

On Finding Home:

Fractures and Dislocations In Memory Through War, Rebirth, and the Ghostly in Trauma

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Abstract

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This essay critically examines memory and trauma through my experiences in war and motherhood. I consider violence in war stories and the role of memory and imagination in my work. I question what is possible in finding home and making a life when the past cannot be erased and yet has been forgotten. Within this past, I wonder about grace within what is absent as well as within creation and destruction. This essay creates testimony on the importance of craft as my path to question both what my past means to me now as a new mother and about how my past might create meaning beyond my personal experience? This paper discusses works such as *Venus In Two Acts* by Saidiya Hartman, *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien, *Home* by Toni Morrison, and other works related to war, memory, and the speculative. This paper discusses Korean American identity and generational trauma through *Tastes Like War* by Grace M. Cho, *The Magical Language of Others* by E.J Koh, and other works.

You were born, and everything changed. Over the months of my pregnancy, you had swelled to fill my belly, expanding yourself as big as you needed to be. I would place my hands on you through my flesh, holding the gently sloping ridges and mounds of you— an elbow here, your bum there as you traversed your home in water, and feeling my touch through the darkness of your world. Eventually, you decided it was time. Through unknown powers, your amniotic sac broke so that your underwater world drained, where liquid escaped slippery and warm and wet, ferning out like microscopic forest fronds as if to mark the world with a brushstroke of your name.

Everything about bringing you here rested in hope. I had sensed you in a dark space, a long time ago, knowing you existed as a spark of potential. I had thought for a long time that someone else had to make this promise of you but then eventually, years later, realized that you were a promise I had to give to myself. I would have to journey through myself to find you and hope you would make your conjuring. You found your way to me, spiraling through the galaxy, waiting in stasis, and discovering the connections through the spirits of our family as if on a spider's web constellating through the universe, vibrating through the faint tenor of time's delicate threads from the past until now.

On your birthday the day turned to night for one moment, the moon aligning itself between our planet and the sun to blur the boundary between night and day. I had been laboring with you for a day and a half, drenched in sweat and eroding elation as I headed into desperation, pulling on my faith in you that I wished would transcend the frustration and hopelessness that licked at my heels. But this faith would only go so far. So hungry to meet you, with a fatigue so thick I lost track of whether it was day or night, whether I was myself or someone else, I could only cry hot tears into my pillow while I forced myself to breathe. I clenched your daddy's hand

while I whispered away the thoughts that you or I would die, one of us leaving the rest of our life to live without the other.

In our birthing room the minutes moved slowly, seeping into one another so that your birth could have taken all my life or passed in the minutes of the eclipse. You showed a courage and bravery, a grit and patience rooted in a steadfast knowing that reminded me of your daddy. My weakness is seeing myself as someone weaker than I am. I told you that you were my big, strong baby, and when I thought I had nothing left to give, my body spent, you made me strong. You told me that you were waiting for me. That you wanted and needed me. I shuddered with yearning to see your face. You did not falter until eventually, even you needed help. The fluid that had drained from your womb had left you too dry for too long. Like an ocean creature, you needed the sea until you could be born, where you would transform to live on land.

The spines of ghost women lined up like spines of books and stories, of women who were our ancestors, standing along the room, encircling us. They came from an invisible space, pulling themselves from the ether of the eclipsed sky, their outlines and forms grainy and diaphanous, swaying in a slow counter-rhythm to your heartbeat. I leaned into the stretch and my breath, opening my body to a portal from another place. I found beauty, but I also found an ancient void of darkness that seared along a pathway of pain. The threads from the past connected to the present, radiating through harmonies and rotations of planets and bodies to transform us both. Everything I had ever known—done—lived—breathed—feared—betrayed—survived—became part of this moment of all of what it took to bring you here.

I rebirthed myself while I birthed you, sensing time collapsing in on itself. I saw myself in you. When you cried your first breaths, I held your hot, slick body next to mine, and felt my heart move out of my body and into yours. You calmed and you knew me.

My writing interlaces with the layers of me, infusing some spirit form into my work through an agreed upon arrangement between my writerly self and my heart. It sits in truth and moves beyond the superficial, challenging the *status quo* of the systems that would have me thinking and speaking to sustain a white supremacist, cisheteropatriarchal, oppressive, racist, and capitalist society. My writing supports my learning and unlearning. It contains my values and ethics. It's a palimpsest of myself and what I've collected along the way to re-envision. My work addresses reconciliation. My writing is a conjuring. Magic. Primordial wisdom. My writing breaks cycles. It *spirals* like a *double helix*; like life; like art; like nature to double and loop on itself, existing as continuous fragmentations that shapeshift and swirl, weaving with irregularity of fractals to rotate and circle back onto itself and me, to involute so that it can radiate (Nelson 92). At the heart of it, my writing is my craft. Mothering is my craft. This is how I face myself.

My writing addresses war and rebirth¹, woven together and pulled apart, where one evokes the other, forming the foundation of the

spiral of my life and writing where “forgetting is the only way to remember; remembering is the only way to achieve benign forgetting” (Kermode 7). This work holds the contradiction between memory's truth and malleability.

¹ “Rebirth” allows the layers of me to shift and become anew through pressure and pain, through knowledge and memory accessed through imagination. It's entering the flow of a river, churning with change. It's heart, chaos, and suffering. It's action through embodiment, and vice versa. It's destructive and fearsome. It's life. It is land and lineage. It's recursive wonder.

Rebirth extends into the environmental, the global, and the geologic. In “What the Sands Remember,” Vanessa Aagaard-Jones writes on Black life and queer ecology theory with a poem by Tamiko Beyer (325):

Environment:
all that surrounds our bodies:
what exists along/be/side us and what we have created:
what surrounds us because of what we surround
.....requires an examination of the distinction between the human
and nonhuman..... world
implies location, shelter, belonging, not belonging
.....asks how we are both inside and outside, there because here,
Interconnected
.....and therefore, a center
becomes place and placeholder, repository of guilt and outrage, a
saturated, empty syllable – Tamiko Beyer, “Notes Towards a queer::eco::poetics”

I appreciate Beyer and Aagaard-Jones’s perspectives when considering that my work moves beyond both borders within the traditions of stories and identities about war and motherhood. My writing doesn’t locate a hero at its end and doesn’t orient to a revelation about war or motherhood that directly solve problems attuned to both or create traditional story arcs. Rather, the context for war and motherhood in my writing exists in interdependence where one evokes the other, where the beginning of my life as a mother exists within the context of everything else of my life, in which I exist with/within/along/beside everything else. I seek to melt categories of containment that provided false safety to move beyond borders of things such as “corporeal,” “human,” “woman,” or “mother.” I want to see things softly, fiercely, and everything in between. In my writing, I seek sensitivity and sincerity. I want to look at the war and my ancestral inheritance directly in its face while letting them see my face, and within it, all the beauty and treachery that forms the complexity of what it means to be human. My endeavors feel personally and politically powerful as part of my reconciliatory work as a human, an artist, and a feminist.

Both war and motherhood embody rebirths that exist in one another as magnetized radials of scars, pain, beauty, silence, resentment, and healing (Allison, 165). Past and present collide, where memory forms bridges between time and space. These memory bridges can be brittle and worn; supple and resilient; repaired and regenerated. They exist as an archival root system in me. As fractals. Memory looks like a breathing landscape to synergize my experiences as a soldier and a mother to exceed the limits of a traditional archive or as these stories told apart from one another. In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida considers the meaning of the archive by turning to its root word *arkhē* as the “place from which everything emerges” (Singh 24). It is here, within the void of darkness through which my daughter emerged where the ghosts of my past and my writing emerges. My archive supports a webbed network of pulsing life to address historical and inherited trauma, memory and postmemory, as well as the ghostly, speculative, and haunting nature of my work, fostering

survival to see myself through pain to produce something necessary to me, like my voice echoing through caves with sounds bubbling up in pockets of air searching for light.

My body is both my destroyer and my liberator, destructing and constructing the amorphous layers of my life. My work mothers on many levels for time and space-shifting, moving into other dimensions, reaching into the past to mother the self that I was and projecting into the future to mother my daughter of who she will be. To mother the memory of my mother. I recall and reenergize to reinvigorate the past, bringing ghosts to life as I summon and imagine through invisibilities.

May I support versions of myself who felt powerless, voiceless, and mindless.

I write to subvert the systems in which I participated, and I write to subvert my younger self who adopted a framework of monstrosity within the war complex to survive. I must remember not only do I write to know what I think, but I write to reclaim my power. It is only through writing, and always through writing, that I know myself. It is how I care for and love myself. How I accept myself. How I *act* instead of *think*, and how *action* can lead to change, transformation, and understanding, to create a reckoning and reconciliation within the creation and destruction of my life.

You are too precious for this world, my sweet abundance. Look at your lovingness. I believe in you. (Simpson line 3)

one question. How can I create without reproducing the violence and harm when the very basis of how I think/write/read/learn/breathe/think risks remaining in the wretched forms that infiltrate and rule the world since I am a product of my environment?

In *Venus In Two Acts*, Saidiya Hartman explores how to write “impossible stories” of violence in which trace remains of the violence exist in the archive, but without committing further violence in her own act of narration (2). Hartman’s *Venus* feels vital to the foundation of my work, providing a lens through which I tell my stories outside the tradition of war testimony to disrupt the narrative around how war is written and known. Hartman writes that it’s possible to exceed the limits of the archive through speculation, use of the subjunctive, flattening the levels of narrative by confusing narrator and speakers, using narrative restraint to create a history

written with and against the archive (11,12). I can reconcile the violence of my past without replicating the grammar of that violence using Hartman's methods to build the foundation of my work.

An effect of Hartman's methods reclaims the voice of the narrator and speaker or those who remained silenced within the missing or obscured archive. For the ghosts of the past. My approach to the voice of violence hold a critically important place in my work as a tool to break cycles of intergenerational trauma. I pull the grain of archive against itself over time to capture the ripple effects of violence without re-harming. Consideration for the temporality of my voice(s) addresses the voicelessness of my past to create a resonant voice for myself now, allowing the shaping and shifting of my work through the archive of my life. My work pushes against the infrastructure of violence that forgets itself with the start of a new day. I cannot say what others have said about war. The gift of time is on my side where my ghosts come to life. In *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien narrates fictional stories of his and his comrades' experiences as soldiers fighting for the US Army during the Vietnam War. His approach aligns alongside Hartman's methods in that he writes on an archival slice of the uncommonly told experiences of soldiers with a transparency and philosophy on memory that offers uniqueness among war stories, but the narrator doesn't contend with temporal legacies of the war in others' lives, or how he has changed over time to address archival limits.

I see connections between Hartman's concepts on violence and the considerations of memory and repetition that inform my writing. This has to do with how things are remembered and repeated on the page. Memory can be filled with speculation or the subjunctive to create a feeling of the truth based on what is plausible for the missing or forgotten knowledge that needs retrieval to infuse a story with life regarding the way I remember things to have been. My writing

cannot exist in violence because it would perpetuate the violent cycles I've already participated in. The birth of my daughter holds intentionality over decades of change that symbolize a desire to hold connections among a life of war and its destruction and a life for living and beauty. The speculative and subjunctive push against the archive, empowered through memory and imagination work. My writing endeavors to break cycles to become more of myself. O'Brien describes his approach to storytelling and memory as "I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth...[which is that] there were many bodies, real bodies with real faces...and I was afraid to look. And now, twenty years later, I'm left with faceless responsibility and faceless grief" (O'Brien 172). This is a moment of vulnerable clarity that resonates and that I attempt to capture as a key tenet within my work. This faceless grief of war that O'Brien writes of seems to transcend time and space. Yet he defines the "story-truth" of fabulist memory that stretches for story's sake to "make the stomach believe" (74). This notion stands alongside the notion of moving past the archival grain of history in Hartman's approach, yet there is an ungroundedness evoked from the writing because I never know which parts of his stories are true and which ones are not.

I enacted war through military occupation of Iraq and therefore contributed as one part of many who seeped and shifted into the Middle East and caused damage, destruction, and loss of life, lineage, ancestry, and land. Part of my work is to address this unknown story of violence that I created instead of burying it in my own trauma or pain. In *Home*, Toni Morrison pushes into the limits of the archive, using speculation and imagination to fill the silent horrors of the Korean War and its aftermath with the story of Frank Money's killing of a Korean girl and a long-buried traumatic memory from Frank's childhood. Not only does Morrison contend with the temporality of voice, but uses the voice of violence to illuminate itself, breaking its locks of

silence instead of keeping Frank “so proud grieving over my dead friends...my mourning was so thick it completely covered my shame” (133). The story eventually comes out, bubbling up and showing itself in unexpected ways. I speculate on truth of aerial warfare during the Iraq War, writing about a bomb landing on a mosque in Iraq and the possible rippling effects to the people of Iraq and the destruction of their country, culture, land, and their displacement. I approach the fabulation with narrative restraint where I allow silence and unknowing to fill the story’s space instead of using a more unrestrained narrative that can evoke the sensory experience of the past that can’t escape the violence from which it came. These are my memories that aren’t my memories—that I only touched tangentially, yet are there if I pay attention and see through war’s eyes to what remains hidden. These small mental memorials of life in Iraq show so much.

My work centers on highlighting the violence that I experienced and that I can imagine beyond myself without inflicting harm. When I write about the death of one of my soldiers, I tell what was necessary and speculate on others instead of drawing out details to impart the felt experience of the war. O’Brien’s fiction situates in realism, using a more unrestrained narrative technique to churn memory of his “story-truth,” and “happening-truth” over and around and throughout one another to show the fascinating flaws of memory through O’Brien’s richly descriptive and evocative work. This writing aesthetic executes alongside Hartman’s methods instead of within them.

O’Brien dramatizes the effects of fabulation in the recounting of the death of a baby buffalo in vivid, grisly, and extended detail, suspending me in the space of the Vietnam War. In *In The Dream House*, Carmen Maria Machado’s approach on queer domestic abuse differs from O’Brien’s extended, lyrical approach by using a fragmented form of short chapters, often veering away from the violence in her home to circle back to it again, creating a type of emotional space

and distance from the trauma while using narrative restraint. Machado's chapters tell us what is necessary for the story without extending the trauma and violence she experienced. My role is to not re-create the war to show what it *was*, but to show what war *does* in a similar fashion to Machado, who highlights what domestic abuse *does* and not always what it *was*. This differs from the memory work on the baby buffalo in *The Things*, where the shock effect compounds when we learn later that "every goddamn detail—the mountains and the river and especially that poor dumb baby buffalo. None of it happened. None of it" (81). The violence intertwines with the unreliability of memory, making the memory and its afterlife violent, describing in detail what the baby buffalo *was* to illuminate what war *does*. I'm swept into O'Brien's stories yet feel the trauma of war inside my body as the archive of violence within war stories perpetuates.

My work highlights the disconnections of my past and present to show the marred view of how I remember or felt the war: first as factual, muted, dull, and mundane—a type of shock sorcery at play; next as hidden reverberations through PTSD; and last as a haunting image birthed over time and rooted in speculation because I could see more deeply through myself and through time to access the unreality of war and its perpetual effects. These are cycles of pain. Machado writes "but my nervous system remembers. The lenses of my eyes. My cerebral cortex, with its memory and language and consciousness...My memory has something to say about the way trauma has altered my body's DNA, like an ancient virus" (225). This feels like a *double helix* that becomes cellular and fragmented, where objects of memory embed in the spiral around itself and through me. Objects serve as placeholders for a constellation of the past and the future, swirling around me like wind currents moving through the desert of Iraq, imaginary celestial objects that are the spirit of my unborn baby, and about the way these memories of my family hover over me like thick blankets of air where I search for movement. I can't write a memoir

about the Iraq or Korean War without respectful speculation and imagination because what I remember or experienced of the war would not highlight the alterity that undergirds the conditions that allowed for oppression to happen and is the alterity that I seek to illuminate.

Part of how I address my pain from war is through speculating and fabulating in the name of those whose stories sit in silence. I imagine the lives of a food vendor in Baghdad. A translator and his son. The memory of sand in Iraq. My mother and the legacy of the Korean War. I fabulate to create bridges because we are all connected. Leaving the unknown in silence limits my writing so I must write what I have forgotten or not known to express my voice. In *The Warrior Woman*, Maxine Hong Kingston speculates through her and her mother's fictional "talk-story," as a memory tool for the importance of fabulation within their daily lives. This "talk-story" sets the foundation for her to use the mythic to explore her Chinese and American culture: of her deceased paternal aunt, on her mother's accomplishments as a physician in China, and on herself, all which move against the archive's grain to tell stories of people to claim their power and voice.

My writing approaches an aesthetic of non-violence by moving into the archive as well as moving against it through email correspondence with my father that shows me sounding like a person who I do not remember and am not now. I had power and I had no power. I write responses to the emails from who I am now, both to myself and to my father, to unveil the mistruths of my voice at that time, giving my past self a place from which to speak the truth. This is about grace. Kingston's "talk-story" and O'Brien's "story-truth" form from the same fabulist conventions, yet how these fabulations are employed differ. Kingston's approach uses speculation and the subjunctive within family tradition, moving against and within the grain of the archive through imagination but without inflicting violence and with transparency about what

she's doing. Kingston speculates on her maternal aunt's husband, spinning a long, fabulist tale, only to later reveal the truth: "in fact, it wasn't me my brother told about going to Los Angeles; one of my sisters told me what he'd told her. His version of the story may be better than mine because of its bareness, not twisted into designs. The hearer can carry it tucked away without it taking up much room" (Kingston 163). This allows Kingston to unveil the mistruths of her talk-story to provide transparency and claim voice. This is also about grace.

I'm going to tell you this story about your mother, a vessel who knows plagues of darkness and shadows—to remember who we were, and who we can become. Who I was. Who I'm becoming where

water trickles over bark and rock, rinsing over aerial roots that fan out like fingers pushing their way through for a mind massage, pivoting through the ages, and moving through language and memory to filter through interconnected branches that shoot up/down/up/around, so that I can step through the past and look into the future at the same time.

Repetition is a function of memory and can be used as an approach to subdue or enhance violence. Repetition can create a shock factor that becomes more and more animated, or it can infuse an atmosphere with a tone that contains weight without the shock. My writing repeats on the image of a dog: the soldier's dog, the war dog, my best-friend-mother dog and her puppies, to finally a dog that died by my hands on a highway in Iraq, weaving this image throughout my work to represent interconnected contradictions and fragmentations.

My repetition attempts to create an atmosphere of something that I just can't quite place my finger on yet is evocative of the horrors of war. In *Home*, Morrison uses the repeating image

of “an orange, soft now and blackened with rot, lies just beyond her fingers” where a soldier “blows her away. Only the hand remains in the trash, clutching its treasure, a spotted, rotting orange” (95). Later, once Frank admits to himself that he was the one who killed the little girl Frank asks “what type of man thinks he can ever in life pay the price of that orange? You can keep on writing, but I think you ought to know what’s true” (134). Morrison spares us the details of the violence of this girl’s death. Of her body. Of the sexual attraction Frank held for the girl. But Morrison provides enough detail, repeating on this image of the orange to indicate the lasting effect of Frank’s violence.

This differs from O’Brien’s extended fabulation about a deceased Vietnamese man that repeats in several times in one chapter, and in several chapters throughout, on the image of a “star-shaped hole” of his eye, along with the unsightly details of this real or fictitious Vietnamese man’s body. I address legacy through speculation of a metal pot used for cooking, repeating this image in various chapters of my work, carrying it through to the women of Korea and the people of Iraq. This is narrative restraint in the spirit of *Venus* and reminds me of how Kingston uses the repetition of talk-stories and the myths of her family to spiral around the truth of her Chinese American identity and life. Machado repeats within her memoir as well, using the form of “the dream house” as object repetition of a different genre for each chapter. This repetition deepens the sense of trauma Machado experienced from that time of her life, tunneling through time and imparting foreboding without inflicting violence in the work. The pot in my story takes on a ghostly presence, moving through time and place to instill a sense of the monstrous. My story on the pot allows me to question myself and the possibilities of meaning of that pot in the background of war, oppression, and pursuit of food sustenance during the war and as a symbol of continued lineage, culture, home, and family. O’Brien’s repetition and fragmentation about the

“star-shaped hole” to disconnect, reconnect, and weave is rhythmic, seizing, lyric, and meditative. The repetition shows the horror of war directly and differs from my undertaking to tell a different kind of war story that aligns with the spirit of these other writers.

My aesthetic on avoiding amplification of violence to tell violent stories differs from O’Brien, where *The Things* does not move along the grain of archival silence, but moves with it and into it to impart the “story-truth” of the war, but in doing so, amplifies the voice of violence and shocking mythology of war at the expense of the Vietnamese people who could not speak about the genocide against them or its legacy. I am grateful to lean into this canon of others’ works, through a community of writers and teachers and friends, to learn and unlearn. To see power differently. To see myself differently. To write what I mean to say.

I am making testimony of self through the concepts of rebirth and birth to create a narrative against networks of fractured lineage: within my Korean identity, my family history, the human systems which were necessitated by the conditions of my life—from the land itself—as an act of narrative rebellion. My work’s purpose is to break cycles of war and trauma through my generational inheritance of the Iraq and Korean Wars, to reconcile who I was and who I am within the web of these cycles, and to celebrate the gift of motherhood as an integral part of my development. This feels like peeling away the layers of my past, exposing the chaff, and restoring myself.

You will resist and see yourself. You will be you and you will be free. This is your

time. There is no escaping the past or present or myself. Writing forms visions of my past self and present self, spiraling and nesting within one another, containing everything of me and everyone from before me. Growth—Rebirth—Death—Mutation. Inheritance that reverberates with forward motion.

I write “the experience as remembered” through memoir, which is not the same as the “experience remembered” (Kermode 5). The former requires some amount of imagination and creativity where time has passed, and the feeling of truth within the experience is what becomes captured. I enjoy this “doubleness” of memory because it showcases so many influencing forces at work: the psychological, the cultural, of space and time—and the pliable foundation from which I write, where aesthetically, I can capture the feeling of my life as a series of fragmentations and dislocations (5). When I consider memory, I think of how image comes to mind in my work: of my daughter’s placenta and the trees of the Pacific Northwest; of the roads and highways of Iraq and the United States; of bullet holes that mark concrete walls in Iraq and Korea; of shallow, gently sloping remnants of colonial defense positions along the Hudson River; of a well-worn blanket that has seen me through the decades.

In *Sight of Memory*, Toni Morrison writes of “[seeing] corn on the cob. To “see” corn on the cob doesn’t mean that it suddenly hovers; it only means that it keeps coming back. And in trying to figure out “What is all this corn doing? I discover what it *is* doing” (97). My images contain meaning that extend beyond their function and weave my story together to form impressions that function towards the themes of power, forgiveness, and liberation in my work. Kingston writes, “I would grow up a wife and a slave, but [my mother] taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman” (163). She uses the image of the sword to metaphorically slice through themes of oppression, patriarchy, and

traditional versus emergent cultures as Kingston weaves the meaning of the sword through myth and into the reality of her disappointing “American life” to create dislocations of identity as she remembers her youth (45). Kingston’s focus on invisible objects like ghosts and the spirit of Fa Mu Lan extends her work directly into the mythic. I transpose the hand of time and memory in my manuscript to move past the archive of whatever my scorecard for rifle range shooting practice was, of military service medals, or my memories of a photograph of me in my Army Greens with my hair pulled back and staring blankly to create a different story than the facts of those old army archives.

In *In Memory, Of Memory*, Maria Stepanova writes that the archive’s “speech and its subject have no subjunctive mood. They have no past, they’ve already been torn from it; they have no future, you can’t see any future for them. Archival documents exist entirely in the present, and they see nothing more than themselves, their own *process*, their own result. This is life buttoned up wrongly; these are the ones who will never exist again, dragged out of the darkness into the sudden random light, and then deposited back into darkness” (124). By not writing my memoir, I would allow the archive to carry the story of my past, and in doing so, would allow myself to disappear. In *Home*, Toni Morrison uses the image of horses as a memory tool where it illuminates the hidden archive of Jerome’s father’s tragic death through the effects of racism, and serves as a symbol for Frank on his journey to find home: “Since you’re set on telling my story, whatever you think and whatever you write down, know this: I really forgot about the burial. I only remembered the horses. They were so beautiful. So brutal. And they stood like men” (5). The pain of writing my story lends solidness to my reality, allowing me to stand in myself like Frank stood in himself, and helped Jerome’s father stand in himself through a proper burial under a sweet bay tree. I illuminate my story within my archive to prevent myself

from dissipating. There is no destination on finding home. No story arc in my work on motherhood and war that provides succor. My home is how I make myself for myself, in motherhood, in family, and as a writer.

May I even find beauty and goodness in it.

*Now, the image of you as: newborn / in the womb / as embryo / cluster of blastocyst / as stardust
and sand.*

A light on a wall or shimmering through the trees just so. This is like

water rippling on a lake with the sliver of moonlight shining long and lean, splicing me between here and there; past and present; future and infinity; this mysterious thing, slippery and malleable.

Frank and I are both haunted by the effects of the war, and *Home* resonates with my aesthetic in both approach and theme. I see themes of Frank's own mind and body archive that form the bedrock of my own approach to writing with Morrison's opening lines (preface):

Whose house is this?

Whose night keeps out the light

In here?

Say, who owns this house?

It's not mine.

I dreamed another, sweeter, bright

With a view of lakes crossed in painted boats;

Of fields wide as arms open for me.

This house is strange.

Its shadows lie.

Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key?

My key fits a lock like this, too. My aesthetic is rooted in the horrific, the silenced, ghostly, haunted, and speculative. Within my body and mind archive lives historical and inherited trauma and how those carry out on the page. I write to find a release for my own trauma, fear, and drama. To find a restoration.

You did not know. I was not there to guide you, my innocent and brave mother child.

I consider how my writing is housed, of its tone, and how I seek to get there. How these writers influence me in finding my way. My writing feels like a labyrinth, and this makes me think of haunted houses. Of a haunted house, Machado writes, “the past never leaves us; that there’s always atmosphere to consider...[this consideration] spoke to you, as an agnostic who still can feel when the air in an enclosed space is not quite right” (127). I push into accessing a feeling of truth that will never be in plain sight because it doesn’t exist that way. I’m talking about alternate dimensions. Whether it was through a vision when I thought I would die, or other things, like my Korean grandmother, “The face of an old woman first appeared to me at that spot in the darkness of the lamp’s dead light,” I’m accessing other worlds to make sense of this one without reproducing violence or creating harm. Kingston speculates into the character and life circumstances of her dead aunt, where “the real punishment was not the raid swiftly inflicted by the villagers, but the family’s deliberately forgetting her”, and in turn, making her aunt a ghost

by which to remember her and give form to the formless (16). The hauntings of mythologized people in my work allow me to show how the weight of inherited and historical trauma echo through time, serving as a form of “repetition and reenactment” where I am haunted by the past (Hirsch 82).

My writing pushes past my mother’s silences on what she deems as “ugly stories.” I speculate on my mother’s memory to address the haunting image of the Korean diaspora: “She had pretended to forget, but this place echoed of departures to the past. There on the other side of the factory wall, back in time to the gentle slope from sea to land, cracked fragments of knowing appeared. Nets in ocean currents caught hauls of fish, and bullets pattered like steel rain against the concrete wall, marking hollows of flesh and memory, where something floated through the sky. A baby searched but the milk had gone cold and would wait for dawn in mother through dislocations in time.” I forage through a few facts my mother has told me and what I know of history to amplify a feeling of truth through ghosts. In *Tastes Like War*, Grace M. Cho also speculates about her mother’s past, exploring the secrets of the Korean diaspora in which she writes about the Korean *yang gongju* as a haunting symbol of the Korean War, the imperialist involvement of the United States government, and her mother’s development of schizophrenia as a cause from the trauma and secrets of her legacy and inheritance from the Korean War. Cho’s memoir radiates light and love for her mother through the ghostly effects of the Korean War and the legacy of schizophrenia on her mother’s life. I see parallels in Cho’s writing and my own drawing influence from Marianne Hirsch’s “postmemory,” to describe trauma in which the “generation after” bears the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who come before, in which they “remember” things they have not experienced (3). I speculate and turn to the ghostly as agents of change that bring my work to life by imparting an otherworldliness created

from the passing of time (3). In *Dicteé* Theresa Hak Kyung Cha uses hybrid forms to present a haunting image of the Korean diaspora in similar fashion to Cho. Cho takes inspiration from *Dicteé* in her book *Haunting the Korean Diaspora* and I'm heartened to take inspiration from both Cho and Cha as I write my own haunting memoir. Cha writes:

“You return and you are not one of them...every ten feet they demand to know who and what you are...when did you leave the country why did you leave this country why are you returning to this country” (56, 57)

Here exists a haunting image of the woman who can never return once she's left. My work, like Cho, has more to do with me than with my mother, as I search for meaning in the absent silences or from what has been forgotten or erased. I draw upon the content of both of Cho's and Cha's books to understand one way to view ancestral heritage within the Korean diaspora. My mother was born soon after the Korean war, but I include her within the legacy of the war because its aftermath continued for long after the war ended. My mother's life in post-war Korea, her desire for an American partner who happened to be a soldier who represented the imperialist forces that spurred the war, and her life in the United States within a webbed network of historical and generational trauma and violence feel salient to understanding how I was chosen for and volunteered myself for war and its violence, and how I choose home, family, and motherhood with the passing of time. These are the legacies that repeat. Within my story rests my desire to claim this painful story and to find the beauty and goodness within it. My story is how I become more of myself as a writer and a mother, and it's how I can reconcile the haunting image of a myself who fears she can never return to who she always was.

I write about the fear continuing after my daughter was born to indicate the continued and ineffable impact of trauma from the ghosts of my inheritance that I fear will make a ghost of my

future in the form of anxiety and vigilance that my baby or I will die, or that I will become a monster mother, unable to outlast grief like Kingston's dead aunt, who drowned herself and her baby in the bottom of the well. I care about "hearing beyond what we are able to hear" as I push into the absence and silence of what existed but was erased or forgotten (Butler 17). This push resurrects ghosts or perhaps creates them. Either way, they could be easily avoided, but to avoid the ghosts means to avoid making art and avoids a grievability that is necessary to make people and myself real (33,34). I write of the military headquarters building in Iraq where I "stood there in the empty halls of our battalion command center, rubbing my hand against the stone wall marked with faded blue arabic, tracing the holes in the wall with my fingers, leaning in to find the faintest of concentric lines, of bloodied fingerprints when I thought I saw someone in the room. A flash of brown—dangling the empty chains that were no longer theirs, as the echoes of voices resounded through the space." Here, I move into the mythic, where the metaphor of haunting fits the atmosphere of Iraq.

The mythic serves as an opportunity to harness the power of the speculative, subjunctive, and imaginative to create hauntings. I use myth to create from my mother's silence, where she "stares at the knotty pine boards, termites having just grown wings and flown away a week earlier," and imagine another world that transcends time and space, rooted in the Korean War and mixed with a few facts of my mother's night-shift work in a chicken factory, "reminding me of her secrets even though she's never uttered the words. After all, she is someone who does not have secrets and tells things as they are." That is my launching point into myth. I emulate Kingston in this contradiction of secrets and storytelling that invites mythical fabulation when she writes that her mother is "a practical woman, she could not invent stories and told only true

ones” (66). This type of storytelling supports the content of how I understand the silences and absences from a lifetime of feeling haunted by my mother’s quiet past.

But the tension from ghosts and speculation doesn’t rest solely in the haunted and fictive. The tension rests in the juxtaposition of hauntings and truth. I alternate chapters and sections of mythical writing with realism, and alternate subjunctive and truth in scenes: “[My mother] would have thought about the food items in her suitcase to calm her worry. She would have packed her suitcase with seaweed. [Her pregnancy] changed what might have been a casual relationship...and I would have come out like she was a *natural* queen. She churned currents of ocean and seaweed...that her aunt and mother connected to.” This is a response I give to myself on questions of my birth story upon hearing my mother’s response that “it was normal.”

In *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, Cho writes about reading against the archive, leaning into Hartman’s “attempt to read against the grain is perhaps best understood as a combination of foraging and disfiguration—raiding for fragments upon which other narratives can be spun and transposing and deforming the testimony through selective quotation and amplification” (Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 34). This reminds me of how I pull a small detail from childhood when my mother made eggrolls—a hybrid recipe of Korean, Chinese, and American food—and sold them at our military housing neighborhood yard sale for one dollar each, leaving the neighborhood raving about her culinary abilities and pleading for more. I connect this story to a fabulation on my mother’s ability to feed a village and the importance of food during war, and juxtapose that story with a future hard-won dream and reality when she opened a Korean restaurant. In *Tastes Like War*, Cho’s mother forages for wild blackberries to build an entire life and community, and Cho forages for facts and history, for snippets of stories and sensations from her earliest memories. I write about my mother’s absence, but I also write about her presence in

the daily living and domesticities of life. I write about her Korean cooking from the time I was a small child and into the present as she cooks for our family, reminding me of the cooking I knew from my youth. I write about her care of my daughter while I write my way through this graduate degree program and her indispensable commitment and devotion to our family. I write about the practicalities of her love.

Sections of *The Warrior Woman* that rest in fiction occur through speculation, fabulation, and ghost stories that alternate with the realities of the family's laundromat business, of aging white hair and aches and pain, the dynamics of her relationship with her mother, and her parents' fatigue and physical exhaustion from living in the United States as first-generation immigrants. This reminds me of my fabulation about my mother and Korea as a search to understand our opposite desires: with me wanting to know everything about the past, and her wanting to forget. Kingston writes of asking questions when the children in her family were younger, wondering if their mother was talking to spirits, only to have their mother respond with "'It's nothing,' she said. She never explained anything that was really important. They no longer asked" (121). After hearing it enough times, "nothing" becomes everything of my and my mother's history. Like Kingston and Cho, I'm interested in taking nothing and turning it into something where speculation and subjunctive serve the archival absence and create an experience that feels more truthful than the fiction itself while maintaining the ethics of how I approach memoir. I fabulate on tigers in the desert during the Iraq War and write "I would remember the tigers most of all. How strong they stood, how powerful, with their soft backs and minds, their strong hearts, who would suspend themselves like giant pillars of hope." This happens early in my memoir. I use tigers to represent the spirit of Korean people as strong and enduring, set within the foundation of a haunting, other-worldly existence, through

change states in amorphous form, cutting through rock to make canyons, layering knowledge and imagination over pain to create anew.

When I think about generational trauma, I think about *han*. The most I've learned about *han* is from E.J. Koh's *The Magical Language of Others* and Koh's dissertation. "*Han* is the word for sorrow in reaction to historical injustice against those who identify as Korean" (Chi Kim 274). If *han* occupies such negativism and destructive forces, it has also been "characterized as also creating complex beauty. In fact, *han* not only refers to a consciousness of ongoing trauma and a lack of resolution, but also the *means* to its own resolution" (256). Sorrow and pain will always exist but so will joy and beauty that come from reconciling the past, present, and future.

"Why resurrect it all now. From the Past. History, the old wound. The past emotion all over again. To confess to relive the same folly. To name it now so as not to repeat history in oblivion. To extract each fragment by each fragment from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will not repeat history in oblivion" (Cha 33).

I use my words to mold cycles of generational trauma within myself, my ancestry, my lineage. To voice the generational silences that resound loudly, of my own and others' making. My voice must traverse through pain to find forgiveness.

Ancestors join hands and stand in line for you. When you are too weak our hands touch your back.

I move forward and backward at the same time in a progressive pattern of how I remember myself. I alternate point of view of myself (I) with the daughter/mother/father (you) in chosen places within my work. I incorporate the epistolary in my work by writing to my daughter through direct address as an entry point into my work. My work forms part of the spine of her life because I am part of her history and her future. But I also write to her as an infant. As someone who doesn't understand and can't respond, my direct address to her is also a way I speak to myself. My imagination of her ancestral hunger is my own, and my writing takes away my pain through her nourishment (Cha 109).

In *The Magical Language of Others*, E.J. Koh uses the epistolary form in letters her mother wrote her to trace distance, connection, and disconnection during her formative years in California through her parents' move to Korea. I nourish my daughter now by planting seeds. If she wants to know her roots to anchor herself as she faces this world, this work, and I will be here for her. Koh's mother writes "Mommy read a book written by a Japanese author called, "How to Age with Grace." Though I can't do everything in the book as well, I want to live as a good person and age with grace. Eun Ji will help me, won't you?...This next time I want to be born as Eun Ji's Mommy again to live and become a better Mommy." I use a Korean myth of reincarnation to approach the distance I write about between my mother and me, weaving into our story a legacy of silence that haunts my role as her prisoner in a past life. Koh writes about the concept of Korean reincarnation: "The present is the revenge of the past. There is a Korean belief that you are born the parent of the one you hurt most" (2). If I was my mother's prisoner in a past life, then my daughter is a ghost baby from a past life. I searched for her through the decades and resurrected her through death five times to bring her back to me in this life.

Machado alternates between “I” and “you” in point of view, setting this up early in her memoir, using the different points of view as a tool to show how memory informs the trauma of the relationship of which she writes. I endeavor to use “you” as a ghostly throughline where this voice of “you” serves as linking points to create a ghostly assemblage and throughline of my memoir. Something happened to me beyond my control during war where the “you” and its residue stains and scars. The “you” here might be parts of me to capture both my role as a colonizer and a victim. As someone who got caught in the system that was necessitated based on the conditions of my life. This reminds me of how Machado uses “you” in *In The Dream House* to create distance from the trauma as a form of protection, and ultimately, to claim her power. The “you” in Machado’s work serves as a haunting backdrop to her language, forming a ghostly presence and architecture within the work where form supports the content. Similarly, *Home* complicates Frank’s memory through “you” to allow him to find and accept the truth where the “you” threads its way through to the end of the novel. Frank says “I have to say something to you right now. I have to tell the whole truth. I lied to you and I lied to me” (133). The “you” of Frank distances himself from the trauma so he can expose it but there in the work is a haunting. My use of “you” will be a key portion of how I create my work’s narrative lines and supporting architecture.

I write past the archive, and into the futurity of trauma’s legacy because there will always be another day until there is not. There are ghosts of trauma, and here also is life. And joy. Love. Machado writes “I wished I had always lived in this body, and you could have lived here with me, and I could have told you it’s all right, it’s going to be all right” (242). Life continues for Machado, Koh, and Frank, but not without the legacy of the painful events of their lives. But isn’t that part of the process? This process of learning about the “I” and the “you” meanders in

disorganized fashion, separating and joining through virtuosity and depravity, through brokenness and wholeness, where unbecoming is becoming.

I write about myself from the past, and myself of the present as I attempt to make home for myself, where the birth of my daughter serves as the apex of my journey. My future is with her.

Will you find comfort in holding my hand?

I wonder if my question to my daughter here, and Koh's mother's question "Eun Ji will help me, won't you?" is a mother's guilt and request for forgiveness. For me, it's also a gentle, playful request for self-forgiveness where I search through

time, through frozen forms of ice carvings through land to make anew. To shapeshift. Through spiderwebs and shells; flower petals and snakes; galaxies and hurricanes, in black holes and nothingness. In everything.

My memory faces the persona of my past as if it were a ghost. Memory work addresses inheritance: of depression and trauma, of history and war, of joy and beauty. Motherhood holds the linearity of my memoir to show the forward progression of time and to line my work with a spine that the spiral of my story can connect to. The effects of this spiraling within the domesticity of motherhood is that the ghosts float between time and space. I hope to build dramatic tension for the stakes of parenthood through the effects of my inheritance and past that linger and weave through my life. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf switches sharply between past and present, moving the story along over the course of twenty-four hours, weaving the repetition of

time through the ringing of Big Ben to culminate in Clarissa's party and news of Septimus Smith's suicide where "she felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun" (102). The stakes ebb and flow in Woolf's writing, with the pace of time beating urgently in the background, with a grip that makes my heart suspend while I wait to come through the other side of what I call a psychological haunting. The single day on which Clarissa's party takes place feels like a psychic, ghostly fight for Clarissa's life. Something plagues her in the back of her mind. I write of my quest to stay in the light. Of finding joy and happiness. I write about a Vietnam War veteran who told me about the time he killed someone: "the memories of that place and that time that he'd wound up in and didn't know how he'd gotten there in the first place had carved away at his soul, and so it came to be that his eyes would stay glassy and round." I write about how we were both perpetrators. How we are the same in a psychic, cosmic space, both of us with these sad eyes if one really looks, where ghosts haunt the fabric of our lives.

Koh writes on her paternal great-grandfather's death, "they stoned him until he was gravel...Many of us stoned him to prove our innocence. We stoned our own, again and again" (111). This legacy of memory haunts the atmosphere of her memoir, quick and steady. I haunt my present and face my generational inheritance to address the legacy that I give to my daughter, and to address the legacy that I wish I could have given to myself. I write of the unreality of my reality permeating through my core. My work addresses the realness I experience in motherhood with my daughter being a grounding agent. Of her being my co-conspirator in life, and the person who reminds me that I can let the ghosts of my inheritance rest. I move sharply through my writing, cutting from war to motherhood and back again, employing a minimalist writing

style with a stream-of-consciousness writing style that supports the widening aperture of memory, eventually opening it to the dreamlike haunting nature of my work.

The ticking time in my journey to and through motherhood, and the ticking of time in *Mrs. Dalloway* infuse pressure into a ghostly atmosphere. Woolf writes that Clarissa had this feeling of not being herself and that everyone was unreal, and in this way, the character of myself in my memoir matches Clarissa as wonders about deeper meaning in the current (93). The ghosts of my past, and the ones I create through fabulation penetrate through the quotidian and predictable at the hands of time, accentuating the haunting through memory blowing in, reminding me of who I once used to be and the effects of the past that cause me pain. The stakes in my work become heightened through memory of the past. O'Brien doesn't address inheritance directly, but he writes about his daughter who "asked if I had ever killed anyone.... 'You keep writing these war stories,' she said, 'so I guess you must've killed somebody.' It was a difficult moment, but I did what seemed right, which was to say, 'Of course not,' and then to take her onto my lap and hold her for a while" (125). Family matters.

My daughter enters my work because she is the person whose presence facilitates the writing of it. The meaning of it. My mother enters my work because she is the person whose presence creates the mysteries of my lineage. We are all connected. I write to my daughter that "a slice of me wished I could crawl back into my mother's womb. *See Mama, I can do it right this time*, to take away the pain...when I was laboring with you she would have labored with me, so that when you came into the world I could come into the world again, too." This reminds me of Koh's grandmother and great-grandfather, the one who was stoned to death, "urging [her] to try—and how much harder one must try when learning to love. She never asked me to speak but

to understand, rather than endure to forgive, and never to sacrifice, only to let go” (116). My work is about matrilineal love, yes, but it’s also about

“what exists along/be/side us and what we have created:
what surrounds us because of what we surround
.....requires an examination of the distinction between the human
and nonhuman..... world,” (Beyer through Agaard-Jones 325) seeking

Survival where I’m challenged to overcome fear of: world/myself/my past/my obsessions/my biases/my ignorance/my insecurities/my suspicions. So I must move through this pain that starts as a stinging silence in my throat, settling down in my shoulders where the net that holds me together pulses with resignation and disappointment at how easy I would give up.

This writing is a reclamation of power that others took from me, that I took from others, and that I allowed to escape or not known how to claim for myself or even destroyed in myself.

I consider Michel Foucault’s use of Jeremy Bentham’s image of the architectural panopticon as a concept from which to understand the learning and un-learning I’m doing on the page. The panopticon exists as a cylindrical building designed to hold prisoners who could never tell if they were being observed by a guard. Never sure if someone is watching, the prisoners self-surveil. I relate with this idea of self-surveillance as I had been holding my ideas captive in which the “power of secrecy [had] become a prison” (Febos 8). The mechanism allows for survival of the self, yet under the conditions of oppression and control the self is placed under, so that the self becomes subsumed into that system, performing at the will of the organization through their acts of survival. I unknowingly upheld structures of the “market forces” that would tell me what craft was, that my craft held some “[silence] about genocide,” while I convinced myself that other stories were the right kinds of stories to tell (Sharpe 11-22). I had unwittingly

become my own creative oppressor, binding and gagging myself and leaving myself voiceless. My writing breaks through the walls I emplaced because of the systems I took part in. I'm dismantling that old house brick by brick.

I address the time after the war when I didn't know how to dismantle and could only live one day at a time, how I tried to pretend that none of the war had happened and that I was not impacted by it. I was trying to shove myself back into a womb that was no longer my home, and I was left born unto myself as a monster.

This monster lives in alterity nested within the societal structure I came from, conditioning me and influencing me. This was about survival, and what I felt was necessary, even if it wasn't. Writing on war memory and its legacy comprise devotions in which repossessing my "life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change, which has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process of survival after liberation" (85). Laub writes about "liberation" in the context of life after the Holocaust, for survivors of the Holocaust. Testimony is important for victims and innocents, but also perpetrators. We are all human. We are all water. We are all change. I reclaim myself through this work. In *Body Work*, Melissa Febos writes that "refusing to write your story can make you into a monster. Or perhaps more accurately, we are already monsters. And to deny the monstrous is to deny its beauty, its meaning, its necessary devastation" (27). I cannot condemn my stories to silence. My stories scaffold with motherhood to create layers of tension through time. They are the living experiment of memory in my life. Finding a way to accept this monstrosity as horrid and beautiful is my work.

I write of hypervigilance and PTSD after the war through suspicion of others: through veterans' associations and groups, through the kind acts of people, through rage in drunken

hazes; and through too many additional examples of PTSD to place within this essay. O'Brien writes that his writing explains "exactly what had happened to me, how I'd allowed myself to get dragged into a wrong war, and all the mistakes I'd made, all the terrible things I had seen and done" (152). I write about my struggle with depression and about the darkness I've experienced from my participation in the war. But then I also write about the joy and incandescence in my life. O'Brien writes "for years I'd felt a certain smugness about how easily I had made the shift from war to peace" in a story that ends with his war comrade Norman Bowker's suicide years after the war (151). A part of me relates with the part of Norman and of O'Brien when I consider the contradictions of the landscape of the darkness and incandescence of my life. I struggle at times with the feeling of great pointlessness of life, only to work through it and find happiness and satisfaction. My work addresses the shadows in me who thought I did not deserve happiness. Woolf writes Septimus Smith's last thoughts: "but he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings—what did *they* want?" (Woolf 81). After he commits suicide, Clarissa's stream-of-consciousness thought weaves between his death and her party: "Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them [her guests]. But what an extraordinary night!" (101). A part of me relates with Septimus Smith and Clarissa in their competing thoughts. I can almost feel them struggling, and suppose I can almost feel Woolf struggling, too. The day *Mrs. Dalloway* took place was the day that Clarissa and Virginia Woolf found the light, and this is the time I find mine.

I speculate on the darkness of PTSD and of human death through the image of a deer. The deer reminds of power and how it can be manipulated on one end, and of life and hope on another. Machado writes on trauma of her dream house as "nightmare on elm street": "the footsteps never sped up or slowed down but remained horribly, terribly even...and I am still

terrified that if I force myself awake...she will step out of the dream and into the waking world where I am safe and so far away” (221). I am a perpetrator of the Iraq War, culpable and complicit in the geopolitical and military of this nation we live in, invading and occupying other countries; but I am also a victim of the organization I supported, someone who could not say “no,” because I had already said “yes,” and there was not an option to change my mind (Rosner 155). The lack of agency creates my nightmare.

The trauma Cho’s mother faced during the Korean War plagued Cho throughout her life, writing that her mother “escaped Korea only to find that American society devalued her too—*this gray country, this violent foster home...land where they stuff our throats with soil & accuse us of gluttony when we learn to swallow it*” (Choi through Cho 211). I speculate about my mother’s life where her silence places me in a space of disconnection and fractured understanding. I explore how to move through pain to seek reconciliation and consider the idea that “*han* conceptually provides a path for the movement of the present into the past, for a fresh and creative movement from the past and present into the future.” (Chi Kim 256). I look for home in myself through the trauma of the past and how I can move into a future with it. I relate with these authors as they write on home: in themselves—with others—in dreams—of place—through an idea—around seeking—within surviving—alongside perishing while I search to find

a time of The Otherwise: a circularity spinning around itself to revisit the same direction but at a new level to remember land and living beings in which we “struggle for a world- no many worlds—where we might exist and thrive as each other’s beloved. Struggle against our elimination, our disappearance from each other” (Oka 51).

Writing is like rebirth and war in that it can only happen bit by bit, where things slowly shift and change, consciously and unconsciously, moving by my hand on paper or fingers on keyboard, moving with my eyes and my mind as I will for things to happen on the page or to erase themselves completely. Writing is an act in service of and in memory of all a life, whether directly lived, observed, or imagined. It is an act of creation of its own right, one that is painful and beautiful, challenging and illuminating, loving and frustrating. I write to own all these parts of my life and to make meaning of them. How many times have I written or thought about the war in the past? Can I lay these ghosts to rest by writing my way through them? If there is no such thing as laying them to rest, can I live in my body and mind archive knowing that I have changed and grown through this writing process, and that I've used my voice to create beauty?

Your mother finds this release easy and hard. "What rests invisibly?" she asks, and then she tells you like she would tell a younger version of herself, "We...

...change. It sits in newness and applied memory. Forms shape from deep in core of body and heat, of pressure and will; of secrets and whispers that call to me from some other time and place like the voice of my daughter calling to me long ago in echoes where I searched for her in darkness moving like glowing branching trees, a nervous system that remembers. We have been here before.

The forms sway like canopies that mark wind currents, or radiate deeply, down into source, lighting up with conversation. This is where the whispers in forests enter. Trees live as nature's archive (Gumbs 287), and if I were a tree my body is my archive. I conjure the creative spirit to find her, to find my writing. In *The Creative Spirit: Children's Literature*, June Jordan

writes that “love is a lifeforce” (Jordan, *Revolutionary Mothering*, 12). My daughter is the way the world begins again and again as a concept of her promise (12) where we live through the

change in the tides, the seasons, the moons. These rotations of bodies to shape the land like I shape myself, of applied intention to move beyond mechanics and into theme and heart and life, where my craft addresses survival/fear/love/and power to draw life out of me and put it on the page, where I get to be the person I want to be...

...in my dreams my *writing craft* is mythology and rebirth. I shape it to shape myself to shape my lineage to shape my words in the making and unmaking of myself through the creation of energy forms moving, swirling, morphing into new.

I write about how the cycles of war do not indicate death for all.

You are my persimmon tree in the shaded seasons/golden orange fruit, sweet girl of mine.

Where has the time gone?

Rebuilding and regeneration form the beauty and growth in the aftermath of survival and what it means to make a life in my work.

Do not swallow your pain

I look back at the past to re-remember and re-make sense of it all, turning around to greet the sun and filtered through a prism to make rainbows. In *Matrescence*, Lucy Jones explores the “existential crisis of motherhood,” as informed by the psychotherapist Claire Arnold-Baker who said “Mortality is very much there for women. But I also talk about it using crisis from the Greek crisis (κρίσις), to choose or to decide. Everything must be chosen again. What is important to

them? How are they going to mother? How are they going to incorporate this identity of mother into themselves?” (228) I ask myself these questions of motherhood, just like I had to ask myself these questions after I returned from the war. Her form is a symbol of the work I’ve done so that I could become someone who could be her mother. The difficulty of childbirth and my recovery from it, the beautiful challenge of learning to mother her as well as learning how to integrate a human into my life and the history within it captures the essence of the challenge of birthing this book I’m writing. I must pick up the thread of the journey through war and the life afterwards because the way to myself and my daughter lives in my past.

My writing seeks to trace myself back to who I was. Parting ways with lost selves who wanted to stay the same but could not:

one as a warrior perpetrator

one as the creation of war and imperial conquest

one as a mother

one as a daughter

This path of bridging the ineffable experience of pain and darkness, of pursuing places “ancient and hidden...holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power” that I turn into an expression of compassion and joy through the rebirth of my body and mind in war and motherhood, where I am an archival and living relic of the past (Lorde 3,4). I reimagine these stories for

survival where I take a breath so that I can move through pain, stagnancy, through my own fascia to breathe into and move through the past, through the voices that tell me to silence

myself, through an inheritance that was bestowed yet is not mine. My breath moves to believe I can create truth and know that my soul matters in quiet, peaceful nothingness. I sit in darkness. After, better words trickle out because I cleared the path. My daughter and my younger self who look to me—they keep me brave, challenging me to write with an untamed heart that flows like water.

Now, one year has passed. The wind flutters cherry blossom confetti, spinning through the air to shed the season, *spin, baby girl, spin*, while I twirl her in my arms and stand at the window. Longer rays of sunlight beam while we celebrate softness that we can pick and hold. She pushes the start button on our record player, *See the record spin, baby? Now let's wait for the music*. A baby bunny eats clover in our yard, and you squeal while it hops along and hovers to nibble. I breathe her sweetness while Sandy Denny sings about birds taking flight.² I could savor her forever, her long hair tickling my nose. I hold her body of substance close to mine and feel her fluttering heart against my insides, losing time.

² Fairport Convention. *Who Knows Where the Time Goes?* Performance by Sandy Denny, Island Records, 1969.

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