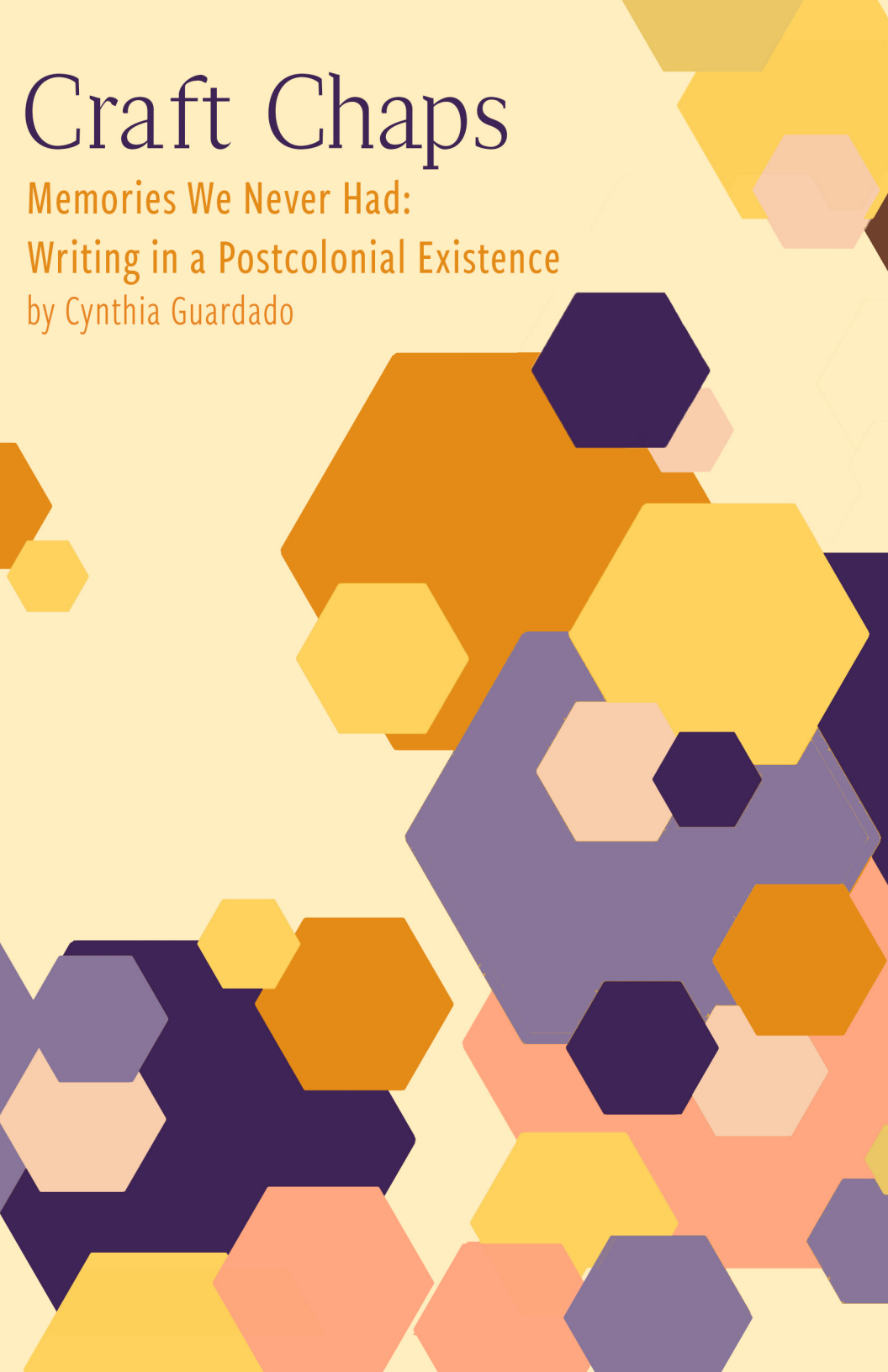
Craft Chaps

Memories We Never Had: Writing in a Postcolonial Existence

by Cynthia Guardado



MEMORIES WE NEVER HAD:

WRITING IN A POSTCOLONIAL EXISTENCE

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Disrupt everything, which cannot be stilled
—Natalie Diaz

MEMORIES WE NEVER HAD

I wish I could tell you that I remember the last words Mamá Chila said to me, but only her voice, raspy like a low prayer, hovers in crescent waves in the corners of my mind. My hippocampus, a fractured compass, holds incomplete records.

Mamá Chila's laugh ascends, a waxing moon, from where I have kept it. Her jaw fills the air as her head tilts back in a full body release of joy (this is the only way I remember her: smiling). (I need to lie to you *here* in an attempt to rewrite the weight of her sadness—sometimes there is no place for truth).

> *Do I remember when we went to El Salvador, and I last saw Mamá Chila alive? When we surprised her by arriving sin avisar and found her in the hamaca drifting above the afternoon heat?*

The truth is, I don't recall that last trip we took to El Salvador before my maternal grandmother died. I can't even remember my age at the time of her death. I suppose the real question is: *how does one write about memories we have forgotten or memories we never had?*

I'm here to tell you that you must write about what you can't remember. You must write about history even if you do not have all the pieces, because in doing so you are writing about loss—you are writing about the lack of—you are writing a history only you can tell.

PHASE 1

In order to write, we must interrogate ourselves and interrogate what we have been taught in Eurocentric educational systems. To be a Black, indigenous, person of color in a colonized society means that our voices have been diminished, that our authority has been revoked. To be a queer person of color means that—despite our resistance—we have been taught to look at the world through a heteronormative lens.

It is not possible to decolonize ourselves, as Natalie Diaz argues in *Postcolonial Love Poem*: we have to find our existence here—amongst the aftermath—in order to create what is truly ours. The first step in doing this is understanding that we have the authority and obligation to write. How we arrive there is full of possibility and requires *you* to be patient with *yourself* during your blooming.

I first fell in love with books in the Inglewood Public Library. I believe now this was only possible because I did it alone, quietly walking the lonely stacks searching for books that called to me. There was no teacher praising canonical writers to interrupt my process of discovery. Only the pages were there to guide me as I flipped to random sections searching for worthy reasons to check-out each book. Checking out the maximum books allowed quickly became my routine when I was twelve. Down Manchester Avenue, I cradled stacks of books as I walked the six blocks home. Laying on my parents' porch, the splintered sun bounced off the plastic covers of each book I picked up. I started from the beginning, and if after reading sixty or so pages I hadn't established a connection to the worlds within, I moved on to another book.

These decisions were mine. There was no one hovering over me expecting me to read to the end. These texts were not early-nineteenth-century books written by white people. They were written by authors of my choosing with names familiar to my tongue. Among these were stories my spirit always knew. A novel I read as a teen has always stayed with me: it was centered around an elder brown woman who was chased by military men and their hounds. The antagonists believed she was a bruja. I remember she was in a relationship with a much younger man and this was evidence against her. Even though I cannot

recall the title of this book—or her name—I can still see her in my mind's eye surrounded by the snarling dogs, minutes away from capture, and then she squats, lifts her dress, and urinates. The dogs stop barking, their teeth retreat, and a calm quiets them. She is powerful. She is free. She survives.

To this day, I search for this book—whose title I've forgotten. Often, I type varying scenarios of the above into Google search engines because I want to reread the first story that showed me brown women possess immense power. To read books one loves is an act of survival. This is how I survived academia: my love for writing continued to be fueled by my resistance. I never stopped reading books that weren't assigned to me. Even if that meant I barely read for AP English and didn't pass the AP exam. Even if that meant I would bullshit four years of literature courses taught by all white professors—except for the brilliant Louis Onuorah Chude-Sokei, whose classes I flocked to, the only professor of color I had in four years.

I know that it was a privilege to have a public library with three stories of book stacks and that it was a privilege to attend a four-year university. The full picture is that my undergraduate degree as a literature major at UC Santa Cruz is the perfect example of a Eurocentric education that attempts to crush BIPOC and QTPOC folks' love for literature. The reality is, these experiences scarred me, and it has taken me decades to unpack the damage that was done to me along the way. I have spent the majority of the last decade unlearning what I was taught, teaching myself about who I am and where I come from, and acknowledging my own story is valuable.

Your story is, too. You must write it. You have an obligation to honor what you've experienced and how you see the world. Be patient with your process, and nurture your understanding of yourself with books that truly reflect aspects of your reality—this will slowly allow you to cope in a postcolonial world, and will slowly heal your spirit.

PHASE 2

Through lyric poetry, we are able to inspect every angle of a situation and uncover the weight of each gesture or word exchanged. The denseness of these moments sinks deep into my body, and I find myself carrying it with me everywhere I go—this is how a lyric poem begins for me.

I first fell in love with lyric poetry because it allowed me to nestle tightly into a moment and seek shelter among what I could count as true. Before I am able to write a lyric poem, the gravity of the event needs to reveal itself to me. My poem "Aislado," from my poetry collection *Cenizas*, is a perfect example of how a poem happens to us. I did not create a metaphor for the convoluted relationship I have with my maternal grandfather. Instead, the universe presented me with a metaphor to process the tangible truth in my hands. "Aislado" is filled to the brim with layers that unravel in each line:

> Abuelo holds the end of a broom halfway bent
> over the pila, tries to scrub clean places in the walls
> he can no longer reach. I climb into the water basin;
> in the pila's dark corners hides an algae-eating fish.
> I must catch it. With a bucket I make waves
> in shallow water, search for what is tucked away from sight.
> Abuelo says, *Me siento solo*. His days lonely, long
> like the movie marathons he watches on TV.
> The fish circles in a bowl. Already I know I won't visit
> again tomorrow—know I don't love him anymore—
> the magic of childhood gone like his clamorous
> laugh, murky like the chaparro he still drinks. Abuelo
> stares at the faucet. He tells me to guard the fish,
> says if it hears water running from the tap it will jump.
> Abuelo's eyes move slowly across the empty house, & we both
> see the fish: its gills exposed on the empty basin's
> concrete floor. Its fins shudder in air.

In the poem, each description is of what really occurred before I cleaned my Abuelo's pila and the events immediately after—they are my reality and

simultaneously metaphor too. The significance of these experiences is what led me to write the poem, and even re-reading it now I see the symbolism when Abuelo "tries to scrub clean places in the walls he can no longer reach"—in his old age he is unable to shed the past that haunts him, and it is the magnitude of this that permeated even before I wrote the poem.

To magnify small instances is to exist in lyric, and for a long time this is the only place I felt comfortable. Over time I realized that in some ways I was too attached to lyric poetry. The form became a way for me to limit what I allowed myself to write. I believe this was a direct repercussion of my Eurocentric education. I didn't trust myself to imagine more, to move away from the truth, to create my own truth—and to lie when I needed to. In order to find my voice as a writer, I had to look inward, and this was difficult to do when so little of what I had read at that point in my life was a reflection of who I was. There were no mirrors, no authentic ways to interrogate my experience through the experiences of others.

There are many still frames I have filed and yet never been able to develop into poems. They are single moments, like when Mamá Chila came to los estados and we sat on the couch, our backs against the light of the window, as she embroidered our family tree onto a large white manta in brightly dyed threads—neon pink, kelly green, and turquoise. I have written many drafts of this moment with Mamá Chila, a series of incomplete poems resulting from my obsession with what I could no longer remember.

Over the past decade, I have spent a lot of time unlearning what I was taught in my creative writing MFA. I wrote a nearly identical version of the poem "Reflejo" in my third year of graduate school. This ekphrastic lyric poem remained the same until just about a year ago. The early version of "Reflejo," based on a 1988 photo by Donna De Cesare of a boy in El Salvador, reads as follows:

> A boy plays with the carcass
> of a bomb, its broken container the aftermath
> from attacks on his village. The placard says, 1988;
> he was the same age as me. His furrowed brow
> carries war; a building crumbles behind him. At
> four the only force against me was a pre-school fence,

the red tail lights of my father's car disappearing.
This boy poses alone, lifts his arm higher
as if to show me the bomb's fractured tail, its metal
edges like teeth. His parents must be just outside
the frame. They watch the American
photographer instruct their son to glide his finger–
small like mine–over the sharpness of steel,
to peer into the open belly of this bomb.

In its fourteen lines, this poem held on to a much larger sentiment—a much larger knowledge of being rooted to a country in the middle of a war—something that I was resisting because I did not believe I had the authority to write it. I had not yet fully honored my voice. I had limited myself to Western/colonized forms of writing that did not represent my people or my culture.

In a way, I had stopped imagining what was possible. Writing about loss can also be beautiful if we allow ourselves to construct our own reality—to grant ourselves permission to see beyond the facts. Ten years later, I envisioned the memories I never had and realized my imperfect fragments were always interconnected. The final revision of "Reflejo," which is now in *Cenizas*, reads as follows:

I.
a boy plays with the carcass of a bomb,
its broken container the aftermath

from attacks on his village. the placard says 1988;
he is the same age as me when i board planes

in & out of war. in the photo his furrowed brow
weighs heavily like the ghost of his mother in the rubble

of buildings still crumbling. at age four,
i was convinced the only force against me

was a preschool fence: the red taillights
of my father's car disappearing. Somehow

i've forgotten the war that wages in Chalate—
the sound of bullets muffled by pouring rain

& two kinds of thunder. in this photo the boy
poses alone, lifts his arm higher as if to show me

the bomb's fractured tail, its metal edges
like teeth. i imagine his parents must be just outside

the frame when a white woman takes his picture.
But this photo will not tell us: his mother was killed

by militares & his father joined la guerrilla;
instead i watch the boy glide his finger—

small like mine—over the sharpness of steel,
peer into the open belly of the bomb.

II.
querido Abelito,

hay distancias que no podemos sobrepasar
como los fantasmas que nos ven

entre las hojas del aguacate moviéndose
frenéticamente —queriendo tocarnos—

debajo de la lluvia de estrellas muertas.
nunca nos conoceremos en los cuarenta kilómetros

de tu casa a la de mi abuela en Buena Vista
donde me da miedo dormir. en ese tiempo

no entendía cómo se quemaban
los montes, ni cómo a un lado de tu casa

caían bombas. nunca nos conoceremos cuando
me regrese a Los Ángeles —4639 kilómetros

fuera de tu hogar. hay distancias que son inmensas
e invisibles como los volcanes debajo de las montañas

de Chalate. a los cuatro años nosotros no sabemos
qué nos va pasar en la vida (o, cuando yo escriba de ti,

si todavía tú vivirás o si habrás encontrado un refugio
eterno en alguna esquina del universo).

III.
at ten years old, caution tape wrapped around
a building in Inglewood like a noose still waiting,

& i imagine a dead body (even if i've
never seen one) (or at least this is what i believe).

drifting among us is the spirit of the dead boy;
he lifts his finger to touch mine from an alternate

universe as i point at the bullet holes in concrete
& plaster. at ten years old, Abelito sits on a hill—

a volcano brewing beneath—& hopes his father
will return from la guerrilla (i read this in a book

at thirty-six years old, & it is the first time i know his name).
at ten years old, Abelito & i hold in our hands a reality—

stretching across space—hoping to repair the burn
of bombs & bullets, the way only children can dream of.

i know i don't remember much of my childhood
(& now my fading memories try to make their way

into this poem i've been writing for a decade)

the black hole that sits in my brain swallows up years,

& maybe this is my body's way of protecting me,
the way the shell of a tortoise resists certain kinds of death.

To revise this poem, I went back to the source. I did research on the photographer and read about the boy in the photo, Abelito. This allowed me to explore how Abelito and I—despite our close proximity—did not exist in the same dimension. But I knew we both existed on this earth, and I could sense our energetic connection, as peoples from modern day Cuscatlán—how our spirits were heavy with war.

Part of arriving at who I am as a writer came with removing the barriers in my mind—the ones that stopped me from honoring what I did remember—and giving myself permission to formulate the rest. Most importantly, I allowed myself to grieve my disappearing memories. When I wrote the final version of "Reflejo," I released the guilt of forgetting and embraced what I did know. This is evident in the second section of the poem where, through direct address, I let myself invent the place where my kinship with Abelito did exist. In this place, I was able to truly confront my existence as a daughter of refugees who fled—the weight of this privilege—and the destruction of our homeland, which was Abelito's sole reality. In this poem, like many of the poems in *Cenizas,* I hold the burden of accountability—I will always carry the weight of this.

Memory is not an exact science, and often imperfect. *So why should we limit what we write to the truth?* Poetry gives us the freedom to weave realities together. This is exactly what Eve L. Ewing does in her book *Electric Arches*, when she explains that several poems in the book are "a re-telling" of events. In these poems Ewing describes what she has witnessed, and the re-tellings grant her a way to cope with the reality of systemic racism in the United States. In her poem, "four boys on Ellis [a re-telling]," she writes about when she felt powerless to help four boys who were being interrogated by the police. The poem begins with lyric version of the story:

As I was getting into my car I saw the lights flashing and the four of them sitting on the curb. CPD stood over them and the university police were looking on. I drove up and pulled alongside and asked

> what was going on, if their parents had been called and informed that they were being questioned. (15)

The poem continues with Ewing describing how she advocated for the boys and how her interaction with CPD quickly escalated. She writes, "Another officer began to yell at me, standing next to my car and shouting through my window. He told me to leave. I would not." (15). As readers, we understand the fear and helplessness Ewing feels when the officer gets aggressive. The line "I would not," is Ewing's resistance, and marks the end of the literal event depicted. The poem then switches to handwritten words juxtaposed against the typed font above, and this is where Ewing's "a re-telling" begins. She creates a reality that empowers her. It is in the handwritten section of this poem that we enter the realm where Ewing envisions herself saving the boys. She writes:

> I put the car in park and closed my eyes. I concentrated very hard, picturing the boys at home, eating cereal and watching Naruto. When I opened them, the police were shouting and jumping into the air, grasping at the boys' shoelaces as they drifted upward into the clear night. (15)

Ewing tells us the facts up to a certain point, and we trust her to lead us the rest of the way. When we enter the handwritten section of the poem, Ewing creates what she needed: safety for these boys, who are no longer in the hands of the police. She writes, "They seemed to have forgotten the police and didn't notice me, only looking at each other and smiling and singing as they flew" (15). Ewing's "a re-telling" exists at the intersection of truth and hope. Through the poem, she was able to change their lives, to protect them all from what could have happened next. "a re-telling" makes her powerful. Ewing teaches us how writing is a way to recover, is a way to hold in our hands a truth that is only ours, allowing us to discard the part of the story we no longer need.

When I first read *Electric Arches*, I was surprised by these poems because they were so different from the poetry I had read before. I knew that if I had thought about writing like Ewing when I was a creative writing student, my professors would have discouraged me from writing this way. When I look back on my education, especially now that I am an educator, I can see all the ways I was intentionally restricted—and all the ways Eurocentric educators

didn't even realize they imposed barriers. My revision of "Reflejo," and other poems is part of me letting go of confines. I have immense appreciation for writers like Ewing, who imagined the impossible and broke all the rules of Eurocentric standards of writing. When we allow ourselves to become writers in our truest form, it is an act of reclaiming parts of who we are. Ewing shows readers an individual event and moves from the lyric to the imaginative.

Becoming the inventor in your own writing is how you can create your own truth. If you write a poem about a moment in your life, it will be just one version of that event. As a reader, I am here for the ride, and you should trust yourself to lead me into your world. This is how you will you dig beneath the surface and excavate your own truth.

When you write, write what is true for you at that time, then add what is true for you later, and then imagine what the truth is from another point of view. This is how you will honor your story and your ancestors. This is how we write in this postcolonial existence.

PHASE 3

Colonized people—and those who live perpetually oppressed—are victims of erasure. We experience destruction in all aspects of our lives. History is taken from us through the systematic erasure of our ancestors, our bodies, and our records. Writing is a tool for us to take ownership, to be the arbitrators of our own history. This is necessary because we exist in a world where history is often written by our oppressors, and therefore the real impact on our lives is entirely left out of the equation. Every time we write about our lives and our community, we are writing historical documents—we are creating records—that can be accessed by others and will exist long after we are gone.

To realize we can write our own history requires us to love ourselves and push past the ways colonization, oppression, and migration have made us question our potential and preeminence. In writing our own history, we are able to cope, heal, and imagine the lives we never had. As BIPOC and QTPOC writers, we have to believe we have the power to tell our stories even if all the "facts" are not there, even if all our memories are not measurable. Most importantly, we need to deviate from dominant historical narratives and write versions that humanize our people and their experiences.

Writing from a place of longing to conjure worlds of our own is crucial to our development as writers and beings. The poet Janel Pineda, in her chapbook *Lineage of Rain,* interrogates the world she lives in and considers how her reality would have been different if the Salvadoran Civil War had never occurred. Much like Ewing's "a-retelling," Janel Pineda, a U.S. born Salvadoran, writes "a-retelling" in her poem "In Another Life." Pineda's poem breathes into existence a world that does not grieve the catastrophic effects of war, and instead she delves into another reality. The poem opens with the line:

> The war never happened but somehow you and I
> still exist. Like obsidian,
> we know only the memory of lava
> and not the explosion that created
>
> us. Forget the gunned-down church, the burning (1)

Pineda's poem allows us to believe in possibility while simultaneously mourning the life Salvadoran people never had. Pineda resists our reality as diaspora people, as refugees, and as the colonized. This is part of her process of reclamation. Later in the poem, she writes:

> Mozote does not mean massacre and flowers bloom
> in every place shoes are
> left behind. My name still means truth, this time
> in a language my mouth recognizes,
>
> in a language I know how to speak. My grandmother is
> still a storyteller although I am
> not a poet. In this life, I do not have to be. This poem
> somehow still exists. It is told
>
> in my mother's voice and she makes hurt dissolve like honey (1)

In these lines of Pineda's poem, there is a convergence of the past, present, and the life we—the Salvadoran people (insert your reality here)—never had. The poem still has the weight of grief over how Pineda's own existence (much like mine) has been shaped by colonization and war. She writes, "My name still means truth, this time/in a language my mouth recognizes/in a language I know how to speak." In this part of the poem she goes further back, beyond the war, to the colonization of the indigenous people of modern-day Central America. Pineda gives herself the power of a language and a culture that was taken from her. Pineda also reminds us of the burden of existing in this reality when she writes: "[...] I am/not a poet. In this life, I do not have to be." She empowers herself and releases history, in this poem she does not have to carry trauma in her bones—she is free to exist with all of her humanity.

I've always felt that there is a relationship between trauma and poetry, and perhaps this is why so many poets come from deeply wounded places. Poetry is an act of resistance, one that is tightly woven into the fabric of our beings. Janel Pineda shows us her resistance to this reality in her poem, "In Another Life," and teaches us how to exist in another reality. Part of our journey as writers is arriving at a place where we accept that we can write our own accounts of history.

You too, have the power to rewrite your history—to tell your side of the story.

This is also what poet Mai Der Vang, daughter of Hmong refugees, does in her book *Yellow Rain* when she presents readers with a variety of documents and artifacts regarding the chemical warfare and experiments that were conducted on the Hmong people. The Hmong people experienced these atrocities at the hands of the CIA and the United States government. Of course the records regarding the chemical agents used against the Hmong people are incomplete, redacted, and inaccurate, and this is why Vang researches these events herself.

Vang shows us how research is vital to writing these poems. The Hmong people were murdered and dehumanized, but Vang is not willing to let this be the only reality for her people. Vang instead writes their story which she juxtaposes against excerpts of cables and other documents, between government entities referencing the chemical attacks and the events that happened after the fact. Through these poems, Vang writes a new version of events and creates her own record. The Hmong people, as a result of yellow rain, were infected and then studied post-mortem. In Vang's poem, "Arriving Lost," she includes an epigraph that is an excerpt of a cable from the US Defense Attaché Office in Bangkok, to the US Army Medical Intelligence and Information Agency, on August 20, 1980. It refers to samples taken from Hmong people post-mortem, which were being shipped to the United States for research. The cable reads:

> *Samples are being transported in the loose baggage hold where live animals travel. Courier service is concerned that unless this box is collected as soon after the aircraft lands as possible (prior to normal baggage off-loading procedures) it will go to the Port Authority and it will take a great deal of time to extricate it from this bureaucracy.* (53)

Vang's poem "Arriving as Lost," addresses how the cable's only concern is the preservation of samples for United States government research; they are not concerned for the Hmong people and their humanity. In the Hmong culture, rituals around the dying and the dead are sacred, therefore these dehumanizing experiments do not allow the Hmong to rest. In the first lines of the poem she writes: "There's no defense for how they will/Fail you, how you will

become/Trapped in movement […]" (53). Vang begins this poem in second person address, she talks to her dead, and in this way she honors them. The United States government failed the Hmong people, but Vang's poem humanizes them by addressing what actually occurred:

> […]Turmoil of belongings. There's no
>
> Reason for how no one will be there
> To meet you, hold you onward,
>
> Call you from the factory of your
> Crossing. There's no acceptance for
>
> Why you've been crammed alongside
> Pets, placed haphazard to fend among[…] (53)

Vang writes what is unstated in the cable: there is no tenderness for the Hmong who have died, no regard for their humanity. In writing this poem, and so many others like this in *Yellow Rain*, Vang is able to tell the full story—to question the only records that exist, to write the truth of what happened. Vang teaches us that we do not have to settle for the information we have been given and that, through writing poetry, we can pull from these fragments to create a complete picture—a memorial—to document what has happened.

As you let go of the barriers that have been placed on you, you will write in remembrance. Your ceremony will be poetry.

Many poets, especially those who are descendants of war, carry with them the obligation to write their story. There is something heavy in knowing that Mai Der Vang, Janel Pineda, and I are all second born daughters of parents who fled. Mai Der Vang addresses this lineage bound to war in *Yellow Rain* when she writes: "I am a daughter of Hmong refugees: mother and father were among the fled, which makes me among the fled. Second child and first born in a new land, daughter who keeps looking back at the sky" (5). She knows that her entire existence was altered by war, and she does not need to experience it firsthand to be harmed by it or to write about it—neither do Janel and I.

This parallel between us is not a coincidence, this is how we became poets "who [keep] looking back." All diasporic people from war-torn countries share an inheritance that is comparable to the generational trauma all beings carry into this world. In order to write, we must acknowledge how the past, present, and our unknown stories are woven together.

You will find your path as a poet, and you will embrace your power each time you create a new file—that is your truth—to add to the archives. This is why you must write.

WRITING PROMPTS

1. Write a poem in the voice of your younger self to your present/future self in which you tell the story of how you fell in love with literature. Recall what brought you to writing and remind yourself why it is a part of who you are.

2. Write a poem that intentionally breaks a rule (or barrier) you were taught in an English/creative writing class. Push yourself to break this rule in a way that feels natural for you. For example, repeating lines were always cut from my poems in poetry workshops, but at this point in my life I have read many brilliant poems that repeat lines and even read some poems that only repeat one line all the way through. Consider the rules you've been given for writing, break them, and make your own rules.

3. Write a lyric poem about a single event in your life that you feel was symbolic. (a) Describe that moment step-by-step, highlighting the details which you felt carried the most symbolism and will function as metaphor for the emotional weight of the situation. (b) If you cannot remember all the details, use the fragments you do have and make-up the rest.

4. Write about a moment in your life you do not remember—a memory you never had. You can write about this moment from a first-person point-of-view or in the voice of someone who witnessed this moment. You can also write this as a multiple point-of-view poem where each section is a different perspective.

5. Write an ekphrastic poem on documentary art. (a) Describe what you see, and then move beyond the art piece into imagination. What world can you create as an extension of this art piece? (b) Research what is being documented in this art, and consider how it relates to your own life. (c) After doing research on what is documented, write a letter where you speak directly to who (or what) is being documented.

6. Write a poem after Eve L. Ewing in which you only tell part of an event you witnessed or experienced, then switch to "a re-telling" of events. Be like Ewing: (a) be obvious about the shift in the poem—*own it!* and (b) be as imaginative and creative as possible. For more examples of "a re-telling" see *Electric Arches* by Eve L. Ewing.

7. Write a poem after Janel Pineda, where you imagine another life. Remove a crucial element of your current reality and imagine a life in which this is no longer a part of who you are. Like Janel Pineda, make sure to include elements from your former life to juxtapose with the new life you have created in the poem. This will highlight the weight of this change and how this crucial element of your current existence has impacted who you are today. For a deeper understanding of this prompt, see the complete poem "In Another Life" in *Lineage of Rain* by Janel Pineda.

8. Write a poem after Mai Der Vang that explores what has been left out of history. Find an artifact that is important to your culture and/or family history. Use a portion of this document as an epigraph for a poem. Write a poem that fills in the blanks in this history and addresses what is left unsaid. What has been purposely omitted? What should you include? What other knowledge do you have about this event? For more examples of how to use existing (incomplete) records to write poems that paint a more accurate and true record, see *Yellow Rain* by Mai Der Vang.

9. Select a poem you have written which you consider to be complete. Imagine this poem is only the beginning of a much larger poem. What are you not saying? Why are you not saying it? What is holding you back? Extend this poem and reimagine it.

10. Become your family historian. Write a poem about something crucial and important to your family's history that is not in any textbook or historical document. This should be really specific to your family's history, and it should capture the circumstances of the societal context relevant to this topic. You can combine multiple versions of this story compiled from oral history, photos, and other fragments. Do not limit yourself to the "facts."

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