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Attached is my submission for Ricepaper Magazine. Sorry about sending it in a day late. Below is some info about me and the writing:

Description: This speculative personal essay examines common multicultural metaphors such as 'mosaic' and 'melting pot.' Analogies to a community mural are made and also, there is a description of what a more inclusive metaphor for youth would engender.

Bio: Cathy Truong is a Vietnamese-American wanderer residing in Vancouver and planning her next destination. She is in search of her ever-changing identity and the elusive concept of home. After spending a large portion of her life in Southern California, she embarked on a journey to teach English abroad and travelled throughout Asia. Her writing appears in East and West Magazine as well as Tuoi Tre News, both publications in Vietnam.

Thank you so much! Please let me know if you need any clarification or additional information.

Warmly,

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Reflecting on the Metaphors in the Mural

In an east Vancouver neighborhood on the corner of Fraser and Broadway, is a colourful community mural on the side of a dollar store's walls. As I walk past it, I think to myself that the artist who designed this must have been thinking of a multicultural Garden of Eden where people from different backgrounds live in a harmonious coexistence amidst a backdrop of flowing waterfalls, lush foliage, and stately mountains.

At the very edge of this mural is a yin yang symbol in the form of a glowing moon, balancing the ebb and flow of the ocean tides below and reminding us that all things positive also work in conjunction with things negative as well.

In the water, a killer whale looms over those who are native to this land, resonating strength and a compassionate nature with his movements. In the canoes, prayers are made to him for protection, a prosperous catch, and a safe return to shore.

A woman sits in the grass facing a rainbow of trains and is in contemplation of her ancestors. They built the railroads that ran across Canada. The trains are pulled by a fierce dragon who will not back down in the face of any hardship and danger.

An Islamic mosque is centrally located in the hills along with a Greek temple and towering pagoda. Different ideologies exist here.

There is a giant multi-coloured sun near the entrance of a store representative of a medicine wheel, a symbol sacred to many Aboriginals. It is divided in quadrants with the black, yellow, red, and white hues. After all, the sun had kissed the skin of the people creating their varying shades.

The artist had included cultural symbols and historical motifs that were representative of different groups of people. The Coast Salish people were acknowledged as the forbearers of this land as well as the Chinese railway workers who risked their lives by working under unfit and treacherous conditions. For other groups of people, a religious or cultural building was the depiction, recognising their presence in our community. The entire mural was the artist's metaphor for our multicultural society.

All of us have different views and representations of our multicultural society and how we, as individuals, fit into this paradigm. The most well known metaphors are the mosaic and melting pot.

The cultural mosaic symbolizes the diversity in our collective society. The individual pieces represent all the different cultures that are part of the whole. The mural artist had represented the artwork similar to a mosaic representation, showing the

individuality of different ethnic groups.

As an interesting contrast, the melting pot metaphor represented in the States represents a heterogeneous society becoming more homogeneous. Various metals are melted down to conglomerate into an alloy and the original parts are no longer recognisable, leaving only the new creation visible to the naked eye.

The community mural near my house does a wonderful job of portraying individual cultures. But what about those who are wedged between cultures, such as people who are interracial or interethnic, second generationers, or those who have created subcultures within their groups? Where do we stand in the quadrant sun?

Growing up in the suburbs of California, I had always felt a lack of belonging. My Asian-American peers surrounding me conformed to certain subcultural identities in order to be what they thought 'cool.' Either they were studious straight 'A' students or talked like they were rebellious thugs who were heavily influenced by MTV pop culture.

I felt little inclination to be a math or science whiz and I certainly didn't want to speak Ebonics or the Asian-American version of it. Therefore, I didn't feel like I was part of these two major subcultures. I also didn't feel like I fit into any of the four quadrants in the sun. I was somewhere outside, perhaps a mutated colour.

Some of the 1.5, second, and third generationers that I have met have struggled to find their identity within the North American stereotypes. Perhaps, like me, they believed that they must be like the one conglomerated alloy, or exactly like the grass green mosaic tile piece which symbolized their demographic group.

If I could repaint the mural, I would keep the sun's core as it is, in quadrants, symbolizing the division of groups. In the center of the sun is where all the colours come together to create a hue that artists call 'mud.' We are all made of mud, and that is our essential source and spark of life, so to speak. Somehow and somewhere, along the way, we learned to segregate ourselves into certain beliefs about the colour we are.

We might think we are white, yellow, red, or black. We create borders between ourselves and our fellow mud-made humans. The lines in the center between the colours function as walls so that certain groups can remain unto themselves if they wish to. Many groups like their gated communities and interact only within their 'privileged' socio-economic class or demographic that they feel comfortable with. They probably feel more connected to their 'muddiness' within these exclusive regions and boundaries.

At the edge of the core, the borders dissipate and here there is more of an intermingling and integration of cultures. Those who want to leave their exclusive communities just have to walk to the outskirts. The colours then start to blend with one another, fusing

together, melding and meshing to create new hues never before seen.

Somewhere on the outer edge, I see my colour. It's a dark orangish rouged vibrant blend with a hint of mud in it. I know that it's okay not to be the pure yellow colour, and that I have my own special shade, created just for me on the mixing palette of life.

Angling out are rays radiating brightly and losing the primary colours. Maybe, as the colours fade, they have changed completely from their ancestral roots, no longer speaking the ancient proto language and existing as something new to shine upon the world.

Another change that I would make to the mural is to outline the silhouettes of a group of people, whose faces are irreconisable. They can be anybody. They can be you or I. We can be whoever we want to be without conforming to popular colours or shades.

The new generation needs a new metaphor, one that depicts our society as a diverse group of people that allows for inclusivity of cultural groups and subcultures alike. Youth need to know that it's okay to be different colour from the typical. It's okay to be a blend and a fusion of something. It's okay not to fit within the lines and borders.

Our community murals can undergo a metamorphosis of our cultural evolution that is inclusive of multiple generations, mixed roots, or an orientation that is not of the majority to reflect our present cultural dynamics.

The mosaic and melting pot are adequate metaphors in and of themselves, but maybe there is a better phrase or artistic representation for the community that can be used to represent our relationship as culturally diverse humans.

It will be subjective for everyone of course, as we all have our own ideas about how we relate to culture, still we can include everyone in this new metaphor. We can mold the metaphors in the mural so that they can be more positive in identity formation for the younger generation.