

Inday Dolls: Body Monologues and Lullabies for Freedom in Prison; Scripting Possible Futures in Justice Art in Iloilo's Correctional System

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ABSTRACT

The prison is not a dead end. Freedom is born in prison. Women in prison bounce back, resurrecting through their stories, reclaiming their bodies. This research investigates the politics of freedom, space, and body in prison. Women exercise their own sense of freedom navigating in a tight small crowded place through stories of objects, body lullabies, and archetypal ethnodrama. Women recreated new selves with new colors to light up their life in the darkest times.

Storytelling as a powerful tool for political and cultural assertion is essential in this research as a healing art process. The creative personal geography work makes women tell stories as a means of gathering parts of themselves back to one piece. Our work in freedom art we resonate

to the words of Estés, “Stories are medicine... They have such power...we need only to listen... Stories are embedded with instructions which guide us about the complexities of life” (Estés p 15-16). This performance research presents the body monologues of women in a space (read: prison) where time restricts liberty and memories of freedom collapse with dreams of emancipation. Through a series of creative and performative exercises this prison became a performance space animated with the living narratives of human stories of objects and as a site of compassion where an overflowing bodies intersected and shared the politics of tolerance, compassion and love.

This study examines Iloilo women’s resilience in an overcrowded prison. The study further investigates the context of “freedom in prison” inside the jail with 700% congestion in the Philippines. The Freedom-in-Prison project encompasses arts-informed research (Knowles and Cole, 2007) and performance research, and served as psychosocial intervention through the arts for women in detention, considered as Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL). In the Philippines with a population of over 100 million, more than 160,000 PDL are in detention, including 12,000 women. According to criminal justice scholar Raymund Narag in *State of PH in 2018: Our jails are now world’s most congested* published online by Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, “We are now officially the most overcrowded correctional facilities in the whole world: our 605% congestion rate is far ahead of Haiti’s 320%, the second most crowded” (2018). Narag, who was a former inmate and now a faculty at the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the Southern Illinois University Carbondale, decries the state of injustice within the confines of prison bars. Many of these inmates live in an overcrowded condition, some with 700-3,000% over-congestion rate, which still continues to rise.

As a direct response to the harsh situation in detention of PDLs in Iloilo City, Freedom-in-Prison research started in 2016. The study evolved into a “restorative social enterprise,” providing livelihood skills training to women PDLs and their children and families. This paper argues that artistic processes inside the prison halls and its critical-creative engagement is an imaginative restoration and has potential for

economic enterprise. In the Freedom-in-Prison project, the stories of the women were foregrounded and gathered through “stories of objects.” Stories of objects embody a creative process wherein the women PDL were asked questions on how they can potentially express their freedom inside the prison hall. Their answers were manifested through their fabric soft sculptures, such as dolls, as a way to tell their stories. The women’s stories are a complex juxtaposition of archetypal characters embroidered into dolls, called Inday dolls. *Inday* is a Visayan word for woman. If one is called *inday*, an indication of endearment is suggested, but over the years with rising poverty in the provinces, cases of extreme migratory movement and the influx of Visayan women to Manila, the capital of the Philippines, as domestic workers, the word shifted as *kasambahay* or helper/maid. Originally though, the word means “Miss” or “Mademoiselle” as a personal endearment or used as a title for a woman respected, adored, and loved. While for the Ilonggos in Panay region in Central Philippines, *inday* is a name that rings a euphonious sound of affection, but nowadays this word is nuanced with meanings of disempowerment and oppressions. However in theorizing empowerment and examining the possible futures of the oppressed women inside the prison, we decolonize the word *inday* and re-claim it as significant inspiration in mobilizing the narratives of these women, by bringing its original meaning and re-formulating its identity as a term that scripts stories of the futures. The women were tasked creatively in naming and claiming their identity through the “stories of objects” workshop. These Inday dolls were produced by women as art products that featured the artisanship and artistry of PDL.

Additionally, the women were organized to create a devised performance piece based on their interviews, that I (Zerrudo) conducted with my students. My co-writer, Dennis D. Gupa on the other hand, helped in the post-dramaturgical reflection of the performance and the analysis of Inday doll project within the framework of freedom art. While Gupa was not present in the creative workshops and actual performance inside the prison hall, he was aware of my freedom art projects. His works in the applied and community based theatre inform my theoretical tendencies in executing freedom art. Our long creative and academic work began when I invited him as a scholar in residence at the university where I work. We (Zerrudo and Gupa), write this article on freedom art from our mindful, conscious, overlapping, and intersecting theoretical dispositions. In this article the use of pronoun “we” includes Gupa and

the use of “I” refers to me (Zerrudo).

Four specific narratives of resilience were used in this performance research of women archetypes as basis for the dramaturgy. Prison art and the stories performed behind bars contend that the prison is not a dead end. In this paper, we, as co-writers narrate the process and performance analysis of the project that hopefully can contribute in the discourse of freedom art emerging from sites where continuing oppressions within the social, cultural, and political structures that entangle women inmates. By navigating the ethical complications of freedom art projects, we explored how the women in prison were able to bounce back, be resilient by giving them agency and able to engage with the themes of optimism and empathy within the sites of precarity. Through visual art and performance making processes with elements of storytelling, poetry performance, and body movement exercises, my students and I witnessed the commitment of the women inmates in creative art forms that engender collective energy of scripting new futures. Inspired by these activities, these women signified possible futures within the zone gutted by miseries and fires of anticipated freedom, like phoenix rising from the ashes and dancing in their lullabies.

Finally, we write this paper as a textualization of the often unwritten narratives of self-empathy and confidence that rupture an artistic thematization and performative exploration of freedom by women behind bars. By accessing semiotics as exegetic lens in reading the visual texts produced in their Inday dolls and the cogency of a self-meaning making processes, we contend that freedom art gives rise to a script of a possible future. This paper is a contribution to the growing interest in justice arts and social transformative art-making projects, gathering collective and individual stories in an exploration of personal geographies (Harmon, 2004) through body monologues and poetic inquiry (Prendergast, et al., 2009). By creating spaces of creativity that allows artistic agency to rise from the bodies of the women inmates and through an ethical practice of our freedom-art, we employed our indigenous cultural worldviews of *pagrespeto* (respect), *pakikisama* (fellowship) and *pakikipagkapwa tao* (sensing oneself to others). We also decided that all women PDL's names be changed herein to protect their identities.

I initiated the first phase of the project in Iloilo City, Philippines after getting the permission from the Iloilo City District Jail Female Dormitory.

During this phase, interviews with the women with signed consent form were conducted. The coded data during interviews became essential in the performance research, which then translated into visual theater juxtaposed with elements of ethnodrama and ethnotheatre put forward by Johnny Saldaña, a theatre practitioner and scholar. Saldaña defines ethnodrama as “the written script which consists of dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected through interviews, participant observation, field notes, journal entries, and/or print and media artifacts such as diaries, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, and court proceedings” (Saldaña to Hare 2007). Ethnotheatre is then the staged script, which uses “the traditional craft and artistic techniques of theatre production to mount for an audience a live performance event of research participants’ experiences and/or the researcher’s interpretations of data” (Saldaña to Hare, 2007). We advanced our practice of freedom art that uses *pagrespeto* (respect), *pakikisama* (fellowship) and *pakikipagkapwa tao* as ethics of creative and critical engagement and by borrowing Saldaña’s ideas of ethnodrama and ethnotheatre: “The narration, monologue, and dialogue must ring true to life and evoke the world of its participants. The live, intimate, real-time nature of ethnotheatre gives the audience member not a sense of “being there” but, during performance, “being here” (2005).

Guided by these principles, my students and I foregrounded the narratives of the women. Data drawn from the interviews, observations, and poetic biographies were formed as scripts. These personal narratives from the prison brought out rich poetic content, resulting in a performance text used in devised theater work. When interviewing the women, we realized that listening is not just a process of hearing the stories shared by women, but an act of performing empathy and care. And as artists-scholars, we were inspired by Neilsen’s (2004) words in shaping a creative-ethical encounter that happens between the women participants and the facilitators. She puts it plainly:

Poetry and inquiry ask us to listen deeply. We must put ourselves in the context; we must feel, taste and hear what someone is saying. Sometimes we must learn to listen under the words, to hear what is not being said. We must be empathetic, aware, non-judgmental, and cautious. (to Prendergast, et al., 2009)

Referencing this quote on listening, we remember the Visayan word “*pamati*” which means shared listening. Its root word “*mati*” literally means, to listen. My students and I brought the practice of *pamati*, as method of engaging to the stories of these women. Linking this act of listening to theorizing is in itself a creative process of decolonizing that is needed in freedom art project, as this ethical practice mobilizes and engages an awareness of the feelings while listening to the participants who live in sites or spaces of precarity. The practice of *namamati* allows the facilitators ethical accountability to these women.

Gathering the women who have been subjected to intense criminal processes, confinement, and emotional miseries, this project repurposed the prison hall as a new zone of freedom by allowing the women to script their narratives by constructing Inday dolls. Shared listening in creating these dolls is not just a method but includes an ethic and generative act of individual/collective agentive sculptural/performative art process. We continue to draw our inspiration from the words of Neilsen who asserts that “we owe our participants and ourselves nothing less” (Neilsen to Prendergast et al., 2009). The poetic texts are a powerful collective testament of the unthinkable trauma in prison. Women boldly transform angst and pain into poems and stories candidly, with delicateness, truthfulness, humour, care, and courage.

In our experience and through our self-reflexivity, doing arts that examines justice, Freedom-in-Prison investigates the undercurrents of the authoritarian institutional penology where the body is walled and the morality of the women prisoners are subjected into confined rehabilitation and management. Within the processes of this state-imposed penology and rehabilitative initiative, the facilitators of freedom art create a politics of space where the politics of disaster embedded in the women’s stories are celebrated and revealed. As artists facilitating this project and examining the signification of the post-performance, we began the process by asking ourselves this question: What is the culture of women in prison and/or prison for women? Answering this question means allowing the women to exercise their own sense of freedom, as they constantly navigate in a tight small crowded place. By bringing the arts in their space my students and I facilitated a creation of a mental space for healing and re-imagining a renewed self with new colors (as evidenced by the various textiles of Inday dolls) to light up their life in the darkest times.

In foregrounding the relevance of stories in freedom arts we were inspired by the American poet, Jungian psychoanalyst, post-trauma recovery specialist, author and spoken word artist Clarissa Pinkola Estés, who states: “Stories are medicine...They have such power; they do not require that we do, act anything—we need only to listen... Stories are embedded with instructions which guide us about the complexities of life. Stories enable us to understand the need for the ways to raise a submerged archetype” (2005). We read “stories as medicine” (Estés, 2005) as a powerful tool for the political and cultural assertion that is essential in this research as a healing art process. The creative personal geography work makes women tell stories as a means of gathering parts of themselves back to one piece. In recent work in Prison Theatre, my students and I have witnessed how the potency of telling stories open spaces where participants remake themselves and breathe in new life to a new self, a new body, a new way of thinking about life. For some women, telling stories is like singing to one’s deep old wounds, tending to the pain and caressing the calloused skins. Listening to one’s own story opens new arms embracing the old self. For example, Nanay Maria found a new family much more loving than her own inside the prison. She feels she is no longer alone. According to her, being heard and accepted by the collective is her redemption and affirmation.

The following paragraphs of this paper outline our reflections as artists and scholars theorizing freedom art and working with women who turned into performers and visual artists. Although there is a sense of temporality of them being artists, we perceive that their participation had a profound impact to the way they imagine their lives outside the halls of prison.

ART TRANSCENDS PAIN

This project provides us a connective reflections of how these women behind bars carry a natural predilection for artistic production that appertain to self-empowerment with deep emotionality and wisdom. Witnessing them create Inday dolls and emote stories for performance, we contend that every woman in the prison hall is a culture bearer, and given more opportunities for art and cultural training, they can be a repository of wisdom. In Philippine mythology, Filipina women are depicted as spirit warriors. They can be a counterpart of the women in the indigenous communities who are the exemplary artisans like mat

weavers. In Basey, Samar it is an age old tradition that women gather under the Sohoton cave in Guirang Village, drying wild *tikog*¹ grass and weaving together as a daily artistic chore. Even in the aftermath of the superstorm, this is the source of strength as the grandmother's thread held them together as one community to rebuild their lives together. The extraordinary handwoven mats interlaced effortlessly with colorful *tikog* by these ordinary housewives and unschooled artisans symbolize the capacity of women in engaging in a symbolic re-imagination of their world. This village is the source of exemplary artisanship handed down in a school without walls but breathes a living tradition. Mirroring these women weavers to the women behind bars allows us self-reflexivity in observing, participating, co-creating, facilitating and even theorizing freedom art with the women who end up in prison, which we feel is a great loss in exercising their imagination.

Responding to the women's rehabilitation program through the arts, we believe that art making is a creative process where women express their painful stories through stories of objects. Art gives birth to ideas, makes invisible visible, and transcends the personal narratives to meaningful objects as artworks. The performance does not happen on stage, the storytelling happens during the process of art-making through embroidery, beadwork, and the doodling of threads and pens.

The Freedom-in-Prison project proactively engaged with incarcerated women within the context of psycho-social support. These female PDLs exercised their own sense of freedom navigating in an intensely crowded place, through art workshops which finally gave birth to Hilway² art products—where they were free to re-imagine a new self with new colors to light up their life in the darkest times—resisting the mechanisms of injustice that portray them as others and captives of the law.

POLITICS OF SPACE

The politics of space is often a major issue in the process of restorative art making. The Freedom-in-Prison workshops in Iloilo City District Jail

¹ Scientific name is *Fimbristylis Globulosa*; belonging to a grass family this type of reed plant is ubiquitous in Samar Island, Philippines.

² In Hiligaynun, the language spoken by women inmates, the word "*Hilway*" means, "freedom".

Female Dormitory is voluntary with an average number of 10-20 participants per workshop confined in a very small area out of the total 330 square meters where everything happens at the same time. The jail population totals more or less 23 PDL with 22 personnel with a ratio of 22:1 personnel. The total cell area is 120 sq.m. which is meant ideally for 25 PDL based on international standard. The present area has a ratio of 1 prisoner to 4:7 sq.m. area. The facility originally good for 30 women, accommodated more than 232 women ages 18-65 years old. The only space for workshops is the multi-purpose area which serves as visiting, sleeping, eating, worship, resting, and working areas.

Women learned to navigate in such a congested detention space, and painted a picture in their own words of a place: “longing, clammy, dark, overcrowded, crammed full, painful, remorse, sticky hot, bitter, dreamlike, sacrifice, failure, exhausting, excruciating, scary, terrifying, hardship, shortage of food...” One called it a room where all dreams cease to exist. On the contrary some women considered the crowded room as “sweet, a place full of love, a place for change, a place to repent sins, enlightenment, a new heaven, a life.”

For some, being in detention is redemption from being killed in the streets or abused in their own homes. Some suffered many years without family support and visitation. The normal trial could last six months, but the majority of the women are still on trial for five to ten years. More than 91% are accused of violating Republic Act No. 9165 Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 Section 5 (selling) and 11 (possession). In many circumstances during the workshops that I conducted with my students, this multi-purpose area was treated not just as a physical space but as a platform for an agentive and collective project of imagination. Just like the *tikog* of the mat weavers of Basey, Samar, these women weaved their stories in confinement and were permitted without shame to re-imagine their world by symbolically performing these stories and sculpting Inday dolls, rupturing new futures outside the halls of incarceration.

STORIES OF OBJECTS



The women's stories were spontaneous outbursts, reflections, supplications, and lullabies expressed as poetic tag lines for the Inday dolls. The prose, poetry, and tag lines created by the women as their personal narratives were coded for analysis. The coding resulted in several categories which spoke of family, relationships, parent-child issues, body, sexuality, dreams, memories, spiritual quotes, prayers, humor, jokes, dreams, visions, and objects with embedded memories of hope. The narratives were further categorized based on archetypes such as mother/caregiver, lover, heroine, explorer, warrior, worker,

believer, traveler, and jester.

By acknowledging the significance of the concept of archetypes, we draw our inspiration from Carl Gustav Jung, who used the concept of archetype in his theory of the human psyche. He believed that universal, mythic characters—archetypes—reside within the collective unconscious of people the world over. Archetypes represent fundamental human motifs of our experience as we evolved; consequentially, they evoke deep emotions (Golden, 2019). These archetypes served as our framework in understanding motivations based on the candid, instinctive, and spontaneous expressions of the women in their personal narratives. The majority of the women evoked the mother or caregiver archetypes, which can be easily connected to matriarchal society with close family ties in the Philippines. The lover archetype was also very strong as a natural tendency to desire human connection and touch for women who are deprived of basic human needs.

Women in prison embrace freedom in different archetypal characters who are powerful, traditional, indigenous, eternal, mystical, modern, engendered, no gender, misfits, single, mother, grandmother, and wild women. An inter generation of women stories played multiple roles as the artist, dreamer, believer, carefree, caretaker, innocent, leader, listener, warrior, lover (seductress), creator, jester (joker), sage, boss (ruler), magician (free spirit), and gatherer of stories (*chismosa*). These archetypes also represent our powerful characters such as the Inday Bato as the women born on drug trade; Inday Gugma as the lover; Inday OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker), and the Inday Nanay as mother, caregiver, and believer who leave everything to God's mercy. All as one woman fighting her own villains and demons, for only when she faces her own truth and accepts her own weakness, she becomes a heroine, and she becomes free. Her truth is her freedom.

SIGNIFICANCE OF OBJECTS ON STAGE

Bodies are stories. Stories as art objects. Each object carries a story. Bodies tell stories as repository of pain, experience, dreams, memories, death, and life. The stories of each woman come alive on stage as a result of ethnographic performative inquiry represented by objects on stage. The following are the names of objects on stage that represent the stories of the women in our devised performance inside the prison

hall. The beaded hammock (*duyan*) of dreams was woven by several women as they tried to weave their dreams together through their lines, colors, and symbols. The “*duyan*” as the powerful symbol of the mother singing to her child captures the essence of the bittersweet ordeal of “mothering behind bars.” Many of the women in prison are mothers, and the story of one woman encapsulate the essence and struggle of a mother.

The chessboard is the metaphor of the game of life that makes one either win or lose. The objects were related to women’s everyday life such as pawns as sandal, bishop as bag, rook as umbrella, and queen as woman. Women fight to reclaim their own territory and power in society. When in the worst scenario with all odds against her, she fights back with love, compassion, gratitude, remorse, wit, and humour to conquer the adversaries in life. On the other hand, the delay of justice and inhuman ordeal of incarceration toughens her resolve as she dreams of a way out or freezes at a dead end.

The Healing Tapestry; Light inside the darkness reflects the symbols of faith activating the light inside each one as a prayer mat for women who wish to be alone with God. The *Piko* (hopscotch) represents the land and history of our ancestors where local motifs of Panay Bukidnon are embedded to highlight the cultural identity of our people. This game also is a metaphor of how women evolved from their innocence until they stepped into the dangers of society, dysfunctional families, or abusive relationships as harsh challenges in order to earn a personal space in this world. *Bato, bala, bata* (drugs, bullets and children) is the representation of the painful cycle of a person being hooked on drugs or either involved in the drug trade which is over 91% of the cases of women in this prison. A bullet has already wounded a child before he or she is born.

The Wings of Freedom (beaded brassiere), the embroidery brings out the bright colors of the heart. All of the beadwork on the “bras” unleashes the intimate reflection of the hidden emotions of women. The coming out of the women in their beadwork is also the “freedom” of their expressions and the coming out of their dreams, hopes and self-worth. *Barangay sa panglakataon* (Beaded boat) is a symbol of the journey of women who left their families hoping for a brighter future but ended up in prison. Finally the Inday Doll (beaded doll) is the story of each of the women for each story is a powerful, iconic portrait of self.

The theater making as a devised piece evolved from the written and spoken stories, which gave birth to characters. The women told their stories through their beadwork and embroidered tapestry, naming and claiming their identity in a process that expressed a symbolic representation of their life stories. The Inday dolls are not just mere objects but material portraits of the women that reflect the prison psychology, collective memory, personality archetypes, and personal stories. The creative process of sewing, doodling, beading, and stitching is the organic performance of the everyday, where inner personal monologues intertwine with the conversations happening between women. Manaf believes:

While the natural coping mechanism may be there in women's physiology, courage can be learnt and can be taught. We strongly recommend that prison curriculum include programmes which will harness on women prisoners expressing themselves (to conquer their fear and practice courage) especially through creative writing or creative art work. (2016)

Stories are a pathway to memory making. In the Philippine Northern ethnic group such as Kalinga, people make sure their stories are not forgotten by embedding or tapping ink on skin like the tattoos. *Batok (tattoos): Body as Archive* is a book written by a Filipina social anthropologist that showcases a traditional art form where "permanent visual record of the biography and memories of the person underneath the skin" (Amores, 2017). Traditional tattooing like *batok* of the Cordilleran people of the Northern Philippines employ several body inking techniques of inscribing stories, symbols, and status in the body. Like the traditional tattooing process, these women inmates involved in the freedom art project engaged in visual memory making by telling stories through thread and needle marked on a different skin, the textile. In this textile they encode their status as women in the community they wish to live, love, and share light. Their stories are inscribed through threads and embroidery, resulting in a rich textual material that served as personal slogans and artist statements.

BODY GEOGRAPHY AND SOFT SCULPTED POETRY

Words and bodies of memories are the major inspirations of the

narrative in which bodies become stories and stories become art objects. Each object carries a story, a personal “*hugot*.” “*Hugot*” can be a derivative of several Hiligaynon nuances such as *ugot* (disgust), *kagat* (grit), *ugot* (rage), *siagit* (shout), *akig* (angst), *buya* (release), etc.... These words rapture sources of creativity and inspiration for the rendition of creative works—a verbal iteration and textual manifestation of the inner anxiety and frustrations of these women artists moved through the threads and embroidery. Through bodily poetic renditions, Inday dolls are born as the manifestation of women’s way of reclaiming their bodies and freedom in prison. In this process, we reflected on the artist Frida Kahlo, the Mexican painter who painted her struggles and pain not only to show the world how she suffered, but to give the world a deeper insight of her vulnerable life, and most of all to show her strength. Her paintings seem to be a meaningful roadmap of her existence. Kahlo mused, “I paint self-portraits because I am the person I know best. I paint my own reality. The only thing I know is that I paint because I need to and I paint whatever passes through my head without any consideration” (Mehta 2019, adapted from Kahlo).

In one person, Kahlo embodies the many hearts and the multiple wounds that live inside a woman’s body. Her stories in her paintings are far beyond her time that echoed the pain as surreal protests on her canvas. The life of Kahlo existed in many pages just like revisiting the museums of the dead, for she had died many times being a “wife” and lover to a woman-hungry man. Similarly, the personal narratives from the women in the Freedom-in-Prison project are the encyclopedia of “*hugot*” of the PDLs who volunteered their personal stories through their artworks. In the personal narratives of the women, there are so many underlying tones, temperaments, meanings, and emotions as the Inday Dolls poetic tag lines have a rich texture of poetic substance. The poetic texts are powerful collective testaments of the unthinkable trauma in prison. The women inmates boldly transcend their excruciating pain of leaving a family and being implicated in a crime, into poems and stories with truthful visual and performative representations of their deepest wounds with wisdom and sometimes humour. The textual narratives become part of a traveling Inday dolls exhibit, the other version is sewn together into a fabric book of Inday Monologues.

STORIES HEAL

In her book *Truth Heals: What You Hide Can Hurt You*, Deborah King exposes her own truth to help others face their own truth, asserting, “What we try to hide hurts us. The truth heals us” (2009). Women fight the battle by facing their fears, taking charge of their own emotions and thought processes. Telling the truth is also taking back a healthy mental and physical state of being. Embracing truth can heal. As King put it:

Telling the truth is about freedom. It is about joy and peace and health and living a life that is meaningful, powerful, connected and loving. Ultimately, telling the truth is about feeling good in your own skin, unencumbered, free, and having the life that you want to live... we cannot live a lie and have joy. True peace and joy are manifestations of living our personal truth. (King, 2009)

We read “stories as medicine” (Estés, 1992) and use them as powerful tool for political and cultural assertion. Stories in this project function in the healing process of a wounded body by means of personal and creative re-imagination of painful memories into lullabies, object stories and body monologues. In attempting this re-imagination, women tell stories as a means of gathering parts of themselves back to one piece, and singing to deep old wounds, tending to the pain and caressing the calloused skins. Listening to one’s own story opens new arms embracing the old self.

A SPACE OF COMPASSION WITH OVERFLOWING BODIES

The physical space shared by hundreds of growing numbers of inmates is a living reality of harsh human condition. But on the other hand, a tight small space is shared with tolerance, compassion, and love. There are contrasting overflows, the lows and highs of human existence. A room of strangers share an intense mental and emotional space which serves as a venue for psychosocial intervention. With such human resources, the prison with overflowing bodies becomes a complex scenario of live performance and role play.

The detention cell is a challenging space where life-changing lessons are learned and celebrated in the context of freedom in prison. When the physical space is limiting and debilitating, women show resilience, and ways to comfort and support each other. The art making

process is a meaningful exercise to create a mental space to help in the rehabilitation with humanity and compassion. One of the greatest gifts of a human to the world is the freedom of creation and expression. According to the women, to create means freedom, the one who continues to love is free.

MOTHERING BEHIND BARS

Mothering deeply carries the qualities of unconditional love. Mothering behind bars is the most empowering scene, seeing women find a way to exercise their freedom to support their children and family as breadwinners. Nanay³ Kakay, in her deepest sadness, remorseful of her actions, but nonetheless brave in facing her own realities is quoted: “Prison has taught me many lessons in life. Prison gave me a new life, a new way of seeing, a new way of loving. A kind of freedom I never experienced when I was in the outside world.” What women say about prison is strikingly interesting, for it is lonely and painful, but the same place that gave them hope, strength, and courage to face their own truth. Nanay Daday, another young inmate said, “If I’m not inside, I would have been found dead on the streets. It is better that I am alive inside. I have no life anyway outside. Here, I found a new family among my friends and I found a new me.” Before, prison had a stigma for being such a notorious place, though it has slowly transformed its programs, still it is not a place to dream of.

The personal narratives of these inmates reveal a picture of women becoming and turning as mothers of different generations. One mother, Nanay Lalay vowed to stop another generation of her family from ending up in jail, especially her children: “My mother died in prison. My father and brother are in different prisons serving life. My two sisters are with me in the same jail. I don’t want this to happen to my children. This curse has to stop.” Some of the women who left behind children and families are breadwinners and continue to earn inside the prison from washing clothes or giving massage to earn extra money to continue to send their children to school—they continue to mother behind bars.

The then jail warden Imee S. Lopera (ICDJ FD in Iloilo), shared the positive impact of the project in a testimonial program saying in context,

³ *Nanay* is a Tagalog word for Mother. Another iteration of the word is *Inay* or *Nay*.

Freedom-in-Prison project did not only help financially as a creative enterprise for women but most especially as a psychosocial support. When women are busy making art, the jail was quiet and peaceful. There were less or no fights and bickering, which can result to chaos and physical assault. The women were contained and focused in their art works that serves as therapy and positive diversion from many women issues such as sexual repression, menopausal syndrome, hormonal imbalances, psychological trauma, and physical irritability.

The process of art making brings the women to a meditative healing space as a temporary sense of freedom from the everyday harsh realities of the prison environment.

Author of *Long Walk to Freedom* and former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela said, “When a man is denied the right to live the life he believes in, he has no choice but to become an outlaw....It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones” (Mandela, 1995). The famous quote speaks about how jail is a mirror of a nation. In a country with a crumbling social justice system and where extrajudicial killings⁴ are perpetuated everyday by the highest ruler of the nation and the jails are never a transformative space but an infernal site of death, we listen to the stories of women inmates, celebrate their work of arts and watch them perform their monologues. They become *kapwa* (fellow)—contributors of life in a community hinge from what the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh calls, “interbeing” (Hanh, 2009). *Kapwa* and “interbeing” re-enforce our belief that art impacts the lives of other people. Ordinary people who have dared to love and make a difference in their community through art are very contagious: “Artists have roles as agent in transformation that are more socially viable than mainstream art world roles” (Goldbard, 2009). We

⁴ Philippine Senator Antonio Trillanes divulged that the war on drug spearheaded by Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte resulted to deaths of “more than 20,000” Filipinos. As quoted in [Aljazeera](#), Trillanes said, “While the country continues to laugh at the lewd jokes of Duterte, more than 20,000 of our countrymen have been killed” (Regencia, 2018). Online news website, [Rappler](#), reports that according to the Philippine National Police records, “...4,540 drug suspects have been shot dead in anti-drug operations...” (Talabong, 2018).

believe that every human being has infinite possibilities, tapping into the potentials of incarcerated women could also mean digging into a gold mine of powerful creative force.

ACADEME OPENS ITS DOORS

As part of the academic service learning, the classroom opens its doors to immerse students in social justice based curriculum and serve the community. This becomes an opportunity for our students to have an engaged, hands-on, critically conscious immersive learning environment and research-informed art practice. The University of San Agustin (USA), in collaboration with the Iloilo City District Jail Female Dorm (ICDJFD) as initiated by the USA Fine Arts Major Organization (FAMO) opened the doors to community-engaged work and a multi-sectoral and intergenerational practice of art making that aims critical empathic discourse on justice art. This creative-led research which originally started as “Freedom-in-Prison” has involved my students in the workshops, product development, bazaars, and art fair for display, sales, and exhibitions of the art product. A funding grant from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts supported the initial product development.

According to Boyer, “The Scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to your schools, to our teachers and to our cities....” (Boyer, 1990; as cited in King-Jupiter, et al, 2008). The education inside the four corners of the classroom is nothing if this is not applied to impact the community.⁵

⁵ Zerrudo’s students in cooperation with the Fine Arts Major Organization (FAMO) of the University of San Agustin, Iloilo design team were directly involved in various activities in the formulation of Freedom-in-Art Project, including a fundraising project where they pitched the project at the Youth South East Asian Initiative (YSEALI) Seeds for the Future by the US Mission for the ASEAN. The project, Hilway (freedom) Art Project was chosen as one of the top 20 social enterprises by Bank of Philippine Island Accelerate Program and the Bayan Academy in 2018. FAMO, an organization under the supervision of Zerrudo, has produced a Walk to Freedom fashion story to showcase the personalized creations made by PDL to represent their stories outside the prison hall. What started as a class project and professorial research of Zerrudo has evolved into a restorative social enterprise.

REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

The authors believe in storytelling as a tool for cultural assertion and a weapon for transformative education. Storytelling is likewise essential in this research as a healing art process. The results of this short engagement used the unconventional principles of art-making in the context of “stories of objects.” The most important part of the experience was the learning process with organic unfolding of each woman’s narrative. Estés’ philosophy frames the intention of this soul work: “The ‘craft of making’ is an important part of the work.... Art is important for it commemorates the season of the soul, or a special or tragic event in the soul’s journey. Art is not just for oneself, not just a marker of one’s own understanding. It is also a map for those who follow after us” (Estés, 1992). Art is not just about making objects or paintings or products, it is seeing the unseen and creating a portrait of the soul.

This real human situation in the prison is the ultimate test to a human being. The real encounters with the women made the author believe more in the capacity of an “*Inday*” Ilongga woman to cope with intense human hardships in the culture of resilience, tolerance, spirituality, and acceptance. Aside from family support, other PDLs even without visitors for many years, gained from the culture of intimacy of extended family support and the compassion of other inmates. Alma Quinto, a Filipina visual artist who metaphorized art as a womb, says “I see art as a womb—compact, snug, and warm—a shelter that nurtures, provides comfort, and offers protection. When the womb gives birth to an idea and fosters exchange and dialogue, it brings people and cultures together...” (Quinto, unpublished research). The art making served also as a refuge or escape from the discomfort and everyday torture of the congestion. Somehow the creative workshops revealed the “beauty” of each one, and brought a common ground to reach out to one another.

Human creativity is boundless and a synergy of women doing art together transforms the space into a supportive healing environment. The subtle experience of shared space is life weaving energies and emotions and minds into a nest of comfort and understanding. The politics of space and body brings a crucial discourse in the prison as women navigate their own sense of freedom and expression. Above all, where women thrive, one can see resilience, love, and compassion even in the worst places such as an overcrowded prison. The Inday Dolls serve as an agentive object that gives voice to the women, not just those who were imprisoned, but those who are in the peripheries. For the

women, Inday is no longer a poor province girl or domestic helper or woman inmate, but a strong resilient woman who continues to stand up for her family by mothering behind bars. According to one PDL recently released who survived after committing suicide inside the jail, the Inday doll project gave her purpose in life.

The arts-based process has been life-changing to both the researchers and the participants. The purpose-driven initiative brought the art works of the women around the globe. The Inday Dolls Project has been presented as a research project in local and international audiences. initially as “Stories of Objects from Indigenous to Contemporary; A presentation with performance installation” at Artful Inquiry Symposium at McGill University, Montreal in 2016. Zerrudo’s research paper, “Freedom-in-Prison, Prison-in-Freedom” was awarded Best Paper in the 4th National Conference on Social Justice in the University of Cebu, Philippines in 2017. In the same year, the paper was presented at the International Conference on Education and Global Studies in Kyoto, Japan. Another opportunity came when Zerrudo shared this project at the New York University’s Forum on “Performance as Activism” in 2018. The Inday dolls exhibition, coupled with performance and workshops, has reached and engaged with both local and international audiences.

Museo Pambata, a famous children's museum in Manila, hosted an art for healing workshop in which Zerrudo was the facilitator of children of victims of extra judicial killings during the exhibition of the Hilway Stories of Objects in 2018. On the other hand, Got Heart Gallery hosted the *Hilway Art Exhibit; Mothering Behind Bars* in 2018. In time for the Mother’s Day Celebration, Zerrudo delivered an Art Talk with an art exhibition hosted by Kularts at Bindlestiff Studio, in San Francisco, California. Thankful for the Filipino-American communities, Zerrudo was supported to exhibit her Inday dolls in two cities in the USA in the same year. *Ilongga Matters; Mothering Behind Bars* was exhibited at Purple Yam, Brooklyn, New York.

By tracing the impetus of our freedom art project, we are also historicizing the globality of Inday dolls as an act of articulating the value of justice in spaces of precarity in the Philippines, including the many prison halls through local, national, and transnational freedom art engagements. We write this article using the light that the women inmates have shared to our lives and we will continue to tell their stories

until their scripts of new futures have become a reality.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Ma Rosalie Abeto Zerrudo bridges multi-characters as cultural worker, performance and visual multi-media artist. Her lifework in the Philippines gifted her a complete workshop. She combines her background in BA Psychology, and MA Educational Theater (New York University) as community-engaged culture-based art practice she calls soul work. The process-based people-centered approach employs restorative creative process, intuitive spontaneity, memory making, ritual performance, music poetry, ephemeral installography and restorative social enterprise.

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