MOON ROOT
AN EXPLO-RATION OF ASIAN WOMYN’S BODIES
goals of this zine

to explore/revisit gender journeys; to explore roots & routes to open up discussions on difficult experiences as asian amerikan womyn
to think through the way race influences our experiences of gender, and gender our experiences of race
to bring together womyn through collective experiences from contributors, readers, and the broader community; to create a support network through the sharing of experiences
to highlight multiplicities
to facilitate intimacy, experiment in speculative non-fiction
to archive, acknowledge, affirm; because we exist
to find & create our ways back to love, to heal
to make visible
to honor ourselves, and each other
to give ourselves & each other permission & inspiration to tell stories to fill in missing gaps: the places where certain bodies have been silenced
to speak through the body, to think about the politics of language to subvert fragmentation, to resist categorization, self-determination
because if not us, then who?
love
care
joy
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sine Hwang Jensen: INHERITANCE</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy Dewan: VARUNA</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun Hashmi: WHEN PEOPLE ASK ME</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilla Li: THINGS I DON'T DISCUSS (AT HOME)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monna wong: LOVE LETTER TO MY BODY</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess Kealiioalani Toshea Mease: QUEER LIKE ME</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jackie wang: THE VERNACULAR OF OUR BODIES</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mai c. đön: BLOOM</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linda nguyễn: TEN HONEST THINGS</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhanu Kapil: BHANU KAPIL’S BODY</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I have one body and three names.

One for the law.

One for the past.

One for me.

My body:

Like a dumpling, my body is covered in a thin layer of skin.

Under threat of fragmentation, my meridians contract.

When my body feels reduced, bones stretch.

My body is familiar, hot-blooded, and magic.

Some people are confused about the origins and nature of my body.

They ask, “Oh, where is it from?”

Or, “What is it?”

Did I mention there is a series of deep caves just behind my sternum filled with crystals?

There is.
I can’t tell just how deep they are, but I know that among other things, there are long tunnels inside them filled with water, birds that make nests on the walls with their saliva, and tiny worms that hang from the ceiling and release strings of glowing dew drops to catch insects.

The caves are also filled with phosphorescent crystals. These crystals vibrate almost constantly, absorbing the reverberations of the outside world, and emitting waves that burst through my chest wall.

The caves are not visible with the naked eye or any Western medical devices (e.g., Xrays or MRIs). But, most people can feel when the vibrations are strong and can generally sense what types of music they’re making at any given time.

Sometimes, the vibrations are so intense it feels like my insides are imploding. When this happens, my teeth chatter and my palms sweat.

My mother and grandmother also have the same thing.

You wouldn’t know it about my grandmother. She’s only about five feet and a half tall, two feet wide and maybe one foot, three inches deep.

She was born on a rubber plantation in Singapore where the airport is now. Her mother was a maid who worked on the plantation. Of course, I can’t know for sure, but I can guess that she probably had the caves too.

My mother’s caves are very deep.
The phosphorescence of the crystals inside my mother is almost blinding. Even though most people can’t see them glowing, they can tell that something is very special about her.

Remember how I said the intense vibrations can sometimes feel like imploding?

Well, her crystals are so sensitive that a glance from a passerby can send them into violent tremors. When they do this, brows furrow, joints ache, knees knock, and it becomes almost impossible for her to function as a “normal person.”

When my grandmother, aunts, and uncles fled China, mother and grandfather were left behind. They didn’t know if they would see them again. She was only eight. But the crystals hummed, even when it must have felt that the stillness would overtake her.

They were vibrating on the boats she rode and in the abandoned buildings she slept in.

And they haven’t stopped.

The crystals cannot be muted by Western medication, by denying the existence of magic, or by rendering the bodies that hold them invisible and irrelevant.

All these strategies were employed against us, and they have caused great damage. But we have not been destroyed.

Tiny, resilient, quivering glow worms: my inheritance.
Swelling, pulsing, quivering.
Radiating, glowing, glimmering.
Soaking, grasping, sensing.

We resist assimilation, eradication, and implosion.

We are not the first; we will not be the last.
Varuna

Sometimes you make me jealous
Of you and the ocean

And now I see the sting of
American born and confused
When it hits you, pain can be exported

Where we exorcise our mountains
And set to sea those angry spirit innards to
Countries who ache for the
Price of the soul we sold

Tapped full while their
Veins dry up and their noses
Flood, we ask their possession to be
Moderated

But what a life to live
Where with the American Dream,

All I want really
Is for you to introduce me to the ocean.

-Amy D.
This poem is about the fact that right now, Baltimore MD gets most of our energy from the Powder River Basin, which is in Wyoming.

The coal coming from the mass mountain top removal projects in West Virginia and the Appalachias is too dirty to pass EPA inspections here. So, it is shipped to India and China to be burned for electricity there.

While most people in India see electricity as a human right, they know that with most of the Himalayan ice already gone, the Ganges river is set to completely dry up in the next 50 years. Indian officials know this, and this is partially why they refuse to comply with treaties asking them to curb their emissions; most of the damage has already been done.

While telling them to stop polluting, we sell and ship them our dirtiest energy.

This is also about inhabiting the body of a first generation Amerikan born woman with Indian roots, seeing family members strive for an ideal that only lives in fiction, watching my kin dry up on the other side of the world and realizing that I am part of the life that perpetuates the truth of this injustice.

(Amy Dewan is a tiny body of questionable origin who first emerged in Baltimore, MD)
When people ask me “When did you come to this country?” I say “When my MAMA gave birth to me.”

Other Things People Have Asked Me:
- When did you learn English?
- Where are you from? (MD) I mean where were you born? (DC) I mean where are your parents from? (...Pakistan)
- Do you speak Arabic?
- How do you say my name in Pakistani?
- Can you make me Indian food?
- Aren’t Pakistan and India the same thing?
- Why don’t you cover your hair?
- Do you need a work visa to intern here?
- Will you have an arranged marriage?
- Why don’t you just get married? You have nothing else to do.
- Isn’t that against your religion? (maybe that’s logic...)

Things People Have told Me:
- You’re Middle Eastern — because you’re Muslim.
- You’re exotic. (Not pretty, but this special category.)
- I like the color of your skin.
- You should talk to my son. He’s looking to settle down.
- You’re next — you’re the next cousin to get married.

Things I Feel:
- I look fake in a dress.
- I look fake in salwar kameez.
- I’m so American. I’m so not. I couldn’t live anywhere else.
- Sun
THINGS I DON'T DISCUSS
在家 (AT HOME)

THE EATING DISORDER
that ruined my self esteem
in high school.

THE FIRST PERSON
I ever had sex with

THE TRANS MAN
I fell in love with

MY FIRST VIBRATOR
and all subsequently
purchased sex toys

MARILLA L1 is a complex
being like everyone else. She loves her
family & friends and makes her
own home. @MARILLAL1
i want my
body
to create space
for
your
body

❤️
dear you,

thank you. thank you for being strong, resilient, and defiant. for knowing when to start and stop. thank you for remembering, for embodying history, for inscribing the tales of what it took to get here. and thank you also for forgetting and letting go when that's what it took to heal. thank you for bouncing back.

thank you for being ugly sometimes.

you remind me of our mother in some ways. your calves, your clumsiness, the violence of your sneezes. the way you are small but sturdy. i like the way you let me know when i've had too much to drink, too little to eat, too many things on my mind. the way you interpret the languages of other bodies, the ways you have learned to touch and allow yourself to be touched.
i like that you kicked asthma and nicotine
to the curb.

you are a battleground they wage wars on

and map their desires across, navigating

your landscape with their power,

legislation, and privilege in tow. they

have told you how to dress, how much hair

you should have, how you should groom it

and where it should grow. they have told

you to be smaller, weaker, and fairer.

they have told you to open your eyes.

sometimes, you listened--fell into the
rhythm of their misogyny, racism,

homophobia, classism, and ableism.
sometimes you followed their lead, hair

straightener and eyeliner in hand as you
pirouetted around your self-loathing,

simmering like a campfire.
but other times you put on your assertive shoes and kick-ball-changed into a different rhythm altogether. one that said, fuck you! i’m going to find other bodies that look like this one. we are going to share space, movement, and language in spite of your cries of reverse racism and exclusionary practices. we will change the beat with our recognition of each other. we will teach each other the top rock and the six step, and even though we are clumsy and fractured and unrefined we will be fierce and in your face.

thank you for always knowing what’s good for me.

monna writes radical love notes and food haikus. these can sometimes be found at reconfiguredasian.wordpress.com
My intimacy with girls started when I was young. The earliest memory I have is of kisses that took place under a third grade desk while sharpening Lisa Frank pencils. Later there were the bathrooms where we groped each other and discovered the crevices and curves that varied from each of our own bodies. There were also the bubble baths that ended in erupting orgasms, but we were just practicing. That’s what we told ourselves, that’s what we believed. We were practicing for the only kind of sexuality that we were told about, or saw on TV screens. One man, one woman heterosexual relationships were plastered on every billboard, on the front page of every magazine, and filled the pages of every book that was required reading in school. Heteronormativity dominated my pre-adolescent and adolescent years, which led me to internalize the fact that there were no queer women represented let alone queer women of color. In turn my emotions were blanketed with the invisibility that accompanies girls’ socialization processes.

For me the invisibility was both good and bad in that I never had to question my emotions and sexual tendencies. It was a twisted kind of salvation. Jessica was the blue eyed blonde girl that first validated my body, but she made it clear that it could only happen on her terms; in silence. She embodied everything a Hollywood country girl was supposed to; a slender wrangler jean waist, taut muscles that would barely peek out of her flannel shirts, and leather riding boots that were always flecked with mud and horse shit. When we messed around it was a one-way game, she could trace patterns all along my body with hands calloused from farm work but when I went to touch her, whether it be a sly initiation of footsie or a back rub, she would rush to tell my mom and I would deny it in shame. We never talked in school, except for when we were in the backseats of the 30 minute bus.
ride to our neighboring farms. It was there that we would twirl each other’s hair and whisper about what we wanted to do once we were alone. We would alternate the two mile walk to each other’s houses on windy gravel roads and we occasionally give each other a ride back on horseback. I can only assume that we accommodated each other because the secret and rushed hangouts provided us with a kind of bliss that could only be found in moments of shared passion and intimacy.

A full year went by before I recognized that there was something bizarre with the silence that encompassed what Jessica and I did, what we were, and what she made me feel. There were times when she wouldn’t even look at me while we fucked, she’d stare at glossy pages in Playboy magazines; full of thin white women, just like her. That was what made me first question the value in my body. If I was attractive then why did she have to look at those pictures to get off? If I was beautiful, why were there no women who looked like me in those damn playboys? There were no curves, no variation in nipple size or color, no women with unshaved vaginas, no Asian Pacific Islander girls. This confusion turned to anger when I realized that her continuous denial of anything else between us left me feeling hurt. At the time I didn’t understand why, but I chose to cut things off between us and left with an even more abstract understanding of myself.

Looking back, I can see that the confusion and potential self-hatred Jessica must have felt was projected onto me in ways that I am still trying to undo. While she was trying to make sense or rationalize something that wasn’t supposed to happen, she also taught me lessons in self-denial which was
more impactful than either of us could have recognized. By making me ashamed of my feelings for her, she taught me that my developing sexuality was something to be afraid of; by making me question her reasons for ever wanting to touch me, she taught me to hate my body.

It’s been nine years since I’ve seen or touched the pale moonstone skin that dominated my fourteen-year old thoughts and as painful as those memories are I can’t say that I don’t appreciate what was started. It would be nice to say that what I went through with Jessica was the hardest part of carving out my sexuality, but in reality it was the beginning of a continuous process which I am still trying to make sense of. I never stopped asking myself those questions about the value in my body and that questioning has led to some tragic attempts at relationships.

When I think about how I tried to further the distance between my body, mind and sexuality in order to push away the confusion I felt, I cringe because these realizations are still so new. I’ve spent years trying to make myself fit within the prescribed sexual identity that was expected of me. I’ve been so terrified that I might not fit within the binary that I suppressed my simultaneous attraction to people all along and outside of the gender spectrum. I made myself believe I was only attracted to one gender and could only be with one person at a time. I’m still trying to make sense of what my sexuality means to me but now I know that the limitations set by society are social constructs that I can choose to opt out of.

I have started to weave together my body, sexuality, and mind to form the positive image of my whole self that has been missing for twenty-three years. I have started to believe that my fat-girl curves are worth loving and that my sexual and intellectual selves can both be at peace within my body. I wish that the damage those prolonged separations caused were limited to myself but they weren’t. I know that I inflicted pain upon those who I tried to love and those who tried to love me because I hadn’t yet learned to love myself. This process has brought about the realization that there are many layers to my experiences and I am still trying to reconcile some residual guilt.

Jess is a Queer DIY Bookworm who likes to throw oppression on the ground/jessirahrah.tumblr.com
what is this rattling
i sent for someone to come get me but where are they
where have they gone
where am i supposed to go if i am not got?
the sad woman sat
next to me on the plane.
she watched me. she looked at me again and again, gave me gum
while i was staring out the window. she followed me through the
airport. i didn’t want to make her feel bad so i looked at her and
smiled. she wanted to know what i was and spoke to me in spanish.

when outside i remember
i was crossing the street
the street crossed me, i became tar
i realized, i have been following her into the dream
and i am lost. she lost me,
i’m on the streets waiting for the giant hole to open,

you are the jackie and you have the bones
the ones the soothsayer needs to write out his prophecy.
you are the jackie and it is time to skin
for the love of this world and the people in it,
we have to know.
his word is sacrosanct
and the luster of your bone has shone through your blouse
billions of years waiting to be unlocked by the blade
running across your thigh
looking for the stone center
of her

take my bones i gave up on sports and being tall a long time ago
take them home with you. take them away. leave me a heap of flesh
waiting to bleed till dead, till my ransacked body opens its mouth and
heaves its last breath, then vomits up the spine you’ve wanted so badly.

razzias across the villages.

they are pillaging for spines. the construction of the forest of spines
will take place soon. i will have to go in it with disgust and marvel i
will have to walk through the forest looking at the bones, wondering
which are mine, if i’d even recognize them, and know that the spine
forest is beautiful but also evil in a very baroque kind of way.

they will scatter the hinterlands with their spine forests.

they have announced that my body is a pariah state always far from
what i need to be
one without being
we do not vote because we are broken. you broke us. you continue to break us.

you have to write fast not give a shit the disorder you must let the disorder in, make it loud, doesn’t matter if the shrink is beneath the balcony shivering to itself about the lonely head.

the move

the movement of the music is dragging you into the beatific page of the digital fingering the page with my finger-mind.

when the early morning sought a certain levitude in the transition to the yellow. what happened when the birds ripped out their throats and said no more no more we

we want a second of silence in this town.

the birds ripped out their throats and sold them to their young. the young used a grinding apparatus As Seen On TV to turn it to mush so they could feed themselves, the little helpless jerks.

dear ----

i am living in your ghost and we are living in the bodies of our memories. your body next to my body is being rewritten. i hope that’s
okay. i dream of you every night and i worry that the more i dream the more i overwrite you, the more i re-write the memory of you. in the dream i am always struggling to explain something to you in the language we created, in jumyung hua. i’m gathering the lingual filaments to finally say what i came here to say. i speak to you in a strange blend of chinese, english and bodyspeak. and telepathy and intuition and the cosmic synchronization of unspoken understanding. in the dreams i am trying to say something and then—ah!—the revelatory moment. dong le, dong le! like when i explained i was queer and your eyes got wide and you got out your notebook and said, today is a good day. but not in english.

you and the memories of you are ghosts. i want to write you without writing over you. i have something to tell you. that’s what it’s like in the dream. come here! i have something to tell you. one night it was rather meaningless. something like, “that woman is going to japan.” that woman...nage nuren jiu qu riben. sometimes i am confessing my love, or just trying to be clever and funny around you so you’ll like me.

you came into the sitting room when i was shaking and crying because i took two shots of soju and felt very alone. and when you came, i thought, this is what i wanted. you started crying too. a Canadian girl was like—no! not you too! you told me about my future. i was allergic and fainted in the bathroom.
but the bad ones surface like dead fish.

i’m writing into you.

i see your face.

you speak to me in the body vernacular.

i felt so fucking sick i had another bad dream this one was about her
she was on the same bus as me and then she got off and i followed
her and tried to explain that i didn’t have anything planned and could
i please follow you wo meiyou dasuan, and then the bus driver made
fun of my pronunciation and i repeated it slower. i was waiting for
you to say, lai ba. come here.

i guess it’s true that in most of them you are afraid. or i’m afraid. i
can’t tell. i’m waiting for you and i know you’re thinking, fuck off. but
still i persist with our language, and on some nights you understand.
you turn around to face me, you are with me inside it.

* * *

i am jackie wang and i write. my other zines include: on being hard
femme, memoirs of a queer hapa, the phallic titty manifesto, c.
exigua, shadow ladies, and the vertigo of falling. come find me at:
// loneberry.tumblr.com // loneberry (at) gmail (dot) com //
My gender is
A red dress in
the middle of
the desert
heat soaked on
a cactus
aching
to bloom
to be just
needles and
sun
OR MAYBE
THAT'S WHAT MY
FEMININITY
FEELS LIKE
NOT WOMAN
BUT A BODY
BURNING IN
LOVE AND RIOT

mai currently lives, loves and resists in Oakland, California. mai.c.doan@gmail.com
ten honest things.

01. This list is way the fuck past due on our zine submission deadline. thank you to all of the other contributors for your magnificence. <3 <4 <5

02. It's difficult for me to get up in the morning because I don't know how to deal with life and have more avoidance practices than I do healing practices. My body is stressed more than it needs to be, but I can trust it will find a way to take care of itself, productive for or detrimental to my life.

03. My body hair haunts me. I can't even begin to write about it, my fear is so debilitating, afraid of my own body. And I think often about how it would be different if I were assigned a body at birth, socialized to not give a shit, take my clothes off in public, numerous other fantasies I'd get away with. I think about maybe I could get away with this by identifying as trans, this is my masculinity hirsute. I'm conflicted about these thoughts as I am about my body, it all feels wrong and how I desire a lover, but would feel obligated to shave, but then I'd get tired of shaving all the time, or be ever anxious of them discovering when I didn't shave, and hoping for a time when we'd get intimate enough that I wouldn't feel like I had to, we've arrived! I'd arrive, but who knows—why am I waiting for someone to help validate the feelings I already want to feel? I know I'm supposed to say I love my body, in all that it is and isn't, but I can't. I know I'm supposed to say I love my body, in all that it is and isn't, but I can't.

04. I haven't come out to my parents because the notion has always felt white and distant to me with its implications of individuality. My steadfast rebuttal is that of, I am who I am, wherever I am, and have always been. My family sees me in the same clothes, carrying my body in the same way. I never had to come out to my sister in any event like manner because she paid attention to who I was growing up and just knew. And I believe the rest of my family knows too, in one way or another. But to be honest, every time the notion of coming out comes up, I freak the fuck out internally no matter how much I am able to theorize otherwise. About my dad condemning me to hell, banishing me from the family (spiritually or literally). I can barely think past that in any hypothetical scenario.
05. It's extra difficult to fathom coming out to my parents, even though I am much more emboldened now hearing more stories from homies of color, because it's an overwhelming multi-layer process: I don't know how to communicate feminism and queer and genderqueer and justice and liberation in Vietnamese the same way I do in English.

06. I want to be able to share love and wholeness with everyone who is important and dear to me.

07. In third grade, I resented being called a tomboy because it implied that I wasn't a real boy, when I really felt like one, although I don't know if I would have necessarily chosen to verbally claim myself as one. I just felt an uneasiness that I didn't know how to articulate then, so I seethed instead. I still don't know how to articulate that uneasiness, but I think I'm moving past the seething.

08. I need more than space for my identities within your communities. I'm trying to let go of my fear of leaving your communities so I can focus on love and wholeness with all of my transformations and communities I have yet to find/are to come.

09. I'm not going to make it to 10, y'all.

Linda Nguyen was raised on the internet and hustles culture at surnameviet.tumblr.com. More honest things at reconfigureasian.wordpress.com.
Bhanu Kapil's Body: Quick Notes
(written in less than three minutes,
while the bath fills with hot water,
bubbles, and herbs)

Bhanu Kapil's body has been pre-soaked in wintergreen,
rosemary and thyme.
Bhanu Kapil's body has been dissected on a waist-high table
then set on the ground, on a tarp, to dry.
Bhanu Kapil's heart is rosy.
Bhanu Kapil's lungs hurt when she breathes in, unlike other
Europeans.
Bhanu Kapil's body shares traits with people from countries
like...can't think of any countries...Sweden?

See: Bhanu Kapil's cheekbones, that are sharp.
Bhanu Kapil's nerves, arranged on the riverbank.
There's the sun.
There's a bird flying past with a part of Bhanu's body in its beak.

Bhanu Kapil made love to strange husbands, over and over
again, like a robot.
Bhanu Kapil ate a lot of snacks.
Bhanu Kapil can't type; in fact, she's typing with two fingers,
naked from the waist up (see: butcher's block) but with a tartan
fleece draped over her shoulders and then her front.
Bhanu Kapil breastfed.
Bhanu Kapil climbed a stone staircase cut into the side of a sub-
Himalayan paradise, and look where that's got her.
See: Bhanu Kapil's body.

Bhanu Kapil's body has been pre-soaked in rose oil and various kinds of aftermath.

Bhanu Kapil committed many thefts today, including the theft of envelopes.

Bhanu Kapil's hair was once cut into a *bodhi* by Anu Gupta in a childhood game, though when they fell in love as adults and Bhanu Kapil ignored Anu Gupta in Green Park, in an inaccurate attempt to mimic the heroines in the BBC mini-series *Poldark*, Anu Gupta turned at the gate and wrote, much later, on a postcard: "Revenge is a dish best served cold."

Bhanu Kapil's body has been bruised by love, pummeled, shot through with fuschia and gold spears, the kind people use in tropical drinks.

Bhanu Kapil is exhausted by the care a body needs on a regular basis.

See: Bhanu Kapil's body.

I want to be cremated.

Take my ashes to the Ganges.

Set a boat of butter, flowers and flame into the rigid wave.

See: Bhanu Kapil's arms, legs, trunk and head: that flare.

Then diminish.

Set her down.
MOONROOT is an ongoing collaborative project. If you would like to contribute, please email us at moonrootzine@gmail.com.

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