



**I AM
NOT
A
WAR**

SOPHIA TERAZAWA



I AM NOT A WAR

SOPHIA TERAZAWA

a winner of the 2015 Essay Press
Digital Chapbook Contest
selected by ROSEBUD BEN-ONI



#56

ESSAY PRESS CONTEST SERIES

For Essay Press's 2015 Chapbook Contest, we asked 12 recent Essay authors each to select and introduce a manuscript extending and/or challenging the formal possibilities of prose.

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INTRODUCTION

– Rosebud Ben-Oni

Sophia Terazawa's *I AM NOT A WAR* is an incredible subversion of textual and personal record, and both the order and manner in which these events are told: "Let me be clear in the beginning. This is not a memoir. This is not a scrapbook album of what it is like to be a person of color. This is not even to be tasted or consumed." Terazawa does not only testify to historical transgressions; she provokes the very idea of what it means to write about them. Through verse, photographs, symbolic diagrammatical narratives like "order forms," and endless questions about racial-sexual representation and the writing process itself ("How do these sources cite evil?"), Terazawa's hunger for stripping off the patriarchal gaze of the dominant culture reveals the many conflicts of self-expression in "a language that is not of my own, not of my native tongues" in which she must "speak from the margin with shadows around my history of annihilation."

This is absolutely essential reading—and you will need to spend some time with *I AM NOT A WAR*, revisiting passages from its past pages as you continue, taking in its images both written and visual. In this extraordinary time of dismantling the standards against which we measure socio-historical truth, Terazawa's *I AM NOT A WAR* rings true.

The right side of the page features a vertical split background. The top portion is a solid teal color, and the bottom portion is a solid red color. The title 'I AM NOT A WAR' is printed in a teal, serif, all-caps font, centered vertically and horizontally across the red section. The text is split across four lines: 'I AM', 'NOT', 'A', and 'WAR'.

I AM
NOT
A
WAR

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I begin with my bibliography:
the dialectics,
the body.

Second are my primary sources:
silence,
shadows.

Third are my secondary sources:

PREFACE

History originates from a fantasy. That is why I choose to start from the end, the product, the exhaust catapulted from the lips of a factory line.

What is the fantasy, but a performance of desires around power, yet more importantly the wish to not realize that one is any less than one's performance?

The fantasy of history, rather the history produced by spectacles, is a matter of semantics, of stitching together the memories that complete each other's emptiness across time and space. So historiography with the colonialist's eye can only see through the lens of what makes sense, of the production, of explanations.

Must I explain myself? Must I produce myself? Must I make sense?





This is a historical text without fantasy, but with a form of documentation not *made* to break any silences, already fractured and made crooked by ghosts. I will not write in a language that is not of my own, not of my native tongues. But I speak from the margin with shadows around my history of annihilation.

These words do not know me unless I prostrate myself with subject-verb agreement and narrative cohesion to the colonizing-half-intellectual-half-blind. This is not the space to expose any body's history—be it the silenced or the silencer. History does enough with self-exposure. What is my history?

You will not have it. Let's move.

HISTORY ONE

"know this about us
we have lived our lives
on the edge of oceans
in anticipation of
sailing into the sunrise

i tell you all this
to tear apart the silence
of our days and nights here

i tell you all this
to fill the void of absence
in our history here"

*



1

"we are fragmented shards
blown here by a war no one wants to remember
in a foreign land
with an aching familiar wound
our survival is dependent upon
never forgetting that vietnam is not
a word
a world
a love
a family
a fear
to bury"

*



2

"let people know
VIETNAM IS NOT A WAR

let people know
VIETNAM IS NOT A WAR

let people know
VIETNAM IS NOT A WAR
but a piece
of
us,
sister
and
we are
so much
more"

—*lê thi diem* thúy³

*



4

An exceptional witness once documented a text that is *reproduced* in the following:

Who needs this book?

You may, after all. Give us two minutes of your time and we may change your entire life. We're going to show you how to meet Japanese girls and ladies right here in America.

Sounds almost too good to be true, doesn't it? And yet, men all across the country are meeting them right now. Ordinary men, with no special education or background. YOU CAN TOO!

With this book you may easily contact girls and ladies who were born in Japan and now live throughout America, and those of Japanese descent who were born in the United States and Canada.

Here's your chance to end loneliness, to enjoy the companionship of a loyal, considerate, and thoroughly pleasant lady and to find a suitable wife.

This is what you will be getting in a few days after sending us your order:

*** How to contact these fine ladies right from where you live.

*** Locations, names and addresses.

*** Breaking the ice. What to say first.

*** Using the slow approach. When to use the quick approach.

*** Things to look for in a girl. Choosing the right one. Marriage.

*** How to obtain Japanese ladies and girls for:

Maids	Domestic	Female Servants
Social Housekeepers	Cooks	Household Workers

*** Complete details of a fantastic method for meeting ladies and girls. Go any place and, using this method, 8 out of every 10 women you pass will come right up to you and start to talk. Yes, it sounds too good to be true, but it really works. Everyone we've told about it has been delighted with their success. POSITIVELY, IT WILL WORK FOR YOU!

*** Plus a host of other important features all directed at introducing you to a fine Japanese girl or lady for a friend, helpmate or happy wife. Includes items like obtaining an extra 200 to 500 or more dollars per month, how to buy more for less money (new cars, clothes, etc.), dressing for the ladies, and many, many more features.

We know this book will help you, because it is helping many others, just like you—helping them right now. Be you 9 or 90, banker or baker, mechanic or manual worker, sailor or surveyor here is your chance to have a fine Japanese girl friend or wife.

For these reasons we urge you to get a hold of JAPANESE GIRLS IN THE US AND CANADA at once. To do so simply fill out the form below and mail to us. Your absolute satisfaction guaranteed.

To: International Reports, P.O. Box 2202, Newport Beach, Calif,
92663

Send me a copy of Japanese Girls in the US and Canada. I have enclosed the full, post paid price of \$4.00. Please rush, for I am waiting.

Name _____ Street & No. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Who needs this book?

You may, after all. Give us two minutes of your time and we may change your entire life. We're going to show you how to meet Japanese girls and Ladies right here in America.

Sounds almost too good to be true, doesn't it? And yet, men all across the country are meeting them right now. Ordinary men, with no special education or background. **YOU CAN TOO!**

With this book you may easily contact girls and ladies who were born in Japan and now live throughout America, and those of Japanese descent who were born in the United States and Canada.

Here's your chance to end loneliness, to enjoy the companionship of a loyal, considerate, and thoroughly pleasant lady and to find a suitable wife.

This is what you will be getting in a few days after sending us your order:

- *** How to contact these fine ladies right from where you live.
- *** Locations, names and addresses.
- *** Breaking the ice. What to say first.
- *** Using the slow approach. When to use the quick approach.
- *** Things to look for in a girl. Choosing the right one. Marriage.
- *** How to obtain Japanese ladies and girls for:
Maids Domestics Female Servants
Social Housekeepers Cooks Household Workers
- *** Complete details of a fantastic method for meeting ladies and girls. Go any place and, using this method, 8 out of every 10 women you pass will come right up to you and start to talk. Yes, it sounds too good to be true, but it really works. Everyone we've told about it has been delighted with their success. **POSITIVELY, IT WILL WORK FOR YOU!**
- *** Plus a host of other important features all directed at introducing you to a fine Japanese girl or lady for a friend, helpmate or happy wife. Includes items like obtaining an extra 200 to 500 or more dollars per month, how to buy more for less money (new cars, clothes, etc.), dressing for the ladies, and many, many more features.

We know this book will help you, because it is helping many others, just like you—helping them right now. Be you 9 or 90, banker or baker, mechanic or manual worker, sailor or surveyor here is your chance to have a fine Japanese girl friend or wife.

For these reasons we urge you to get a hold of **JAPANESE GIRLS IN THE US AND CANADA** at once. To do so simply fill out the form below and mail to us. Your absolute satisfaction guaranteed.

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Send me a copy of Japanese Girls in the US and Canada. I have enclosed the full, post paid price of \$4.00. Please rush, for I am waiting.

Name _____ Street & No. _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

An exceptional witness once responded to the aforementioned text that is *produced* in the following:



6

The shadow knows how to count the borders of spirits who cross over. An emptiness speaks to me, but no text answers back———red petals, notwithstanding the weight of an entire race, but my body———my body for you to see, my body for you to see, because you are not even

LOOKING! ~~I am alive because~~

*

Where does it start? This memory of a border I once had but never owned? Is it at the bottom of the sky, stretched like lightening across the Pacific? No! No! It is too safe in the dark. What do you hear? What do you hear?

But a thunder ~~God~~ crane. かみなりさん

*

There was once a time
bodies,
kings new of our faces before the colonized, colonizing,
forest breed of cattle sails,

before we flew into porcelain,
before our language of stone broke into beads...



There was once a time...

but I will not give you that
anymore.⁷

Let me

tell you of my people. [Instead, count this shadow—count
with mouths unopened, pounding—] attack my heart.

Look but don't see. Hide but don't breathe.

Then you will know *survival*, survival at the borders.

NOTES ON HISTORY ONE

1. This is an excerpt from a photographic postcard on the lynching of Lige Daniels in Center, Texas, August 3, 1920. The spectator writes on the back: “This was made in the court yard in Center Texas. He is a 16 year old Black boy. He killed Earl’s grandma. She was Florence’s mother. Give this to Bud. From Aunt Myrtle.”

See Figures 5.7 and 5.8 of Jacqueline Goldsby. *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, 262–3. Photo courtesy of the Allen-Littlefield Collection.

2. Produce these nameless spectators through another lens. What happened to these men’s eyes when they first lost their sight?

See Figure 43 of Shawn Michelle Smith. *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.120. Photo courtesy of the Allen-Littlefield Collection.

3. The eyes of Lige Daniels’s spectators were partially blue, so it is not haphazard that these photographs share a turbulent space of “shrapnel shards on blue water” by poet lê thi diem thúy. The

immediacy of nostalgic violence through the calm cadences of written word falls into entrapment. How can we ever forget what we witness?

See “shrapnel shards on blue water” in its entirety, along with other poems by lê thi diem thúy, “[An Electronic Chapbook by lê thi diem thúy.](#)” *The Drunken Boat*. The Drunken Boat, 2013. Web. 8 April 2013.

4. Do you see the blue more clearly now?

See Figure 48 of Smith, 126. Photo courtesy of the Allen-Littlefield Collection.

5. Documented by GIDRA, January 1971.

6. Photographed by Mike Murase for GIDRA, January 1971.

7. The reconstruction of historical trauma precariously speaks on the margins of narrative coercion. Isabelle Thuy Pelaud warns: “Writing to evoke the past is not always about creativity, nor is it always a matter of choice. The act of returning to fragmented memories reflects what Derrida calls ‘learning to live with ghosts.’”

See Isabelle Thuy Pelaud. *This is All I Choose to Tell: History and Hybridity in Vietnamese American Literature*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010. 64–5.

DISCOURSE ON TRANSITION ONE

“Clear expression, often equated with correct expression, has long been the criterion set forth in treatises on rhetoric, whose aim was to order discourse as to persuade....To write is to communicate, express, witness, impose, instruct, redeem, or save—at any rate to mean and to send out an unambiguous message. Writing thus reduced to a mere vehicle of thought may be used to orient toward a goal or to sustain an act, but it does not constitute an act in itself. This is how the division between the writer/the intellectual and the activists/the masses becomes possible. To use the language well, says the voice of literacy, cherish its classic form. Do not choose the offbeat at the cost of clarity. Obscurity is an imposition on the reader. True, but beware when you cross railroad tracks for one train may hide another train. Clarity is a means of subjection, a quality both of official, taught language and of correct writing, two old mates of power: together they flow, together they flower, vertically, to impose an order.”

—Trinh T. Minh-ha.
Woman, Native, Other. 16–17

We arrive at an impasse, a mountain-scape bleached like the chemical dye of indigo sunburn. Can we hear the fire crack our bones? The tattered flag of our warrior cry dances in self-sacrifice like dying parchment around its bamboo brace. Sister Dragon grips this signifier, as we whistle:

からす なぜ鳴くの
からすは山に

Likewise. (Place this word where it belongs.) We are a writer.

*

At what point does documentation limit speech? Who do we write for? To? Without?

Once upon a _____, the house of cranes built its wings upon the waves of a great plain. No _____ knew of the winds it carried—East, _____, North. But the marsh farmers often sang many words of pride: “Oh, to be under his lordship, to be humbled, to live and live and live. What an _____!” Honor thy kingdom.

But little do memories know of the Te-ra-za-wa Clan, the shearing ambers, the blackest of lightning that scratches out a sky. How many _____ we killed.

Let those who survived tell the story.

HISTORY TWO

2.1

Legitimacy

killed Bang Mai, son	Nhi Mai	lives
killed Vincent Chin, son	Lily Chin	lives
killed Joseph Santos Ileto, son	Lilian Ileto	lives
killed Won-Joon Yoon, son	Kang-Soon Lee	lives
killed Luyen Phan Nguyen, son	Thang Nguyen	lives
killed Satendar Singh, son	Akesa Singh	lives
killed Xinran Ji, son	Jinhui Du	lives
killed Balbir Singh Sodhi, son	Inderjit Kaur	lives
killed Deah Shaddy Barakat, son	Layla Barakat	lives

Shayan Mazroei, son	Shahzad Mazroei	lives
Cite him.	Cite her,	
Till Death Us Do Part from our	mothers.	

2.2

What space does she leave for oxygen?

She asks these questions of consequence to a white face that flinches:

“What is your relationship with loss?”

“Do you know violence?”

From the inscription of a television, a child runs to her with the innocence of a gurgle that speaks of hot springs and Princess-Me-but-don't-Pocahontas-Me costume dresses.

She closes her eyes. Can she hate this child yet?

How do these sources cite evil?

2.3

No sign. No sign. The dawn opens like a sweet ^{ORANGE} my complicity to another reminder that, despite last night, despite the rush away to terminals, I am still alive—envious of the words that do not come, bitter of these words that bind my reality to paper. Am I burdened to write in perpetual response, in reciprocal reaction speech, to the situations that compress my body and language into monolithic forms?

Describe without patience. }
Flail with images. } a cycle of silence
Contradict without source. }

2.4

Living ends in the body. Dying begins in the mind. Mami slices the ^{WATERMELON} with a single click of the knife. A pause rests in between the two halves of flesh, as she pulls in her face. The disgust.

“This is the wrong color. No good.”

We will not eat this fruit because my mother sees the evil of a shelled meat that deceives us.

What revealed itself in the cleave is not a matter of ripeness or rottenness, but of the brave women who once sprung from the seeds of a watermelon. To eat from a memory that attempts truth but incompletes the lived story means the death of Our family.

2.5

I have witnessed many castrations. Have you?

Indeed the removal of one’s dignity summons such two-word questions—inquiries about humiliation, poverty, trialed rape.

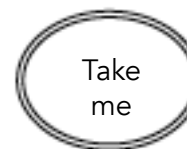
Have you?

Have you?

Have you?

What is more unjust than the language unrevealed, perhaps muffled, by the masses of Guilt muted by their inadequacies, by the mere awareness that they have yet to be humiliated, yet to be impoverished, yet to be raped by trial?

Communication assumes the identity of one who has healed with one who has hurt, yet without any symbol of resolution.



to the deep, plunged into a kind of pain that knows no Other.

2.6

Until this time, I have not seen the face of my pain. But if I could imagine her, she would hold the space of wide-breadth Obasan. Eyes cut like needles, sewn without its buttons on her skin. Would her hair be like the silver edge of sea gulls? Probably so. She is an old woman.

I am not Japanese.

I am not Vietnamese.

I am not United Americana.

My whole is unholy, suffocating even, to a monk's editorial.

Seven seconds of silence.

1.
image of
running from behind

2.
image of
running from behind

3.
image of
running from behind

4.
image of
running from behind

5.
image of
running from the front

6.
image of
running from the front

7.

image of
running from the front

So I run away from the whiteness of my people, my people
as white as the paper cuts that dry white. What I choose
to tell cannot be consumed, cannot be relived, cannot be
localized. What I choose to show, however, is a body in exile.
Do you love my Asia? My Asia Americana?

Kiss me into silence.

*YELLOW
FACE*

*

This is a different kind of alienation. A choice unchosen—
lifted as the oncology of exploding bodies—has only these
credentials:

I am Agent Orange.

I am Atomic Bomb.

I am the village mangoes ripped open by the ends of
bulleted teeth.

(Fetish this dream.)

I am the radiation making love to a Gay-Sha girl on a BUSH-
ido sword.

(Intimate this dream.)

I am Agent Orange.

I am Atomic Bomb.

Dry your lips white man boy.

Close your eyes white girl.

You will not save me today.

You will not understand me today.

Get out! Get out!

And don't you ever come back.



ON HISTORY THREE WITHOUT TRANSITION

I question the Man who thirsts for a riot. Combustion is a queer thing to ask for, *queer*, with writhing naked bodies of atonal muscles and phallic limbs. Lips touch everybody except for other lips. Rage is not desired, but where does his *need* for an outlet of rage come from?



I always question the Man who fills his belly with lust for a revolution, as if to quench an emptiness of ^{ORANGE} and ^{WATERMELON}, made again of lies. How queer is her body in his?

Trans-gender this riot, this trial by fire, an unlied, unlied rage.

HISTORY THREE

Who is this woman?

Staceyann Chin [who else] *Yuri Kochiyama*
Suheir Hammad *Phoebe Eng* *Tomie Arai* *Jessica*
Hagedorn *Trinh T. Minh-ha* [who else] *Zainab Salbi*
Qiu Jin *Fay Chiang* *Arundhati Roy*
Helen Zia *Sham-e-Ali Nayeem* *Grace Lee Boggs*
Somaly Mam *Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan*
Maxine Hong Kingston *Nellie Wong* [who else]

The body knows when the mind is too full. It smells of a kind of heat that perspires most peculiarly in shadowed stillness. This wholeness of knowledge (stuffed with memories, facts, dates, hopes, actions, responsibilities, regrets, rationality, truths, and intellect) quivers under its own gluttony. An explosion of incompleteness.

Lessons of such desperation are disseminated and consumed among institutions of education, the marketplace, a refugee camp, and the between of language. My voice here, thus, stands as a patterned point instead of any indication that knowledge uncovers the best of my imprisonment.

What is important? I trace a circle around this question, imperfect in form and intention. He writes to this topic with a determination that careens his ideas this way and that.

"It is best to get these thoughts *down* on paper, so I can see them."

Hear them. Feel them. Pummel them.

The hammer of visibility knows the bounds of tenderness, as thoughts expose their individualities, hubris, and unrecognizability on the flats of their [paper] backs.



They will find out. My mother repeats, "They will find out."

What I am about to reveal is not so important, though its contents—its innards and glass walls, its citadels, its blood maroon mangosteen, its fingernails—are all matters of public record.

A nation will fall, and they will find me chanting, "I thought so, I thought so."

My mother calls the police before noon. I've split myself open like the serpent to a flame, my thighs like fangs, my wrists like the twitch of some beast in pain, but I scream because it feels that good.

They find me on the bathroom floor, and I think I am menstruating. They ask for my name, and I think I say, "Yes."

They cite my mother as next of kin, though she cries, "I think it's just the depression."

It is as if they find me dying in the heat of my possession. Here, a little boy sprinting down the road. Here, his father tripping not far behind. They are both naked. Here, napalm. Here, a mass grave. They forgot to cover the bodies.

At the hospital, I insist the ghosts are real, "I see them. I see them."

They ask for my name, but before I can think, my mother answers for me, "Freddie, hang on."

I can't, mama. I have to go. Remember when you fled that night, and your own mother pushed you away? The fisherman's boat was small but heavy with orphans abandoned at sea. Remember how you starved on rice but did not fall asleep? Remember where you left behind your nationality?

"Freddie, hang on."

I can't mama. It's my turn now to go.

ABOUT *I AM NOT A WAR*

- transforming radical consciousness of Asia America
- deviate from educating the oppressor of our struggle (and the oppressor [within? within?])
- evolution of a collective self:
- Who is the subject? My ancestors?
- Who is the audience? The wandering spirits?

trembling rage, I release
you upon this earth

From a river, I write this book. It pours from the mouth like a delta. Waves bring mud and waste generated by decades of forgotten memories.

Why is the refugee at once lethargic and desperate to throw away the traumas of exile? My mother escaped Vietnam in an ambiguous year, clawed her way up to the American dream, and birthed me in 1989.

My story is not much different from that belonging to children of immigrants. Our identities have been restructured, fragmented, and, if we are lucky enough, some of us have the privilege to ignore the cries of social injustice that poison the very soil upon which we rest our heads.

In the suburbs of Texas, a man sleeps through most of his life. He is not lazy. He works too much. The pressure at the office is great and never ending. On the weekends, he mows the backyard, naps, and records video of his children. This is my father, a Japanese American, who spent some of his boyhood in Tokyo, some in New York City, and his entire adulthood married to the strongest woman on the planet.

For this project, I have asked him many questions about his identity and memories of his parents. We quickly enter the realm of ancestry, and his eyes squeeze shut.

"Let me see what I can remember," he chants over and over. The voice fades until it is only the sound of lips moving, a light smacking like rain. Together we will write a book of legends.

With my mother, however, we grasp at the smoke and whispers in silence. With my mother, we write a book of erasures.

*

Let me be clear in the beginning. This is not a memoir. This is not a scrapbook album of what it is like to be a person of color. This is not even to be tasted or consumed.

What do I intend?

With these words, I look at you, Sister. We are half-Yellow. We are half-Burnt. We are not tools for colorblind white feminism. We are not tools for anti-Blackness. We are not tools for colonial fantasies in the kitchen, at costume parties, or through television.

With these tools of another name, I look at you, Brother. You are brave. You are strong. Stand with us, as we stand against the crimes of an empire that singlehandedly displaced our parents with their bombs and with the other hand cradled orphans of the genocides.

With this howl, I look at us, the in-betweens, spirit within
(within, within), queer, obscene, us, a gathering quake.

Asia America,
What do you intend?

ASTEROID ONE

After dinner I ask my father about the atomic bombs. Did his parents talk about it? Where were they? How did it affect relatives closer to the flash?

And was it possible that the explosions fertilized the conditions of his birth?

“Nothing is im-possible!” My father emphasizes the “im” in “im-possible” with a grin.

Radiation may explain his childhood epilepsy, subsequently inherited by my younger sister, but to explain this now—how war is to seize a nation and the bodies of its people—is entirely useless to a screaming mother.

“What do you mean, you *forgot* to tell your *wife* about your seizures?” With an emphasis on “forgot” and “wife,” I am struck with the image of my mother sobbing over the small convulsing body of Baby Yoko.

"At the time, I did not think that to be im-portant."

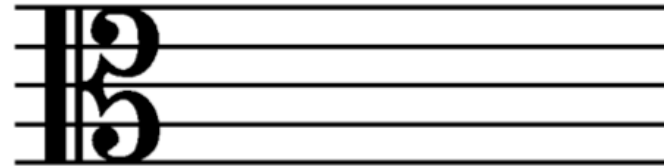
"Not important?!"

Shame suddenly crosses my father's face, and he lowers his head. "After I told her, your mother was very angry at me..."

You mean, just as angry as when you almost left her for a white woman? The thought leaps from my mind, but I do not utter it.

There are tears in his eyes, and we sit in silence.

ASTEROID TWO



*YELLOW
FACE*

We, the sanitized assimilated "multi-cultured," have risen only in the minds of democratic imaginings. What does the police state of the Occident really know of a stoic, unflinching face?

How do I wish to confront racism? With a hissing coil and strike. Are you so curious about my embrace?

No, I owe you nothing.

Where do you think my forgiveness lies? なるほど

CONDITION OF SHADOW

Fear accelerates in the dark. Fear of the unknown, the things that clatter, yelp among stillness. Fear of attack. On the train to work, a man makes eye contact with another man. This occurs at the instant all becomes black.

Through a tunnel, the men continue to stare into the same direction. (Who will look away first?)

In cinema, particular to conditions of an audience of the global middle class, the display of emotions—fear included—is prescribed to a recognizable fashion. (Recognizable to whom?)

In the dark, Mr. Ade holds a book on fascism. He shifts his weight on the cabin door. It will not open for a while, and for now, a cold draft passes through.

In my mind, this is no “East meets West.” Somewhere on the passage from Japan to Vietnam to the United States, I must walk through the Ivory Coast. Arriving at the chapter on slavery in primary school, I am taught about it in a way that appeases a white audience. North meets South. _____

meets Black. Evil meets Redemption. The economics of learning—fear included.

I learned about oppression through the perspective of white uplift. ("Children, today we are going to read about the bad things that bad people once did a long, long time ago." The teacher asks me to recite the pledge of allegiance. I recite the pledge of allegiance.)

It is already enough that I speak in a language that meets the lips of my savior. Beneath this face, I wear an ocean of feelings. A sobbing white woman can barely recognize a drop.

In your destruction, sister, I am
quietly aware
of my own sorrow.

DE	WA	NAI				で	は	ない
	WA	NAI					は	ない
W	A		N	AI				
			I	A	N	A	W	
			I	AM	NOT	A	WAR	

Steal away
these soft words,
sharpened and

made cold; yes,
forget the
name of your

hunger. Come
home. Let the
silence feed

you.

*

ではない is incomplete negation. Is not this. Is not that. I hope for the book to start here. Family is not....Nationality is not....At home I like to dance to the music of FKA Twigs.

"For the most part," my mother repeats "Life is simple."

"Work until you die," is another one of her e-mailed mottos.

*

ではない translates to a hanging negation of an object, action, or general state of being. My father taught me this, I think. The rest of the Japanese language is merely a state of guessing.

"Perhaps...the United States is not quite perfect," agrees my father. "I was, *sahh*, perhaps quite in-terested in protest history of American peoples." He emphasizes the "in" in "in-terested" with an omniscient head wobble.

*

Language wants me to be a referee. Take two words and separate them—mother, father, Viet Nam, Japan. To be alone forces me to write, and I write because of the agitation. There is no aggressor, no victim, only reality.

The reality is Black Lives. The reality is menstruation and heartbreak. The reality is schizophrenia, baguettes. France maintains its colony in my mother's country, and thus my

mother's mind. My mother and I are not colonized by law. No, that is finished. The reality is in the artillery of imagination.

How long does it take for an entire generation of the colonized world to forget the name of her hunger?

*

The tree was difficult to find. Roots carry no names. Sense the dust. A child, she is born. Enshrouded. Ash purple.

Tamago, its shell, a dotted mask of parchment.

Read the lines at the end, the ones. The ones not yet too faded from time and sunlight and shame and sound called Forget, forgetting.

They are telling. Speak. Speak, not of living. The body, no, the spirit cannot live. Speak of her, otherwise, known as two unborn.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

HUYNH THI MAI

An old woman with a tall forehead. Wears pungent oils and a jade bracelet. Limp with one leg missing its knee. Hair is sparse and white, but wild like an electric mane. Dead. She is Bà ngo²i, the maternal grandmother.

LE VAN TAN

A silent father figure. Stares through the photograph. Dead husband of Huynh Thi Mai. Must be summoned with great effort before he reveals himself as a memory. Mostly a ghost.

KIYOKAZU TERAZAWA

A proud おじいさん (pronounced *ojiisan*). Lives in Tokyo. An established banker with steady morale. Appears as a father with iron in the blood. Dead. Nostalgic. Played by the actor who also plays Hajime Terazawa.

KIYOKO TERAZAWA

A young poet and stone. Wife of Kiyokazu Terazawa. Stops the seizures of her only son, Hajime Terazawa. Calm like a baby. Gazes at the sun, burns her eyes. Never speaks to children. Dead.

CUC TERAZAWA

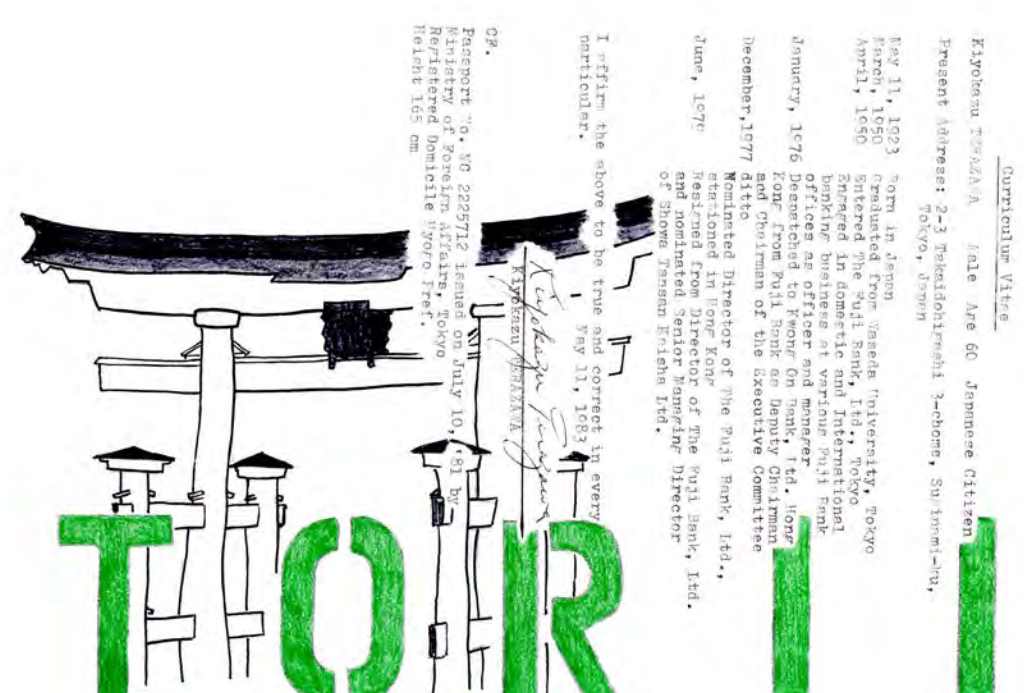
A jumping monkey. Yelps in pain (pronounced oo-ya-ya!). Has cramps in the feet. Vacillates between identities of daughter and mother. A refugee. Mami!

HAJIME TERAZAWA

A laughing dragon. Coughs. Husband of Cuc Terazawa. A ten-year-old Japanese American boy who walks with hands behind his back. Earnest. Quick to imitate father, Kiyokazu Terazawa. Refers to himself as お父さん (pronounced otousan). He admires one person very much, Cuc Terazawa, who he refers to as お母さん (pronounced okaasan).

GHOSTS

Who find the text and push it through. Carry messages for the parents of unfinished histories.



SETTING

I AM NOT A WAR takes place over several generations in various settings of the colonized world. Let the jaw be unhinged, Nagasaki, the second temple. Skin melts from muscle, like velvet curtains rising.

And with these names,
let the fire bring fire,
let it.
Begin.

SELF PORTRAIT OF A SHAMAN



My grandfather was a Japanese prisoner of war when the first atomic bomb dropped over Hiroshima. He slept next to an open window that August night in Siberia. The following morning, he woke to a cell full of dead inmates. They had all suffocated on carbon monoxide.

My mother was a Vietnamese refugee at a camp in Malaysia when her little brother pushed a guard by accident. Soldiers with bayonets dragged the boy away to kill him. My mother fell to her knees on the beach. She prayed they would *not* spare his life and send him back to sea.

My father was a Japanese kid in New York City. He saw the police spray a group of Black boys like dogs, on television, and he was afraid to pick a side as white children shoved him around gym class. But he would later join the fight for decolonization by marrying my mother.

My Vietnamese grandfather was lucky because he died on impact.

My Vietnamese grandmother, Bà ngoại, was not so lucky because she survived with a steel rod in her knee. She bribed a fisherman to take her youngest children away, but my mother did not want to leave. To some extent, she would always see Bà ngoại's act of love as a death sentence.

When I was born, my mother squeezed me so tightly I almost drowned. I never felt like this body was mine after that.

When I turned 16, my Japanese grandfather died, and I think something happened to me. At night voices arrived, hissing curses I could not understand. Their faces appeared soon after, choking with tales. These were the ones who still wandered the earth seeking retribution for their violent ends. I could not silence their anger. It changed the shape of my jaw, my chest. It almost killed me. I never asked to see ghosts, but maybe they were just waiting for me to grow up.

When I told my mother that all these spirits were visiting at once, that all these spirits were entering my teenage body and tearing it in half to make space for testimonies, that I had no choice but to witness history again, she wailed, "They *said* you were not supposed to be a fortune teller."

Does this revolution have enough room for demons? For the wretched reborn with forked tongues and leathery skin, with fangs, with outstretched arms of open veins, with the babes aborted beyond the womb, with twisted hair and twisted eyes, black as pearls after an aerial raid? Is there enough space for their rage?

In this age of good, I-am-not-racist-how-dare-you-call-me-racist white supremacy, the boundaries of expressing pain wrap more firmly around the neck. *Make sense. Produce talking points. Improve. Convince. The headshot should be powerful but not too threatening. Edible.*

My mother does not want to say how her father combusted in Vietnam. She does not want to say how a woman died next to her in the fisherman's boat. It is not *conducive* to dwell on memories, but the ghosts, the ghosts are not so patient with amnesia.



Our ancestors are demanding attention, but they do not want statements of accountability. They do not want peace treaties or tax-deductible donations.

Our ancestors were murdered, and they are demanding intimacy. *Here is where the shrapnel pierced my flesh. Do you want to hold it?*

White America does not know what to do with such incantations.

White America burnt the bodies of my people but did not know what to do with the ashes.

My chest is an urn.

Asia America, stop giving thanks to a country that promises cease fire if we cross over.

Asia America, stop apologizing for our angry dead.

Asia America, take the bullet and re-write a constitution. *We, the wretched...*

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AUTHOR BIO



[Sophia Terazawa](#) is a Vietnamese-Japanese poet and performer working with ghosts. Her poems, essays, and performances (film, music, dance, etc.) have been featured in *Project As[I]Am*, *The Fem*, *HYSTERIA*, *Bluestockings Magazine*, and elsewhere. Currently, she is a columnist for *THE DECOLONIZER*, where she writes about love and intimacy as radical healing practice.



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