

Wor(l)ds of rebellion: Rosemary rememberings, grief pedagogies and honouring the elders

Posted on June 6, 2024 by Sara C. Motta
[vc_row][vc_column][vc_column_text]A few weeks have passed since our encounter in *Reading Decoloniality*, – so tender, new/old/ancient threads, faces familiar from faraway territories in my memory, faces new yet recognisable. I turn to my plant kin: Rosemary/romero. We gift her in sacred circle to support our re-memberings from these timelines and from deep time. I am called to (re)turn to her in this reflection piece.

The rosemary sprig I have in my hands and that I bring up to my nostrils to dwell with her fragrance is in fact native to these coastal lands where fresh and salt waters meet in the mangrove swamps of unceded Worimi and Awabakal Lands of so called Australia. One of her names is Westringia Fruticosa and she grows to between one to two metres tall, with white and violet flowers. She flowers mostly in spring and summer but sometimes, like today, she surprises us with her flowers in late Autumn/early Winter. She can dance through drought and floods, weather salt water, and

flourish in multiple soil types. She is a beauty-filled and gifting survivor of the wilds.

During *Reading Decoloniality* I shared through the metaphor, the materiality, the ancestrality, the enfleshment and/as ecologies of intimacy of the mangrove swamps. I proposed how we might re-read covid (not) as crisis and apocalypse but as lived through Black, Brown, Indigenous (m)other eyes (Motta, 2022a). Through these, our genealogies of apocalypse and genocide are foundational and ongoing to our experiences of living in the borderlands and margins of (non)being and onto-epistemological (non)recognition of heteropatriarchal capitalist coloniality. They are not exceptional moments or events but ongoing brutalisation constitutive of the fabric(ation) of the real within capitalist-coloniality.

Yet, our experience of systematic and systematic gratuitous violence and violations that the racialized (m)other body as flesh has survived is also a site of (m)other wisdoms and modes of world-making. These are deeply relational and enflesh the epistemological as the ontological in which we come to re-member and know ourselves and each other as a project of futurities (m)otherwise (Motta, 2022b). I shared that this necessarily means as Auntie Theresa always tells us, bringing the territories of Mother Earth, of Country, and our fleshy territories of the negated (non)bodies to the centre of our praxis. It requires us to weave worlds and/as words otherwise (Motta, 2021).

And in this bringing to presence and visibility on our own terms and our own tongues, we birth new-ancient languages and categories ways we make meaning, strengthen the courage to refuse, and build healing relationalities of reason, the political, the politics of knowledge and of critique. These ancestral tongues and future generation dreamings move us beyond the asphyxiations of negation of the lifeworlds and/as knowledges of the racialized and feminised (m)other. Such negation are the conditions of possibility of hetero-patriarchal capitalist coloniality and have been re-produced too, in many traditions of ‘critical’ social and political theory.

Here, we re-member the ancestors as acts of decolonial love-making rebelliousness and irreverence. We share in inter-cultural circles between those on Country and those dis-placed through multiple and plural ways,

herstories and journeys, and the wisdoms of our plant kin. This is a non-essentialised re-turn and re-membering of the Trans Mother. We poeticise our woundings to find the erotic medicines of our collective healings and sovereignty makings. This neither respects nor owes anything, nor has inheritance to the codifications of the modern-colonial state and its imperial global knowledge unmaking and disavowing projects (Motta, Bermudez, Miranda, 2023).

Here I become sister to Auntie Theresa and stand with her in guardianship of Onebygamba learning the plural tongues of the mangroves. We drop into ever deeper forms of deep listening/escucha profunda with our more than human and non-human kin.

There I am in relation to the Abuelas of the Muisca/Chibcha with her waters, guardians of lifeworlds through rivers and mountains, through dreamings and parteras ancestrales.

(T)here I am kin in anti-colonial, anti-Zionist, queer, decolonial autonomous feminist Jewish lineages. I stand with my kin to hold the line against Palestinian genocide, connecting our body-territories in ways that break down the frontiers of Reason, Right, Law and (Political) Subject to honour each other in circles of mutual Black/Indigenous/Queer recognition.

In our wanderings that day/night we came to grief or grief came upon us; and how we must honour our dead, our murdered, the way we have so often been rendered to half-life, our losses, and the violations to which we have been object (Motta, 2018). We honour our grief together in the intimacies of the mangroves enfleshing and protecting our right to opacity (Glissant, 1990). We choose a certain invisibility to the gaze of Whiteness and its ever-tightening grip; realising that we are indecipherable anyway and relishing in this, together with the laugh of the kookaburra circling us as we walk the territories of death so we might find the wisdoms and the keys to re-birth (Motta, 2024, *forthcoming*).

These are the deeply material concrete yet cosmological pedagogies which we teach to, and nurture in, our future generations. We do not share these wisdoms here; for this is intimate pedagogical, cosmological, onto-epistemological work not for the public gaze (Simpson, 2007).

For you, if you:

- Come into relation with my kin and I, and you join us in making medicines with which to heal our wounded young ones from the ravages of this post-industrial smart city (no)place;
- Come and co-design strategies of communing that are irreverent to States and Lettered cities and any desire for recognition within the barbed wire of what is premised on our genocide (Motta and Abeydeera, 2024, *forthcoming*);
- Come and tenderly place your body on the line to co-weave infrastructures of care, and be willing to fall and know our and the Abuelas' arms will hold you and witness you as you are becoming, touch you in the liberating methodologies of stripping (Motta, 2018) which are our ways;

Then you are welcome.

Who does this work: It is us, the racialized and feminised communitarian women, feminised, queer, trans folk and kin – the holders and enfleshment of the ancestors' wisdoms and of liberatory motherlines.

We have been doing this re-membering, cultivating our healing, nurturing our fleshy territories, as (no)body and Country as deep time and future generations forever. We are hypervisibilised by the State and its foot soldiers to justify gratuitous and violating interventions upon our body-territory and our kin (Motta, 2023). We are made violently invisible as leaders and elders, storytellers and medicine women in our own right with our own tongues and world-making wisdoms. But we are also often forgotten in the movements that speak and act in the name of other worlds, futures otherwise and of refusal of capitalist-colonial logics.

This must change.

We are soul tired, and body weary. We are dropping away into houselessness, chronic dis-ease and forced forgetting. We are trodden into the ground through strategies of amnesia as onto-epistemological erasure. This fuels the neo-fascisms of dying empires that characterise this historical-political moment of Time.

Without us, as feminised, racialized, queer, trans elders, leaders, medicine women, storytellers our hopes for futurities (m)otherwise, for future generations, for healing medicines, for onto-epistemological plurality are without roots. They/we are vulnerable to the strategies of anti-life and genocidal logics that seek to erase us and disallow our co-weaving of plural worlds, subjects and relations beyond this System which is at its end.

I made chicken caldo as I wrote this; fed my first grandchild raspberries, made medicine teas for my youngest to bring down his fever and body pains. I know that I and my kin were not meant to survive (Dillard, 2016). I know too that we are here now, and again, and will remain. I handed the youngest of our (m)otherline the rosemary sprig so he might take in her fragrance and re-member, hold on to his relations across deep time and feel them holding him.

Today is day 35 of counting the Omer, of the journey from slavery to liberation in the story of Pesach or Passover; when in our lineages we bring to presence all communities facing imperial power and might and break bread together in sacred circle. This year we met across Palestinian, First Nations and Jewish (m)otherlines, sharing grief, story, courage and our right to joy.

Today is day 35 of counting the Omer, – Malchut she'b'hod – rooting deep in gathering power (Lamm and Ma Shere, 2022).

Today I give thanks and blessings for the space-time of encounter weaved as Reading Decoloniality. I end this piece by invoking an other power, a plural power, a power of water, wind, fire and earth, plant and/as ancestor to accompany us, to nurture us on our journeys of healing liberations, decolonial feminist love-making, and erotic freedom weavings.

Sara C. Motta May 27th 2024 | website | academic profile

[/vc_column_text][vc_separator][vc_column_text]Photo: Onebygamba, Carrington Mangroves, Mulubimba-Newcastle, NSW.[/vc_column_text][/vc_column][/vc_row][vc_row][vc_column][vc_toggle title="Reading group event details" open="true"]

Date: 8th May 2024
Title: Decolonising Critique: Enfleshing Futurities (M)otherwise with Sara C. Motta
Speaker: Sara C. Motta
Chair: Ann Ang
Minutes by: Teodora Todorova

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Ann Ang Su Lee (AASL):

Introduces Sara with her bio from the event promo and extends a warm welcome to the readers in attendance.

Sara:

> Thank you to Teo(dora) for inviting me to participate in the reading group. I extend love to all who have come together across different territories. Present in this space are kin, and those who are on the land I honour [Sara does a land acknowledgement of the country and nation on whose land she stands, and its unceded sovereignty. She acknowledges the 500 nations who make up what is today Australia. She performs several rituals]… I call on water which symbolises flow and connection. I call on fire which symbolises protection and the campfires around which we tell our stories. I call upon the ancestors as an invitation and not an obligation to come together in conversation.
> The article we’ve read for the reading group draws on social theory and theorises Covid as a major point of rupture, crisis, and apocalypse. I wrote it to re-write. An act of making right the stories that are told about us to dehumanise us. Covid was raced, classed, and gendered in its genealogy. And this is not new, but we need to trace its genealogy of coloniality, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. Covid is linked to modern modes of governance which subjugate and dehumanise those who threaten the dominant matrix of power. Covid reproduced multiple invisibilised modes of violence. My work draws on

Marxist and Statist social theory to push back against criminalisation and call for access to healthcare, centring the racialised mother, challenging the logic of dispossession – child-removal, and the incarceration of children. This comes from a place of decolonial feminism. Foregrounding survivance – care and reciprocity and presence. A reading as an epistemological process which is deeply ontological.

The capitalist, colonialist system reproduces itself by marking our bodies and not just our territories. It's about healing these scars by reconnecting with the wisdom of our ancestors – our abuelas – to heal. A re-wilding. The process of re-wilding is about coming into being (m)otherwise – about decolonising and enfleshing our futurities. Rooting-in our complex present in our strength and knowledges. The mangrove swamps are a key point in this process. The indigenous people who lived in this land at the point of encounter with the invading colonisers were seen as empty and disgusting in the way the land was also seen as a dirty and disease infested swamp. As Terra nullius. When the invasion arrived the people of the land hid in the swamp and that's how they survived the violence.

There is also an ecology to the mangroves. This ecology is powerful and rich. The roots are deep and can thrive in salt and sweet water. These roots are also invisible. They are a metaphor for the visibility/invisibility that black racialised mothers are subjected to. Constantly subjected to hyper surveillance as unfit mothers. How do we reclaim being invisible without being subjected to gratuitous violence? This type of invisibility is an empowering invisibility which protects us, and is a place where we can share our stories on our own terms and remain safe. The categories of the flesh as spoken about in Black Feminism is a cite of transformation and re-wilding.

Decolonising critical social theory so we can live, so we can breathe, so we can live well and in relation. Not as a survivor who is always bleeding but through deeply embodied and material and ancestral theory which helps us think through our lived experience. This is not an essentialist or identitarian politics – it is about disrupting these other modes of thinking with poetry and with care. This is a third space where decolonial

philosophy is being created…

Ann:

Thank you for your words. I often walk in the mangroves here – the trees are almost like a symbol of motherhood – their fruit has baby fruit inside it. The piece we've read made me think about embodiment. What happens when we are displaced from our land and how do we remember it without it becoming colonising or orientalising?

Sara:

We had a plant circle and people in it had a different relationship to the land. We'd pick a plant – once we picked a lemon balm – there was someone who really cared about the biochemical components – and someone else remembers really wanting to assimilate but then started to remember stories about her abuelas. And I think of the plant as an ancestor who can have a conversation. Focusing on the heterodox or esoteric reproduction of knowledge. Remembering is about foregrounding black sovereignty and responsibility as relationality. Forming relationships of kinship. We share the knowledge of the plants of kinship.

Reader:

I have a question about allyship. About how devalued and exploited both the non-human and human kin and human mothers are. The labour and the resources, and the care these undervalued and devalued subjects give, and how can we build resistance with natural forces? How can we come together to resist our devaluation?

Sara:

Plants are both kin and ally. Plants are like midwives. The idea of relationality is broader than human kin. By coming together in this way, we listen with more attention to different voices – for example, to the stories of elders. By listening to birdsong or the sound of the tides, listening and watching the crabs alongside indigenous custodians, we create new voices we're trying to work with. Working with music and percussion and drums and with storytelling and poetry. The process takes a lot of care and patience so that future generations and non-indigenous folk can come into a responsible relationship and learn from elders. But time is precarious and capitalist coloniality robs us of time and space. These are life projects. It involves ongoing relationality and responsibility. Getting to know and enfleshing – the birds, the crabs, the plants.

Reader:

You referenced the risk of essentialising – we might not want to take every ancestral experience with us – can you say something more about celebrating our heritage but remaining open to its complexity. There may be a need to remain ambivalent.

Sara:

One form of essentialising is liberal multiculturalism and identity politics. Then there is the heteropatriarchal forms of indigeneity as "blood". Kinship as a relationship to place is the non-essentialist form. Its about how do we become an aunty or a sister without being a blood relation. Then there is root work – when you engage with your own lineage… We're fed up with being survivors. We want to rewild. I have Eastern European Jewish lineage, but my Judaism is anti-colonial and not aligned

with hegemonic practices. It's important to be public about believing that everyone should be free without reproducing settler colonialism as an expression of our trauma… and some of this rewilding work has to remain private and is not performed for the colonial gaze and needs to be protected.

Reader 3:

You mentioned pedagogy and grief – how do you bring pedagogy in grief and how do you develop healing and liberation in relation to it?

Sara:

I hold space and we create maps together enabling the process to take on its own life. Pedagogy is a practice of inhabiting space. It creates the conditions of invisibility and playing with the registers of visibility – connecting to the rooting-in. Cultivating practices of rooting-in, care and belonging. Cultivating yourself as a holder of an eldership role – the responsibility to share ancestral knowledge. To understand and read the territory for what is dangerous but also for what is possible to do (m)otherwise. Cultural circles – mentoring with the knowledges of how to keep safe in these spaces, but also how to flourish. We have to form leaders, space holders, healers. And being an elder is not about age… We also need to reclaim and contest how the concept of leadership is used in a hierarchical way.
Concluding thoughts… Ambivalence is what we refuse in hegemonic notions of motherhood. The whiteness of motherhood. A refusal of the sacrificial figure of the mother. How we can care for each other is fundamental. We can take on burdens that aren't ours to carry. What does it mean to start from the wildness? Moving away from the non-relation of the colony. It's about refusal and naming that refusal as a form of

> liberation. There is so much exhaustion – being a carer and working in a precarious job and organising in the community, burning ourselves out. That's how women get sick and suffer from chronic illness and when they burn out, they disappear. This is become more present with Covid. We want to be well, yet we are chronically ill. We need to tell stories of the ones who disappeared. Postmenopausal women and women who are exhausted… Thank you for being here to listen.

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Editor: CLAIRE FRENCH
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