

Underground Anthology

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Underground Anthology vol. 1

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UNDERGROUND ANTHOLOGY



VOLUME NO. 1 2021

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY

Underground Anthology is a creative writing journal created by English fourth-year students at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. The UA team acknowledges the importance of uplifting, amplifying, and empowering the talented voices of BIPOC, APIDA, and Latinx students in order to create a more vibrant and diversified campus climate. We hope that this journal will inspire change in the ways we conventionally think about literature. In doing so, we strive to expand the literary canon and encourage our fellow artists to look at creative writing through a multicultural lens.

The Anthology features fiction and poetry via publication on Digital Commons, as well as a digital format.

UNDERGROUND ANTHOLOGY

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A Note from the Managing Editors

The creation and production of this journal holds great significance for us as scholars who seek to decolonize our bookshelves and work towards a multicultural literary framework. As students of color, we felt that our voices and thoughts should not only be heard, but also recognized and respected. Existing as a student of color in a predominantly white campus is arduous, especially when our ideas are silenced or othered. Students of color deserve the right to success and opportunity. Our campus, alongside many other higher educational institutions, continues to see a lack of representation of creative work, projects, and artistry created by students of color. It is through this journal that we seek to empower underrepresented voices and provide a space for creative expression. It is time to eradicate the obscurity and invisibility of students of color; we hope this journal serves as a step in the right direction. However, we must continue to take meaningful and effective action outside of the realm of scholarship so that not only students of color, but also all the voices of the oppressed, receive the same visibility, appreciation, and respect as white folx.

We hope that readers enjoy this first ever edition of *Underground Anthology*, and that you take the time to consider the ways in which the UA authors use themes of identity and race to express social and political concerns and ideas. To inspire a more intentional readthrough, we must be willing to look at these pieces through an intersectional, multicultural lens and maintain awareness of our own positionality and privilege.

Thank you to all of the contributors of UA who have helped us bring our ideas to life. To Dr. Martinez, who aided us through all steps of the publication process and guided us to the very end of this project, we thank you for all your help.

Eden Railsback and Juan Vergara
Managing Editors, 2021

Brown Eyes

Ibrahim

Brown eyes, blue eyes, green eyes, hazel
Brown eyes, blonde hair
that became Brown
strong Brown
an ethnic
Brown
that contrasts
gold-flecked, turquoise eyes.
Brown eyes gaze with Brown fierceness
the strength of hot desert Brown in a blue-eyed,
blonde hair, fair skinned America where
Brown
stands out.

I'm writing about this night I had an asthma attack back home over winter break. I awoke in the middle of the night unable to breathe so I went to my bathroom to sit in the shower and breathe in the humid air to help open up my lungs. While I was sitting there the humidity and water reminded me of Puerto Rico (Borinquen in Taino) and my memories of the island and thoughts of my ancestral connection to the land gave me comfort. The idea that I could travel there just by simply turning on the faucet and sitting in the humidity felt magical to me in that moment. By the time morning came around my lungs had opened back up and I went to sit outside on the steps of my house and watch my neighbors start their day and leave for work. In that moment I was reflecting on my experience that night and how in a time of fear and pain, my cultural heritage and ancestry had helped me through it. I would always have the strength of my culture and the perseverance of the Puerto Rican people to remind myself that that strength is within me as well.

Alessandro Zanghi

Coqui

Alessandro Zanghi

A betrayal on a biological level
My lungs torn open
I wallowed in bed, too sick to move my head
In that moment, I began to feel light
What little air squeaked through the night
Coming home was always accompanied by a shortness of breath
An uncomfortable asthmatic episode that lingered for only a few days
But this wasn't shortness
It was a lack
I awoke two hours later

Panicked...

Panting...

I was a child again, begging for breath
Pleading for anything except
death
Making deals with myself
That if I survived this, I'll tell you how I felt

Huddled on the floor of the shower
Warm water beaded down my skin
I closed my eyes, let the steam in
Shrouded in a thick mist, I emerged on the other side
in Borinquen

I took your place in the past
You purified me
I deified you
I carry you in my look
What the sun gave, I took
Comfort in your memory
My lungs mirrored the lapping waves on your shores
Slow, gentle and rhythmic
The shadows began to roll back, the light of dawn allowed me to see
My gasps no longer resembled the sounds of
coquis

With the clarity that followed that sleepless night
I watched the world turn on
I was invisible
The world taught me to be divisible
That my adversaries were invincible

Or so they seem

You taught me a deep breath is a dream
And weakness is stitched in the seams
But that's what binds me together
And I'm waterproof in this stormy weather

Our Message from Death Row

From *Voices in Captivity* by Ibrahim

(. . .)

*For throwing dusty stones
the size of American NASCAR
toys at bulky tanks with small
brown hands and jagged nails.*

(.)

We are on death row

(. - .)

*because we pick up stones
and hurl them to defend our homes with the only weapons we have—
with scrawny arms, wide eyes,
and a myriad of health issues.*

(. - - .)

*We throw bloodied stones from broken homes
because we would rather throw something to make even the smallest
of dents than throw away our lives that have been diminished in their eyes—
we throw stones knowing we will die.*

(. . -)

*We are the children
of Falasteen.
We are the traumatized, the maimed, the killed, the 'to be killed', the orphans—*

(. . .)

*We leave you this message:
We are the stone throwers
to be soon buried under stones.*

Excerpt from *Fated to the Seas* Alyiah Gonzales

This is the end, isn't it?
And you are here with me again, listening with me: *the sea*
no longer torments me; the self
I wished to be is the self I am.
From "Otis" by Louise Gluck

Chapter 1 (Caelestis)

Five years isn't that long to be alone at sea—not when you come into this world alone and will surely die that way.

Loneliness fits me well. It's what keeps me laced into billowy garments. It's why I never have to worry about how close the nearest sword or dagger is. Though, that doesn't keep me from holstering my sword to my side each morning after the back-breaking effort of lacing myself into a bone corset that cinches my insides in place.

Who needs people when you aren't one? Who needs crewmates when you can defend yourself just fine? This hunk of metal and flame is the only piece of home I brought with me to this gods forsaken realm.

I do not miss the land. Not the seasonal blooms of pinks and violets. Not the scents of jasmine and magnolia as they take over towns and lands for weeks at a time. I no longer miss the soft, brown soil. Once rich with history, stories, peoples, it now pours from buckets and bags. Before I wrenched my ship from the Atlantic's trenches, I stole one last touch of Earth's lifeblood.

It crumbled dry and brittle between my fingertips.

I *especially* do not miss the warring people that occupy the land I evade. Those treacherous villains that rip through the willow trees, already weeping from abandonment.

Is destruction all they know?

Is it in their nature to ruin *everything* they touch?

Do humans relish in the pain they inflict?

These questions are not my own. The souls I return to the skies ask me this upon every encounter. I do not provide them answers—it would be one last wound on already sunken,

traumatized existences.

It is not in *my* nature to inflict such pain.

Even I, a being of unruled fire, do not seek such destruction. Despite my makeup, I do not desire pain or ruin.

How is that so? How do I, a being of primordial ash, disorder, life, *chaos*, not create ruin? Yet these soft, fleshy creatures strive for it?

When I first came back to this realm, many took my falling from the stars as a sign of old divinity—an angel come to earth.

Others see me as an omen—an angel fallen from their god’s heaven, as if I came to wreak havoc on their souls.

I prefer the people that see me as an alien. I am none of these things. Perhaps their gods, their angels, their aliens, are all real. I was once told you can believe *anything* into existence.

I come from events much older than their calendars can keep up with. Eons in the past, when the stars exploded in chaos, I was wrought from their ashes and fury. I carry these with me and temper my desires with this blade, always by my side, as it was born to be.

It remains my only true right hand.

When I first came to this planet, I did not conjure the seas and oceans to be burial grounds. I did not imagine they would be run over with spite, hatred, violence—the waters may not boil over, but I am well-attuned to their rage.

I returned here to quell the miseries of the seas, and tumultuous currents will not soon allow me to forget this. Ocean currents whisper to me, tell me stories, remind me where to steer my ship. They urge me forward, direct me where to jump in and begin a new search. Every search for new souls I endeavor upon, they are with me.

Every soul I manage to save from the oppressive depths of these waters is right where the currents tell me it will be, and I am grateful for that. An ocean full of pinned spirits means chaos for the world—chaos I was designed to rein in.

However, what I never understand is why *I* am supposed to end the chaos. If these souls I return to the stars were left here, or worse, forced into their loss, by the people who still walk above the seas, then why should there be peace?

Why shouldn’t tsunamis wreak havoc on each shore these souls could never reach on their own?

“Because those are not the same shores. That is not your burden to bear, Caelestis.”

The waves grow turbulent in their response, their whispered chorus burgeoning into a shout.

“STAY YOUR COURSE.”

The seas do not enjoy my interrogations, whether I keep them in my thoughts or shout them

into the wind stirring around me. The restless breeze buffers against my chilled cheeks.

The *wind*.

My heart skips a beat.

I tilt my head back and stare into the midnight sky. Thousands of stars look back at me, and if I squint hard enough, I can make out the light from my explosive rendering many, many years ago.

A storm is on the horizon.

My lips split into a wide grin and glee brings a twitch to my fingers.

I was created from wander, restlessness—much like the storm brewing just ahead. I cannot exact retribution for these scorned souls, but I *am* Caelestis.

Caelestis, tempest of stars and capturer of souls.

Brewer of storms.

Laughter bubbles out of me, cutting into the wind.

The waters can guide me, but I command them.

And sometimes, I cave in to the havoc I was born of.

Chapter 2 (Inácia)

Sound and spittle flies from the pale man's thin, chapped lips as he shouts words at me. His lip curls in the beginning of a sneer. Two yellow rotted teeth jut out from the thin-lipped curtain.

I don't speak his language, *Inglez*, or something of the like. We speak Kriolu and Portuguese where they stole me from, my home tongue long forgotten when I was first taken.

Now, none of that matters. I don't need to know his words. His face tells all: a threat is a threat, no matter the language it's spoken in.

My fingers twitch over the trigger of the hunk of metal, but my aim is shaky at best. That didn't stop me mere seconds ago. A trembling hand grips my ankle, followed by a meek groan.

I spare a quick glance at my feet, assessing the heap of flesh below me. Ragged breaths drop from him in heaves even as he pulls at my ankle, trying to bring me to the floor with him.

He's too weak. Blood pools around him, far too much to survive. I offer a quick kick to his hand, slamming my bare foot on his wrist when I hear a crackle and snap, followed by a stifled scream as blood gurgles from his throat.

He's the first man I have ever killed. I should feel guilty—murder is wrong, right?

I lift my head and level a glare at the men closing in around me.

But they deserve it.

Their violence came much sooner and much harsher than mine. I am owed their blood and screams. My hand stabilizes around the gun and my finger stills over the trigger as I aim directly for the man in front of me.

"Inácia."

A warm chorus calls out to me, both familiar and foreign. I expect warning in their tone, but it is only coaxing, inviting.

I spare a glance behind me, searching for this source. That momentary distraction is all it takes for the men to storm towards me, their leather boots thudding against wooden boards as they close in.

A hiss escapes my lips as I hurl the metal at the closest pale face, the object colliding with his head in a sickening *thunk*. I whip around on my heel and rush for the edge of the ship, wasting no second thoughts as I dive for the waters below, the midnight darkness lit by a faint glow in the crashing waves.

I didn't think I'd make it this far, anyway.

At least this last choice is my own.

I suck in a deep breath, perhaps my last, as I pin my arms and legs to my sides and spear into the raucous waters. I prepare myself to sink, to swallow chunks of salty, cold waves during a slow descent to death.

This way, I can be with *her* again. She's down here, somewhere.

My lungs burn. The icy waters numb my limbs. I can't feel my arms flailing at my sides. My eyes sting from the salty onslaught. Darkness hedges my vision.

“Inácia.” The voices call to me again.

The numbness subsides in my legs first, blooming into a tingle as soft green lights cascade beneath and around me. Something tears at my neck, forcing me to expel my breath and suck in a mouth full of water. I expect the liquid to choke me, drown me. Instead, oxygen fills my lungs and bubbles escape my throat. I regain control of my body and the sharp, tingling sensation spurs me into action. I reach up for my neck and feel rough edges at the skin. Rippling, unfamiliar lines of flesh materialize beneath my fingertips.

“You’re free,” the chorus of voices whisper to me.

“We are free.” I announce, my voice lost to the currents. Only the bubbles escaping my lips announce my intentions. Scales of precious jewels reflect the sun’s light upwards, back into the sky. I follow the many-hued light, the strength of my new form propels me up and up and up. The waters part around me.

A child’s face peers through a small window in the ship’s lower deck. For the first time, her deep brown eyes fill with wonder.

With *hope*.

I look down to the sharpened talons anointing each of my slender fingers. A wicked grin lights up my face as I dig the first clawed hand into the wooden wall of the ship. Adrenaline courses through me as I pull myself up the ship, my scaled tail dragging behind me. I relish the burn searing through my shoulders, my biceps, my back and abdominals—for once the sensation is of my own will, and I plan to flex and tense each muscle with purpose.

When I claw myself on deck, I look up to see the pale faces drained of color. Their skin now ashen skin with lips pulled back in horror—though their eyes illumine with curiosity. Laughter tumbles out of me, ringing out like tiny bells as each man drops his gun, his knife, his rum bottle, his leather rope.

I can’t help but grin, my lips parting into a wide smile, each sharpened tooth on display for my captive audience. With a deep inhale, I can smell past the sweat and grime on board and the breeze instead carries the delightful terror of each man. I snake my newly-forked tongue over my teeth and lips before a wordless tune spills from my lips, a call for their flesh, their blood, their very *lives* if I deem it so.

Their eyes glaze over as they each throw their limbs forward in a slow, unending shuffle. Their movements do not cease until they’ve stepped up and over the ledge of the ship, into the midnight currents below.

Once the final pale face tumbles in the seas, I stop my song. I look up again at the deck where my people clamber to pick up the daggers and rush below deck again. A chorus of steel against rope, gasps, sobs, and, finally, mirthful laughter meets my ears just as I dive back into the screaming darkness below.

Penultimate

From *Voices in Captivity* by Ibrahim

In our plight, we look back on history
by looking into our tattered school books,
damaged by the years of bombings and blockade.
And we realize, though we have always known,
that we are not the first to suffer so.

We look to you, the *First People of the Americas*,
and ask you for guidance and strength
to best cope with the loss of our lands,
of our culture, of our ways of life. We look to you,
because we know that they cover up your history
the way they continue to cover up ours, suffocating it
from the minds of the world's general population,
until we are no more.

We look to you, *Japanese-Americans*,
who understand what it is like to be relocated
in your own country against your will. To be taken
from your home, your business, your birthplaces,
and forced to live in shambles, in stables, like animals.
We look to you because we know that they altered the news
of your relocation to make it look as if it were willfully done,
the way it's been done to us for decades.
We look to you for the strength to live another day.

We look to you, the other side of our coin,
the *Black-American* population.
We look to you because you too are too aware of having your pains,
experiences, discrimination, dehumanization, and your unjust murders
written off as *history* but it is not history. It is today, it is tomorrow, it is next year,
and the year after for God knows how long. We look to you

because you know what it is like to not gain media attention for the injustices done unto you.
We look to you for an embrace.

They said these injustices would never happen again, some never stopped,
new ones continue to be carried out.

We look to you,
we look to you,
we look to you.

the truth about stories

Elizabeth Chan-Diaz

a story on reddit:
it tells of an Asian boy
adopted and raised by a White couple
to be Chinese
when actually Korean

however,
the comments struck me as odd
instead of seeing the boy,
the trauma he was now facing
they were amused by this “mistake”

@bentzi says:

It's slightly funny, but at the end this will only help him. Being fluent in any language opens extra doors when it comes to relationships, travel, job opportunities, etc.

being fluent in chinese is a massive asset, and extremely impressive to chinese people when a non-chinese is fluent. This will only help him in life. They should be happy about this fuck up :-)

@shannister added:

I came to say this - as someone who lives in China at the moment, I cannot emphasise how much value there is in him being close to the Chinese culture. Now clearly it would be a little upsetting to realise it's not your own, but hey this mistake will open him a lot of doors in his life, so he might as well enjoy it. And start learning Korean.

so focused on his future
neglecting the magnitude of his present
the core of his being shaken
revealing another surface of his world

my **favorite** comment:

When you tell your son, he will have an INCREDIBLE college application essay topic to write about.

their casual disregard

makes me want to **SCREAM**

this is an actual human being

the truth about stories that nobody ever realizes is that

they're not just stories

but lives

ours

Our Friend Maya Angelou

From *Voices in Captivity* by Ibrahim

Because of you,
Ms. Angelou,
We understand
Why the caged bird sings

But it seems
Though you've lived
The atrocities first-hand,
More generations
Of the oppressed creation
Of God, the almighty
Will learn the cruelties of man.

Sister Angelou, I don't believe
Your strong heart was meant to see
The atrocities that came to be
Once you left my people and me—

Oh, how we Palestinians learned to sing.

We stopped crying long ago,
and sing
About our Palestinian blood,
that snakes slowly into our loose, dry earth
to nourish our scant flora for the next disappointing harvest, until a new wave
of violence pushes more of our red pride down to reach
The caverns of our barren water supply.

Did you hear, beloved teacher Angelou,
That though your efforts to educate
The world of the horrors of racism, segregation, and apartheid went worldwide, the same
Eyes
That read your books and shed tears
Are dry at the face of the slaughter and the caging of the people of Palestine?

They are same eyes that fail to twitch as they hold a sniper and aim
At a child
A paramedic
A mother
An innocent
But will return to tears
After reading about the injustices
In your stories that they return to
With gently folded page corners and battered bookmarks,
snuggled in their favorite blanket with their
Guns
hung up on their walls
And the screams of my people forgotten.

Advisor Angelou, since this blockade, our country's main outputs are as follows:

Dead

- Teenagers, "accidents"
- Children, "unfortunate, will never happen again"
- Innocents, "lamentable, but necessary in attempts to suppress (insert issue)"

How do we fare, do you think?

Friend of Palestine, Maya,
I wish you were here to share a word
With me and my people in Gaza, the West Bank, occupied Palestine, and those others forcibly removed in
Jordan and around the world--
To tell us that one day, we will raise
Our voices and our flags and speak
About the injustices done onto us
And our lands.

Sing, people of Palestine--
Sing but do not cry.
One day, this caged bird will learn
To fly.

on-ramp

M. Alexander & Pamela Arciniega (art)

I've grown tired of living next to

A freeway



La Sobremesa

Shania Raylin Hernandez

If there is one thing that I can say with great confidence about my family and I, it's that we are all impeccable storytellers. From an early age, I listened to many stories. Stories from my grandmother, Mama Chela's harsh childhood stuck with me the most. Many of these I could recite with the same steady natural flow as the blood in my veins. I listened in disbelief at the recollections of her pain and suffering. Her unwavering strength and immeasurable faith. In my family, as in many Latinx families, you hear the stories that become intergenerational knowledge and wisdom. These are stories of dreams. Good and bad. Carrying wisdom that is not yet ready to be articulated all at once, but slowly discovered over the years of listening and retelling. They tell you about where you come from and who you are. They provide knowledge from your ancestral past, applicability to the struggles of your present conditions, and potentiality for envisioning a liberated future. Manifesting your dreams.

It was in these spontaneous kitchen table storytelling sessions that I developed some of the most integral aspects of my identity. This is still the focal point of my self discovery that I keep coming back to time and time again. I am simultaneously all and none of my ancestors. That is why I take on this task of telling who I am with strong hesitation. It is not just my own story I am inviting you to hear, but all of who made me the person I am. It is the dreams of my ancestors and my dreams for those who come after me.

I was blessed to have grown up rich. Let me be clear, this is not to be misinterpreted as the socioeconomic definition, but rather the Vera family definition. My mother never lets me forget this when I call her crying from my tiny (and overpriced) apartment room because I've been living off of \$5 in my bank account for the past two weeks, but too ashamed to burden her when I know finances aren't great back home.

"We are rich. Say it with me mija. We are rich. Rich with what?"

I respond, "Rich with family. Rich with food. Rich with love."

These words are a constant in my household. In times of gratitude, struggle, and pain. My household consisted of my single mother, and three older sisters. Struggling to support us, she made sure we knew what the true values of life were. She was a correctional officer and sergeant in a high security men's prison for over 20 years. She told us we could do anything we set our minds to. The gender barrier to my career options was invisible to me, sometimes. Other times, her comments of "marry a wealthy white man" persisted. The potential solution to all our problems. At family gatherings, my sisters and I served food to my uncles and male cousins, and I washed the dishes after everyone was done. That's just the way it was.

Working in the prison changed her. Or so I've been told. But that is all I had known her as growing up. She was terrifying. Strong. But she often brought work home with her. Her anger. Frustration. Her incredibly hate filled prejudices that I now understand were her ways of keeping a job in an institution built on the dehumanization of marginalized communities, even if that included our

own. This tangentially related factor contributed a significant amount to my internalized self hate. My process of assimilation. My colonized mind. I do not blame her whatsoever, as she was forced to conform to this role in an institution predicated on destruction, for our survival. It just makes the decolonial work that much more painful and rewarding.

I sit in these classes. Surrounded by these students. At the college I never dreamed of actually being accepted into. I tell myself every single day that I am incredibly privileged.

Me.

But, as I have come to realize, this was by no means an accident. I come from a heavily Latinx and Filipino community back home. From a young age, I was treading the dangerous line of integration and assimilation, and early decided my public persona would be as assimilated as possible. Hiding the undesirable aspects of my culture that I perceived as hindering my American identity. My potential progress. Whether that was refusing to take “ethnic” leftovers for lunch, or ignoring my Spanish speaking grandmother when my class walked by her house on a field trip.

When kids asked in 3rd grade, I identified myself as half Mexican, half White. It came easy to me, to identify myself as light skinned, not born in Mexico like many of my friends, and not very confident in speaking Spanish. I thought nothing of it. Did the state test demographic questions not reinforce that? I reflect back, what a privilege to have held onto that blind ignorance for those few years.

Throughout school, I did my best to absorb all the knowledge afforded to me. I was mastering the colonizers language as if it were my mother-tongue. While it was becoming increasingly divisive to communicate with my Mama Chela in English, it was nonetheless encouraged. I wrote many essays, gave many presentations, and got complimented regularly for my speaking ability at school. The way I articulated words so well. I learned the process of code switching, of course before I even knew the term.

Attending this university has been an interesting experience. My whole life I kept my “culture” to myself. It was my home. Coming here, I felt like I had the word “minority” written in large letters on my forehead. Because of my privileged positionality back home, this was a painfully new experience. Minority wasn’t a widely used term in the Central Valley, we just knew it was sometimes used to describe us. I knew what racism was, because I read and wrote about it in papers of course, but I was privileged enough to have never actually experienced it. Until my freshman year here. Until I was called a Spic by a boy in a truck at 3 a.m. walking home from the library. Until people started trying to guess “what I was” at parties. Judging me for not being their idea of what my people should look, act or speak like. Until I was fetishized on dating apps.

Fortunately, I have found a community here at this university. It is small, but it is strong. It took me three years to find and build, but here we are. We sit around the table in our overpriced apartments and share our rendition of the stories that have sustained generations of knowledge, and will continue to do so. Nobody back home understands how something as simple as changing your environment a couple hours away could be so challenging. “Don’t you have the beach? The sun?” But the people here, the community that listens and understands, is what keeps me going; they too are my family. Surviving through sharing, bearing witness to each other’s pain and joy - *la sobremesa*.

About the Authors

M. Alexander | on-ramp

M. Alexander is a fourth-year Cal Poly architecture student currently passing the listless days by writing songs that no one will listen to, designing buildings that no one will occupy, and feeling things that no one will experience.

Pamela Arciniega | on-ramp

Pamela Arciniega is a 3rd year city + regional planning student minoring in architecture. Occupying her time as a member of Lambda Theta Nu and a board member for several other extracurricular committees, she describes herself as obsessed with sweets – among them apple pie, ice cream, and abuelita hot chocolate.

Elizabeth Chan-Diaz | the truth about stories

Elizabeth Chan-Diaz, or Liz, as she prefers, uses she/her pronouns, identifies as a womxn of color and was raised in the San Gabriel Valley of California by her Chinese mother and Mexican-American father. Her father was absent in her life from the age of 14, so she considers herself raised by a single mother for some of the most formative years of her life. While she appreciates the many sacrifices her family made for her, Liz also strives to unlearn and heal from the emotional and mental trauma she experienced because of them. Liz is an English and Ethnic Studies major, with minors in Chinese and Italian. She has a younger sister that she cherishes and holds very close to her heart.

Alyiah Gonzales | Excerpt from *Fated to the Seas*

Alyiah Gonzales (she/they) graduated from Cal Poly in Spring of 2020 with a B.A. in English and will be starting her Ph.D. in Literatures in English at Cornell University Fall 2021. They focus on academic and extracurricular work that prioritizes the perspectives and experiences of womxn, nonbinary and queer people of color. Alyiah published her debut novel, *Faeblood Unbroken* (*Faeblood Chronicles #1*) in Spring of 2021, and is currently working on *Fated to the Seas* and *Faeblood Chronicles #2*. Alyiah injects a heavy dose of fantasy in her creative fiction and plans to continue producing more Black, queer, fantasy fiction well into the future.

Shania Raylin Hernandez | La Sobremesa

Shania Hernandez uses pronouns are she/her(s). She is a first generation college student originally from Porterville, California which is located in the Central Valley. She grew up in a strong family of 3 older sisters, her single mother, and grandmother. Creative writing has always been a private outlet for her, but it wasn't until recently that she started sharing some pieces with those closest to her. She hopes this small work helps others feel seen, heard, and validated in their experiences. She is grateful for the opportunity to share how she has come to embrace all of what has shaped her into the person she is today, even if it was not always an easy process.

Ibrahim | *Brown Eyes, Our Message from Death Row, Penultimate, Our Friend Maya Angelou*

Ibrahim is an Arab-American poet, writer, and aspiring novelist. Ibrahim's poetry is interested in exploring and bringing awareness to racial tensions, social injustices, and mental health to spur conversations and dispel ignorance on topics that are difficult to discuss or neglected. Ibrahim has a Bachelor of Arts and Masters of Arts in English Literature and Language with a focus on ethnic literature and has been immersed in different ethnic struggles due to his own mixed ethnicity and interest in different cultures and their struggles. In his spare time, Ibrahim enjoys reading, watching sci-fi T.V. shows, traveling to other countries, and spending time with good friends.

Alessandro Zanghi | *Coqui*

Alessandro Zanghi is an Architectural Thesis student from Mount Kisco, NY, who comes from a Sicilian/Puerto Rican/Ecuadorian household. He not only writes poetry, but is also involved in a variety of artistic mediums, including clothing design, photography, film, music and various forms of visual art. His work tends to explore race, interpersonal relationships, environmental sustainability, and the reuse and repurposing of discarded objects.

About the Editors

Musa Farah | Fiction

Musa Farah (she/ella/lei) is a Fiction Reviewer for Underground Anthology. Between drinking hot coffee like it's water and reviewing pieces, she loves writing and obsessing over new languages. When she's not writing stories, you can find her miserably failing at completing her degrees in Anthropology & Geography and History, while minoring in Spanish and Italian. Being that it is her second year at Cal Poly, she is ecstatic to have the opportunity to join such a creative and inspiring journal.

Kavya Makam | Poetry

Kavya is a fourth-year English major with an emphasis in Poetry. She goes by she/them and is honored to be a part of Underground Anthology. She enjoys color coordination, natural lighting and talking to her plants.

Sakina Nuruddin | Fiction

Sakina Nuruddin is an English major and a Fiction Reviewer for Underground Anthology. She is pursuing an Ethnic Studies minor and was also an intern at the Cal Poly SLO MultiCultural Center. She is deeply committed to promoting, advancing, and representing the needs of BIPOC.

Pooja Tipirneni | Poetry

Pooja (any pronouns) is currently a third-year majoring in political science and ethnic studies with minors in global politics, WGQS, and GRCST. In her free time, she likes to read, watch movies, and make watercolor paintings.

Vanya Truong | Poetry

Vanya is a fourth-year English major in the Technical & Professional Communication Certificate program and minoring in Media Arts, Society, and Technology (MAST). When not reading or writing, she is most likely eating sugar.

Malia Weingarten | Fiction

Malia Weingarten is a second-year English major at Cal Poly who enjoys dancing, hiking, and cooking whenever she can find the time. She loves sweet cream coffee, overused romance tropes, and dramatically journaling about her feelings, and is looking forward to hanging out with her friends again. She's very grateful to have been surrounded by really wonderful people making the Underground Anthology.

Leche Flan

Editor Piece by *Malia Weingarten*

Leche flan is one of the Philippines' most iconic desserts, a staple at any family gathering or any party. A combination of egg yolks, condensed milk, evaporated milk, and caramel, these 4 ingredients melt together and create a beautiful symphony of sugar, vanilla, milk, and nostalgia. They also melted together to form a stronghold over my sense of cultural identity for several years, from the ages of 4 to 19 years old.

Growing up, I was a notoriously picky eater. As a toddler, my diet was restricted to chicken tenders, Campbell's goldfish soup, chocolate, blueberries, and juice. If there was any other kind of food out there, I didn't know and I didn't care. When my brother and I were served leche flan to the first time, around ages 2 and 3, we had very different reactions. My nana was excited to see her grandchildren try her famous leche flan for the first time. My brother scarfed it down immediately, with no thinking or hesitation. He just saw a pile of something sugary made for him, so of course he was going to eat it. However, 3-year-old Malia saw a dish unknown in front of her, and quickly decided that this new food wasn't going to be allowed on her short, stagnant list of foods she liked. The kind of caramel on here was new and strange - it wasn't like any of the American candies I had liked before. And because it didn't quite taste like them, I rejected it. This rejection of leche flan came long before I would learn to repress my Filipina heritage to fit in with my white peers at school; for now, this was solely based off of my picky eating habits. My Lolo looked over at me, appalled, and asked me "You don't like leche flan? What kind of a Filipino are you?" I looked down at my plate in shame, and that was it. I learned, in this moment, that I was not Filipina by birth alone, that to call myself Filipina I would have to work for it. On top of that, I had just failed at this first, small step. That feeling of shame, of realizing I was not a "real" Filipina, was what I would associate with leche flan for the next several years to come.

As I said before, a lot of my childhood involved repressing my heritage to fit in with my white classmates - a result of a childhood in Orange County. Orange County is a diverse area, but it is still learning how to grapple with its own diversity, which means a lot of my culture and heritage would be pushed to the back in order to fit in. In "get to know your peers" assignments, I would change my favorite foods from kare-kare to pizza, I would be teased for having leftover adobo for lunch, and teachers would remind me how "interesting" and "exotic" it was to have Filipina features and a staunchly German surname. My heritage was warped into existing for the convenience and entertainment of the white peers and parents that I would have to explain myself to. I didn't want this role forced on me, so I

stopped bringing it up. I pushed it all to the side, and just wanted my ethnicity to be left alone.

I grew up pushing it to the back burner so much that when I was finally willing to embrace it in high school, I didn't know how. My Filipinx peers didn't know how to integrate me into the culture, because for them it wasn't something they actively had to accept—it was just the way they grew up, the way things were. How do you teach someone your customs and culture when it should have been theirs to claim too? When they tried to introduce me to words and customs, it accidentally ended up coming off as condescending (the way someone can be when they have to teach you about something you should already know). I was grateful to them for trying, but I quickly realized that this would have to be something I did on my own time.

While this was all happening, my Lolo and Nana would make a trip to Orange County twice a year: once during the summer, and once during the holiday season. Every time Nana cooked her famous dishes, leche flan was always on the list. And each time that she made leche flan, it felt kind of like a test.

Am I Filipina enough?

Am I Filipina enough to finally enjoy this part of my culture?

And every year, each time I took a bite, as soon as the custard and caramel would wash over my taste buds, so would a feeling of guilt and rejection, over and over again.

No.

I was not Filipina enough yet.

It felt shameful because it felt like I could only finally accept being Filipina once I had the physical reminders in front of me. I took comfort in the foods that I'd always had since childhood. I took comfort in hearing the language, the way the consonants would flow and hang off of each other, even though I understood none of it. I found home among my mother's extensive collection of chinelas, among the copious amount of wooden cooking spoons, and in the unmistakable smell of durian in the fridge. I felt guilty that I couldn't feel this comfortable being Filipina all of the time. I didn't really feel like I deserved to sit in that comfortability for too long, lest I make a mockery of the culture I didn't even know. And even worse, this guilt was apparently visible on my face. My grandparents were hurt and disappointed because they just thought I didn't like leche flan, but I could see the disappointment on their faces too, every time.

I still was not Filipina enough to them either.

At the end of my freshman year going into my sophomore year of college, I joined a facebook group - "subtle mixed traits" - and read post after post from other Wasian users who felt the same way I did. Maybe they didn't have a complicated relationship with a dessert from their grandmother, but they definitely had a complicated relationship with themselves and how they wanted to fit into their cultures. Seeing the solidarity in mixed-race people with Impostor Syndrome was incredibly impactful in understanding that I was not actively rejecting my culture, I was the byproduct of a society that only

had room for white culture.

Flash forward to Christmas of 2020, my grandparents came to town again in the middle of the Coronavirus pandemic. Because they were elderly and high-risk, we spent a lot of time in the house together. While we were all quarantining, I had a lot of time to think about this internal debacle. And then, Christmas Eve rolled along. We were at the dining table playing mah jong, and my Nana brings out her classic leche flan in her iconic star-shaped pan. She asks if I would like some, not so much as an inquiry but as a courtesy. To her surprise, I say yes, and in my head I start panicking about how monumental this moment could be if I have confronted my fears correctly, if I have reached inside and examined who I am at my core, correctly.

I take a bite, and it is sweet, and melts in my mouth, and it has a little touch of lime zest, and I enjoy it.

I can't believe I enjoyed it.

I look over at my mom, who is too busy staring at her mah jong cards, looking for an 8 ball.

"Mom? It's really good."

She looks up and looks at me, and is surprised to see I'm tearing up.

"It's really good," I repeat, and I am on the verge of crying.

My mom understands what this means for me, and gives me a long, excited hug. For the first time, I had tasted leche flan and the only thing I felt guilty about was going back for seconds and thirds. I reveled in this new feeling, of feeling like I had somehow passed the test. My nana is confused as to why I'm crying while eating leche flan, but she's just happy to see that I like it now. And I know that leche flan isn't all of the work I have to do to finally learn to be comfortable in my own culture, but it definitely feels like a step in the right direction. It feels a little bit sweeter.

About the Creators

Eden Railsback

Eden Railsback (Eddie, she/her/hers) is a fourth-year English major with a fiction writing concentration at California Polytechnic State University. She has worked with several different on-campus publications including feminist and queer studies journal *sprinkle* from 2018 to 2021 as a copy editor and reviewer, as well as award-winning newspaper *Mustang News* in 2019 as a copy editor.

Eddie is a lover of all things artistic. She wholeheartedly believes in the power of creativity and art, and finds herself enveloped in music, reading, writing, and digital drawing. She's currently reading a mix of Tara Westover's *Educated*, Ta-Nehisi Coates's *The Water Dancer*, and Celeste Ng's *Little Fires Everywhere*—all at the same time, because figuring out the next read is way too hard with so many good books in the world.

Eddie spends most of her days chaotically consuming way too much caffeine, heading to the climbing gym and hiking with her roommates, and daydreaming about being good at video games. Realistically, she spends a lot more time daydreaming about being good at video games than she's actually letting on.

Juan Vergara

Juan Vergara (he/him) is a fourth-year first-generation English and Spanish major minoring in music at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. He has been an active member of the Cal Poly Debate team, primarily participating in the Spanish division. He has also been a member of the Cal Poly Percussion Ensemble for four years. Over the years at Cal Poly, he has volunteered at local elementary schools working as a tutor and teacher's assistant. Juan enjoys playing the marimba, listening to Lady Gaga's marvelous music, geeking out about linguistics, and reading books on race, identity, and social justice. During his freetime, Juan enjoys writing poetry and short stories in both English and Spanish. When he is too tired or lazy to do anything productive, he binge watches shows on Netflix and Hulu.

In the upcoming year, Juan will continue his education at Cal Poly pursuing a Single Subject English teaching credential and Bilingual Authorization certificate. In the future he hopes to eventually teach at a school in a low-income community similar to the one he was raised in. He desires to provide students with an adequate and equitable education because everyone deserves the opportunity to soar.