



Horaya't Paglalakbay:
Filipina Monologues



Hiraya't Paglalakbay: Filipina Monologues



Philippine Embassy New Zealand
and Philippine Studies Network
Wellington, New Zealand
2026



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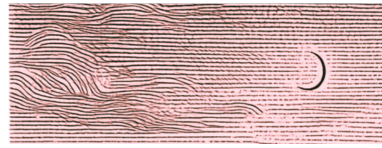
Contents

Introduction.....	5
Message from Ambassador Kira Christianne D. Azucena.....	6

The Monologues

<i>Istoryahan po tayo</i>	8
Janet Hope Tauro	
<i>A Blessed Journey</i>	11
Nanette Carillo	
<i>Sinigang Moments</i>	15
GM Francisco	
<i>Filipina: Legacy</i>	19
Cherrylyn Panganiban	
<i>Sisterhood as Belonging</i>	23
Lovely Dizon	
<i>Dear Mahal Ko</i>	26
Ditta Mae Siena-De Guzman	

About the Authors



Introduction

Filipina Monologues: Hiraya't Paglalakbay is more than an e-book—it is a celebration of the lives, stories, challenges, and triumphs of Filipinas in New Zealand. Through six riveting monologues, this collection paints a tapestry of resilience and courage of remarkable women as they navigate the complexities of migration, cultural identity, and personal growth in their adopted homeland. Each story reflects not only their struggles but also their indomitable spirit in their journey of hope and discovery.

This project is a proud endeavor of the Philippine Embassy in New Zealand and the Philippine Studies Network Aotearoa New Zealand to provide a platform to amplify the voices of Filipinas. Guided by the Philippines' Magna Carta of Women, which mandates the promotion and representation of women's voices in all spheres of public discourse, the e-book is a testament to the vital contributions of Filipinas to the multicultural fabric of New Zealand society.

Filipina Monologues: Hiraya't Paglalakbay is launched in celebration of National Women's Month, honoring the strength and spirit of women, and coincides with the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of bilateral relations between the Philippines and New Zealand. As you delve into each narrative, may you find inspiration in the power of storytelling, and may these voices echo as reminders of the courage and triumphs of Filipinas across the globe.



Message from Ambassador Kira Christianne D. Azucena

The Philippines places great importance on the celebration of National Women's Month. At the Philippine Embassy, we recognize and honor the invaluable contributions of overseas Filipinas especially in New Zealand.

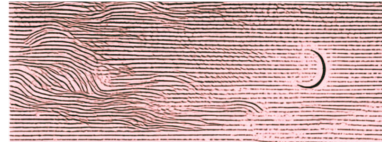
Filipina Monologues: Hiraya't Paglalakbay celebrates the voices and lived experiences of Filipina migrants in New Zealand. Through this platform, we aim to honor and amplify the stories of Filipinas who have built their lives abroad, highlighting both their individual and collective journeys. By sharing these narratives, the project seeks to foster a deeper understanding and stronger connections between the Filipino and New Zealand communities.

The stories shared by our Filipina migrants are woven with hope, challenges, and triumphs, each shaped by their identity, heritage, and aspirations. While each journey is unique, a common thread emerges from their narratives: the strength and spirit of an empowered Filipina.

As we commemorate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and New Zealand this year, we recognize the vital role that Filipina migrants play in strengthening people-to-people ties between our two countries. By providing an avenue for them to tell their stories, we affirm their meaningful contributions to cultural exchange, community building, and the enrichment of both societies.

This publication not only elevates individual voices but also fosters solidarity among Filipinas in New Zealand while affirming cultural connections. Through this initiative, we hope to inspire more individuals to embrace storytelling as a means of personal reflection and cultural celebration, leaving a lasting and meaningful impact on both the Filipino and New Zealand communities.

The Monologues



Istoryahan po tayo

Janet Hope Tauro

I remember August 2011 so clearly. I was already in Aotearoa then, trying to build a quiet, ordinary life, when I heard about an extremist right-wing group handing out flyers in Auckland and Christchurch that shouted, “Stop the Asian invasion.” That phrase felt like a slap across my face. It told me, without any subtlety, that people like me did not belong here, that my brown body and Filipino Asian face were a problem to be solved. The police said they were investigating because the flyers might incite hate, but by then fear had already seeped into our bones. That was one of the first times I realised how fragile the “kind, inclusive New Zealand” story really was—and how easily another story, a racist one, could take over if we did not challenge it. This is why our voices, our istorya, the counterstorytelling are powerful.

Years later, in May 2017, I was in a large hall at a women’s conference in Auckland, surrounded by more than a hundred women of different ethnicities, sectors, and genders. The energy felt empowering, but deep inside me there was a knot of worry. When the open forum began, I took the microphone and asked the question that had been nagging me for months: “With the rise of racist Trumpism in the U.S., and similar white nationalist groups in Europe, should we Filipino migrants in Aotearoa be worried that racism and exclusion might also intensify here?” The answer came in a calm, soothing voice: “Do not worry.” People around me believed that New Zealand was progressive, that leaders like Jacinda Ardern would keep racism at bay. For a moment I wanted to rest in that comfort. But I also knew that their confidence came from a position of safety that I did not share. Their story of New Zealand as a fair and tolerant country

did not erase my memories of slurs, suspicious stares, and flyers screaming about an “Asian invasion.”

Then October 2023 arrived with a new general election. I heard the political slogans over and over: “Get our country back on track” and “Take our country back.” Officially, they were about the economy and law and order. But to my ears, and to the ears of many migrants, they sounded like invitations to blame someone—often people who look like me. Those phrases were vague enough to be defended as “harmless,” yet sharp enough to be weaponised by racists who already believe this country should be white. That is how dominant stories work: they appear neutral on the surface, but underneath they carry old hierarchies about who belongs and who doesn’t. Each time I heard those slogans, I felt the same old fear and anger rising, and I knew again why counterstorytelling is necessary. If we do not speak, their story becomes the only story.

People here often say racism in New Zealand is rare, that it is just a few ignorant individuals at the margins. That is another powerful story, and it is comforting—for those who are not targeted. But it erases us. It ignores the data that shows race-based hate crimes have risen in recent years, and it brushes aside the everyday experiences of Filipinos, Asian, Māori, Pasifika, and other minority communities. When someone insists that racism is “not a big problem” here, they are really saying: “Your pain does not fit my picture of this country, so I choose not to see it.” That is exactly what Critical Race Theory warns us about: how dominant narratives protect privilege by pretending to be neutral and objective. Counterstorytelling is our way of saying, “No, your version is not the whole truth. Here is mine.”

My previous workplaces’ experiences showed me how deeply these dominant stories run. For years, I was the only Asian person in the office. In that environment, people felt free to say things like, “Those Asians come into our country, apply for benefits and pensions, and have a lot of money in their bank accounts,” or, “Once they get permanent residency, they bring 25 family members.” Someone even remarked, “Clients like you because they can’t understand your accent.” And then there was the question that cut the deepest: “So who is the Kiwi man that you married?”—as if my presence in Aotearoa could only be explained by a white husband.

When I complained, the response I heard again and again was, “We’re so sorry you feel that way, but he or she is not racist—it’s just unconscious bias.” That phrase became another story used to protect the comfort of the majority. By calling it “unconscious bias,” they were able to avoid the word “racism” and avoid

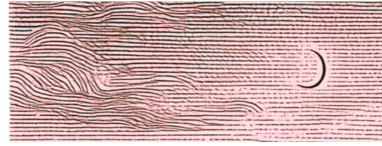
responsibility. My experience was re-framed as a misunderstanding, a matter of my feelings, instead of a structural problem. Critical Race Theory helps me name what is happening there. It tells me that racism is not just individual hatred; it is embedded in systems, policies, and everyday assumptions. Counterstorytelling gives me the right to say, “No, this is not just my oversensitivity. This is racism, and I will name it.”

Sometimes I get tired of telling these stories. As a Filipina, I was raised to be modest, to avoid drama, to carry my burdens quietly. I often do not feel like writing about my pain or speaking about my anger. But I also know that if I stay silent, the dominant story wins: the story that New Zealand is almost racism-free, that migrants are grateful and compliant, that Filipinos are hard-working but voiceless. I refuse to let racists and their defenders be the only narrators of this country. My monologue, my “kwento,” is not just self-expression; it is a political act. It insists that Filipino women exist here not just as invisible workers, but as thinkers and storytellers who can interpret and challenge the world around us.

Leaving the Philippines because of my health was one of the hardest choices of my life. People see the statistics about millions of Filipinos working overseas and assume we are eager to go. They do not see the tears at the airport, the guilt of leaving parents behind, the fear of starting again in a strange land. Counter-storytelling or telling you this story allows me to connect my personal sadness to larger structures. It reminds me that I am not simply “lost”; I am navigating forces that were here long before I arrived.

In the mornings, sadness still sometimes wakes me, and at night guilt still whispers questions about the choices I have made. Yet alongside that, I feel a growing sense of purpose. For me, that word is “we.” When I tell my story as a Filipina migrant in New Zealand, I am also speaking for a larger “we” of migrants, refugees, and racialised communities whose experiences are constantly pushed aside. Critical Race Theory and counterstorytelling help me see that my voice joins a chorus, that our many small stories can slowly chip away at the big, comfortable myths about this country.

So this is why I keep talking, writing, and insisting on my perspective: because without our counter-stories, the only narratives left will be those that excuse racism, hide inequality, and cast us as problems instead of people. As a Filipino woman in Aotearoa, I claim my right to narrate. My story is my evidence, my protest, and my hope.



A Blessed Journey

Nanette Carillo

“You are a superwoman!” That’s what I always hear from my friends and colleagues here in New Zealand...

How do you manage to do all those things and responsibilities, Nanette? You don’t even look stressed or pressured... in fact you always look calm.

Well, I just smile and say, everything is by God’s grace.

And this is true my friends and fellow Filipina women...

I’m deeply blessed with God’s grace that empowers me to accomplish the different roles that are given to me, as a Director of Kids at School Care, CEO of NZ-Philippine SCOT Foundation Charitable Trust, as a Council Member of the Asian Network Inc, as a Dean & school teacher in ACG Sunderland, as a Curriculum Coordinator of Spanish, ESOL & Learning Support Curriculum Coordinator.

I’m also blessed as a Business Partner of Miss Universe New Zealand and a Committee Member of the Pinoy NZ Bazaar Caravan.

Few years ago, I helped the Ministry of Education ethnic community group by organising the Filipino & Asian Learning Hub, to help and empower children and their families through the Reading Together Programme.

Wow, that's a lot, for sure you would say.

At first glance, yes, it looks overwhelming.

But the key things to make these happen are being well organised, relaxed, proper prioritisation of the most important, and the power of prayer and daily devotion.

I don't stress out myself with negativities around. I don't entertain negativity but I always practice how to exercise faith in everything I do.

Living a purpose driven life helps me to inspire and motivate myself everyday...to achieve my daily goals and to enjoy even the small things around.

I rely on God for strength each day, for He is the source of everything.

Before coming to New Zealand in 2007, I prayed to the Lord to bless me so I can bless other people around me.

By faith, my family and I moved to New Zealand in 2007. I left my job in the Philippines as a college lecturer and as a primary school co-founder.

With the eyes of faith, I knew that something was in store for us and the best was yet to come. Just like the story of Joseph the Dreamer in the Bible, I didn't know what was in store for me in this country.

Indeed, God's plan is always the best for us.

During the first few months in New Zealand, I didn't feel like teaching anymore due to a long years of working as a teacher and school founder in the Philippines..I thought it was too tiring and complicated. But I was wrong...

So instead of pursuing a full time teaching job, I started working as a part time after school care manager. I didn't realise that it was my training ground so I can run my own after school care centre.

One day, while I was in one of the Filipino shops in West Auckland, I saw this fascinating school across the road. For some reasons, my interest to work in school has been awakened. I told myself, "If this is the kind of school where I will work, I will surely enjoy it". How I wished and prayed that I could teach

in that school one day.

Not long enough, I became a teacher and a school Directress but it was in a different school located in North Shore, right after I processed my teachers registration.

The Lord has started to bless me, and I was reminded of my prayers to be a channel of blessings to others. So when I was approached by a friend who was keen to help the less fortunate children in the Philippines, I didn't hesitate to support that good cause.

In 2009, SCOT Foundation was officially registered as a charity. There was no big fund to start it with. The small amount that we have raised from the very first fund raising project, when we joined the community centre's garage sale, was the seed money that was used to start helping the children overseas. The rest was history. For the last 16 years, SCOT Foundation has helped so many street children to obtain education from primary school to university. There were so many volunteers and event sponsors who have supported its fundraising Dinner Gala which aided the Annual Gift Giving in the Philippines. The Lord has opened the doors and sent us the right people from all walks of life who have helped us to reach out and give back to the underprivileged children.

In 2016, former Ambassador Virginia Benavidez and the Miss Universe New Zealand team in 2017 came to the Philippines and helped us to conduct the gift giving programme. I will never forget the kindest Marilao Mayor and his staff who offered us to use the Municipal City Auditorium as a venue.

It is truly indescribable and unbelievable that a simple woman like me will be used by God to do an extraordinary job.

I remember one of the Bible verses, "As long as He sought the Lord, God gave him success" and Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart."

While I was serving and helping others voluntarily, the Lord answered my prayers. I got a full time teaching job in the school which I have seen and got interested to be part of, many years ago, ACG Sunderland. In that same school, I was able to run and operate Kids at School Care with my staff who

have supported me for ten years now.

Promotion comes from the Lord ...In 2015, I was surprised when I was chosen as a Global Hero by Western Union. I found myself in CNN Philippines TV programme where I was interviewed about SCOT Foundation.

Then, Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year has awarded me a medal for being one of the Local Heroes in West Auckland.

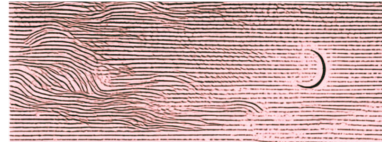
Those recognitions have inspired me to do more and to continue to make a difference wherever I go.

We are all empowered women, and we can lead and inspire in different ways.

Recently, when the Auckland Filipino Trust has awarded me a golden plaque for being one of the Ten Outstanding Filipinos in New Zealand, I mentioned in my speech that "With or without recognition, I will continue to help others".

Everyone can help make a difference, even through small and simple ways of doing something for others. We don't have to be rich, popular or talented. We just need to have a heart's desire to reach out and to give back to our fellow countrymen.

I am Nanette Carillo, and I'm proud to say that I am an empowered Filipina here in New Zealand.



Sinigang Moments

GM Francisco

Mga sangkap:

Baboy, salmon o hipon
sibuyas
kamatis
madahong gulay, kung anong mura
labanos kung meron, pwede ring wala
gabi at okra kung meron pero sa gaya kong hindi mahilig sa madudulas na pagkain, hindi na ako naglalagay nitong mga ito
siling panigang, kung meron at kung mura

At siyempre sinigang mix dahil wala na kong oras at lakas para magpakulo at magpiga ng sampalok. Oo, tawagin mo na kong tamad. Alam ko, sasabihin mong mas masarap at healthy pa rin ang totoong sampalok, pero para sa kulang sa oras at kailangang humigop ng mainit at maasim na sabaw, pwede na yan. Nung nilisan ko ang Pinas at nagdesisyong maging isang Pinay overseas, dun ko napagtanto kung gaano kaimportante ang sinigang mix. Kung pwede ko lang i-nominate ng Nobel prize ang nakaimbento nito, ginawa ko na. OA. Pero aminin mo, pag nasa sinigang moment ka, itong simpleng pulbos na ito ay napakahalaga. Nakaka-panic pag nagkaubusan ng sinigang mix sa iyong suking tindahan-- pag biglang out of stock sa Taiping o Lim Chour. Hahantong ka sa panghihingi sa kapwa pinoy. Kabayan, pahingi lang ng isang pakete. Promise, papalitan ko agad pag nakabili na ko.

Paraan ng pagluluto

Una, magpakulo ng tubig. Ilagay ang sibuyas at kamatis. Huwag munang ilagay ang katas ng pinakulong sampalok o sinigang mix dahil sobrang aasim ang karne at gulay.

Palambutin ang karne. Kung baboy, matagal-tagal yan. Kung isda o hipon, mabilis lang dapat. Gamitin ang utak o mag-research sa internet kung hindi sigurado. Kung baboy yan, pwede ring tusukin ng tinidor para malaman kung pwede na. Masarap yung malambot na karne, kaya hindi naman basta ma-o-overcook yan. Mas mainam na yung malambot na malambot, kesa yung nakikipaglaban sa ngipin pag nginunguya na. Marami na tayong pagsubok sa buhay. Huwag mo nang idagdag yung pag-nguya ng matigas na karne sa kailangan mong ipaglaban. Maghintay na lang ng ilang minuto. Haba-habaan ang pasensya.

Pag malambot na ang karne, ilagay ang gulay. Syempre, mauuna yung mas matitigas. Yung mga dahon, mabilis lang lutuin yan. Ilagay ang sinigang mix sa bandang huli na. Gaano kadami? Depende kung gaano kaasim ang gusto mo. Maraming bagay ang wala tayong choice, yung hindi natin pwedeng ipagpilitan ang gusto natin, pero yung kung gaano kaasim ang sinigang mo, nasa sa 'yo na yan. Lalo na kung ikaw naman ang nagluluto. Siguruhin lang na mapakulo para tunaw na tunaw yung pulbos at humalong mabuti sa sabaw. Hindi yung pagsubo mo eh may buo-buong pulbos pa.

Para sa akin, hindi tama na maglagay agad ng patis sa sabaw lalo na kung hindi lang ikaw ang kakain. Madali namang maglagay ng patis pag kumakain na. Hindi masarap yung maalat na sinigang. Pag nagdagdag ka naman ng tubig, tatabang na pati yung lasa ng karne. Gaya ng maraming bagay sa buhay, iwasan ang pabigla-bigla. Baka magsisi ka pag napaalat ang luto mo. Pwede naman yung tantya-tantya, pero hinay-hinay lang.

Hanguin at ilagay sa lalagyan, lalo na yung mga gulay para hindi malanta.

Kung kulang sa asim, pwede namang magdagdag ng sinigang mix. Kung gusto mo na mas maalat, maglagay ng patis. At ayan na handa na!

Sinigang moments

Pag winter at giniginaw ka tapos ayaw mong gumamit ng heater dahil dagdag bayarin sa kuryente.

Pag napakanta ka ng Aegis song na “Heto ako basang-basa sa ulan, walang masisilungan walang malalapitan” dahil hindi kinaya ng mumurahing payong mo ang tindi ng halong ulan at hangin ng New Zealand. Plano mo kasing bumili ng Blunt, yung sosyal na payong na pangmalakasan pero syempre kinuripot ka, kasi yung presyo higit kalahati na ng weekly rent mo o mas mahal pa sa buwanang maintenance na gamot ng nanay mo. Next time na lang pag sale. Pero yung sale price higit isandaang dolyares pa rin. Kaya, sige next time na lang ulit, pag nagka-tax refund. Baka sakali.

Pag na-ho-homesick ka at na mi miss ang luto ng nanay mo. Kahit na yung sinigang mo bok choy ang sahog dahil wala kang makitang kangkong sa Asian store.

Masaklap lang pag winter, yung kamatis mas mahal pa sa karne. De-latang kamatis na lang kaya. Ano ba yan! Parang feeling mo kawawa ka naman. Sige na lang. Bili ng isang pirasong kamatis. Pwede na yan.

Pag nagka-budget makauwi, dun na lang babawi. Totoong sampalok, maraming kamatis, at fresh tuna o hipong swahe, yung malalaki tapos may sawsawang patis na may siling labuyo.

O kaya sinigang na baka sa bayabas. Wala kasing binebentang sinigang sa bayabas mix sa suki mong Asian store. Sarap sana. Nakaka miss din.

Yung kanin ha. Baka naman makalimutang magsaing. Nakakaiyak yung ang tagal mong hinintay lumambot yung baboy at nung patapos ka nang magluto, pagbukas mo ng ref, ubos na pala yung kanin mo. Mas malala kung naubusan ka pala ng bigas. May sinigang ka nga, wala ka namang kanin. Di naman bagay ang sinigang sa tinapay o sa pasta. Gigil ka sa sarili mo. Anong klaseng Pinoy ka? Nauubusan ng bigas sa bahay.

Sinigang moments

Pag masama ang pakiramdam mo, sinisipon, nilalagnat, at hinahanap-hanap ang alaga ni nanay--yung kalinga na mabilis pumawi ng sakit.

Pag gusto mo nang kayakap pero mag isa ka. Pag naiisip mo na sama-sama silang naghahapunan tapos ikaw naglulutong mag-isa at kakain ding mag isa.

Yung nilulunod mo sa sabaw lahat ng negatibong emosyon mo para pagkatapos kumain ok ka na ulit.

Yung nilulunod mo sa sabaw lahat ng negatibong emosyon mo para pagkatapos kumain ok ka na ulit.

Para bukas gigising kang nakangiti

Babati ng *Mōrena! Kia ora!*

Yung hindi halata na nag-alalala ka dahil merong maysakit sa pamilya

o iniisip ang nakabinbin pang visa

Paghigop ng mainit at maasim na sabaw,
ayos na. Ok ka na.

At kahit mamaya uuwi ka ulit na basang basa sa ulan, alam mong magiging maayos din ang lahat.

Sabi nga sa paboritong Aegis videoke song mo, kahit

“Heto ka ngayong nag-iisa

Naglalakbay sa gitna ng dilim

Lagi na lang nadarapa (lampa ka siguro)

Ngunit heto bumabangon pa rin.”

At pagdating mo sa flat,

Pag tuyo ka na at suot ang paboritong butas na T-shirt na pambahay

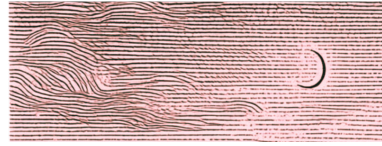
Alam mo pagbukas ng ref

Andun ang tirang sinigang

Meron pa ring tirang kaning lamig

Maya-maya lang nakangiti ka na ulit.

This piece is dedicated to my family, especially to my mother Nenita, who cooks the best sinigang in the world.



Filipina: Legacy

Cherrylyn Panganiban

FILIPINA is a term often used without much reflection, yet it encompasses two significant components that speak to cultural identity. “Filip” denotes leadership, while “ina” translates to “mother” in the Philippines, together reflecting important values within Filipino society. Put them together, and suddenly the word becomes more than a name. It becomes a calling. A responsibility. A legacy.

A Filipina is both a leader and a mother, a guide and a nurturer, a strength and a shelter. She is the quiet force that shapes families, communities, and generations.

Growing up, I believed I knew exactly what a Filipina was supposed to achieve. Finish college. Build a family. Work in a big company. Earn more money. These were the dreams many of us carried — whispered by our parents, echoed by society, tucked deep into our hearts. I had those dreams too. I imagined myself becoming a lawyer, stepping into boardrooms, wearing suits, making decisions that mattered.

But God had a different plan for my life.

I didn't become the lawyer I once envisioned. I didn't join the big companies I thought would define my success. Instead, I started a family. I became a wife. I became a mum. And for a while, I thought this was it — the whole story, the final chapter. I thought my life had settled into its shape, predictable and complete.

But I was wrong.

Somewhere along the way, a new perspective found me. A new life. A new heart. I began to understand that being a Filipina is not about titles or positions. It is not about fame, recognition, or applause. A Filipina leads not by standing in front, but by serving with a full heart. Her leadership is not loud; it is lived. It is seen in the way she loves her family, supports her friends, encourages her workmates, and welcomes even acquaintances with warmth. It is something you cannot pretend. Something that flows naturally from the abundance within us.

Do you want to hear my story?

I am a wife and a mum of three beautiful children — and above all, a follower of Christ. My life circles around work, home, friends, and church. A rhythm many Filipina households know well. Maybe you know it too. It is the life of balancing responsibilities, carrying invisible loads, and still finding ways to smile, to serve, to show up.

But my journey didn't start with stability. I grew up without a family to look up to. Without the picture-perfect foundation many children have. Yet in that emptiness, I discovered something precious: there were people like me. People who understood brokenness. People who knew what it meant to be found and loved. Through them, I learned my purpose. I learned that this lifetime is not all about me. And I wanted to share the same love I received with the people and communities around me.

It began with the people in the church — people who became the very ones I now serve alongside. People who also found their peace. People who give their time, money, and resources freely, without expecting anything in return. Their generosity, their humility, their willingness to serve — it shaped me. It reminded me that leadership is not about being above others but being available to others.

I thought that was it. That this was the extent of my calling. But another opportunity arose. Years passed, and another window opened. And now, we are able to connect and serve within our communities and beyond.

Everything is unfolding rapidly before our eyes.

It all began with an invitation to help, which unexpectedly grew into a community beyond what we could have imagined. The encouragement of a

friend led us here—to a space where trust, accountability, transparency, and integrity truly matter.

New Zealand celebrates and values every ethnicity. Yet, when we joined our local board for the first time, there were no other Filipinos present. Although we were technically included, our voices weren't heard, and our presence wasn't truly acknowledged—another missed chance to express my identity and who I am.

Failure only becomes absolute if you never make the attempt to begin. I gave it a try, not knowing how long we'll be able to serve or how far our impact will reach. Still, I am grateful to witness our gradual progress as we become more active and visible within every community around us.

I see Filipino language being celebrated. I see Parol lanterns recognised. I see the Philippine flag hanging proudly in ethnic festivals and multicultural gatherings. These moments may seem small to some, but to me — they are reminders of identity, belonging, and home.

This is who we are.

A Filipina who celebrates unity grounded in God's purpose.

Unity that is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of shared vision. Unity rooted in a commitment to honour God and serve one another.

It took me time to understand this. But now, I am grateful. Because I know that one day, the seed I planted will become the tree my children will climb on. One day, we will be recognised as a community that stands strong, resilient, and proud of who we are. Yes, we are broken — but through our brokenness, our light shines even brighter.

A Filipina is not defined by what she lacks, but by what she gives.

Not by the dreams she didn't reach, but by the lives she touches.

Not by the titles she holds, but by the love she carries.

We are women of faith.

Women of courage.

Women of unity.

Women who rise, not because life is easy, but because God is faithful.

And wherever we go — whether in our homes, our workplaces, our churches, or our communities — we carry a light that cannot be hidden. A light shaped by sacrifice, strengthened by resilience, and guided by purpose.

This is the Filipina.

This is our story.

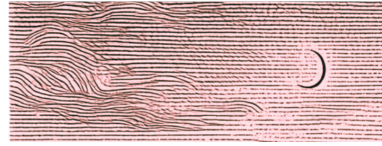
This is our calling.

To reflect love.

To walk in faith.

To build unity.

And to shine brightly in every place, we step into.



Sisterhood as Belonging

Lovely Dizon

When I was five, I wanted to be called “Christine.” While renaming oneself in childhood probably raised no red flags, in fact it was often laughed off but looking back, I think it spoke to something deeper. My name, Lovely, was the first indication that I was different, that I wasn’t like the other blonde-haired, blue-eyed girls in my class and I wanted to belong.

Across the years, I felt isolated from the wider Filipino community. Part of this was due to living rurally in the Waikato in the mid to late 2000s, and part of this was spending most of my time in spaces where nobody looked like me. I was desperate to fit and feel a sense of belonging, particularly when it came to female friendships.

For so many years, I dreamed of the friendships I saw mirrored on television. The besties, the big group, the sisterhood. However, I spent most of my childhood a lonely child, and an even lonelier adolescent. I’m not sure how much of that was due to my general introversion, shyness and teen awkwardness or the fact that I was acutely and constantly aware of my differences. I was always going to be an outsider – obviously not white, but also not Asian or Filipino enough.

I learned from experience that one will go through almost anything in order to belong. I became a chameleon, a magician. I would magically contort myself into a version I thought others would like, while I had no idea who I actually was. It was exhausting, as well as shameful. I had spent most of my adolescence and young adulthood rejecting being Filipino because of this desire to belong.

For example, when my Pakeha flatmate made fun of the kare kare that I bought home to share, I stopped eating in the living room. I prided myself in not listening to OPM or watching Filipino movies, although I would secretly watch them in my room when I missed my family.

The rejection was not limited to white spaces. I was often made fun of by other Filipinos for my lack of Tagalog or my 'white' accent or my limited knowledge of Filipino pop culture and history. When I went back to the Philippines, I was constantly being asked if I was a foreigner. No matter how much I tried to mold myself into an acceptable version, nothing worked.

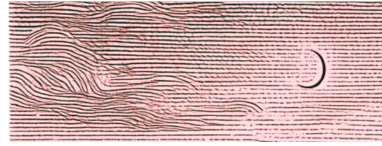
I ended up doing a PhD on ethnic identity and belonging, as a way (albeit a completely nerdy way) to explore my own Filipino-ness. About halfway through my studies, I eventually met some like-minded Filipino women at an Asian mental health hui. They were like me. Born in the Philippines but grew up in New Zealand. They also had complex feelings about being Filipino in New Zealand, and could understand all the associated challenges with these feelings. Becoming friends with these women felt like a warm embrace, a homecoming. It felt so incredibly validating to be able to talk and feel like I was being heard. To not have to over-explain myself to someone who was most likely going to misunderstand me anyway. Finally, the sense of belonging I had always been searching for had somehow found me.

As my Filipino friends navigate their own individual relationships to being Filipino, it feels like we also navigate this space together. These people I have laughed and cried with. We have bonded over our own shared (and varied) experiences of being Filipino in New Zealand. Rather than needing to hide parts of myself, I could now share these in an environment where I know I would be received with love and grace, rather than dismissal or anger. There is something so special when you're able to bring your own frustrations and challenges into a space and are met with love and compassion.

My friends are gentle guides, providing loving challenges and encouragement whenever it's needed. Through their words and their actions, they encourage me to embrace the parts of being Filipino that are important to me, such as valuing closeness to family and the importance of community. They do not judge me for my lack of Tagalog and encourage me to try again when I get words wrong. They celebrate with me through the joy of shared food, often home-cooked Filipino food that I no longer have to hide.

Rather than a life that has shrunk to fill the expectations of others, my friends have allowed my life to become more expansive. They have helped me to understand that being a Filipino in Aotearoa is less of the either/or but rather embracing the both/and. Many things can be true at the same time. I can love being Filipino because it can offer intimate family connection, incredible food and a moral framework to love and care for others. It also has its challenges, which can be talked through with others rather than having to push through it alone.

These friends have become more like family, a sisterhood that keeps me grounded when life feels impossible. A Filipino sisterhood that allows me to bring my whole self, no matter how insecure, confused or lost I may feel. This sisterhood has not just allowed me to survive but has encouraged me to thrive and to become a more whole version of myself. There are no words to describe the level of freedom that these friendships have provided me. While it's not the 'girl-gang' that I envisioned in childhood, it's so much better than I could have ever imagined.



Dear Mahal Ko

Ditta Mae Siena-De Guzman

Moving to New Zealand was a dream — but it was not without conflict.

I come from a place I have always revered, a country that shaped my values, my resilience, and my sense of self. And so living abroad has meant carrying two truths at once: gratitude for where I am, and loyalty to where I began.

Written mostly in Filipino, this love letter is about that quiet tension — the inner negotiations of building a life in a new land while honouring the roots that raised me.

Dear Mahal Ko,

Kumusta ka na? Kaytagal na rin pala tayong hindi nagkausap. Alam kong alam mo na narito na ako sa New Zealand. Noong huli tayong nagkasama, naging maayos naman ang aking paliwanag kung bakit kinailangan kong umalis. Sana naintindihan mo ako. Sana hindi ka nasaktan.

Alam kong marami rin tayong pinagsamahan. Kay haba ng panahon na ating pinagsaluhan, halos 37 years din iyon. Ang dami nating hirap na dinanas. Nakita natin ang isa't isa sa iba't ibang yugto ng ating buhay. Nakita mo akong nakapasa at grumaduate sa UP, nagkatrabaho, at nagserbisyo sa gobyerno. Nakita rin naman kitang magpasan ng napakaraming responsibilidad. Parang hindi ka nauubusan ng kailangang alagaan. Parang hindi ka puwedeng mapagod. Pinasan mo na yata ang lahat ng hirap para sa kanila.

Isa kang martir — at bilib ako sa tapang mong hindi sumusuko.

Ilang beses mo silang pinaglaban. Hindi mo sila sinusukuan. Sinubukan kitang tulongan ng mahabang panahon para magkaroon ng kaunting angat man lang sa estado ng iyong buhay. Buong puso kitang ninais na tulongan noong tayo ay magkasama pa.

Matagal ko itong pinag-isipan. Hindi ito madaling desisyon.

Sa huli, nakita kong mas makakatulong ako sa ibang paraan. Tinawag ako ng oportunidad sa New Zealand — isang oportunidad na ang hirap palagpasin. Binigyan nila ako ng scholarship para mag-pursigi ng Ph.D. Nakita nila ang halaga ng aking pananaliksik at ang posibilidad na makatulong ito sa mas nakararami.

Madalas naiisip ko, napakaswerte ko para mabigyan ng ganitong pagkakataon. Siguro likas na talaga sa akin bilang isang Pilipino ang maging mapagpasalamat sa bawat oportunidad na natatanggap ko. Pero naisip ko, isa rin itong pananagutan — maging mahusay na ehemplo, maging mabuting bahagi ng lipunan dito sa New Zealand, at gamitin ang aking natutunan para sa ikabubuti ng nakararami.

Niyakap ako ng New Zealand nang buong puso. Sa umpisa, nahirapan ako rito. Iba ang kultura. Iba ang ritmo ng buhay. Tahimik ang paligid. Minsan, sobrang tahimik. Walang masyadong matataas na building. Maagang nagsasarado ang mga establisimiyento. Malayang nakakapaglaro ang mga bata sa park. Libreng nakakapag-aral ang mga bata. Naisip ko, kung sana maranasan mo rin ito, siguro napakasaya ng malaki mong pamilya. Hindi ka siguro lumuluha sa hirap.

At dito ko napagtanto kung gaano pala ako kasanay sa ingay.

Dito, pakiramdam ko para akong batang muling natutong maglakad. May espasyo ang bawat tao, espasyo para huminga, para mag-isip, para mabuhay nang hindi laging hinahabol ng oras. Natuto akong maglakad nang mabagal. Natuto akong tumingala sa langit. Dito ko napansin kung gaano pala kalawak ang ulap kapag hindi ka abala sa paghabol sa araw.

May mga park na puno ng batang malayang tumatakbo. May mga silid-aralan na bukas sa tanong, hindi lang sa sagot. May mga pagkakataong pinapakinggan ka bago ka husgahan. May mga komunidad na tumanggap sa akin.

Nakakapagsimba ako kasama ang mga maraming Pilipino. Nakakapagpicnic kasama sila na hindi kailangan gumastos ng malaki. Nakakatulong din ako bilang miyembro ng grupo ng mga Pilipinong iskolar dito. May mga pagkakataon din na naibabahagi ko ang kulturang pinanggalingan ko dahil interesado sila dito. Bukas sila at nirerespeto nila ang pinagmulan ko. At masaya din ang mga tao dito sa New Zealand na ibahagi sa akin ang kanilang kultura. Pakiramdam ko ay nakatagpo ako ng isang malaking pamilya.

Nakakatuwa. Nag-uumapaw ang aking puso sa pasasalamat sa bayang yumakap sa akin.

Pero hindi ibig sabihin noon na lagi akong kampante.

May mga gabi pa ring tahimik — at sa katahimikang iyon, mas malakas ang boses ng pag-aalinlangan. Natatanong ko ang aking sarili, “kaya ko ba talaga? Mahusay ba talaga ako?”

May mga araw na pakiramdam ko, kailangan kong patunayan ang sarili ko nang doble. Bilang estudyante. Bilang iskolar. Bilang Pilipino. Bilang isang babaeng galing sa isang lugar na hindi laging nauunawaan ng iba.

Hindi perpekto ang buhay rito. May sarili ring mga suliranin ang mga tao. Tulad natin, may mga usaping pampamahalaan na pinagtatalunan. May mga nabibiktima rin ng panlilinlang at ilegal na gawain. May ilan ding nahihirapang makahanap ng trabaho — at dito, mabigat ang mawalan ng hanapbuhay. Lingguhan ang bayarin. Hindi ka puwedeng maghintay ng susunod na buwan para bumawi.

Sa kabila ng lahat ng hirap dito sa New Zealand, nakita ko rin ang mga tagumpay ng iba’t ibang kababayan dito. Marami sa kanila ang nakabili na rin ng sariling bahay. Ang ilan ay nakakapagnegosyo pa. Nakaka-proud kumbaga.

Unti-unti, natutunan kong ang pag-alis ay hindi pagtalikod. Ito ay paglawak. Paglago. Paghanap ng paraan para mas maging buo.

Kapag may maliit akong tagumpay — isang papel na tinanggap, isang presentasyong matagumpay, mga bagong kaibigang nakikilala — hindi ko iyon inaangkin nang mag-isa. May bahagi ka roon. May bakas ka sa bawat tapang na pinipili kong ipakita. Sa bawat pagtindig ko kahit may kaba. Sa bawat pagsubok na hindi ko tinatakbuhan.

Alam mo, Mahal Ko, sa totoo lang halos sumuko akong mahalín ka. Pero minahal kita kahit magulo ka. Kahit maingay ka. Kahit minsan parang hindi mo alam kung saan ka patungo. Sanay ako sa init ng ulo mo, sa pabago-bago mong sistema, sa mga pangakong paulit-ulit na napapako. Sanay ako sa trapik mong tila walang katapusan, sa pila mong parang sinusubok ang pasensya ng bawat nagmamahal sa iyo.

Pero sa kabila ng lahat, umaabot sa New Zealand ang tapang, pagmamahal, at mga aral na tinuro mo sa akin. Nakatatak sa isip ko ang mga magagandang alaala ng pinagmulan natin.

Ito yung mga umaga na gigising ako sa ingay ng mga batang naglalaro sa kalsada. Dadaan ang magtataho. Mga hapon na sabay-sabay kayong tatawa sa simpleng handaan kahit kapos ang handa. Mga gabi na kahit brownout, magtitipon-tipon pa rin para magkwentuhan. Mga pamilyang nagtitipon-tipon pag ka-Paskuhan. Ganun ka, Mahal Ko — marunong kang magpasaya kahit may masaklap kang pinagdadaan. Marunong kang magbigay kahit ikaw mismo ay kapos.

Pero minsan, napagod din ako. Hindi sa pagmamahal — kundi sa pag-asang baka bukas, magbago ka. Ilang beses kitang tinanong sa isip ko: Kailan darating ang panahong magiging magaan din ang lahat para sa atin?

Marahil doon nagsimulang luminaw ang lahat. Na ang pagmamahal ay hindi lang pananatili. Minsan, ang pagmamahal ay paghanap ng paraan para hindi tuluyang maubos ang sarili.

Naalala ko kung bakit ako umalis.

Hindi dahil ayaw na kitang mahalín.

Hindi dahil gusto kitang talikuran.

Kundi dahil may bahagi sa akin na naniniwalang kaya pa kitang mahalín sa ibang paraan.

Na may maibibigay pa ako kung lalawak muna ang mundo ko.

Na may maiaambag ako kung matututo muna ako.

Na minsan, ang paglayo ay hindi pagtakas — kundi paghahanda.

Doon ko naunawaan: ang pag-alis ay hindi kawalan. Ito ay pagitan. Isang pagitan sa dati at sa maaaring maging bukas. Pagitan na sinisimbolo ng layo ng New Zealand sa iyo.

Malayo na ako.

Pero alam kong malayo pa.

Malayo pa ang landas na tatahakin ko. Marami pa akong kailangang matutunan. Marami pa akong kailangang patunayan — hindi sa iba, kundi sa sarili ko. At sa iyo.

Hindi ko piniling umalis dahil napagod akong mahalín ka. Umalis ako dahil tinawag ako ng pagkakataong palawakin ang aking mundo — at dito sa New Zealand ko piniling itayo ang panibagong yugto ng aking buhay. Para sa iyo rin ito kung bakit ako umalis. Para sa bawat oportunidad at biyayang natatangap ko, sisikapin kong maging karapat-dapat. At balang araw, may maibahagi ako sa iyo na hindi lang kuwento, kundi kakayahan. Hindi lang alaala, kundi tunay na ambag. At pag nagkita tayong muli, masasabi mong proud ka sa akin.

Malayo na, pero malayo pa.

Habang unti-unti kong binubuo ang pangarap kong mamuhay rito sa New Zealand, saan man ako dalhin ng landas na ito, lagi kong bitbit ang pag-ibig ko para sa iyo, Mahal Ko.

Mahal kong, Pilipinas.

Patuloy na nagmamahal,
Ditta

About the Authors



JANET HOPE TAURO

Janet is a writer and educator whose work centers on the Filipino diaspora and media. She spent over 10 years as a journalist, including two years in London investigating mail order bride syndicates and the challenges faced by overseas Filipino workers. Her reporting contributed to the passage of laws banning the practice.

She brings 16 years of experience in social services, specializing in government policy and client support.

At De La Salle University Manila (2000–2006), she served as Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Filipino Studies, earning the Br. James Marcian Distinguished Professorial Chair for Research. She holds a Doctor of Arts in Language and Literature with high distinction.

Her work on media and Asian cultural studies has been presented and published at the University of Leeds (UK), Miami University (USA), University of Malaysia, and the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She also taught Critical Studies and Communication Arts at Hubei Polytechnic University through Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology.

Currently, she teaches Philippine Media Studies and Filipino Diaspora at De La Salle University, online.

In her favorite roles, she is a makulit Nanay of Ludwig and Rielle and the sumpunging partner of Ritchie.



NANETTE CARILLO

Nanette Carillo is a community leader, educator, and social entrepreneur dedicated to empowering families, supporting education, and strengthening multicultural communities in New Zealand. She is the Managing Director of Kids at School Care, a position she has held since 2015, where she works to provide safe, nurturing, and enriching environments for children and families. In 2009, Nanette founded the NZ-PHIL SCOT Charitable Trust, where she serves as Founder and CEO, leading community initiatives that promote cultural engagement, volunteerism, and support for Filipino and diverse migrant communities across New Zealand.

Her commitment to service has earned her several recognitions. She was a Global Heroes for Better Awardee in 2015 and received the New Zealand Local Hero of the Year Medal in 2012 after being nominated for New Zealander of the Year. In 2014, she received the Torch Bearer Award from the Peace Run in Auckland and was nominated by the Philippine Embassy for the Philippine Presidential Award for Outstanding Filipino Overseas. In 2025, she was honored as one of The Outstanding Pilipino Awardees by the Auckland Pilipino Trust.



GM FRANCISCO

GM Francisco hails from Antipolo, City, Philippines. Coming from a close-knit family, her childhood was filled with fun memories of weekend dinners with the whole clan, sharing mouthwatering homecooked meals (kainan), loud chatter (daldalan), and banter (asaran). Her love for the arts was developed early, watching her uncle, Antipolo-based artist Neil Manalo create his pieces from her grandparents' home in C. Lawis St. Most of her family members have creative pursuits, whether in visual arts, music, theatre, and literature.

In 2014, she was awarded a postgraduate scholarship by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) which allowed her to complete a Master of Public Policy degree at the University of Auckland (UoA), then went back to the Philippines in 2015 to continue her work in the corporate and non-profit sectors. She returned to New Zealand in 2018 to pursue a PhD in Politics and International Relations at UoA which she finished in 2021. She is currently based in Auckland and works as an academic researcher. She writes for fun when something piques her interest.



CHERRYLYN PANGANIBAN

Cherrylyn Panganiban is a devoted wife, mother, disciple, and community leader in Franklin, Auckland. Her life is anchored in Christ, and she is committed to building a strong, faith-centered family alongside her husband. She balances this calling with her passion for nurturing, training, and guiding women in her church community, while also leading initiatives that strengthen and uplift the Filipino community in Franklin.

Born and raised in Manila, she spent more than a decade working in the Middle East, where she served as Secretary for the Filipino Community in Yemen. During the height of the conflict, she became part of the repatriation team that helped rescue and support Filipinos stranded in the war, an experience that shaped her compassion, resilience, and heart for service. For over ten years, she has also faithfully served in CCF Auckland, witnessing and contributing to the church's growth alongside her husband.

With a deep passion for outreach, she took the initiative to lead Filipino Grapevine, a community-driven movement that promotes bayanihan and empowers Filipinos through skills development, cultural connection, and collective support. A lifelong learner and servant of Christ, Cherrylyn continues to inspire others to honor their faith, embrace their heritage, and build bridges of understanding wherever they go.



LOVELY DIZON

Lovely Dizon is a proud 1.5-generation Filipino. She was born in Angeles, Pampanga, Philippines. Her mother is from Nepo and her father is from Floridablanca. She migrated to Aotearoa, New Zealand at the age of three years old in the late 1990s. She completed her doctorate in public health at the University of Auckland in 2023. The focus of her research was on supporting 1.5 and second-generation Southeast Asian migrant adolescents as they negotiate their ethnic identity.

Currently, she works as a research and evaluation advisor for a non- government organisation and a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Auckland. She currently lives in Tāmaki Makarau with her husband. Lovely is passionate about creating safe and intentional spaces, community building and communal care, always advocating for greater representation of the often-invisible experiences, needs and strengths of Asian youth in Aotearoa. She also loves her dad’s cooking, reading anything she can get her hands on, craft-ing with friends and re-watching her emotional support sitcoms.



DITTA MAE SIENA-DE GUZMAN

Ditta Mae Siena-De Guzman is a public policy scholar, educator, and public servant whose work reflects a deep commitment to inclusive governance, learning, and frontline perspectives. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Public Policy at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, supported by the University of Auckland Doctoral Scholarship.

She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of the Philippines Baguio, where her interest in public service and social change first took root. She completed her Master of Public Policy at Meiji University in Tokyo, Japan, through the Japan Human Resource Development Scholarship. She was also selected as a Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative fellow, which brings together emerging leaders across Southeast Asia in Washington, D.C.

Before pursuing doctoral studies, Ditta served for eleven years as a Supervising Human Resource Specialist in the Philippine Civil Service Commission. She now works as a Research Assistant and Teaching Staff at the University of Auckland and contributes to scholarly conversations as a member of the Philippine Studies Network Aotearoa New Zealand.

Her academic and creative writing draws inspiration from the struggles and quiet triumphs of Filipino researchers whose journeys across borders carry enduring hopes for both New Zealand and the Philippines.



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