary struggle: “Atrasado’t talamak ang karukhaan. / Kung kaya’t buto’t balat ng sakada / ang upos nilang buhay . . . At malaon na ring natuklasan ng tao / kung paano babaguhin ang mundong ito” (173–74). In “Pulang-pulang puso,” a piece dedicated to the family of the martyred Juancho Sanchez, a single remaining photograph of “ang huwarang anak / Na huwarang kapatid / At huwarang kasama” (177) takes center stage, plastered on posters and banners of resistance, defying the cold and faceless indifference of fact sheets and affidavits. Years after the massacre, the photograph of a slain martyr, of a beloved brother, son, and comrade, remains engraved on the hearts of freedom fighters as a beacon towards liberation: “Pulang-pulang puso / Na patuloy na pumipintig / Para sa pulang-pulang paglaya” (178).

Concluding *Sa Aking Henerasyon* is “Manggagawang Pangkultura,” an essay written by Tariman for the news publication *Bulatlat* in 2015. In response to claims that revolutionary work prevented her from writing, Tariman reveals she never stopped writing, poetry and otherwise. “Mas madalas ay wala na sa isip ko ang paggamit ng sarili kong pangalan,” she writes (384). “Hindi ko na iniintindi na maglagay pa ng indibidwal na byline o pirma dahil kolektibo naman ang karaniwang paraan ng paggawa at pagpapalaganap ng mga pahayag, akda, o likhang-sining.” The recognition of the collective does not only call into question notions of the solitary, individual author as isolated from processes of production and distribution, but also forwards a writing practice that is inseparable from revolutionary work. It is a practice of writing that recognizes it is sustained by the farmers who till the land and grow our food, the workers who keep society afloat, the communities who care for each other in order to keep each other alive. Tariman diligently asks: “Para kanino at kumikilos tayo? Para kanino at lumilikha tayo ng tula? Para kanino ang sining at panitikan?” Writing and activism thus become unavoidably cultural in the same way the revolution seeks to create a new culture—one that is just and liberating for all peoples.

Ultimately, what binds the entirety of Tariman’s work is an enduring undercurrent of hope. Refusing vague abstractions, her poetry concretizes a commitment to the revolution that manifests in the daily work of activism as well as in larger moments of revolutionary struggle. The poems that comprise *Sa Aking Henerasyon* foreground a kind of hope built on commitment and dedication to another possible world, one that ceaselessly challenges oneself to remain true to the principles of the revolution, that continually seeks to be in solidarity with the oppressed.

Kerima Tariman and her husband Ericson Acosta, both revolutionary artists, were steadfast revolutionaries until the very end—Tariman and Acosta were murdered by state forces a year apart, both while organizing farmers and peasant workers in Negros. Their exemplary lives and work testify to the fact that the revolution is not

only built or waged; it is also lived and embodied, a decision made and renewed every day of one's life in service to the people. Brilliantly crafted and consistently sharp, *Sa Aking Henerasyon* compels its readers to choose similarly.

WORK CITED

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