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### Poem by Aimee Suzara



*“[T]he boat then possesses its own soul, which is fundamentally related to the tree that had been used for its construction.”*

—Maria Bernadette L. Abrera

### My Next Tattoo / A Promise

The *bangka* that would sit on my lower back  
Floats in twilight after a torch-lit night,  
Empty, anchored, buoyed over crabs  
And fishes, sharks and corals, seaweed flickering  
Above the ocean floor.

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I imagine this boat tattooed: the engraved  
Wings reaching in each direction  
Indicating those early sea voyages.

The wings form a question mark:  
Could I ever return to a home  
That is unstable, shifting?

The *bangka* on my altar is filled with rice,  
Sits beside the wooden purse my Lolo gave me  
Which once contained a map of the Philippines  
Which I've since misplaced  
As I've misplaced many important things.  
Beside this purse sits a picture of my Lolo,  
His feet propped on the gravestone  
Of our ancestor, so casually.  
Beside this photo sits one of him and his sister  
My Lola Remy, the teacher who kept  
Our ancestral home even after its foundation  
Was flooded by typhoons.

Maybe the *bangka* will take me home  
If I tattoo it on my back,  
Home as a shifting, unreal thing.

Will this home be a house, a foundation, the doors, slanted  
Wooden floors, where my cousin saw a hunched-over  
Ghost-woman waiting by the kitchen  
Upstairs, where my Lolo and Lola's marriage bed  
Bears their names etched into the headboard,  
Where the little dog that haunted my stories  
Whimpers as it pulls on its chain,  
Captive, as other dogs run the dusty village streets?

Home, as unstable idea,  
A construction  
Not even a construction, but a sketch,  
The blueprint, the promise  
Of an indestructible architecture, dreamed  
In light pencil on flimsy, ghost paper,  
The vision of this *bangka* on my back.  
The promise of a place  
To reside in:  
Is home like that?

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### Publishing Information

- Opening quote: "The Soul Boat and the Boat-Soul: An Inquiry into the Indigenous 'Soul'" by Maria Bernadette L. Abrera, *Philippine Social Sciences Review*, January 2007.

### Art Information

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Aimee Suzara is a Filipino-American poet, playwright, and performer based in Oakland, California. Her mission is to create, and help others to create, poetry and theater to provoke dialogue and social change. She is the author of the book *Souvenir* (WordTech Editions, 2014), was a finalist for the WILLA (Women Writing the West) Literary Award in 2015, and has been featured as a guest artist nationwide. Her poems have appeared in publications such as *Kartika Review*, *Lantern Review*, and the *California Language Association Journal*. Her theater work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and a YBCAway Award. She currently teaches at De Anza College in Cupertino, California.

For more information, visit [Aimee Suzara's website](#) [5] or on Twitter [@aimeesuzara](#) [6].

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