



Library podcast

M. Evelina Galang discusses "Lolas' House: Filipino Women Living with War"

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[00:00:35] I'm Stesha Brandon and I'm the Literature and Humanities Program Manager here at The Seattle Public Library. Welcome to tonight's event with M Evelina Galang And Donna Miscolta to presented with our friends at Elliott Bay Book Company. I wanted to take a moment to thank the Seattle Times for their generous support of library programs and we are also grateful to author series sponsor Gary Kunis and finally a big thank you to The Seattle Public Library Foundation. So to the library foundation donors here with us tonight we say thank you very much for your support. Now I am delighted to turn the podium over to Rick Simonson from Elliott Bay Book Company who will introduce tonight's authors thank you so much and thank you very much for being here. We are very pleased tonight in having Emily in and got land here along here with a book that has been almost 20 years in the work in the writing and the research and literally spending time with the women whose stories she tells in this remarkable book entitled Lotus House

[00:01:42] Of Filipino Filipino women living with war. It's a book that tells. The story of 16 women who themselves are among the were among the thousand women that during World War Two were taken prisoner and and put into sexual slavery by the Japanese army and a whole series of things that never have really been reckoned with certainly not by Japan. And as she tells their stories or lets them tell their stories and give voice to them it becomes evident what this was in their lives and really in Philippine society in many ways and certainly as the legacy of what war does and is it Selina Galang as herself a highly regarded educator teacher. She's ahead of the Creative Writing Program MFA program at the University of Miami and has been there for some good many years and many good writers have come out of that program and she herself has also written fiction with collection of her stories for Wild American Self published by coffeehouse which is one of the finest literary presses. So she brings to what she's done with this book. An excellent form of writing and it's what to do this kind of work takes care and attention with language as well as as part of the story being told with her tonight will be for part of this after Lena talks at the beginning and I think there'll be a brief film clip of some of the some of the women whose stories are in this book. She'll be joined by Don Imus school to the Seattle writer who has herself. A wonderful novel when the Delta food crew's

family danced and the Book of linked stories Ola and goodbye. We thank you again for being here tonight and actually please join in welcoming first and Emily back along and then don't miss school time thanks

[00:03:48] I think I know who you are. Good evening everyone. So thank you so much for coming this evening. I'm here to share with you some stories of very important women in my life and I just wanted to start up I say giving you a little background on how I came to tell their stories. So back in nineteen ninety six when her wild American self first came out I heard a lot of young women writing to me and telling me that these were their stories. And it was the first time they had seen their stories on the page and that was pretty exciting to me. And then shortly after that day 19 1997 1998 there was a survey done by the Center of Disease Control that said the highest rate of suicide among young teenagers in San Diego was among Filipina American teens not boys and girls not African-American not Latina but Filipino American teens. Right around that time Perla Bullen a choreographer out of San Francisco did choreographed a beautiful piece called bamboo women which was done to the testimonies of one of the Filipina Comfort Women and that's how I met

[00:05:03] That story. And a question form for me and the question was. What were those women doing back during World War 2 that gave them the strength to fight to survive to want to live through the kinds of horrors that they lived through during World War 2. And why is it that our youth particularly in San Diego and in this survey. Were giving up so easily.

[00:05:29] So in that question as a fiction writer I really wanted to know what that was about. And I started to do research with several young women in in an attempt to write a screenplay called The LA guy. And actually I think I see Anita here. She was here. She was there in Chicago when we were beginning that research.

[00:05:49] I brought five of my students with me two of them were high school girls and the others were in their 20s and going to school in Chicago. And and for me it was about the research it was about writing the kind of fiction that is based on an understanding of where a person is coming from not just the comfort women but the teenagers themselves.

[00:06:13] So we did that and eight weeks into it we were hit we were dancing with these women we were making pictures with them. We were doing dramas. They taught us how to tango. We taught them how to raise the roof. You know we were really getting to know them and they sat me down one day and said When are you going to interview us. When are you going to take to take our testimonies. And when I left they said when are you going to write our stories. And so that began my journey and I'm going to. Just I think that Don and I will be talking quite a bit about the process but I'm going to introduce you to them this way.

[00:06:49] Oh before I before I before I read. That's right. So when I was on a Fulbright the first of my first large chunk of research that I did there and I was able to take seven of the women back to their hometowns to their garrisons where they were held to the places where they were kidnapped to their homes. And at the end of that Fulbright year all the women I got to meet. So let me just give you an

idea. There are 400000 women that we think were taken throughout Asia of the 400000 women a thousand were Filipino of the thousand Filipinos one hundred seventy three came forward after little Lola Rosa Hanson of those one hundred seventy three. I got to meet 40 of the women of the 40 of the women 16 are in this book of the 16 who are in this book.

[00:07:44] Only one survives today so they can't be here to introduce themselves to you. But I have a little video that well so could you please roll the video. Oh. Rule no rule. No not

[00:08:44] Rule module. My colleagues colleagues some need

[00:09:33] Could be the key. No one is saying why like I could leave my young but those remain low alas 16 of them.

[00:10:14] And this is for them through the mercy of God in our most intimate conversations. You will hear the lawless say so our known jaws like a chorus to a song. With a last prayer on a string of beads so our name jaws after 50 years the women have come forward. One by one they hear the story of Lola Rose Henson on the radio a woman like themselves shamed into silence. But not anymore. Is there anyone else she wants to know. Are there others and one at a time. The women take a jeep need to Lola's House. They ask their grandchildren to bring them. They ride a motorcycle with their grown daughters. A former beauty queen greets them helps them organize tells them to fight for the first time. The grannies will sit together and see women who have had to endure the same secret for 50 years they will speak their stories they will stand on streets in protest they will seek justice.

[00:11:33] How did you manage it. You ask how you say I know Lola. I know. And they look at you and smile

[00:11:43] So I would know Jaws to whisper to the mercy of God. It doesn't matter if she is Catholic or Muslim or if God has not seen the walls of her kitchen she will at some point tell you I have made it through the mercy of God Allah none Joe's testimony of Virginia VMI lawless House Carson City Metro Manila July nineteen ninety nine I am Lola Verjee I was born on May 5 1929 I was orphaned when I was 2 years old and brought to Manila before the war I was a vendor for my uncle near the river of Pan 14 years old I was not thinking of war because we were so poor

[00:12:33] When the Japanese first came. We lived in interim Moros. They captured the civilians. And my uncle was not spared for a long time. There was no food and people were dying of hunger. So one day for my aunt I went across the street searching for food five Japanese soldiers on a jeep stopped. I ran but they were looking for women. They came after me when they caught me. I struggled. They held my hands down and I thought they would kill me. They pulled my hair. They jab my back with their bayonets. They hauled me onto the jeep like a pig bound for a market. They kicked me. They pulled me up only to throw me down again. They drove me to what is now the customs house we took a turn near Jones bridge and headed south to the garrison. I thought they would kill me when we got there. They put me in a room with many other prisoners. I didn't recognize any of the

women. I wanted to get out but there was nothing I could do. So I cried. The Japanese soldiers undressed me. And because they were still pointing their guns at me. I was scared I could do nothing but resigned myself to what they were doing. I suffered for months and sometimes when I think of it I can still feel the pain. When I was there they would not feed me. I'd wait for leftovers from those who pitied me. The soldiers made me wash their clothes and clean their sleeping quarters I suffered for three months until one day there was a riot.

[00:14:22] The Japanese could not determine who was their enemy. Everyone ran. I crawled under the barbed wire fence and then I ran toward the Passaic River. I had no idea if I was being followed but I ran as if I were. When I got to the river I jumped in. I hid under a water lily floating among the grass and I rested and slowly I began to move under water. But I did not know how to swim and I was afraid they'd see me in the water.

[00:14:52] So I crawled through the water slowly. I don't know how. But I floated to the other side of the river which was big and wide

[00:15:02] By then I was not afraid anymore. I didn't care if I drowned. I was more afraid that they might catch me again when I reached the other side. I saw people and I was scared because I thought they were Japanese but they were civilians. And when I rose from the water. I was surprised to see my dress was torn from the barbed wire fence. And my skin to blood flowed from my wound. I was bleeding everywhere. I felt nothing. People bandaged me up. By the time I was well enough to look for my aunt she had evacuated from Manila. So two couples adopted me. I worked for them sewing clothes. Later when I found my aunt I didn't tell her what happened to me because I was ashamed.

[00:15:55] Thank you. So I think that now we're gonna Donna's going to join me right.

[00:16:02] So thank you all for being here and thank you Emily enough for bringing these stories to us and for the beautiful video and happy Filipino American Heritage Month to us all Filipino American Heritage Month in the House history.

[00:16:24] Yeah what we see here is that its history history month sorry. What is that. And why did things to Fong's

[00:16:34] Who initiated that 21 years ago.

[00:16:37] Thank you Dorothy Cordova is in the house. Yes. Thank you for coming.

[00:16:42] So I'm going to ask some questions and I want to covers broadly the areas of arts and activism family and community and mentorship.

[00:16:53] But following up on the reading that you did I wanted to talk about how the lolis stories are not easy to read. The brutality and dehumanization are really horrific. And yet when I was reading it I

felt compelled to turn the page to keep on reading it to know their stories. But what I want to know from you is well first of all there was this observation that one of the loaders made after you and one of that the loggers had been taking their testimony for over 14 hours and you were Rex and what she said was the stories have entered their bodies. So you were greatly affected by them and so what do you say to people who might not want to read these stories because of the cruelty and heartbreak that are in the book and they may not want to be overcome by that I say that the only way to stop this kind of violence on our young women and girls. Is to hear their stories and to know what we are capable of as people as soldiers as people of victims of war that the only way to stop that kind of violence is to really hear

[00:18:14] What has happened and to hear these women's testimonies I say we have a duty to read those stories and imagine their lives at that time because if we don't these stories continue to happen over and over again as we're seeing now we see it happening now. So it seems to me that the least we can do is read their stories or listen to them. Now I think I think of you know that the pieces of their testimonies are in first person they are in their words. So I think of it as a listening act an act of listening. I think we owe it to them to listen to them so as I was reading the book

[00:19:01] It occurred to me that you were the right person to write this book so why do you think you were the right person to write the book.

[00:19:09] And what if any fears or misgivings or hesitations that you have about writing it or even researching it.

[00:19:20] I want to know why you think I'm here. I will tell you after you die alone. So. I. Think that once I heard the stories of the women and once the women truly became my grandmothers because they did in my heart and in my spirit I could not turn away from them like I had

[00:19:46] It.

[00:19:47] I still have a full life. I still have other books that I'm working on but I had to write their stories.

[00:19:53] I had to work on this book and it took me almost 18 years to get it out in print and I feel like I wasn't going to stop until I did it. And I worked with 16 translators and transcribers who helped me to go through 40 hours of interview tapes but I was 16 because I kept losing them because it was so difficult to actually just transcribe the stories and then translate them. One of my nieces who was working on this story from the testimonies from the Philippines wrote me and said I'm a.. There's a guy in Tokyo. Yeah I really can't do it. Please don't make me. And you know I've worked with so many volunteers when I worked with House Resolution 121 students who worked with me and I would lose them along the way because it's just too hard. And for whatever reason I'm driven and and I want to do right by them. So maybe that's why I'm the right person to tell. I don't know what do you think. Well right.

[00:21:00] I think partly because what I know about your previous work and your commitment to social justice but also as I was reading the book I felt that since I've driven this in in the book I mean because I'm interspersed with a Lola's testimonies are your own reflections and also background about how you came to the project and also the euro your connection with the young women that you brought with you and that and also your your connect your family connection.

[00:21:32] You had one of the Lola's was from the same hometown so it seemed like all of those things sort of combined to sort of make it the right person at the right time.

[00:21:45] Kind of like a perfect storm. Yeah I.

[00:21:49] I mean I feel I feel like I was really honored to meet them and to get to know them. And when they tapped me on my shoulder and said When are you gonna write our stories they didn't care about the screenplay you know. And then that screenplay ended up being until de la Luna and the Fifth Glorious Mystery became more important than a screenplay became a novel. You know they didn't care about that. They wanted. They want justice. They wanted a formal apology and they feel like when they tell their truth it's going to. That's what's gonna bring them their apology. That's what's gonna make it so that it never happens again.

[00:22:24] So so they asked you to write their story. And they they didn't want to. A book of fiction. They didn't want a screenplay. They want it a true documentation of their story. So how did that change. Because you had written several books of fiction before this. So how did that change your way of thinking about writing and also your process and also how you think about how some stories demand a certain form over others. I could talk a little bit about. My

[00:22:58] Process and fiction is usually I have a character in mind and I'm very language driven you can probably hear that in that first piece and very language driven and I can sit down and just tear through a short story or work on a novel for an entire weekend without ever getting up to change my clothes. I can have that kind of focus in my fiction and apparently I have an extended play when it comes to writing this book of nonfiction because I had like the lungs I had a lot of the kind of longevity to do that like I could do that for all these years but I would sit down to to work on one of the testimonies to review some of the notes I had. And I would go fatigue I would fall. I would just get sleepy within an hour and a half or two hours. And I. I. I've come to realize that that was about self care and listening to your own body because the stories have entered the body. And the only way to make it through this process is to also take care of myself which is in terms of you know like I said I could sit and write fiction and just forget about eating and the whole kit and caboodle but with this book and this material and because it is so deep you have to take the time to take a breath and reflect it also.

[00:24:25] It's it for me it was also really interesting because when I'm not writing this book or when I wasn't writing the book I was working on my fiction and I'd like to think that I have like all these other larger stories to tell and somehow the Lola started to creep into my fiction too. And I think in part that has to do with the research that I know all the. I went back maybe I went back in 2000 to 2004 or

2005 2007 2009 I went back continually to touch base with them and so that kind of life experience and research that I was doing started to creep into my imagination and my fiction. So I think in those ways living my life with them and knowing like imagining trying to imagine them. In those spaces that they told me about started to feed my own narrative fiction narrative.

[00:25:32] So Lola Catalina says that the war was between the Japanese and the Americans that the Philippines was so it goes to the fact of colonization and the fact that many times the stories of the colonized are not told. So how does how did that play into the need for the Lola's to have their stories told. And for you to put them in this book. Well it seems to me that so often and I was just working with a reporter who was interviewing me at Lola's House and we were talking and it was supposed to be for a progressive feminist journal and for some reason. That

[00:26:22] These stories this book was not enough was not it was not strong enough like we did the interview and then they wanted to broaden it.

[00:26:32] And I don't mean broaden it in the sense that let's talk about how how acts of war on women are still going on. I mean broaden it like there was a quote from you know another writer regarding another country it was male writer and it didn't have anything to do with war against women right. So it's just super broad as if to say this is not an important story. So that that kind of colonization and invisibility was still is still happening today. I think she got a note from that editor that says how can we make this story relevant to our community

[00:27:08] Like this supposed to be a feminist community what is she talking about. No. So I can't remember the question because it's like it's so it's so amazing to me that a life. A woman's life. Does not count

[00:27:22] A woman of color as life does not count and then 16 of them in this you know does not count. That's not that's not good enough to tell the story. And of course you know these 16 women are representing those 400000 who have not yet told their stories or who are unable to tell their stories. And of course the women telling these stories are telling the stories of young women today. So I don't know I think that that's really a story for our community.

[00:27:49] You know I get it. And I. Which is

[00:27:54] I think it's so important that this book is out and available for us to read. So when you took the lolis to their hometowns to the places of their objections and imprisonment you took seven of them.

[00:28:09] And so whose idea was it to go and what were the hesitations on your part and also on their part and was it why only seven out of this 16.

[00:28:24] That was my budget.

[00:28:26] So I had I had enough money to take and that was in part part of my fulbright experience. That was a budget I had. I think every single one of them wanted me to take them back and it was hard to choose. I think it was we did first come first serve really. I mean the case of a look Krista she was like bugging me from like go. She wanted to get back to Tacloban but. I think I think it was kind of a joint imagination for us like between rich elder extra Dora the executive director of lippy Pina Gabriela myself and the Lola. We were trying to imagine like the different ways that I could learn about them I wanted to I wanted to go to where they lived.

[00:29:09] You know all of them and I wanted to be able to experience their story first and you know when you write when you write stories whether they're fiction or in this case nonfiction it's really important. And I have my some of my writing students out there it's really important to do the work to do the research and to have and to have a sense of of place.

[00:29:33] So that was important for me. And when I don't know what would for me there was no hesitation. They all wanted to do it but it was interesting once we actually got there for some of the women like for one of the women in the book I love the crew said to her I took to Tacloban she told We met women along the path like going to her going to where she was her former home going to the site of abduction and to where they were held. She told her story to every single woman she met she was silent for all those years and the minute she got home she told everybody. And I thought that was something that was like such a freeing thing you know. But then Lola Pia dad who just passed away last year who is being featured in the film the apology you know she's like you probably if you've ever looked for photographs of the comfort women in the newspaper or online you'd see Lola Pia dad because she was like she was like out there with her sign all the time and being photographed. We got to her place in Cali ball and she told everybody that she met that I was her granddaughter from the United States and Auntie tall. And you know she I'm going to write the story of our of our family and I want to know what the vegetables and plants look like and Cali both.

[00:30:54] She brought me back she told everybody. And then. When we got to the church where she was held. And I was going to interview her again talked a little bit about possibly doing a documentary too so we were standing before the church and I said Lola you want to tell your story.

[00:31:11] She said No I already told you I already told you. Lola we came all this way. She said you already know my story and she said. She said. Uh

[00:31:24] You tell my story. I said But why do I tell my story. She said because you have a mission. I retold my story but that's your mission. You tell my story.

[00:31:34] So you talked about Lola Christie and how she was telling people along the way about her story.

[00:31:41] And I remember one of the women said that she had heard that this sort of thing had happened but this was the first time she had actually heard somebody tell their story.

[00:31:55] And you wrote the story was in the trees in the grasses integrated in the sands on the beaches but never spoken out loud.

[00:32:05] So the idea that the land was witness to this but also that there was this sense at some level that people knew this was happening but it was not spoken about. And so I'm just wondering about that there's sort of collective silence about this shared trauma that it was too difficult to talk about or what did you think.

[00:32:31] I think a couple of things were going on one. I think it depended on the community you were coming from and what do I mean by that. So in some in some communities it happened to some of the women not all of the women. And. And so there was kind of a stigma that came with that. But like let's say an opera where Lola Narcisse was from all of her sisters were taken all of her aunts were taken. Everybody was taken and the man who she eventually married found her and her sister on their knees peeling and eating from a banana plant. And they were they had gone mad and he helped to nurture them because he took pity on them because. His sister had also been taken so in that community it's incredibly open and everyone talks about it everybody understands it. There's a way that the community is open to them. But I think you know there's also this thing in the Filipino about shame and gossip. She's only said here. And it's so prevalent so strong lola. Or do how when she went home her family wouldn't even open the door. People were calling her on the street and happiness Japanese leftovers. And even though they were crying when they know kind of half opened the door they said to her you have that maybe it's better if you go to the city maybe it's better for the family if you go so you know I think there was there was you know they're just really dependent on the family. And it depended on what was going on in that community. Lola Catalina saved her her husband and her her son. She she actually said that they did not exist when the soldiers asked about her. And and they were in hiding. And she saved them. And yet when they got back together and the doctor came in and he came to the doctor to see her he denied her.

[00:34:35] He you know he took her home but he he never loved her again. And in her telling of the story you know for me the saddest part of her story is she said uh you know she would.

[00:34:48] The sad thing is that her husband took her back but he never loved me again. He never loved me again. So I guess it really depended on the woman. And the culture.

[00:34:57] You know there's some heartbreaking stories. In this book and I want to talk about your connection to the to the Philippines and to the little nose in the book. You write the land which was part of my ancestry felt like home the strength of the women reminded me of the strength of the women in my family. So you grew up in Wisconsin in a place where there are not many Filipino families. So how did your family manage to maintain that Filipino identity and how did that serve you in this project and also were there any times or places or parts of this where you felt insufficiently prepared for the project.

[00:35:42] So I'm the oldest of six children and my father is Miguel t Galan Galang means respect. Gloria t Galang Lopez Stan Galang is my mom who are also very strong woman and they raised us in that house to understand

[00:36:04] Not only who we were but who are community was.

[00:36:08] We didn't have a big community of Filipino American community in Milwaukee specifically Brookfield Wisconsin suburbs but we had a strong community. We were what I would say tiny but mighty and we were just as loud as any large community because we were Filipino you know. So there was a very we had a very my and my father and mother were also community leaders now so that was always a part of our upbringing. Family very strong part of our upbringing and always stories about home. My dad's a storyteller

[00:36:42] Always telling us stories. You know he he actually they are the age of the comfort women and they're in their 80s. They have many stories from that time when they were children.

[00:36:54] And that you know even though we weren't surrounded by it like the amazing community that I'm sure is here in Seattle that I always hear about we had our we had something there and that really held me. That made me feel very connected to the women and the and the and the place. And also there was kind of a hunger a search for that time when I would go to the Philippines right. All those stories that I got told to me I wanted to find them in that space. Yeah I think the only thing that was difficult in the beginning was language my Tagalog was all like I eavesdropped on my parents my whole life so I understood everything anyone said but it was the practice of speaking that was kind of difficult. But when I once I was thrown in there it started to come to me in bits and pieces never completely. My Tagalog is still a little bit like what wonky but like little Narcissus said still my Galo that I understand her

[00:37:52] You know it's a little turned around but she still gets what I'm trying to say so we're going to open up to questions from the audience now.

[00:38:06] From Korean literature to English. And right now we are translating story about comfort woman. But the title is one left Korea. We have 200000 comfort women taken snatched. That's the official count unofficial count is half a million. The people return to Korea. South Korea is 10 percent which is 20000.

[00:38:43] So the people either died or left in China or North Korea. And

[00:38:52] Out of 20000 the first woman came out in public. Say I am a victim that is a 50 years after the war.

[00:39:07] We have. You said you have a thousand comfort women and a hundred seventy three came forward. Yeah. For it. Korea.

[00:39:18] Can you guess two hundred thirty six people twenty thirty six came forward.

[00:39:26] Yes.

[00:39:26] Thirty. Right now we have thirty six people surviving and their average age is 91 years old. And so this novel this novel is a prison.

[00:39:47] And then last come for a woman officially announced last comfort woman is on death bed. So on of comfort woman she lived ghost to live for 75 years.

[00:40:07] Just like you said the shame guilt and everything shunned by people.

[00:40:14] And so she decided to meet the last comfort woman on the death bed. And so she's wearing her best dress shoes on the way to hospital. So my husband and I've been you know translating Korean literature

[00:40:31] But this is a first Korean novel written by Korean writer. It's been very very hard to subject to write although we have a more research and oral history done. So I'm very interested. Took 18 years for you and I'm wondering is there lots of research.

[00:40:55] Yes there is. Yes. So I have more than 40 hours of interview tapes from all from the 16 women themselves where whenever it was possible I tried to interview them more than once and then I also found a couple of the testimonies in some of the grassroots literature of Gabriela network. I also have the women some of the some of the earlier women were the first to file cases against the Japanese government on on their own behalf and they gave testimonies to the Japanese courts. So I also have those testimonies. So where and when they when they file those those cases they also had. People come to corroborate their stories. So it was really important to me and that's why it took so long to take the time to ask for stories be told more than once from different places so that the stories would be accurate so that they could not be challenged. And so that we would have their stories written down. So yes there was a lot of research that went on.

[00:42:08] Yes. Thank you for that. Thank you for that. Another question I'm in a run up.

[00:42:14] My question is pretty brief. Any word from Japan on the formal apology right.

[00:42:20] So after all this time there is still no formal apology. You might think you might have heard in the news that there was an apology but there was not a formal apology. There's never been. And what do we mean by formal apology. We mean an apology that was drafted by the Japanese government that was voted on by the diet and that is given as public notice. We do not mean a prime minister such as Kono or this pseudo apology that came from our Bay when recently with Korea. You know those those are prime ministers talking on their own behalf.

[00:42:59] That is not what the women have been looking for. They've been looking for a formal apology and reparations and a place in history warnings Rubin. Yes I was actually going to ask about whether or not you know if any of the Lola's

[00:43:16] Thoroughly loved Filipinos or maybe Gabriela had ever gotten a chance to meet any creator of the Korean comfort women. But it sounds like maybe that never never. Well it's possible the question What was the question whether if you not know if any of the low levels were able to meet any of the Korean call yet women may have.

[00:43:35] Yeah I think that they have. I mean the thing is that this campaign has been going on for such a long time and the women have gone on numerous occasions for example to Japan and they've been at the conferences. So I mean just to give you a little bit of background. It's true that the first the first to come forward with the Korean comfort women and there was I believe I have to take a look at my notes. But in the early 90s there was a conference of women and in Korea and three. And these women were testifying and and sharing their stories Korean comfort women were sharing the stories there were three women I believe. And at that time Gabriela network and a couple other grassroots organizations from the Philippines were at that conference and they came back to the Philippines after having heard these women and and knew that we had that there was a possibility that the Filipinos had also suffered the same atrocities. So that was when they began a campaign to ask to ask women to come forward. And so the first Filipina Comfort woman to come forward was Rosa Hansen.

[00:44:43] Lola Maria Rosa Hansen. And when she came forward which was not an easy thing for her to do it took her several times trying to make it to Lola's House. But when she did come forward and she was on the radio Lola's heard her.

[00:44:57] They heard her and they said should I come forward should or should I should I do it.

[00:45:05] And they did one at a time. And so that's like that first piece I was reading that more literary piece that I was reading was in reference to that moment when Lola Hanson was on the radio and and was calling to all the other women to come forward and that beauty queen is Nelly essential who was at that time the executive director of Leila Billy Bina I'm so happy to hear you talk about this project especially after such a long journey with it. My question is about the word Lola

[00:45:39] Coming back into the discourse on Filipino culture and identity and since we're in Seattle we can't not talk about Alex t zones wildly popular social media big buzz article in The Atlantic that also use the word Lola in the context of an indentured servant that was enslaved by his family. And I see some parallels but of course completely different journeys. So I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about parallels and differences and I know you responded to that efficiently in an essay but I'm more interested in the fact that. You know what if we had this issue on Filipino comfort women with the word lo Luz encapsulated in the way that Alex zones article went so far reaching on this issue yet we can't do the same with these Filipinos.

[00:46:39] If you can talk a little bit about that.

[00:46:43] Well it's very interesting because when that when that piece came out and I was asked to write that essay I did and then people in my community in Miami. I was at a bookstore and they were conflating they were conflating Alex two songs Lola. So Lola is the garlic for grandmother right. So his grand the woman he called grandmother with the women that we call grandmothers which is different than the fact that

[00:47:13] I too am a Lola I have a little one year old grandson you know. So the term is grandmother and and it's and the connection the emotional content of that word to me is about nurturing it's about love and in and in the context of the Filipina. And I'm sure many other women it's also about strength. Strong Women Strong women raising people strong women raising the fight. You know protecting us. And I guess that's. That's a connection I see. I mean I was just on a panel or not on a panel but I had just seen Alex two sons brothers speak on a panel just this past weekend. It's the first time he's talked about it. And they really. Know that it's a very complicated issue. And she was an indentured service servant and all the siblings. The way he talks about it they all understood that and they were all conflicted about it but they loved her like a grandmother. They loved her. They thought of her as a grandmother.

[00:48:13] And and so the connection I see is like there's this these women who are strong nurturing mother figures it's you know in the Philippines when they talk about the law lies there's a clear clear distinction and that's how they're known there right. They're known as the grannies. And so people know like the lawless around the streets again. They don't mean like all the grandmothers that are like you know they mean the comfort women the Filipina Comfort Women around the streets again. And it's a. And for me it was a natural. It was natural to bring that back in lawless house actually lawless house is was a place in Carson City and it was the community center where the women would get together and they would organize their campaigns for justice and they would sit together and sing and you saw actually you saw Lola's House at the end of that video where we were dancing with them right. It's that space where they come together and they find safety and they and they gather up there their warrior tools to go out and fight. So I thought that it was an appropriate name for this book and to bring into our world. But it's also I don't know it's interesting.

[00:49:24] I mean when you're not Filipino or you don't know who are Lola is how does that how does that that term get turned around and get conflated. You know I thought being conflated a lot with with that particular story Alex T's own story and even on that panel some of them refer to those same kinds of women that worked in their home homes not only as Lola but as non which is a Gaelic word for mother or. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:49:53] Which is the Tagalog word for baby sitter. Question. Up here. So I have a bit a two part question you spoke earlier about the situation in San Diego and. Now that you've put out this book I'm

[00:50:08] Thinking back to that situation that original question that you asked yourself where do you find yourself with a response to that. And then also you took children excuse me teenagers and

young women with you down to the Philippines have you kept up with them and how have they responded as you've put out these books of fiction and now on this nonfiction work.

[00:50:29] Thank you.

[00:50:30] I'll answer the last one first. They're all my friends on Facebook and they have all grown into like strong women in their own right doing different kinds of things.

[00:50:41] They've they've kept in touch and they've been following they've been following the lawless fight. And. As far as what did I learn. I had a very interesting experience because I've been with them for almost 20 years. You know. In the very beginning they would call themselves victims. You know survivors and then as their journey. Their journey grew and they continued to fight for their rights and their justice. They became more than survivors. They were heroines. And I'd like to say that they're superheroes you know and you could really see it. You could really see it in the way they carried themselves and the way they they interacted with youth and the way towards the end there. The some of the people who worked with them the young women and men who worked with them were actually victims of sexual violence themselves. And I even heard a conversation. This was not your fault. You did not ask for this. You have a right to tell your story. So what I learned the story the lesson that I was looking for is they have taught me about the importance of speaking your own truth of standing up regardless of who is going to like fight.

[00:51:58] You deny you call you out and make lies about you fake news. You know they have.

[00:52:06] They are excellent lesson models about standing up and speaking your truth which I think maybe more of us can do.

[00:52:15] We have time for maybe one more question.

[00:52:18] If there's my I apologize for coming in late. I really wanted to be here. I may have missed them.

[00:52:25] I want to take away from this. I want to know how we as women can move forward because you know Lola's will die as well. You know we're all mothers going through our cycle of life. Our children go on. What's the takeaway for the women that are right now going through war times like growing up one point three million refugees the women are the ones that are the men were taken out right there killed the women are being raped the women and the children are the next generation. So what is the takeaway from this.

[00:53:02] Well the takeaway really has to be we have to start. We have to begin by seeing seeing what is happening. We have to begin by looking we have to begin by listening. And once we do that we have to be serious about what we mean when we say let's organize you know let's let's you know I found it so heartening. I mean when I was working on House Resolution 121 we I came out to the west coast and spoke on behalf of the lawless and worked with with some of the youth. We read their

testimonies to different communities. I handed out blank sheets of paper. I said if this matters to you write a letter right now we're there with your address and your signature and I will hand deliver it. So I hand delivered stacks of letters to Nancy Pelosi's office and to the late Tom Lantos his office. And I got word back through the grapevine that when that how when that bill went from markup to the house for a vote it was because a larger community beyond the Korean community the Korean American community who were who have been working so hard on this bill you know all of a sudden not just Filipino voices Filipino American voices but you know like African-American voices Latino voices white voices were writing these letters to their congressmen and I don't know.

[00:54:23] I mean it's hard to say with the times and what they are like now but at that point it seemed that we were able to and it was a really proud moment for me as an American to be sitting in the house and see a unanimous vote pass for House Resolution 121. So I think that we got to get serious about hearing these stories and then doing something and you know you don't have to be on the streets protesting because not everyone can do that. But we all find our ways to make our mark. We all find our ways to get the stories across. And for me it was writing this writing this book you know like a lot of a lot of the Gabriella women were always like come on you got to be on the streets because that's what really what that's what protest is all about. But there are other ways of protesting and I think when we come at the problem in many different ways then we start to work together and then we start to do some. So the takeaway is let's start listening. Let's start looking at the women and let's start seeing what's happening and then let's do something about it. Let's just talk about it.

[00:55:24] That's a great question to end on.

[00:55:26] That was the perfect ending. Thank you for the question and thanks for the answer. Thanks to all of you for coming tonight. Let's give these ladies a round of applause. Applause

[00:55:41] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.