

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION IN SPIRITUALITY:

how deepening our
understandings of settler
colonialism, race and
privilege can help us
reland our practices with
humility, accountability and
reciprocity



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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While printed matter can travel great distances, it's important to acknowledge in writing the context that this work is coming from, no matter where it's being read. We are living and working on Unceded Coast Salish territories (known as Vancouver, BC, Canada), the lands of the Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Tsleil-Waututh people. This land was never surrendered and no treaties were ever signed; the occupation of this land is illegal not only by indigenous law, but international laws and even Canadian laws. As settlers, we are complicit in the ongoing colonial project which continues to enact genocide, violence and oppression, as our presence here displaces those Indigenous peoples and the beings who have called this place home forever.

magickal community: Ultimately this work is for our magickal community and also comes from it. We would like to acknowledge that so many people have come together to make this happen: the letter writers and those who showed up for conversations in person and on the web, Ten Crows, heekate, Spark, Goo, Bridgid, Medwyn, Eli, Moss, Thaeo, Theo, Ruckus, BCWC orgs and teachers, as well as those magickal beings who have generously offered their thoughts and feedback from outside of the Reclaiming tradition, especially those that were hard to hear. We thank you all.

our many teachers: You are too many to name but especially we thank Starhawk, Rain Daniels, Kalamity, Kim, Anna Soole, rain crowe, Vikki Reynolds, Matt Hern, and Joanna Macy.

much loved ones: We thank our partners, friends, guides, co-conspirators and allies.

While this work came about as a result of a particular set of events, it neither begins nor ends there. This has been on our minds for a long while and we have embraced these circumstances as an opportunity to really prioritize this work amongst all the other work we do.

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Reclaiming Witchcraft is a feminist tradition of earth-based spirituality founded in the San Francisco Bay area around 1980. It basically serves to unify spirit and politics in practice that includes ecstatic ritual, education, and action. It now includes several dozen regional communities across North America, Europe and Australia, including 16 different Witchcamps -- annual week-long intensive gatherings that bring members of the community together to focus our shared intentions, and to learn, teach and explore magick through a Theme & Story chosen by organizers and working groups throughout the year. Each Witchcamp community has both shared and distinct cultures. We are all connected through the Principles of Unity, a document that lists the core values of the tradition and serves to guide our work: personal authority, inclusivity, social and environmental justice and a recognition of intersectionality are all parts of this greater whole that we seek to serve in our magickal work.

BC Witchcamp (BCWC) was the first Witchcamp and is now celebrating its 27th year. It is rich in eldership, many of the members being co-founders of the tradition and the camp. It is currently located at Evans Lake Forestry Education Center on Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish) territory, just across the lake and within earshot of the reservation. Despite the close proximity, BCWC doesn't currently have a relationship with the Squamish Nation. I (Aja) was told that when asked about it, an organizer said, "They don't want anything to do with us." As part of this work we wish to ask the logical follow-up question: "Why?"

Every year, a Theme & Story is chosen for the camp community to work with together. Often these stories and their respective pantheons are pre-existing from cultures such as Ancient Greek, Egyptian, Norse and from more contemporary sources such as the Wizard of Oz, or generated from within the camp culture and more elementally centred. The roots of Reclaiming are very much grounded in the feminist scholarship that brought together a vast array of feminine deities from around the world as a way of galvanizing the women's spirituality movement and Goddess-based devotional practices. In the context of 2nd wave feminism, this work makes a lot of sense and it still does to many people in pagan and witchcraft communities. There is deep reverence and respect in these practices, as we have witnessed them in our community. And still we need to ask how our community rituals that engage theme, story and deity in these ways may inadvertently be alienating to people of colour and Indigenous folks who would otherwise have interest in Reclaiming magick.

“Dancing with Ganesha” is the theme for the 2014 BCWC, which was chosen with some community input. It was after hearing about this theme and story that we felt called to action. We started off convening a gathering of people we knew had similar concerns and did some brainstorming. We ended up writing a letter to the BCWC organizers and teachers and 10 of the original group signed it. It was also sent to our 2 online forums, where it stimulated some interesting discussion. 4 of the letter signers decided to offer what's called a camper-led-path, meaning it is a path (or week-long workshop) that is offered in addition to the official paths at BCWC which are organized by official Reclaiming teachers and vetted by the organizers. We also decided to create this zine, so that the work would be available to people who aren't able to attend BCWC for any number of reasons. We the facilitators of this camper-led-path each need to raise the fee to attend BCWC (between \$650-925 sliding scale) just like other campers and we thought the zine might be a way to help raise that money.

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As mentioned, this is not the first year that Reclaiming Witchcamps have drawn from other spiritual traditions for inspiration and content. Other camps have been contemplating using Ganesha recently, but to our knowledge this is the first time that stories and deities from Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism have been used at Reclaiming camps, though this may not be true. It must be said that some folks on the teaching team for BCWC 2014 are very knowledgeable about Ganesha and have been devotees for many, many years. There is as much integrity, skill and self-reflexivity as could be hoped for in a group of teachers; this work we are doing is not an indictment of them in any way.

So why now? Why is this the year that this particular concerted effort be made towards addressing cultural appropriation and unchecked racism, colonialism and privilege in our community? What is the difference between drawing from Hinduism, Norse or Egyptian mythology?

While there are many ways in which our community is diverse; there are significant ways in which it is not -- namely that people with white privilege are over-represented and are a vast majority in the community, which is not in any way to invisibilize the people of colour, Indigenous and mixed race folks who are here. We, the co-facilitators of this path and co-creators of this zine, and many people involved in Reclaiming have been getting the feedback that the practices used in our public rituals and Witchcamps have been offensive and alienating to people, including many people of colour. These questions and concerns have existed for years. The conversations have been happening amongst individuals, covens and small groups. Again, this work neither begins nor ends here, with this Theme & Story.

This criticism is important and we must pay attention to it. Being that Reclaiming is a Feminist tradition, criticism is not seen as a bad thing necessarily, but there are definitely ways in which we expect a lot from our critics in terms of always using a gentle, compassionate, loving tone, getting permission before giving feedback face to face, and general politeness. There are ups and downs to these norms. We agree to work within them up to a point and also welcome ways of communicating that are somewhat outside these very particular styles, though we of course appreciate being treated with respect. Conflict can be very productive when it is embraced as an opportunity to learn and grow.

As just one example of how conflict has been constructive in our community, there has been a lot of heated discussion about gender-binarism (the use of male/female and god/goddess dualities) in the language of Reclaiming for years now and much work has gone into addressing these concerns, including rewording the Principles of Unity, which was a huge undertaking that took years to reach consensus on. Reading an account of the history of the tradition in Starhawk's newest book, the Empowerment Manual, one can appreciate just how many times this tradition has had to transform its shape, its function and how it works in order to survive. Many times it almost didn't. We believe that we're at a similar crux and that change is afoot. We are humbly offering this work in service of this change and hope that what we begin here will be a small part of helping this culture grow to become more just, more relevant and inclusive, more aware of itself and its impact on others so that we can continue to move forward into the future with humility, accountability and reciprocity with the web of life, creating the world we truly want to live in.

CO-CREATOR BIOS

Aja is a witch and a settler with white-privilege, who was born in Okanagan Territory and has been living for the last 10 years on unceded Coast Salish land. To the best of her knowledge, her ancestry is of Ukrainian, Welsh, Irish, Scottish and English descent. She is a multi-disciplinary artist, a community organizer and co-founder of the Seamrippers Craft Collective, Her Jazz Noise Collective, The STAG Library and the Witches* Union Hall, amongst other projects. She's worked with Reclaiming as part of both BCWC and Free Cascadia Witchcamp communities and organizes, facilitates rituals and does magick with WOEVAN (the Witches of East Van), a collective committed to magickal activism.

Esther is a queer and genderqueer writer, witch and collective organizer, with ancestry primarily from Italy, Scotland and Ireland, though some of those places had different names at the time their ancestors lived there. They grew up on Stó:lō land and now live on the lands of the Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh, and Tsleil-Waututh people. Their magical practice is deeply rooted in the elements, homebody mysteries, poetry as prayer, and social justice.

sid is a witch and a genderqueer, and their ancestry comes from predominantly Scotland, Ireland, Germany, and England. They have been practicing Reclaiming magic since they were 19. They are a settler with white privilege and have lived on Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh, and Tsleil-Waututh land for the last 9 years. Their work in the world is about becoming embodied. They see clearly that our disconnection from the earth as our home is mirrored by a disconnection to our own bodies. They see the potential for us to do great work together that will nourish our descendants.

scout is a queer and magickal creature, and has called the Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh, and Tsleil-Waututh land their home for their entire life. Their ancestry is of primarily Scottish, English, and Hungarian Jewish descent. They have a lot of white privilege, a deep commitment to magical activism, and a practice that primarily revolves around embodiment and play.

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GUEST WRITER BIOS

rain crowe works with and from a body of work dedicated to cultivating the arts of interdependent relationships through group facilitation, mediation, and educational opportunities. She is a regenerative culture events organizer who engages with spiritual, political, rewilding, and intentional communities. She teaches and writes about magic and ritual, the ancestral skills of council making and restorative conflict transformation, systems thinking in radical organizing, and ecstatic connection to the sacred. She lives bi-residentially in the ancestral lands of the Chinookan (Multnomah and Clackamas), and Tutuni (Takelma, Latgawa, and Dakubetede) peoples of Oregon.

Thank you to the teachers with whom I've studied and learned from: Starhawk, the entity of Free Cascadia Witch Camp and all of the New Moon Culture Paths, Martin Prechtel and the students of Bolad's Kitchen, Arnie Mindell and the Process Work Institute, those living at and the diaspora of Tryon Life Community Farm, Ravyn Stanfield, Bill Aal of Tools for Change, Cynthia Jones and Diana's Grove Mystery School, Naomi Archer and the Awakening the Horse People projects, and The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. Thank you to the many inspiring offerings from: Pema Chodron, Ward Churchill, Joanna Macy, Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry, and Winona LaDuke.

Heekate is magic.

ant  is a tiny magickal being in this vast complicated world who fell deep in chaos ritual back in the 1990s. He has since become a slightly more social and eclectic practitioner weaving anti-oppression and decolonization into an earth-based anti-authoritarian spiritual practice.

Ten Crows: Olympia, Washington, Where the Northern waters reach. That's where I call home. My element surrounds me. I'm a slacker Lakota, pagan and curious engineer, zen student ... child of the interpreters. I practice tech, magic and writing. Mindfulness. My mother was a mixed breed Lakota, a tribal judge. I still wonder at her breadth. My colonial side goes back to splintered sources, but an Irish grandmother. I follow the thirteen indigenous grandmothers. I don't believe in a DNA based spirituality, but in justice. I search the dusty practices, the stories, and the wisdom of the ancestors to find the threads of reconciliation. I'm learning to sail.

G. believes in impossible things because inspite of everything, they keep on happening.

DEFINING CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

The first quote below is the one that inspired this work to unfold the way that it did. When it was first offered to me, I (*Aja*) essentially agreed but realized it brought up more questions than it did answers. I broke down the statement piece by piece and made lists of questions that it brought up. Essentially, this was how the path was born and this is the quote we are diving into in the arc, which will be explained in the next section. Still, we wanted to have a few different definitions to help complicate things a little more...

“Cultural appropriation is taking the gifts of the ancestors without a commitment to their descendents. So don’t lay claim to knowledge or spiritual teachings or entitlements you haven’t earned, then relax, enjoy and get on with the work that will benefit the generations to come.”

- *Starhawk*
author, activist, and Reclaiming Witchcraft founder and teacher

“Cultural appropriation for me means when we take things that were not freely given to us and then pretend that we made them up, don’t give credit to their creators or take them out of context. I truly hear the concerns that we might be awkward, arrogant or disrespectful with deities from Southeast Asia, that we might perpetrate the crimes of the colonist because we have been taught these ways so deeply, that we must ensure this absolutely doesn’t happen. These are real concerns and I am listening. I still trust that we can figure out how to have guests over or be guests to someone else and learn how to respect them, include them and not oppress them. I’m ready to try because we so desperately need to live this kind of respect in our world right now.”

- *Rayvn Redd*
writer and teacher

“Cultural appropriation is taking a symbol or cultural practice out of its original context and then plunking it down somewhere else. And it becomes devoid of its original meaning. The people who are doing the extraction often are benefiting, whether through personal gain, financial gain, or entertainment.”

- *nisha ahuja*
actor, physical theatre creator, writer, singer/songwriter, and arts educator
(nishaahuja.com)

“Taking, from a culture that is not one’s own, intellectual property, cultural expressions and artifacts, history and ways of knowledge.”

- *Lenore Keeshig-Tobias*
poet, author, and storyteller

“Taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else’s culture without permission. This can include unauthorized use of another culture’s dance, dress, music, language, folklore, cuisine, traditional medicine, religious symbols, etc. It’s most likely to be harmful when the source community is a minority group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways or when the object of appropriation is particularly sensitive, e.g. sacred objects.”

- *Susan Scafidi*
author of Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law

“There is always an inherent power imbalance — it is the dominant group taking from a marginalized group. With cultural appropriation, this also often plays out in the realities of colonization: It is the colonizer taking from the colonized.”

- *Adrienne Keene*
author of blog Native Appropriations (nativeappropriations.com)

“It is the use of another culture or cultural symbols to support or justify one’s need for self-expression or sense of freedom. Quite simply, it is theft.”

- *Akil Houston*
filmmaker, dj, social critic, and Hiphop scholar

Many of these definitions come from the article “Cultural Appropriation -- Is It Ever Okay?” by Leeann Duggan (<http://www.refinery29.com/cultural-appropriation>)

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HOW TO USE THIS ZINE

You can read through this zine all at once or in pieces... it's up to you. It was designed to be read and worked through in order but feel free to jump around if that's how you learn or explore information. Do what works for you! Throughout, you'll find suggestions for small pieces of magic alongside the readings.

If you want to make this whole experience a little more magical, consider devoting the time to get into sacred space before delving into the different parts. Each part begins with the creation of *the container* -- this is the time for you, if you wish, to ground and cleanse yourself, cast your circle and invoke the elements and whatever else may need to accompany you on this journey. We've included suggestions for invocations that we'll be working with in the path. Don't forget to open whatever circle you create when you're done working the magic for that moment. Do this in whatever way works for you, but consider mirroring your opening if possible, so that what you open the work with comes full circle as it closes that chapter as well.

We've designed a few check-in questions to help you with the project of *showing up*, fully, to do this work. If you have other folks to share this project with, consider getting together and going through those questions together. Otherwise, spend some time journaling, drawing or embodying your answers if you can -- the idea is to get out of being only in your brain if possible! Find where your responses are in your body too.

When spending time with *the arc* and the reflection questions, consider writing out the questions (and whatever other ones you can think of) and having them available on your altar or somewhere in your circle. Make them physical objects and make them a spell. For reflection, try journaling, talking them over with a partner or in a small group, working through one at a time as a walking meditation, drawing or dancing your inquiry--or anything else you can think of! The important thing is to generate exploration and even more questions. Don't get stuck on looking for answers and know that the contemplation of these questions may be a life-long project.

This zine was originally imagined as an accompaniment to the weeklong path on Cultural Appropriation in Spirituality. As such, its structure is taken from the path, though many of the individual activities in each of the different parts aren't included here. For more suggestions and ideas on specific magical and critical activities, check out the *resources* section.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

(definitions that are not definitive)

capitalism

An economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production. It is structurally characterized by the expropriation of the products of labour of the working class by the capitalists or ruling class in exchange for wages. The working class produces "surplus value" (profit) for the capitalist class - also known as capital. Capital has two tendencies; the tendency to expand into (or produce) new markets (through imperialism and colonization) and the tendency to concentrate in fewer and fewer hands. As a result of the latter, capitalism is typically characterized by an extreme disparity (or "gap") between the rich and poor.*

colonization

A violent process through which one nation-state takes political and economic control over another nation-state or indigenous society, expropriates its resources, administrates or governs it locally and actively populates the region with its own citizens.*

decolonization

Not a metaphor for social justice gains in general, but used specifically to describe the process/struggle for indigenous sovereignty and the repatriation of land to indigenous people. It is highly contentious as to whether it is appropriate to use this term to describe mental/emotional/psychic processes if they are not directly connected to the above goals, especially when used by settlers. ****

intersectionality

Both a method and a theory. As a theory, it says that all systems of oppression are interconnected. In our personal lives they are interconnected because each system of oppression that is at work in our society has played a role in shaping each of us, even if we have little or no awareness of this. As each system of oppression works in our life, it is shaped and modified by all the others. As a method, intersectionality is a way of doing all kinds of projects (writing papers, putting on an event, designing a space, etc) that better reflects our social reality and that is more inclusive and relevant to more people.**

oppression

We use this word to refer to society-wide imbalances of power between groups of people. Prejudice and discrimination are definitely some ways that institutionalized power imbalances show up, but they are not the only ways AND not all instances of prejudice and discrimination are backed by systemic imbalances of power. When someone experiences oppression (as differentiated for prejudice or discrimination not backed by systemic power), they are unlikely to be able to escape it.**

A constellation of structural economic, political and psycho-social relations that systematically confine or reduce the life-choices (and often life expectancy) of a social group, often through presenting members of the oppressed group with a set of “double binds”; that is, choices between equally problematic outcomes. [See also privilege]*

marginalized

This term comes from one model of thinking about oppression - this model describes making the privileged group the ‘center’ of society, while the targeted groups get pushed to the ‘margins’.**

privilege

In this context not used in the same way as “I feel so privileged to know you” (which is equivalent to honored or lucky). In an anti-oppression frame, privilege refers to the BENEFITS that flow to a person or a group because a given system of oppression is elevating them above one or more other groups. Oppression exists precisely in order to transfer benefits to the privileged group at the expense of the targeted or marginalized group.** Unearned advantages which are conferred systematically to members of a social group, in virtue of their group-membership.*

settler-colonialism

A specific colonial formation whereby foreign family units move into a region and reproduce. This colonization leads, by a variety of means, to depopulation of the previous inhabitants, and the settlers take over the land left vacant by the previous residents. Unlike other forms of colonialism, the “colonizing authority” (the imperial power) is not always the same nationality as the “colonizing workforce” (the settlers) in cases of settler colonialism. The settlers are, however, generally viewed by the colonizing authority as racially superior to the previous inhabitants, giving their social movements and political demands greater legitimacy than those of colonized peoples in the eyes of the home government. Land is the key resource in settler colonies, whereas natural (e.g. gold, cotton, oil) and human (e.g. labor, existing trade networks, convertible souls) resources are the main motivation behind other forms of colonialism.***

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social location

A term that refers to the idea that each of us has a position within each system of oppression. Sometimes we are clearly members of the privileged group. Sometimes we are clearly members of the targeted group. Sometimes we live on one of the many fuzzy dividing lines. Part of the work of engaging with anti-oppression work is figuring out where we fit within these systems. This requires knowing about the many different systems of oppression and it requires locating ourselves within each. It also requires thinking about what each of them has meant in our own life and considering how our social location affects our assumptions about life, how we relate to other people, and the outcomes we are likely to experience. **

white supremacy

A system of racialized power, articulated with a class system, that systematically confers privilege in some form to white people of all economic classes, genders, and sexualities [Also known as racism]*

white settler state

A term used to refer to contemporary colonial nation-states which have not been decolonized, but are still populated and controlled by the descendants of European colonists (and more recent white arrivals) and which exhibit racialized class relations typical of white supremacist social formation (e.g. Canada, Australia, USA)*

relanding

All places have had earth-based cultures, regardless of how far back or obscured they may be. There are many complicated factors that determine whether or not we have access to the traditional cultures and languages of our ancestry. As facilitators and settlers, we are using the term relanding to describe a process of coming into relationship with the land we are on and creating cultures that are informed by what we bring with us but are also deeply rooted in the context of the place. Earth-based spirituality is a tool that can be used in the process of relanding.****

sources

*Excerpted from “Glossary” by Anna Carastathis and Anna Feigenbaum.

**Kalamity Hildebrant

***Wikipedia

****Aja

PART ONE:

**connecting to ancestry
& setting up the space
to do this magickal
work**

FEELING FOR A PATH OF RIGHT RELATIONSHIP:

Inquiry, Complexity, and Intuition

A spirit-spoken approach to radical anti-oppression work in service of collective liberation.

by rain crowe

“Stories are compasses and architecture; we navigate by them, we build our sanctuaries and our prisons out of them, and to be without a story is to be lost in the vastness of a world that spreads in all directions like arctic tundra or sea ice. To love someone is to put yourself in their place, we say, which is to put yourself in their story, or to figure out how to tell their story. Which means that a place is a story, and stories are geography, and empathy is first of all an act of imagination, a storyteller’s art, and then a way of traveling from here to there.”

- Rebecca Solnit

“When you pit the tree against the machine, the machine will crush the tree every time. However, when you grow the tree within the machine it will be burst apart from inside.”

-Bree Nettie

This writing excerpt is based on a presentation offered at the Cascadia Rising Bioregional Confluence, held in Portland, OR in April 2014. The intent of which is how we might approach the necessary conversations about the intersection of white settler-ism and bioregionalism and which then evolved into a full day offering in June. It is intended to speak to those of you, and us, who identify as non-native to the North American lands, and who are of European descent.

The essence of which is to undertake an exploration of the roots and impacts of our white settler privilege while holding a connection to our own indigenous ancestors and their subsequent colonization.

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Grounding

Into a deep sense of the place we stand and send down our roots. How did the terrain come to be this way in the process of deep geological time? How did the elements shape it; how did the waters come to flow upon it? What creatures of the world have lived here, are no longer, and still remain? Who were and are the first peoples here, and what does their presence and absence mean? What are the old names that bespeak the intimate knowingness of one’s every sustenance and orientation? How did you and I come to be here and what does it mean to be a small and not insignificant speck of living-breathing-interbeing in this time and place, where countless moments have unfolded in silence and sounds, in smells and flavors, in pulsing, rushing, singing, dancing stories? How do we carry home in the recess of our sentient becoming, as new arrivals, and with a longing to “reland” within and without, in the company of the ones we have, perfectly imperfect, lost and found?

Casting

The sphere of life is omnipresent and we cast ourselves into its embrace with a remembering of wholeness that dispells the ensorcellment of Estrangement, Entitlement, and Enslavement, those markers of a pathology that is insidious, addictive, and life-diminishing.

Invocations

Calling out: with a gentle humility rather than the demands of expectation. Calling in: the reminder that we are always in sacred space, and it is all too easy to forget that. Invoking ourselves back into the presence of the elemental energies and all their inherent lessons of great mystery for the endeavors to come:

Air blows with curiosity

Fire burns with courage

Water flows with empathy

Earth holds with trust

Spirit pervades with creativity

And to the Spirits of the Land, will you join us, will you guide us in how to move gently, sense openly, and receive our gifts of appreciation and commitment to tending your well being...

Ancestors of path, land, blood, and love, for those of you who are called to be with us, we invite you to join the feast we set for you, the feast of praise for your willingness, the feast of grief for your sufferings, the feast of longing and delight for all your gifts...

To the Descendants of Life, we invite you to our magical workings to leave a living world for you to embody once again as creatures, dancing the preciousness of the good Earth, our only home...

And to the Stars of Possibility, and the Underworld of Mycelial Wovenness, and to all our guides and allies,

Welcome.

More than likely you, the reader, is already aware of a few premises from which I will continue. If not, there are ample resources, in this zine and elsewhere, with which to explore greater understandings of the foundation from which I proceed.

We are midwives in and of this time. Midwives to the disintegration and dissolution of the inheritance of an Empire culture. Death doulas to the ways that do not serve right relationship and life, to the ways that destroy the land, our psyches, and our connections to the web of wholeness in time and story. We are also midwives to the multitude of regenerative Earth cultures that are growing up through the cracks of Empire, the remnant survivors of the old ways that live in our bones and breath and blood, and which are fed by the compost of that same Empire's demise.

If the revolution is in the moments of choosing Earth over Empire, and if our words are spells, and the language we use is the reality we create the consensus reality in which we live, then let us choose carefully, intentionally, and wisely how we language ourselves into the consciousness of a journey of healing, of decolonizing, and of calling ourselves home.

This is a slice of a template used to work with the difficult and necessary conversations of cultural appropriation, presence to the privileges of white settler colonialism, healing the inter-generational and cross cultural trauma brought about by the global wounds of Empire consciousness. And since some of our oldest stories live in the language we use. We begin with...

Inquiry:

Inquiry is any process that has the aim of augmenting knowledge, resolving doubt, or solving a problem. It is a question, a query, and a close examination of a matter to find truth. The etymology is Old French borrowed from vulgar Latin and the root means: to seek. Moving from inquiry can be a redemptive act, in that it helps us to craft the map of enduring questions, those which have no easy answer and which we can only aspire to lend to some small piece of knowing in our time, and from which we might preserve the layers and registers of our collective glimmers of understanding.

Complexity:

Complexity is generally used to characterize something with many parts where those parts interact with each other in multiple ways. The word comes from French borrowed from Latin and the root means: to braid or twine that which is intricate. It means understanding that we've come from many places, and that for thousands of years our European ancestors lived indigenously in cradle to grave cultures of right relationship to place and life. This is one lineage. There are many stories about how and why the shift away from right relationship happened, suffice it

to say another one of our lineages is that of colonized linguistic cultures of Empire defined by a consciousness that shifted to definitive oriented understandings rather than relational-mystical understandings. These linguistic cultural ancestors, are the ones who were displaced, assimilated and colonized themselves, and who would come to perpetuate an "orphan trauma" of disconnection to place. They live within us as well.

Intuition:

Intuition is the ability to acquire knowledge without inference or the use of reason and is direct perception of the truth, fact, etc...immediate apprehension. Borrowed from Middle French from Late Latin and the root means: to watch over, to see (from within) Part of our journey means wondering about how to proceed with having a foot in two worlds of ancestry, of being a hinge in time inviting spiritual home into our lives with the vestiges of amnesia still tangled in our hair like so many spiderwebs.

Feeling for the path of right relationship requires all that we invoked earlier, the cartography tools of inquiry, complexity, and intuition, as well as to commit to a lifelong journey that will be filled with mistakes and to which we can choose to respond with humility, acceptance, response-ability, and fortitude. Because it is for us, and it is for the future beings.

Why feeling and not walking? Avoiding ableist language, is a part of it, and another part is that we aren't in the realm of the familiar. We feel for it because we are making the path as we go along, using all of our senses to ask the questions, take the actions, grow our tolerance to the distress of not having the answers, and our resilience to the discomfort of not knowing. The wisdom of our bodies will tell us how to move, if we listen. This is a path that is not formulaic, prescribed, or outlined. In order to not reproduce the same kinds of outcomes and consequences informed by the reductionist dualisms inherent in Empire, we must abandon the "one right way", "what steps in what order do I take to figure this out?" thinking. It is an invitation to embrace little "t" truths over capital "T" ones. It is understandable given the inheritance of dominant culture consciousness to want stable ground to stand on because mistakes can be frightening. because intent and impact are different, and because we are still learning how to be gentle with our own and other's blind spots and fumbings.

What is right relationship?

An incomplete answer, to put something on the table, and for each of you to contemplate and explore is: Being right sized with our power, our presence and our absence, our consumption, our mindfulness of impact, our ability to reject entitlement in pursuit of desire, and about being giving-oriented rather than taking-oriented. It is about having a fundamental value of serving the Sacred, and balancing our needs with the needs of the whole. It is about radical honesty and accountability to ourselves, to each other, to our kinship circles, and within the ecological

systems of our the world. It is about the precious gift of feeding something larger than ourselves in the hopes that it will flourish through our fledgling attempts to be the thing we love, by being attentively conscious with relentless determination to change, grow, nourish, pray, magic, observe, ask, learn, invite, and attribute worth not for doing-ness, but for being-ness.

Shame is a powerful emotion and there are many perspectives on its application as a social tool for moderating behavior. Brene Brown, a vulnerability researcher, says this about shame, "Guilt is believing that I've made a mistake, shame is believing that I am a mistake." For those of us thoroughly indoctrinated in the culture of shame and punishment, it can be terrifying to endeavor into the very necessary conversations about our privileges, our tendencies to fill the holes of our own memories and longings, and our unrequited needs for spiritual wholeness in ways that may be perpetuating the harms of our colonized ancestors. Un-shaming our mistakes, while not letting ourselves off the hook of response-ability, is imperative to feeling out the path. Cultivating authentic vulnerability means employing the willingness to not be right in an effort to bolster our own tentative understanding of ourselves, our choices, and our desires to belong to something that is meaningful. All the while creating a compass of conviction that absorbs and moves with new understandings born of the magnetisms of creative inspiration and trust in the incremental and tremendous transformative times we live in.

Acknowledging that our shadow: the sum total of all the parts of ourselves that we repress, neglect, deny and disavow, is always in the room, and is always in the conversation, makes it easier for us to access empathy for ourselves and our communities of conversation and connection. Our shadows are the edge places of discomfort, learning, and enrichment. Learn to notice them and to befriend them.

Template questions for conversational consideration:

You are invited to read these aloud and to notice the sensations within your body. What information are you receiving and where?

What is home?

What is culture?

How do we begin to unravel what it means to be a person of European descent in this time, who comes from both far off indigenous, and most recently, colonizer ancestral lines?

What does "whiteness" mean in a cultural context, and what are the privileges and perpetuations of white settler-ism that must be examined and changed?

Is there a discerning edge of cultural birthright and cultural appropriation, and if so, what is it?

How to make sense of, and possibly respond to, the inter-generational and cross cultural trauma within Empire culture?

What did relationship-to-place mean to our ancestors and what could it mean for us?

How does shame prevent us from action in service, and how do we narrate our vulnerability and accountability as an antidote to shame?

How does one approach earning ally-ship through behaving with cultural humility and consistent responsiveness?

How do we bequeath regenerative earth oriented cultures to the descendants of life?

You are invited to resist the impulse to answer the questions. Instead allow more questions to fluidly move through you. Where does the pathway of questioning take you? What other doors open, what other insights arise, what is your body telling you? Re-member. Sitting with the complexity of your inquiry, guided by your intuition, and holding a steadfast gentleness alongside a commitment to persevere, make symbols of your questions, or work with your hands as you ruminate, contemplate, and meditate. Let your body sense the next steps, maybe you will reach out, find a book that calls to you, create a play or dance, or make art to express, or ask for guidance in dreams about what is coming through. Continue to resist the impulse to "know", and instead make offerings to feed the Sacred with gratitude as you stretch your capacity to be in the wonder, the mystery, and the magical healing work of midwifing a beyond our lifetime vision of right relationship to the web of life.

Blessings.

THE CONTAINER

*We invoke into this circle
complexity
inquiry
and intuition
to help us with this work*

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SHOWING UP

Where were you born and where do you live now? If you know the traditional territories you live/have lived on, name them. And if you don't know the names for those places, now's a good time to learn them!

What is one hope you have around exploring this subject? Where do you feel that hope in your body?

What is one fear you have around exploring this subject? Where do you feel that fear in your body?

If you'd like, choose objects that can represent each of these ideas and place them on an altar in your circle as you call their names out loud. Throughout this work, use those objects as touchstones for whenever you need to remember to explore complexity, embrace inquiry or trust your intuition.

Include holding vessels on your altar -- a chalice, a bowl, a box -- that you can put your hope and fear into, either with intention and energy or by writing them on a piece of paper that can be left in the vessel. Know that you can come back to both throughout the week as needed (including adding more hopes and fears as they come up) and that both will transform as you do this work.

ANCHORING TO CORE WORTH

Take a moment to think about something that is a resource in your life, something that nourishes you, that represents a moment in which you feel most relaxed, most yourself -- when you are in touch with your inner power but don't need to use it. It could be anything: a favourite tree, an animal companion, the ocean, a quality of your own personality, etc. Let yourself resonate with this resource.

Notice as you sit with it, what sensations begin to happen in your body, how do you see the image of your resource in your mind? Perhaps you can hear the sounds of the waves on the shore, feel the solidity of the tree trunk on your back. Just let your senses inform you of what it feels like in your body to connect with your resource.

Begin to notice where you feel this resource in your body and how the resource feels. What are the qualities of the sensation? Does it feel heavy, light, warm, cold, dense, spacious? It may be new to connect to a felt sense of resource in your body. If something feels "grounded," what are the sensations you feel that let you know you are grounded?

Let your self take a somatic snapshot of your resource. Perhaps it is the face of your cat from childhood, coupled with warm, solid, sparkly feeling in your stomach. It may be a visual memory coupled with a body sensation. Is there a place in your body you can identify as holding this state - or a posture you can take, or a gesture you can make? Touch that place and breath into it. Is there a word you can use to describe this state? Combine the word, the place in your body and the image you see or feel. This can be your anchor through this work. You can call this resource in (or others!) as often as you like.

As you do this work, staying connected/reconnecting with your resource can help you stay in present time, stay in your body, and give you support in moments of fear and anxiety.

Return to your anchor as often as you need to throughout this work. If you notice yourself feeling anxious, defensive or afraid, that's usually a good signal that it's the right time to use your anchor! At first, try using it even more than you think might be necessary, just to get into the habit of knowing that it's there and anchoring into your core worth and power as a being in this world.

THE ARC

“Cultural appropriation is taking the gifts of the ancestors...”

Questions for reflection:

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Whose ancestors are we talking about when we talk about “taking the gifts of the ancestors”?

Who do you consider to be your ancestors?

Are there different kinds of ancestors? Ancestors of blood, ancestors of path? What are the differences?

When we are taking from the ancestors of a culture other than our own, how does knowing some of their histories change our relationship to what we are taking?

PART TWO:

**working with whole
time & descendants to
investigate ongoing ef-
fects of colonialism**

THE CONTAINER

Cast a circle using literal objects -- found objects from the woods, from your space, from wherever it is you are. Form a physical circle around you. Does it feel any different from a purely energetic circle? As part of this magic, consider:

How do we change time and space when we make magic? When we move things around?

What does it mean to have altered your surroundings in such a way? Should the objects have been left where they were? Why or why not? What does it mean to have moved them?

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***We invoke into this circle
whole time
to hold us as we do this work
and to transform and be transformed
in all directions***

Whole time is a term that emerged spontaneously and magickally from the Faerie Path at BCWC 2012. As a concept, it's intuitive and has obviously existed for much longer than two years -- it speaks to the idea of non-linear time, in which our actions, thoughts and magick can move outwards in all directions (including backwards and forwards, but also sideways, inwards, dreamwards, and every other way movement can be made). In whole time, healing can be offered not only to the future, but also to the past -- after all, they're kind of the same thing.

One way whole time can be invoked is by creating a ball (or other kind of energetic object) of blue light. Hold it in your hands. *What does it feel like? What does it make your body feel like?* Throw it in the air or toss it to a friend. *What happens when it comes back to you?*

SHOWING UP

What is the story of your name? Who gave it to you? Where does it come from? How do you notice people respond to your name when you introduce yourself?

After reflecting on or sharing the story of your name, take a moment to invoke yourself into the circle: call your own name out three times and let yourself be fully present here.

“...without a commitment to their descendants...”

Questions for reflection:

Who are these descendants?

Where do the people of the present fit into this statement?

Who are you? Whose descendant are you? Who are your descendants?

When you look around at your communities, who's present? Who's missing?

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In having this conversation within the BCWC community, someone raised the question around what the harm or damage is in this particular situation of working with Ganesha at BCWC. This was part of my response:

I feel like I've heard a few folks wonder if people being affected by cultural appropriation and racism in our community are just imaginary. For me, those people are not imaginary -- two of them, in fact, are my partners. Others are my dear friends and deeply valued community members. More than one is of Indian or South Asian descent and lives with a strong spiritual and cultural connection to Ganesha. In saying that I've been actively part of this conversation for several months now, I don't mean with just the Reclaiming community -- I have also had hours and hours of discussion with people outside that community, who are outside of our community for a reason: there isn't room for them inside. We don't hear their voices in this conversation because they aren't present. Which is not to say that people of colour, mixed and racialized people aren't present in our community -- I absolutely know that you're here, and am not intending to erase your presence at all in saying this. But, honestly, your numbers are few, and many other people aren't here. In some cases that's because they've tried to attend ritual or magic space and found it to re-inscribe oppressive dynamics that they already have to deal with in the rest of their lives. In other cases, people are tired of being put into the position of anti-racism educators when all they want to do is make transformative, liberatory magic. In some cases, it's simply a matter of not wanting to be the only brown body in circle, again. These are not hypothetical scenarios I've imagined. I have heard beloved people in my life name all these things as reasons for feeling that Reclaiming (and I've heard these stories told about specifically Reclaiming and Reclaiming-inspired spaces) does not have room for them.

For me, as a white person, trying to centre the voices of these absent people of colour by retelling their viewpoints to my community feels problematic and complicated -- and yet my alternative is asking those people in my life who have already given a huge amount of time and energy to me on this topic to step into a space that already does not feel like their own, that from the get-go is asking them to make an argument for why it may hurt to see deities like Ganesha be worked in spaces like BCWC, rather than asking ourselves why it hurts so much

to look at the places where we carry privilege and, yes, racism and colonialism.

“Look for ways that you are racist, rather than ways to prove you’re not. There are two key ideas here. First, you can’t change behaviors you’re not aware of, and if you’re constantly trying to assure yourself you’re not racist, you’re going to miss the ways you are. Second, once you’ve accepted that you are, in fact, racist some of the time, it’s a lot easier to drop the barrier of good intentions, let go of the defensiveness and take responsibility for your actions.

No point in feeling guilty because you’re a human and the product of a racist society. But, by all means, feel bad about yourself if you choose not to identify and work against your racial bias.”

- Sarah Milstein

(from “5 Ways White Feminists Can Address Our Own Racism”)

PART THREE:

exploring entitlement,
privilege, giving &
taking

THE CONTAINER

If we're following the thread of the path, then this piece is a morning off from the active path -- a time to reflect and read, regroup and sit with all that has come before.

Check in with your container -- is it holding you and this work as you need it to? If not, now's a good time to do whatever it is you need to do to make that container strong: breathe some magic back into your space, get a good night's sleep, walk in the woods, make dinner for yourself, talk with a friend.

This is long haul work, so make sure you're building a long haul container.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY & NEGOTIATING WITH THE GODS

by Heekate

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As white folks, we have the privilege of thinking we don't have a race, that we can take anything we want as long as it resonates with us, because we never feel the adverse effects of anyone taking from us. That's what it feels like to be on top. Also, nowadays, most of us white liberal folks don't think we're racist. In liberal communities, we white folks (who believe we're not racist) will often turn around and wonder where all the people of colour are. When people of colour tell us what we're doing (or how we're doing it) is racist and that's why they don't show up, we usually get defensive instead of actually listening. In spiritual circles, we might say things like "but we're all One" and "don't you believe in reincarnation?" and "the gods told me to."

I want to pause on that last one. We don't always hear the gods clearly. Nobody can know for sure (and those who think they do, well... I think we're all pretty familiar with those religions). Even if we do hear them clearly, many of my teachers and mentors – some of whom are on the teaching team this year – teach that you can negotiate with the gods. I think that's true. Gods don't always understand the embodied human realm – sometimes they want you to do things like have unprotected sex with everyone in the room and you have to (patiently) explain to them that there are these things called STDs and pregnancy and that you're not up for either of those, never mind that sounds like a whole lotta work ;) In the end, it is we who must be responsible for our actions, because the consequences of those actions land with us – and also those we impact.

(Nobody, for example, is giving Ganesha grief about coming to BC Witchcamp! I did try talking to him about it – he kinda shrugged and said, "I'm a transgressor, what do you want?" Take that for what it's worth – he's not a deity I work with much in my personal practice.)

What's one experience you've had with being given or invited into a spiritual or cultural teaching/tradition/event that you didn't grow up with?

Have you ever been told you don't belong in a space, been called out on a privilege, or rebuked for taking something that wasn't yours? If so, what was that experience like?

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At BCWC, we've engaged with various deities throughout the years; one year (my very first at camp!) we worked with Mary Magdalene and Jesus. In having the conversation about Ganesha coming to camp, the question was raised as to what the difference is between Ganesha being at camp and Mary Magdalene and Jesus being at camp. This was my condensed response:

For me, it's really about a history and the ongoing process of colonialism that informs why one of those feels comfortable to have at camp and the other doesn't. Christianity has long been a colonizing force and has often teamed up with white supremacy in its quest to convert and subjugate people, especially indigenous people and people of colour in places like India, where the Ganesha deity originates. Engaging with stories of Christianity as witches here feels to me like a way to wrestle with those histories of colonialism and the harder parts of our past, for many of us who have European lineage (and really hard parts of our present, too, as colonization and Christian missions are still happening everywhere). By contrast, India has undergone a long legacy of colonialism, including an extensive history of physical, cultural and spiritual objects and teachings being taken without permission. If you don't know about Partition (1947) yet, now's a good time to go learn about it.

I think there can be a lot of value in an eclectic, self-created spiritual tradition but I worry about the ways in which taking on deities, practices and rituals from other cultures, especially those that are still living with the ongoing legacy of colonialism and racism, contributes to the practice of taking without asking. Some of the questions that come up for me are: does the fact that a particular spiritual practice/deity makes me feel good or resonates with me enough of a reason for me to take that on? What value could there be in abstaining from participating in things that might have personal benefit for me but not collective benefit for others? Who and how do we define these benefits? What am I willing to give up personally for collective liberation?

“...so don’t lay claim to knowledge or spiritual teachings or entitlements you haven’t earned...”

Questions for reflection:

What does it mean to lay claim to something?

What does it mean to reclaim something?

What must one do to earn the right to claim something?

Who decides this?

How do you earn knowledge or spiritual teachings? How might you access knowledge or spiritual teachings that you haven’t earned? How do we determine the difference?

If a person of a particular culture shares, gives, teaches, or sells you some part of their culture and another member of that culture doesn’t, do you expect them both to honour and respect your use? Why or why not? How might that change if you’re teaching, profiting, or making a living from what you’ve learned?

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THIS WORD, I DO NOT THINK IT MEANS WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS:

Reflecting on Shamanism to Understand Naming and Contextualizing Spirituality

by ant



Names matter. Words matter. This is especially the case in magical and spiritual settings and spaces. Whether you are speaking *om* as the first vibrational sound that birthed the universe or speaking of the beginning where the word was god and word later made flesh, words matter. Words are spells, spelled. Words are invocations, each one, as we live in temple mind. In the more secular sense, words define the limits of our reality and what we are capable of communicating. Words are powerful; we need to be careful with them.

Take a word like *shaman*. This word is used to describe a particular type of person who exists ubiquitously in cultures around the world. The ecstatic technician, somewhere between miracle worker, doctor, psychiatrist, poet, performance artist and psychic. An explorer of the nether regions of consciousness who uses such wisdom obtained in their journeys to heal. The techniques used are as varied as the healers themselves, and yet this one term, “shaman,” has become the popularized form for naming people who fulfill this social role.

What is this word? Where does it originate? How many who name themselves *shaman* are aware of its origins? The term *shaman* originally referred to a certain group of spiritual practitioners within the Tungu community, an Indigenous group in what is now called Siberia. The term was most widely popularized as a general word for describing possession healers¹ by anthropologist Mircea Eliade (incidentally a noted fascist, anti-semitic, and proponent of an ethnic nationalist Romanian state) in his 1951 book *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*.

When one extricates the word *shaman*, originally used to describe experts in a very specific cultural context with a set of practices each imbued with unique cultural meaning, and applies it to all people who engage in possession healing, one effectively erases the names, words, and lineages of all other healers. There are scores of such healers around the world, all with their own names for themselves—Eliade, in his introduction to Shamanism, lists several similar Indigenous names for the *shaman* role just in the local region of north-central Asia: the Yakut *oyuna*, Mongolian *buga* and *udagan*, Turko-Tartar *kam* etc. He makes the case, at least implicitly, that *shaman* should be the generalized term across the globe due to its connection to Indo-Aryan concepts and etymologies. This decision to use *shaman* is at best arbitrary and most likely due to his own geographical location, cultural experiences and biases rather than any essential attribute of Tungu spirituality.

To show the global impact of Eliade's popularization, in Indigenous groups in South America there are some people who refer to themselves as *shamans* when they would have previously called themselves *misayoq*, *yatiri*, *machi*, *ayahuasquero* or *yekamush* among many others, terms that describe their community context and the techniques they employ more directly. Eliade argues for the generalization of *shamanism* to refer to possession healing as a way of avoiding uses of terms such as "magician", "sorcerer", or "primitive mystic," which he deems too vague to explain the phenomenon. Why generalize all similar cultural practices into a single universal term based on just one example among thousands? This linguistic trick serves to exotify *shamanism*.

It is exactly this exotification that is so desirable to certain new agers and neo-pagans within the so-called Western world. Many disaffected white European/North American/Australian progressive left-leaning neo-pagans are paralyzed when confronted with the historical and ongoing injustices of colonialism, capitalism, and globalization. In a certain sense, these folks know that "their people" are perpetrators of violence on a mass scale. The spiritual response to this intense ugliness can get warped into cultural appropriation. In a flight from complicity, an escape to innocence is found in the taking of the spiritual practices of the "other." It is necessary that this spiritual practice come from somewhere else, something not of themselves. Christianity and commercialized mass consumer suburban culture with the heteronormative nuclear family are both *the worst thing in the world* and where some of us come from. The reasoning follows that the answer for authentic and right spiritual connection and practice is through shamanism, yoga, vision quests, sweat lodges, buddhist meditation retreats, dreadlocks, ayahuasca ceremonies, voodoo, anything "tribal", "Eastern", and "mystical", anything not representative of one's own lineage, context, or culture when it is of the west.

It is an understandable impulse, that of hoping to access a spiritual tradition not aligned with empire. Unfortunately for those hoping to distance themselves from the culture of empire, the uncritical, decontextualized, and appropriative taking of spiritual practices from the oppressed and dispossessed people of the world by the beneficiaries of colonialism and global capitalism is not an escape but rather an entrenchment of this ongoing violence.

One of the bitterest ironies of cultural appropriation is that in the past many of these spiritual and cultural practices were banned through laws imposed by occupying colonial governments. When someone takes up a practice of Indigenous spirituality that was forcibly quashed by their ancestors, perhaps one can imagine the resentment that would be felt in these circumstances. When a white American practices a spiritual ceremony that was outlawed, Indigenous people quite understandably feel a sense of anger while living through the legacy of ongoing colonialism. Children were taken from homes, languages banned, spiritual practices forced underground, communities rounded up to tiny reservations on non-arable land. After all this, for a white person practicing a sloppily put together hodgepodge of their ceremonies mislabelled as "shamanism" is either incredibly willful ignorance or a deliberately hurtful act.

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The line between cultural appropriation and appreciation or sharing is a fuzzy boundary filled with landmines of unaddressed and unresolved historical atrocities and current inequities. It is obvious that charging money for a spiritual practice you have no context or grounding in is a heinous and egregious act. Less obvious are the many daily moments: eating sushi, going to yoga class, wearing certain fashions inspired by other cultures. The starting place in figuring out what is ok is listening to racialized, Indigenous, and otherwise oppressed people and taking your cues from them. This means having real relationships with actual people, as a start. Note that having one token friend who gives the go ahead does not mean that everyone else will recognize that you have the legitimate right to take ownership of any given practice.

Shamanism is just one example of a word that is used in such a way that its meaning no longer fully reflects the practice it describes. There are many terms stripped of their contexts and claimed in the name of cultural appreciation and sharing: yoga, totem, tantra, reiki, feng shui, chakra, karma, qi. The same could be said for deities: who is Papa Legba? A god or an orisha? What sustains him? Life force? Qi? Ashe? Hold onto this line and follow it through the woods.

The most careless among us have no knowledge of the meanings of these words and yet use them anyhow, but even with careful devotion and study those of us whose language is not rooted in communities where these words embed naturally in a constellation of meaning are apt to misunderstand a concept, to get something wrong. To understand a spiritual concept or deity requires a grounding in the terminology and world view from where it emerged. We are all capable of learning this context, but it doesn't come quickly, easily, or without sacrifice. Can one understand Kali in 2014 without understanding the British partition of India? Can one understand the Ghost Dance without understanding Wounded Knee? Can one understand yage without understanding the rubber plantations? Can one understand the *shaman* without understanding the gulag?

Author's Note:

Some of the first Indigenous people to undergo colonization, dispossession, and genocide were the Indigenous people of Europe. There is a possibility of reconnection with these Indigenous traditions, although one does need to be wary of the very real strains of white supremacy that exist in Germanic and Scandinavian neo-paganism. This is not to say that all neo-paganists are from white Euro-originated communities, although there is an over-representation of these communities in said circles.

1. I opt to use the term possession healer to describe the role popularly ascribed to the *shaman* as it engages conceptually with the role while maintaining an English set of descriptors, thereby not requiring the exclusion or exotification inherent to the term *shaman*.

PART FOUR:

**unmasking guilt &
shame & sharing
possibilities for hope**

THE CONTAINER

*We invoke into this circle
our hearts as maps
all of the places they've been that have
marked them:
our grief
our fear
our anger
our hunger
our hope*

*and we invoke the compass
object of navigation and divination
to guide us through the lands
of our own hearts*

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SHOWING UP

What's one thing people often wrongly assume about you?

And what's the truth?

If you'd like, spend some time crafting a mask. Use whatever tools you have on hand and let it represent this part of yourself that people think they see -- those assumptions others make about you that may not be true. Try it on and observe yourself: look in a mirror, get a friend to describe your masked face to you, use touch to explore what the mask is made of and feels like on your face. While you're wearing this mask, tell yourself (or someone else) one or more of those stories that others wrongly assume about you.

Now remove the mask. Speak the truth. What feels different?

Feathers

by Ten Crows

I have a feather.

It's long and black and white and gray. It has leather and beads on one end. It was given to me to honor my leadership. This was something I did not ask to do or receive, only acting out of my pain during a time of great loss. I did this to just simply hold things together for myself and others, to hold the circle.

The feather, in its current form, was crafted by a man of violence and misogyny, blessed by a holy man and given by a woman who's known poverty, violence, love and pain her whole life. And I look at it and wonder if I should have accepted it, having known the violence. Having been violent, I wonder if I should have kept it. But I know there is no other way, my violence in self defense is part of the dance that's seemed to sunder all of us. I have my part in this, even though I'm not sure what. So I take it onto myself. We are strong like this. It should be accepted.

And I look at my feather and wonder if the Medicine man, honored to our family, knew the source and story as he blessed it. I wonder if his spiritual bells were going off as he did his work, or if that sense had worn off of him somewhere. I wonder if it had worn off of us. Maybe his Medicine was stronger, I tell myself.

If I can carry this like a Lakota, then I could finish the story, I know that; but every step I take on my grandfather's side of the path decries every step I take on the other doubting, coldly consuming, western way of me. That is the other that, too, holds a value.

The feather brings me back to violence, heritage, love and doubt. It holds a lot for me.

The man who made it was Sioux, and so afforded some right to craft the thing, the gift of the sky, and our sibling spirit bird – his destructive violence somehow overlooked. But I can't believe that – I think it's carried in the eagle's call across the land, splitting the sky.

The Medicine man was loved by me and mine, part of our family. I will never know, nor want to, what his spirit told him of this while he did the blessing. I carry that paradox as a door to my own spirituality. I gave up needing the right to call on the spiritual decades ago. Whatever I am, I am spiritual.

There is no badge or credential that opens the door. There is no feather or feathers we can cover ourselves with that will grant us entrance. No act of courage or leadership will allow us to say we're forgiven, in order to simply keep on walking. It's the stories that weigh us down, hold us back. They do that until, so sick of the morass, the same stories propel us forward to do, and be, something else.

There was a fence on the reservation that I needed to get across. I would ride my pony to my friends house, where we would all get together and go ride in the hills. Once you got to a certain point, it seemed like there were no more fences.

But, getting there, I had to ride along a fence to get to its end. And I would always wish I could just pass right through, take a straight line. But the poles were there and the wire. the barbs had already taken parts of me. I fear them.

So I would daydream that I could just float right through without being touched, me and my pony (a mare named Mike). I could feel us just passing through, but it would never happen.

So my path became a fence, that called the pain. I know the answer, and I can sense a chap named Ganesh on the other side.

But I need other feathers.

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“...and then relax, enjoy...”

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Questions for reflection:

Can we only relax and enjoy ourselves after we have done the work? How do we know when it's finished?

In what ways can we take pleasure that aren't a veiled attempt to shirk responsibility for the things we are implicated in?

How can we make this process -- which can be painful, uncomfortable and difficult -- one in which we can be present and grounded with our whole selves engaged?

How do we deal with feelings of shame and guilt that inevitably come up doing this work?

**identifying &
committing to the work
of anti-racism and
decolonization in earth-
based spirituality**

THE CONTAINER

Invoke whatever needs to be present in this work for you now to fully commit to this path. Only you can know what guides you need. Identify them, name them. What gives you courage? What helps you examine your own privileges and biases? What allows you to look at your shame with compassion? What strengthens your commitments? Who are your ancestors? Who are your descendants?

Call your guides to you and keep on going.

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RELANDING:

A Possibility
by G.

What would it mean to live where you are, to truly live in that place? Any non-indigenous person whose ancestry has migrated across land and waters to arrive in your body at the present moment must consider this question. The human story is one of movement across the surface of the earth, sometimes over millennia, sometimes only very recently. Yet at a certain point a communally-held self-hood emerges from a place. Bodies are made of that earth, language of the sounds on those winds, technology and art forged by the fires of that hearth, and familial blood coursing with the waters which spring from that land. All persons hold within themselves the heritage of this moment, when a people and a place are one. Nearly all these same persons also hold a story of rupture, of dispossession, diaspora or dislocation. Some of these stories are ancient, but many are very, very recent.

I am writing this from a place of questioning and challenge as I inhabit many of these stories simultaneously. To begin with I am currently living as a settler on the unceded traditional lands of the Coast Salish people, in the south western corner of what is called British Columbia. I am an immigrant, recently arrived in Canada, the son of an immigrant, my mother a sephardic jew whose family immigrated to the United States from Holland shortly after the second World War. I carry with me a multitude of unearned privileges which ease my particular experience of immigration, yet when considering the question of “where I am from,” the particulars of my story, and what parallels they might hold for others, matter quite a bit.

All this is to say that as a settler I am participating in the continued colonial dispossession and subjugation of the indigenous people of this place where I now live, even as I myself continue to embody the displacement and dispossession of and from land that is one part of the constantly oscillating relationship that the jewish people have to their traditional land in Palestine. As I pursue the benefits of assimilation into the Canadian nation state, I am reaffirming that state’s existence, one dependent upon the ongoing colonization of the indigenous people of north america. My aspirations for security, access to health and opportunity, not at all different than the aspirations of many migrants, are not unreasonable, but they are not necessarily compatible with the aspirations of a people who may want to remove from their lands those bodies which are not of their ancestry.

Decolonization does not promise a future for settlers, only for the colonized.

This means that all of us, settlers and indigenous alike, must come to terms with this contradiction sooner or later. Any decolonized future must include a new relationship between settlers and indigenous people, but will this exist in a condition where those who live in these places now will continue to do so in the future? Will a newly decolonized place form around itself a series of militarized walls like so many other borders which exist today? Will there be some form of immigration, settlement and support for diverse cultural practices as is proposed and in some ways facilitated by the liberal nation state? Will there be developed a protocol based on traditional practices that addresses the already exploding numbers of refugees fleeing political, social, and climate based catastrophe?

I will state now, quite clearly, that I believe in some form of settler futurity. I am living my life, and fighting my struggles, imagining that I might continue to live in this place and that other non-indigenous people will as well. I don't believe that this future will be unchanged from its present form - I fight so that it will transform in a way that reflects a just relationship with the history that has shaped this place. I imagine that it will encompass a set of social relations that are more in line with those which might exist in a place whose stewardship is in the hands of the first people of this land rather than the current manifestation of the corporate colonial empire that is at present called Canada. Yet as an anti-authoritarian seeker of justice, democracy and autonomy I am compelled to believe that the people who live here now will have a voice in its future, one that is respectful of the injustice of what has gone before and desirous of a new relationship which supports the self-determination of the indigenous people of this place.

There is no guarantee that this future will arrive, nor that any decolonizing process will proceed sooner than later. Whatever the future may look like, the time for settlers to begin transforming their relationship to this place is now. If there is any settler future to be had, we needn't wait until tomorrow to begin a practice of reconciling, unsettling and relanding. Of course, reconciliation is not for settlers to do on behalf of anyone, but for settlers to support by truth-telling, acknowledging past and present injustices and actively seeking to right those injustices in solidarity with those who have been wronged. Unsettling is the work that must be done to ourselves, opening to the fear and pain of facing accountability, challenging our assumptions of what we are entitled to and what is natural, pursuing our own decolonization, deconstructing false categories such as "Whiteness" and prefiguratively transforming our own relationships into ones which might be compatible with a more just future.

The last of these processes, relanding, is the deepening of relationship to place in a way that accounts for both our immaterial, spiritual, affective relationships with the land and for the material, grounded and embodied realities of that place. It is listening to the land, learning from it and reciprocating generously. It is putting down roots so that we no longer stand separated from the land but become immersed, enmeshed, embedded and truly interdependent with the land. In many ways it is the attempt to heal, to re-territorialize that which was broken or ripped

apart when our people left the lands from which they were once inextricably connected. It is returning home, to the earth, in the place where we now stand. To do this we can not keep separate the land - so-called "nature" or "the environment" - from the people who are of this land. To deepen our relationship with one is only possible if we deepen our relationship with the other. We exist in a human world and connecting to the continuity of other-than-human life does not excuse ignoring the struggles and needs of other people.

We can never become indigenous to any place other than our own. We can however begin a process of reconnection and reintegration. Borders are constructs of human relationships, and while the earth has bioregions and elemental boundaries such as oceans and mountains, it exists in unity as itself. The air that blows across oceans, the water that circulates between sea and cloud, the rock which rises and falls to form continents, and the molten flame which is in the center of it all, touches every place that we might call home. More than asking where we might live (if we are even capable of making that choice) let us ask how we might live. Then let us act.

How do you define reciprocity?

Where can you identify reciprocity already at work in your own life? Where is it lacking?

Looking back at your hope and fear from beginning this work, how have they transformed? How have you transformed?

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“...and get on with the work that will benefit the generations to come.”

Questions for reflection:

Can you envision a world in which racism, colonialism and imperialism no longer oppress people? Moving backwards from that vision of the future, what would we need to do in the present to make it possible?

What does this work look like for you as an individual? What about for us as a community?

What can you commit to doing from here?

How can we support each other and create accountability for these commitments?

This may be the time to go through some kind of commitment ceremony. Make it real, have witnesses, name the tangible steps you are willing to take to move toward justice in your life, in your practice and in your community. Perhaps you can name your wildest dream and then also name three practical things that will challenge you while still being doable. Know that others are doing this ceremony alongside you, even if you don't know or can't see them. We can transform ourselves and our worlds together.

RESOURCES

part four:

Truth Mandala, from *Coming Back to Life* by Joanna Macy (also here: <http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/truthm.htm>)

“Decolonization is Not a Metaphor” by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, from *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* (<http://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/18630>)

part five:

Vision Meditation, from *The Twelve Wild Swans: A Journey Into Magic, Healing and Action* by Starhawk and Hilary Valentine, page 305

part one :

Treasure Cave of the Ancestors Trance, from *The Twelve Wild Swans: A Journey Into Magic, Healing and Action* by Starhawk and Hilary Valentine, page 54; developed by Starhawk and poet Rafael Jesus Gonzalez for the multi-cultural ritual group

Heritage Ritual, from *The Twelve Wild Swans: A Journey Into Magic, Healing and Action* by Starhawk and Hilary Valentine, page 51

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part two:

Vision of Opposites in Center, from *The Twelve Wild Swans: A Journey Into Magic, Healing and Action* by Starhawk and Hilary Valentine, page 53

Centering Invocation, created by Flame, from *The Twelve Wild Swans: A Journey Into Magic, Healing and Action* by Starhawk and Hilary Valentine, page 52

Most of the resources we’d like to share are based on the web, and are organized in a clear way on the **W*U Hall** website:

witchesunionhall.wordpress.com/worskshops/

If you know of any you think would be a good addition to this list, please get in touch at witchesunionhall@gmail.com

part three:

Social Position & Spectrograph worksheet, included in center-fold of zine

Norms Exercise, from *The Empowerment Manual* by Starhawk, page 54