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# Bones of the Womb: Healing Algorithms of BIPOC Reproductive Trauma with Rituals, Ceremonies, Prayers, Spells, and the Ancestors (The Production of Life Affirming Epistemology of Grief)

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## Abstract

How do we BIPOC folx survive amid cavernous terror and soul-ripping trauma? In this heart-centered literary story, I embark on a mystical, womanist narration—*autohistoria-teoría*—to provide the broken-hearted a pathway to better conceptualize and practice irreparable grief. From the incomprehensible pain of walking through the loss of three of my children as a WoC in the American nation-state, I serve as a mirror to BIPOC folx who sit in loss of any kind, and I demonstrate how to piece back together the wandering fragments of our Soul from shattering grief. In this work, I respond to the paucity of BIPOC-centered (un)birth trauma research by raising the volume on BIPOC reproductive trauma. I urgently step away from the multilayered inadequacies and insufficiencies of “western” psychotherapeutic models of trauma healing that are violent to us BIPOC folx and serve to pathologize our grief, and I dedicate myself to excavating critical Indigenous epistemology. I accomplish this with a deliberate and intentional blend of the personal, spiritual, and the scholarly to uncover the ways in which our narratives as BIPOC folx are often erased within material experiences.

To Our Children (un)born), the Wisdom Carriers of our Tribal Mothers and  
Fathers

## Part I: Breathing When Unbreathing

*What do we do during life's dark times? How do we BIPOC folx survive amid cavernous terror and soul-ripping trauma?*

In this precise, honest, and heart-centered literary story, I embark on a mystical, womanist narration—*autohistoria-teoría* (Anzaldúa 1990)—to provide the broken-hearted a pathway to better conceptualize and practice irreparable grief. From the incomprehensible pain of walking through the loss of three of my children as a WoC in the American

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nation-state, I serve as a mirror to BIPOC folx who sit in loss of any kind, and I demonstrate how to piece back together the wandering fragments of our Soul from shattering loss, pain, suffering. In this work, I specifically respond to the paucity of BIPOC-centered (un)birth-trauma research by raising the volume on BIPOC reproductive trauma, that is, unbirth, and I bolster a primordial emergence of motherhood (previously acknowledged, that is, outside of abortion debates). I accomplish this with a deliberate and intentional blend of the personal and the scholarly to uncover the ways in which our narratives as BIPOC folx are often erased within material experiences.

This country has created institutions (and strategies and technologies) to render BIPOC folx invisible and “crazy,” and I think deeply, every day, about how vulnerability is imagined, the practices of solidarity, and what it means to be of service to the marginalized, to birth BIPOC life-affirming epistemology. I urgently step away from the multi-layered inadequacies and insufficiencies of “western” pharma/medical/psychotherapeutic models of trauma-healing that are violent to us BIPOC folx and serve to pathologize our grief. (My Christian healthcare plan renders my reproductive body invisible, and I am prompted to turn to ancestral knot lore: I tie magick knots for my reproductive health!)<sup>1</sup> I dedicate myself to excavating critical Indigenous epistemology “not to explain reality and seek truth” (Dang 2021). That is, I offer a “risky” embodied theorization of an assemblage of multiple *saberes* or modes of knowledges/knowings that avoid the traps of binary discourses (Bhattacharya and Keating 2017), and I ask, *what manages to live (survive and thrive) in the ruinous and damaged landscape of BIPOC trauma?*

I contribute to assembling and building what Minh Dang calls “epistemology of survival” (Dang 2021). I explore the strange and unexpected corners of un/birth trauma, and I stoke a reimagination of our actions in life by embodying grief—“theories in the flesh” (Moraga 1981)—as a pathway to conceive the life we have as BIPOC folx as Divine as a mundane blade of grass. And so, I gather the “bones” of my babies and I stitch them together to heal and transmogrify my losses, and I write with painful urgency fueled by a ferocious and unwavering commitment to BIPOC trauma-healing and liberation. My fingers tingle to strand together that which *must* be written. My people—our children—are dying. I have *no* choice but to write and to ask for varied witnesses. My hope is to offer a way for us BIPOC folx to rebuild our lives—a model of repair—from the violence of suffering. In the end, my work clarifies the power of speaking our truth as BIPOC folx from an embodied position of vulnerability and how the embrace of our vulnerability can be transgressive, radical, and healing as a mode of being (versus the “western” psychotherapeutic tradition of overcoming) to stake a claim, sit with, and affirm. *The teaching and knowledge of how to restore life shifts our traumas*. “Bones of the Womb” is an original tale that offers a diverse examination into the relationship between destruction and multidimensional collaborative creation for continuing life on Earth.

## Part II: Mystical, Womanist Ethnography

### *Autohistoria-Teoría*

How I navigate the world as an intersubjective, queer, divine, lavender feminine/masculine Bangladeshi-Muslim-American Person/People of Color (PoC), Woman of Color (WoC), Mother of Color (MoC) to four fierce energy beings, and Scholar of Color (SoC) at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) has led me on a path of living and exploring (state-sanctioned) terror. Inderpal Grewal contends that hegemonic discourses of this nation use racist images . . . as a formative structure of citizenship

(Grewal 1994, 70). The abyssal pain I feel is informed by my assembled trans-intersectional oppressions predicated on conquest and erasure (Badrudjoja 2021). Adrian Piper, in “Passing for White, Passing for Black,” writes:

The most famous and highly respected member of the faculty . . . Without introduction or preamble he said to me with a triumphant smirk, “Miss Piper, you’re about as [B]lack as I am.” . . . in social situations . . . insults take longer to make themselves felt. The meaning[s] of the words simply don’t register right away, particularly if the person who utters them is smiling. . . . What I felt was numb, and then shocked and terrified, disoriented. . . . Later those feelings turned into wrenching grief and anger. . . . (Piper 1991, 1)

bell hooks commits to equally razor-sharp words in “Loving Blackness”:

It has taken our collective oppressors centuries to teach Africans to hate themselves. Global white supremacy is very real and ancient. Not a single African in America was ever supposed to survive. Slavery, institutional racism, constant media attacks, incessant eurocentric imagery were all designed to deliberately destroy us. (hooks 1992/2015, 10)

Grewal, hooks, and Piper teach me about racial capitalism: Racist images are absorbed into economics, racialized structures of the nation-state, US imperial history and militarism, and the globalization of capital and labor. I am devastated by my colonization (I grieve the lives of BIPOC folk slaughtered for over five hundred years). I cannot breathe at times (RIP Eric Garner and George Floyd). We are not yet survivors of hatred, erasure, and systemic oppression (Manuel 2015). Like Zenju Manuel, my wounds prevent me from fully and rhythmically interacting with people every day. Hence, I use a mystical, womanist autoethnography—Goddess Anzaldúa’s autohistoria-teoría balm (Anzaldúa 1990)—to tend to my colonization, and I mark autoethnographic studies as an invaluable practice and production of spiritual, womanist, personal, and scholarly life-affirming BIPOC epistemologies.

Saidiya Hartman, in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, asks what methods and compositions lend themselves to the documentation of “wayward lives”? (Hartman 2020). I take this to mean, how can our lives as BIPOC folk in the American nation-state be animated and made to interrupt binaried discourses?

I begin by posing: what is (auto)ethnographic work and what does it do to us (Pławski, Szwabowski, and Szczepaniak 2018)? First, I rely on Sarah Amira de la Garza’s conceptualization of autoethnographic text: “the intentional storytelling of culture through the lenses of one’s own life” (de la Garza 2004, 8). I take de la Garza’s words to dispel the myth of autoethnography as the narcissistic study of oneself and absent of analytic method in developing cultural texts (Kakali Bhattacharya intimately knows the ways in which qualitative inquiry and autoethnography are contested, criticized, and misunderstood in social-scientific research [Bhattacharya 2020]). Second, I draw on Clarissa Estés’s axiological declaration: by denying women’s emotions, we attack their fundamental power—their senses (insight, hunches, and intuitions) (Estés 1995). I argue that women’s emotions are a form of valuable knowledge-production in rupturing hegemonies, and I insist we return to women’s emotions and the act of writing itself as testimony and living proof of history. Third, I situate my story in Black Feminist Autoethnography (BFA) (Griffin 2012). Rachel Griffin models for me

a theoretical and methodological pathway in which I, as an academic of color (I am the only woman and WoC faculty who is tenured and a full professor in my home department—sociology—at a PWI), can “critically narrate the pride and pain” of WoChood and use anger as a productive force for resistance and liberatory and life-affirming work. Gloria Anzaldúa crafts her reality: “I pick the ground from which to speak/a reality into existence./I have chosen to struggle against unnatural boundaries” (Anzaldúa 2015, chapter 2). I understand this to mean that there is no egress in engaging with our physical world, and our stories must be told. BFA robustly helps me to self-reflexively explore and problematize intersubjective oppressions omnipresent in my everyday experiences as an “outsider within” (Collins 1991). To be clear, there is authority rooted in our knowledge(s), and there is authoritative value and power in the narrative (personal and scholarly) texts we produce.

I breathe life into de la Garza’s, Estés’s, and Griffin’s standpoint epistemology by dancing and howling around the orange-yellow-blue fire stoked by Bhattacharya (Bhattacharya 2020). Bhattacharya summons the sacred “merging self, culture, community, spirit, and theory” by listening with fidelity to the drumbeats of Anzaldúa’s autohistoria-teoría (Anzaldúa 1990). Autohistoria-teoría is the social and relational practice of self-writing and self-knowledge by calling on the incorporation of spirit into justice and liberation. It is beyond blowing the “self into existence” (Bhattacharya and Keating 2017). In utilizing autohistoria-teoría, Bhattacharya and AnaLouise Keating mentor me to critically excavate my chthonic depths: My traumatic womb wounds require me to tango with my “shadow” (Zweig and Abrams 1991) to restore my life. Here, I argue autohistoria-teoría carries the hidden signature of poet Federico García Lorca’s “duende.” Duende can be conceptualized as moments of creative expression when something takes over and speaks through you (Evans 2014). Lorca names duende as “[D]aemon, hobgoblin, mischief maker, guardian of ‘the mystery, the roots fastened in the mire that we all know and all ignore.’ Unlike the Muse or Angel, which exist beyond or above the poet, the duende sleeps deep within the poet, and asks to be awakened and wrestled, often at great cost” (Smith 2005). This means duende rises from darkness and death (Evans 2014). Duende inhabits “wounded healers”—raw, vulnerable, exposed, and broken souls struggling to inhabit the unrecognizable parts of ourselves—as sources of miraculous artistic creation. Levity and weight. Darkness and light. I offer duende as an analytical method and a conceptual tool as standpoint on the world: Different kinds of complex thinking and being from the unapologetic depth of our truth both in and out of the academy (there is a sense of transness in our moments of duende).

My commitment to the “assemblage of theory, spirituality, community, culture, and self together” (Bhattacharya 2020) squarely guide me to enact land acknowledgment as a discursive practice of resurrecting land trauma and singing healing into being. The modern identity “American” as a subject of citizenship is predicated on conquest, the erasure of Indigenous histories and cultures, and the desecration and pirating of Indigenous lands known as Turtle, Serpent, and Heart Islands (the Aboriginal creation story of the lands that are now known as North America). Consequently, I embark on curating my narrative by living on stolen land where a BLM sign is burned on a muggy COVID summer August night. I write, in (American) English, from the territory of Munsee Lenape of the Lenape people and their endangered Munsee (Huluniixsuwaakan) language. With deep reverence for BIPOC liberation(s), I engage with deliberate land acknowledgment and immerse myself in the following intertwined intentions: To get in my body, grapple with what it means to be colonized, and interrupt oppression. I blow on my conch shell to summon Ma Durga (my Devi guide and protector of my records). I howl like a wolf to

call on Ma Bhūmi/Mother Earth. I remember my ancestors. I acknowledge that I sit on native water and land nourished by stolen and slaughtered lives and that their descendants remain here.

Autohistoria-teoría situates autoethnographies as compelling narratives and theorization within justice, equity, and decoloniality (Bhattacharya 2020) that rise from the underworld or what I call “peculiar integration.” I invoke the assemblage of insurrection, trespass, and errant path—rattling subaltern histories and Orientalism—as peculiar integration. Autohistoria-teoría is a tool of peculiar practices of possibilities for me, restoratively and transformatively interrogating and assembling my conjuring roles as curandera, social inequalities scholar, and wounded mother (of color as a colonial subject) into radical self-care, collective healing of ancestral and land trauma, and liberatory spiritual unification, or what Bhattacharya and Keating call “activism in imaginative ways” (Bhattacharya and Keating 2017). Autohistoria-teoría is a method of chthonic “counternarratives” (Keene 2015) or Hartman’s notion of “wayward lives”: Cracked narratives told from nowhere and an ongoing exploration of what might be when there is little room to breathe (Hartman 2020).

Plainly, my methodological agenda is restorative: I underscore ethnographic studies of our own lives as cultural text where stories are written and told (de la Garza 2004), and I tend to my wounds by asking, “What stories do I want to tell and how do I want to write about myself?”

### *Metacognitive Writing Strategies (Duende)<sup>2</sup>*

I respond to the questions by returning to my syncretic—cross-cultural and interfaith—ancestors. My Muslim-Hindu-Bengali traditions guide me to conjure anamnesis and invoke powerful spiritual imagery and archetypes to flood my academic writing. An angelic, divine, feminine goddess magus of knowledge, music, arts, wisdom, and nature, Ma Saraswati—who summons my creativity and willingly serves as one of my guardians—appears ceremoniously as I purify and ground under steamy, sparkly water (for the day/Grandfather Sun and the night/Grandmother Moon). She materializes while I retrieve my daughter from the mall, she speaks to me through songs and podcasts, she delivers propitious emails in my inbox and books at my front doorstep, and she is visible in my dreams during witching hour. Embellished with vivacious blue, teal, purple, and gold peacock retrices, Ma Saraswati sits on her creamy white lotus to make love to her gleaming twenty-four-karat gold veena. Her melodies raise my heart to the velvety heavens. I caress her sleek swan sitting by her tender yet solid feet, and I pay my respects to Ma. She unwraps the delicious secrets of the Universe, innate Knowledge that we are gifted with.

Next, I create (my writing) through the hallowed and protected Akashic realm. The Akashas are a vibrant creative stream of unconditional loving and evolving energy one can access through the calling of the heart and a dedicated integrity to walking the Red Road.<sup>3</sup> Through my Akashic apprenticeship with a former ARCI<sup>4</sup>—a mystery school—*instructor*,<sup>5</sup> I learn to materialize a vibrational key with a protected prayer—the *Sacred Prayer Method*.<sup>6</sup> I use the key to open myself to receiving information in many layers from my Akashic Records.<sup>7</sup> As I recite the sacred prayer from my shielded grimoire, my muscles loosen, my breath lengthens, and my heart softens with discernment. My spatial embodiment becomes tender and vast. My fierce, protective, loving, relaxed, and serene Record Keepers step forward to help ground me into clarity with intentionality so that I may hold my light expansively and with confidence. Hissing with a raspy



De la Garza's axiological connection between autoethnography and cultural texts is valuable for bringing these spiritual Knowings into academic writing: "Our epistemology, the way in which we know, can evolve through a conscious reconstruction of our experiential base, inviting deeper wisdoms available through willing embodied engagement with the . . . phenomena, we are seeking to understand" (de la Garza 2004, 7). I translate this to mean we learn through a process of surrendering to what we do not know (that which is veiled), and I welcome alternative wisdoms into academic writing (the unveiled word). I take to heart the paramount role Hartman offers to imagination, that is, "critical fabulation" (a method of writing to uncover "wayward" practices) (Hartman 2020), in the production of scholarship. Duende! I begin writing this story when the egg that would become me manifested in my mother's body when she was five months old in utero in her mother's body.<sup>9</sup> The body, indeed, is a reliable indicator of what has happened, is happening, and will happen. Like the dramatic and dynamic Hound's Tongue flower who flourishes in the dense understory of the forest floor (darkness) until it gloriously ascends in spring (light), my body of work is a product of my Soul Agreements with the Underworld and Mother Earth. My ceremonious subversive acts of writing as resignification are "Lal Pari Mastani," *bold, angelic, and fearless*.<sup>10</sup>

### *Chicana Feminism as Creative Disruption (Medicinal Feminism)*

Lastly, with deep humility, I bow to my Chicana feminist sisters—our Elders—to receive three specific methods of theorizing—"Other" languages, nontraditional texts, and honoring mothers—to reconnect with my suppressed syncretic ancestral culture. Chicana feminists participated in and disrupted multiple movements simultaneously, writing in opposition to the symbolic representations that do not include and recognize them as active agents, from the Chicano movement to hegemonic feminist discourse to academics (Córdova 1994, as cited by Hurtado 2000). "Chicana feminisms [were] born out of acts of disruption . . . Disruption, that is head-on confrontation . . ." (Hurtado 2000, 129). Aida Hurtado writes from the standpoint of absences and exclusions (Collins 1991), [Chicana feminists] avoid false homogeneity (Sandoval 1991), and they recognize feminisms in their multiplicities (Pesquera and Segura 1993, as cited by Hurtado 2000). Chicana feminists seriously think about what methodologies and theories might look like in the context of disrupting absences, homogeneity, and hegemonic "expert" knowledge. With the blessings of the Chicana Elders, I craft trauma-informed "medicinal feminism."

First, Chicana feminists strongly advocate the use of (varieties of) Spanish to create a woman's space and discourse (Hurtado 2000, 130). Devi Anzaldúa guides me to challenge assimilation theorists who juxtapose the English language in opposition to the Other language: One must choose a single language—English—and forgo the Other (Anzaldúa 1987). I learn to include a variety of languages in my writings to systematically include those who are systemically excluded. As a mestiza (a woman of "white, Mexican [and] Indian" descent), lesbian, and feminist, Anzaldúa writes about the mestiza consciousness: "a new value system with images and symbols" that may serve to heal the split between "white . . . and colored, . . . male and female" and the hegemonically differentiated "us" and "them" (Anzaldúa 1987, 3). In this "testimonio" (Panjabi 1997), I employ Bengali/Bangla, Hindi, Arabic, Spanish, Quechua, and Kiowa words and phrases to disrupt hegemonic thoughts. The mestiza consciousness is a dynamic "new mythos" capable of breaking down dualistic hegemonic paradigms.

The second lesson I learn is the use of "nontraditional places for our theories" (Saldívar-Hull 1991, 206, as cited by Hurtado 2000). Mothers Moraga, Sandoval,

Alarcón, Cisneros, and Anzaldúa point me to anthology prefaces, poetry, dance movements, autobiographies, songs, creative writings, cultural artifacts, cuentos or stories (MS Word automatically “corrects” the Spanish word “cuentos” to an English one, “cents”), paintings, autoethnographies, and marginalized journals as sources of feminist multidisciplinary teachings distinguished from those of (middle-class) white feminists (Hurtado 2000, 130–31). My use of Bengali lore, lullabies, Hindi ghazals, Qur’anic verses, and so on with intercultural poetry and lyrics of songs in American English, coupled with curating an expert reference list of BIPOC folx, is a project of “home,” a reassertion of my silenced intersubjective identities—an act of choice in the face of constraints—rather than passive conformity with white-supremacist, empire-informed traditions. Chicana feminists and my interlocutors teach me I have inherited myths, folktales, and multilingual translations that I need not deny in my inheritance.

Third, Chicana feminists illustrate their loyalty to their mothers by writing about the love and care provided by their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and other mother figures. Hurtado writes, “That loyalty is born out of their shared condition as women, but also out of the writers’ recognition of these women’s . . . struggles to survive against all odds” (Hurtado 2000, 137). Our intimate relationships with our mothers are also fraught with tension, for example, anger, hurt, and betrayal. And it is precisely the tensions that have transformed so many of us as children of progressive political struggles and movements. Each one of us calls in our mothers to learn the lessons (of grief, pain, loss, and heartbreak) we have come here for through their wombs. Poet Carmen Giménez Smith composes in “The Daughter”: “Daughter, where did you get all that goddess? . . . She and I are the gradual ebb of my mother’s darkness. . . .” (Smith 2013). I rupture time and space and create solidarity by choosing my mother’s womb. I can think of no better way to repurpose women’s roles as vehicles of cultural (re-)production as products of considerable agency.

### Part III: Broccoli Crowns

Broccoli crowns. I emerge before a fecundity of firm, fresh emeralds at Whole Foods in response to my teenage daughter’s entitled text “get broccoli (emoji)” and afterthought texts “please”—“. . .”—“thank you.” Broccoli crowns. Green, the color of fertility. My feet are firmly planted on the black, squeaky, and grooved rubber mat. My eyes are bewitchingly drawn to the middle of the natural, forest-green exhibit to a sturdy and generous tripod broccoli crown. *Crown*. The terraqueous landscaping tightens and relaxes around the mesial broccoli crown. *Crowning. Visible. Slipping out*. I drool while I visually navigate the constellation of sparkling verdant vegetation of an other-worldly personality. The rhythm of my heart is fluttering, fast-beating. I ravenously reach out for my babies, gasping a chilling declaration: “Rock-a-bye baby. . . . When the bough breaks. . . . And down will come baby. . . . Cradle and all.” My dominant hand is encapsulated by the void. Father Saturn—the ruler of discipline—reaches out for me from the darkness. He activates a “wake up” alarm (with a disabled snooze feature) summoning the Divine Guardians of heartbreak—Grandfather Pain and Grandmother Grief. “I passed through the narrow hills of my mother’s hips one cold morning and never looked back, until now. . . .” (Laux 2011, 4). I consent to have my thick, steel heart blocks defrosted by the icy water spraying on my longing hands.

Aligning with the imperceptible embodied signs of my material losses, Grandfather Pain—the Divine Masculine (Shiva Consciousness)—solemnly carries me in his reliable



arms and inconspicuously transports my unripe womb to the back seat belonging to Stella/Tara, my silvery-black Land Rover who faithfully caresses the abandoned Graco SnugRide Infant Car Seat.<sup>11</sup> Grandmother Grief—the Divine Feminine (Devi Consciousness)—collects my lukewarm sobs in a bowl she designs with her pinkish brown palms, a muluc.<sup>12</sup> Rainwater amasses in the no longer milky-white meringue clouds hovering over purloined land of the Mohegan Confederation. Shepequa is now colonized as Chappaqua. The once cerulean sky is punctuated with sooty, dense, velvet clouds. Grandmother Grief and Grandfather Pain dutifully deliver me to Grandmother Pregnancy—a crone goddess of amaranthine wisdom—and she irenically dismantles my thickset, blood-red, rose and ivory-white skeleton-head-appointed face mask. Poet Lucille Clifton blows on her conch shell in the “lost baby poem”: “the time i dropped your almost body down . . . what did i know about waters rushing back . . . what did i know about drowning/or being drowned . . .” (Clifton 1987). Sprawled on Grandmother’s lap I let out a terrifying howl, the abhorrent sound of irreparable heartbreak shattering the sound barrier.

I lay my cauldron head on Grandmother Pregnancy’s engorged breasts while she rhythmically moves back and forth, back and forth, and back and forth on the buttery, ebony leather seat. I experience her pulpy spit resting outside of my angular ear canal as she hypnotically whispers a prophetic afflatus, “feel the pain . . . honor the grief. . . acknowledge the horrors that have taken place . . . take time to grieve the loss(es).” I lift my weighty head to investigate her mellow leathery face. I unmelodiously sing, “Yaadein/Yaad aati hai/Ye yaadein . . . Chale jaane/ke baad ati hain . . .”<sup>13</sup> (Iqbal 2020). I understood my work is to break down the inspissated slowly to create life-affirming fuel that is long-lasting. Grandmother Pregnancy offers me a crest for clearing old emotional patterns and accepting change. It was time to chew and digest the undigested. I trace the dunes of her sandy wrinkles with my willowy fingers and chronological time wobbles—*adagio*—into *Kairos* or *Deep Time*.<sup>14</sup> Father Cronos or Baba Kala Bhairava, the archetype of linear time, has arrived. With a trenchant gaze, Baba wraps me in Grandmother Pregnancy’s hefty onyx shawl. He bends toward me, and I feel his crystal beard on my right cheek. Shaada Nanu (for as long as I can remember, my maternal grandfather—Shaada Nanu—sporting a long shaada—“white” in Bengali—beard, a distinguishing feature that marked him as our Father Christmas!) He lifts me up. My gaunt right cheek is moist. He cries with me. I return to the primordial source of abundant waters in the land of Munsee Lenape. I sit firmly in my ceremony of loss, bathing in my glibbous-designed tears. *Dia de los Muertos*.

Eckhart Tolle teaches us that grief and pain challenge us to awaken us; they show us where we need to awaken (Tolle 2008). My shamanic mentor<sup>15</sup> names being aware of the gifts and challenges of the systems we are walking in as “spiritual vigilance.” And so, in the aftermath of the unceremonious end of three of my pregnancies—*Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji’un*<sup>16</sup>—I walk with the Divine Mothers and Fathers on a journey of initiation in spirituality, firmness, and spontaneity. *Friducha!* The rainstorm—karmic (“debt”) cleanser—has arrived.<sup>17</sup>

#### Part IV: A Demonic, White-Feminist Fantasy

I position Stella on “D.” I cruise on “the long and winding road” (Lennon and McCartney 1970) that leads me home to my first and only live birth child, a witch daughter—Raneem. Stella’s wheels whirl with ascending speed. I am bitterly reminded of voices from the (near) past, popular educational resources for expectant mothers—

for example, *What to Expect When You Are Expecting* (1984)—that imagined for me what I should experience as I become a mother to an evolving fetus. I received what I call the “party line” story of (re)production: Eerie, white, heteropatriarchal expectations for pregnancy, including how to bond with the fetus, the role of the father, nutritional guidelines, and so on. (Badruddoja 2008; 2016a; 2016b). The *What to Expect When You Are Expecting* metanarrative not only commodifies pregnant bodies into public domain (Tropp 2013), but it also represents tropes of normative femininity. Practices of normative femininity (historical and contemporary) have proven restrictive!<sup>18</sup>

Ankles cuffed, I am delivered to the demons of sexual racism à la white supremacy. Beelzebub visits me with ravenous desire as my latte-hued thighs spill my foamy vagina over to my colonizer: The (white) midwife at my OB/GYN practice scolds me, “If you don’t have time to have sex, then what makes you think you have time to take care of another child!” I am sternly slapped and put in my eugenics-inspired place. Faye Ginsberg and Rayna Rapp’s notion of “stratified reproduction” is hungry—famished—and on the move for suitable prey: “Some categories of people are empowered to nurture and reproduce, while others are disempowered” (Ginsberg and Rapp 1995, 3). Mazikeen (a demon) accompanies me to the ER: My hospitalizations were informed by neglect, dismissal, and inadequate care. I was left alone for hours while experiencing rectal impaction and bleeding from a torn rectum. I was perilously dehydrated, and I requested targeted clinical interventions, that is, I begged to be given fluids. Channeling Asmodeus, the Jewish king of demons, the nursing staff sharply expressed, “Being pregnant is normal. . . stop being a drama queen” and physicians infantilized me, berating “If you don’t stop throwing up, then that means you don’t want your baby.” My psychiatric evaluation, which I did not consent to, from a midwestern hospital with a nationally leading obstetrics department read “narcissistic and immature” and “patient should put up child for adoption.”

Natalie Jolly contends, “a central feature of a woman’s life is her dampening of her own expertise over her bodily experiences and prioritizing an outside appraisal of her embodiment,” and “being treated merely as a body parallels the material reality of women’s daily life and the social practices that constitute womanhood” (Jolly 2018, 36). My point is, BIPOC folk are rendered as an “epistemically disadvantaged identity” (Tuana 2004). I was condescendingly, harmfully, and inhumanely silenced by biomedical professionals every time, for example, “You’re a scientist?/You have a PhD?” and “Are you sure you are happy to be pregnant?” Khiara Bridges, in *Reproducing Race*, vividly expounds,

Pregnancy engages racial discourses to such a dramatic extent that pregnancy can be described as a racially salient event. . . . That white women are largely exempt from the discourses that censure and condemn their reproduction on the basis of their race increases the racial salience of the event of pregnancy. (Bridges 2011, 10)

Indeed, race is a set of exchanges between groups and individuals in a culture within a social political structure; “race is a verb” (Crenshaw 1992; 2018) and “race is a discursive phenomenon” (Bridges 2011).

Stella roars, breaking the twenty-five-mph, hamlet-mandated speed limit. Rubescent Mother Pele stokes the lava in my fiery volcano mouth. My saliva is brewing with the acidic taste of bitter because my body and the bodies of “Others” (for example, Drs.

Shannon Gibney, Zandria F. Robison, and Saida Grundy) are under constant surveillance (Badrudjoja 2016c) by “controlling images” (Collins 1991). The sexualized and racialized pathological biomedical discourse of my pregnant body of color is informed by demonic “epistemic violence”—the routine silencing of marginalized peoples (Spivak 1988). The midwife and medical staff rendered me as “not knowing” (Tuana 2004, 13). Black feminist scholars are far too familiar with practices of epistemic violence. Melissa Harris-Perry, in *Sister Citizen*, describes the construction of the “aggressive” Black woman who is criticized for her unwillingness to protect and take care of people threatened by her nonconformity (Harris-Perry 2013). (I find myself in a similar position in my classrooms at PWI, for example, “professor hates white people,” “Dr. Badrudjoja teaches her opinion,” and “she is the anti-Christ.”) The implication of epistemic violence is that BIPOC folk “disappear,” our knowledges and histories eliminated (Spivak 1988; Collins 1991). (Reproductive epistemic violence heinously affects both infant and maternal health and mortality rates in BIPOC communities.) Kristie Dotson identifies a type of testimonial oppression here: “testimonial quieting”—a “speaker needs an audience to identify, or at least recognize, her as a knower in order to offer testimony” (Dotson 2011, 242). My testimonial quieting occurs when “an audience”—biomedical personnel— “fails to identify a speaker”—me—“as a knower” (242).

The rape of my humanity (and womb) is expansively expressed by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Mask*; he accounts for the feelings of inadequacy we encounter as postcolonial subjects (Fanon 1986). Jasbir Puar writes, “The actuality and validity of our displaced, ‘outsider’ identities [are] . . . negated” (Puar 1994, 22): I am (epistemically) displaced by the colonial/imperial/white-supremacist project of (reproductive) sexual racism. And Bridges conceptualizes production or to “produce” as “a conscious effort to evoke imagery of manufacture and industrial processes. It is an effort to analogize the treatment of women’s bodies . . . with the methodical creation of a product” (Bridges 2011, 71): I, like Roxane Gay, succumb to the production of my pregnant body of color as unruly and unworthy (Gay 2017). Michel Foucault teaches me modern discourses that formalize knowledge and regulate and control our experiences (Foucault 1990). My reproductive experiences within the medical establishment demonstrate the extent to which the care of BIPOC pregnant and un/birthing folk is shaped by a neo-liberal project—an antilibertarian colonial-imperial-capitalistic moral racial economy of worthiness and desirability.

## Part V: Racialization, Spectacle, and Liberation

Zoey—my home—blushes pink upon my arrival. Tara hums at A432 Hz while she rests on the synthetic lake of dull asphalt. Zoey graciously encapsulates my eighteen-year-old, college-bound daughter—Raneem—in her cozy womb. Gazing at Zoey with deep gratitude, I begin chanting HU with her and steadily back out of the driveway.

In “Devouring the Light, 1968,” poet Cheryl Boyce-Taylor vents, “The day they killed Martin/ . . . the whole world went crazy/devouring whatever light/that lit our half-cracked windows” (Boyce-Taylor 2017). Boyce-Taylor invokes communal, racialized traumas—unseen/unheard/silenced/ignored/murdered—and conjures my personal experiences muzzled/suppressed/censored. My twenty years of anti-oppression/anticolonial/BIPOC liberation work to create “safe spaces” as a human, person, woman, mother, community advocate, teacher/mentor, and scholar/researcher/academic has left me a nomad unattended and *wary*. And as an interfaith and cross-cultural womanist, urban, shamanic,

and akashic practitioner—a syncretic priestess/witch/curandera/chemist, my experiences with gender essentialism, color blindness informed by cultural essentialism, and national, oppression-blind spiritual communities leave me cracked and parched. The invisibilities have left me disconnected and hurting inside (Lorde 1994).

Warrior Goddess Sojourner Truth sits next to me on the passenger side. I jerkily pull over to the hard dirt shoulder that belongs to the windy road of colonized Shepequa. I offer her a densely woven lavender cloth face mask with my right hand, and I accept her angular left shoulder. I weep, soaking her thin blouse. I whisper an apology for soiling her polished white cotton top. Following in the footsteps of Manuel, I achingly ask Grandmother, “Mother, how can I reconcile my enduring experiences of racialized and sexualized traumas while holding tenderness for those who serve positions of domination” (Manuel 2015)? Grandmother Truth parts her precise lips to smile. She puts my soggy face in her scaly heart-shaped palms to sharply lift my drenched chin. She looks at me with ardent eyes, “Granddaughter, reconciliation itself is oppression!” Grandmother Truth vanishes.

Grandmother Truth directs me to confront a life lesson: There is no straight line of progress from Seneca Falls to Selma to Stonewall. Piper writes,

[In] encounters with white racism, there are at least two directions in which one’s reactions can take one here. One can react defensively and angrily, and distill the encounter into slow-burning fuel. . . . Or one can detach oneself emotionally and distance oneself physically from the aggressors . . . making it easier to forgive them for their human imperfections but harder to relate to them as equals. Neither reaction is fully adequate to the situation. . . . (Piper 1991, 7)

Meaning *there is no way out of engaging with our physical world* (I have futilely tried). Trauma and tenderness are not necessarily at odds with each other. Richard Rohr names the state of brokenness and luminosity as “bright sadness” (Rohr 2011, 117-21); the seemingly dualistic contrast is a necessary tool of (trauma-)healing and spiritual maturity. Rohr argues that dislocation is a blessed disruption—“holy trouble”—that tilts us towards tenderness, grace, and invaluable growth; it is an invitation into intimacy with reality that can only be entered on our knees (117-21). I understand this to mean, *vulnerability transforms us*. The question of reconciliation is not the right question or the answer then. Inspired by Manuel, the question is, can we walk with the challenges of trauma with devoted honor and integrity? Can we trust with unwavering faith that what happens, that is, trauma, is the path home?

A thin, silky dragonfly visits me through Tara’s parted window. The dragonfly gifts me the penetrating medicine of challenging old flight patterns in the underbelly of contested feminisms in the US. In the film *No Más Bebés* (Tajima-Peña 2015), the racialized sexual strategies and technologies that were imagined in an East Los Angeles hospital in the 1960s and 1970s to coerce Mexican American women into tubal ligations, that is, “stratified reproduction” (Ginsberg and Rapp 1995) teach us “the very act of being pregnant as an act of resistance” (Bridges 2011, 256) for BIPOC folk.<sup>19</sup> hooks is invaluable here:

Collectively, [B]lack people and our allies in struggle are empowered when we practice self-love as a revolutionary intervention that undermines the practices of domination. Loving blackness as political resistance transforms our ways of looking and being, and thus creates the conditions necessary for us to move against the forces of domination and death and reclaim [B]lack life. . . . [We] break

through the walls of denial which hide the depth of [B]lack self-hatred, inner anguish, and unreconciled pain. (hooks 1992, 12)

Fanon is no stranger to the role of violence in historical change, and Foucault ignites the productive elements of repressive aspects of powers: “What makes power hold good . . . that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse” (Foucault 1980, 119).

I return to the parking lot customer line for pandemic safe passage into Whole Foods and I retrieve three earthy broccoli crowns—an amorous green-golden lily<sup>20</sup>—for Raneem. Life. Perfection. Light. Anzaldúa accesses “knowing”: “Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is *travesia*, a crossing. . . . ‘Knowing’ is painful because after ‘it’ happens I can’t stay in the sample place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before” (Anzaldúa 1987, 48). Hence, I learn to *not* turn away from the lived experiences of trauma. My ancestral Mothers teach me my journey with heartbreak and grief squarely puts me on the path of love. “So let go; And jump in; Oh well, whatcha waiting for; It’s all right; Cause there’s beauty in the breakdown” (Frou 2002). I spill myself to occupy all there is to fill to recognize and give voice to my wounds and grieve what I have lost. I step into and embrace my womb traumas by “singing over the bones.”

#### Part VI: Singing over the Bones

The loss of my children bursts opens my heart into a space of deep reverential healing, that which needs to be healed within myself and my ancestors. Without feeling pain and grief—loss and sorrow—we are unable to “see,” and without “vision,” we remain trapped in family patterns that are no longer in the highest good of all.<sup>21</sup> We are here on planet Earth to have human experiences, and this means we choose to experience a range of emotions from the “good, bad, and ugly.” Manuel tenderly liberates me:

When I contemplated being tender in this way, I realized that it did not equal quiescence. It did not mean fiery emotions would disappear. It did not render it acceptable that anyone could hurt or abuse life. Tenderness does not erase the inequities we face in our relative and tangible world. . . . I say that complete tenderness is an experience of life that trusts the fluidity of our life energy and its extension into those around us. (Manuel 2015, 29)

By sitting in our heartbreaks, we learn to tenderly forgive ourselves, and when we learn to forgive ourselves, we learn to tenderly accept all the parts of ourselves. Without compassion for ourselves, especially the parts we do not like about ourselves—our “shadow” self (Zweig and Abrams 1991), we cannot hold compassion for one another.

Seventeenth-century poet and samurai Mizuta Masahide’s shattering proverb dissolves me:

Barn’s burnt down –  
now  
I can see the moon (Masahide 1688).

Masahide gifts me with insight about what it might mean for us to grieve the loss of people we love. Grief expert Kim Bateman offers her understanding of Masahide:

“When we’re forced to say goodbye to someone in the physical form, we’re also being offered an opportunity to say hello to them in our imaginations” (Bateman 2017). Here, Bateman unfolds a folktale about a woman named Nyctea, after whom I name my third unborn child:

Nyctea’s job is to protect that which is in danger of being lost in this world, so her cave is filled with bones. . . . the most precious bones are those of her namesake, the owl. . . . she patiently reconstructs the owl’s skeleton. When the skeleton is complete, she sits by her fire and thinks of what song she will sing. In this quiet moment of love, the great drum of her heart becomes audible. The rhythm gives rise to a song and she sings into being the owl. . . . (Bateman 2017)

I chant alongside Nyctea to bring into being my lost children: “Nahin samne/Ye alag baat hain. . . Meri paas hai thoo. . . Meri paas hai/Meri saath hai. . .”<sup>22</sup> (Iqbal 2021). So, I too gather the “bones” of my babies and I stitch them together through ritual and ceremony. I heal and transmogrify my losses—the absence of my babies (and my unpresence during my teenage daughter’s formative years)—through ritual ceremony and altar-making. With great care, my shamanic mentor and my confidant<sup>23</sup> guide me to create rituals and ceremonies in which I may continue to love my transitioned children in material ways. I “sing over the bones”: *La ilaha illa Allah*—“In the face of the Divine, all separation vanishes. . . the rivers of multiplicity unite in the ocean of His singularity” (Helwa 2020, 158).

My thirteen<sup>24</sup>-day ceremony—my Ghost Dance or *Awh Mai Goon Gah* (meaning “You stand up with your hands waving toward heaven”) (Vetter and Tartsah 2012, 126)—begins with medium-sized, lime-green crunchy apples. Each midnight-blue Crayola evening, the silver curve of my Shun Classic 8 knife winks at me from the grooved, large, bamboo cutting board. I select the ebony wood handle. I pierce through a firm apple horizontally with precision to reveal the sacred, six-pointed, earthy, brown-seeded Star of David located in the middle of the creamy off-white flesh. I place the heart-shaped, bifurcated fruit on a square raft Raneem built with popsicle sticks when she was five years old. I secure the two apple chunks—glowing like radium (atomic number 88 or double infinity)—on the popsicle raft and serve it on my ocher red back porch as my *sankalpa*, an offering of sustenance to my children. A cricket soundwave zizzes. Each alkaline sunrise, through the biting rain sprinkles, my precocious children arrive through the glistening moist bodies of speedily moving black ants, and they relish the sweet-tart fruit.

Death in the Aztec tradition is a Soul journey between the North, the underground place on Ma Bhümi, and Mictlan, the original place of tribe (Magaña 2014). Hence, my thirteen-day fruit ceremony is accompanied by an altar that serves as a bridge to carry my children from this world to the next one.<sup>25</sup> I consecrate a floor area in the maple-wood hallway upstairs that bridges the gap between my bedroom and my daughter’s bedroom with sacred libation, Agua de Florida, to prepare a fertile seed of creation. I create the Circle of Life with blue cornmeal. I use tobacco to draw the four cardinal directions. I offer three bay leaves in the center in a fleur de lis formation. The three leaves represent integration of the Trinity—Upper World/Hanak Pacha, Middle World/Kai Pacha, and Lower World/Uhu Pacha (the three shamanic worlds/cosmic energies)—or “living kimsa,” as Miro-Quesada puts it (Miro-Quesada 2016). The leaves also represent Wisdom/Yachia, Love/Munay, and Right Action/Yunkai along with the three energies of Creation: Kanchai/Light, Sammi/Animating Essence, and Talsai/

Vital Life Force (Miro-Quesada 2016). I snap with my dominant hand to seal the energy, a vibrational field that is contained for healing.

I next square the circle by laying my mother's red muladahara paisley-pattern silk sari, folded multiple times over to form a smaller rectangle to ground ritual items in generational mtDNA energy. I anchor both ends of the altar with two battery-powered white candles to support the muluc-charged gifts of Grandfather Sun and Grandmother Moon or Light for twenty-four hours over thirteen days.<sup>26</sup> Between the Target-purchased candles, I place two dark-brown ceramic Japanese rice bowls with small, unpeeled, bright orange clementines (from Costco), another offering of sustenance for my children's journey. I connect the two bowls with a bridge I engineer with four pieces of red and yellow striped plastic soda straws and translucent Scotch Magic Tape. I build a pathway between the bowls, and between the straws I spray red and gold heart-shaped confetti (from Party City). I gather two ornate picture frames (from TJ Maxx), one silver and one gold, to house the ultrasound images and three pairs of newborn baby socks (from Carters). I disperse on the altar additional collected medicine items from dried rose petals (from Hilo) to seashells (from Jones Beach) to raw amethyst (from Fresno) to the Tibetan scroll of the dead (from Quebec). My protected grimoire features a sacred Inca prayer in Quechua; I chant twenty-one times:

Eeya  
 Teksee-mooyo  
 Thaithanchis  
 Weera-kocha,  
 Pacha kamak  
 Hampooi, Hampooi

The prayer vibrationally opens a shamanic doorway that serves to facilitate the merging of Self with the Universe (Miro-Quesada 2016).<sup>27</sup>

The journey is lengthy, especially for unaccompanied minors. I ask my ancestors to step forward to assist my babies in their path. A humid breeze smothers my left cheek. My mother's parents—my Meye Nanu (my sister and I named our maternal grandmother “meye”—meaning “girl” in Bengali—nanu) and Shaada Nanu—step forward as my babies' traveling companions, caretakers, and guides. Jaguar Woman shares, “The Elders say that when we bring an Offering we should bring something of equal value for the gift we expect to receive. . . . All the Love we See and Acknowledge IS our Love Given Back” (Malmos 2020). I energetically pack Cookie Monster backpacks with pouches of Honest Kids Appley Ever After apple juice, Organic Valley stringless string cheese, and Dora and Diego blankets for my children.

For thirteen days, I sit in silent ceremony for my babies to arrive—“They are coming with the (new) earth, tell them”<sup>28</sup> (Vetter and Tartsah 2012, 124). I sing (off-key) as a method to facilitate communication with my children, “Do jism liptey rahey yoo/Ek saaya ho main or thoo”<sup>29</sup> (Iqbal 2019). I wait for my descendants to become my ancestors. Poet W. S. Merwin in “Separation” heartrends:

Your absence has gone through me  
 Like thread through a needle.  
 Everything I do is stitched with its color. (Merwin 1993)

On day thirteen, the raft on my porch disintegrates, disassembled to its original form of unglued, bleached-blond popsicle sticks.

I learn I become a mother not only when I am pregnant; give birth to a human being; and raise the child from the birth, but I also become a mother when I tend to my wounds; the wounds of my family; the wounds of my students; and the wounds of others. One of my former collegiate-level students, who studied social inequalities and shamanism with me, helps me to remember this profound teaching. They text me: “[M]othering is more than birthing. [M]othering is compassion towards all[;] loving, guiding and caring for others. Even though [they] were not able to [E]arth [W]alk, they are alive in [me] . . . and the other [students] you mother.” Another former (BIPOC) student texts:

There are no words to describe how grateful I am that I had you as a professor and now call you my second mom. I love you so much and I am so grateful the universe brought us together. You mean more to me than you know. Your classroom was so different . . . because you . . . read the room and we appreciated that, even if no one said it.

My students rupture the biological concept of mother and remind me mother is beyond a noun: *Mother is the Divine Feminine-Masculine Wise Goddess who is the Bearer of Grief and the Healer of Pain.*

Ceremony grants us a sacred path to engage with our losses, to ritually acknowledge what happened (and at times understand why). Anna Cariad-Barret writes, “Ceremony assists us in finding gentle and meaningful ways to move through the catharsis of acknowledging and honoring our emotions, experiences and those we have lost” (Cariad-Barret 2017, 116). Here, altars—a significant shamanic tool with ritual objects as an apotheosis of kindness, dignity, and respect—offer deep union with our grief, pain, loss, and heartbreak and permit us to live from the eyes of our heart (love and courage). Katherine Skaggs writes, “An altar is a place of non-ordinary reality held within ordinary reality” (Skaggs 2018). Altars create a doorway or interface between the unseen/nonphysical/veiled and seen/physical/unveiled worlds. My altar embodies my unseen and silenced sorrow in physical form. A salient element of grief is fear and, therefore, the importance of ceremoniously grieving is so that we can release our fears with grace and walk our path with love and courage, elements of the heart. The ceremonial altar not only honors my/our loss/es, but it also celebrates my life/our lives.

In this way, ritual ceremony invites us to walk through the pain and grief without the suffering. Ceremony frees us from energies that are not life-affirming. Ceremony is how we ask Spirit to meet our needs. Ceremony “reconciles us with life” (Barrios 2010). With acceptance, we develop the skill of presence to the joys of life while knowing the inevitability of pain and grief (Peck 2003). Bateman writes, “When we sing over the bones of the people we care for, we are sitting in the place of the greatest love imaginable. And we’re not only singing up new life for our loved one, but we’re also singing up new life for ourselves” (Bateman 2017). I intentionally and deliberately create space for the end of cycles—closure (with old patterns, beliefs, pain, life situations, and so on)—and I call in beauty, wholeness, and shift in our lives. Ceremonial altars are powerful forces of energy for clearing old emotional patterns and accepting change. They are the heart of transformation in ritual.



## Part VII: Love Knot

I channel my Meye Nanu's spirit and power to squarely root myself to my chalky white-tiled kitchen floor. Our mothers, our mothers' mothers, and the Devi within us are unclaimed, time-traveling feminist heroes. Like my Nanu, I immerse thinly sliced, brown-skinned potatoes in viscous, swirling, hot, buttery-yellow vegetable oil. I listen to "You Gotta Be": "You gotta be bad, you gotta be bold . . . All I know, all I know, love will save the day" (Des'ree 1994). Des'ree serenades the bubbly oil. Twilight zone. I am amid tenebrous waters. My Shaada Nanu, with his prickly Santa Claus beard and pious new moon on his forehead (from prostrating on his janamaz/prayer rug for decades), materializes. He passes his জাদুকর (*jādugar* or wizard) cane to me. Despite his silence, I hear my ancestor's message: Traumas are gifts of opportunities to transform our open wounds by working in the present to change the past and future.

Estés imparts, "A woman may try to hide from the devastations of her life, but the bleeding, the loss of life's energy, will continue until she recognizes the predator for what it is and contains it" (Estés 1995, 49). Manuel affirms, "If we don't grieve we won't get healthy. The body has to recover from loss in order for us to experience safety and sanity" (Manuel 2015, 80). I dreamed, co-created, and carried life inside of me until I unwillingly released my babies from my unprepared ancestral womb. The transitions of my children—and my father—are unfathomable losses I have felt in this lifetime. The White Shaman writes, "Once someone dies, that collection of spirits disperses back into our collective consciousness. This is the sadness we feel when someone leaves us . . . I would estimate there are the same number of spirits in your consciousness as there are people on earth. So, to change our collective consciousness here on earth, change your consciousness to what you want to experience here" (White Shaman 2020). My Baba, my father—Dr. Mohammed Badruddoja, MD—who transitioned in January 2020, manifests a ground with Crimson Glory training on trellises to Spirit. My dad, in his cream-silk kurta and white-cotton churidar pyjama, cavorts with his three unborn grandchildren—Munay (meaning unconditional love in Quechua), Sarayu (meaning holy river in Sanskrit), and Nyctea (the owl woman)—in the rose garden, simultaneously safeguarding Raneem (meaning the sound the wind makes as it passes through the desert in Arabic) in the material world.<sup>30</sup>

Pregnancy and birthing bring our ancestors into this realm, for we are literally our ancestors. On an active bridge between Life and Death, we engage with our ancestors (and descendants) by being of service to one another (that is, to clear our fears impacting seven generations forward and backward). Our path in our human Earth experience is to be aware and present, to be a witness to that which is unfolding, and hold space for the ways in which the energies are flowing. *La ilaha illa Allah*.<sup>31</sup> Trust. Faith. Surrender. Flow. We can choose to shift into the Light through a change in our perspectives (a shift in perspective is the miracle). The practice of living in this way brings illumination to all aspects of life. The call is to heal our trauma(s).

I place several sheets of thick Bounty paper towel on a heavy buttercream platter named "Emma" from Pottery Barn. An ebullient chipmunk pops into my kitchen through the freed porch door! Chipmunk brings me the medicine of delight, smiles, and laugh. Chipmunk also carries the totem energy of magic and illusion. The message: There are secret tunnels hidden in plain sight all around us. I plate the crispy potato slices crackling with oil. I call on my mother ancestors to assist me to season my Meye Nanu's potatoes with pungent *kalo lobon* ("black salt" in Bengali) and fresh lemon juice and I garnish with tangy ripe cilantro. Raneem's rosy and slender fingers

greedily slide multiple slices of steaming fried potato onto her vitreous ivory salad plate and asks, “Mom, where’s the ketchup?”

At the tonal heels of the squirting condiment, I begin my life-long journey of being firmly rooted in Love. In her Knowing (of our Connectedness), Wise Woman Efatul Bushra Khandekar—my mother—who gifted me my womanhood and motherhood casts a life-affirming spell: She offers me a Bengali sobriquet “Badhon” (বাঁধন) after my birth (inspired by Rabindranath Tagore’s “Pother Badhon,” a poem she was reading before she went into labor). The literal translation of the Bengali word “badhon” is knot (and “pother” means path). Like the eighteenth-century Celtic Love Knot signifying consistency together with completeness, the symbolic imagery or signification of বাঁধন is a love knot, deep-rooted entrainment of all kinds (between people, between people and emotions, between the layers of ourselves, between us and our bodies, and so on). Sufi Saint Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti (R.A.)<sup>32</sup> offers, “The path of love is such, that [hir], who treads on it, loses [hir] name and identity. Love is all-embracing and all-pervading: the lover’s heart is a fireplace of love. Whatever comes in it is burnt and becomes annihilated. There is no fire greater in intensity than the fire of love.”<sup>33,34</sup> I know now my lyrical Bengali name is my primordial name. It reminds me what I am here to do with grace, strength, ease, and influence—Rabbishra li sadri wa yassir li amri.<sup>35</sup> Through our interactions with forgiveness, compassion, and love for ourselves and one another, we become the source of creative power as sacred Ritualists. Anzaldúa writes, “Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious” (Anzaldúa 1987, 48). This is my offering: I assist in bringing back the sacred fire to our family lines—*Rabbi zidni ‘ilma*.<sup>36</sup> My name is medicine. My name is a spell. I am/We are BADHON or an exquisite LOVE KNOT!

My narrative of reproductive trauma in the US is indeed rooted in my role as a critical-race feminist. And, simultaneously, my experiences of reproductive grief, loss, pain, suffering, and heartbreak are antithetical to my rigid and material masculinist training as a social scientist, underscoring the limits of reason, thought, and theory. Bhattacharya and Keating name this “risky narratives against the political landscape” (Bhattacharya and Keating 2017, 347). My experiential walk through the loss of my children defies what I have been taught as a social scientist, how we produce meaning, and about being a “productive” “citizen” of the world. My responsibility is to bring back the teachings of the other realms into the world of the living—fabulation. What lies in the transition of my children is the awakening of my connectivity with consciousness beyond the experiences and perceptions of the physical realm for strength and inspiration (Bhattacharya and Keating 2017). The serpentine lightning in my jade blood—“body lightening”—awakens and the gods/goddess contact me/us directly when my/our *koyopa* is awake—“serpent power.”<sup>37</sup> I break open my heart to curate an epistemology of suffering with great understanding and love. Like a paladin, I steadily pull on the thick strands of my howling heart to intentionally stitch together a hefty, multicolored quilt of how we can traverse inconceivable pain by carefully weaving death and transforming the threads into a lifeline of healing in this world. In all its contradictions, grief and fragility can teach us about sustaining life on this planet. My conceptualizations of trauma, grief, and heartbreak and healing are creative risks to my rigorous social-scientific discipline. I learn unreason may be the most reasonable thing we have.

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## Notes

1 My Christian healthcare plan covers Viagra, but it does not cover IUDs, name-brand birth control pills, and so forth.

2 Selected passages in this section were originally published in Badruddoja 2019.

3 Akemi G explains, “The Akashic Records are the energetic records of all souls about their past lives, the present lives, and possible future lives. Each soul has its Akashic Records, like a series of books with each book representing one lifetime. The Hall (or Library) of the Akashic Records is where all souls’ Akashic Records are stored energetically. In other words, the information is stored in the Akashic field (also called zero-point field). The Akashic Records, however, are not a dry compilation of events. They also contain our collective wisdom” (G 2014).

4 *Akashic Records Consultants International, Inc.* (see <https://learnakashicrecords.com/>).

5 Sister Tara Jolley.

6 *The History of the Akashic Record Prayer* (see <http://akashicrecordstraining.com/2011/08/the-history-of-the-prayer/>).

7 The Akashas were once close to Mother Earth, twelve feet away, and freely accessible to everyone without prayer. By Atlantean time, the Akashas were misused and, as a protective mechanism, the Akashas floated away.

8 I journal to facilitate the flow of information with pure focus. Journaling in my Records enables me to delineate my belief systems and how I evaluate aspects of my life, search for recurring life themes, and document my transmigrations (birth/death/rebirth).

9 Mark Wolynn writes, “before your mother was even born your mother, your grandmother, and the earliest traces of you were all in the same body—three generations share the same biological environment” (Wolynn 2016, 25).

10 I borrow the phrase “Lal Pari Mastani” from singer Sona Mohapatra. Lal Pari Mastani—meaning red, angelic, and fierce—is Mohapatra’s alter ego and moniker (Kameshwari 2018). As a point of synchronicity, my sister texts me a song—“Tori Surat”—by Mohapatra while I develop this writing.

11 The Sacred Masculine/Shiva Consciousness stands for truth, asserting boundaries, and the ability to act in the world. Combined with the Sacred Feminine/Devi Consciousness, carrier of unconditional compassion, our DNA takes the shape of a double helix (our genetic code and humanity’s collective memory). The Divine Masculine/Feminine is serpentine strength, power, and creation, or what I call “sexual magic.”

12 “Muluc”, in Yucatec Maya, means “something that is gathered up” or “collected,” that is, rain clouds collecting in the sky before a storm. Maya believed the power and energy of the rain was harnessed by collecting it in pots and, ceremonially, Maya used water as an offering for collective strength, adaptability, harmony, healing, purification, releasing negative emotions, and promoting change (Johnson 2009). Debra Malmos writes, “Muluc is the symbol of the ‘Christ Spirit’” (Malmos 2020).

13 The Hindi lyrics in the song refer to the memories of those who are no longer here. “Yaadein” means “memories.”

14 Bashar says that time is a side effect of our consciousness shifting repeatedly to different points of view of the same single moment of existence (Bashar 2018a): meaning, we are literally a new person every moment (Bashar 2018b).

15 Brother Baltazar Villareal, a Magi who has lived the Red Road for fifty years, is a behavior specialist in the Sex Offender Program at Coalinga State Hospital (CA).

16 Qur’anic verse 2:156 “To God we belong and to Him we shall return” (يٰۤاَيُّهَا رٰجِعُوۡنَ).

17 The *Popol Vuh*, the Maya creation story, prepares us to acknowledge and pay back our karmic debts by honoring all that we have received (the good and the bad), atoning for disequilibrium, thanking all that is in balance, and positioning our lives in harmony (Johnson 2009).

18 My own unschooling from *What to Expect When You Are Expecting* unfolded during potentially life-threatening risks to my own life and the life that resided within me during my first “high-risk” and

traumatic pregnancy eighteen years ago. I experienced a debilitating genetic pregnancy complication in all four of my pregnancies that resulted in one live birth, a premature daughter whom I am currently raising and nurturing during the pandemic (Badruddoja 2020).

19 I name and honor the women who came forward in the litigation—Consuelo Hermsillo, Gaudalupe Acosta, Estela Benavides, Maria Figueroa, Georgina Hernandez, Dolores Madrigal, Elena Orozco, Jovita Rivers and Maria Hurtado.

20 Animated by the Greek myth of Hera and Zeus, lilies are an emblem of rebirth and motherhood.

21 Tibetan Buddhists refer to this as “shenpa,” the self-defeating quality and cycle of being hooked into emotions and behaviors that cause us to suffer.

22 I loosely translate the Hindi lyrics to English: “It does not matter that you are not in front of me. You are next to me. You are with me.”

23 Novelist Aruni Kashyap, the author of *The House with a Thousand Stories* (Kashyap 2013).

24 The vibrational energy of the number thirteen is new beginnings, symbolic of a choice we will have to make and for which we alone are responsible.

25 I learn how to build an altar foundation as a shamanic apprentice in the Pachakuti Mesa Tradition (PMT) (Miro-Quesada 2016).

26 Muluc “holds the Element of Fire and resides in the East, the Direction of Life, Light, and Happiness. ‘Light’ defines this cycle as a time for Divine Inspiration and a Higher Revelation of Divine Truth” (Malmos 2020).

27 In his teachings, don Oscar shares with us high ceremonial words or *kapak-seemee* (in Quechua) of the Inca people.

28 This is the last line from the Kiowa Ghost Dance song “The Spirit Host is Advancing” (Vetter and Tartsah 2012, 124).

29 Although the lyrics of the Hindi-language song express romantic love, I have reinscribed the lyrics to express the ways in which a mother’s body is intertwined with her children’s shadows. I loosely translate the Hindi lyrics in English to mean “our bodies and shadows are intertwined.”

30 Raneem, a high school (junior and) senior during the pandemic, thins the un/veiled worlds by summoning her Nana Bhai: “Nana bhai, help! Please, please, please make sure that I am called last for my class presentation today.”

31 “Contemplating and meditation on *la ilaha illa Allah* as a means of detaching from the world and our ego creates space necessary to witness the events of our life, instead of being triggered and ruled by them” (Helwa 2020, 158).

32 “RadhiAllahu’anhu” (رضي الله عنه) means “May Allah be pleased with” him/her/them. The term is used along with the name of a companion of Prophet Muhammad.

33 *The Path of Love* (see <http://amuslimconvertoncemore.blogspot.com/2016/11/khwaja-muin-ad-din-jisty-qs-path-of-love.html>).

34 I replace the pronouns “he/his” with “hir” to summon the Shiva/Shakti Consciousness.

35 Qur’anic verse “Oh my Lord, expand my breast and ease my task for me.”

36 Qur’anic verse “Oh my Lord, increase my knowledge.”

37 Aztec Goddess Jade Skirt is love, beauty, and life-giving water.

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