

TUMUGE' PĀPA' (WRITING IT DOWN): CHAMORRO MIDWIVES AND THE DELIVERY OF NATIVE HISTORY

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The Chamorro phrase *tuge' pāpa'* is a command to write it down. Over the years, “writing it down” would come to have different, often conflicted, meanings for me. As a Chamorro woman and writer, *tuge' pāpa'* would also come to mean access to nothing less than a complex Chamorro past and present of which I am a part. This essay considers the multiple applications of *tuge' pāpa'* within that broader enterprise Donna Haraway calls writing as a “freedom project.” It explores the liberating and fraught moments of narrating the history of Chamorro women, especially through the use of family stories and memories. Examples will be drawn from a master’s thesis on *i pattered siha*, prewar Chamorro nurse-midwives who underwent medical training and certification by the U.S. Naval Administration of Guam in the early 1900s.

And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read.

Alice Walker (1985: 2380)

The hand is an extension of our will, it holds the pen, the brush, the lump of clay. It is both a symbol and a vehicle of communication. Without the hand, the voice is helpless.

Gloria Anzaldúa (1990: xxiv)

WHILE CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON *i pattered siha* (Chamorro midwives)—
who underwent compulsory training and licensing by the U.S. Naval

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Government of Guam before World War II—I encountered recurring images of hands.¹ Hands massaging. Hands catching. Hands laying. Hands pushing. Hands being scrubbed. Hands teasing out. Hands kneading. Hands crafting. Hands delivering. My own hands, meanwhile, took notes, turned pages, and pounded the keyboard.

My work as a relatively young “hand” in academia involves archival research and oral interviews with surviving pattersa² and their families. In my work, I examine naval and native narratives of these women in an effort to contribute to a growing body of critical scholarship on Guam that challenges the hegemony of American colonial discourse on Chamorro identity, culture, and history (e.g., Underwood, 1977, 1987; Bordallo, 1982; Souder, 1992a, b; Diaz, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1998; Hattori, 1996, 1999, 2004; Camacho, 1998; Perez, 1996, 1997, 2001; Kushima, 2001). To do this, I follow the motif and metaphor of working hands to understand another motif and metaphor of colonial rule through the navy’s regulation of Chamorro midwifery: that of delivering the native body from the “decay” of an earlier (and supposedly outdated) religious hegemony under Spanish rule, to the “enlightened” embrace of modern civilization under America.³

But another kindred interest in delivery, in a native delivery of a native ethnography and historiography, also guides my study. How can stories of pattersa delivering babies—especially those handed down through the narratives and images of women in labor—help guide me as I grasp for a form of representing Chamorro history and culture in a way that does not replicate and contribute to an ongoing colonial regime? In this essay, I dwell on the possibilities and liabilities of such hand-deliveries, especially surrounding a maternal genealogy of urging me to *tuge' pâpa'* or “write it down” whatever it was that needed to be recorded.

Indeed, since adolescence, my grandmother had put my hands to work and had given me the responsibility of writing things down. *Tuge' pâpa'*, she’d say. Write it down! My grandmother knew how to print and sign her name in English at an early age, but having gotten only as far as the second grade, she felt awkward reading, writing, and speaking the language. Instead, she got others like me to do the deed. I would write just about everything on anything for her. Names, addresses, numbers, recipes, and directions on napkins, remittance stubs, money orders, thank you cards, and *chenchule'* (a gift, that today usually comes in the form of money) envelopes. I was constantly writing things down for her.

Even my Chamorro mother, who went as far as high school and studied hairdressing and cosmetology in Oklahoma shortly after marrying my white American father in 1964, felt awkward speaking and writing English. Only

after deciding she couldn't stomach the sight of blood as a candy striper did she relinquish her dreams of becoming a nurse. She decided to study cosmetology only because, she tells me half-jokingly, she had already bought the white nursing uniform and needed to make use of it. Although having a better command of the language than my grandmother, my mother comes from that generation of Chamorros who still feel awkward speaking "proper" English.⁴ My aunt tells me (again, half-jokingly) that while growing up she and my mom would remind each other, after speaking a few English phrases, to "save some English for tomorrow!"

Even after becoming a successful proprietor of her own salon and beauty supply store some twenty years after first establishing herself as a hairdresser in Guam, there are times my mother feels her English is still not good enough. I think sometimes my mother and my grandmother, even if they didn't know what I was studying in school, were satisfied just knowing that a college degree would mean I could speak and write better English. Or, as my mother would put it, I was good at putting words together. For my grandmother, it meant I could now help my mom with her business.

And so like the dough that stuck to my grandmother's rolling pin while making her famous sweet bread, or the Yigo red dirt that stuck to her hands while working her award-winning garden, or like the semipermanent color that stuck to my mother's hands while dyeing someone's hair, the phrase, *tuge' pãpa'*, has clung to my consciousness. Over the years, the concept of writing it down would come to have many different meanings for me.

For example, *tuge' pãpa'* has not just been about writing things down for my grandmother and my mother but also for myself. It's not just about writing down names, addresses, and numbers for my grandmother and writing proposals and letters for my mother but also about recording names of great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers. It's been about writing of birthing experiences during my grandmother's time and the revelation for people like my mom who never knew she was a *pattera* baby. I was surprised to discover that my mom didn't know she was delivered by a *pattera* until I began my research and probing into prewar birthing experiences. Why would such things have been kept secret or considered private? And what can I say about my intervention, my role as the writer of these things? Undoubtedly, the process of writing it down has revealed a complex Chamorro past of which I am a part. I would like to think of my scholarship as but one of the many "freedom projects" that features a conscious, if at times ambivalent, desire to write things down,⁵ to claim for myself/ourselves what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (quoted in Hirsch, 1990) have called the "authority of authorship" (416).

Such authority is what underwrote the production of the *Hale'-ta* (our roots) series of textbooks produced in Guam by a locally mandated government body called the Political Status Educational Coordination Commission.⁶ As a staffer for the commission, I researched and wrote the first volume of a subseries called *I Manfâyi* (The Wise Ones). The text, a “who’s who” in Chamorro history, features short biographical sketches of prominent men and women and of “unsung” makers of Guam’s history. *I Manfâyi* is a good local example of the authority of authorship as claimed in freedom projects. The very fact that I was collecting stories about what Chamorros did and most especially what Chamorro women did from Chamorros alone was liberating and rewarding. Such local narratives gave credence to a native agency that had long been marginalized or altogether dismissed in canonical representations and even in more local, contemporary histories (e.g., Carano-Sanchez, 1964; Sanchez, 1988; Rogers, 1995).

At face value, the project required that I read between the lines to ascertain native agency where colonial texts had stripped it, or to listen carefully to the stories handed down by descendents, and to take them and write them into liberating possibilities for posterity. It is this multiple process of handing down, these multiple forms of delivering what Alice Walker identifies as the “anonymous” narratives of baking, gardening, hairstyling, and delivering babies that I think constitute what she also calls the “creative spark.” To the extent that these involve what Marianne Hirsch (1990) identifies as “maternal narratives,” or “tradition(s) of contemporary writing that defines itself (themselves) as a (grand)daughterly tradition in relation to a complicated maternal past” (415), they become for me authentic and legitimate modes of crafting and articulating Chamorro histories. They are authentic and legitimate because, as a daughter and granddaughter, I am only the latest in an ongoing process of writing down what a Chamorro matrilineage deems important. As Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) has observed,

The story is older than my body, my mother’s, my grandmother’s. For years we have been passing it on so that it may live, shift, and circulate. So that it may become larger than its proper measure, always larger than its own in-significance. (137)

But, as alluded to earlier, I am also ambivalent about this noble project of writing it down and especially so in the context of writing academia, which I’ve already experienced as a rigid system of standards and rules. Academia, of course, has also been complicit with colonial rule in general, as Edward Said (1978) has critically demonstrated. And, as native Pacific scholars have begun to argue ever since, this complicity between academic writing and

colonialism is especially true in the Pacific Islands and in American territories like Guam (Diaz, 1994; Teaiwa, 1995; Smith, 2000; Diaz and Kauanui, 2001).

And then I also think about people like my grandmother and mother whose experiences have prompted and enabled my labor but who would at the same time find the fruits of this labor—scholarship—potentially intimidating and inaccessible.⁷ Even now, as I continue to examine the intersections of race, empire, and gender in the early twentieth century colonial project in Guam, and what the U.S. Navy called the “long road to rehabilitation,” I am still reminded of an uncle who once told me that instead of writing a thesis on the pattered I should just write a novel about them that “everyone can appreciate.”⁸ Or even still, according to one aunt, I should write children’s books. My family’s point, of course, is that I should write simply, so that everyone might understand what I have to say.

Yet, I’ve also discovered that esoteric and impenetrable writing is not the exclusive villain. Clear, readable prose is also problematic for many reasons. For starters, the political and analytical turn to “discourse” teaches us that language, no matter how clear, is neither opaque nor innocent, and that clarity in expression will always come at the cost of obscuring a counter-narrative. Remembering something entails forgetting something else. This forgetting, or absence, argues Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995), is “constitutive of the process of historical production. . . . Silences are inherent in history because any single event enters history with some of its constituting parts missing” (49). In the case of my research, much of the present-day discourse about the pattered is consciously about remembering and celebrating their importance, particularly today when the postwar institutionalization of modern health systems on Guam has been a big factor in their phasing-out.⁹

In this context, much is made of the supposed differences between postwar (“modern”) Guam and prewar (“traditional”) Guam, as invoked in the common marker *antes de gera* (before the war). *Antes de gera* life, it seems, was simple. Life was peaceful. Life was tranquil. The war disrupted that lifestyle and forever changed the island and the people. And just as life on that side of the war tends to get idealized or romanticized through nostalgic recollections, figures like the pattered likewise get remembered in heavily affectionate terms that tend to smooth out tensions and conflicts surrounding their lives and practices, especially under colonial surveillance.¹⁰

This postwar nostalgia and celebration certainly has to do with the way that these women and their predecessors, the lay pattered, tended to be marginalized, sometimes demonized, in colonial discourse.¹¹ But is all that we have in writing our recollections a choice between romanticization or demonization? Toni Morrison (1992) speaks directly to this in reflecting

critically about the power of her black consciousness and the place of writing and its potential to replicate oppression. She writes, "I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of people and language. . . . My vulnerability would lie in romanticizing blackness rather than demonizing it" (xi).

In my case, the "vulnerability" that comes from responding to demonization/romanticization would be in forgetting that antes de gera, the pattera were also the subject of scornful reproach and deep suspicion within different sectors of Chamorro society for their relative mobility and especially their close working proximity to American naval men in particular, or the fact that there were different "classes" of pattera depending on the type and level of training and the location of their work. One man, for example, considered his mother a pattera simply because she had a midwife's license and delivered babies during the war. Other *manâmkô'* (elderly), I spoke to, however, did not remember (consider?) her as a pattera' because although licensed, she, they seemed to recall, worked mainly in the hospital and not independently going from village to village the way (real?) pattera did. When I pointed to the fact that she delivered babies, one response was that wartime was a special circumstance. Often, in postwar narratives of recollection by family and clan members, researchers, and now codified in publications like *I Manfâyi* (in which I was directly involved), such tensions and differences tend to get washed out in favor of neat, nostalgic, romanticized narratives.

At the same time, there are instances today where such messiness of prewar distinctions—born of colonially imposed and native-ordered social and political hierarchies—carry over into the postwar years, such that on occasion somebody might openly question whether this or that pattera was really a "bonafide" nurse. Recalling one such instance, the son of one such pattera, Frank Aguero, stood up at a public forum (honoring the pattera) and was enraged:

I remember growing up [knowing] that my mother was a midnight wife [sic], or *pattera*, and also a nurse [my emphasis]. Somebody told me a few years ago that my mother wasn't a nurse. And I said that's a bunch of malarkey. Now let me tell you something about my mom . . . my mom wore a cap, a nurse's cap, and she works at the dressing station between [the] post office and Leary School. I remember it so well. She went [from] village to village from Umatac up to Machananao feeding people who were sick. Believe me you when I tell you that I'm very moved of a situation like this, because

my mom is the greatest nurse and midnight wife I can ever honor. Why? Let me tell you why. When all the midnight wife left Agana and fled to the hills during the Japanese time, who remains in Agana? My mom, my mother. She ate a few barley and a little *gadao* fish from time to time and survived. But she made sure she treated all the Chamorros who needed help. All of those years . . . I remember so well because I used to walk from Machananao all the way to Agana to give 'em a few fish, *lemmai* (breadfruit without seeds) and a few *dokdok* (breadfruit with seeds) called "*hutu*" to her. I remember my mom. I'm not degrading some of the midnight wives that are here. And I'm telling you right now that they deserve a lot of credit too. But my mom, everybody knows my mom. And looking around I don't think none of the people that she had delivered [is] still alive at this time. She is better known as "Tan Marian Dogge'." That Marian Dogge' from the Taitano family. That's all ladies and gentlemen. I just want you to know that she is a great person.¹²

Aguero's rage is justified, I think. The person who questioned his mother's status did so perhaps because his mother did not belong to the cohort of Navy nurse-trained women from the *mannakhilo'* or "upper class" families. Or perhaps because Tan Marian Dogge' was not a Chief Native Nurse or did not work exclusively at the hospital. And yet when other "nurse"-trained midwives fled the capital at the outbreak of the war, who remained? "My mother," declares Aguero, emphasizing her presence against those who might deny or dismiss her worth. In his bid to honor his mother and confront such misconceptions of the past (and present), Aguero reminds people that his mother wore a "nurse's cap," the quintessential sign of a nurse. And by pointing out that his mother worked at the dressing station, Aguero implies that Tan Marian Dogge' not only cared for pregnant women in private (less visible, less official?) homes in the villages but treated the ill and injured in public (more visible, official and professional?) spaces. More than recalling her presence to honor her, to include her in the record, Aguero's recollection calls attention to important tensions and differences among the historical experiences of the *pattera* that tend to get smoothed over in postwar narratives.

Hence, the heroic process of writing down something that someone has selected as important to be recorded, identified by someone as that which should be remembered, needs to also be scrutinized for what gets deselected and forgotten as a consequence. This critical injunction raises very quickly a dilemma for me, the would-be obedient (grand)daughter-writer, beyond

issues of clarity and prose. The need to interrogate motives and interests, to question the choices of and reasons for what to remember and what to forget, becomes a process fraught with questioning nothing less than the intent and the substance of my elders' desires. The predicament for me in cultural context is that this line of questioning begins to position me as "*embilikera*," nosey at best, and "*desatenta*," disrespectful at worst. Although such descriptions would really cut deep, at first, eventually, I think I could probably live with such appellations—I mean, there are other, more biting names that I can think of. But there is the more significant liability that those who matter the most just might stop asking me to *tuge' pâpa'*. And that, I think, would be the worst.

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NOTES

1. My research on *i pattera siha* was conducted for a master's thesis, in which an earlier draft of this essay appears. See DeLisle, 2001: Chapter One. The master's thesis itself originated from oral histories of prewar midwives that I conducted for a public history project under the Political Status Education Coordinating Commission from 1993 to 1995.

2. The plural form for pattera (Chamorro midwife) is "*i pattera siha*." However, when conversing in English and using Chamorro words in between, it's not uncommon to use the singular form of the Chamorro word to also signify the plural.

3. The origin of the word "pattera" comes from the Spanish word "*partera*," which also means midwife. Hence, the word "pattera" refers not only to those women trained as nurse-midwives by the U.S. Navy beginning in the early 1900s, which my research focuses on, it also refers to their predecessors, the lay pattera of *i tiempon Españót* (the Spanish times). Although the navy called these new trainees "nurse-midwives" or "nurses," the Chamorros still continued to call these women "pattera" in the American period. As I argue in my master's thesis, in spite of being trained by the navy in modern methods, some

of the nurse-trained pattered continued to practice age-old beliefs used and handed down by their predecessors. For example, some nurse-trained pattered continued to bury the afterbirth and the cord, and relied on traditional massage and medicine and old beliefs surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. For a history of naval health policies in Guam, see Hattori, 2004, based on her dissertation (1999) that includes a chapter on the pattered. My master's thesis coincided with Hattori's dissertation and was completed before her later book publication and revised pattered chapter.

4. Like my grandmother, my mother's first language is Chamorro. My grandmother was among the generation of Chamorros who were prohibited from speaking their native language in public schools.

5. Here, I am working with Donna Haraway's definition of "freedom projects" to describe political and feminist projects that contest traditional narratives of science produced predominantly by white, upper- and middle-class males. See Olson and Hirsch (eds.), 1995: 46. This work continues the work begun by Laura Marie Torres Souder and the effort by one *hagan hāga'* (blood daughter) to "recover the forgotten ones." See Souder, 1992a, for her analysis of Chamorro women's experiences and the figure of *si nana* (mother).

6. See: *Hale'-ta* 1993a, b, 1994, 1995, 1996a, b, 1997. The *Hale'-ta* books are now published through the Department of Chamorro Affairs.

7. Here, I think of what Kamala Visweswaran (1994) says about her grandmother's response (confusion?) to the academic work she is doing—to the misunderstandings, missed understandings stemming from language, generational, cultural and class barriers (xii). Also pertinent here is an article by Teresia Teaiwa (1995) who expresses her ambivalence and commitment to doing native Pacific Studies within the field of Cultural Studies, and who has grappled with the "desire to contribute real work . . . and the impulse to refuse the burden of (native) representation" (68–69). I, too, have grappled with being in the (privileged?) position of, as Vince Diaz reminds me, "delivering the cultural goodies" for other peoples' consumption (pers. comm., December 1995).

8. The master's work on pattered and public health has pushed me to look deeper at relations between native Chamorros and the U.S. Navy—especially white Navy wives—and Chamorro investments in American modernity. Part of the more recent work, "Native Lives/Navy Wives: Landlooking in the Upper Michigan Peninsula and the Guam Flag," was presented at the following conferences: "Remaking Asia Pacific Studies: Knowledge, Power and Pedagogy" at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa, 2–5 December 2002; "Rethinking Pacific Studies" at the University of California, Santa Cruz, May 2004; "Race Matters" at Columbia University, 15–16 April 2005.

9. See Cruz 1997, 2001.

10. I argue in my thesis (2001), for example, that pattered who were scrutinized by the navy, themselves became surveyors of the native population, (re)articulating the navy's discourse on health and cleanliness, and enforcing rules, particularly among pregnant Chamorro women. Getting Chamorro women to comply with navy procedures (such as getting them to see the doctor in the clinic at the beginning of their pregnancy) was at times difficult, potentially confrontational for the pattered. In other instances of modern surveillance, the pattered, who was expected immediately after the birth to accurately fill out birth

certificates and submit them to the Department of Public Health, ran the risk of neglecting family obligations (Note: It was not unusual for the pattera to stay away from her family two or three consecutive days before, during, and after a delivery). One pattera indicated that on one occasion, the recording and reporting of vital statistics would have to wait so that she could check on her family (92).

11. The lay, older pattera of Guam's Spanish era were transplanted by the younger, nurse-trained pattera. The former were represented in prewar naval writings as primitive menaces to society, and hence they needed to be replaced by the younger, "more adaptable" cohort trained by the U.S. Navy. In the postwar years, modern discourses on health, together with institutional forces, eventually contributed to the phasing-out of nurse-trained pattera, as well.

12. "Forum on Guam's *Pattera: Their Story and Legacy*," at which I served as Moderator for the "Woman, Culture, and History" panel. Sponsored by the Guam Humanities Council. Government House, 11 April 1997. Coincidentally enough, Agüero's reference to his mother as a "midnight wife" is fitting because pattera delivered babies during all hours of the day. However, I think such a reference is really more of an indication of "English, the Chamorro way."

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