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“*from* achiote”; “*from* tidelands”; “*from* The Micronesian Kingfishers”

CRAIG SANTOS PEREZ

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from **achiote**[1]

~

the achiote plant is indigenous to central and south america and the carribean. it was transported across the pacific to southeast asia by the spanish colonialists.

the achiote has been traced back to the mayans, who used it as a food spice and dye, as body paint for war and rituals, and as pigments for arts, crafts, and murals. the leaves, roots, and bark have been utilized for their medicinal qualities.

you can find achiote powder in the ethnic foods aisle of most grocery stores.

~

my grandmother leans over the achiote plant and picks its ripe “shells” our hands among the red veined leaves “an attractive pink flower made it a popular hedge plant in colonial gardens” “ahi” she says when i touch the flowers

“don’t touch your eyes”

—the frail blind body of father sanvitores [1672]

is led around by a rope tied to his waist he refused glasses because "if the poor were too poor for glasses" etc a small satchel: a breviary, a new testament, lumps of sugar for children who could recite their prayers and catechism lessons

flagellation physics *disciplina* a cilice

he is always "i fi'on-mu" : a sunday school warning: if you don't say your prayers you wake with bruises [no : ahi]

[achiote can be used to treat skin problems, burns, venereal disease, and hypertension]

we carry the shells to her porch and deseed their red hearts place them in aluminum trays

shining beneath the territorial sun—

annatto, in english "a poor man's saffron" "lipstick tree"

our hands stain red— our nails—

he baptized children in "agua bendita" and other waters become no longer holy—

"teach them the way to heaven" he built a church in hagatna where i was baptized

my grandfather buried

renee surrounded by plumeria

he named us—

—hale'ta —haga'ta

and when I rubbed my stained hands on my face and threw stones at the sky my grandmother called me "mata'pang"

[achiote can be used to treat heartburn, fever, and sore throat]

the shrine of father sanvitores shows him baptizing chief mata'pang's newborn daughter, despite the fact that mata'pang did not give him permission. the baby is held by her mother and mata'pang is shown from behind wielding his machete.

*[*after the death of sanvitores, the native population dropped from 200,000 to 5,000 in two generations as a result of spanish military conquest]*

[near you : i fi'on-mu]

they dragged his body into a proa and sailed to tumon bay tied stones to his feet and threw him beyond the reef they say he rose three times before finally drowned

tumon from tomhom, from "ti apmam homom" [our roots : hale'ta]

[our blood : haga'ta]

~

spanish soldiers erected a small chapel of coral masonry and a cross where san vitores was killed not far from where magellan landfallen

every april, a red tide of unialgal blooms covers tumon bay they say it is the miraculous appearance of the blood of san vitores! apuya pale'!

– i gima as pale' [at father's house] it's [getting dark : ti apmam homom]

[achiote can be used to treat liver and blood disease, eye and ear infections, and digestive problems]

my grandmother helped wash my face in her outdoor sink that she used to clean chickens she told me her father held her hand and took her to the cliff's edge overlooking tumon bay to see his blood that looked to her like hair

in tumon, you can stay at the Hilton, Westin, Grand Plaza, Marriot, Hyatt, Holiday Inn— the hotels are located off "Pale' San Vitores Road" which runs parallel to "Marine Drive" now renamed "Marine Corps Drive"

the shrine of father san vitores nestled between Guam Reef Hotel and Sails Restaurant—

"motives for not delaying further the conquest and instruction of the island of the thieves"*

my grandmother used the achiote to make chalikiles and hineksa agaga so young when the japanese invaded and renamed hagatna "akashi" —the "red city" "bright red stone"

later "reports" claimed that mata'pang sold the ivory crucifix for thirty bags of rice

"mata'pang" used to mean "proud and brave" used to mean "alert eyes" —he led the rebellion against the spanish before he was captured and killed—

now it means "silly" or "rude" or "misbehaved" or "uncivil"

[achiote was used to stop bleeding. was used as an antivenom for snake bites. was used to heal wounds]

from **tidelands**

taut
“shadows almost” visible be-
low the dispersal of “forms – swathe” this
small touch “no maps sown” to hallow

[tano]

hold “alms that shell” this pulse

~

[tano : land, soil, earth, ground]

~

from **tidelands**

"sieved
of breath" to recover – brief
sounds kneaded "into sand buried" as
currencies "define" the ruins

now shored –

[tasi] of "endless thresh-

~

[tasi : sea, ocean]

~

from **tidelands**

"if
fires" – strangle this "forced tongue" let
wind – shield the culled – remains as [langet] –
an arrangement "of opening

language

among common" debris

~

[langet : sky, heaven]

~

from **The Micronesian Kingfishers**
halcyon c. cinnamomina / sihek [in Chamorro]

1

What does not change / is the will to colonize

I was still awake. I remembered no birds, how
when I entered the jungle was
emptied of bright blue, green, turquoise, red,
gold feathers. Everywhere, brown
tree snakes, avian
silence.

Yes, they have been talking strategically about Guam.
The snakes entered without a word. When we saw them, they were at our doors,
but it did not matter, they were already sliding along
the passages of the night, finding themselves
in the routes of empire. "The Micronesian kingfishers!
were last sighted
on Guam
in 1988."

Their words had been: "Species Survival Plan." Suddenly everyone,
captured and transferred 29 Micronesian Kingfishers to
U.S. Zoos for captive breeding. They stared
at the birds, gasped,
they repeated and repeated, could not go beyond their thought
"If it weren't for zoos, the Micronesian Kingfisher would be
gone forever"

It was then the birds vanished.

2

I thought of Chief Gadao's drawing on stone, and of what Chief Hurao "said" *[1671]*
"Mungnga hit

but i sihek

numana'falingu ånimu

but i sihek was transported to the states

put ini na achåki!"

They got the color of their breasts
from the blood of our veins!

The exterior features : quarter inch plywood screened mesh cage front,
bumpers, burlap shield over screened mesh. Interior
ceiling : foam rubber or burlap stuffed with straw. External
minimum size : 9 in. x 9 in. Internal
height : minimum 10 in. clearance between floor and
ceiling padding. Perching : 0.5 in diameter.
The recommended minimum enclosure
size for breeding pairs is 10 ft. x 8 ft. with a height of 10 ft. Containment
should be either solid material, wire mesh, or glass. For wire
enclosures, mesh size should not exceed one inch. There
have been several cases in which kingfishers have attacked
their images reflected in glass
cage fronts. These
are the features. Not the legends.
The birds are
birds. Almost all dead, inside snake belly, *i sihek*
will not spread seeds in tradewinds,
or avert pests. Nor, without nest,
birth eggs to still the open
air.

It's true, it's difficult to place nest logs at this height
in captivity, attempts should be made to hang nest logs as high
as is reasonable. The National Zoo has had success using a pulley
system to lower and raise
the nest log in order to check for eggs,
with minimal disturbance to the birds. Logs have been placed in
several orientations with success. The most common
is vertical placement, but pairs have successfully excavated
and used logs that were placed horizontally, and those that have been placed with the core
of the log exposed
so that the pair had access to the soft, rotted
center
without excavating
through the hard outer bark.
On these simulacra—
(nest logs should be a minimum of 2 ft. in length with a diameter of no
less than 15 in.) i sihek is born and fed and grows.

Hurao concluded:
"…ta na'ta'lo tåtte
i minagof yan
i minåolek lina'lå'-ta"

3

When snakes arrive / the jungle
dies
even the latde stones break
i taotaomo'na rive

Or,
enter
our current colonizer we naturally depend upon
he makes us into himself

But the glyph
cut so deep in Chief Gadao's cave
resounds,
is still heard

as, in another time, were treasures abused

(and now, now, listen, hands hold
the endangered)

"A rare Micronesian kingfisher hatched at the National Zoo's Conservation and Research Center—the chick weighed 5.5 grams [2004]

"Our newest pair of Micronesian kingfishers at the San Diego Zoo is currently raising a chick [2007]

"Two of Guam's endangered Micronesian kingfishers were released from quarantine at the Department of Agriculture. The female birds arrived on Guam about a month ago from the Philadelphia Zoo (both were hatched at the St. Louis Zoo), courtesy of Continental Airlines PetSafe Program [2008]

"A Micronesian kingfisher recently hatched earlier this month at the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago [2009]

"The Saint Louis Zoo has hatched 41 chicks since 1985. Recent modifications to Bird House habitats have now made it possible to house a pair of these rare birds for visitors to see :

In this instance, the keepers
(in white lab coats, and sterilized,
their hair matted with light, and flowing angelically
over our shoulders)
rush in among our people, calling on us
to protect the birds

Yet all is still colony.

What peace?
What sweet democracy? Who stole
our land?

4

Not one trespass but many,
the accumulation of theft, the flag-whip proves, the flag-whip is
the law

Into our ancestral land we can't step
When land is polluted we are polluted
No one remains, nor will, island

Around our disappearance, one common truth, we grow up
caged. Else how is it,
if we remain still caged,
will we take pleasure now
in what keeps us in captivity? love
Amerika? assimilate and/or vote? use
their words, adopt their habits, have
only speech, skin, wisdom, body
in mimicry?
To become incorporated should not be
our future

We can be free. The signs are
in the birds and the cages the signs are
destruction and control, both involve
colonizing. And what is a colony? A colony is
a continuous chain of immeasurably destructive events in time
is the death of air, is
the death of water, is
a death between
the origin and
the nation, between
death and the ending of
all nests

is thievery, takes
everything

And its strong grasping,
when it suffocates
our breath

This choked thing we are

II

We buried our dead facing the ocean
snake turn knife salt of the tide
And we carried the body through the village, crying
with our faces to Oceania
Where the bones are buried beneath the house
with loved objects, with
our fingerprints

I sihek is in our hearts. Hunggan. But will we rise,
act? The military covers us all,
look, can you bear it, can you, long enough

long enough for this to be necessary, who will guide us
to look into our own blood
but we must, and, in their blinding greed, *atan*
our contaminated land
the long absence of free hands
(of the three who came, one imagines to save, one
raised an emperor's flag, one militarized
our home)

ekungot,
ekungot, where our lost blood speaks
where old thirst breaks

"manaiguini hit sa' sigi ha' ta eyak i mambåba
na dibuyo'-ñiha siha ya sumala' sa' ta po'lo
ha' para u fañåga guini"

don't hide, look
them in the eye don't run
into shadows
under their feet

embrace our light, embrace
i sihek

of rising

with what trust
what justice
what rights to determine
what cuts
our tongues

how fear, money-lust, and language can rot

what follows their flag
what saws
within

III

I am no American, even'th I have a passport.
And no Asian.
Yet we must take risks,
the risk of freedom most of all

As told
thru genealogy,
our ancestors will bruise
if we don't. *Magahet.*

I offer, in excerption, a quote:
"Manmetgot-ña hit ki ta hongge ya siña ta apåtta
hit ginen ini na tåotao hiyong siha."

Despite the difficulty (the courage of voice)
this is also true: if we are to survive
it is because we refuse to be
slain in their Territorial Sun

Ask ourselves:

will we resist / where weapons mount?

rise above fences

[1] The poems titled ***from* achiote** and ***from* tidelands** are reprinted, with the author's permission, from *from* unincorporated territory *[hacha]* (Honolulu: TinFish Press, 2008)