

## Capacity

I have trouble swallowing:

rice ruebens on rye shrimp tempura

chicken breast bucatini puttanesca lumpia

Dutch crunch rolls lamb burger, onions & swiss red rice

shaved pork combination bún mochi

kelaguin bindadu lemon butter asparagus vanilla bread pudding

coconut cake medium rare kibbee cornbread and butterbeans

bahn mi buttermilk pancakes calamari

bi bim bap chicken fried steak mustard greens

tostadas de carnitas BBQ pork and slaw catfish

curly fries bunúelos ton katsu

mushroom kebaps potu pilaf

beef pot pie bangers pot brownies

lätke brats brownies

kartoffeln salat kielbasa mousaka

chuletas cabbage dim sum

lasagna tri tip cobb salad

vermicelli linguini clams casino

horchata.



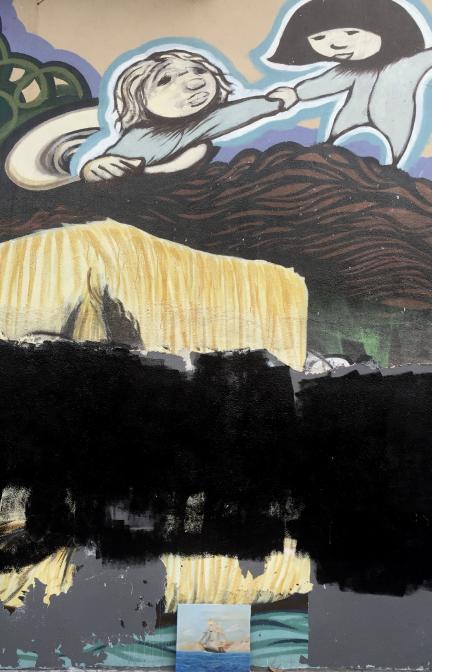
Well—not horchata.

Or anything liquid, smooth, smoothy-esque, slick or oily, slippery, slidey, esophageal glide-y.

I have a condition.

In which all the foods I love inflame my guttural lining, puff up my smooth muscle membranes, make the otherwise unfeel-able an unavoidably painful stricture—
a bulging bolus punch to the thorax,
a digestive impasse only water and gravity can attempt to make lax.

Swallow upon swallow, I make a river of my gullet, hope the rapids will burst the dam of home cooking



bottle-necked above my stomach.

And it has gotten so pronounced—
my occluded condition—
that I sought out a specialist
to investigate my painful indigestion.

Which brings me to the medical office counter and the ensuing intake questions:

Can you verify your name?

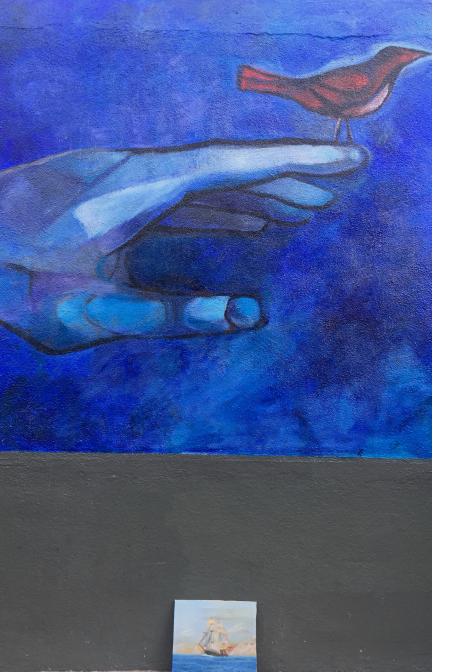
Can you verify your date of birth?

Do you have a religious preference?

Tell me, what is your ethnicity?

And this. This is the location.

Where the throat spasms a twitch in preparation for a stalling. A piling up of what I've been swallowing.



My name is Lehuanani Marie Taitano. I would prefer no religions at all. I am Chamoru.

C-H-A-M-O-R-U C-H-A-M C-H-

But the assistant shakes
her head, scrolls through a drop-down
list of pre-existing ethnic
conditions.

She shakes her head, brow furrowed, pointer finger clicking, tapping, wagging *no*.

That's not an option.



I am told that my ethnicity is not an option.

Being Chamoru is not an option.

But before I get to the sucker punch, the great, curled fist of *Other*, let me tell you a story.

I could issue a litany of other scenarios, regurgitate a pile of questions I've swallowed, little fishbone fragments of others' doubt.

But I will tell you a story of belonging. Of when and where and to whom and what. Of identification.

Of unavoidable collision. Of transplantation. Of the sea.

My first memory, the sea. Swallowing a mouthful of saltwater in Tumon Bay. My siblings catching sea cucumbers in the surf. My first memory of belonging.

Evening light, grip of sand, the quiet tug of tide and the moon rising.

My siblings splashing, rejoicing in their brown bodies,

brown, like mine,

which is to say

half-some-hey-grel-why-your-dagun-so-white-brown.

Island-mama/

airforce-father

brown.

Coconut husks scooped

up and flown off to the "mainland" brown.

And once there, too-too brown.

Word bank brown, a puzzle for

every introduction, like

where-you-from-

are-you-

ain't-you

or ain't you

where-

where-where-

my-great-white-eyes-

don't-recognize

can't-categorize

please-explain-yourself

to me, brown.

School, church, downtown, uptown, all around the same, and home was no refuge because my father was ashamed and drunk tried to kill my mother in front of me and shot our puppies when they whined to be let in and finally cast me off when he said my life was nothing but sin because somehow God hates

white side of our family, which is to say, unslyly, him.

fags and the only good brains I have come from the

And what I have,
besides these big ass ears
and the way I sometimes place my hand
on my thigh
when I'm relaxed or listening

is this painting.

This painting, a seastory sailing across a canvas, masts puffed against clouds gathering a pink-orange evening.

All the rigging taut, white foam kissing an oaken keel. No land in sight, an unmanned ship, just sailing.

I remember when the canvas

had a frame.

I remember the day he crashed and raged and tore it from their bedroom wall, fists and a jug of wine together reeling and him, disgusted perhaps with gazing at a reminder of wanting, once, to be something like an empty vessel cutting a path across an evening sea.

This painting, forgotten in a mice attic until last year, when my sister sent it to me.

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What do you do with memories you don't want to keep?

Where can you store them that they won't come creeping back on a scent or melody?

**k**\*

At the medical office counter,

I tell the assistant I AM an option,

I am my *only* option,

I am the daughter of my mother, sister to four sisters and a brother, an auntie, great auntie, great-great auntie to nieces, nephews—"kindling" I call them—because fuck assumption of gender.

I tell her the flaw is not me, and yes, it's the whole goddamned system, and no, I won't be quiet until they sedate me, which they do.

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Inside:

the endoscopy.

My doctor guides a camera into the guts of me, finds I'm suffering the same digestive side-effects of monoculture as I had suspected.

Home from the hospital, in the house filled with

boxes from my most recent migration, the painting .

Unframed. Leaning against a shelf. Reminding me.

That at least once, my father
had the capacity to create. To sit and
imagine a scene filled with wind and cloud
and light. That some version of himself
was compelled
to make art
and love and children,
before he filled himself up, instead,
to the brim, with toxicity.

I will not replace the frame, but hang the canvas raw and ragged, let art and poetry frame it how I choose. It will remind me that poetry is my home,
a place of belonging
that can house memories, choices,
the best versions of
ourselves.

## **Author Bio**

**Lehua Taitano** | Lehua M. Taitano, a native Chamoru from Yigo, Guåhan (Guam), is a queer writer and interdisciplinary artist. She is the author of two volumes of poetry–*Inside Me an Island* (June 2018) and *A Bell Made of Stones*. Her chapbook, *appalachiapacific*, won the 2010 Merriam–Frontier Award for short fiction, and her most recent chapbook, *Sonoma*, was published by Dropleaf Press in 2017. She hustles her way through the capitalist labyrinth as a bike mechanic who sometimes gets paid to make art.