16 Weaving Enfleshed Citizenship (M)otherwise

Sara C. Motta

Our re-membering can be everything as fragments, loose threads, multiple tongues; transversing lack and loss, longing and survivance; enfleshed archiving of the silenced and violated racialised mothers and daughters, daughters and mother; excavating the fecund silence; escape, migration, dispossession, and desire.

We are at once mother and daughter, lover, and sister, comadre (comother) and wisdom keeper, the centre of the subterranean webs, pulsating as pluridiverse rhythms, wild indecipherability to the registers of unreason and antilife that were never ours, flows and re-connection to an ancient-yet-new becoming political (m)otherwise (Motta 2018a, 2019).

Part one: on not re-mapping our trauma

I acknowledge the different Tierras/Lands/Countries from which we come as writer and readers, yet I am writing on Awabakal and Worimi Country. I recognise the sustaining quality of land, sea and sky and the ongoing sovereignty of Awabakal and Worimi peoples. I honour and call to presence the abules of all the lands which meet in me. I am mindful not to reproduce a notion of place, belonging and dwelling that encourages our honouring of place towards an “official” singular idealised place consciously identified with self, whist disregarding the many unrecognised, shadow places that provide our material, existential, ancestral, and ecological support. Instead, I seek to develop an ecological and ancestral form of consciousness and relationship with place as multiple. This acknowledges how our consciousness and connections can extend through time, across space, through the palimpsestic experiences of Tierra/Country across lands, and encompassing not only the human, but the non-human and the more-than-human. I thus also acknowledge how Tierra/Country is enfleshed in our own territories of the body which themselves have been subject to interventions, disposessions and violences but are also sites of the dark wisdoms of which Patricia Hill Collins (1990) speaks and the erotic of which Audre Lorde (1989) poeticises.1

DOI: 10.4324/9781003231073-20
Return to innocence

I feel it, self-hate
like there is something ugly
about my skin
a disease of the flesh

I feel their hatred
thick congealed bile
inflaming my solar plexus
filling me with their dread

I understand why a brick
gets thrown in their windows
façade, to crack the spread
of the original disease of Whiteness

not phenotypical but phenomenological
not the colour of skin
a subjectivity instead
premised upon our genocide

Fanon’s non-recognition
foundational to the colonial divide
epistemological frontiers
trauma derived

and inspired, blankets with small pox
baby milk laced with cyanide
health campaigns to sterilise
stop us breeding, cut off her head

place it on tall sticks
mark possession, mastery and pride
the entryway of the Lettered City
protect the purity of the race

hide the putridness of their homeplace
a landscape of the intimacies
of the patriarchal colonial state
for whom the black mother

begets a savage, monstrous race
a place
of dirt, infanticide
an undignified disgrace
genealogies of forced forgetting.

Veins of Abya Yala,\(^3\) pulsating
coursing memories
refusal
to be laid to rest

they shake me from the delirium
In which the mirage of their hatred
Is mistaken
for the real

eye sing to me
soothe my pain
wash away the shame
honour rage in ceremony

eye stroke my feet
I look down
feel the soil
the roots of my soul

eye implore me to take tea
manzanilla, ortiga, milenrama
allow the poderes to nourish my skin
replenish our wholeness

make medicine
with the oceanic pain
imprint the possibilities to remain
despite their dread

eye hold my tears
overflowing sacred containers
alchemical grief
ancient release

eye remind me
I have a right to life
to weave the thread of our recovery
have home, and hearth and kin

I am innocent
We have always been innocent of their crimes
We are not guilty
I AM NOT TO BLAME
their logics of dispossession
and despair, are not mine
let them go now mijita
allow them to fall

from shoulders and thighs
fly like the eagle, connect with our dead
love, live, breathe in
the majesty of our flesh.

Sara C. Motta, 13 October 2021

Part two: speaking as the racialised and feminised maternal flesh

I could begin writing from the wounds and markings on the communal flesh of the violent onto-epistemological cartographies and mappings of us as non-citizens, relegated to the exteriority of modern/colonial Reason and Political Subjecthood. I could begin from our rendering through the White gaze as objects legitimately subject to biopolitical epistemological regulations that seek to break our kinship structures, pathologize our registers of care, and deny our forms of subjecthood and sovereignty. I could begin from our being systemically targeting as Black, Indigenous, and Indigenous-Mestiza mothers for our centrality in the birthing, tending, and nurturing of these cosmopolitics (m)otherwise. I could speak this in ways that seek recognition from the White gaze and inclusion into its registers of Right, Law, Governance, and Reason; a desperation for decipherability, distorting my body and breath to fit the containments, performing to a rhythm that is premised on my/our negation and reproducing my/our spirit annihilation.

This is a script of right, writing, and rite that I now refuse.

Instead, I take a breath, a deep ancestral breath and commit to writing as ceremony and medicinal epistemology in which the threads of our surviv ance and flourishing are enfleshed.

I (re)begin.

I bring to memory circles of storytelling and mourning, of the intercultural women’s movements in Cali, Colombia (Bermúdez 2013; Motta and Bermudez 2019; Motta 2021) which rupture the registers of the visible within the contours of a system of governance and citizenship, of reason and law, premised upon the ongoing negation of the knowing-being of Indigenous, Black, and working class racialised Mestiza mothers and kin. Into this space of ceremony and/as mandala making, of ancestral re-membering and elemental invocation, we bear witness to the stories of assassination and murder of children and young, of rape and assault of women, of infiltration of police agents into community, of curfews and militarisation of the streets. We bring to thought and communal breath how precarity and abandonment are the foundational logics and irrationalities of a modern/colonial system of governance
and state sovereignty premised upon a death-making onto-epistemological politics that seeks to eradicate Indigenous, Black, and Indigenous-Mestiza political difference and life (Serje et al. 2007; Morgensen 2011). Following from Black feminist Saidiya Hartman (2007) the bodies of Black women are thought of as the naturalised site of gratuitous punishment and violence.

Colonial administrators instituted strict regulations on behaviour, relationship, desire, and policed complex and intimately coded racialised and gendered frontiers, separations and violent orderings of humanness. Independence from Spain in 1820 saw the configuration of the great mestiza-nation presumed upon the heralded disappearance of indigenous communities and the erasure of the presence of Afro Colombians of slave descent. All would become Mestizo now, a process of whitening or blanqueamiento in which “there was no place or future for the Indigenous population… except as a legacy from the past, as a ‘stain’ that had to be cleaned…in the republic of liberal dreams” (Gros 2000, 536). Strict frontiers were drawn throughout the late 1800s and into the 20th century in the Lettered City (Rama 1996) of civilisation and modernity in which the Ingenious and Afro were rendered uncivil, dangerous, dirty but able to be super-exploited as labourers, domestic workers, racialised mothers separated from their babies and kin caring for the babies of Criollo women. Whilst in the countryside, that wild, untameable tierrra so rich in minerals and resources, indentured slavery reigned, as did ongoing militarised and violent policing by a para-military state as a key US ally in the region over campesino, Indigenous, and Afro communities, ways of life and relationships of kin, and forms of social economy (Chavez and Zambrano 2006). Indigenous communities often felt shame at their roots, denied their wisdoms, hid in plain sight/site, sons and daughters sought to escape the countryside and modernise (Serje et al. 2007). My father who once flew with the eagles and healed with his hands married into Criollo elite, rejected the lineages of my abuela and bisabuela as evil ideas and practises as something to deny, ridicule and hate.

Is not the most powerful of the colonisers’ logics, when these logics colonise our minds, relationships and spirits?

The inter-cultural womens’ and feminist movement is made up of multiple collectives, movements, experiences and fluid articulations responding to the recent militarisation of popular protests in Colombia. The region of the Valle de Cauca and the cities of Cali and Buenaventura have been the site of some of the richest intersectional feminist movements in the country that weave traditions of Black, Indigenous, Queer, and nonviolent feminisms with traditions of popular and radical education. They are at the heart of reoccupying the nature of the political, political subjectivity in the decolonisation, defence, and healing of both the territories of the land and their bodies. During the recent popular uprisings, women of this movement led as madres en la primera linea (mothers on the front line) and as curanderas and medicine women behind the madres de la primera linea in a collective refusal to respect the heavily policed urban frontiers of the modern/colonial city in Colombia. The reoccupations of the racialised flesh visibilise the rigid and violating raced, classed, and gendered cartographies of Cali and cities across Colombia. They represent and enflesh an emergent appearance on their own
terms with their own languages of the political (Bermúdez 2013; Motta 2017, 2018a, 2021). The speaking of the systemic and systematised violences onto their territory-bodies enacts a remapping of processes and technologies of blanqueamiento and embraces a becoming-Indigenous as an epistemological politics of Black flesh (Motta 2021). As Mishuana Goeman describes “[remappings] …mediate and refute colonial organizing of land, bodies, and social and political landscapes” (2013, 3).

This is a refusal of modern/colonial erasure and an other tracing of presence/presents of inter-cultural decolonising and feminising sovereignties and subjectivities. The mothers relegated to stories of neglect and incivility, their children’s bodies dumped and decapitated in the Rio Cauca, become a cite and sight of scripts of knowing making and survivance that prefigure other forms of (political) life. To be accompanied in grief; to re-write dominant narratives that blame Black flesh for its own annihilation and social death, to hold tender links of re-membering which weave deep time of the ancestors as presence/present is both a collective refusal and an affirmative sovereignty making (m)otherwise. Reason is no longer the domain of abstract mastery and possessive individualism but rather collective embodied re-occupations and healings of the communal flesh. Ceremony is no longer relegated to the territories of the wild outside of political subjectivity and humanness (Blu Wakpa 2016; Mattingly and Blu Wakpa 2021; Motta 2018a). Ancestors, and elements are co-weaved into on-going relation and responsibility, fonts of strength and survivance.

The eagle flies.

She cannot be contained by your borders that maim, exile and separate.

On Worimi lands, so-called south-east Australia, I, with kin from these unceded lands, co-weave with our comadres in Cali an inter-cultural ritual of grief. The borders of nation-states cannot separate us. Our old ones meet; they come to hold the circle; with fire, water, earth, and air, with dried eucalyptus leaf and cleansing burning as we offer our wisdoms to the breeze so they might join in pan-indigenous mourning. The great Mother holds the centre, as three mother-curandera women speak their blessings to and out from her centre – as we journey in collective to Cali, meet with the spirit sister, surround them with protective and nurturing light; sing in Spanish with Indigenous-Mestiza women and First Nation woman from these lands (Figure 16.1).

Opposite the ceremonial site in which we weave this pan-indigenous magic are mangrove swamps where mud crabs would roam free in droves. Invasion marked the drawing of racialised and gendered frontiers between the urban modern city and the marginal settlements of the periphery; places named violent, uncivil, dangerous, dirty, and black. Where white men might roam at night to rape and pillage and return by day to their place of prestige and positions of power; where massacres occurred to rid the terra nullias lands of unwanted blacks, where custodians of these lands were refused passage to the White clean streets of modern settler sovereignty (Heath 1997; Maynard 2015). The mangrove provided a place of refuge; an (in)visible site of safety and protection; a rich ecology of intimacy where Black mothers and their kin could reside and hide from
The mangroves hold the spirit of those foremothers; of lineages of matrilineal descent, of matriarchal social economies dedicated to life and care and (co)responsibility for self, other and Country. The stolen generation’s screams echo through the land beneath our feet and continue to mark the logics of state “protective” intervention into Aboriginal families in these unceded lands. There are higher rates of child removal from Indigenous families than at the peak of the Stolen Generation; there is ongoing displacement and incarceration; there is the violent reproduction of epistemological terra nullius (Watego 2021). There are so many stories to tell and share in these (in)visibilised spaces and timescapes; stories of grief beyond borders, of Indigenous and black ways of life and knowing-being that have survived despite all, and practises of maternal governance and political being.

Part three: the (Settler) state is a white woman

These choreographies that violently mark the gendered and racialised frontiers of the urban Lettered City are deeply epistemological in that “the racialisation of bodies is the very ground for subjectification – [we] come into being as knowers/subjects or objects in the form of particular racialised bodies”
(Riggs 2005, 463). To come into being as an unmarked (settler) colonial (political) subject is to be granted the right to name, intervene, judge, narrate, and author the nation-state and sovereignty; whereas, to come into (non)being as a racialised and feminised (m)other is to be denied such marks of modern subjectivity and humanness (Anzaldúa 1987; Lugones 2010; Morgensen 2011; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Motta 2018a; Watego 2021). Such logics of (non)being of nation-state-sovereignty deny and seek to destroy other ways of coming to know, creating knowledge, forms of knowledge, and passing on wisdoms and lore between generations. These logics are premised on the story of epistemological terra nullius, or as Aden Ridgeway has termed it “terra nullius of the mind” (2001). From where I write/rite, this is viscerally embodied in the earth beneath the building beneath me upon which Mulumbimba-Newcastle’s University was built through the eviction of one of the last remaining Indigenous camps in 1963 (Maynard 2015, 46). The Lettered City (Rama 1996) is formed and reproduced in relation to the erasure and removal (or more recently assimilation) of the irrational, dangerous, and savage racialised (M)other who is an impediment and block to modernity and progress and a threat to White reason, political subjecthood, and nation-state. The Collective, a group of precarious intersectional feminist radical educators, in Cali, Colombia, all racialised and feminised mothers, whether that be biologically or through extended kinship networks of comadreando (comothering), are committed to a decolonising and feminist pedagogical politics of life and/as education (Motta et al. 2021). They have spent decades nurturing the conditions of possibility both for the flourishing of liberatory, feminist, and decolonised emancipatory epistemological-politics and for their own survival and flourishing as feminised and racialised women on the margins. Their work involves the co-creation of autonomous political education projects outside and inside the university, as shapeshifters transgressing its violent separations and borders between knowers and known, education and life, and university and community (Bermúdez 2013; Motta and Bermúdez 2019).

In many ways, they are neplanteras of whom Gloria Anzaldúa speaks, those who bridge communities, sociabilities, epistemologies, and subjects on the margins (Anzaldúa 2002, 2015). Nepantleras, as Anzaldúa continues, “are threshold people, those who move within and among multiple worlds and use their movements in the service of transformation” (2015, xxxxv). They are shapeshifters on the margins of the margins, the (m)others of the othered who chose to remain in the margins as a political-epistemological act, as bell hooks describes:

a space of radical openness a margin—a profound edge … not speaking of [a] marginality one wishes to lose—to give up or surrender as part of moving into the centre—but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.

(1989, 149)
Part of The Collective’s visioning and political practice inside of the university, in this case Univalle, in Cali, Colombia, has involved the setting up of feminist collectives and the struggle for the acceptance and accreditation of a Master’s in Popular Education and Gender that can embed and embody the kinds of pedagogical practices that decolonise and feminise the project of the neoliberal Lettered City (Motta 2018b). It is co-weaved through the creation of a dialogue of knowledges in which their knowledges, while often without “official” accreditation, have been valued and embraced as the site of wisdoms from which to co-create individual and collective transformations. This has enabled a becoming visible on their own terms, without the need for internalisation of the shame, devaluation, and negation that they have experienced from the official university. A central strand of this critical pedagogical-political practise is the sharing of their stories of discrimination, violence, and exclusion as well as those of resistance, survivance, and feminised/racialised power as a means of creating as they describe:

A box of tools, a collective vision, the strengths of one is combined with that of others, and we emerge as a Collective that is absolutely fragile and marginal, but we have learnt the power of fragility.

(Collins 1990, 206)

Their pedagogical-political process is embedded in mutual recognition that each subject arrives with a knowing-body of “dark wisdoms” (Collins 1990, 206), with desires, and embraces the aesthetic, affective, and emotional dimensions of knowing-being that the colonial/modern (neoliberalised) university devalues and negates. This involves weaving the dimensions of spirituality, of motherhood, of care for life, of music and ritual, into their practices of co-construction of narratives of themselves and others, and of the possibilities of their lives, which transgress the logics of invisibility and hyper-visibility to which they have been subject in the dehumanisation of the pedagogies and politics of cruelty of Colombian society and politics. It is enfleshed through embrace, as opposed to rejection, of the territories of that which are re-presented as wild regions and their racialised and feminised peoples and which “have been thought to constitute a reality that lies beyond the scope of civilisation … imagined as an Other reality … construed as la Otra Colombia, the Other Colombia” (Serje et al. 2007, 39). As the Collective recount, this has involved re-membering and reclaiming these, their wild territories as sovereign spaces of epistemological and political becoming:

We cry together, share stories, celebrate life, dance together, arrive together to formal classroom space, the rest of the university and the city. We believe that accompanying each other in both our sadness and our joy generates another type of knowledge and being (political) that ruptures and transgresses the project of the patriarchal capitalist colonial lettered city.

(Author correspondence with Collective, October 10–12, 2018)
The Collective holds and nurtures a pluridiversity of dark wisdoms and dedicate their lives and caring epistemological labours to nurturing a politics of decolonising and feminising emancipatory flourishing and fostering of a pluridiverse political subject of la otra Colombia. The frontier of the “official” university and the margins of precarity that they inhabit have often been policed by White-Mestiza feminist women, with permanent academic contracts at the University, who have claimed recognition and extracted the labours of these racialised neplantera women through the exclusion of members of the Collective from ongoing work and from key places and sites in which official valuation and recognition are performed.

This comes as no surprise for the Black and Indigenous woman, for as Sojourner Truth proclaimed in 1851, “Ain’t I a woman?”. The urban frontier of the Lettered City of modernity/coloniality was/is premised on the biopolitical epistemological coordination and containment of desire through laws, codes, scientific and expert discourses, material awards, and political recognitions of the hetero-patriarchal family of the White possessive individual in which property, kin, and liberal sovereignty were the highest entanglement (Davin 1978; Morgensen 2011; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Stoler 2002). This was not only a project of patriarchal and capitalist construction of particular gendered division of labour, sex, and power but one enabled only through the destruction and negation of other Indigenous and Black onto-epistemological registers of kinship, care, and social reproduction (Simpson 2017; Stoler 2002; Sydney, 2019). As Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear’s work teaches us “…Indigenous kinshipmaking produces mutual obligations whilst the elimination of those kinship structures enhances Indigenous dispossessions and disappearance” (2016, 1). The forging of the frontier of (settler) coloniality/ modernity could only happen through such an onto-epistemological coordination and containment of desire and as Morgensen argues “Indigenous elimination manifestly proceeds through settler regulation of sexual relations, gender identity, marriage, reproduction, and genealogy, and all similar means for restricting resistance Indigenous [political] difference” (2011, 10–11). At the heart of such a “training of the heart” (Slater 2020, 818) and containment of desire into white possessive logic and the project of Empire and modern/colonial (political) subjectivity was the White bourgeoisie woman.

The bourgeoisie White (mestiza) woman in the (settler) colony was required to both embody and enforce the pinnacle of White motherhood, tied to domesticity and framed with feminised traits of morality and homemaking as opposed to law and public world making. She was a key figure in the construction “of a racial grammar.... installed in the 19th century imperial populations... [through which] a sense of self has been formed and fabricated” (Wekker 2016, 2). Her enforcement of such gendered and racialised domesticity and responsibility for the labours of social reproduction and domestic and sexual labour included both the disciplining of the poor white mother in settler colonial contexts such as so called Australia into the
proper role of wife and mother, and in the forging of a hierarchically ordered racialised dividing line between the black/Indigenous woman (mother) and herself and husband; a line which she was/is the core figure of its policing (Davin 1978).

Domesticity and intimacy were/are key sites in which the choreographies of hetero-patriarchal (settler) capitalist coloniality were/are mapped, ordered, and rendered subject to biopolitical epistemological containments. As Dominic Alessio argues “were it not for the ‘Mothers of Empire’ there would be no sons, soldiers, sailors or settlers of empire” (1997, 240). Such mappings were/are not benign for they both rendered the White mother to the figure of the (house)wife and negated the Black and Indigenous mother in her entirety. European women were thus recruited into the projects of Empire and settler coloniality to ensure “racial vigilance and virility… and construct a racially coded notion of who could be intimate [and become kin] with whom” (Stoler 2002, 1–2).

Imperial women’s role was “extended to all those whose lesser race and lower morals marked them out as in need of imperious maternity” (Alessio 1997, 253). As middle-class White (mestiza) (settler) women joined the workforce in the second half of the 20th century, it is of no surprise that they filled the roles of state social reproduction in social work, early childhood and primary school teaching, nursing, and health visiting for it was from here that they would continue to police the racialised line of negation of Black and Indigenous motherhood (Davin 1978; Motta 2017).

It was and is essential to target the Black and Indigenous mother, for she was/is a key figure in the transmission of kinship relationships, intergenerational wisdoms, and social economies of care (Simpson 2017; Alessio 1997). She was/is re-presented as a monstrous threat to propriety and the modern/colonial family and yet employed away from her children to care for those of the mistress of the house, whilst often subject to the violences of its master (Alessio 1997; Davin 1978). She was/is stripped of her children through complex inter-layered state sanctioned violences of the necessity of precarious work, strategies of assimilation and removing “the Indian from the man” in which white passing/mestizo children were/are removed, violent logics of dispossession from land and kin, and/or the targeting of black and indigenous youth for incarceration or assassination.

I remember the home economics teacher who looked at me for coming in late and breaking the sewing machine needle, for asking questions about gendered school dress and authoritarian rules, looking at me as though I was dirty, smelly, a mess. She grabbed me once, dragged me out of class. I remember the history teacher who, no matter how hard I tried, only ever noticed the well-behaved white middle class girls who had nothing really to say but were neat and tidy and mirrored her; who was I, daughter of single mother, coming in from that public housing estate?

I remember the white woman magistrate who seemed to take pleasure in putting me in my place and threatening to hand over my two-year-old child to an abuser. Who was I to assume I might speak back to the court, Dr maybe but still always-fundamentally
a brown single mumma who was probably asking for it and lying anyway? My stomach drops and I feel as if the ground might swallow me whole as I remember.

Forced to leave another home in less than a year, mid-pandemic and mid housing crisis; white middle class apartments; brown single mumma family. We are not welcome here. Notes kept for little things, lists written, held, furtive white woman eyes from behind curtains, through slightly ajar doors, mistrust and disgust left to fester to then pounce, anonymously of course so there is no right of return or reply, with tales of indeterminate indiscretions and abstract petty unproven non-abidance of rules to landlords. Fear to laugh or cry too loudly; fear to invite over kin; disciplining my children, disciplining myself. We are not welcome here.

It does not therefore come as a surprise, the mistreatments, nonrecognitions, and forced precarities of the Collective from the (settler) colonial/ modern state of reason and law at the hands of the White (mestizo) Woman. It is thus no aberration that on the day I write these words the officer who shot and killed Aboriginal woman JC in Geraldton in September 2019, was found not guilty of her murder and manslaughter. As Durrumbal, South Sea Islander journalist-scholar Amy McQuire (2021) states:

The family had hoped for a just outcome – an outcome that had been denied every single Aboriginal family who had suffered and grieved for those who had died in custody – Mulrunji, John Pat, Lloyd Boney, Robert Walker, Ms Dhu, Ms Wynne, Ms Day, Mr Briscoe, Mark Mason snr. There are so many names, so many families, so many communities, where history tells us there is no “justice” in the white [wo]man’s system. Despite hundreds of black deaths, there has never been a single conviction. While blackfellas continue to die behind bars, in paddy wagons, on the street in handcuffs, the police and prisons see this as business as usual, and the coronial processes and the courts legitimate that view.

To re-vision and enflesh a citizenship from Black and Indigenous motherhood thus means inhabiting this figure of the non-mother, the mother-denied, and with it the subterranean territories of peripheral and marginal space that have been rendered abject, irrational, and dangerous. Her citizenship (m)otherwise does not begin through escape from the sphere of social reproduction and the figure of the mother as it is her kin and family that she has been denied. Nor is there any easy investment and inevitable kinship with lineages of White feminisms or nice white middle class feminised people for, as Sandy Grande has argued, feminism’s failure to acknowledge “the complicity of white women in the history of domination… has positioned mainstream feminisms alongside other colonialist discourses” (2003, 329). We are thus not (yet, or ever) a we.

No, her citizenship is emergent in the recovery of the roots and routes of our dismemberment and re-membering of the unbroken ancestral connections with which to bring healing balm to the pain and exile of systemic dispossession and (attempted) murder and kindle our erotic creative desires.
It is a politics of sovereign desire in which homeplace, and Black/Indigenous motherhood become intimate territories of survivance, resistance, political organising, and kinship making beyond the constraints of hetero-patriarchal forms of possessive kinship making/breaking and (political) subjectivity (TallBear 2018, 2020). It is vital not to conflate Indigenous and non-Indigenous feminised experiences of homecoming and home because the aim of (settler) colonialism is for “settlers to make a place their home… [by] destroy[ing] and disappear[ing] the Indigenous peoples that live there” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 6).

Homeplace, kin, (racialised) motherhood, thus take on another meaning as a historical and contemporary place of renewal and self-recovery, where our stories can be told and we can become authors of the script of political being, and where we come home through re-connection and re-membering. This is a feminised and decolonising epistemological politics that does not seek recognition in choreographies which are forged through our onto-epistemological denial and rendition to less-than-human. Rather there is an embrace of the (im)possibility of our passing (Ahmed 1999) in which we cultivate the infra-structures of care that enable us to choose, as an epistemological and political collective in-relation choice, the deep, dark, ancient re-birthing power of (in)visibility and coming to voice and/as political being on our own terms.

Part four: homecoming (to desire)

*We invoke the ancestors, abuelas, and four elements before beginning the first of our diálogos de saberes. We then sit in circle, mestiza, black, indigenous-mestiza mothers and daughters and Black and mestiza men, our sons, lovers and brothers, all participants in different and sometimes overlapping intersectional feminist and decolonial movements and political experiences. We read in turns from the story of finding the wild woman/la mujer salvaje. There are moments of silence as we pause to take in some of the depth of the words and wisdoms being spoken. Someone notices that a colibri (hummingbird) comes to hover next to us. A sacred animal spirit and animal totem of the city of Cali. We come to a close of our ceremonial invocation and collective reading/breathing into life of the wild woman and move to the suggested activity of making our wild woman archetype with cloth and string and other craft elements that had been shared between us. As we stitch, sew, and stick ‘her’ together, we begin to dialogue about a thematic that has been emergent in our own practise and work in relation to movements and communities deepening the threads of past conversations and dialogues. We discuss the use and exhaustion of occupying the figure of the survivor. Yes, we had all in different ways suffered and continued to suffer systemic violences, and yes, we had moved away from being “victims” spoken about and for in our combined rich political heritages and hi/herstories. But we were tired, tired of constant struggle and being in relation to the Power and Processes that had caused us (in the plural both of those present and those in which we were in relation) harm. We talked, bringing in examples and noting down our reflections onto the white board beside us. We laughed as we pieced together our creations and we told stories of being the survivor and feeling stuck in that binary*
subjectivity. We worked towards the insights of the story of the wild woman determining her sovereignty and knowing-being not in relation to Power; not exhausted by the (im) possibility of recognition but as free in relation in the mangrove swamps and margins of our own communities and relations. Of what it might mean and involve to embody together, and despite the violences, the power of black joy and the power of wearing together other modes of living, defending, caring for land and each other. As the time of the workshop moved near to its end, someone suggested ending with a meditation to go to meet our wild woman and listen to her talk to us and offer gifts we might carry with us outside of this sacred time and space.

Now, three years later, this wild woman archetype doll has stayed with us, with many of the participants still in Cali, and others such as myself in different lands and territories. We talk of them not as things but as living archetypal energies and wisdom holders in relation offering us ongoing threads and seeds of a becoming otherwise in thought and practise. Here we see the deeply pedagogical process of meaning-making and of constructing liberatory theory as an enfleshed knowing in relation; as a moment of our coming into (political) being otherwise, as an element in our healing of the exile from self, other, and cosmos of dispossession. This is a thread in our weaving of other relationalities with which to tejer and trensar other modes of communing and enfleshing political subjecthood and politics and/as life with the multiple territories that hold us and which we honour, protect, and nurture. These kinds of epistemological-political processes do not reduce reason to cognition or merely cognitive (individualised) objects and processes; rather, there are multiple languages and literacies of which re-connection to the territories of the body with the territories of Madre Tierra and the Ancestors is key. In these ecologies of critical intimacy (Motta 2019) – as opposed to critical distance that marks the onto-epistemology and containments of reason of modernity/coloniality – we bring together story, ceremony, music, dance, and sacred crafting, affecting connection with our capacity to re-enflesh ourselves in the world and word.

Ceremonies such as that of the Wild Woman/La Mujer Salvaje are our ceremonies in which we co-weave ourselves back to the entirety of our living and creative potential; in which we re-map and heal the intimate territories of our own bodies and psyches in relation. Yet Choctaw scholar-dancer Tara Browner’s foregrounding of relation in her discussion of the Anishinaabeg way is also translatable to other Indigenous and Afro ways “in the [Anishinaabeg] worldview, spirituality is not separate from the business of daily life, and activities cannot necessarily be conceptualised within the Western binary categories of sacred and secular” (2002, 35). Nor do the binaries of intimacy and embodiment versus reason and political citizenship hold, for they reproduce our (epistemological) dispossession and negation (Motta 2018a). Creating up from the roots of our survivance and the strength and wisdoms of re-membering and reconnecting to our ancestors, our lineages, and the exiled and shamed parts of ourselves, we heal our inner territories of knowing-being. Like this we re-member our erotic power which, as Audre
Lorde describes, “lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (1989, 1). It is a deep knowing or joy which forms the basis for an articulation of voice and political subjectivity which once experienced, cannot be forgotten and reburied. Like this we free the wildness of our desire from its misnaming, violation, and maiming (TallBear 2018). Like this we re-unite the Black mother with her kin in relation and with her creative erotic fires and waters of life.

I/we take a deep breath and bring attention to our shoulders and spine, places where we carry the marks of systematic trauma and places which can become tight and contained in the hypervigilance of survival. Inhale – we allow the breath to enter our back ribs and straighten our spines. Exhale – we allow a loosening and relaxing of the neck and shoulders and jaw. Sitting in circle I tend to the tulsi (holy basil), placing her soft sweet, aromatic, and dry leaves into the sacred container to be held by the grandmother replenishing presence of nettle/ortiga and covered with a layer of queen-warrior yarrow/milenrama – protectress of the blood. I pour the boiling waters as we place her living plant into the centre of the altar. We read of her myths and stories as Lakshmi in Hindu mythology, as elixir of life. We learn of her formal properties – expectorant, adaptogen. We weave multiple threads of learning with her to then become one with her as we journey into the inner territories-in-relation to find her as archetype and ancestor. She is the heart opener; she is the revealing of and revelling in, the possibility to be loved and to love. She gently helps to clear the gunk of unfelt grief from our lungs. She is gentle yet fierce mother/lover.

Our citizenship and coming/re-turning into political being (m)otherwise thus foregrounds interdependence with our plant kin, and more-than-human and non-human kin which as Blu Wakpa describes “transcends human-to-human interactions and presents an alternative to Western epistemologies” (2016, 119). There is the co-creation and co-birthing of a polyphonic healing and homecoming in which the different strands are not in competition but inter-weave, shapeshift, compliment in their plurality (Kimmerer 2013). Enfleshed into our coming into political being (m)otherwise are practices in which we re-learn the divinity of our senses and drop into the world and our bodies in-relation. We learn to see anew, feel anew, taste anew, touch anew, and speak what needs to be breathed into life.

Part five: living across the intimacies of two continents

Hetero-patriarchal capitalist coloniality institutes in the intimacies of desire frontiers of hierarchical disconnection that are policed by the White wo(man) and embodied through the entanglement between heteropatriarchal family and/as the premised of invasion, property, and the Colonia/Modern state, governance and (political) subject. The Black, Indigenous, Indigenous-Mestiza mother is relegated to non-being and monstrous threat on the other side of the policed White frontier of Right, Reason, and Law. She is subject to complex and reinforcing systemic and systematic onto-epistemological violences.
A path to revisioning and enfleshing political subjecthood and being from these subterranean margins of la Otra Colombia and Bla(c)k Australia and the Black, Indigenous, and Indigenous-Mestiza mother is tenderly made through pedagogical practices which suture our systemic wounds and recover the epistemological majesty of black flesh. (Re)learning to live and love across the intimacies of multiple territories of land and body, of time and space, of human and non-human and more-than-human takes us from a place of negation, which can result in our living death, to a place-relation of joy, care, and decolonising love. This is constituted and enfleshed through a praxis of homecoming and awakening of our erotic fires and waters and nurtures our collective creative liberations.

Homecoming to the creative capacities of ourselves as Black, Indigenous, Mestizo-Indigenous (m)others and re-weaving the connection with our plant ancestors and more-than-human and non-human kin foregrounds the sacred enfleshment that is at the heart of what re-visioning citizenship and political subjectivity from the racialised mother can gift to her/us and all.

Notes

1 When I have used capitals for words like Power, Reason in the text this indicates that these are the articulations of the universal and disposessing gaze of White power (White in Sara Ahmed’s (2007) sense of Whiteness). The slippage between I/we is deliberate and is a way to try to indicate that I am in relation to the processes written about, but it is not possible without losing this relationality to drop this into a unitary ‘we’. Italicised sections are all her/history: some are temporal-historical shifts in narrative, and others are my personal in relation more recent herstory/present. Re-membering and honouring how Indigenous-decolonising time is cyclical and past and future are present with us now.


3 Abya Yala is a notion coined by the Cunas in Panama “to refer to the territory and the indigenous nations of the Americas.” The use of this name seeks to “confront the colonial weight present in ‘Latin America’ understood as a cultural project of westernisation” (Walsh 2007, 236).

4 Since invasion began in 1788 thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have been forcibly removed from their families and communities through numerous government laws, politics, and practices. On 13 February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a formal apology to Australia’s Indigenous peoples, particularly to the Stolen Generations whose lives had been blighted by past government policies of forced child removal and Indigenous assimilation.

References

Ahmed, Sara. 1999. “‘She’ll wake up one of these days and find she’s turned into a nigger’: passing through hybridity.” Theory, Culture & Society, 16(2): 87–106. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/02632769922050566.


Bermúdez, Norma L., and J. Tamayo. 2017. Liderazgos sutiles: Historias de re-evolucioncs cotidianas de mujeres populares en la Comuna 18 de Cali, Colombia [Suble (female) leadership: The histories of everyday re-evolutions of popular class women in the Comuna 18 neighbourhood Cali, Colombia] Cali, Colombia: Casa Chontaduro.


