A Botanical of Grief

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Abstract

A Botanical of Grief writes connection to our Ancestors, delving into and relating their reinvented and white-coded experiences and spaces that they occupied. Through a poetic triptych, as protocol for talking to the dead, we reach to the need for irreducible narratives, to be accessed by descendants in defining themselves. We represent what we hear in the spaces between, silences that speak volumes and call for us to take heed. We ask, what is grief in the afterlife of enslavement? We explore deep grief and fear as fruit and seed, realms in which The Bahamas, The Caribbean countries, and their Diasporas remain moored. Our writing makes explicit the tensions inherent in deep grief, denied public mourning, and fear of connection, reverberating throughout diaspora, unresting in the blood and bones of those that went before us. We are represented only in select details of the history of this land. The weighted sorrow of the forgotten seeks to make new worlds. This exploration navigates a perspective outside the colonial presence of idyllic beauty and exoticism.

Keywords: Talking to the dead, grief, unfixing coloniality, Afro-Indigeneity, mourning as remedy
Prologue

As writers, our attention is drawn to how colonial understandings of our society might be unfixed through creative empowerment.

We write connection to our Ancestors, delving into and relating their reinvented and white-coded experiences and spaces that they occupied. We reach to the need for irreducible narratives, to be accessed by descendants in defining themselves.

We present a poetic triptych. Individual contributions accompany a collaboratively authored piece. We represent what we hear in the spaces between, silences that speak volumes and call for us to take heed. We ask: how does one grieve in the afterlife of enslavement? How is life not perpetual mourning? What happens if we refuse to disentangle black diasporic life from poetics? The triptych employs the magic of the number three to point at christianization implicit in black nation state forgetting, amidst its own germination and fruition, in a more complex representation of nation and nationalism.

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We see Afro/Indigenous Ancestors as smothered voices that can be accessed, honoured and spoken of should we allow them entrance. What does it mean, in this difficult legacy of related blackness and indigeneity, to live blackness and Bahamianness unapologetically, without transparency, in ways that nourish and resuscitate?
Mourning: A Bounty

the bones of our ancestors are sold at our shores
    white and powdered
a part of our bartered selves these bones
are my mother's garden a haunting
beauty uprooted
do you know how to rest inside this life

i wore my mother's fingerprint the first time in forever
jelly hovered there translucent
just beside my left tricep that day i was praying in the ocean
for them and for us
it has been so all along
now i wait for the wind to tell me what to feel
picture death in all its outfits
crossing into an oncoming lane longing
for a return to its original form i wonder when
is the right time to tell you your grandmother's stories
what to say but thank you here is this in return
my grandmother left a plot of land when she died
i will never thank her for it i will plant the umbilical cord of my children here
hoping 1/3 of her blood is enough
for this earth to remember the weight of her feet upon it
there are ways our blood marks a place
and no rain can wash us away
let ya self bleed gal
right into the soil
and watch life grow
they are beginning to forget stamping their history over ours
stealing my grandmother's stories asking god to sprinkle holy water
over thanksgivings we offered starry skies
i wonder in the unsovereign do we own our own stories
next generation will move in knowing nothing
of cereus beneath lignum vitae
my connection anchored in a yard not my own
someone else lives
in grammie's house now spreading
down in
the
ground
i thought to leave fallow when we were pluckt out
WITH TEETH
Henay

the child calls its name out to his mother taking pictures of my vulva

my vagina has teeth here
and a fleshy skin tag on otherwise smooth brown skin
the old women say this is all perfectly normal
they think we unprotected
photos are just to ensure the dentition is healthy
small sharp points aligned
the boy’s mother is a dental gynecologist
she fixes the future
i tell her we can write it into becoming she hears the house’s name
directs me to the purple paint around the door sills
it matches the stripes on the parking berms downtown
where the government is going to build yet another jail
i’m left in this house with four walls and no roof
oversized chairs cradles for the trouble that lives here
interior completely refurbished in hospital white
no vegetation comes creeping in
the roof is just concrete like this ceiling
i write a concrete ceiling even into the afterworld
does luxie visit anymore i wonder
the doctor puts her body between the camera
recording my transgressions and passers by
it’s a door
the house
is missing a way into
or out of
its pink facade
Her Legacy

Glinton

I am rememorying
the black woman's journey to love
Before it muted brown children
growing in their mother's wombs.

I was born with silence
on a clef tongue
a garden of weeping
a gift from my mother's mother's mother
& a seawall of her daughter's rage

I wish to join these severed halves
this weeping rage
there is a journey to be found
in stitching one's self together.

There are stories she has never
spoken, the women whose womb
I know from time my mother's
mother spent there

Sometimes I pluck at them
poems emerge from this sewn sea of words
this makeshift tongue filled with a hope for healing for
me
her

& us all.