

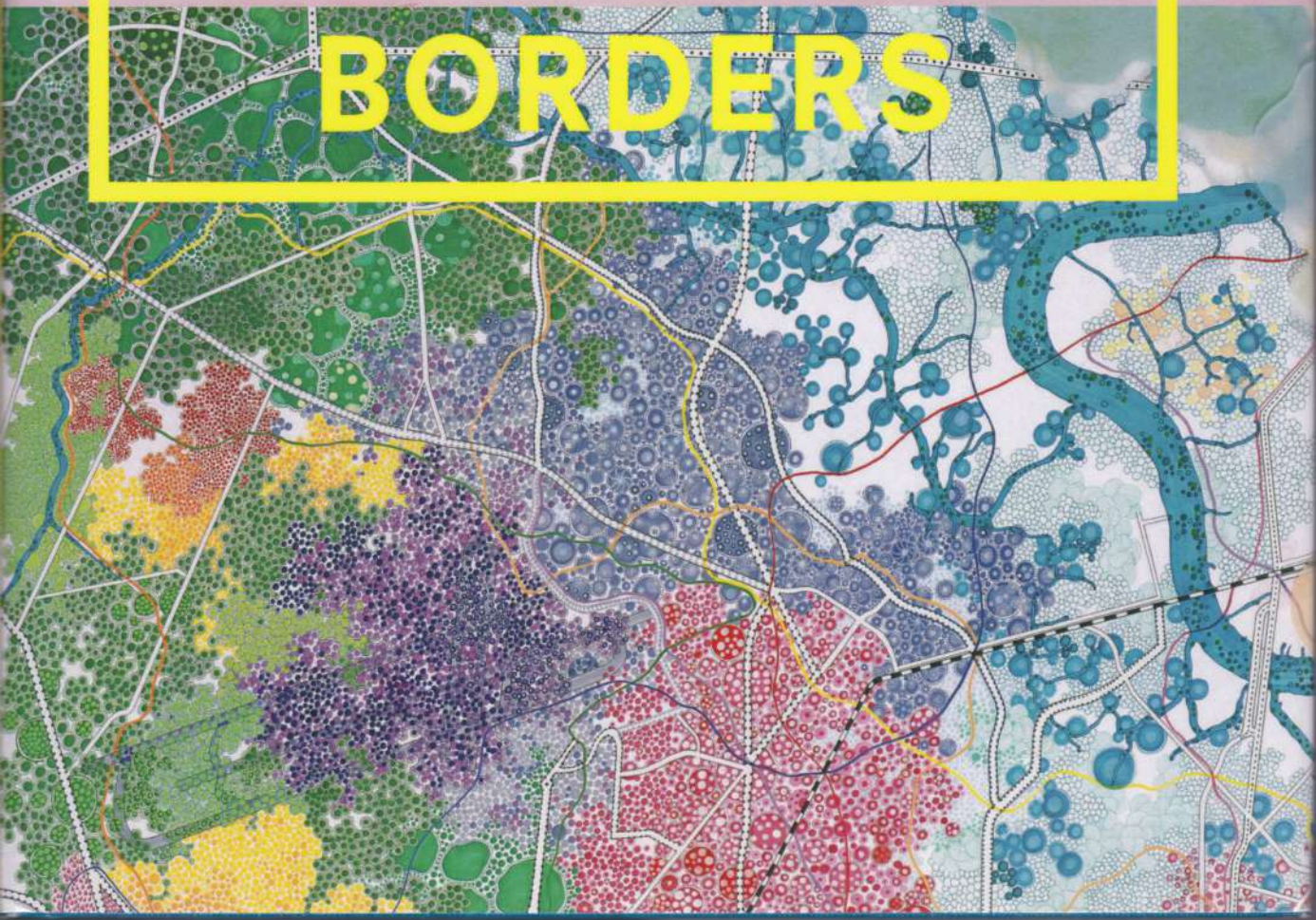
An Anthology of Art and Literature by Southeast Asian Women in the Diaspora

Edited by

Isabelle Thuy Pelaud,
Lan Duong,
Mariam B. Lam, and
Kathy L. Nguyen



TROUBLING BORDERS



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INTRODUCTION

**Mariam B. Lam, Isabelle
Thuy Pelaud, Lan Duong,
and Kathy L. Nguyen**

Nearly six hundred million people live in what is generally understood today to be Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia includes Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor and Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), the Philippine Islands, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The region is characterized by profound linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity as well as markedly different histories. Populations have emigrated and immigrated at different times, in different numbers, and for different reasons. But similarities can easily be found. For example, all of these Southeast Asian countries have large minority groups, such as the Hmong from the mountains of Laos or Thailand, Chinese Malaysians, and Malay Singaporeans. Most of these nations and peoples engage in wet-rice farming. A large part of the region has been colonized to different degrees, beginning with Portugal, Spain, Holland, and China in the early fifteenth century and then, later, England, France, and the United States.

With the seizing of territory for markets and resources came the imposition of diverse languages and cultures, followed by more costly wars and migrations throughout the world. Although immigration patterns differ, a larger number immigrated to North America from the end of the nineteenth century onward as a result of U.S. intervention and military presence in the region. The 2010 U.S. Census recorded more than 6.4 million Southeast Asian Americans. Southeast Asia has played a central role in the United States' rise to power. For pedagogical purposes, the attention to diaspora, as opposed to Southeast Asia itself, attempts to provide cultural, historical, political, economic, and geopolitical contexts for the routes of migration and traversal by those on the margins of Southeast Asia. These routes and the women who have sojourned along them share the imprints of colonialism and other imperialisms in the Pacific and their lingering cultural and global economic effects. The contributors in this collection bear witness to both the "ends of empire" (J. Kim 2010) and their residual hauntings.

As a result of the traumatic resonances in each artist's creation, we framed the organization of the collection thematically around the most prevalent concerns and preoccupations found in the literature and artwork. Rather than categorizing the contributors by ethnicity, geographic origin, or diasporic host nations, we chose to re-situate these writers and artists as both a diffuse global presence and individuals who carry with them world

historical memory and global political lineages of great importance. Rather than delimiting their works by specific genre or craft, we chose to put these diverse aesthetic attempts at history and memory, expression and repression, into complex juxtaposition, so that readers will see a full range of arts activist practices at work and in conflicted conversation with one another.

Art and literature are not elitist acts per se. What they share is attention to form and content. As such, they hold the power to convey heavy and complex emotions derived from the everyday, and we wanted to present that power in an accessible manner and format. As hybrid cultural productions, art and literature engage, extend, and transform American culture (Kim, Villanueva, and Asian Women United of California 1997, 36). While they do not necessarily represent the entire experience of these communities, art and literature from Southeast Asian women do point to the psychic costs of colonization, war, and migration for the individual and for nations. Asian diasporic women struggle with traditional values, expectations, and sexism imposed on them from within their communities (Nakashima Degarrod 2012, 252) as well as from external forces. While not all the contributors identify as “women,” preferring transgender or genderqueer identifications and subjectivities, they see their works as deeply rooted in the experiences of immigrant women, daughters, sisters, and mothers. Some find that their diasporic socialization as female-bodied but gender-variant writers and artists greatly informs the ways in which they approach their work. As editors, we embrace this larger definition of “women” that encompasses these diverse experiences and complex identities and “troubles the borders” of gender, as well.

As artists often do, these women push the boundaries of their communities and beyond. Their vision also serves as a site of cultural memories marked with lingering pain, loss, and anger, often tracing back to foreign imperialist presence in their region of origin, making them vivid and vigilant critics of empire building (Machida 2008, 128). As has been noted, mainstream society, such as that in the United States, does not always accord full acceptance and responsibility for collective trauma or similarly shared psychological experiences of loss and grief (ibid., 129). Storytelling, poetry, and visual representations can communicate multiple layers of harm and resilience left by imperial and colonial violence and the continued repression of Southeast Asian states, even though trauma is also highly resistant to direct narrativization and recall.

Our decision to group artists and writers around specific themes mirrors our desire to move away from more familiar inherited images and narratives, such as those developed around the Cold War or that rationalize French colonial nostalgia, and instead to replace them with less commonly produced tales and iconography by people who have lived in these regions, many of whom were forced into migration and displacement by imperial acts. Their experiences and dispositions, as evidenced by their creations and stories, vary greatly from the representations imagined and fantasized in the process of military, cultural, and economic interventions and conquests. We did not compile lists of themes in advance of submissions;

rather, we allowed them to manifest on their own out of the contributions received from the artists and writers in this collection.

While the brief introductions to each part discuss the parameters of each chapter's thematic categories, we intentionally chose the overarching thematic organization of the book in order to productively reframe the work of Southeast Asian diasporic women artists and writers around the most salient concerns for them at this moment in time. The traditional manners and forms in which they have appeared in the past keep them anchored to their ethnicities, histories of victimization, enclave economies, acculturation patterns, marketable literary genres, and legible visual arts displays. Though the contributors are not free from those diasporic ruptures, constraints, and tensions, this anthology reenvisioned the work of Southeast Asian diasporic women and cultural producers as that which intervenes in larger global political and social justice dialogues, rather than as solely self-representational acts.

The following artwork and literary pieces converse with one another and comment on a host of issues and concerns, which we have grouped around specific themes only for the purposes of organization and emphasis. These thematics are merely the beginning of such newly founded and legitimized perspectives and projects and foreshadow even more penetrating insights from this demographic in the years to come. We include the following in this repertoire of subjects and motifs: family relations in the diaspora; language, writing, and literacy; homes and homelands; love and sex; militarization; otherness and Asian America; race, roots, and religion; travel and narrative; and activism, resistance, and labor.

Individual pieces in the collection engage the border-crossing dimensions and bring together multivalent exchanges vis-à-vis the metaphors we have outlined. Diasporic familial relations defy containment of nuclear and extended families, crossing borders of public and private knowledges, and expose overdetermined registers of success and shame. In part 1, "Wombs and Wounds," Diep Tran's poem "Visitation" depicts the maternal as both a menacing and a sympathetic figure:

1. 2. 3. 4. Writing (always
 2. 1. 2. in the submerged room,
 1. 2. 3. 4. and in bed before the circling
 1. 2. 3. 4. and more shark than Mother,
 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100. 101. 102. 103. 104. 105. 106. 107. 108. 109. 110. 111. 112. 113. 114. 115. 116. 117. 118. 119. 120. 121. 122. 123. 124. 125. 126. 127. 128. 129. 130. 131. 132. 133. 134. 135. 136. 137. 138. 139. 140. 141. 142. 143. 144. 145. 146. 147. 148. 149. 150. 151. 152. 153. 154. 155. 156. 157. 158. 159. 160. 161. 162. 163. 164. 165. 166. 167. 168. 169. 170. 171. 172. 173. 174. 175. 176. 177. 178. 179. 180. 181. 182. 183. 184. 185. 186. 187. 188. 189. 190. 191. 192. 193. 194. 195. 196. 197. 198. 199. 200. 201. 202. 203. 204. 205. 206. 207. 208. 209. 210. 211. 212. 213. 214. 215. 216. 217. 218. 219. 220. 221. 222. 223. 224. 225. 226. 227. 228. 229. 230. 231. 232. 233. 234. 235. 236. 237. 238. 239. 240. 241. 242. 243. 244. 245. 246. 247. 248. 249. 250. 251. 252. 253. 254. 255. 256. 257. 258. 259. 260. 261. 262. 263. 264. 265. 266. 267. 268. 269. 270. 271. 272. 273. 274. 275. 276. 277. 278. 279. 280. 281. 282. 283. 284. 285. 286. 287. 288. 289. 290. 291. 292. 293. 294. 295. 296. 297. 298. 299. 300. 301. 302. 303. 304. 305. 306. 307. 308. 309. 310. 311. 312. 313. 314. 315. 316. 317. 318. 319. 320. 321. 322. 323. 324. 325. 326. 327. 328. 329. 330. 331. 332. 333. 334. 335. 336. 337. 338. 339. 340. 341. 342. 343. 344. 345. 346. 347. 348. 349. 350. 351. 352. 353. 354. 355. 356. 357. 358. 359. 360. 361. 362. 363. 364. 365. 366. 367. 368. 369. 370. 371. 372. 373. 374. 375. 376. 377. 378. 379. 380. 381. 382. 383. 384. 385. 386. 387. 388. 389. 390. 391. 392. 393. 394. 395. 396. 397. 398. 399. 400. 401. 402. 403. 404. 405. 406. 407. 408. 409. 410. 411. 412. 413. 414. 415. 416. 417. 418. 419. 420. 421. 422. 423. 424. 425. 426. 427. 428. 429. 430. 431. 432. 433. 434. 435. 436. 437. 438. 439. 440. 441. 442. 443. 444. 445. 446. 447. 448. 449. 450. 451. 452. 453. 454. 455. 456. 457. 458. 459. 460. 461. 462. 463. 464. 465. 466. 467. 468. 469. 470. 471. 472. 473. 474. 475. 476. 477. 478. 479. 480. 481. 482. 483. 484. 485. 486. 487. 488. 489. 490. 491. 492. 493. 494. 495. 496. 497. 498. 499. 500. 501. 502. 503. 504. 505. 506. 507. 508. 509. 510. 511. 512. 513. 514. 515. 516. 517. 518. 519. 520. 521. 522. 523. 524. 525. 526. 527. 528. 529. 530. 531. 532. 533. 534. 535. 536. 537. 538. 539. 540. 541. 542. 543. 544. 545. 546. 547. 548. 549. 550. 551. 552. 553. 554. 555. 556. 557. 558. 559. 560. 561. 562. 563. 564. 565. 566. 567. 568. 569. 570. 571. 572. 573. 574. 575. 576. 577. 578. 579. 580. 581. 582. 583. 584. 585. 586. 587. 588. 589. 590. 591. 592. 593. 594. 595. 596. 597. 598. 599. 600. 601. 602. 603. 604. 605. 606. 607. 608. 609. 610. 611. 612. 613. 614. 615. 616. 617. 618. 619. 620. 621. 622. 623. 624. 625. 626. 627. 628. 629. 630. 631. 632. 633. 634. 635. 636. 637. 638. 639. 640. 641. 642. 643. 644. 645. 646. 647. 648. 649. 650. 651. 652. 653. 654. 655. 656. 657. 658. 659. 660. 661. 662. 663. 664. 665. 666. 667. 668. 669. 670. 671. 672. 673. 674. 675. 676. 677. 678. 679. 680. 681. 682. 683. 684. 685. 686. 687. 688. 689. 690. 691. 692. 693. 694. 695. 696. 697. 698. 699. 700. 701. 702. 703. 704. 705. 706. 707. 708. 709. 710. 711. 712. 713. 714. 715. 716. 717. 718. 719. 720. 721. 722. 723. 724. 725. 726. 727. 728. 729. 730. 731. 732. 733. 734. 735. 736. 737. 738. 739. 740. 741. 742. 743. 744. 745. 746. 747. 748. 749. 750. 751. 752. 753. 754. 755. 756. 757. 758. 759. 760. 761. 762. 763. 764. 765. 766. 767. 768. 769. 770. 771. 772. 773. 774. 775. 776. 777. 778. 779. 780. 781. 782. 783. 784. 785. 786. 787. 788. 789. 790. 791. 792. 793. 794. 795. 796. 797. 798. 799. 800. 801. 802. 803. 804. 805. 806. 807. 808. 809. 810. 811. 812. 813. 814. 815. 816. 817. 818. 819. 820. 821. 822. 823. 824. 825. 826. 827. 828. 829. 830. 831. 832. 833. 834. 835. 836. 837. 838. 839. 840. 841. 842. 843. 844. 845. 846. 847. 848. 849. 850. 851. 852. 853. 854. 855. 856. 857. 858. 859. 860. 861. 862. 863. 864. 865. 866. 867. 868. 869. 870. 871. 872. 873. 874. 875. 876. 877. 878. 879. 880. 881. 882. 883. 884. 885. 886. 887. 888. 889. 890. 891. 892. 893. 894. 895. 896. 897. 898. 899. 900. 901. 902. 903. 904. 905. 906. 907. 908. 909. 910. 911. 912. 913. 914. 915. 916. 917. 918. 919. 920. 921. 922. 923. 924. 925. 926. 927. 928. 929. 930. 931. 932. 933. 934. 935. 936. 937. 938. 939. 940. 941. 942. 943. 944. 945. 946. 947. 948. 949. 950. 951. 952. 953. 954. 955. 956. 957. 958. 959. 960. 961. 962. 963. 964. 965. 966. 967. 968. 969. 970. 971. 972. 973. 974. 975. 976. 977. 978. 979. 980. 981. 982. 983. 984. 985. 986. 987. 988. 989. 990. 991. 992. 993. 994. 995. 996. 997. 998. 999. 1000.

Intergenerational trauma continues to suffocate new victims violently and vehemently. The contributions in the "Homes and Homelands" section expand the bounded definitions of home, motherlands and fatherlands, and homelessness, drawing out the transnational dimensions in the works of

many of these diasporic women who continue to crisscross national borders and imaginary homelands. In “Archipelago Dust” by Karen Llagas, the poetic voice states,

My friend and I eat cold fries, in our mouths
the taste of salt and land, the heat of drunkenness wearing off.

I tell him that in one story of belief, there's a planet
so small a child brooms it clean in seven steps.

Space and time contract and expand in these emblematic texts that concretize the tensions and intellectual stakes for Southeast Asian diasporic women.

When love and sex are laden with both predictable and inexplicable expectations, hesitations and compulsions, as in Kao-Ly Yang's short story “Three Pearls Facing Unfaithfulness,” in the “Loving Sex/Sexing Love” section, the reader is confronted with the pressures of materiality for a Hmong community struggling with traditional gender roles while under constant threat of disappearance, annihilation, and lost nomadism. In the works in the “Military Lives” section, the presence of military personnel, bases, secret strategic strongholds, and recruitment, as well as the economic sectors that grow out of that presence—sex tourism industries, arms trade, espionage, and the like—all leave lasting effects on women and families long after their formal infrastructures are gone. The photos from Anida Yoeu Ali's performance series *Palimpsest for Generation 1.5* capture not only the words NO CHOICE BUT TO LEAVE and ATROCITIES written on a woman's bared back as she is being washed and scrubbed clean of those words but also the personal and national histories they signify. Another installation view from the same series zooms in on a length of hair mounted above clothes, which together resemble a hair shirt and rags after they have been stripped from an absent female body. Such a palimpsest forces viewers to face the precarious issues of erasure, effacement, (in)decipherability, tabula rasa, historiography, legibility, and hidden and rewritten texts.

The section “Asians in America” is populated by many younger writers and artists still struggling with ghettoization within Asian Pacific American “yellow” networks and coalitions, while another section, “Race, Roots, and Religion,” encompasses concerns with these three intersecting influences. In the latter section, the beautiful and evocative poem “In the City, a New Congregation Finds Her” by Barbara Jane Reyes sketches lovingly imagistic new women in stanzas such as “She whose memories not paperbound lover of midnight words / Scrawled myth upon flesh woman indigo testimony tattoo woman,” each couplet more meaningful and historical than the last until the final lines, “She who has kept vigil always she of the wing-kissed sunset / Sipping starlight woman before there was a nailed god woman.” The aesthetic maturity and economy of words lend themselves to hybrid and heterogeneous heroic figures less familiar to mainstream readers.

Two final sections, “Travel Narratives and Narratives That Travel” and

“Speech Acts,” round out the collection. Julie Thi Underhill’s photographic piece *Fear of Ambivalence* mixes melancholy disjuncture with ambiguities of place, play, silence, and trepidation in the unearthing of a Cham diasporic presence, while Jenifer K. Wofford, an artist and educator based in San Francisco and Prague, Czech Republic, and raised in Hong Kong, the United Arab Emirates, and Malaysia, taunts us with the many suggestive gendered and sexual connotations in her work. Her works link the history of the Spanish-American War, military bases in the Philippines, and sex tourism industries to the contemporary sociological phenomenon of Pinay nurses, domestic caregivers, and the mass transnational migration of medical professionals from the Philippines. The works of Mail Order Brides/M.O.B., a collaboration between Wofford, Reanne Estrada, and Eliza O. Barrios, play with phantasmatic desires, camp, and performance in subversive portrayals of trends in transnational marriage migration.

Together, these tropes assist in our attempts to trouble various ideological borders. We wish to disrupt the stability of official national histories and simplistic renderings of collective consciousness or apparently shared memories by challenging history and historiography in popular discourse as well as in academic scholarship. We question notions of political justice and social justice by deploying these contributions as witnesses to the haunting of historical traumas and discontented ghosts. The collection troubles the authority of academic scholarship and academia itself when that archive is traumatized by the absence of contributions of minor literatures (Deleuze and Guattari 1986) compelled and articulated by minor transnationalisms (Shih and Lionnet 2005). National borders and notions of cultural nationalism are troubled by what might be imagined or created by this collection’s offering of a global or diasporic cultural citizenship. This anthology magnifies the aftermath, or what is left in the wake, of rampant global capitalist development. The pieces destabilize cultural norms, practices, and forms that participate in and promote neoliberal and global economic, as well as imperial, tactics. In doing so, such politicized and conscientious art and literature can slow down or beg pause in the speed of economic liberalization, of free trade and open markets, privatization, deregulation, and corporatization of the public sector. They also reveal the lasting effects that prolong accepted temporal demarcations of war and imperialism. These make up some of the material and imaginary borders we wish to trouble.

While this collection hopes to fill gaps in the understanding of the lives and imaginations of Southeast Asian diasporic women and to contribute to feminist studies in empire and migration, this has been an understandably difficult undertaking in light of the heterogeneity that marks the Southeast Asian diasporic subject historically, economically, politically, linguistically, and socially. In one respect, the limitations of global dispersal, educational acquisition, and publication and arts venues betray the overwhelming dominance of the English language. The original call for submissions targeted international contributors writing in all languages, as we are fluent in at least four languages. Some of us work in

transnational Southeast Asian studies, while others are more squarely situated in Asian Pacific American studies; those were the academic, arts, literary, and social networks across which we solicited contributions. We did not make any conscious decision to exclude other languages, and the call for submissions indeed welcomed writing in any language and from any geographic location. The 165 written submissions received, however, were nearly all composed in English, with only several texts written in a language other than English or bilingual. The latter has been retained whenever possible during the editorial process. While also constrained by limited financial resources, we did enlist the help of writer-translators who helped in the submission and review process.

Ultimately, we chose to respect the corpus of submissions, with full awareness of the resulting overwhelming dominance of the English language. While at least two contributors deal with translation on a theoretical or practical level in their writings outside this volume, namely Chi Vu and Rachel Quý Collier, the pieces they chose to submit are in English. Language carries the trace of history, artistic traditions, notions of self and other. Hence the choice of language in writing is as much a gauge of the present status of global cultural forms and their circulation—a sign of the times—as an indicator of the consequences and ramifications of such a future trajectory. Political economic questions of linguistic access and production have historically taken a back seat to the more pervasive and sociocultural close textual readings of “figurative representation” in both literary criticism and visual studies. The Southeast Asian writers and artists whose literary and visual texts have been selected and permitted to circulate internationally have become the spokespersons for contemporary “Southeast Asianness.” Those writers’ works either have been translated into English, allowing for their global travel, or were originally written in English. Translation theorists have described the global power of translation as an exotic space in the politics of representation in itself (Carbonell 1996, 79–80). Because cultural translation raises hermeneutic concerns of national(ist) proportions and beyond, those who wield that power to translate, to make meaning cross-culturally, grasp a different kind of exponential power than the cultural producers crafting their representations solely in Southeast Asian languages and contexts.

Further, critics have differentiated between four types of translations produced in our day based on their objectives—to communicate information, to circulate cultural capital, to provide entertainment, and, finally, to persuade readers to take a particular course of action (Lefevere 1998, 41). The present circulation of Southeast Asian cultural capital infects and absorbs all of these forms of translation and many more in our age of globalization. Today, one cannot speak of any representation of Southeast Asian culture without calling upon some mediated experience of cultural translation, whether in the form of visual art, literature, documentary work, cuisine, tourism, war memory, historiography, or individual relations of intercultural exchange. A historicized analysis of the production, distribution, and reception of contemporary Southeast Asian arts and literature in English

translation, or the same historicized analysis devoted to Southeast Asian arts and literature in other languages, would begin to navigate the complications of potentially subversive critique and the ambiguities of such a desire in a critical audience. However, that analytical desire is beyond the means and purview of this collection at this historical moment—that is, Southeast Asian diasporic writing in Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, or Malay, for example, does exist, in smaller quantities and in scattered geopolitical and genealogical sites throughout the world, but to compile an assortment of such texts is tangential to the current cultural industrial condition and skill set of this editorial team. We do address alternative and diverse publication venues and pressures later in this introduction.

More important to note, though, is that the language politics and polemics embedded in this collection, including the English monopoly, are endemic to the traumatic aftermath of U.S. empire building, global minority-majority politics, and issues of historical-linguistic migration and displacement. This phenomenon also marks the dehistoricizing gesture of Western cultural translation as a pushing of “Eastern” or minor texts written in non-Western languages into a pastness, so that all art and literature from developing nations and global southern spaces occupy an imaginary loss and antiquity.

Some writers hope to become more visible and easily accessible to mainstream global audiences by writing in the “McLanguage” of English as today’s lingua franca. While we recognize the problematic globalization of English described, we support these writers’ efforts to assert international legibility with the means available to them. For example, Trần Mộng Tú, a writer who normally writes in Vietnamese, has contributed her work here in English, though she also submitted other pieces in Vietnamese. Her strongest contribution, “Letter after Thanksgiving,” which Trần dedicated to her daughter Angela Tu Pease, is written as a letter from a mother to her daughter and speaks to intergenerational differences and the difficulties of communication, and it is perhaps for those reasons that the poet chose to contribute this piece in English.

In the “Coming to Voice” section, it is evident in a number of selections in which the authors combine at least two languages that the writers are in fact negotiating the need for linguistic survival of “heritage languages,” even as they perpetrate partial submission to the English medium in their linguistic choice of intervention. The fascinating infusion of Thai poetic forms, Pali linguistic registers, geometry, English, and language poetry in Jai Arun Ravine’s “ $\text{๒๒๓} dt erN$ ” troubles the borders of poetic form and global comparative literature, as well as notions of interdisciplinarity. Barbara Jane Reyes’s “polyglot incantation” mixes Tagalog or Filipino with English to create a kind of “Taglish” indicative of second- and third-generation Pinays in the United States. “Cuộc Nội Chiến của Những Identities” and “The civil war of identities” by Trần Tuệ Quân (as written according to Vietnamese ordering), or Quan Tue Tran, are written in Vietnamese and English, with bits of French and German, and depict the fragmentations of identity as they are intimately tied to linguistic struggles.

In the final section, "Speech Acts," Grace Kong, or Kahn Chara Vatey Kong, also commands attention for new genres and experimentation with media such as poetry and spoken word in both Khmer and English in the poem "I Demand Respect."

The literary and artistic contributions of Southeast Asian diasporic women are still nearly invisible. *Troubling Borders*, as the title suggests, not only challenges the narrow category of Southeast Asia, it also speaks to the difficulties inherent in collecting stories by and from women located on the margins of the margin. Some of the women come from cultures with strong oral traditions that do not emphasize written language. Only a generation ago, the Hmong and Mien did not use the written word to tell stories, and the Cham were presumed to be nearly extinct due to lack of visibility. Stories were told and passed down orally. For these women, writing and submitting their work are bold acts. Their stories are told not only in words but also through images and art, which are an integral part of this anthology. By putting together examples from an array of genres in literature (poetry, spoken word, short story, and personal essay) and art (installation, oil painting, photography, film, and video), we wish to trouble the borders of categorization in order to showcase the ways in which these women artists must speak differently and across multiple border zones.

As editors, we have sought to be as comprehensive as possible in the depth and diversity of experiences; however, we are also deeply aware of the challenges of compiling a body of work such as this anthology. In addressing these issues of power and privilege, representational comprehensiveness, and the (im)possibilities of rhetorical tactics, we had to rethink the ways in which "Southeast Asia" as a category was a limiting construction. There are indeed absences and aporias—a literary term for the conscious presence of uncertainty and doubts—within the book. We recognize the ways in which certain ethnic groups within this category have been historically dominant and thus overrepresented because of shared histories of uneven power and hegemony. We received more than 240 submissions from emerging and established writers, filmmakers, photographers, and artists. The decision-making process was a collective effort that involved much deliberation, multiple revisitations, minor disagreements over the quality of form or the need for underrepresented inclusions and vice versa, and additional solicitations for submission. However, the collaborative spirit in which we worked enabled generous give-and-take in submission discussions and ultimate decisions.

We felt obliged to reach out to underrepresented communities that sometimes did not see themselves as belonging to the category "Southeast Asian." For example, courses on Southeast Asian Americans in the 1990s almost always included only the experiences of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian Americans under the limiting categories of refugees and Asian migration. The history of Filipinos was treated as early Asian American historiography and a result of U.S. imperialism, while Filipinas were considered in newer sociological work on the international gender and racial division of labor. The histories of Thai, Burmese, and Indonesian

women revolved around their gender, spiritual and sexual politics, geopolitical unrest, and humanitarian abuses, while Malaysian and Singaporean subjects in diasporic spaces were seen as “Westernized” or “modern” and relegated to traditional Southeast Asian area studies, although such a field formation had yet to develop.

For many theorists of diaspora, these subjectivities display particular kinds of identities that are varied and spread among “ruins,” never completely finding an end to a path, an end to a subjectivity that is ever in process. Their migrations and displacements entail heightened registers of the margins, “the invisible, the ephemeral, to the spirits of one’s past, to the ghosts of one’s own memory” (Gabriel 1993, 215). For us, and for many of the contributors to this anthology, “it is such intangibles, such minutia of voices, which surge out from where silences dwell,” cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary spaces that “make silences speak” in order to reach a different level of understanding (*ibid.*, 213).

Adding to the difficulty of finding and selecting pieces for the anthology was the sensitive nature of the content of many of the contributions, such as the story of a young Filipina woman still haunted by the impact of American military bases in the Philippines many years after becoming a U.S. resident, or another woman’s harrowing account of being sexually violated. Such stories are reminders of the interlacing of violence,

war, migration, and displacement, the stitching together of patriarchy and subjugation that can shape women’s lives. This anthology and the works contained herein are supposed to be troubling and discomforting. Some of them speak unflinchingly to the traumas of abuse and

the horror of exile. Others reflect on the ways that we negotiate with the past, the ways that we form and re-form our fluid identities, as well as how we labor to sustain memory and imagination in our present lives.

We agreed to extend our submissions to diasporic women of Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and East Timor and to include works by women from minority groups such as the ethnic Chinese and Indians in Southeast Asia and the often stateless Mien, Hmong, and Cham in many regions of the world. The reader will find that contributions by diasporic women from Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore are still rare, in part because their social, political, and cultural conditions in the diasporic contexts do not facilitate such forms of cultural production with ease; they may have alternative publication venues in other culturally developed aesthetic spaces within Asia and Europe; and they have not been integrated or rendered visible and audible in Asian American studies or Asian diasporic scholarship and resist being representative tokens against that backdrop of absence.

These geopolitical and academic differences in historical treatment led to the choice of the word *diaspora* as a useful identifier, even while we recognize that the collection’s most common diasporic settings are in the United States. We do this purposefully in order to broaden the parameters

of Southeast Asia and to dispel common notions of the region as an area delineated only by Cold War genealogies or derivative of Indian and Chinese cultures. There are hundreds of thousands of women of Southeast Asian descent in the United States, Canada, Western and Eastern Europe, Australia, East Asia, and other parts of the world. The notion of diaspora elaborated by Ella Shohat, Rey Chow, and others requires a constant historical “emptying out,” space clearing, or “deterritorialization” and simultaneous deployment of newer relational approaches to identity, or reterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, by way of Shohat 2006, 201–32). As an incredibly diverse group, these diasporic women’s voices reveal the repeated ruptures caused by colonization, wars, globalization, and militarization, while the works point to the complex and often mediated agency of Southeast Asian women writers and artists of the diaspora. We hope to link U.S. minority and immigration studies to global migration and diasporic movements working toward social cultural justice. We hope such strategies will inspire more women to speak, write, and create.

Few anthologies have attempted a similar demographic coverage as this one. The only other Southeast Asian American literary anthology that has been published is *Tilting the Continent* (Lim and Chua 2000). Other Asian and Asian American women’s anthologies, such as *Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire* (1999) and *Virtual Lotus: Modern Fiction of Southeast Asia* (2002), have broken ground in creating and reinforcing a need for the publication and circulation of women’s writings. Our anthology follows in this path. At the same time, however, we also seek to differentiate our anthology from these collections. We believe that the artwork and the diversity of the works, spanning generations and genres, mark this critical difference. Together, image and text create a textured way of telling these stories, one that makes this anthology unique and touches upon the multivalent expressions of the women artists whose works we feature.

In some earlier collections, women’s voices are subsumed under national and/or ethnic markers, such as ethnic-specific anthologies like *Returning a Borrowed Tongue: An Anthology of Filipino and Filipino American Poetry* (1995) and *Watermark: Vietnamese American Poetry and Prose* (1997). And in Asian American women’s anthologies such as *The Forbidden Stitch: An Asian American Women’s Anthology* (1989), *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women* (1989), and *Making More Waves: New Writing by Asian American Women* (1997), the Southeast Asian women’s presence is marginal. Similarly, books on Asian American arts omit or overlook the full range of Southeast Asian diasporic women’s varied art forms, for instance, *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream 1899–1999* (2002), *Fresh Talk/Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art* (2005), *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary* (2008), and *Asian American Art: A History, 1860–1970* (2008). American imperialism has indeed experienced a protracted afterlife in the sphere of cultural production.

None of these anthologies shows literature and visual art spanning multiple generations and genres by transnational Southeast Asian women together. As editors, we subscribe to an interdisciplinary cultural studies approach that denies bifurcation of the arts and humanities from the social sciences of sociology, anthropology, history, economics, and politics. While we acknowledge that the branches of the arts have varied industrial formations and constraints, we have found that images and texts powerfully complement each other and make visible subjectivities that are too often hidden behind the writing of history. This anthology also speaks to the differences that exist among us and the polemics of belonging, while making visible the similarities that link us to one another. Art and literature are strong media in which to convey nuances, exceptions, and overarching themes. These contributions are by women who may originate from the political and geographic designation that has been identified as "Southeast Asia" during and after the Cold War but whose work crosses and transcends national boundaries and generic borders.

As a population, Southeast Asian women in the diaspora are not only diverse linguistically, historically, and culturally; they also differ from one another with respect to their immigration histories, socioeconomic classes, and educations. Both under-studied in the academy and often misrepresented in society, they are women whose backgrounds have been influenced by histories of war, colonialism, and migration. *Troubling Borders* highlights this diversity and foregrounds the voices of women from Southeast Asia who have been deeply impacted by racism, patriarchy, and poverty and whose histories and identities have too often been subsumed under larger categories. While new stories have emerged in this anthology, thematic issues present in Asian American immigrant literature from the 1970s through the 1990s are also expressed here, including figurations of anger and self-hatred, as well as the promotion of self-determination and ethnic and racial pride in reaction to racism, sexism, and heteropatriarchy. The need and desire to claim America are still very much alive.

We are all too familiar with the victimization and marginalization required of some multiculturalist discourse and the deployment of such victimization in cultural industries. Theorists have further elaborated on the problem of cultural "subcontracting" when referring to a kind of postmodern aesthetic practice in which particular identities are constructed elsewhere, such as in the diaspora, in response to or reaction against familiar nationalist political pressures to follow prescribed demarcations of appropriate sites and bodies for the work of identity formation. While men of the nation are praised for improving economic conditions and accelerating developmental progress in home and host nation-states, women of the diaspora become burdened with the more "menial" and "subcontractural" cultural work of post-traumatic healing and recuperation from global political historical disasters (Tolentino 2001, 149). We are well aware of and, as editors, literally embody multiculturalism's gendered academic division of labor. This anthology is led by four women, Vietnamese American studies scholars and writers trained in the

humanities. Those with time, training, financial security, and access are the ones who are able to frame the conditions for the self-representation of others. This endeavor places us in a position of relative privilege, to sit in judgment of creative works by other Southeast Asian diasporic women. We used this privilege as best we could but grasp the problems that come with having an editorial board composed only of women of Vietnamese descent. We had a more difficult time finding stories by Thai or Burmese diasporic women and communities with whom we have relatively little contact, while we received a large amount of writings by Vietnamese American women.

Most explicitly, the stories we selected do not support an alleged post-ethnic era. The intersection of race, class, gender, and immigration status shapes many of these narratives. Many of the stories, poems, and artworks feature emotions derived from layers of pain caused by racism, sexism, poverty, globalization, and militarization. These contributions, however, cannot be regarded as products created by passive victims. They hold power. These stories are vital and varied, and they provide a sharp contrast to normative narratives and ideologies that have historically been constructed by both the West and the nation-states of Southeast Asia. Too often Southeast Asian women are represented as exotic sex workers and dragon ladies or submissive maidens in the media.

For the nation-state, the Southeast Asian woman often stands in for the purity of the nation itself. For us, troubling these very notions meant redefining the category of Southeast Asians in relation to multiple and transnational geographies rather than geopolitical boundaries, as a strategy with which to protest the history of colonizations, wars, and American empire building. This broadening of the category, although it is not new, allows us to point to the broad diversity of the group and to further the inclusion of these women in academia and in society. Because they do not fit neatly into institutional disciplines and other academic categories, they too often remain in the shadow of nations and academic formations. These stories, we believe, will stimulate newer stories and better understanding of this population of women.

For all these reasons, we endeavored to be inclusive with full knowledge that there would be fissures, taking into account not only age, sexuality, ethnicity, education, and language but also style, aesthetics, and thematics. Another of our editorial challenges naturally arose over the concern with writing as an uneven form of expression and the quality of aesthetics; we often had to weigh the maturity of artistic expression and quality of style against the potential sociopolitical value and impact of a given piece. To some extent and for a certain segment of women in this population, writing and painting are not part of familiar traditions or are luxuries that they cannot afford. This situation made our selection process delicate, as the representation of certain groups was a concern, as were the taboos around the airing of communal dirty laundry. We tried to be as inclusive as possible of both emerging and more established artists, while understanding that the rate and the ability to be established correlate to the

specific history, culture, and demographics of a group, as well as immigration policies.

Historical forces enable the formations of diaspora across many cultures, various languages, and diverse understandings of memory and identity. While these forces may have shaped the expressive works showcased here, artists also resist and remake structures of racism, imperialism, sexism, and knowledge production that have conditioned their arrivals and departures. Tracing historical contexts allows us to delineate how the category of Southeast Asia itself is troubling, and how we can in turn trouble regional boundaries. What follows is an abbreviated historical contextual framing for the transnational and diasporic archive contained within the following contributions.

The Philippines has a unique relationship with the United States. Filipinos began coming to the United States in the sixteenth century as a result of Spain's colonization of Mexico and the Spanish galleons that began traveling between the two, and again during the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the subsequent Philippine-American War (1899–1902), which facilitated even greater immigration starting in 1903. In the early twentieth century, most Filipino migrants joined other Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican agricultural laborers, with numbers decreasing into the mid-century. Although the United States and the Republic of the Philippines signed a treaty granting the Philippine Islands independence in 1946, the Philippines remained an economic ward under U.S. protectorship, while the United States maintained large military bases on the islands. The United States also pressured the Philippines to send troops to fight in Viet Nam. After 1946, Filipinas/os who immigrated to the United States entered increasingly as students, migrant workers, and wives of U.S. military personnel. Following the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, they came primarily to be reunited with family members. In recent decades, skilled workers, home-care laborers, medical professionals, and brides have arrived in larger numbers as demand has also risen. While some Philippines studies scholars see the Philippines' unique national history as indicative of the shared experiences of multiple imperialisms, racism, border crossings, and inter-Asian cultural negotiation felt by other Southeast Asian minorities, other Philippines studies scholars resist affiliation with Southeast Asian studies in light of the particular differences in historical colonial struggles and Cold War polemics. The experiences of Filipinas are thereby also caught in the web of academic politics.

After World War II, the Cold War with the Soviet Union and China allowed the United States to extend and intensify its involvement in Southeast Asia. It assisted France at various moments throughout French colonial expansion into Indochina and eventually involved itself with more self-interested pursuits during the Vietnam War.

Even Thailand, which has a reputation as the only Southeast Asian nation to never have been colonized, forged ties with the United States during the Korean War and solidified that relationship during the Vietnam War by sending troops to Viet Nam and playing host to seven major military

bases. These became, as in the Philippines, "highly sexualized" zones of commercial and cultural economic consumption (Enloe 2000, 231).

From these bases, the United States bombed Cambodia and Laos without congressional authorization, charging that the Vietnamese Communists of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam were bringing weapons into the southern Republic of Viet Nam by way of these countries. During this time, the United States also recruited the stateless Hmong and Mien in Laos to fight in the war. Ironies abound. From 1966 to 1974, the Central Intelligence Agency enlisted some thirty-six thousand people from the mountain tribes of Laos as guerrillas in the Vietnam War, with the promise that once the United States won the war, the historically nomadic Hmong would be awarded their own territory. Thousands lost their lives, while their widows and children received no compensation (Fujiwara 2007, 289). Social dislocation in Cambodia during this period further strengthened the Khmer Rouge regime, which in turn became responsible for two million Cambodian deaths and forced many to flee the country.

The Vietnam War ended in 1975, initiating yet another flood of refugees from these countries and war zones to other neighboring Southeast Asian countries, as well as Australia, Europe, and North America. About 150,000 primarily southern Vietnamese, who were politically allied with the Americans in some manner, Catholics fearing persecution by the new regime, educators, skilled professionals, and other civil servants, left in 1975 when the war was lost to them. Today, there are an estimated 1.7 million people of Vietnamese descent in the United States. Because U.S. intervention in Laos and Cambodia was under the radar, however, only approximately 800 people could leave Laos and roughly 4,600 were able to leave Cambodia in 1975. By that time, Thailand no longer accepted U.S. military bases, and by 1976, more than 30,000 Thai had immigrated to the United States. Women who married former military personnel make up 30 percent of all Thai immigrants and 40 percent of all female Thai immigrants (Bankston and Hidalgo 2007, 146-49).

One consequence of such divergent histories is that Southeast Asian American women's social and economic backgrounds are extremely diverse across the diaspora. Their stories trouble the borders of multiple official national histories. Although Thai Americans appear statistically to be equally represented along with other Americans in professional occupations, reports of extreme abuse of women smuggled illegally into various countries surface intermittently (Bankston and Hidalgo 2006).

Also, Cambodians, Hmong, and Lao have immigrated with some serious disadvantages, compared to Filipinas/os, Thai, and Vietnamese. Cambodian society was torn apart by the Khmer Rouge genocide. The Hmong lived in a largely illiterate and rural culture and tended to have more children, which also made their initial adaptation more difficult. A vexed issue among Hmong practices is the "bride capture," which involves the ritual seizure of a bride by a prospective husband (Bankston and Hidalgo 2007, 154). Although the ethnic Lao have been deemed to have generally struggled less in resettlement relative to the Cambodians and the

Hmong, they often live in low-income neighborhoods, have no large ethnic enclaves on which to draw, and may have acculturated very differently than sociological patterns might suggest. Their smaller numbers and forced assimilations also render them more imperceptible and inaudible. But all Southeast Asian Americans—from the more visible Filipina/o Americans, who now compose the largest Southeast Asian American group, to the less visible Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian Americans, who could not emigrate readily in large numbers due to the nature of the United States' "secret war"—are in large part involuntary products of the building and consolidation of the American empire.

Given this past and present, this anthology is a timely attempt to speak to the ways in which multiple wars and imperialist acts continue today in the Middle East and Africa. In 1997, Anh Bui, Isabelle Thuy Pelaud, and Khatharya Um began a similar literary anthology project, but they were unable to find enough writings by Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian American women; many women they came across were concerned with survival. As graduate students, Bui and Pelaud also lacked access to certain communities. There was disagreement on what constituted a good story and on whether to prioritize social content or literary aesthetics.

Now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the demographics of these communities have changed. More women are going to college, have taken classes that correspond to their social and intellectual interests, and have had the relative luxury to reflect on their lives and those of their parents. Those born in Australia, Canada, Europe, and the United States appear more detached from "homeland" politics but are often nevertheless buffeted about by them.

The demographics of Southeast Asian studies scholars have also changed. It was not until the late 1990s that comparative literature departments in the United States began to host or house researchers in Southeast Asian studies and scholars from Southeast Asia. This absence left Southeast Asian literatures underrepresented in postcolonial and transnational feminist debates. Unlike Latin American or South Asian studies, Southeast Asian studies has not generated an abundance of critical feminist work, with the notable exception of a few critics with reputations and positionalities outside the region, such as Aihwa Ong, Ann Stoler, and Anna Tsing. The treatment of global arts and literatures often faced dismissive inattention as being merely "cultural frills" that could occasionally be helpful for describing social trends (Sears 2007, 37–38). A predominance of academic men in the field of Southeast Asian studies well into the 1980s and a heavy emphasis on political and diplomatic history focusing on elite figures meant that women's histories and visibility attracted little academic investment (Sears 2007, 54).

As for Southeast Asian American women artists more specifically, their cultural works are for the most part nearly invisible in U.S. society, neglected by mainstream critics. Art that speaks about racism, exile, and displacement does not fit into recognizable models of arts criticism invested either in the authentic and traditional or in contemporary and

modernist aesthetics. Conventional art historical approaches typically treat diasporic production, when addressed at all, as a vague and often orientalist fusion of binary notions of East and West. The dichotomous stereotypes of Asia and the West do little to bring critical attention to "the rest." Asian American studies scholars began looking at this diasporic body of work only a decade ago. Neglect up to that point can be explained by a variety of reasons: visual art was regarded as elitist, transnational themes were seen as threatening to the solidarity of people of color against racism (Chang, Gordon, and Karlstrom 2008, xi), and Southeast Asian American perspectives and visions were subsumed under a larger Asian American category dominated by an East Asian perspective. Southeast Asian women artists and writers who came to the United States after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act or after the Vietnam War ended in 1975 often identified more closely along ethnic and community alignments than with the larger narrative of a common Asian American history and shared racial markers, particularly when they had to endure forms of racial and economic discrimination within Asian America. The histories and personal stories of Southeast Asian diasporic women challenge older, accepted understandings of citizenship, ethnicity, and community.

The profiles of emerging academics and scholars are now politically and creatively engaged with these communities in newer and more varied ways. We ourselves are tenured university faculty members, established writers, and editors, so together we have better access to larger social and professional networks that can facilitate more comprehensive and conscientious outreach. More Southeast Asian American professionals, who are no longer burdened by the sacrifices necessary for survival as many of the previous generation had been, can help to advocate for and facilitate the processes of inclusion and visibility.

This visibility is not a clear and concrete subjectivity and materiality, however. It is in the residue of such politico-historical and institutional haunting that we can see "how relations of empire crash through and then recede from easy purview, sunder families, storm sequestered spaces, and indelibly permeate—or sometimes graze with only a scarred trace—institutions and the landscapes of people's lives" (Stoler 2006, 1). The desire to bear witness not to the real but to the haunting is, instead, to bear a newly reconfigured and re-empowered "threatening presence, to invisibly occupy, to take on changing form[;] . . . to be haunted is to reckon with such tactile powers and their intangibilities" (ibid.). Each of our contributors reveals the mediated forms of subaltern "speaking" that strategic subjectivities confound with their own difficulties in perceptibility and audibility. It is within these shadows and liminal spaces of vacillating identities and multiple dislocations that the writers and artists included here position their works. It is for us, for all of us as readers, then, to seek out and to reimagine, humanistically and pedagogically, the "fractured images and anti-narratives," the "errors and omissions," "the kaleidoscopic mass of fragments," and the "snippets of vision and sound . . . that continue to frame our picture of the past even when the details of the accompanying

narratives have been forgotten" (Morris-Suzuki 2005, 18, 10, 2–3). One goal of this anthology is to highlight that which has been forgotten in history and in disciplinary formations. Responsive to this cultural context, we aim to meet the need for an inclusive cultural and pedagogical text that will become an important component in the curricula for feminist studies, Asian American studies, and diasporic studies.

This anthology recognizes the differences that exist among us while drawing on similarities that bring us together through literature and art. Located in many parts of the world, we form a multilingual collective of women artists who are committed to narrating our own stories. We believe that this anthology—imperfect and incomplete—is an exciting intervention within the fields of cultural studies and diaspora studies, as well as literature and art. It affirms that Southeast Asian women are producing art and literature and affecting both their local and global communities. We hope that this anthology will inspire future generations of women artists and students to continue to create and to find their own forms of expression. By publishing their works—by troubling the imagined borders of national, ethnic, and gender identities and by pushing the boundaries of literature and art—we strive to reveal the global connections that bring such disparate groups of women together.

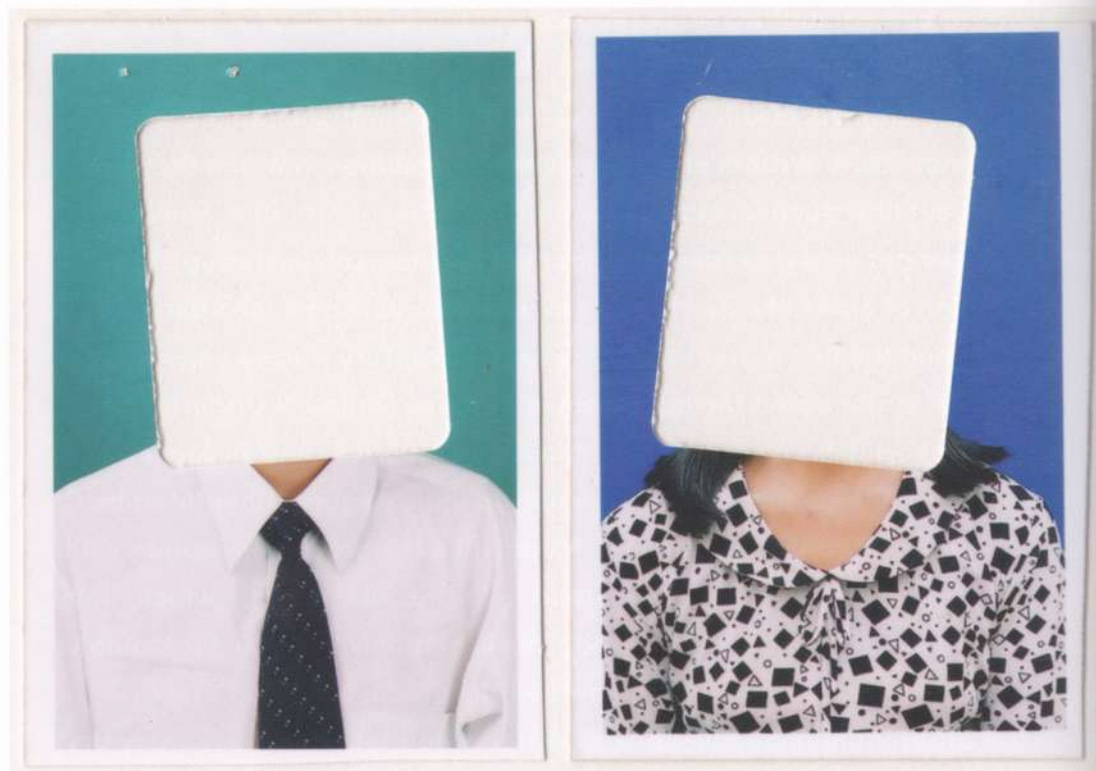
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Asians in America

Echoing the strands of narrative found in many Asian/American works is the theme of being invisible in the United States and of wanting to “claim America.” Lin + Lam’s collaborative work *This Is Not Me* speaks to the paradoxes of being pictured through the processes of immigration but of never being seen nonetheless. In response to this dynamic of visibility and invisibility, writers and artists stress the ways in which they demand to be fully realized subjects in U.S. national culture and within the landscape of Asian America itself. Writers claim the dynamic localities in which they live and talk about how such localities are integral to their identities. These authors stake out an Asian American identity for themselves through the appropriation of cities like San Francisco, reterritorializing such spaces as Chinatown and the flea market as their own. The literary pieces especially resound with anger about facing racism in America (Julie Thi Underhill’s “Progress Report”), being invisible within Asian America (Azizah Ahmad’s “A Letter to Asian America”), and fitting only in the category Other (Marsha C. Galicia-Monroe’s “#6-Other Female”). Meanwhile the artwork is replete with dramatic color and strong lines that stand in for the vital ways in which their Asian American identities are animated. This is certainly the case for Melba L. Abela’s *God Bless America*. Ann Phong’s works are also layered and textured but different thematically; *Box of Water 2* meditates on the journey that has led Vietnamese American refugees to the United States on boats, while *Boats* paints a grim portrait of this passage. Ultimately these works—both the writings and artwork—come from a vibrant Asian America and draw on the problematics and contradictions of being Asians in America.



LIN + LAM

This Is Not Me, 2005

Mixed media installation; 1,000 found photo fragments and archival plastic sleeves

4 × 6 in.

Courtesy of the artists

Speech Acts: Labor, Activism, Resistance

The works assembled here are energized by an impulse to activate language and art as a form of politicized communication, as acts of activist speech. Underlying these literary and artistic pieces is a radical desire to critique structures of racism, sexism, and classism that work to subjugate women of color. Shot through with rage, bristling with biting critique, the works by Leakhena Leng, Grace Kong, Emily Lawsin, and Connie Pham feature women who "demand respect," as Kong puts it. Their demands are rooted in the need for a global political consciousness around issues of race, women, and labor; consequently, they name themselves anew, as Grace Kong does in her poem "Miss Boss." And in "No Moments of Silence," Emily Lawsin reminds us of a lineage of racisms that must not be forgotten in a "post-ethnic" era, arguing for the need to memorialize the long line of people who fought against racism throughout the years. *Incognito 31*, by Linda Saphan, and *Bubble Shooter and Friends*, by Tiffany Chung, take a different tenor and draw on iconic images of female strength and subversion. Working in the realms of camp and seriousness, Lin + Lam's stills from the collaborative film *Unidentified Viet Nam No. 18* feature the two artists reenacting the appearance and motions of the historic personages of Madame Nhu and former South Vietnamese president Ngô Đình Diệm. Jenifer K. Wofford, Reanne Estrada, and Eliza O. Barrios, a trio of Filipina American artists, form another dynamic collaboration known as Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. Their campy work disfigures the conventional notions of Asian femininity and Asian American feminism. We end the literary contributions with Leakhena Leng's "Breathing Fire," for it is on this strident note that we wish to conclude. In line with the Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. collective, we emphasize the collaborative spirit that this anthology is premised upon. With this anthology, we show the ways in which we, indeed, breathe fire.

LIN + LAM

Stills from *Unidentified Viet Nam No. 18*, 2007

16mm film, color and black-and-white with sound

30 min.

Courtesy of the artists





ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS AND EDITORS

CONTRIBUTORS

MELBA L. ABELA, a Filipino American immigrant, was born in Capiz, Philippines. She received a BSE in history from the University of the Philippines, where she also matriculated in postgraduate studies in education and library science. She has had solo exhibitions at Diego Rivera Gallery, San Francisco Art Institute, and Washington Square Gallery/Togonon Gallery in San Francisco and participated in group shows throughout the United States. Melba has been an artist in residence at the Asian Art Museum, Asia Alive Program, in San Francisco and a fellow at the New Pacific Studio in Vallejo, California. Her artwork and writing have been featured in *Cheers to Muses*, *Paper Politics*, *Trepan*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Switchback*, *Tayo Magazine*, *Poets 11*, *Revolutionary Poets Brigade*, and *Occupy SF*.

AZIZAH AHMAD was born in San Francisco and is a second-generation Cham American. She received a BA in both religious studies and sociology with a minor in Asian American studies from the University of California, Davis. Azizah was one of the founding members of SickSpits Poetry Collective and was part of the first slam team at the University of California, Davis. She lives in Washington, D.C., where she is one of the lead organizers for the 2013 APIA Spoken Word and Poetry Summit (apiaword.com). She works at the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association.

ANIDA YOEU ALI is a first-generation Muslim Khmer woman born in Cambodia and raised in Chicago. She is a performance artist, writer, and global agitator. Since 1998, Anida has toured more than three hundred colleges and venues with the spoken word ensemble *I Was Born With Two Tongues* and the multimedia collective *Mango Tribe*. The *Tongues'* pioneering live performances and critically acclaimed debut CD *Broken Speak* ignited a new generation of Asian American voices. She is a founding member of *Young Asians With Power!*, *Asian American Artists Collective—Chicago*, the National APIA Spoken Word & Poetry Summit, and the fine arts journal *Monsoon*. Anida has received grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, the

Fulbright U.S. Student Program, the Ford Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Illinois Arts Council.

ELIZA O. BARRIOS is an interdisciplinary artist and curator for the Luggage Store Gallery's Projection Series based in San Francisco. She received her BA from San Francisco State University and her MFA from Mills College in Oakland, California. In addition to her individual practice, she has been in cahoots with Reanne Estrada and Jenifer K. Wofford in *Mail Order Brides/M.O.B.* for more than a decade. Her work has been exhibited internationally and domestically. Eliza received an honorary fellowship (media arts/new genre) from the Djerassi Resident Artists Program and was awarded residencies at Banff Artist Residency in Canada, Fundación Valparaíso in Spain, and the Living Room in the Philippines.

CHRISTILILY CHIV is a second-generation Teo Chew (Chinese) Cambodian American born in Los Angeles. She received a BA in media and cultural studies at the University of California, Riverside. Since 2006, she has been a curator for the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Islander Film Festival Youth Program. In 2011–12, she was the project leader for the Urban Oasis Film Academy in Los Angeles, a program designed to enable inner-city youth to express themselves and share their stories through film.

TIFFANY CHUNG holds an MFA from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and a BFA from California State University, Long Beach. Her work has been featured at the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland, Australia (2012); the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2012); Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri (2012); Singapore Museum of Art (2012); the Kuandu Biennale, Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan (2012); Singapore Biennale (2011); Sørlandets Kunstmuseum, Kristiansand, Norway (2011); Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, Spain (2010); International Incheon Women Artists' Biennale, Korea (2009); and

Tasmania, Australia, in 2000. She was selected for the Faculty of Art & Design Artist Residency Programme, Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, and the Aomori Contemporary Art Residency Programme in Japan. In 2005, she participated in *Parallel Realities*, the Third Triennial of Contemporary Art curated by the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum. Her artwork is in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, Artbank, Australian Parliament House, and Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan.

EMILY P. LAWSIN is originally from "She-attle." An oral historian and spoken word performance poet since 1990, she has performed on radio and stage throughout the United States and Manila. She has taught Asian American studies at the University of California, Los Angeles; California State University, Northridge; Paaralang Pilipino; and the University of Michigan. She is a trustee of the Filipino American National Historical Society, cofounder of the Detroit Asian Youth Project, and coauthor of *Filipino Women in Detroit: 1945–1955*. Her poetry and essays have appeared in numerous publications, including *Flippin'*, *The FANHS Journal*, *disOrient 9*, *InvASIAN*, and *Teaching about Asian Pacific Americans*. Go to www.emilylawsin.com.

ANNE LE received her BA in English in 2007 and her MFA in creative writing, poetry, in 2011 from George Mason University in Virginia. She resides in Springfield, Virginia. She has worked as the conference coordinator for the Association of Writers and Writing Programs. Her manuscript, *The Mausoleum*, is a collection of mythical lyric poems that traverse a landscape between Vietnam and the United States.

MAY LEE-YANG is a playwright, poet, prose writer, and performance artist from Saint Paul, Minnesota. She received her BA in English from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. As a current Bush Leadership fellow, she is attempting to build a theater company that tells Hmong stories. Her most recent theater projects include *Confessions of a Lazy Hmong Woman and Ten Reasons Why I'd Be a Bad Porn Star*. Her children's book, *The Imaginary Day*, was published in 2011. Visit www.lazyhmongwoman.com.

LEAKHENA LENG is a Seattle-based performance and spoken word artist and public health advocate. She received a BA in English from the University of Washington and is an activist in Cambodian health-related

programs, from compiling web resources to presenting formal educational workshops for the American Public Health Association. She has worked on post-traumatic stress disorder and AIDS/HIV prevention among Cambodian Americans. She has been a longtime member of Khmer in Action, a group of concerned young adults formed in the spring of 2007 to address issues that impact their local communities.

SHIRLEY GEOK-LIN LIM was born in Malaysia. She received her PhD from Brandeis University in 1973 and is a professor in the English Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She is currently at work on a study of gender and nation in Asian American representations. She is the author of five books of poems; three books of short stories; two books of criticism, *Nationalism and Literature* (1993) and *Writing South/East Asia in English* (1994); a book of memoirs, *Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homelands* (1996); and a novel, *Joss and Gold* (2001). She has served as editor or coeditor of numerous scholarly works, including *The Forbidden Stich* (1989), *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's "The Woman Warrior"* (1991), *Transnational Asia Pacific* (1999), and *Tilting the Continent* (2000).

LIN + LAM (LANA LIN and H. LAN THAO LAM) collect research in the form of interviews, archival materials, and found objects. Their collaborative work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; Arko Arts Center, Korean Arts Council, Seoul; the Oberhausen Short Film Festival, Germany; and the Third Guangzhou Triennial, China. They have received support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Jerome Foundation, the Fulbright Program, and the New York State Council on the Arts, among others. Lin and Lam were 2009–10 Vera List Center for Art and Politics Fellows. Lin earned her MFA at Bard College. She is currently on the faculty at Vermont College of Fine Arts and a Jacob K. Javits Fellow in the media, culture, and communication PhD program at New York University. Lam received her MFA from California College of the Arts and is an MFA-IA program faculty member at Goddard College, Vermont.

KAREN LLAGAS was born and raised in the Philippines. She received a BA in economics from Ateneo de Manila University and an MFA from the Warren



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