

SALTWATER
HEALING



ANGELIQUE V. NIXON

Saltwater Healing

*A Myth Memoir &
Poems*

*For the ancestors
& my grandmother Mabel Sistella Charles*

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On Myth & Memoir



My vision for this work grew out of the ways I engage with home as a Black mixed-race queer Bahamian woman living abroad. It grew out of troubled women's stories (herstories) too often left out of our "history" books. It grew out of messiness—the stuff we don't often speak about: poverty, domestic violence, drug abuse, disease, mental health, sexual trauma, sexuality, race and color, class and privilege, and environmental crisis. It grew out of my desire to speak and share hard stories through a visual medium, using a storytelling poetic form and collage of materials and found objects. And it grew out of my visits home over the years to reconnect with homespace, and this not only involved spending time with my loved ones, but also going to the sea, laying in sand, breathing in salty air, and soaking in the ocean's healing embrace. It grew out of all the stories my grandmother told me as a young child - many which centered on the healing powers of our land and seascape. It grew out of me depending on my visits for rejuvenation, but also experiencing the difficult memories of my childhood.

The pages started with an adult me telling stories and then transformed into a childhood persona re-telling and re-imagining my childhood through the land/seascape and my grandmother's mythic voice. Some pages started with the stories, while others started with photographs and scraps of materials. I went back and forth with inspiration from the materials (cotton, fabric, seeds, dried plants and seeds, straw plaits, and sand) and with the stories that emerged as I wrote and created each page – interplay between visual and text. I used Androsia fabric and plaited straw specifically because of how we use these materials in cultural

production and for tourism. This vision expanded as I worked with the fabric and straw as a reflection of the obvious to tell what is not so obvious – the hidden from view, the unspoken, the silenced.

The process was an incredible healing journey and the piece transformed each day I was at home in March 2012 to do the installation. I was fortunate to be home during Woman Tongue season – trees being ripe with pods and the beautiful sounds they make during our Bahamian spring time. This took my project to the healing and mythic space I had envisioned through the stories, and working with the woman tongue seeds and pods captivated my poet self. And so the pieces grow from distance and longing in photographs of the first few pages to a more physical closeness with tactile offerings of the last pages and the entire frame of woman tongue pods and coconut tree branches. I ended the memoir with a kind of opening and circular movement that I hope pulls readers/viewers back into the piece to share in my vision of Saltwater Healing. The chapbook grew out of my original idea for this project, which blossomed into a visual art piece. I see the book as an extension and movement of the piece that includes the myth memoir and several of my poems that brought me to this creative journey of self love and survival.

I call my literary artwork "A Myth Memoir" because this describes the blending of stories, experiences, memories, dreams, and mystical elements of the narrative and poetry in the artwork. Also, I am working in the tradition of Black women writers who insist upon our need to create our own stories out of what we know and what we don't know -- because so much of our histories/herstories are unknown. I am particularly inspired by the great Black feminist poet and activist Audre Lorde's biomythography *Zami* where she defies literary boundaries by creating a new genre using storytelling, dreams, myths, and histories/herstories to tell her story. I think its important for artists to cross and play with boundaries. Poetry and writing generally help us to create images in our minds, and so I wanted to push myself as a word artist further into the visual realm. Language is as fluid as other mediums of art, yet it is so often fixed in space. I love word art, mixed media, collage, recycled art, and photography. And so I found myself using a variety of objects to compliment and complicate my words and the stories I wanted to share. Through my collection, I hope readers feel inspired to tell their own stories in whatever ways that make sense to them. And I hope to encourage readers to share and speak their truth.

Saltwater Healing



A Myth Memoir

"It's better in the Bahamas"

I remember hearing this over & over again on T.V. and the radio growing up in Nassau.



(me)



↪ Angelique



(Paradise Island Beach)

I remember words like 'paradise' & "Sun, Sand, Sea" describing the island nation I still call 'home' even though I've lived away for 13 years.

(Sunny Day)

I remember the smell of the ocean during summer, especially when sea grapes are ripe and in season. They are green and purple, round & fuzzy, a sweet fruit, yet salty like the sea.



(sea grapes on the tree)



(Sea Grape Tree)

I remember the sounds of coconut trees telling their stories



(Coconut Tree)

I want to tell you my story, but it's not one of Paradise. There are no beach-filled romances or happy endings (fairy tales) in my story.

* You see I took these pictures of the beach, the ocean, and sea grape & coconut trees to remind me of home.

But when I lived at home, I barely had time to go to the beach or to enjoy the trees, ^{sea} grapes, & coconuts.



(Rose Island, Bahamas) (can only get there by boat)
[I was lucky to have friends with boats]

And when I was growing up in all this Beauty... there was all this Sadness, tragic stories I can't share with you.

So much beauty I could never see until I left and came back. *
* leaving, returning, Home. can be painful.



Cause you don't wanna hear about ghettos in paradise... about drug-addicted fathers and crack houses...


about how my mom had to do not-so-romantic things to make sure we had lights, food & rent.

No, you don't wanna hear that story.
You want the Sun, sand, & sea.
Shit man, I want it too...


(* How can I explain this hole inside of me - wrapped in Home... made / forged in memories of Home.)

I want to be home and be me.
I want to have memories that do not sting me.
I want my people to love me & accept me.
in all my light-skinned, feminist, black, queer, Radical self...
I want it to be better in the Bahamas for Bahamians.

2



As I travel between the places I live
and the place I call home,
I create many homes and
memories filled with love.



Building Bridges,
Repairing Fractures,
inside me ...
I am still here ...

And so I embrace
the memories that
sting ... and I
wrap them inside
promises of joy
and hope and
love. my soul
jumps in
this light.

Blessed even through
the unspeakable,
I am still here ...
here because of
grammas & aundies
& mothers of
all kinds ...

Here because I'm
supposed to share
my story.

I want to tell you my story
even when its hard,
even when you
can't hear me.

We have to go
back for you to
see me ... and
-this place I
call home ...
• envisioning memory •

3



My Guardian Angels : * Great-grandmother
Willabie Black

Radiant Light

I create memory through naming...
I remember through Blood lines and struggle and stories...
VISIONS
RETURN

- * Gramma Mabel Sistella
- * Mummy Kim Grace Louise

I remember Gramma sayin "Trees don't lie" and so I listen I listen & to my ancestors...
and pray to trees

LOVE

HOPE
SOUL JOY
Peace

The Sky in too much Blue...



I listen to the trees ...
* they tell me just how things is go.

(once upon a time, was a very good time)



Dilly Trees speak of patience & teach me how to build nests of homespaces while carrying my roots. Green summer magic in leaves that conjure wind



(monkey chew tobacco & spit white lime)

"ole story time"

I want to tell you about these stories carried by the wind & conjured by leaves on Dilly Trees... stories that made me dream of possibility & living... sweet as Dillies.



(A Dilly tree and coconut tree dance under the sun)

I remember the trees of my childhood... many backyards and climbing and hunting for fruit in the summer.

(one of my favorite trees...)
(The Dilly Tree)



Searching for the ripest fruit, carefully selecting & picking

I remember the treasure of finding a Ripe Dilly still on the tree, right before it falls & breaks... Brown, delicate, soft, textured outside, silky inside... (comforting fruit) Dillies are like warm love.



5

(And so...
I had these
dreams
of
Peace)



(Tamarind)

You see I took these
photographs to remember
and to re-memory...
Walking through Nassau streets,
running into tamarind bush,
and it all comes back...
★ the taste of tamarind
on my fingers as I break
open its shell & the tart
tangy flavors rush
across my tongue...
I re-memory...

long school days...
the threat of tamarind swith
mixed up in the joys
of its fruit...

(on this day,
my god daughter walked with me
and took this photograph.)



(she ate tamarind
for the first time,
and I showed
her how...)

I make
my curry with
homemade
tamarind sauce
& spread
tamarind jam
on my toast
to re-
memory

I
enjoy
its sour
& sweet
vibe...
Tamarind
bush always
tells both sides of
the story.



(my Spirit
rising)

Tamarind Bush
speaks of perspective
and teaches me how
to share my light
& my stories
& the bitter & the sweet.



6

I also had these
dreams
of flying
away...

(I have no pictures
of butterflies in
the Bahamas...
so I rely
on memory.)



* I remember
butterflies ...
so many butterflies
of my childhood.
I followed them
in the bush,
on flowers &
in the air,
dancing with wind.

I wanted to
take flight
and visit other places
and other realms
like butterflies
our doorway &
vision into
other worlds...
I wanted more &
held onto my
dreams...

* They were
always so
busy with
sharing life
& determination
to make it...
every bush
every flower...

touched
by the
butterflies
of my
childhood...



I saw myself rising & taking
flight... becoming me...
* I **Bust** out of my
cocoon & escape from
hopelessness.

7

* I went in search of roots & rootedness...

* I had to travel too many miles too many years away from home to find myself...

* But I always returned and continue to return.

* To make sense of my past & to understand my present.

* I remember talking to mangroves & Casuarina Trees (as a child... these were my favorite... to make up stories about & name.)

(they name us too.)

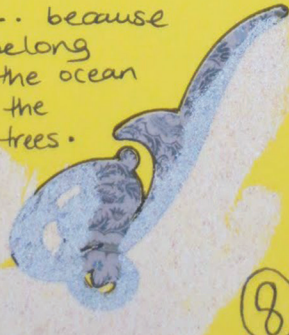
* They live near the sea & love salt water. They told me to make wishes with Sand Dollars, and I did... because I belong to the ocean & the trees.

(they are in need of rescue.)

(Like so much of the earth.)



(my imagination as I child)



(8)



(Ponciana Flowers)

(these ones are red with specks of white, but there are other colors too...)

Like
earth orange
&
sun shine yellow.)

(they are soft & playful in the sun, and resilient.)



The Ponciana Trees have lived in Paradise long time. And they have been witness to all that is unspeakable. They tell us stories every summer through their colors & bloom... It is beyond time, they say, for change.

9

(The buds of Ponciana open & flowers climb out like butterflies.)

I listen to Ponciana Trees who tell me of transformations, like their opening every summer... Their colors painting us with radiant memories...

of times when their roots in the earth did not feel so much pain... They know the suffering... & they know how we treat each other & the earth.





I remember hard times
& struggle through
Ponciana trees...
because they remind me
like the spirits of my
ancestors... that
a new day is
always coming.

(coconut trees
& Ponciana have long been comrades in the
struggle.)

I meditate
on the branches
of Ponciana.
I remember
swinging in
their branches
as a girl
child.
I found
strength in
their knowing.



(majestic)

They transmit stories across
the Caribbean Sea into the
Atlantic & Pacific. They know.
The wind, ocean, & butterflies
carry their magic & sadness.
They sing in unison & their
colors transform space
in moments. I am blessed
to remember my time
in their arms.

(Poncianas are
Big Lucious Trees
with long thick
branches & leaves
so green & rich.)



(Their flowers
fall at the end
of summer
reminding us
that they will grow
again.)

10



✱ My gramma always said
no matter, the sea will
always be (we tings),
(ours)

Life inside the ocean
would be easier than this one
Memories are fuzzy like
spider webs in my mind's
window...

All that I
have locked
in vaults of
shame ...

pull myself through
each window of refracted selves
unraveling to make me whole ...

The mighty sea embraces me
in a sliver of new moon's
arms, I drink salt &

bathe in
dark
light.

Sea Weed beds
deliver me
on shore

Blessing me with
green light radiance

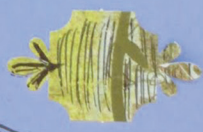
I sit with sand
letting anger
meditate in her
grains

The salt
pulls the
weight
out of me.

The weight
of hard
stories.

The ocean
carries
them away.

(11)



As a girl's child,
I survived through
fantasies of other
worlds.

Stories rooted in the ocean
of my imagination
kept me alive.

I remember the sea
comforting me with
her tides of change
pushing & pulling me
to escape ...

I would build a sailboat
out of driftwood, leaves,
and silk cotton.

I would weave magic
out of cotton buds & seeds
as winds from the north
ushered me away.

my vision of freedom
submerged ...

I would be carried
along with Ocean Spirits
and Sea life ...

under the ocean's rippled
surface, I would live
and be whole ...

this I imagined
as a girl child
on Saunders Beach ...



(12)



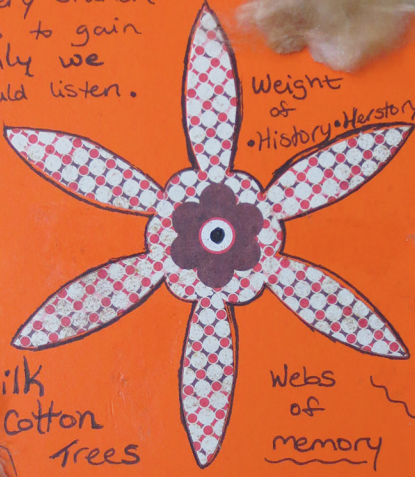
I remember
the stories
of old silkcotton
trees ...
magic ever present
in their mighty
trunks & limbs.

I carry with me
the strength
of my
ancestors ...
Their stories
flow through
me ...

Wisdom rising
in every branch
for us to gain
if only we
would listen.

Powerful stories
of survival
& hardships

Spirits
are close
& speak
when we
need them.



Weight
of
History • Herstory •

Silk
Cotton
Trees

webs
of
memory

buried
underneath
magnificent
da-story
time -
Silk Cotton
trees

I remember
silent means &
calls to know more.
From Market street
majestic trees
speaking to their
sisters on the
top of East street
all the way
to Fox Hill.

speak of
times & days
we do not remember
or rather work
hard to forget ...
in these
Bahama lands
oh yes there
was slavery ...
oh yes our ancestors
were enslaved ...
on the weight of
failed plantations ...
they are with us.



13

We enter a state
and states
of knowing

Genes

Memory

cause
the wealth of
this world came
from our ancestors'
sweat & labor

These are the whispers
coming from the
seeds & buds of cotton
falling from her
ancient branches.

I remember haunting images of more
recent times... my grandmother's
identification card for the Dundas
reading "General servant" and
her tired brown hands curled
from cooking
& cleaning
for
white
families
& her stories
of her "fall"
from grace...

Black woman has "affair", her employer -
English methodist Priest, who denies, denies...



on we back...
on we backs...
dis stories dot
make up we...
Mix up, clashes
Torn selves,
Colored
Whole.



(14)

Conjuring
the power
of Nature's
stand...

I rememory the
stories of my
birth into
fire tongue.

Woman
Tongue
sharp & determined
like a stormy
day's wind
blowing fierce

My grandma
Mabel Sistiella Charles
made her way
with lightskin
daughter
(she named
Kim Grace Louise)
& Demanded
with her woman tongue
(father)
that the white man
(priest)

to
the courts
she went

Dashing
-through

Claim Her...

The church embarrassed,
sent him away...
Even though mummy
never knew him,
she had this story
of claiming &
demanding
of shame
Yet she knew
her mama's
head was
always
lifted high,
Her tongue
powerful...

The
Sands
of
Island
Resistance
#Grandma
Say
Use your
Tongue
Wisely #

The
Sound
of
Woman's
Tongue
like
conch
shell
Resistance



(Keepin da wibe)

Like ocean currents bringin stories & wisdom

through branches leaves seeds

(our trees) telling us how to get through dese turbulent times if only we would could

listen (wibe da)

2430W TONGUE

(Knowledge)

& the earth's warnings

* Experience this woman's tongue. Her light & fire.

* Yes I. Womanish. Brazen. Bigedy. Like Gramma say. I. am.



I am forever haunted with these stories of home... making sense in the stretch of time, distance, drops me closer... to wholeness to love even as I exist with purpose on the margins of each & every place I live. even at HOME.

I embrace the cycles looking back in search of origins to make sense of the present.

I listen to the trees still.

I still. I.

sent through tremors, wind, storms, currents, calling for change.

(16)



SPIRIT

Waship

Earth

LOVE

Magic

SOUL

FOR

PEACE

LIGHT

HOPE

DISPINE

Ancestors

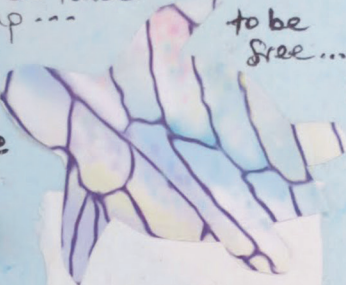
Obeah

STORM
MOON
GODDESS

Healing

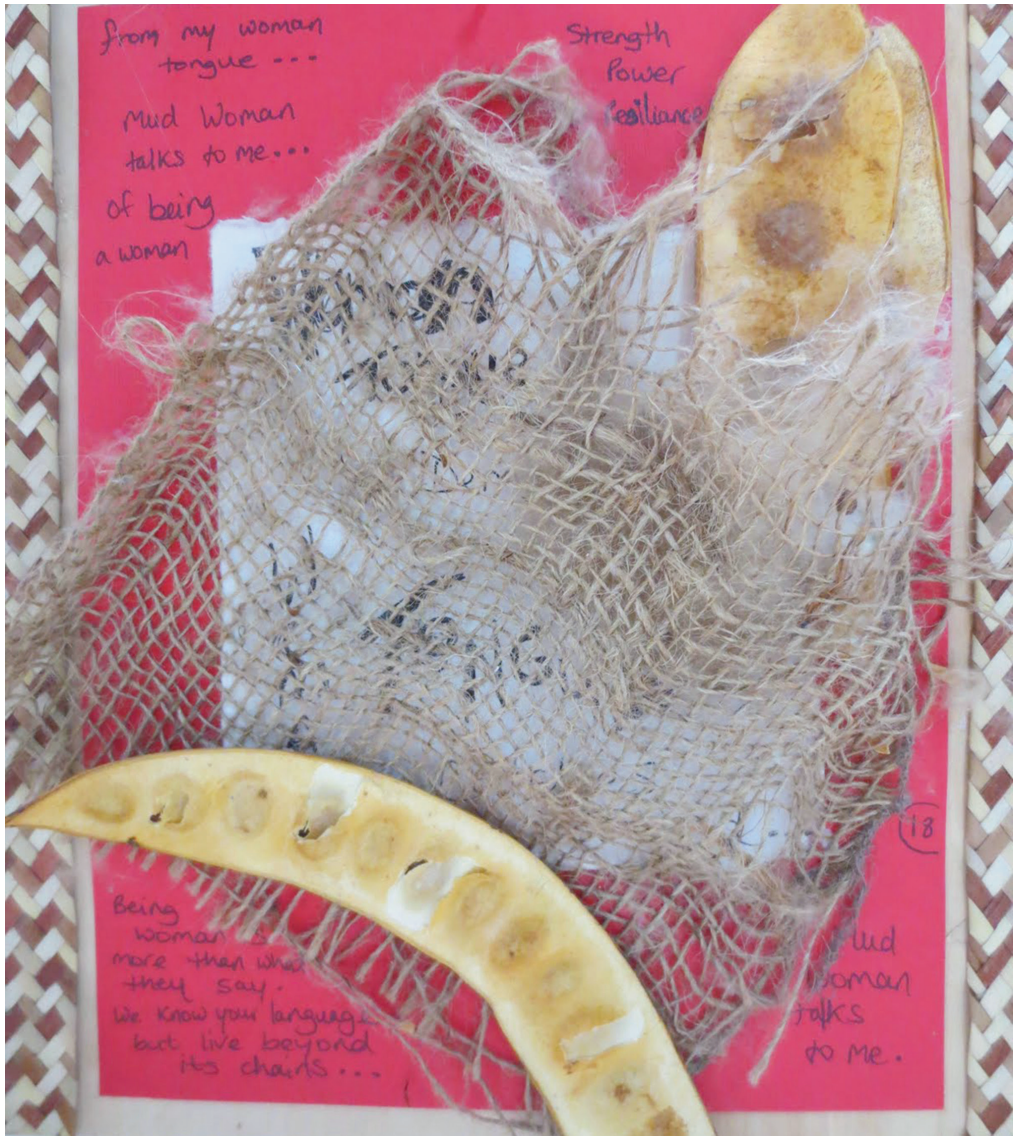
gramma raise
me up...
in dreams
with her
woman
tongue

to be
free...



to Plant Seeds of Remembrance

The sands remember ... telling ^{our} stories.



Poems

minkisi*

I open the box of memories where I keep your voice.
I hold onto the fan made of blue feathers, the colour of ocean's play.

You kept it in a special place on your bureau, that fluffy fan
still in its plastic box. I would go to it, playing dress up,
wearing your church dress with goldish yellow flowers,
pretending to be you with careful fanning strokes.

When I unfurl the fan, your essence fills the space
I occupy, as I breathe in that cloudy picture, holding onto it,
with your song to guide me in this reverie.

I always heard you coming,
the dangling silver gliding on your delicate dark brown wrists,
emitting a relentless power, hands curled from sweeping and scrubbing.
I wear those bracelets, the sound of you, a faint noise in my ears.

The silver bracelets speak of you,
they whisper in harmony of your determination
to perform in a world that could not see you.

I gaze at withered photographs, searching in the shadows
to discover you, flashes caught by chance, holes in time,
haunting with long days of cooking for white families,
still bringing fervor home.

You stare back with defiant eyes, reminding me of your stern
cold love, always assured through stories, songs, and
tasty meals made from grits, rice, and sardines.

I keep the tarnished silver key to your bedroom, as if it will unlock
some mysterious black hole transporting me to the time I need back,
time we didn't have. Those nights creeping into forever
dangling on despair became easy in your arms as we slept,

and I dreamt of the bookie and b'rabbe tales,
stories you sang to keep my imagination spirited,
I want them again.

your fan's breeze, your silver's melody, and your key's magic, gramma,
are what I have left of you in my box of memories.

**"In the Kongo tradition, minkisi are objects that contain
medicines and a soul that are spirit-embodying and spirit-
directing, thought to effect healing and other phenomena."*

-Flash of the Spirit

never again

once I felt ashamed of being my mother's daughter
but I am not her, and what I have from her is all I needed.
I let all the other things about her I dare not say,
go far away, as her spirit seeks rest and hunts for peace.

once I felt ashamed of being a woman,
because I saw the woman my mother was,
she was all that I did not want to be,
I ran from her and the person she revealed to me.

so ashamed
living over da hill, filling empty stomachs with stories on walks to the well,
draping worn sheets over broken windows,
growing into the teenager who lied about these things.

so scared
the boyfriend who beat our windows and her,
mood swings tested my faith in her words and god,
rat bat nights into endless rows making gramma vex.

so angry
leaving me long before
she died, hiding the bruises,
her distance grew wider with each inch I grew taller.

resentment soaks through the girl child who has seen too much,
distrust settles hearing another broken promise,
the walls grow wet and porous
like sand castles at dusk, in between knowing and fear.

watching my mother waste away, tore at my walls,
the last time I saw her—recognition meandered in her vacant eyes
and the wonder if she really knew it was me, hung in the air,
this puzzle sticks like a hungry potcake following me home.

memories remain opaque, held in vaults of shame,
locked away, until I broke through,
outside the perceived, in troubled shadows,
I found place, a space to breathe.

now, I feel myself (me) being a woman,
being the woman my mother wanted me to be,
strong like saltwater, defiant like moon tides,
independent like the sun, cool like summer rain.

and now, no matter my wish to save her,
I am never ashamed.

through old eyes

*“suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me:
for of such is the kingdom of heaven” - Matthew 19:14*

I.

delicate. eleven, maybe twelve
through tunnel vision, blocking out
recollections that bring tears like

birds at dusk, singing on Market Street lamp pole
bridging currents, against her will
flying on replay, this scene of love

raised voices, shouting
rat bat is drunk wit' water on da side
gettin juicy, soundin tipsy, feelin heat
screaming, slapping, punching
crying and cussing
muffled and distorted
feeding on fright
bonding obsession and fear

as the mother takes more, bears more,
the child closes her eyes, remembering to pray in Jesus' name,
meditative rocking, slow breathing, wrapped in knots,

door slams, relief comes until tomorrow
and she exhales, belly unravels, seeing herself in miniature
jumping from lamp pole to lamp pole

darkness falls over child's soaring dream
mother's nervous hands rub her shoulders
cracking voice whispers, I'm sorry.

II.

guarded world holding her from flight,
repressed five-year old memories
pierce her skin,

bruises
broken arm
battered face

another woman
not the mother, but the stepmother
not by the boyfriend, but this time, the father

same scene, different people in this child's life
claim love, living through anger
building homes in shattered spaces

the child breaks from speech
away from the father's hands
she screams for the stepmother

she longs for home
back home to the mother
where they can laugh through tears.

III.

sharper. fourteen, tiger eyes
widened gaze to another broken
window, another panic-filled night

worrying if the mother would make it out alive,
but the child has to leave, her grandmother says, with machete
under pillow, holding together broken hip and worn heart,

*“go somewhere safer than this,
I no longer have the fight
in my bones”*

she whispers in the avocado trees, tossing her walker into lime bush,
we skip past broken house on Market Street, sing through East Street,
chant down McCullough Corner and Mason's Edition,

flying high over Collins Hill wall,
its design meant to keep certain people out,
so we learnt to fly, wishing for something else, something better.

Still Caribbean Roots

twin female spirits—-independent by nature,
complete each other without speaking, for their movements
and mindscapes create worlds beyond the expected.

these spirits in youth survive
through finding each other,
two distinct creatures from the same sea water,
the same current of air.

we flew together, rising above Nassau,
in unison, a circling double helix,
fighting damnation, proving selves, defiant sweat.

super winged warriors – Egyptian Goddess and Amazon Queen,
imagining lives anywhere but here on island rock
fever, as young teens, we wanted to be more
than trouble or unwanted or too different.

You held me up when hurricanes blew in too much hard water
You nourished me with salty rain and ripe avocado
You danced with me under the scorch of summer heat.

I be your grounding force
You be my other half

why I kept going, striving for more,
when despair hovered like hungry seagulls on the horizon,
my fire rising, grew through your belief in me,
in our powers to be, whole.

with new phases of a fall equinox moon, life paths shifting,
changes and unspoken words between us,
drifting parts, yet our sand-selves rooted still,

as you become the mother we both wanted and needed,
I will be there, proud in ways only you will know.

twin female spirits balancing with grace,
high tides of logic and intuition.

we stories

*“white ways are the ways of death
come into the black and live”
–Lucille Clifton*

Lost in between guilt and shame
takin’ the easy way, passing, never pausing
(time to listen to all you miss)
grasping desperately for time and her memories

I wore this mask of white
my ruptured body blurred into something safe
(the easy way will not work for you)
silence warped my body

my skin burning from inside shame
(the danger is forgetting)

Gramma spirit was restless
singing hymns of our past, stories lost
“chile, we guh make it some kinda way”

jumping into murky oceans of her story, talkin’ ole story
Gramma voice did catch me, an’ take me up
(dese stories make up we, keep us alive)
I started dreaming in colors of Black and hope

I let go of that self who could not see
had to tear away years, unlearn colonial lies
(to discover ways of hearing)
truth in we blood, in dis we spirit

shedding this mask of white
and silent otherness
left me vulnerable
to the cold white weather

the questions, the gaze, the stares
my masquerade collapsed
under the sound and weight of we story
Black women’s stories, rekindling lives of fire

from Africa to Trinidad to Inagua to Bain Town Nassau,
our survival heard, colorfully Black, shades of miracles

I rise up in tune with my ancestors to reclaim
Blackness and powers hidden underneath my skin

Bahamian, Speak

trained to speak a language
taught to wield its power

told it be the way out,
this language is called proper
english, the correct way to speak

told as a child the way I spoke
was “bad,” “ghetto,” “over da hill talk,”
speaking “that way”
“too Bahamian”

but now, we say our words with humour,
forgetting the shame

our dialect (Nation Language, Bahamian English)
decorating performances in our schools,
dressing plays at the Dundas, “sip sip” and “grape vine” in The Punch.

It was embarrassing,
for chirren gettin’ an education,
talkin’ Bahamian only at ‘appropriate’ times
during lunch an’ happy hours, rat bat nights

but now, our dialect is fun and entertaining, somet’ing to laugh at,
somet’ing dat really Bahamian, cause dis we tings, be a true true Bahamian,

cause if you is Bahamian,
you know the rawness, the rhythm,
the movement of speakin’ Bahamian

it can’t be fully captured
on paper, it gatta be heard
it is fluid in motion and sound,
to hear it, is to see it.

So when you ask me, “Wha’ happen to yuh Bahamian accent?”
my response can never be simple cause I fuh sure ain’ loss it

it was molded and masked through training
paddles on knuckles, uniformed classes, british/american teachers,
serving tourists in bars, working in offshore banking,

and gramma’s insistence on speakin’ right,
cause it would get me far,
but the place I went, was too far,
from her, my truth, my roots.

But come to find out, I slip in an' out
of languages wit' ease and discomfort

as I live between worlds of home and e'rry where else
in transition I be, through tongues,
what I was made to speak and what feel, what be, natural.

delicate nature

run away, turn away, but you cannot hide
from what they see, cannot hide from the obvious

features of a face, distinctions of Grace
differences of the Other, outside the margin
now that we are “hip” and “cool,” “trendy” and “tasty”

look through broken glass, never staring at cracks, spackle
holding it together, holes, fallen pieces, missing mirror

What do you see?

Sex and Gold
Lust and Paradise
Passion Fruit
Cascading Falls
Ocean Breeze across White Sand
Flamingos on Deserted Beaches
Coconut Trees and Palms

out of need, to make a living, royal subjects still pleasing the crown
tending/serving those generous enough to visit our shores
generous enough to spend/spread their dollars/diseases

Will this illusion last?
Is that what you see?

but you don't want me, you just want that—
body, skin, touch, smell of the
fantasy you place on me

oh yes, let me guess, you think I am
exotic, you like the islands
you find me erotic

tasting julie mango skin, touching dark lustrous hair
teasing sensuous lips, you dream about, but can never truly have
what you perceive as wild and willing, ravenous and flaming

crazy even
you miss the garden
you miss the truth

Sisters

No imitation
We create
We must do more

black sisters, do your thing
weave, braid, cornrow, locs, fro
stamping out the burn of the perm,
leave behind the singed edges
we need approval from no one but ourselves.

gramma put down the hot comb
she was free way before the afro was in again,
escaping from what she swore was eating us alive.

yellow sisters, with silent russet power
in shades of passing abilities becoming chameleons
sunning or not for attention, with “good” hair,
blending into the background, yet the spawn, the mule,
we make it easier for them—for a time.

gramma says you pass, and acceptance be a tool,
our way to bust through walls,
but you always be my grandchild and I’m black.

brown sisters, in our mixes—creamy to dark chocolate—
hair that runs the gamut in light waves to dark nappy curls,
ignoring the glare and stare,
defy the question of what it would be like (or can I touch it),
we break from the gaze of lustful desire with force.

gramma says put down that hair straightener
throw that relaxer away
pour that dye down the sink.

think about your reason
consider the cause as we “whiten up.”

Dye, Straighten, Perm, Highlight

But who am I to say what you do
As natural becomes the next hype.

I am, we are, silent no more

*“When we speak we are afraid are words will not be heard or welcomed.
But when we are silent we are still afraid.” -Audre Lorde*

we are home
we are migrants
we are born on islands and lands
touching the Caribbean Sea, mixing Atlantic & Pacific oceans
we are born away, in foreign, we are hyphenated abroad
crying from London to Toronto and Miami to Brooklyn

some of us can leave, some of us can't
some of us don't want to leave
some of us have to leave
some of us return home, some of us don't
some of us can't return
though we dream

we come from different backgrounds and places
we are spiritually religious, but some of us are spiritually driven
we have built bridges over/seas with cardboard and duct tape
we have invented languages out of clashes and drums
we have culled families out of many races and mixtures in/between
we are many cultures, many languages, many people

we accept each other (do we?)
we celebrate and love deep
we cry and laugh loud
we are oceans of highs and lows
we are people, rippling beyond/inside home
but we are not all the same

so when you cut your eye at me, turn your back,
or raise your fists in hate, rejecting my body
when you see my female hands touching her shoulders
my fingers lingering, along her back, a second too long,
you have already heard stories about me
my “lifestyle,” you suck teeth and shout “sissy”

remember I told you
that I love you anyway
I hold open your eyes with my pen's light
I embrace your fists with my third eye's alliance
I do not threaten you
I do not hate you

some of us are not straight
some of us are queer
some of us are gay and lesbian
some of us are bisexual
some of us are same-sex loving
some of us are transgender and gender defying

we can be silent no longer about all that we are
we can be silent no longer about all that we are not
and the in/betweens trouble boundaries
these must be spoken

Mud Woman

mud woman talks to me
and her voice soothes my inner being

she talks to me of being
a woman and embracing strength,

*our survival is fierce, it is tenacious, subversive memory
carried through hurricanes of stolen spirits, blood in bondage,
we do not forget.*

the rising full moon glows and shines upon me,
feeling her influence, power unleashed.

Amazon, the Rainforest baths your vibrant glow with a constant dew,
mighty rivers carry your revolution and thoughts,
spirited trees adorn you, too numerous to name, guarding your secrets.

countless species of plants and animals coexisting,
orchids living in canopies of spicy green tree tops,
bursting with wisdom of other times, while spider monkeys
meditate in their branches, biodiversity and harmony born here

in the Peruvian Jungle
Alive and Captivating
Drawing me in, to her.

mother nature defies logic through temper and restraint,
flooding to drought, weakness consumed, sacrifice accepted,
yet peace circulates, gliding on intricate webs of breath.

Primordial identity, the journey within self, discovering the uncharted regions,
of this earth (once our blessing, now burden to save) filled with hurting bodies.

proud of being woman
strength in intuition,
aggression in emotion,
trust with love, pain, and darkness
embracing all

*being woman is more than what they say
we speak in waves through rivers, forests, and oceans
we know your language, but live beyond its chains*

mud woman talks to me

Hibiscus Opening at Day Break

I woke up today
soaking in her golden red light
for the first time, pulling myself
through memories that break skin

they melt like glass this time
sun showers across my collar bones
they unravel me, no longer
I remember & exhale stories, hard to pass on.

*hands and mouths, not suppose to touch or lick me
slow movements, nine year-old thighs, not suppose to enjoy
feel stirring below my belly, each time
tight eyes spill shame, not suppose to tell
I mimic my button on pillows at midnight, to forget
pray forgiveness, our father in heaven, my test?*

waking with purpose, I know better now
my broken limbs of dusted pollen
cleansed with rain over petals
telling stories, hard to pass on.

I spoke up today
tethered by Oshun's tongue
for the first time, patching up
pot holes inside me with warm words

her waters rise up, bursting with leaves
they know me, each pore, each curve
they dance calypso & chant against fear
they carry me to moon's full embrace

she holds my belly, healing me with honey
her rivers bring vision, eye lids flutter orange
Oshun baths me in her sweet water, letting blood go
my stories seep into oceans of stories, hard to pass on.

They pass through my lips
speaking tongues of revolution
Oshun teaches me to love pleasure
for the first time, trusting female desire
 beauty in touch & night's end
 waking to her dark red flame.

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