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Taboo

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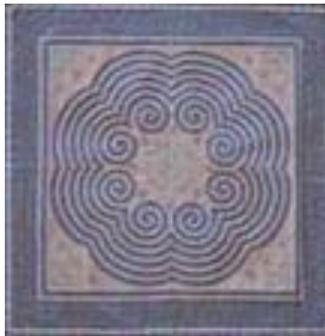


Taboo

A graphic Novel

A forgotten king, a shaman, weirdo extraordinaire, who thinks he fits in because his uncle named him Peter; in order to become who he truly is, he has to consider his past, his spirit, and his dreams, obliterating the fine lines between the law and taboos.

Taboo



CSUMB
2016

Taboo

A Hmong dude

His American Nightmare

And the Aftermath of a Cultural Rebirth

Peter Xiong

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or they'll get you

Don't cut your hair after sun falls
Or you'll get chased too

Don't run at the funeral
Cause if you trip, your spirit will fall

Don't touch your baby nephews head
You'll take his luck

Don't Point to the moon
Cause it'll come after you

Isn't it crazy that my 3 week old niece
Won't grow up with these taboos

See Hxstory was never taught to me correctly.

I was

*Helpless and lost when I had to color in my own skin, in 1st grade
As I reached for the yellow & brown crayon
My teacher snatched away the brown
and said
"that won't blend."*

Told I was Chinese, but never spoke a lick of Cantonese
Then I was told I was Viet

So I asked my grandpa who fought the Secret War
Slanged to Americans as the "Vietnam War"

Simplee to simplify things.

I'm confused

My gramps who isn't really my gramps

My mom's...dad really drowned in the river

Hunting for whatever was left
streams, and yellow

After poisoned

Rain.

My skin yellowed and browned

And...Now...I'm Khmer..

Darker than ever

Mom said "never to buy a red Honda Civic"

Cause pigs will chase after you like the moon you flipped off.

As mom rips old school food stamps and YELLS

"Don't you ever go outside to play again"

"I don't want you to get darker"

You're Hmong, not Cambo

...I'm now afraid...

...of the dark...

But

Isn't... ironic... that Now

I write my identity as "Hmong"

Which means the "Free myn"

But

As I write these English words to tell my story

I lose

my language, and feel like

A trapped humyn

But

Don't worry there is a Hmoob written language

Fuck that shit was translated by a white Christian old man

I know my hystory

Because knowing your roots
Will enable you to earth your way underground
And rip out the bombs buried in our homelands
That caused our heroes to swim the Mekong River.

As the Full Moon plays with the ocean,
It leaves a slit underneath your ear
Opening a hole, so you'll listen
I'm the Moon, and I saw it all.
Can you
hear?

Once upon a time Hmong people were believed to be half human and half spiritual beings with super human powers. Powers that scared full human beings (Chinese people). Some say there were once Hmong kings who could control fog and doctors that had the abilities to travel into soul society¹ and rescue lost spirits. Human societies, who were afraid of these super humans taking over the land, teamed up and went to war against Hmong nations.

After war, rape, genocide, uprooted burial grounds the cursed tear drops of raped women, slaughtered infants and awoken ancestors slips its way through the dirt polluting everything like radiation, germinating taboos. Symptoms of these taboos were

¹ Bleach

weaponized by colonizing forces that would bring down even the strongest Hmong super beings, one being Chi You².

Generations cycle and taboos reappear to reclaim its harvest.

Parents had always said not to point at the moon. Not supposed cry at night. Not supposed to sleep with arms crossed as if you were dead and most importantly don't date someone with the same last name. I was a Xiong. So basically all Xiong girls were my sisters. Never eat raw meat.³ There were some creepier taboos like don't point at the moon or the moon will cut a slit behind your ears when you are asleep and also if someone cried at night Poj Ntxoog would appear. Depending on which taboo,

² Chi You – Was a bad ass Hmong king during about 27th century BC, also a deity worshipped by the Chinese, Koreans and other Asian ethnicities. Chi You was one of the last known Hmong super humans. He created iron and was half ox half human that manipulated fog as a war tactic; which practically made his army military undefeatable until the Chinese invented the compass. Then he was screwed and lost his sons would split into different parts of what is the continent which is now Asia.

³ Raw meat – Dating someone with the same last name as yourself.

breaking one summons a spirits that can attach, cause illness, possession and these entities even sit on people when their asleep and has the ability to crawl into dreams resulting in nightmares; Or insomnia as diagnosis by Western medicine (boring).

A few believed The Vietnam War and its neighboring Secret Wars un-earths ancient taboos with its Agent Orange, yellow rain, napalm, and around the clock aerial assaults. Theses taboos locked onto Hmong peoples fleeing persecution after communist regimes unleashed its secret genocide. Hmong folks in the thousands found refuge in the United States. Some had nothing but the cloths on their backs and whatever item survived that survived journey and approved by U.S. government officials, nothing basically. They had nothing but their language and culture.

Fast forward, the Hmong refugees learn the language of the land, a new calendar and the importance of the American dream. But the even this dream couldn't block out the infestation of taboo spirits. This inflection snuggles into the shoulders of its host and jumps onto the offspring's shoulders when the parents past.

People aren't perfect. As humans we break a few taboos here and there. Babies point to the moon because they're curious, Vang people in California kiss each other all the time, I would too their cute and the United States starts a war with Vietnam because to hell with communists and rape all Asian womyn because yellow fever! Joke.⁴ We mess up and taboo reminds us that it'll cost to screw up. Remember taboos are not forever, they're treatable but with what? Hu plig? Jingle Bells?⁵

⁴ There is a truth to every joke

⁵ Hmong ceremonies lead by shamans who enter the spirit world to figure what the hell is going on with a patient. The shaman has a sword, a shield (metal gong) and a circular dagger lined with bells that represents movement. This dagger coins the term jingle and the name for this ceremony is directly translated into English as Jingle Bell. You'll find Hmong people using this term all over Facebook. "Hey Kou going to jingle bell this weekend?" NOT Christmas.

The Guerrilla Unit

Peter couldn't spell if his life depended on it. In 5th grade he lost the spelling bee in the second round because he couldn't spell the word again. Other than spelling he was above average in everything and outstanding in nothing.

Ironically the kid's parents were complete opposites of him. Lou, Peter mom, was a brainiac. She graduated adult school and learned to speak fluent English within two months after arriving from the refugee camps in Thailand. Peter's pop, Cher Kou was a quiet guy, had no intentions of perusing education but was amazing at craft. He'll collect metal junk along with recycled pvc piping and plastic packaging straps to make weaved stools and Hmong knives.

The crafting skills were never passed down from Cher Kou, he died in a car crash on the intersection of MLK and S Lincoln St next to Chevron⁶. If Stockton had cared enough about this Hmong janitor the headlines would've said Cher Kou Xiong passes away in fatal car crash leaving behind 6 children and Lou. Instead news outlets produced. "Drunk driving kills again! 36 year old man dies, growing issues of crime in the City of Stockton."

Before Lou could bury her husband, her oldest daughter got married to an abusive drug addict; oldest son was a college dropout and Bee was banging blue in a city full of red.

⁶ All he left me was his knives.

The youngest Peter, well not much changed with him, he just started to smile more. That kind of smile where you couldn't really tell if he was really happy or covering something up; Something blurry, heavy on the shoulders that slowly crawls from the foot of the bed clinging onto the throat as he begins to grasp.

Ant! Ant! Ant! The alarm goes off.

Its 8:13am! We're late get up lazy ass! Jenny screams from the outside of Peter's room.

Peter snoozed for 10 minutes and wait for Julie to come out the restroom with the shower. He had a strict early morning routine. Shower. Brush teeth. Put on Jean shorts and G-Unit XL tee. Lastly must be sitting down when putting on shoes after digging under the couch for clean socks. Navy Blue Jan's sport handed down from Bee. Eat a little of rice with water. Sometimes with egg or hot link hotdogs with cheese depending on how much food stamp we qualified for. We just skip breakfast.
Done.

The three oldest graduated high school already so they were old enough to work full time and get married. The younger three who were born in California were all still attending Mcnair high school. Julie was the early bird who always ready to go, while Jenny slept in until 7:45am and takes 30 minutes to get ready. Bee had graduated already and took them to school every day in his green Honda Prelude. He worked night shifts as a pizza delivery guy and would wake up right before we had to leave. Well they would have to wake him up 10 mins like an alarm, warm up his car and hope he wakes up in time because he'd kick with his homies all night either in the back yard or the garage.

They were consistent with kicking it too. Rain, freezing temperatures or extreme heat waves they'll always be chilling paying spades and drinking Coors light. Most of Bee's boyz were pizza delivery guys too. So after every night shift they'll all get together to play poker with their tip money. The winner of the pot ended up spending his winnings for another case or for pot the next day.

Some days Bee wouldn't wake up and they had to walk, it took about 25 minutes but for some reason they always made to school on time either on the dot or early enough to eat breakfast at school. But as an incoming freshmen Jenny and Julie taught Peter to don't eat breakfast every day so other people wouldn't know we poor. Being poor wasn't cool. So Peter ate every other day and learned to play it off smooth like

I'm not hungry, breakfast sucks anyways.

It was going to be tough hiding being poor; someone at school was bound to notice that Peter will be wearing the same 10 T-shirts for a whole semester. Also high school wasn't like middle school, wearing the same shoes ever day wasn't cool anymore. Black and white tall tee's, Echo, and G-Unit shirts everything Bee wore was considered gang related.

Peter was also fat 160 lb, 5ft 2 with short limbs and a big head. So nothing fitted him perfectly. To top everything off this square had the zero'ed buzzed cut hair freshly trimmed by Bee in the backyard with a garbage bag acting as a haircut cover cloth. No

fade, no taper no nothing. It's the morning before first period and the first week of High school. Peter is sitting by himself in the cafeteria. Most of his friends from middle school went to a different high school or somehow got cooler over summer. But eventually everyone ended up linking up with their own people. Hmongs with Hmongs, Mexicans with Mexicans, Black with Blacks, Cambos, Philipinos and Viets had their own clique also. It felt like a segregation survival reality TV show. Weird because just a year ago everyone was cool with each other, like diverse cool.

Peter's way of fitting in with a crowd was to sit near the people he wanted to hang out with until they invited him in while watching out for any Hmong guys because who knows what their brothers and cousins are affiliated with. Choose no sides until you know who they are. But the girls were fine, most of them didn't bang. So for the next semester passing period and lunch was loner huddle.

Loner huddle was when all the equally shy, stuck in the same situation as Peter sat quietly near each other until the bell rang to first period rang.

Yes, nerds.

They stuck together like sheep because the deeper you were the scarier you were and we stayed rolling deep cuz if you singled yourself out anything could happen to you even if you didn't bang. All Hmong people looked the same; you were bound to look like someone's younger brother. It was cool sometimes though because you could use practically anyone's ID to go clubbing in Sac.

But

At in high school especially the beginning, Bee said

To always watch your back because it's not like middle school no more.

Alright man, Peter nodded his head.

See two years before Peter became a freshmen Bee fought in the one of the biggest rumble at MHS. It created a lot beef between old middle school friends. Everyone who was involved in

that fight either moved or transferred schools because of zero tolerance. All the little brothers and cousins of everyone who fought were coming in as freshmeat in 2008. MHS was new too it was built in 2005.⁷ Bee was a part of the first Freshmen and sophomores to transfer into the school.

In the morning passing period to first period was eight minutes long so the older students didn't bug. As the loner huddle picked up our huge text books rushing to class.

What class do you have Peter? Ken said. TEng, Eng, Biology, Span

⁷ MHS was Lodi Unified but is actually in North Stockton. Most communities of colored, well those who could afford it, moved up North side to avoid the ghetto South Side. Some even argue that Ronald E. McNair High School was built so North side P.O.C. would stay out perky white Tokay Tigers. Aka Trump territory. Hmong People hated tigers and FTD!

English Transition with Mrs. Green.

My sister said she teaches media?

Idk, but I guess because I was in ELD student in middle I had to have this class

You hella mtt⁸. Haha

Hate. We laughed.

Ken was the skinny dude with a baby face in the loner group. He wears pants and long sleeves all the time to look bigger. Dude was super smart though, probably the smartest Hmong guy in middle school. This one time at the bus stop before school some Mexican guy was trying to copy his homework but Ken wouldn't let him so the douche grabbed his backpack. Then a big as Cambo dude who saw what was going on stepped and dropped that m. Long story short, Cambo dude didn't have to do math homework for a whole year. Ken only flaw was that he couldn't follow through with the

⁸ Hmong Thaib Teb, Hmong people who just got here from South East Asian same connotation as Fresh Off the Boat. (Only Hmong can say this word, don't be a racist Ha)

girls. He just freeze up when the baddest chick in algebra 1 asked him if he could her tutor with number 6 and 9.

The hard word problems.

Peter steps into Eng trans class and in each corner of the room were each group the Cambos, Hmong and Mexicans. Peter couldn't pick out if the Hmong dudes were cool or not so he sat with the Hmong girls. Everyone in this class except the few actually spoke fluent English. Most of everyone in this class was in the class in the first place because they couldn't perform 'outstanding' on the Star testing, or were too gangsta to care about life. So they were thrown into ELD classes every semester on top of regular Language arts. There was one Cambo guy who would always be rolling on E. He ended up getting B+.

Even Mrs. Green was wilding, she taught basic lessons from 8th grade English work books and spent half the class preparing for the media elective in the rest of her periods. Each period ran 1 hour 45 minutes.

And because first period was Eng Trans, everyone ditched. The bell rings and we have brunch before second period. Everyone goes to brunch so the lines to get breakfast were so long everyone would just hang out on a wall. The cool kids stayed under the overhang. The loner crew's meeting spot was in the quad.

Mai tagged along with Peter to the loner kid rendezvous point. She was chill, a new student who just moved here from Sac. Short and had short hair still going through the emo stage wearing hella eye liner, eye shadow, skinny jeans and slip on black vans. Among people don't move just because, most of the time it's money related or had too beef in the city. Her wrist had a couple scars. Peter didn't ask

Sup Ken, this is Mai.

Hey... Ken stiffens up.

Over there is Kevin and Michael.

Kevin and Michael were kind of brothers. Well Kevin was the only son of the older wife and Michael was the oldest of 8 from the young wife.

What's your last name Mai? Kevin asked.

Vang. She replied

Ha! Idiot thought he could cock block me. I was a Xiong so it was all me, well and Ken. Peter thought to himself and smirked.

Kevin was originally a Hmong Her, but when his mother died and remarried into a Vang family. He converted over into being a Vang. Michael and Kevin were the same age because Michael's dad was messing around with the whole village before he settled down with his first wife who already had Kevin. Michael and his mom moved in when Kevin's step dad married her. They ended up having 8 more kids.

I like your style, Kevin spits smoothly

Thanks, most guys don't like my short hair they think I'm a hoe.

Nah, I like it.

Peter looking back and forth from Kevin to Mai as they talked.

Brunch was over and Peter was heading to an actual college prep English class and this class was actually pretty cool because the

teacher taught new words everyday as warm up activity. There were regular students. By regular students, this meant they were either Non-Hmong and Cambo, a light skin Mexican. And it was rare to have white kids in class because most of them didn't survive at MHS they'll transfer to Tokay. All who actually wanted to go to college and wasn't rolling off a grey superman.

Losers.

Myriad means hella or a lot.

Like Kevin who had myriad amounts of handsomeness because even Vang girls were falling for him. Kevin was the type of Hmong guy. He looked Korean because of his pale skin and Tae Yang jaw line. Always wore nice clothing like famous, zoo york, and pac-sun. He also had enough shoes to end Tom's shoe campaign. On top of this he was tall, like tall for a Hmong guy about 5'7. This was the guy you dated. Weird cause he stuck around the loner huddle.

There was early lunch and late lunch. Early lunch ate after 2nd period and late lunch ate after 3rd period. The principal explained at

orientation that this was because the school couldn't feed everyone in one lunch but Bee said they only did that so they can separate people.

Like rival gangs, couples, cool students from not cool students, and older & younger folks.

Of course Peter was left alone in late lunch, while everyone else from loner huddle had early lunch. No ate breakfast or brunch those were the un-cool meals. Only the rich and white kids ate the most important meal of the day cause they had nothing to prove. But everyone ate lunch. People would cut, bully, fight, pay to get into the front of the line. It was Monday so the cafeteria was serving American food.

Monday lunch was nasty. It's always box mash potatoes with bagged gravy, meat loaf or sloppy joe's, so we don't eat on Monday and just starve until we get home. Julie and Jenny warned Peter. It wasn't that bad seemed like they were exaggerating.

I'd eat this again I mean we never eat mashed potatoes and gravy at home. I think mom didn't even know how to make it.

Peter said to himself sitting alone in the quad were loner huddle would hangout during the morning and brunch. This is what happens when you don't want beef and the system aint working out for you luckily everyone was too hungry to make fun of peter for eating alone.

Bee would pick Jenny and Julie from school but I walked home with Ken. He lived in the projects a block down from Peter and no one picked him up so they stuck together. Last year in that same street Mayra Lopez⁹ was killed in a shooting she was just at the wrong place at the wrong time. Third period biology was a joke easier than making rice and what made it worst was that biology and language required students to carry the fat blue/green bio book with a frog on it and the fatter orange lit book. Spanish class was easy all the class did was practice rolling our rrrrr's.

The last bell for the day rang. Ken and Peter meet up at the quad before walking home.

How was lunch without me? Lonely?

⁹ RIP :]

Nah it was cool, Mai and Kevin were listening to Linkin Park on her new MP3 player. That thing was pretty cool I want one.

Ken you don't even listen to music.

You don't either; all you listen to is Tupac and Jjen. Wait Kevin doesn't even listen to music.

He does now haha.

I bet he's going to start wearing skinny jeans too.

Foo you're wearing your sister's skinny jeans. Remember that one time you wore your sister's skinny jeans to school when we were still at morada. Hahaha.

I know you don't have to remind me foo. And! They're not baggy like what gangster wear, I anit tryna to get jumped. I also remember that skinny ass Cambo dude Nick making fun of me for wearing skinny jeans. Now he's a skater and probably owns more than his sisters. Buck tooth, dark hair, looking like a tree branch ass.

Dam lol. I mean you did wear skinny jeans with an XL G-unit shirt.

Yea, haha Alright Ken this yo stop see you tomorrow.

Be careful.

It should be cool today.

Peter walked a street down to his house.

What's up man! Whatchu trying to do?!

Ugh, what are you talking about?

Set up motherfucker, yo boyz tryna sweat¹⁰ me the other day!

Johnny, dude lived down the street from Peter. Dark, scrawny little cambo motherfoo who was technically a blood but his homies were all Mexican. This guy was a fake thug that always gets punked around by Bee and his homies. He was throwing up the blood sign with his two homies standing behind him.

I don't what you're talking about.

That's right keep walking away little bitch.

¹⁰ Taunt, Johnny never sweat me before today.

Peter power walks home because running was a sign of weakness.

No one was home.

Peter gets into his afterschool routine. Showers, changes into house cloths, turns on the TV to fox news, pulls out homework onto mom's coffee table sitting in the green couch. Waiting for his turn to check is myspace after Bee, Jenny, and then Julie.

Night falls.

Peter was drying himself after showering and looks into the mirror noticing there was a longer hair that was missed when Bee cut his hair last week. Mom always said never to cut your hair at night because you'll have bad luck.¹¹

Ehh..it's just one hair, Snip!

Peter either slept on the floor in mom's room or in bee's bed when he out kicking it. Because it was still August and summer weather was still burning up the city Peter slept in the living room under the biggest window in the house because the AC was like the fire extinguisher.

¹¹ Like breaking a mirror

FOR EMERGENCY USE ONLY.

Peter had a hard time sleep.

BA! BA! BA! PA! PA!

Kou don't run over...

BA! BA! BA! PA! PA!

Everything goes into a blurry.

Peng! We're being ambushed!

Peng? I'm Peter, my vision shift downward and there is a M16 in my hands. We were on the mountain side, flooded with vegetation, and reminded me of a jungle. A village was burning. Beams of light were flying above us I poke my head out to look closer because I thought it was shooting stars. But I couldn't move. A soldier rushes towards me and he had G-unit and Xiong printed on his name tape.

He cuts open my shirt and had 4 holes in my chest bleeding like a faucet. I felt a tingling sensation from where I cut that hair. I ran my hand over the spot and dug a finger into a how in my head. I look at my hand

Vision blurs.

Don't fall asleep! He yelled,

How can I be falling asleep? I am already asleep..

Huuuuuuu...! Peter wakes up trying to scream but nothing is coming out. He recognizes the green couch, the brown coffee table and the TV.

Why can't anyone hear me screaming!?! Peter struggled Guuuhhh! Some lets go of his chest, Peter sits up. The living is dark with the porch light slipping through the window blinds. He breathing hard and scanning the living room.

Whispers

...I'm...Koj...

His eyes widen. Peter turns his head towards the window in the living room. Its dark, Peter fumbles putting on his glasses and sees the figure of a little boy standing in the middle of the street and holding something. It looks like a war helmet. Then he started to melt like blood. Some grabs Peter's hair from behind.

I have hair!?

He wakes up again. Touches his head to make sure he still had a buzz cut, breathing hard and sees something dark on the couch runs to turn on the lights.

Turn off fucken the light !

Bee?!

Turn off fucken the light!

Flick.

Peter Xiong

American Multicultural Studies

2. Project Description:

My project will be a manual script of two chapters from the future novel *Taboo* which will explore the life of a Hmong living in America. The novel will consist of creative non-fiction, poetry and mixed media, the combination of a written novel and collection of visuals content. The first chapter *Rain* and one other chapter in the novel *Taboo* will be the focus point of my project. These two chapters will represent moments in the characters life that has molded his identity of being a Hmong person living in the United States. These stories are based on true events of my life and self-exploration of my own identity which fits into the theme self-identity.

3. Alignment with Common Theme:

The stories from these two chapters will focus in on the complexities of being Hmong that reflect themes of double consciousness, orientalism and healing. The ability to see how others see Hmong people along with the issues that arise from the east and west dynamic and exploring intergenerational trauma through story telling as a way to heal.

4. Purpose:

The purpose of this novel is to write for one's own self and validate the experiences of Hmong people in America. Alongside seeking self-healing through storytelling and reconnection to Hlub.

5. Format Rationale:

My project will contain an Introduction, two chapters and two videos. The manual script will be number by pages and media will be provided in CD-dvd, Flash Drive and Youtube formats. Title of chapters will be listed above to the page next to the page number.

6. Capstone Title:

“Taboo” ~A Creative Project~

7. Working Summary:

See “[#2] Project Description” and “[#3] Alignment with Common Theme”

8. Expectations:

My goal of writing a novel is an attempt to understand my own identity along with providing a foundation for others to relate.

- To contribute to the works of ethnic studies
- To contribute to the further discussion of “What does it mean to be an American?” & Hmong American
- To address the injustices of our generation and explore social justice in the midst of our current political climate
- To define Taboo, not translate it.

9. Specific Skills Required:

Creativity, research, and intersectionality will be the strength in my writing. The ability to connect existing themes and theories to my stories will be crucial in the execution of choosing and creating my stories. A balance of storytelling, creative writing and visual mixed media will bring the project together. This project will also explore possible new ways to communicate effectively.

10. Next Steps:

Upon approval I will begin the writing process and compiling of previous research I have completed in the past four years at CSUMB relating to the novel's two chapters. I will revisit all videos created under the theme of self-identity and be edited if necessary.

11. Timeline:

9/23/16 marks the end of the 5th week of Fall 2016 semester, we have 16 weeks not including holidays and fall breaks. That gives me proximately 8 weeks to complete my writing and peer reviews before finals week which is in first two weeks of December 2016. Ideally final drafter should be completed before or after Fall break. This gives me one week to write each chapter and introduction three weeks and one week for each video, two weeks. And three last weeks to peer review and revise.

September 26th – 30th

Write Introduction

October 3rd – 7th

Write Chapter *Rain*

October 10th -14th

Write Taboo Chapter

October 17th – 21st

Video one "*Poob Plig*"

October 24th – 28th

Video Two "*How to Come Home*"

October 31st – November 11th

Peer Revision

Nov 11 Veterans Day ~ Campus closed

Nov 21-23 Fall break ~ Faculty planning days

November 24 Thanksgiving Day ~ Campus closed

November 25 Academic Holiday for faculty and students~ No classes

November 28th – December 9th

Finalize/publish all writings and videos

December 9 Last day of instruction

Reflection

Aesthetics

The year is 2008 set in Stockton California. This story is wrapped around the educational system seen from the perspective of a Hmong American while living in America whose is in the midst of a new political atmosphere. Everything about Peter's experience ties back to taboo, spiritual situations created from trauma, war, rape, murder and relocation. Oral history acts as a platform for generations of Hmong people to pass down the culture. Each character is carefully crafted to address authentic issues of race, gender, class and other social identities. The story is about Peter and not anything else. The general scope of this novel is to be fun, passionate, humorous and healing.

The poster design carried after the embroidery instilled in the Hmong culture. The more well know sewing/embroidery was about the refugee process. Alongside oral history was embroidery that act as a form of documentation. Adjusting the embroidery cloth to tell a more update story of the Hmong experience in America was the main motivation behind the cloth design. The poster also included inspirations from other books that in hope acts a way to cross cultures through story telling.

Audience/Purpose.

Written strictly for the author's own personal healing in hopes that the teachings from this novel relates to other Hmong youth who might relate. The novel hopefully entertains high school audiences and engages in the U.S. national conversation about justice. How things are set up in the Unites states some of the most vulnerable voices are oppressed and silenced. Hmong voices are likely to be excluded from how neighborhoods, cities and states decide to progress. Symptoms of bad policies or city budgeting that directly affect the Hmong experience does not mean just Hmong people in general. High percentages of Hmong communities live in poverty

and isolation. The Hmong experience reflects the low income struggle and South East Asian communities and the rarely mention Mien populations that exists. The more well-known story of Hmong American refugee coming from nothing highlights the potentials of what the United States could've done. Thousands of refugees who made to the United States, well the ones who wanted to come, sometimes tend to follow the law and the American dream a bit more strictly than and the gesture is appreciated. We live with a certain lifestyle which holds the United States accountable but through the years the nation has been choosing to figure out ways to kill us rather than support us comparable to what is and has happened to other communities of color.

As a Hmong I find it difficult sometimes to read things that are critical about what is going on in the nation in terms of political or social. As youth in K-12 education there was always something lacking about not reading Hmong authors or hearing about anyone who cared. And although there are sources of Hmong literature that exist most don't address youth perspectives. Someone who is not Hmong but reads this story, themes such as double consciousness coined by Du Bois will appear to add address issues of race and racism that still lingers in this nation. A Hmong person who see himself and understands how identifying as Hmong does not correlate with being Asian. The graphic aspect seeks to reflect a visual story telling perspective rooted in embroidery; images of the Hmong knife and plastic woven stools that words won't do justice. Along with visual representations is poetry. The novel opens is a poem that provides context along with an introduction.

Inspiration. I write not to inspire but if it does then so be it. There is nothing more genuine than writing to self.

The novel will narrate United States from 2008 still present times. Depicting history a little differently than how it's taught the United States educational system. This novel is a protest

book. A author's thirst for fighting oppression. In a generation of so much animosity against protesting from rioting to simply not standing up for the national anthem these stories hope to redefine the Hmong refugee voice. As a part of life experiences Native American indigenous teaching illustrates that a part of defining life is to have humor. Or humor as healing. Stories need humor.

Process.

Writing was never a strong topic for me even now as I am trying to hone my craft the educational effects of 'good writers' still makes me question if my stories are worth A material. What I mean by educational effects is more or less targeting the idea that teachers of course taught me how to write sentences, use grammar and knowing the different type of essays. Teachers were never really able to teach how to be conscious of my arguments.

Up until the mid-years of my college education, poetry and creative writing became form of art for me to explore. I'd always been an artist my whole life from painting to digital design. English and writing was more of a school topic I had to pass. Writing poetry felt effortless while to others poetry was impossible. Crazy, because that's how I'd always felt about research or argumentative essays. I wasn't that bad and I can still keep learning.

A huge part of beginning this creative project was uprooting my demons, trauma which ever you prefer to call it. I couldn't write about my life if I'd never critically reflect about it. I couldn't necessarily reflect about it unless I wrote about it. There is just some type of ceremony or magic to it when I name a story of my life. It somehow acts as medicine. The first chapter The Guerilla Unit, focuses in on the socialization of each character when entering high school and their teenage youth. Although different in every aspect in terms of setting, time and tone. Peng a 14 year old Hmong soldier recruited and trained into the Guerilla unit in Laos by the CIA during

the Vietnam War. Visits Peter in his dreams either haunting him or warning him about how the greed of a country can destroy lives through war. Peter's journey does not include learning how to shoot a M16 at the age of 12, instead he holds a 44. special to stay alive in the streets of Stockton. Due to the conditioning of violence in my life I've learned to be numb rather than write and reflect. I wanted to write about these experiences that was the easy part. The more difficult part was figuring out which part of the story I altered to protect myself or should I be honest. This cycle of violence doesn't end after a college acceptance letter.

Ultimately the pain I saw in my family and the words from the love of my life is what made me say "Fuck it, why not." Encouragement from my partner who believed in my stories and storytelling traits allowed me to let go of my fear of being graded harshly. There was a day where I had told a scary story about the dorm rooms on campus to my floor mates. We were chilling in the lounging area and my partner asked me to tell a scary story. In light of the Halloween spirit I told stories about dreams I was having about the old military base. By the time I had finished there was a group of ten with blankets and tea. I had thought they were just scared and that's why no one left the lounge area but some of them started to ask me for advice as if I were a shaman. One even asked me to protect him in his dreams. Laugh. My partner reiterated to me that I was a story teller. I denied her statement for years. But I'm thought back to that lounge time I spent with my floor mates and It reminded me of camp fire stories my elders would illustrate to us in the middle of the woods.

We called him Ghost Gramps. There was about 15 of us sitting around a camp fire, Ghost Gramps looked at us and said, "I'm not rich, all I and a lot of elders who are still alive today have left is our stories. Sometimes that was the only thing we brought from the Homeland."

We all asked what stories. Ghost Gramps held a circle of youngsters around the fire from sun down to shooting stars that night. I think most of us wait for the sun to rise to go to sleep because of who afraid we were but the stories made me happy oddly. My process is not planning out what should go into what chapter it's more of a collection of experiences that will be passed down.

And in the course theme of searching for self-identity and cultural negotiations, I will document my process in doing so, being a first generation Hmong guy whose urgency to put out a story to his generation before the cultures rebirths. Compared to my white counter parts in the same field, there is no for sure that my hixtory will be recorded, taught or even worse buried. Every story is me peeling off a band aid I've been using to cover up my wounds. Every time I use my Brother's name Bee in the novel it breaks my heart to know that at this very moment we aren't talking to each other. The last words we've said to each other was "Fuck you." In the midst of everything that is going on in my life, this novel is keeping me sane, it's Tylenol. The process is to understand that this project is a process.

Thematic/Social Context

When Du bois mentions the veil and the ability of Black souls being able to move fluidly in between the space of how we see yourself and how the world may perceive us; I think about how I saw the hurt transcending from my classmate in 5th grade being asked where he disappeared to when the teacher turned off the light to play a movie. About how depending on where I was physically in the nation and sometimes by climate, I can label differently. In Stockton & Fresno I was Hmong, In San Francisco I was Chinese and in Monterey County I was Philippino and to politicians I'm Asian. In summer I'm South East Asian, In Winter I'm Korean.

Said calls homeland West Asia while I call home

“Before China was China.” This act of de-rooting oppression through renaming that hopefully targets the core by defining our importance in history.

At the core of this novel is the existence of hope and love through cross cultural narratives. Disclosure about social identity and color blindness through-out our nation and especially in politics, brings forth this need of critical cross cultural literature. Color blindness, an illness of not wanting to see color (race, ethnicity) because the belief of labeling does more harm than good. Color blindness only benefits those who have the ability to choose whether or not they want to see color. Cross cultural engagements are not finished products, what makes cross culture significant is that it represents an on-going process more connected to being human. Being human as in we're not perfect, if our society had figured out how to coexist perfectly we wouldn't be having war, genocide or poverty. But this does not mean say to that it's impossible, cross culture as a process only means we need to focus in more about humanity through different lens of social identities taking into account how the world has treat people in history.

In terms of cultural negotiations the main character Peter will navigate mostly intergenerational negotiations. The gap between first generation born in the U.S. and the elder refugee generation; this negotiation is based off differences in homeland and cultural practices. One of the more visible negotiation is language. Again Peter processed in the educational system needing to learn English and also Hmong. This combination forms a rise of a new culture and language.

Artistic.

Another foundation of this novel is its influences from reading novels written by authors from different cultures but similar situations. *The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian*, is a humor gold mine also containing truth. The *Fuku* mentioned in *The Brief Wondrous Life of*

Oscar Wao motivated my book title *Taboo*. Yet what really started off my journey into writing *Taboo* was *The Spirit Catches you when You Fall Down* written by Anne Fadiman. Her investigation and ability to put together a report of Hmong people in which not a lot of Hmong people can do it unmatched. I respect her work and time but reading the book left me one critique. I wish it would've been written by a Hmong person. Yes, the work of translation required her to work with Hmong folk thus one can argue that it was. But I say this because I read a lot about the wounds of Hmong without hearing opinions healing. This story needs more to be added to the story because most of everything described in the book is still occurring. I think it's about time we develop new voices and leadership within the Hmong youth. *Taboo* seeks to do this along with its other goals. The art of this book is its interpretation, whether it will be considered medicine, scholarly, trash or redefining the Hmong experience in the United States.

Synthesis

Before Human communication (HCOM) I was a sleep walking biology major. Many students make the switch to HCOM in different parts of their college Pathway. Aside from course content creating authentic relationships with the professor I meet will be mentioned in the process of talking about what I learned through the concentrations.

No one is an official HCOM student until they've taken Major Pro-seminar with Qun Wang. Folk always mention how 'easy' his courses are which I disagree. Wang's courses are as difficult as you make it. Professor Wang was one of the first Asian professor who understood me and was with it in terms of justice. Low key wished he was Hmong. Laugh. Major Pro-seminar lead to have a meeting with my advisor María Villasenor who changed my life forever, our conversation grounded everything I couldn't explain to people when it came to career pathway. Cooperative Argumentation with Kristen taught me how to write a proper argumentation paper in terms of structure. What motivated me to stay present and committed to the course was the content provided by Kristen. The first time ever I witness a professor use a Hmong case study to teach. I sat back in my chair and thought to myself when I was listening to Radio Lab's piece on Yellow Rain. For a brief moment in college I felt like the expert not the token.

Is this what privilege in the educational system feels like? I said to myself.

Free speech with Patrick felt very a warm up to what was going to happen in the 2016 election. Never had I engaged in a group of critical thinkers seeking to define Freedom of Speech. This course also taught me the importance of being concise and clear with my arguments; obliterating the cookie cutter thesis structure taught to me in K-12 education.

Free speech with John was alright. One of the most memorable experience of this course was a conversation I had with John Berteaux. I've ran into him throughout my college experience from on the bus too campus events. One day I saw Berteaux chilling at Starbucks and decided to ask him for input on the readings in *Ways of Knowing*. The conversation ended up with him mentioning to me the book *The Spirit Catches You When You Fall Down*. I've been referred to read this book by many people but for some reason Berteaux motivated me finial read through the whole book. I read this book on the bus ride from Sand city to Stockton that taught me what the books in *Ways of Knowing* wasn't.

Multicultural History and Creative Writing brought me the best two people into my life. Kyle and Deb. Creative writing made me believe in the tooth fairy again in simple words. Both course felt like an excuse for fate to bring these two into my life. These courses saved my life. Thank you. Latina Life Stories taught me to listen. Testimonies from this course brought to life the beauty in the struggle. This course brought me La Frontera, the definition of not being from here or there.

As I continued to keep on taking courses, each course I took prepped me for each chapter of my book and my life. I know some HCOM'er might feel the same way when I say this but I took the perfect course pathway for my life. It scares me to think about where I would be if I stubbornly stuck with biology.

Du Bois, Double Conscious

Anzaldua, The Border identity

Freire, Banking concept

Said, West Asia

Alexie, Humor

Diaz, Comic genius

And much more have left me nothing but more to read. I say my course pathway was perfect because of what happened outside the classroom. A lot of my colleague stuck to the higher education definition in training and not learning. Everything I learned in the classroom became content for me to experiment with in well my life basically; I don't want to call it extracurricular activity.

Moving forward from college courses, I felt that I learned as much as I could have at my time at Cal State Monterey Bay. There were moments in every semester were I slacked or had prioritized different activities over academics. If I were just a student I would have had a something higher than a 3.5 GPA and I do look back and think about all the assignments and essays I could've turned in on time and meet with the professor or proof read but life is a beautiful struggle. Human communication will go down in my books as a world class department. I hurts me to see it change with the new director and professors but I understand things do change. I feel prepared for how much the career opportunity is changing; from working up in one department to jumping from career to career.

I will continue to peruse education in any field whether it is political, public health, city planning or ethnic studies. Alongside career pathways HCOM has supported me to be a productive member of society where ever I may live or make connection. Being a productive member doesn't just mean voting but being a voice for the community with a foundation of humanity and justice.

As it is important for me to come into a community such as Monterey County it is as important for me to leave or stay in touch in a way that is authentic. I got to show love this community that educated and feed through the worst of times.