

Mixtapes



WHAT ARE YOU?



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SARAH'S LINER NOTES

My parents tell me that when I was a kid, I introduced myself to my kindergarten teacher by saying "I'm half Chinese and half French, but I don't know which half is which". Everyone laughed, but looking back at that moment I still kind of feel like that little kid – I don't know which half is which.

Growing up in an almost all white small town in Ontario meant that my brother and I were the only mixed-race people around. More often than not when people met me, they asked what are you? When I would hedge and say "Canadian" they would put on an exasperated face and say you know what I mean. And yes, I did know what they meant.

This otherness happened on my Chinese side too. When I was doing an online degree, I was invited to a group for Asian students based on my name. When I showed up in person the organizer took me aside and said "you know this is just for actual Asian students, right?".

Not Chinese, not White, my identity was like a black hole – it was built around the vacuum of the question what are you. I am half Chinese and half White, but to each culture it seemed like the important part was that being a half meant I would never be a whole to them.

Unlike other racial groups, the mixed-race community doesn't share a culture or a place. Instead, we share the fact that we tend to be outsiders to

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two or more cultures. Being an outsider can have its advantages too – my friend Helen Humphreys says a writer is usually formed by being an outsider first. Those on the edges are those who need to pay attention, those who can see from a fresh perspective.

The poems in this Mixtape have an outsider’s sensibility along with the love and tenderness we have for the fractured but very whole relationships we have to our cultures. In Sadiqa deMeijer’s poem “Women Do This Everyday”, the speaker sees her complicity in the capitalist divide when it comes to caring for children. In George Elliot Clarke’s poem “Blank Sonnet”, blossoms and snow, whiteness and blackness collide in a speaker who steps through “snow as thin as script”. In Hoa Nguyen’s poem the speaker pictures her mother in Vietnam, when her mother was a famous stunt motorcyclist – a poem that holds its breath as it imagines across time and space. Doyali Islam’s poem about her mother is a little closer to what most of us experience, a mother’s love and stories and sacrifice fed as rice balls. Sacrifice is a large part of what animates Michael Prior’s poem as well, “A Hundred and Fifty Pounds” is a poem about the Japanese Internment, the title referring to the amount each adult was allowed to bring with them for their forced incarceration.

Each family story in this Mixtape, each poem exploring identity, is a poem about building a kind of self. Except we don’t have bricks, my people, we don’t have anything that stacks neatly and evenly. I once saw a home that was made of concrete and glass bottles. The inside of the house was a shifting light that refracted the sunrise. A fractured and whole beauty.



Je suis...



我是...



THE POEMS

WOMEN DO THIS EVERY DAY

by Sadiqa de Meijer

BHATER MONDO

by Doyali Islam

BLANK SONNET

by George Elliot Clarke

FROM ONE AND HALF OF YOU

by Leanne Dunic

**MY IDEA OF THE CIRCUS IS
MY IDEA OF THE CIRCUS
OTHERWISE KNOWN
AS: MY MOTHER WAS
A CELEBRATED STUNT
MOTORCYCLIST, VIETNAM,
1958 TO 1962.**

by Hoa Nguyen

A HUNDRED AND FIFTY POUNDS

by Michael Prior

ENIGMA (FROM OTHER TONGUES IANNA PRESS)

by Andrea Thompson

EX LIBRIS

by Adebe

MARIAH ACCORDING TO MY YT MAMA

by Mercedes Eng

MIXED TAPE

by Katherina Vemette

A WINTER HOUSE

by Sarah Yi-Mei Tsiang

POOR SPEAKER

by Sonnet L'Abbé

