



ABSTRACT

These poems are generated from a creative research on same-sex intimate partner abuse. Concepts from critical refugee and migration studies have a strong contribution in shaping the artistic procedure of this creative research. The author's artistic procedure sets off from how migration elucidates precarity, vulnerability, and the (im)possibilities of resistance in an abusive relationship, how the production of the refugee figure shapes geographies of durable inequalities, and how migration as a social, artistic, and theoretical mo(ve)ment intercedes in the imagination of home.

Keywords

intimate
partner abuse,
migration,
migritude,
queer, violence

IMAGINING MY HOMECOMING AND OTHER POEMS

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POETRY

ITINERARY

the start. the crossing of borders. the migrants in migrant clothing—dilapidated
 walls roofed by the sight of overlords. the destination a sewage with salary.
 the excavated back of a dream. the myths where we are always stealing something.
 the danger sign in our rubiginous faces. the preference for tall and white. the eyes
 that look at us but don't see us entering their lives. the imagination of home
 we carry to places. then a message from home: the crossing of sclerosis
 on a bridge under the kidney. the migrants who continue. then a new message
 from home: the wife you need is your cousin from Quetta. the stories
 my partner knows too much. in one story: the girl who refused to be wed
 and was later found in front of her apartment burning alive. in a new story: a stray
 boy who was tracked by his brother killed him outside a mosque.
 the stray who loved a stray. the soft animals decomposing inside my partner.
 the migrants who continue submerging in the loam of water. the migrants still
 impounded
 in the word *outsider*, thirteen digits in our alien card, a world apart from where
 wounds heal. the new plates and water bottles and cartons of cigarettes we share.
 the dirt in my teeth melting in his mouth. the mouth only we can enter
 and see each other even in the darkest. the night we knew something bad
 was happening in the future. the generations that came before us who broke in
 by the rented window and released the monsters that wanted us hurting each other.
 the known origin. the rule icon. the father emperor of all languages.
 the aircraft technician who always comes home drunk. the strong legs under the rain
 of bullets. the war-born toughness. the iron from a woman's shadow
 when leaving in a coffin. the tradition of saying sorry to a photograph.
 the violence we have witnessed in every newspaper. the violence violence violence
 to which we didn't know we belonged. that too-often violence that is the
 hemisphere
 our families have screwed in our head for us to navigate alone. the migrants who
 walk on coal.
 the further we walk the lonelier we become. the agitation of living in the present,
 an evidence when detained by a history of wounding. the home we can't
 dislodge from our backs. the migrants who continue walking in different streets.
 the text message from my partner: *if we could just talk, i won't hurt you again.*
 the new start. the eidetic cloud formation that appeared and was a staircase,
 there's no other way of seeing that. the height from where outlawed bodies fall.
 the hurt most of all to say: *i thought we wouldn't have to start dead.*



CONVERSION

1. [*Fajr*]

i didn't know it was that early – sunless, light emitted from a handy lamp, just enough to see how quietly things happen. milk darkening on the stove. lentils cleaving to become soup. my partner knifing red meat, his arms a stock of might and repletion.

i hid the gaucheness of my jittery spirit under my tongue. i flashed my alien eyes where he wrote prayer instructions for the first day of my first Ramadan.

together we ate. filled ourselves with taxed smoke and dates. the love i was with believable to the core, a family looking for god. i didn't know intimacy that way—cleaning of bones, being groomed, disgorging all desires like a sect of lice stumbled, sliding off fur when the stray shakes its afflicted body.

in the bathroom i brushed my teeth, the mirror studying a sheep in brown skin, entering a kingdom whose elders' battle cry was to expel animals of the kind we were, but we entered it anyway. above unrolled prayer mats, an invisible ring afloat to live around my neck.

i looked at him before he started the first prayer, a meadow in his lips, sun to burst. in that awakening i bowed my head without history, without ego; that was how badly i wanted to be in heaven. if it never existed, we were finely invisible.

we obeisance. we kneecaps that trickled. we tombs that murmured.

2. [*Dhuhr*]

it was hard to say goodbye, harder if you didn't at all, wasn't it? if you lived with a listless pain for decades and now it's gone yet you are not healed at all, wouldn't you ask where it is? where is Christ? what would happen to Him if i ignored His calls? does He even remember me remembering Him? that night in Ouan's farm, or was it a mountain of contrition? and i was the contrition, wasn't i? Jehovah-Shammah was there,



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incalculable feeling of fire that didn't burn me, did it? i trusted Him
to govern my life, didn't i utterly? roving between sin and a rural house
only with my toddler sister and a portrait of my overseas parents,
who did i call in every place? who filled the void? who took
my anger and my grief? who knew i led a war against myself?
who did i first come out to? being christian and gay was abhorred,
but didn't it seem a debate within, a possibility if alive, faith?
a right to be in a family, said the pope—wasn't that the most humane
of all? did meaning that slit heaven? did i not consider that the continuum
meant *alright, child, live the body you could, go on?* what would
i tell my earliest savior if we met? that i prayed a muslim's prayer?
that i wanted to see if that'd stop my partner from abusing me?

3. [Asr]

look at the glass door refracting the enervated animals who refuse hunger.
no mundane pleasure runs in their palms. no thirst, but not for the same reason.
they read scripture on a digital tablet, one on the floor the other on the bed.
can you see the olive shrubs in their heads, their feet pointing to different directions?

the wall clock has seen it all, again and again. look at them ignore their crookedness,
their blessed rituals will reach as far as one of them climbs out of the cage.
then the other one ripples the view. it's like a liver you drop in a quiet pond of fish.

4. [Maghrib]

we prayed the last prayer to break the day. i stayed where i knelt and prostrated,
my body a burned gate on a divided land. memory and future sharing the ashes.
not a doctor's appointment for a twisted elbow, not a date on top of a skyscraper,
this intimacy feeds on my sacrifices—squashed honeycombs, more and more
of use from hands to mouth—my hands a print of disappearing bones. mostly





i'd know just by silence i must stand at the back of the food line or else—
the heaviness to numb my legs down to the last weeping stones they gradually
turned into. a boy drawing bubbles in the air with his own saliva would someday
throw those stones at the new woman in their house to spite his father.
that's the urge to speak, a prophecy of rapture. *how are you*

thinking shit like that, my partner vented, the promised paradise in his face
instantly rumbled. when i looked at his eyes swelling into fire to calm him down,
it could be written as this moment: on a motorcycle waiting for a truck
to turn right a shadow stops so close to my helmet and pounds a sledge hammer
on my forehead. the shadows of everything then walks away into the direction of future.

5. [*Isha'a*]

this is a prayer of ruins and limits, of nights i didn't feel much of my body.
a prayer of the wounds in the air, the heart in salt. out of it escapes a cloud
of smoke. a destruction i do not make simply out of the freedom of little hands.
the will to form. the will to deform. the will to see things as they are: deformed,
hostile, revolutionary like a lily in mud.
to consider the haunting of seas with man-made doors, the lands that rape built.
to cross the turbulence that ravages my head. the revolting sound of madness.
the lifetime echoes of being ensnared, of the need to throw myself against
a moving truck for quiet for quiet for quiet.
to leave the violence that stays hungry. the thirst that outlives water.

*o Allah, i ask You by Your mercy that envelopes all things that You forgive me
like You forgive those wives and daughters who think of killing their men
before they hang their bodies at the window of their trap house.*





POETRY

MIGRITUDE, OR THAT I “IN ANOTHER COUNTRY”

deepening like the knot-end of a rope down a sinkhole.

our dear life: a flaking animal my partner would hold up close to his eyes by the tail—a travel that took years; once it's there, inches from the bulwark of his nose, scintillating like oil on water hit by the sun, he leistered its little heart.

in the birthplace of my partner, a king made a palace for the tomb of his favourite wife who didn't stop bleeding. in my birthplace, a man revisited a war and came back on a stretcher with a finger in the cave of his palm.

is it a fault to think that we had enough sources to keep wanting a piece that doesn't belong to us—a torchlight fault if you see it from the orchid too azure cropping up in the corner of my left eye?

my partner takes his lunchbox from my hands and i tell him the fruits inside or his chance to say one thing nice, anything despite my head still sloping netherward in that trepidation. he said *it's bullshit to have to call you something to make you feel better about where you came from.*

sweat smudges my face while everything is being taken from me—slices of orange, cubed apricots, the serenity of not thinking whether to breathe or not, a tenderness that will not remember any of us.

and it's true, once he leaves without saying a thing, my hands become smocks of filth, wind-swept. the stone where i'm kneeling cracks into a sinkhole.





TRAUMA POEM THAT ENDS IN TAGALOG

i, too, am now forgetful
of bruises, of excoriation—

days the sun was shot,
tugged

from my eyes, then
buttoned deep

black oil-covered waters
under a bridge.

the truth is
i resemble my people

who keep forgetting
the names of domestic helpers

a bandwagon of roc-winged
planes brought

into guarded smart houses,
daughters

we didn't know,
each

with a burst head
when we cry,

sacked in a black plastic bag
deposited under the feet

of a near-finished skyscraper
or into a wood chipper.





POETRY

i am not afraid
of anything,

not anymore,
though i am a predator

to no one,
i want to be that

somebody who can say it
without thinking,

a spirited corpse
that doesn't look back,

except my partner's twisted
my head

so all i see is everything
behind.

the truth is
i can use my eyes

to sing just as much.
do you know

what i mean?
the sound of happiness.

each day i look for it,
i vigil

kasama ang mga kandilang
hindi nalulunod sa pagkaubos.



JULLEEBEE RANARA, 34

was raped then murdered then burnt then thrown in a desert in Kuwait—
whereas my partner saw me sleeping on the couch, my hands joined together

the way children begin a prayer. as if the voice of my fatigue, the breakdown
we keep to ourselves, calling your name

lost in a body that is no longer a body, could change anything. could bring you
back to playing with rocks and sand and captive insects—

when the word *house* is enough to build a house. but a house is only real when
you can live in it, married and with kids. it's everyone's best dream, the flight

to another country, the quietness of violence, how nonbrutal a peeled wire
but can still char the insides of rats. here, days grate fingertips

all the while replacing the warmest film in memory with a sequence of events
that end with nights refusing questions.

we use our mouth for surrender. a song in a small room without windows.
the people who rule our singing, the many names of god.

didn't a hole grow in your face when you called the wrong god? and a rear
hook turned your lights off when you said *no*.

i imagine your neighbours heard that you were just fine. cleaning chairs and
walls until they have the skin of the sea with glitters of sunshine.

the carpets oozing with the scent of jasmine and lilac. how scrubbing the
floor is a time to think of walking on grass, without sores and iron burns.

look at the hours we can afford, the lives we spend praying we don't get killed.
and look at you in your prime—hurt wearing a white uniform

who mothered gods, who made beds strings of a lullaby. you're more caring
than you could ever be, how it makes us employable, how we're taught to be

Filipino, a song in a small room without windows. it's everyone's best dream.





POETRY

IMAGINING MY HOMECOMING

reunion of a kind Filipinos know too well, a crowd of six standing
at the airport arrival area. in their faces the entrance to different days

a foreign man wakes and plucks the feathers of an animal tied to his bed
until the animal forgets hunger and the grating sound its captivity makes

and the view above trees. wind swirls in the tarmac, rippling, disentangling
a weave of ropes around boxes unloaded from the plane's cramped gut.

it's 1:15 in the afternoon. inside the head of a man who is a husband
dollars are exchanged into pesos and pesos are then divided into three—

one for his pregnant wife, another for the bungalow they want to build,
the third for his parents, in-laws. people push their lives back and forth.

it's 3:20 in the afternoon. a chocolate bar drops from a woman returning
for the first time in six years—a story of human trafficking and missed funerals.

as she looks: the gates open to a rainforest to a bus terminal in rust coated in silver
to dry-weather road to where fireflies torch the way when it gets dark to a brown dog

that remembers everybody to where one shall find something good about living.
all this is my home, she whispers. because what is home if not a field to which one

goes back, crossing through its ancient agonies carved within for the essential
shadows only of course to find them sitting on empty chairs, their clothes folded

still in the same cabinet you'd pushed your back against to see how tall you'd grown.
it's 6:10 and the sun begins to separate from the white trenches in the sky.

my sister takes a phone call, shakes her head. my father wrings a greyed towel
wet with tears, with sweat. my mother holding something invisible in her chest

runs to the stairs to a floor below. my grandmother, uncle, and aunt follow down
the way a clan of pigeons with a strong memory moves to a voice.





but i am quiet. i don't say i had to come back because my partner strangled me.
my grandmother bites her lips, glowering at the spread of black plastic on a table

as if it's a burning house. my father pounds the air. my mother hymns a song.
the wires in their mouths break as they open a cadaver bag to see me.



POETRY

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i heard
about it.
it was
our future.
we will
be searched.
something will
be found.
someone will
cry like
a burst kidney.
someone will
be killed.
more will
be killed.
more kidneys
will burst.
a child
will learn
how to bike
in cities
of graves.
a child
will learn
how to hold
the hair
of air
and call it
father.