

## **Event Title: Choices and Challenges in Writing Diaspora**

### **Event Description:**

Writers who write about other cultures and languages have to navigate many issues in how they present themselves and their communities. Should we italicize non-English words? How much should we explain about cultural nuances? And who is it that we're writing for—a general audience that doesn't know us or an implied diaspora community? Hear from five diverse writers on the choices we've made and how we balance authenticity with the demands of a predominantly white publishing industry.

### **Event Category: Multiple Literary Genres Craft Discussion**

### **Event Organizer and Moderator: Grace Loh Prasad**

### **Event Participants and Short Biographies:**

#### **Moderator:**

- **Grace Loh Prasad** received her MFA in creative writing from Mills College and is an alumna of VONA and Tin House. Her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Longreads*, *Catapult*, *KHÔRA*, and elsewhere. She is currently seeking a home for her memoir-in-essays, *The Translator's Daughter*.

#### **Participants:**

- **Lillian Howan** is the author of *The Charm Buyers*, recipient of the Ka Palapala Po'okela Award for Excellence in Literature. Her writings have appeared in *Asian American Literary Review*, *Café Irreal*, *CALYX*, *Jellyfish Review*, *New England Review*, and the anthologies *Ms. Aligned 2* and *Under Western Eyes*.
- **Sunisa Manning** is a Thai and American novelist. She's the author of *A Good True Thai*, which was a finalist for the 2020 Epigram Books Fiction Prize for Southeast Asian Writers. She is the recipient of the Steinbeck Fellowship, a residency from Hedgebrook, and other honors.
- **Victoria Buitron** is a writer and translator who hails from Ecuador and resides in Connecticut. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in

*SmokeLong en Español*, *Entropy*, the *2021 Connecticut Lit Anthology*, and other literary magazines. Her debut memoir-in-essays is the 2021 Fairfield Book Prize winner.

- **Michelle Chikaonda** has won awards at the Seventh Wave, the Tucson Festival of Books, and the Fine Arts Work Center at Provincetown. She is a contributing editor at *Electric Literature*; has attended workshops with Tin House, VQR, and VONA; and has worked at *Al Jazeera*, *Catapult*, and *Hobart*, among others.

### **Event Structure:**

The Moderator will introduce the event and how it came together, then she will introduce each panelist one by one. Each panelist will provide a brief introduction of how they are situated within a diaspora and then will read a short excerpt of their work (approximately 3 minutes). Following these short readings, the panelists will engage in a craft discussion.

Questions we will address:

- Do you write about characters in the diaspora or in the country of origin—or both?
- In writing about another culture, how much do you explain to the reader and how much do you leave unspoken?
- How do you approach using other languages in your work?
- If you are bilingual, do you think it makes you a better writer?
- Why is it important to have stories about “other” cultures in American literature?