



AAPI Women Voices:

Untold Stories



*Through
Poetry*



AAPI Women Voices: Untold Stories Through Poetry

CREATED BY MEGAN ROBERTO

Introduction

TEOFANNY SARAGI

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The Personal is Political

What does it mean to be an Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI) individual? Many of us struggle to understand what our culture and background means to us. Oftentimes, we feel different when all we want is just to fit in. These themes of internal conflict and self-discovery run throughout the personal narratives of the women featured in this story entitled “AAPI Women Voices: Untold Stories through Poetry.” Through this story, we will explore ideas of family, community history, and change. We will discover how these AAPI women work through their struggles by engaging in reflection and writing. These women have faced discrimination and isolation as a result of their race, ethnicity, economic class, culture, the model minority myth, sexual orientation, and gender identity. In facing this, they realize that the personal is political. They work to contribute to society in the fight for social justice.

Bringing Forward the Marginalized

The creative work of the AAPI women featured in this story bring forward the experiences of the communities of color, working-class, immigrants, LGBTQ individuals, and indigenous people. Though the narratives that dominate history often do not reflect the lived realities of many marginalized

individuals, these women’s voices are among the perspectives of those who provide the contrary. They are committed to diversity and representation, whether it is, in the non-profit world as activists, in the creative world as performers, in the academic world as scholars or business world as entrepreneurs.

The Journey Continues

What does it mean to be an Asian American or Pacific Islander individual? According to these women, it means many things. While these women are accomplished and successful, they are still on the same journey of introspection that many of us share. While they come from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences, the creative work that they produce demonstrates that AAPI culture is relevant and that our histories are important. Though we may be unique, that is what makes us strong. Through their work, they are helping others realize that we have the individual power to shape a popular culture that is reflective of our personal experiences, and to bring about greater self-awareness and social consciousness, a foundation for social change. AAPI women’s voices have the power to transform. We have the power to transform.



MONICA FERRELL was born and raised in New Delhi, India. As a child, Ferrell enjoyed reading myths and fairytales, calling herself a “history geek”. Accordingly, her writing reflects similar imagery and obscurity, and Ferrell has explained that she considers such pieces of writing, though they are not necessarily about her daily life, important reflections of her life and feelings. Speaking on her writing style and method, Ferrell stated she is more likely to write about something that she does not know everything about, “following the trail” of her curiosity. The role of uncertainty and curiosity is significant, with Ferrell stating she sees poetry as “uncovering” rather than as invention. Ferrell has also discussed

challenging herself to remove the barrier between her normal consciousness and way of thinking or speaking and the more refined form of self that is presented in her writing. Regarding her poems, Ferrell states she hopes to “embody a wild diversity of perspective, voice, and style” in an effort to surprise her audience.

Ferrell earned a BA at Harvard University and an MFA at Columbia University. Her novel, *The Answer is Always Yes*, was named one of Booklist’s Top Ten Debut Novels of 2008. Her collection of poems, *Beasts for the Chase*, won the Kathryn A. Morton Prize. She teaches in the creative writing program at State University of New York at Purchase.

Geburt des Monicakinds

MONICA FERRELL

- 1 I woke. A tiny knot of skin on a silver table
Set in the birth-theater, blinking in the glare
Of electric lights and a strange arranged
- 2 Passel of faces: huge as gods in their council.
I was the actor who forgets his lines and enters
On stage suddenly wanting to say, *I am*.
- 3 I was almost all eye: they weighed me down,
Two lump-big brown-sugar bags in a face
Which did not yet know struggle, burden;
- 4 How the look of newborns unnerves. Then
They wrapped me in pale yellow like a new sun
Still too small to throw up into the sky.
- 5 It was midnight when they injected me
With a plague; tamed, faded as imperialism, pox
Had once put its palm-leaf hand over a quarter of Earth
- 6 Saying, *these*. Now it was contracted to a drop:
And in the morning I knew both death and life.
Lapped in my nimbus of old gold light, my
- 7 Huge lashes drooped over my deepened eyes, like
Ostrich-feather shades over twin crown princes: wet heads
Sleek and doomed as the black soul of an open poppy.

Monica Ferrell, “Geburt des Monicakinds” from *Beasts of the Chase*.
(Sarabande Books, 2008)
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Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/54063>



JESSICA HAGEDORN was born in Manila, Philippines and moved to the United States as a teenager, at the age of thirteen. While in San Francisco, she enrolled in acting classes, which led to an interest in performing arts and eventually her engagement in multimedia work. Her ethnic background includes Spanish, Chinese, Filipino, and Scotch-Irish-French.

Hagedorn’s work includes novels, poems, plays, and anthologies and incorporates songs, spoken word, and music. She is known as an experimental artist, addressing various issues and topics through innovative combinations of different mediums, like switching from a narrative to newspaper

articles or a radio play. Hagedorn explains this choice by explaining that, in certain contexts, a traditional narrative structure would not do the topic justice, as in the case of presenting Filipino culture. In regard to her writing style, Hagedorn states she enjoys creating complex, complicated characters, and as a “naturally curious person”, she sometimes reimagines parts of real-life events and events in different contexts and time periods to create stories.

Hagedorn is the author of five books and the editor of three Asian-American literature anthologies. She has won numerous awards including the American Book Award. She works in music and performing arts.

Filipino Boogie

JESSICA HAGEDORN

1 Under a ceiling-high Christmas tree
I pose
 in my Japanese kimono
My mother hands me
 a Dale Evans cowgirl skirt
and
 baby cowgirl boots

2 Mommy and daddy split
No one else is home

I take some rusty scissors
 and cut the skirt up
 in
 little pieces

3 Mommy and daddy split
No one else is home

I take my baby cowgirl boots
 and flush them
 down
 the
 toilet

4 I seen the Indian Fighter
Too many times
 dug on Sitting Bull
 before Donald Duck

In my infant dream

These warriors weaved a magic spell
 more blessed than Tinker Bell

(Kirk Douglas rubs his chin
and slays Minnehaha by the campfire)

5 Mommy and daddy split
There ain't no one else home

 I climb a mango tree
 and wait for Mohawk drums
(Mama—World War II
is over . . . why you cryin'?)

Is this San Francisco?
Is this San Francisco?
Is this Amerika?

buy me Nestle's Crunch
 buy me Pepsi in a can

Ladies' Home Journal
 and Bonanza

6 I seen Little Joe in Tokyo
I seen Little Joe in Manila
I seen Laramie in Hong Kong
I seen Yul Brynner in San Diego
and the bloated ghost
 of Desi Arnaz

dancing
 in Tijuana

7 Rip-off synthetic ivory
 to send
 the natives

back home

and

North Beach boredom
escapes
the barber shops

on Kearny street
 where
 they spit out
 red tobacco
 patiently

waiting
 in 1930s suits

and in another dream

 I climb a mango tree
and Saturday
 afternoon
 Jack Palance
 bazookas
 the krauts

and
 the YELLOW PERIL
 bombs
 Pearl Harbor

Jessica Hagedorn, "Filipino Boogie" from *Danger and Beauty*. (Penguin Books, 1993).
Copyright © 1993 by Jessica Hagedorn.
Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/58124>



SHADAB ZEEST HASHMI was born and raised in Peshawar, Pakistan until she migrated to the United States at the age of eighteen to attend Reed College. Although Hashmi grew up studying renowned British and Urdu poets while attending boarding schools in Pakistan, she did not get serious about poetry until attending Reed.

Growing up in post-colonial Pakistan, Hashmi experienced Pakistan developing and finding its own identity after its independence from British colonial rule and partition from India. Similarly, Hashmi has focused on the theme of identity, the making of it and the “between-ness” that emerges with different parts of one’s identity. She has written two books, *Baker of Tarifa* and *Kohl & Chalk*. In both books Hashmi often uses a female narrator, explaining this choice by

stating that the “female historian” had been “suppressed thus far” and that it is “her time now, for the benefit of all”. Accordingly, Hashmi’s *Kohl & Chalk* includes poems that range from Hashmi’s experience as an immigrant in the United States for college to becoming an American citizen and balancing her roles as a mother and as a poet who is trying to create new work. By discussing such issues, Hashmi helps others like her explore the different and connecting areas of their identity and cultures.

Hashmi graduated from Reed College with a BA in 1995 and received her MFA from Warren Wilson College. She received the San Diego Book Award for *Baker of Tarifa* and *Kohl & Chalk*. She is an editor for *MahMag World Literature* (magazine) and a columnist for *3 Quarks Daily* (blog and magazine).

Guantanamo

SHADAB ZEEST HASHMI

1 A guard forces you to urinate on yourself
Another barks out louder than his dog
the names of your sisters
who live in the delicate nest
of a ruby-throated hummingbird
Each will be a skeleton he says

2 Was there someone who gave you
seven almonds for memory,
a teaspoon of honey every morning?
Cardamom tea before bed?
Someone who starched your shirts
in rice water, then ironed them?

Held your chin
To say the send-off prayer
before school?

3 You’re tied to a metal coil
And memory
is a burnt wire.

First published in UniVerse: A United Nations of Poets

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Source: <http://www.sangatreview.org/poems-by-shadab-zeest-hashmi/>



KATHY JETNIL-KIJINER is a journalist, writer, performance artist, and poet who was born in the Marshall Islands and moved to Hawai’i at the age of 7. When Jetnil-Kijiner moved back to the Marshall Islands at the age of 25, she came face-to-face with climate change. After being gone for 18 years, she hadn’t focused too much of her time on the issue—it was just something she heard about. Moving back brought her to realize how vulnerable the Marshallese people were, how close the ocean was, and how large the ocean was in comparison to the islands. This scared her and she found that it scared the community as well. Jetnil-Kijiner worked to address the issue of climate change through the lens of Marshallese humanity, history, ways of life, and loss. She wrote poetry that focused on raising awareness surrounding nuclear testing, militarism, the rising sea level, forced migration, and racism. This included the fact that from 1946 to 1958, the United States conducted 67 nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands. This equals 1.6 Hiroshima-size explosions per day, creating a devastating lasting impact on the community.

Jetnil-Kijiner was selected to represent the civil society at the UN Climate Leaders Summit. She addressed the Opening Ceremony of the UN Secretary-General’s Climate Summit on 23 September 2014. Jetnil-Kijiner has also created performance-based poetry, competing in slam poetry competitions and performing at open mics, showcases, conferences, and literature readings. Her hope is that by widely sharing the threats that arise from climate change, she can influence communities and government leaders to work toward positive change. Through her work, she demonstrates that the Marshallese culture is intimately tied to their lands. As climate change slowly eliminates their lands, they simultaneously face the threat of losing their culture, history, identity, and sense of place and belonging. On the side, Jetnil-Kijiner utilizes journalism to promote the achievements of the Marshallese people; she publishes her articles online and in *The Marshall Islands Journal*. Jetnil-Kijiner graduated with an MA in Pacific Islands Studies from University of Hawai’i Mānoa.

2 Degrees

KATHY JETNIL-KIJINER

- 1 The other night my
1-year-old was a fever
pressed against my chest
- 2 We wrestled with a thermometer
that read
99.8 degrees
the doctor says
technically
100.4
is a fever
but I can see her flushed face
how she drapes
across my lap, listless
- 3 LiPeinam is usually a
wobbly walking
toddler all chunks and
duck footed shaky knees
stomping squeaky yellow
light up shoes across
the edge of the reef
- 4 And I think
what a difference
a few degrees
can make
- 5 Scientists say
if humans warm the world
more than 2 degrees
then catastrophe will hit
- 6 Imagine North American wildfires increasing by 400%
animal extinction rising by 30%
fresh water declining by 20%
thousands, millions displaced
left wandering
wondering
what
happened?
- 7 At a climate change conference
a colleague tells me 2 degrees
is an estimate
I tell him for my islands 2 degrees
is a gamble
at 2 degrees my islands, the Marshall Islands
will already be under water
this is why our leaders push
for 1.5
- 8 Seems small
like 0.5 degrees
shouldn't matter
like 0.5 degrees
are just crumbs
like the Marshall Islands
must look
on a map
just crumbs you
dust off the table, wipe
your hands clean
- 9 Today LiPeinam is feeling better
she bobs around our backyard
drops pebbles and leaves
into a plastic bucket
before emptying the bucket out
and dropping pebbles in again
- 10 As I watch I think about futility
I think about the world
making the same mistakes
since the industrial revolution
since 1977
when a scientist said 2 degrees
was the estimate
- 11 On Kili atoll
the tides were underestimated
patients with a nuclear history threaded
into their bloodlines, sleeping
in the only clinic on island woke
to a wild water world
a rushing rapid of salt
closing in around them
a sewage of syringes and gauze
- 12 Later
they wheeled their hospital beds out
let them rest in the sun
they must be
stained rusted our people
creaking brackish from
salt spray and radiation blasts
so so tired, wandering wondering
if the world will
wheel us out to rest in the sun
or will they just
dust their hands of us, wipe
them clean
- 13 My father told me that idik
– when the tide is nearest an equilibrium
is the best time for fishing
- 14 Maybe I'm
fishing for recognition
writing the tide towards
an equilibrium
willing the world
to find its balance
- 15 So that people
remember
that beyond
the discussions
are faces
all the way out here
that there is
a toddler
stomping squeaky
yellow light up shoes
walking wobbly
on the edge of the reef
not yet
under water

Source: <https://kathyjetnilkijiner.com/2015/06/30/poem-2-degrees/>

Tell Them

KATHY JETNIL-KIJINER

- 1 I prepared the package
for my friends in the states
the dangling earrings woven
into half moons black pearls glinting
like an eye in a storm of tight spirals
the baskets
sturdy, also woven
brown cowry shells shiny
intricate mandalas
shaped by calloused fingers
Inside the basket
a message:
- 2 Wear these earrings
to parties
to your classes and meetings
to the grocery store, the corner store
and while riding the bus
Store jewelry, incense, copper coins
and curling letters like this one
in this basket
and when others ask you
where you got this
you tell them
- 3 they're from the Marshall Islands
- 4 show them where it is on a map
tell them we are a proud people
toasted dark brown as the carved ribs
of a tree stump
tell them we are descendents
of the finest navigators in the world
tell them our islands were dropped
from a basket
carried by a giant
tell them we are the hollow hulls
of canoes as fast as the wind
slicing through the pacific sea
we are wood shavings
and drying pandanus leaves
and sticky bwiros at kemems
tell them we are sweet harmonies
of grandmothers mothers aunties and sisters
songs late into night
tell them we are whispered prayers
the breath of God
a crown of fushia flowers encircling
aunt mary's white sea foam hair
tell them we are styrofoam cups of koolaid red
waiting patiently for the ilomij
tell them we are papaya golden sunsets bleeding
into a glittering open sea
we are skies uncluttered
majestic in their sweeping landscape
we are the ocean
terrifying and regal in its power

tell them we are dusty rubber slippers
swiped
from concrete doorsteps
we are the ripped seams
and the broken door handles of taxis
we are sweaty hands shaking another
sweaty hand in heat
tell them
we are days
and nights hotter
than anything you can imagine
tell them we are little girls with braids
cartwheeling beneath the rain
we are shards of broken beer bottles
burrowed beneath fine white sand
we are children flinging
like rubber bands
across a road clogged with chugging cars
tell them
we only have one road

- 5 and after all this
tell them about the water
how we have seen it rising
flooding across our cemeteries
gushing over the sea walls
and crashing against our homes
tell them what it's like
to see the entire ocean__level__with the
land
tell them
we are afraid
tell them we don't know
of the politics
or the science
but tell them we see
what is in our own backyard
tell them that some of us
are old fishermen who believe that God
made us a promise
some of us
are more skeptical of God
but most importantly tell them
we don't want to leave
we've never wanted to leave
and that we
are nothing without our islands.



Source: <https://kathyjetnilkijiner.com/2011/04/13/tell-them/>



VANDANA KHANNA was born in New Delhi, India and immigrated to the U.S. with her family at a young age. Raised most of her life in Falls Church, Virginia, Khanna's life path represents the way her heritage and family roots shape her creative vision. Her award-winning books *Afternoon Masala* and *Train to Agra* incorporate South Asian influences. In these books, Khanna shares poems about the struggle of searching for a place to call home when migrating from one country to another. The poems spotlight the challenging shift from childhood to womanhood and immigrant to American. She portrays the shared struggle of youth who scramble to find their place in a world that makes them choose between different parts of their identity. Her words reflect the difficulties youth face when they are ridiculed or bullied for a part of their background

that is important to them. Khanna's poems are powerful in the representation that they bring to the world of poetry, centering South Asian narratives and perspectives in a realm that often lacks diversity. Her work has appeared in the anthologies *Asian American Poetry: The Next Generation* and *Indivisible: An Anthology of Contemporary South Asian American Poetry*.

Khanna graduated from the University of Virginia with her Bachelor of Arts and later went on to earn her Master of Fine Arts from Indiana University. Khanna has served as an instructor of English and Creative Writing at institutions of higher education throughout the nation, including Indiana University, Pitzer College, and the University of Southern California.

Evening Prayer

VANDANA KHANNA

- 1 Two Gods: the one in the closet
and the one from school days
and both are not mine. I opened
the door on God at dusk and closed
- 2 him the rest of the day. He perched
on the ledge above my father's shirts
and wool suits, a *mandir* in every Hindu
house, ours smelling of starch, surrounded
- 3 by ties and old suitcases. I was the ghost
at school, sat on the pew and watched
as other girls held God under their tongues.
My lips remember the prayer my parents
- 4 taught me those evenings with their bedroom
closet open—Ganesh carved in metal, Krishna
blue in a frame. I don't remember the translation,
never sure I really knew it. I got mixed up sometimes,
- 5 said a section of the "Our Father" in the middle
of the *arti*, ending in Amen when I meant *Krishna*,
Krishna, not sure when to kneel and when to touch
someone's feet with my hands.
- 6 My name means it all—holiness, God, evenings
praying to a closet. My mother says before I
was born, I was an ache in the back of her throat,
wind rushing past her ear, that my father prayed
- 7 every evening, closet door open, for a daughter.
And so I am evening prayer, sunset and mantra.
At school, I longed for a name that was smooth
on the backs of my teeth, no trick getting it out.
- 8 Easy on the mouth, a Lisa or a Julie—brown hair
and freckles, not skin the color of settling dusk,
a name you could press your lips to, press lips
against, American names of backyard swings, meat loaf
- 9 in the oven, not of one-room apartments
overlooking parking lots, the smell of curry
in a pot, food that lined the hallways with its
memory for days. I watched the hair on my legs
- 10 grow dark and hated it. I longed to disappear,
to turn the red that sheened on the other girls
in school, rejecting the sun, burning with spite.
In the mirror, I called myself another, practicing—
- 11 the names, the prayers, fitting words into my mouth
as if they belonged: *Ram*, *Ram* and *alleluia*, *bhagvan*,
God the Father, thy will be done *Om shanti*, *shanti*, *shanti*.

Vandana Khanna, "Evening Prayer" from *Train to Agra*. Copyright © 2001 by Vandana Khanna.
Train to Agra (Southern Illinois University Press, 2001)
Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/57702>

Blue Madonna

VANDANA KHANNA

- 1 Back before color threaded the world, when everything was in black-and-white, I was the only pagan at school, hiding my breath with its curry and accent, mouthing words to prayers I didn't understand. I wondered why there were always holy men but so few holy women. I wanted to be enchanted, to steal the baby Jesus from the Christmas play and keep him hidden in my closet, pull him out when I needed to be saved. I wanted to be the blue Madonna holding all the pieces of her son together.
- 2 Half a world away, girls my age came as close to God as anyone could be.

They were already throwing their bodies over their husband's funeral pyres, flung out like blankets over the flames, chanting *Ram, Ram* like a nursery rhyme. My mother told me it was a holy mantra, the more I said it, the holier I would be, but I never really knew how or why, just that it was supposed to happen. Once I tried saying it as many times as I could in fifty seconds, but nothing. No miracle, no halo of thorns around my head. And all I could think about were those girls, widows at fifteen. What did burning flowers smell like? Something terrible, something holy?

Vandana Khanna, "Blue Madonna" from *Train to Agra*.
Copyright © 2001 by Vandana Khanna.

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/57701>



SHIRLEY GEOK-LIN LIM was born in Malaysia in 1944. Lim experienced deprivation, poverty, and abandonment in her childhood, and she was often overlooked as an individual among her five brothers due to the importance placed on the male gender in her culture. As a child, she found "solace, retreat, escape" in reading, which shaped the rest of her life.

Lim wrote and published her first poem at the age of ten, and by the time she was eleven, Lim knew she wanted to be a poet. As she read more and more, she came to realize that she wanted to write her own voice and that of her community as well rather than simply continue reading about others. Although Lim identifies as a poet, her writing goes beyond that genre into non-fiction, fiction, and scholarly essays. The themes

of her writing revolve around questions of identity, transition, race, gender, and the complexities of relationships, reflecting and building upon her own life experiences. In particular, her memoir, *Among the White Moon Faces*, addresses her experience of migrating to the United States from Asia and the sense of not-belonging she felt as an Asian immigrant in America.

Lim received her Ph.D. in English and American Literature from Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts. Her first collection of poetry, *Crossing the Peninsula and Other Poems*, received the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1980, making Lim the first woman and the first Asian to win the award. Lim is currently a professor in the English Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Learning to love America

SHIRLEY GEOK-LIN LIM

- 1 because it has no pure products
- 2 because the Pacific Ocean sweeps along the coastline
because the water of the ocean is cold
and because land is better than ocean
- 3 because I say we rather than they
- 4 because I live in California
I have eaten fresh artichokes
and jacaranda bloom in April and May
- 5 because my senses have caught up with my body
my breath with the air it swallows
my hunger with my mouth
- 6 because I walk barefoot in my house
- 7 because I have nursed my son at my breast
because he is a strong American boy
because I have seen his eyes redden when he is asked who he is
because he answers I don't know
- 8 because to have a son is to have a country
because my son will bury me here
because countries are in our blood and we bleed them
- 9 because it is late and too late to change my mind
because it is time.

From *What the Fortune Teller Didn't Say*. Copyright © 1998 by Shirley Geok-lin Lim.

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/46551>



JANICE MIRIKITANI was born and raised in Stockton, California. She is an Asian-American activist, poet, and community organizer. She and her family were incarcerated in the Rohwer, Arkansas, concentration camp during the mass internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II.

When Mirikitani was young, she envied white people because those were the only images of beauty she saw. She later realized those standards are “cooked up.” After becoming involved in activist movements of the 1960s, she proclaimed, “we, marginalized people, became stronger in our own voices, and stronger without walls amongst ourselves.” She writes about major issues of Japanese American experience, identity, ethnic stereotyping, and the subordination of women. She offers compassion and healing and inspires solidarity by bridging local and global struggles.

Mirikitani helps serve the needs of the marginalized in San Francisco after GLIDE Memorial Church helped her heal from years of childhood abuse. She is now the co-founder and President of the Glide Foundation. In partnership with her husband, Reverend Cecil Williams, the foundation empowers San Francisco’s poor and marginalized communities to make meaningful changes in their lives to break the cycle of poverty and dependence.

Mirikitani received her bachelor’s degree from UCLA, teaching credential from UC Berkeley, and went to San Francisco State University for her graduate studies. She is the author of *Out of the Dust*, *Awake in the River*, *Shedding Silence*, *We, the Dangerous*, and *Love Works*, all of which are book collections of her poems. In 2000, Mirikitani was named San Francisco’s second Poet Laureate for her powerfully inspiring body of work.

Bad Women

JANICE MIRIKITANI

- 1 Bad women
can cook
create a miracle in a pot
create something out of chicken feet, pigs feet, cornmeal,
hogmaw, fisheads, ribs, roots, soy or red beans
- 2 Bad women celebrate themselves
dark as plums and coffee
light as cream and butter
gold as sun on lemons, red as cinnamon
brown as kola.
plump as mangos, skinny as tallow.
- 3 Bad women flaunt themselves,
fingerpopping, hipshaking, big laughed, smart thinking, wise-speaking
soft syllabled,
tangerine lipstick queens,
small and full breasted women,
fat kneed, thin-ankled women
who dance without warning
wrap their men or their women around their waist
and boogey to the edge of dawn.
- 4 Bad women resist war,
poverty, violent love affairs,
child abuse, and unsafe sex.

Bad women know how to stir
our tears into cups of compassion
add some hot sauce, wasabe, five spices, jalapenos
the salt of memory
stoke the fires of history
simmer in resilience
make it taste like home.

5 Bad women can burn.

Transcribed from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvPmygOXHLM> by permission from Janice Mirikitani, 2016.



Desert Flowers II

JANICE MIRIKITANI

1 Bamboo, mimosa, eucalyptus seed.
Resilience, strength, courage.

What are you
Where are you *really* from?

Go back to where you belong

What are you?

2 I am the wind that shaves mountains,
twisted barbed wire of Amache Gate, Poston, Manzanar, Rohwer,
Tule Lake

I am memory hurling us into history.

3 I am the fist of sand that pushed my mother against a wall of silence.
I am the camp mess-hall meal of potatoes and stale crackers,
dry as the desert floor.

4 I am the ten infants buried at Tule Lake,
incarcerated for their own good?
interned into the dust.

5 I am
Bamboo, pine, plum
Resilience, strength, beauty.

I grow despite the freeze of winter,
racism, drought, injustice.

6 I am a river whose tributaries
converge and touch your shores,
enter your pores,
Living water that slakes your thirst.

7 I am my mother's song
rising from the silence
to America's ear...

I am camellias that bloom
at your door,

The infants who live again,
cry from out of the dust:
Matsubara baby, Testuno, Yamamoto, Okada, Nishizaki babies,
Shigemi, Chiyko, Ichi, Minoru... resurrected in memory.

8 I am the dream for justice that reaches
to kiss your eyes...

Bamboo, pine, plum

We will not be plucked out again.

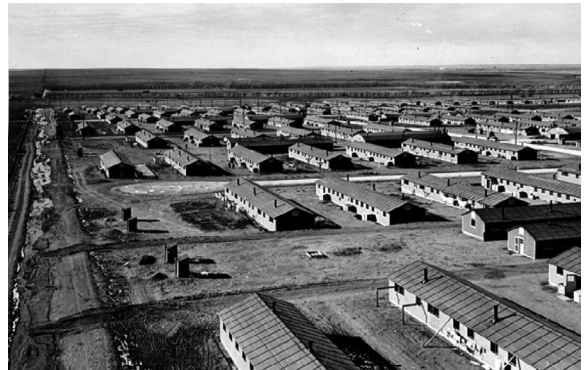
9 Inside our soil, like a river of roots, we spread, connect, grow.

Inside our voices, thunder builds under its nest,
These camps will not contain us again,
Not here, not us, not anyone again.

10 So when they ask *What Am I?*

I tell them,

and shake the dust from my hands.



Japanese American Internment Camp.

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Sing with Your Body

for my daughter, Tianne Tsukiko

JANICE MIRIKITANI

We love with great difficulty
spinning in one place
afraid to create

spaces

new rhythm

the beat of a child
dangled by her own inner ear
takes Aretha with her

upstairs, somewhere

go quickly, Tsukiko,

into your circled dance

go quickly

before your steps are
halted by who you are not

go quickly

to learn the mixed
sounds of your tongue.

go quickly

to who you are

before

your mother swallows
what she has lost.



SAHRA VANG NGUYEN was born in Boston, Massachusetts. She is a trailblazer and role model for all creative minds. She was inspired by the entrepreneurship of her parents who came to the United States as Vietnamese refugees. She pursued her passions in poetry, paint, and film and became an artist, creative producer, and entrepreneur. She worked to amplify underrepresented voices like that of her Vietnamese American family, and her creative pursuits were the foundation of her commitment to social justice. After writing and performing poetry nationally, she implemented a youth literacy program at Artists for Humanity in Boston; she then became the Director of the Writing Success Program at the University of California, Los Angeles. She also published a poetry e-book called "One Ounce Gold" that explores race in America. She has collaborated with COACH and exhibited with a roster of renowned street and graffiti artists.

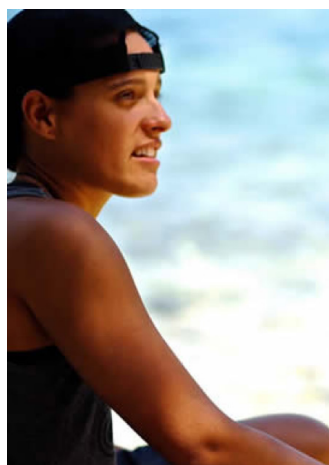
Nguyen founded her own production company, One Ounce Gold, through which she created and filmed 14 documentaries, "Maker's Lane," featuring unconventional entrepreneurs. NBC News recruited Nguyen to create an original series, Self-Starters, featuring diverse Asian-American trailblazers throughout the nation who challenge norms and carve their own paths in fashion, alternative energy, technology, art, food, and social enterprise. In 2014, Nguyen was honored with the May Takayanagi Making Waves Award by social justice leaders. Nguyen graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles with a double major in Asian American Studies and World Arts & Cultures.

Idolize

SAHRA VANG NGUYEN

Praise until empty
Raise him on a pedestal
Fallen off your throne

Sahra Vang Nguyen, "Idolize" from *One Ounce Gold*. Copyright © 2012 by Sahra Vang Nguyen. e-book version.
Source: https://issuu.com/riotinthesky/docs/one_ounce_gold



JAMAICA HEOLIMELEIKALANI OSORIO is Native Hawaiian, born and raised in Pālolo Valley, O'ahu. In high school, she attended the Kamehameha Schools Kapālama, where she fostered her love for Hawaiian language and knowledge. Osorio learned the arrival of westerners had changed Hawai'i's ecosystems and the use of its resources significantly. Western merchants exported sandalwood and sugar, and took over land for commercial agriculture operations. She is concerned with the coastal use for commercial fisheries, tourism, military, heavy industry, and other activities. She actively participates in discussions to address these issues to protect the ecosystem of Hawai'i.

Osorio has also done extensive research and written about celebrating same sex relationships which has long been part of Hawaiian culture. Osorio pursued her love for Hawaiian culture by becoming a widely published poet and professional performer, sharing her poetry throughout the Pacific Islands and at the White House after an invitation from President Obama. She is serving as a board member of Pacific Tongues, an award-winning non-profit organization that cultivates an active Pacific Islander community of activists, writers, poets, musicians, performers, educators, and leaders. She is currently a PhD candidate in English at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Letter to a Bilingual Poet

JAMAICA HEOLIMELEIKALANI OSORIO

- 1 I know girls like you
The kind to run when seeing stacks of words on top of each other
I know the way it makes every part of your body stutter, shake and shatter
How the insecurity you think you've locked under your skin
Comes flying past the surface
I know how the repeating consonants remind you of bars
- 2 And walls
Scratch against the back of your throat
Like dry chalk
How you will cramp and cram your tongue into itself
Just to make the sounds seem like they fit falling through your lips
- 3 I know how you will write
Write
Write
And not know why
Not understand the ocean of water falling out
Because you will refuse
To let a single word under light
- 4 Because you are second language
Second chance
You are back of the classroom
Without a hand
You are broken body
And beated tongue
- 5 You are poems
On poems
On poems
Because the thought of punctuation makes you want to crawl inside of yourself
Makes you remember
- 6 You dumb
You worthless child
With words no worth
Illiterate
They say
Illiterate you believe
Because your vocabulary don't stretch far enough to understand
The way the attempt at that insult is laughable

- 7 No one understands
Not even yourself
Cant even communicate right
Got twice the number of words 4 times the feelings circling in your mind
Don't make no sense
The ease of the other kids language
Only have one world they need to find fitting into their mouth
You
Clawing at broken century tongue
And colonial empire
It is a miracle you haven't torn yourself completely to pieces just yet
- 8 So many things you don't know
Cant understand
Can barely see from inside
That cage they built with the rules of their words
Make you believe they own your tongue
And all the fire your saliva spits
They don't know how you've severed all their language in half to make it stable
To make it mean
How bright that light of you shines
Who would have thought your future would be in words
- 9 Not you,
I know
And because you were the last to learn of your brilliance
It will be your job to remember
The fractures of beginning
The way you built your own fortress from nothing
Took those words they called broken
And misused
And lined the whitest of Houses with your dirty brown speech
- 10 Don't let their walls, cages, rules and commas name you anything other than genius
Than strong
Than beauty
Because you are transformation embodied
Evolution acquired
You are two worlds
In one throat
The closest thing to coexisting
That survives
- 11 You are Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio
A chant sung to the heavens
You are made of words
Built of language
And the last thing you should be afraid of
Is yourself

Source: <https://jamaicaosorio.wordpress.com/poetry-publications/letter-to-a-bi-lingual-poet/>



LEHUA M. TAITANO is an indigenous Chamorro from the Pacific Island of Yigo, Guahãn (Guam), the largest of the Mariana Islands. Born to a Chamorro mother and a Euro-American father, her family migrated to the Appalachian mountains in North Carolina when she was four years old. After migrating, she moved around many times throughout the United States, and she now resides in Sonoma County, California. She is the author of a volume of poetry, *A Bell Made of Stones*, a book of short fiction, *appalachiapacific*, and a short book of poetry, *Sonoma*. Taitano's first collection of poetry, *A Bell Made of Stones*, explores the reconstruction of home amidst migration, identity as a mixed-race individual, and queer sexuality. The poems spotlight the fragmented feeling of being different and not fitting into

society's categories—being neither this nor that and somewhere in-between. Through poetry, writing, and art, Taitano speaks to the struggle of finding a distinctive voice while trying to make sense of different parts of one's identity.

Taitano graduated from Appalachian State University with her Bachelor of Arts in English and Education and later went on to earn her Master of Fine Arts from the University of Montana. Taitano's award-winning creative work has appeared in many collections, including *The Poetry Magazine* and *Tinfish Journal*. Currently, she is the Community Outreach Coordinator on the Executive Board of the Thinking Its Presence: Race, Literary, and Interdisciplinary Studies Conference.

One Kind of Hunger

LEHUA M. TAITANO

The Seneca carry stories in satchels.

They are made of pounded corn and a grandmother's throat.

The right boy will approach the dampness of a forest with a sling, a modest twining wreath for the bodies of birds. A liquid eye.

When ruffed from leaves, the breath of flight is dissolute.

What else, the moment of weightlessness before a great plunge?

In a lost place, a stone will find the boy.

Give me your birds, she will say, and I will tell you a story.

A stone, too, admits hunger.

The boy is willing. Loses all his beaks.

What necklace will his grandmother make now.

The sun has given the stone a mouth. With it, she sings of what has been lost.

She sings and sings and sings.

The boy listens, forgets, remembers. Becomes distracted.

The necklace will be heavy, impossible to wear.

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/detail/89746#poem>

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