

Thy Will Be Done: Radical Love as Self-Other Healing Praxis

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This chapter is a dialogic, intergenerational, and cross-racial space unfolding between us. We follow a question-and-answer-approach, creating a written conversation between two womynx born during different generations and raised and schooled in different parts of the world. We were brought together in a doctoral program at a public university and are deeply cognizant of the ways that academia's traditions position us on opposing ends along hierarchized power dynamics: student-teacher, advisee-advisor, mentee-mentor, younger-older, pre- and post-dissertation. From day one of having met in the academic classroom, we practiced and modeled a radical love and respect for each other that intentionally abandons, if not betrays, knowledge traditions that promote and protect racialized meritocracy and the status quo. We spilled our excitement for and about each other's non-negotiable articulations of our daily refusals into late night messaging. Even amidst the COVID-19 pandemic raging on top of previous and unresolved pandemics (i.e. growing Black maternity death rates, food insecurity among trans lives), our linking to each other via phone conversations and text messaging "has not missed a beat" (Perpetual, personal communication). Instead, we have remained deeply invested in each other's pursuit of finding health amidst rampant white supremacy, anti-Black racism, ableism, misogyny, and hetero-patriarchy in and outside of academia.

We turn to Black feminist writer Toni Cade Bambara who opens her novel "The Salt Eaters" (1992) with candid insight to restoring our (Black, Brown, Queer, working class,

immigrant womyn's) health: "Just so's you're sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, cause wholeness is no trifling matter. A lot of weight when you're well" (p. 10). We, too, deliberately choose "healing" over our "wellness." The concretized, racist, and Westernized definitions of what it takes and means to be or get "well" are not meant for us. Institutionalized and state-sanctioned forms of wellness surveille and control our bodies and lifeworlds. We were not born "well," and the current industry of corporatized "wellness" ensures that we will never be "well" to thrive. We don't want to be "well." Instead, we seek our healing as a set of ongoing practices that we define among and for ourselves. "Healing" in this sense is our collective fugitive declarations of our humanities and futures.

The systematic subordination of people is fundamental to understanding the intimate interconnections between global settler colonialism and postcolonialities that are driven by land theft and appropriation, racialized capitalist economies that chase after the commodification of land and life, and the devastations these maintain particularly in economically under-resourced lives. However, these systemic forces of violence transcend time-spaces and blast right through our raced, classed, and gendered lifeworlds. Having access to more remote spaces in academia during the past few years did not protect us from physical and mental injuries that ongoing horrors, terrors, and traumas have etched into our bodies. Both of us have been diagnosed with medical conditions that make the functioning of our bodies regularly painful, sometimes impossible. We ask, how do we restore, recover, and protect ourselves, our bodies, as we walk through deadly minefields? What are some immediate as well as more sustainable remedies that do not pave healing into dependence on profit-driven and privatized cures (i.e. Big Pharma)?

Can we demand liberation with the same terminology of “healing” that also declares our death sentences?

Here, we speak openly about our beliefs and practices of healing as simultaneously accomplices to maintaining our collective fight against the systemic erasure of our lives. We posit healing is a praxis, fueled by radical love for self and others, built by individual commitments to and hinged on collectivized desires towards enacting liberation from economic exploitation and social oppression. To know about and do the work of healing with this purpose means protesting, resisting, and refusing to participate in the reproduction of the injustices and inequalities current globally hegemonized economic and social relations spew into every realm of our lives. As individual-collective labor, we contest healing births individual visions to be linked with collective enactments of freedom. Moreover, healing work is political, a “Source of Self-Regard” (Morrison, 2019) and others concurrently. Healing is protesting, and as Audre Lorde wrote, “I see protest as a genuine means of encouraging someone to feel the inconsistencies, the horror, of the lives we are living. Social protest is to say that we do not have to live this way” (2008, p. 163). We seek our healing with and through each other’s courage. While healing fueled by love cannot cure or dismantle actual structures of capitalist, white supremacist heteropatriarchy, healing practices sustained by “a hermeneutics of love” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 136) embrace risk taking to find multiple pathways leading to healing. And healing grounded in radical love can be a powerful antidote to defragment our socially constructed differences. As Toni Cade Bambara accentuates, we offer hope for the living, thank those who came before us (but are not afraid to disagree), and refuse to participate in state-sanctioned

traditions and rituals that destroy and kill us. Healing as radical knowledge of self and others in action can move us to do this freedom-seeking work.

In the section that follows, we braid together themes from a conversation we recorded in which we each answered six key questions about healing in our lives. We do not offer analysis and categorization of our own words. We will not allow the radical love-abiding healing we frame here to be shoved under the rug of academic conventions. Radical healing is dangerous, and it cannot be tamed and contained. It will move freely into the lives of those who have wanted and needed it for what seems forever. We conclude by recasting healing as a praxis of radical self-other love for freedom.

We Done Resurrecting Ourselves: Declarations of Loving Our Lives

What is my origin story with regards to the healing?

PAH: My story of healing began when I was conceived. This is not something I have been consistently and consciously aware of throughout my life. My mother, my muse, the source of my foundation, prayed to Our Lady of Perpetual Help for a girl when she found out she was pregnant at 46. She named me, a Ghanaian-Liberian girl born Monday, a Virgo, after the Virgin Mary herself: Perpetual Anastasia Adjwoa Baiswa Hayfron.

From a young age I was conditioned to be silent to survive. I was teased and bullied from kindergarten until high school for various things including how I was dressed. When I told my mother, she told me to “ignore it” and do my schoolwork. Since birth my mother dressed me up, my love of accessories and shoes is birthed from her. She always made sure her children were “presentable” leaving the house. By the time I entered high school I learned to suffer in silence *and* look damn good doing it. The non-negotiable standard my mother had set for herself in

regard to dressing her children is something I adopted for myself and cultivated into a survival mechanism for 27 years.

My muse is a devout catholic; I was born into colonization and generational self-hate. My fate premeditated and involuntarily sealed when I was baptized as an infant in my father's Methodist church. My muse's self-betrayal became my biggest conquest, and that has led me to the divinity I was stripped off as an infant. Healing is something I will do for the rest of my life as radical self-love is my birthright.

PKH: I may not have called my curiosities about the always-present urgencies for social change “healing.” Neither would I have linked my commitment to teaching and learning to “healing work,” at least not in the ways I speak of these terms now as an adult. “Healing” echoes throughout most social media platforms these days, especially since COVID-19. This global pandemic has laid bare structures and mechanisms of globalized capitalist nastiness. But we have always been in trouble. The lives of BIPoC¹ peoples were never guaranteed in time-spaces where settler colonialities reigned. I spent my adolescence and early adulthood feeling tormented while entering conversations about social change and racial justice with the same terminologies that also uphold white supremacy and thus our subordinations. “Healing” is one of those terms; it tends to privilege individual needs over communal approaches to maintaining health that will benefit all.

Growing up on both sides of the Atlantic, I experienced first-hand the contradiction between healing self and collective healing. After a 10-hour flight, I would leave behind or arrive to spaces of economically saturated European nation-states, or systemically

¹ Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

underdeveloped sovereign nations in the Caribbean. The socialized healthcare system of one settler nation-state was directly enmeshed with the plundering of resources of the territories it had colonized centuries before. I knew then I would refuse to look at peoples' lives through the cataracted gaze of white settler coloniality. This meant being consistent about making my teaching and researching pedagogies answerable to people's lives. Just as I demand from myself, I invite students to think of their future teaching and researching purposes. This self-reflexive dialogue is guided by questions like, Whose side is my research on? Who gets hurt? Who benefits? What is my endgame with this research?

Where have I run myself into the ground?

PAH: I've run myself into the ground when choosing the comfort of others over my own to feel/be loved, while never believing those who showed they loved me because it wasn't coming from the people I thought I wanted it from the most. Auntie Nikki Giovanni said on the "Daughters of Series" by Girl Trek (2020), "why are you looking for approval from people who don't look like you!?" This is another area I've been raggedy with myself: devouring perfectionism and washing it down with institutional bleach (Guishard, 2008), creating a false sense of external stability while ignoring my internal mutilation, my silence overall as it pertains to various aspects of myself and my life. My absorption of parenthood at 6 eliminated my childhood innocence. I've had to break my silence for my parentified, inner child to heal. Rationalizing pain so I don't have to feel it has been my ultimate self-betrayal.

PKH: I live for the beehives among us; I understand my individual being and living in this world as intimately connected to my families and communities I do not restrict to shared biology. So, I run myself into the ground when I give into forces that exploit the ways I am generous with my

labor, energy and creativity; I run out of steam when I am isolated from my collective being.

Racialized capitalism commodifies and exploits laboring bodies without taking into account the mental and physical toll this takes on us and our communities. I have grown “sick and tired of being sick and tired” (words of Fannie Lou Hamer) when I have allowed academia to take over time-spaces we need for ourselves. As a student and faculty, I have repeatedly told myself, “I will not let [name of university] kill me.”

Where and how has the world run me into the ground?

PAH: My muse was my first bully, then from primary school to high school I was bullied. For any of my experiences as a Black human to be relevant in academia I must cite my primary sources. It is ridiculous yet clear that we, Black womxn, are mandated to constantly re-traumatize ourselves in order to prove to the white mind an abuse that is historical and ongoing (Evans-Winters, 2019). The Black body and mind battle lifelong assaults of micro and macro aggressions from the time Black people are born, as a result of reigning social structures that legitimize white supremacy. My chances of dying in childbirth as a result of my identity are quadruple in comparison to white womxn as a consequence of this. The children that I may or may not have the opportunity to raise in the future are more likely to die while driving, walking, simply existing...because of the color of my skin. They will be born with the epigenetics associated with my survival tactics. This grave world has taught me to neglect my multiplicity and compartmentalize it in order to survive. School systems were not created for Black students like me in mind. What it takes to be considered a scholar in the eyes of the institution, I see as a death sentence for my spirit. However, I am anxious about whether my lived experiences are worthy for my academic pursuits because they are not in accordance with “institutional

standards”. Instead, institutions have run me into the ground by neglecting my multiplicity, leaving me anxiously second-guessing myself at every turn, which is a struggle every day. Hence, by acknowledging my rage while pursuing my doctorate, I have encountered deep love and honor. In the words of Robin G. Kelly (2018), “Black study and resistance must begin with love. ... To love this way requires relentless struggle, deep study, and critique” (p. 164).

PKH: None of our social institutions were originally purposed to hold our collective thinking, strategizing, or guard our practices of care for each other. I do not trust and neither do I rely on academic spaces to do this for us. We cannot seek love and acceptance from places that built their futures by banking on our destruction. Hence my social relations are deeply political, particularly with BIPoC, immigrant, gender-fluid persons, and non-white womxn. As much as we relax in the company of each other to speak truths to our daily struggles, us coming together is always guided by the intensity of “when’s their next strike against us coming? Because it is coming!” Having to be on guard 24/7 will never allow us to breathe deeply, think openly, and love freely. The non-stop murdering of Black and trans lives, whether in public or within the privacy of home life, speak to how this country is free to kill Black and trans bodies. In academia I have experienced this erasure of the space between life and death through “spirit murdering” (Love, 2019) that reduces our existence to “a life of exhaustions, a life of doubt, a life of state sanctioned violence, and a life consumed with the objective of surviving” (p. 39). It is an ontologically tight space that defaults us to being breakable, exploitable and always replaceable. We are drained of our creative sparks that can set free our love and joy for each other.

How do I heal myself?

PAH: I pay attention to what I deserve, being hypervigilant about unconsciously lying to myself and others because “I don’t want anyone to think...”. After 27 years of not being my fully expressed self in all areas of my life, I am committed to deconditioning from self-betrayal and the suppression of my multiplicity to survive a world that hates me (Cooper, 2018). My destiny doesn’t require anyone’s approval. I show gratitude to the highest by *choosing* to show up as the best version of myself, unapologetic in my truth. I have healed by choosing my own comforts over others’ in order to give love. Once I unlearned the things I thought I loved, I began to receive the love I deserved, and I realized, radical love is my birthrite. I used to fear how others perceived me when I was surviving. In the midst of this pandemic, we have been forced to be still and see we aren’t small in comparison to system and structures, as White Supremacy has brainwashed us to believe. In releasing my own shackles of survival and engaging in the process of creating, I have been able to return to my roots and acknowledge the divinity of my ancestors, igniting my own flame of divinity.

PKH: The words of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney have tossed me many lifelines. They explain, our work towards mobilizing each other within the confines of academia towards forms of freedom is to be “in but not of the modern university” (2013, p. 26). For these spaces of “the undercommons,” the authors question, “What is that work and what is its social capacity for both reproducing the university and producing fugitivity?” Doing subversive academic work through teaching, service and research has meant positioning my teaching practices and the learning I facilitate against the currents of conventions. I take great care of my teaching. I am a knowledge mobilizer who intentionally teaches and learns *against* Eurocentric, settler colonial, heteronormative, and ableist traditions of my discipline (education). Teaching and learning

against mainstreamed, whitewashed knowledge can create a strengthened collective critical consciousness among us. Unlearning what we have internalized to know about ourselves and each other has healing powers because it steers us through questioning master narratives that perpetuate and protect one-sided stories (and lies!) about us and our communities. Knowledge mobilization is utterly relational and willfully heals injuries committed against us by curricular violence (Patel, 2019). Moreover, healing through knowledge mobilization is guided by a fearless, radical love for naming all that is not yet; it fosters our fugitivity that “is (in) the invention of escape, stealing away in the confines, in the form, of a break” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 51). Knowledge mobilization as a healing practice also contributes to the protection of well-being of others, and I teach future accomplices to declare, “this is how I want to be loved, seen, heard. This is what I want you to know about me, and us. And if you don’t stop hurting me, I will know what actions I need to take to make sure I am going to be okay.”

Who else participates in my healing work?

PAH: ME! My mother. My friends. My Virgos PKH & JME. My ancestors. My babies. Mother Mercy. God. My Grandmothers. Black Womxn! Cannabis.

PKH: My students, my elders, partner, my children (also beyond blood-relations), my ancestors, chosen families, and me. Everything I do, whether for myself or for others, is a collective undertaking. In fact, my co-conspirators remind me constantly of the importance of resting, reflecting, pausing, and eating healthy while doing movement-nourishing work. I tend to overlook these self-healing practices.

How are others benefitting from your healing work?

PAH: On September 6, 2018 at 4:39 PM, the world began to unravel for me. I was in your (PKH's) TLC class and you stated, "Unlearning what we know is hard and unsettling... it's often painful to be groundbreaking. Many people get depressed and cynical." This is exactly what has taken place for me in the pursuit of unlearning in order to survive and embrace my rage. If it wasn't for your radical love and presence, I would not have had the insight to recognize my pain was worthy of acknowledgement. At a time when I was filled with despair, you said, "I know you are in pain, write about it!" Your radical love unapologetically honors my rage; your encouragement of my healing made me incapable of suffering in silence. The institution isn't worthy of you and they can never kill you because unconditional love never dies. Your love is uncomfortable, because there is no growth in comfort, but it's invigorating at the same time. Your presence and spirit transform the classroom to a sanctuary.

PKH: One of the first things you (PAH) said to me for this project was: "we die every day, and we resurrect ourselves every day." This past year you showed me your courage to surmount an internalized expectation to reinvent ourselves after each racist and misogynist blow we receive. You taught me that there is a limit to how much pain and self-degradation we can endure. In your rage I see you claw after the love and strength you have for yourself. It runs deeply and next to other people's fed-upness with the nastiness in our world. The joy and range of your rage is infectious and intimidating. Just gorgeous! It is magnificent that you have chosen the infinities of you over the deadly pre-determined destinations of you! Your strategic refusals to secure your self-growth ignites our collective getting-out and getting-free.

Conclusion

The labor of healing through and with radical love for each other, whether through teaching and learning, birth assistance, mentoring, or community organizing, does not rest on the assumption that BIPOC, immigrant, gender-fluid, poor and working class people are broken. The healing we speak to disagrees with current trends in healing that focus on personal self-care and benefitting, if not protecting, individual wellness (Delaney, 2020). This dominant narrative about healing is not grounded in collective practices of healing as both starting point and final destination. We emphasize, our practices of healing are not grounded in the brokenness of our bodies and lives.

The healing we speak to does not necessitate causality between injury and healing. We do not enact healing practices *because* we wait for events to strike and injure us, discriminate against us, marginalize us, and attempt to destroy us. Our radically loving healing does not wait; we engage in healing work *despite the* struggles and the injuries. We choose healing as a way of knowing and moving through life while seeking the company and wisdom of each other. We seek our futures *despite ongoing* supremacy, oppression, and dispossessions committed against us. While our healing work is surely responsive to daily racist and transphobic assaults on ourselves and communities, our healing labor is not vindictive of ongoing systemic violence. We participate in our radical healing practices and pedagogies because *through and with* them we seek and demand better living conditions for all. Radically loving healing positions us at a threshold between what has not worked for us, has perpetually endangered us, that we no longer want, and creates social systems, resources, **and shifts us towards collective responsibility for nourishing “care webs” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 33)** that are more equally accessible to us. Healing that positions us at this threshold is freeing, liberating, but moreover, fugitive from

oppressive and subordinating forces in our lifeworlds. This healing is mobilizing. It moves us collectively.

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