

## 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**

*Ginton*

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.