Soothing the Soul: Ecowomanist Healing Among Black Urban Youth

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PART ONE

Diasporic Dreams

Sometime in the early 2000s, my mother sent me to live in Jamaica with my grandaunt while she completed nursing school. There, I had my first kiss with a girl named Bobby who, being lanky and tall, had always towered over me as we played house. She played the husband and I played the wife. One day we both had an inkling that both of us wanted to kiss each other, and so, we did. I remember hearing roosters, feeling the hot sun slip through the shutters and land on my forehead, and fearing that a lizard would sneak its way into the house like they always did. That kiss, along with our latter queer encounters are eternally wrapped up in my memories of Jamaica and its landscape. They were queer intimacies we shared which were inseparable from our Jamaican girlhood.

I cannot think of queer femme kisses without thinking of the sun that always shone even when it rained, mangoes and plantains, or the roosters, chickens and goats that freely roamed around the island. Though, I cannot think of roosters, chickens, goats, and such without thinking of the ugly remnants of slavery and legacies of colonial trauma on the islands that determined our very presence on what was once only Taino land. And, I cannot think of colonial trauma without thinking of my grandaunt's—Auntie, we call her—subsumption into the tired role of the Black female caregiver because of what feels like the eternal damnation of Black women, though never actually having any children of her own. She was even a school teacher for decades, and constantly was surrounded by young children. Auntie had raised my mother because my maternal grandmother did not have enough money to raise all of her children. She took in Bobby as if she were biological family after Bobby's father left her and her mother in pursuit of a better

life in England. Her mother could no longer support Bobby on her own, and so Auntie extended her graces as a maternal figure. She took me in because my mother, single and freshly immigrated, was determined to finish nursing school in search of better economic opportunities and the false narrative of what everyone calls the *American Dream*. The beginning and presumably the end of Auntie's life, and her role as the mother we unfortunately could not have, is intricately tied to the Jamaican landscape. I cannot think of a moment in which my bonding with Auntie, and Bobby, did not involve some amalgamation of the outdoors, eating locally grown fruit, and preparing locally grown greens for delicious meals that ants could not stay away from.

As my mother continued to send me to Jamaica for months at a time, Bobby and I continued to find ways to secretly hold hands, kiss and communicate our queerness. Together, we picked ripe cherries from the cherry tree in the front yard to bring to Auntie. We took turns pushing each other on a swing that hung from a large tree branch all day long. My uncle Steve, showing off his crafty, inventive skills, made the swing out of rope and a slab of wood. Auntie lived in the rural countryside in what I thought was the most beautiful house in the world. It had concrete walls painted a subdued hue of aqua blue. In August, the sound of the hurricanes beating on the tin roof eventually turned into background noise that helped me fall asleep on nights where I would otherwise stay awake, longing for my mother. When the hurricanes were extreme, sharp sounds of the rain drops on the tin roof made it sound like war outside. Pesky chickens roamed around the front yard as we sat about on the veranda. Auntie would yap and chew, mouth open, on a mango, sometimes guineps, as she wistfully stared off into the distance. We got our produce from what was grown locally, and naturally circulated our harvests. In a

town over called Hannover, we helped my great grandmother tend to her pig farm and picked pimento berries to sell at the market. There, Bobby and I cautiously played around the graves of some family members who saw their lifetimes come and go before either of us were born. The white stoned graves lied above ground, letting overgrown grass and vines consume their shiny surfaces. It was as if the plants wanted to desperately pull them down into the earth. What I slightly feared as a child, partly because of American views of the dead and the omnipresent superstition of "duppies" in Obeah, now soothes me as I think about the closeness of my ancestors to Bobby and I's live bodies that have been conjoined by abundant greenery that quite literally stores our history within the soil.

I hold my memories of Jamaica close to my heart as all encompassing tokens of queer ecowomanism, and ecospiritualities that are battered with idealized longing and diasporic dreams. They are epitomes of the social ecologies of Black diasporic queerness—ecologies which draw from and interact with nature's complexities. They are memories eternally bound to the diasporic landscape. They are memories which value and prove that emotional sensory responses are mediums used to navigate through, transcend and proceed marginalization. Jamaica's landscape carries the treacherous histories of the Arawak genocide, the Transatlantic slave trade, and British colonization. These events birthed generational traumas such as poverty, food insecurity, internalized anti-Blackness, misogynoir, a disdain for queerness, and a myriad of neglectfulness. These workings of Western conquest caused circumstances like that of mine, my mother's and Bobby's, where our mothers were not only economically incapable of supporting us, but were also emotionally tethered in part by being forced to base their capabilities of motherhood solely on economic accessibility. Poverty, and I use this as a loaded word reliant on

historical contexts, caused us to bear patterns of maternal estrangement, and had also forced my mother, like many other families of the Global South to immigrate to the United States, in search of better economic opportunities.

Pictured (Left to Right): Myself, Bobbie, and Auntie

When my mother and father immigrated into the Bronx, they entered a community of low income Black and Brown people whose urban setting posited a very explicit view of environmental racism. The landscape of metropolitan New York City is drastically different than that of Jamaica's. There are few nature-friendly public spaces such as public parks and sidewalks in the city's Black neighborhoods. Even when those parks are present, they are unkempt and littered because the New York City Department of Sanitation willfully neglects and divests funding from low-income Black and Brown neighborhoods, despite being the "world's largest sanitation department" and a "leader in environmentalism—committing to sending zero waste to landfills by 2030" ("About DSNY," n.d.). Additionally, parks, sidewalks and other public spaces quickly become unsafe for us as Black bodies become significantly more vulnerable to police harassment since law enforcement wrongly posits us as a threat. In Community Health Profiles published by the New York City Department of Health, majority Black neighborhoods are statistically more likely to experience detrimental environmental factors ("How Healthy is Your City", 2018). Because of the racial wealth gap due to the residues of redlining amongst other racially discriminatory practices, Black people in the city—and nationwide, of course—are more likely to experience cycles of poverty that are extremely difficult to escape. The devaluation of Black communities bars us from having access to essential components of living healthy lifestyles such as adequate and affordable housing, good schooling, clean water and air, adequate jobs, and healthcare including mental health support. As the community health profiles claim, "Health is closely tied to our daily environment. Understanding how our neighborhood affects our physical and mental health is the first step toward building a healthier and more equitable New York City." One may wonder how the city's official department can recognize this

problem, and yet still perpetuate, and, in many cases, create these very same issues. No policies have been put in place to regulate gentrification, the New York Police Department is weaponized in Black neighborhoods in order to sustain an environment of fear and hostility, and public spaces are neglected by the city. The construction of public space in low income Black communities is only attended to in terms of hyper-policing, yet ignored in all other aspects, especially environmentally.

Many residents in these areas don't need statistics to tell them about the state of their neighborhoods because they experience this marginalization on a daily basis. Environmental issues have historically been a concern of the Black community and other people of color since the Civil Rights Movement of the Sixties and the Black Power movements of the Seventies. These concerns birthed the Environmental Justice movement, and was pioneered primarily by Black and Brown residents who faced the woes of poverty in urban areas like New York City, and in rural areas mainly in the South and Midwest. A key part of the struggle also advocated for lands and people of color who were being exploited in the industrialized Global South. The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit was held in 1991 in Washington DC. There, the seventeen principles of environmental justice, which were anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and prioritized Black, Indigenous and other people of color(BIPOC), were adopted.

There is a growing movement of Black people who are advocating for environmental justice in their communities by reclaiming indigenous African ecologies, as well as sustainable

practices of recycling, renewing and reducing, which are practiced to combat poverty and a lack of resources. Many low-income Black people engage in sustainable practices by gardening, reusing containers and plastic bags, thrifting, using public transportation, having potlucks, and more. Additionally, there is a growing call for Black people, particularly Black women and non-men, to communally heal from generational traumas through environmentalist and ecowomanist means. For example, Jahshana Olivierre, a Black graduate student, and daughter of Trinidadian immigrants has created Soil and Soul, a healing initiative aimed at Black youth, and to her own journey in self and communalistic healing, in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Canarsie. This ethnography will explore her operation of Soil and Soul and her own strides to healing personal trauma.

Urban Environmentalism

In New York City, a significant, and almost magical act happens. During the summer, Black people love being outside. The shift from freezing winters to hot, humid weather releases a radiant energy from block to block and the streets suddenly come to life. Black and Brown people plop their lawn chairs onto the sidewalk, recreating the porches they were able to have year-round in the warm climates of their emigrated countries. Neighborhood elders talk amongst themselves as little children somehow open up fire hydrants, letting water soak their bodies as they play in the street. Occasionally, they will move out of the street to let cars pass by—a calm image that will soothe your soul if you pay enough attention to it. Taking turns, the children and teenagers ride their bikes up and down the block as the scents of jerked meats and barbecues

linger throughout the air. Sweaty Latinx street vendors sell icies and cut up mangoes, yelling "Coco, Mango, Cherry!" in thick Spanish accents.

What are dismissed as acts of loitering, are inexplicably environmentalistic in essence. Collectively, Black people reclaim a space, the urban hood—a setting originally intended to cause grief and turmoil by lawmakers who wished to upkeep Jim Crow segregation practices through redlining policies. They boisterously deflect impositions of environmental racism, and engage in an ecology-based communalism. It is unlikely to see these same kinds of behaviors in white neighborhoods. Unlike white Americans in both the suburbs and gentrified cities, Black residents in urban spaces interact with each other on a daily basis, albeit sometimes by force. Cultural practices of forming "chosen families" through non-biological kinship (especially for queer Black youth), centuries of familial dysfunctionality caused by generational trauma, and the encapsulating nature of the urban ghetto creates a highly unique space in which Black people practice communalism as forms of survival. In these spaces, communalism becomes a form of leisure, and momentary serenity in the face of racist capitalism. It also becomes a medium of therapy in the face of generational trauma and patterns of familial dysfunctionality. Local communalism is also inextricably tied to the urban landscape, just as it is in the agrarian South, and precolonial and postcolonial Africa. When we exclusively assign environmentalism to white, upper class bodies, and ignore the environmentalist practices of Black and Indigenous communities, the effort to fight global warming terribly fails as many white environmentalists uphold the same racist and capitalistic structures that have caused environmental destruction in the first place. It is not the "green" or zero-waste gentrifier that enacts revolutionary

environmentalism. It is instead the Black communities, especially Black girls, women, queer people and youth which Jahshana's Soil and Soul initiative caters to.

Ecowomanism is to Ecofeminism as Purple is to Lavender

Ecowomanism is a term defined as the "overt naming of earth justice as a primary component of womanist concern and analysis" (Harris 2017: 58). Historically, concerns about the environment have been credited as white concerns, but environmentalism has always been present in Black women's communal circles whether through indigenous and diasporic African spiritualities, or through more contemporary means of grassroots activism.

The prefix "eco-", referring to ecology, demonstrates the importance of ecology within womanist practices. Ecology deals with the interdependency of organisms to one another, and speaks to a larger notion that every entity coexists on Earth, and thus engages in a shared reciprocity that is often disregarded by the West. Western formations of either/or thinking and binaries create hierarchies which disregard and underestimate the powerful presence of nature and its organisms. The implementation of environmental destruction paralleled the West's colonization of non-white bodies, and the exploitation of their lands resources.

Womanism is a term coined by Alice Walker, a noted poet, activist, and novelist. She defined womanism in an intentionally poetic and ambiguous fashion, evoking the exact ecologies present within womanism. In hindsight, ecowomanism *is* womanism, but the use of "eco-" as a

prefix recenters ecology in our understanding of womanism, as it has strayed away from its original meaning when placed under a Western feminist framework. Though she coined the term, Walker "named something that had been in existence for some time, functioning below the academic and activist radar and outside dominant histories of consciousness" (Phillips 2006: xx). Walker defines womanism as such:

> 1. From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A Black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.
>
> 2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?" Ans. "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."
>
> 3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.
>
> 4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender (Walker 1983: xi-xii).

Womanism is intricately mindful of the Earth and the beings which it bears. Ecowomanist healing has always been essential to acts of revolution, because if we cannot sustain our personal health, then how can we as a community of the diaspora collectively sustain ourselves? And, if we do not embrace the Earth in a deep and intricate fashion as our ancestors have done, then in which locale do we have to even live out our futures in regards to both literally and spiritually dying from Earth's dwindling health? Additionally, ecowomanism is not just a term. It is a

holistic way of being that holds space for queer and feminine love, ecospirituality, communalism, revolution, health and most importantly, the interconnectivities that lie between the aforementioned. The term differs from the more popular term *ecofeminism* in that it specifically addresses the concerns of Black and Brown women, nonmen and queer people, and our historical connection to both the cherising of Earth and its exploitation through colonial rule.

The Call For Healing

In her short essay "Touching the Earth" from her self-help book entitled *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery*, bell hooks notes how the drastic environmental shift from the agrarian South to the industrial north after the Great Migration affected Black Americans' lifestyles and psyches. She notes:

> Certainly, it must have been a profound blow to the collective psyche of Black people to find themselves struggling to make a living in the industrial North away from the land. Industrial capitalism was not simply changing the nature of black work life, it altered the communal practices that were so Central to survival in the agrarian South. And it fundamentally altered black people's relationship to the body[...]Without the space to grow food, to commune with nature, or to meditate the starkness of poverty with the Splendor of nature, Black people experience profound depression. Working in conditions where the body was regarded solely as a tool (as in slavery), a profound estrangement occured between mind and body. The way the body was represented became more important than the body itself. It did not matter if the body was well, only that it appeared well (1993: 178-179).

Being forced to relocate to undeveloped urban spaces in order to flee racial violence in the South, and the effects that such a move has had on the health of Black people has been widely overlooked. Similarly, while somewhat acknowledged, the psychological effects of the Transatlantic slave trade have been reductively studied in a one-dimensional fashion, and/or dismissed entirely by larger primarily white institutions. Before the Great Migration, a majority of Black people in the United States lived in the agrarian South. Outside of the U.S., Black

people live primarily in the tropical Caribbean, Central and South America, and Africa—all geographies with warm climates. Despite the fact that many of our geographical positions were forced upon us because of slavery and latter racist regimes, throughout the diaspora, we have always found ways to maintain indigenous ecologies such as herbal medicine, and create new ecologies as forms of resistance and healing—militant healing, at that.

As hooks mentions, many Black women authors who have based their novels in the agrarian South have inevitably utilized ecopoetics in their novels as a medium to evoke spiritual ecologies that kept us resiliently hopeful for what scholar Tina Campt recalls as a Black feminist future is "that which will have *had* to happen"(2017: 17).

> I remain committed to a black feminist praxis of futurity and the grammar of the future real conditional. More specifically, I feel a deep accountability to the had to of this tense and the necessity of its (grammatically implied) "must." For I believe that the challenge of black feminist futurity is the constant and perpetual need to remain committed to the political necessity of what will have had to happen, because it is tethered to a different kind of "must." It is not a "must" of historical certainty or Marxist teleology. It is a responsibility to create one's own future as a practice of survival. The future real conditional is an essential component of a black feminist praxis of futurity as an existential grammatical practice of grappling with precarity, while maintaining an active commitment to the every labor of creating an alternative future. Indeed, it is this grammatical practice of futurity that constitutes my definition of freedom (2017: 114).

The desire to heal is an act of the future real conditional of hope, where futurity does not remain in the future, but is performed in the present. Black non-men and women are, and have been, engaging in a futurity that, as with ecopoetics, sustains the *soul*—and I mean that in the most multi-dimensional, layered afrofuturist sense—where spiritual holism and communal ecologies are interdependent upon one another. As hooks mentions, "There was the special magic of the Caribbean that was present in the form of Voudoun, that way of working roots my

father's mother Sister Ray knew about (or so everyone said)" (1993: 18). Similarly, it is Jahshana's connection Trinidad and a trip to Senegal which kicked her journey of environmentalist healing into gear. They are sites for ecology-based memories that have reminded her that being in an environment abundant with greenery and ancestral presence have provided holistic ways of being that aid in healing from trauma. This is not to say that places of the diaspora that are not tropical or have warm climates do not evoke this desire for environmentalist healing, nor is it to say that those within "green" climates do not suffer from mental distress, but it is certainly more accessible and easier to engage in ecowomanist healing in the geographical locations aforementioned. Jahshana, her aunties and Mother Cornhusk are women who carry on legacies of ancestral healing and holistic folk medicine of the diaspora that takes into account not only the physical, but the mental, spiritual and social factors that cause various ailments. I myself have always wondered why mental health was only contextualised within the sphere of the mental, if emotional stress tends to manifest itself through physical debilitation.

Like Jahshana, hooks calls for us to heal by way of environmentalism. She remarks, "Collective Black self-recovery takes place when we begin to renew our relationship to the earth, when we remember the way of our ancestors. When the earth is sacred to us, our bodies can also be sacred to us" (1993: 195). The "blow" to our collective psyches hooks names to are described and termed by researcher and author Dr. Joy Degruy as Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome *(PTSS)*. PTSS accounts for the intricate ways in which generational trauma is passed down as a result of the legacies of slavery and systemic racism. Slavery was not purely a physical act; the effects of physical violence and constraint often led to damaging emotional and spiritual defects across the

diaspora. When one is constantly dehumanized and debilitated by larger institutional forces, prominent and detrimental effects alters their mental health. Thus, a person's socioeconomic status is heavily impacts their mental health. People who are low income, homeless, have substance addictions, or are incarcerated are more likely to experience poor mental health. What then happens to a social group that has historically been barred from accessing resources necessary for a healthy lifestyle, and forced to endure traumatic histories, is a cycle of debilitating mental states that, as a result of historical discrimination, is not attended to with care and understanding. This is why healing cannot be independent of the social realities of Black people, nor can it ignore the core principles of ecowomanism which call for holistic healing approaches that prioritize those at the margins of the margins—low income Black queer people and/or women like Jahshana. As a healer, Jahshana has embarked on a journey towards radical self and communal healing which tackles the woes of the social conditions of the Black diaspora.

Methodology

In the beginning of *Ezili's Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders,* Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley asks the reader to "[r]ead this book like a song. No never, ever like a book of theory" (2018: 1). I ask for you, the reader, to read this ethnography like a song as well. This essay is a love letter to Jahshana, myself, and other Black women and queer folks who I have encountered throughout my life. I have seen time and time again that we are always short of the very things we need, one of those being healing. What good does it do to limit my ethnography to academia, especially when it comes to the academic field of anthropology, a field which has historically aided in the institutions that debilitate my community today? Being Black, and hyper aware of

your Blackness in a PWI is a long and tedious battle. I have seen the woes and in's and out's of white elitist academia. I have time and time again felt lost in a sea of academic jargon, and book-long theories that could have been explained in a page or less. I've been made to feel embarrassed about recieving my education in primarily Black and Brown public schools, and frustrated by witnessing the stark differences in what youth who look like me are taught in our public schools as opposed to our white counterparts. I've faced microaggressions from non-Black professors and students alike, and have been in countless one-dimensional and reductive class discussions with raging racist undertones.

Pursuing an academic career in anthropology placed me in classrooms where I was one of the few or the only Black students present. Being a token to supplement claims of diversity in a PWI, was telling as its hyper-Eurocentric curriculums both angered me, and bored me to death. Anthropology and the larger realm of Western academia have long served as tools of white supremacy. Anthropology is a field of study whose origins, like many other sciences, aided in the imposition of colonial rule and psuedoscientific racist classifications. Anthropology still remains a form of colonialism, and the ways in which both early and contemporary anthropologists practiced their fieldwork heavily relied on racist Western conceptions of savagery and primitivism which negatively coded Black and Indigenous bodies, and the lands which they occupied, as merely objects and deemed them as "other." It is the era of evolutionist anthropology that spearheaded nature-culture dualism, the idea that nature is inferior to man, and thus should be dominated. I am forced to wonder that if anthropology has such a horrid background, then what does it mean to use ethnography to explore Black healing practices that

are intentionally done through a decolonial lens? More broadly, what does it mean to use a practice that is brashly the study of humans and their cultures, and arguably the most humanistic study of them all, to study marginalized groups that are constantly dehumanized by institutions like anthropology itself? Where is the space for non-white cultures to reclaim anthropology, as not a Western invention, but instead as something that has been practiced through centuries of oral storytelling, and indigenous knowledge systems? And finally, what does it mean if I use this medium to present my research on Jahshana, who like myself has felt lost, tokenized and overlooked in primarily white academic institutions?

It is in this ethnography where I invoke what Nancy Scheper-Hughes' would describe as the practice of *militant anthropology*, and channeling bell hooks's notion of *killing rage* into *militant resistance* (1996: 42). Acknowledging the political structures that accompany anthropology is essential in prefacing this ethnography. Dictated as universal, hegemonic cultural norms of the West heavily impact the way we function on a day to day basis, and affect how ethnography is approached. These norms, termed as white supremacist culture, include: making sense of the world according to binaries and either/or thinking; the formation of objective, empirical truths that are officialized through the practice of science; the validification of knowledge only if it is produced by Western institutions; and, not recognizing the complex, multidimensional ecologies of the world. White Europeans were thought to be the epitome of humanness, due to being civilized and distant from nature and thus were viewed as the most evolved and most valuable. These constructions of race backed by science—the ultimate enforcer of hard and static truths in the West—gave way to the formation of a colonial empire

that formatted knowledge as absolute truth which could only be validated through logocentric institutions. The healing practices of Jahshana do not function this way as she is a descendant of the African Diaspora where knowledge is not only spread through the verbal or the written. What cannot be articulated through Western means is articulated instead through song and dance, movement, silence, moans and groans, Blues, Gospel, Hip-hop, and so on. As explored in Fred Moten's **"**Black Mo'nin'", "[t]he essence of the gospel style is a wordless moan. Always these sounds render the indescribable, implying, 'Words can't begin to tell you, but maybe moaning will'" (2003: 60).

I intend to reclaim anthropology as a practice that, although is credited to having origins in the West, has existed outside of and prior to formation of the colonial West as oral history and storytelling. They are forms of archiving that exist outside of—and can never properly be captured by—Western institutions. These archives function as memories that are not only denoted through literacy, but are also resiliently and profoundly preserved through ancestral memory. Such memories value, and could not exist without, subjective feeling and emotion, and through artistic means. Such memories are what give birth to diasporic forms of resistance such as Soil and Soul, Gospel or the Blues.

Academia, until this day, heavily relies on white supremacist cultural norms, as academia itself is a product of those norms and is dominated by white academics. Furthermore, the world has not yet seen retribution for, nor have ruling institutions actively worked to redeem and hold themselves accountable for the atrocities of centuries of colonialism. Dangerous yet glamorized

ideas of diverse, post-racial societies and free-market capitalism all show themselves to be present in the work of contemporary anthropologists. While subtle (neoliberal) improvements have been made to the field of anthropology, it still remains an institutionalized science with a wretched history, bound to the likes of jargon, discussion, playful banter, and no action—reminiscent of armchair anthropology—in the face doing fieldwork of marginalized people, who tend to live in the Global South or in the throw-away pits of Western countries.

In writing about healing and the active process of decolonization which it entails, I repeatedly must hold myself accountable for and grapple with the ways in which I approach my fieldsite and this ethnography. I remain cautious, terrified, and almost paranoid of employing the same colonial tactics that created the very same circumstances of daily marginalization which Jashana and I are actively trying to combat through environmentalist healing. This ethnography very well may fail in many ways, but it would be quite silly of me to write about the act of decolonization in ecowomanist healing, and completely ignore not only anthropology's status as a colonial tool, but also the ways in which the depressing spaces of colonial-esque academia have caused Jahshana and I to seek healing in the first place. The least I could do is be honest and transparent in my intentions for this ethnography.

Academia has not, and never will be accommodating, or kind to me, or my community. I know that my immigrant grandmother would never be able to get past the first pages of many of the material I've read throughout my academic career, let alone be able to physically access them. Any knowledge that I want to communicate most effectively to her must be spoken in Jamaican Patois (never written), and expressed through physical gesture, hands-on learning and oral

history. And while this is somewhat acknowledged in anthropology, it remains simply just that: acknowledged and never acted upon by many (white) ethnographers. To be frank, I do not care about white academia. *I never have* and *I never will*. But, what I *do* care about is my community. I care about Jahshana, and the young Black girls she has led through her Soil and Soul journey. I care about radical healing through a queer diasporic ecowomanist lens, and memories that evoke the alleviating ecopoetics of prominent Black women like bell hooks, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison. I care about a Black feminist futurity, explored by Tina Campt who, although works within academic spaces, sees this futurity practiced by Black queer folk and Black women in the everyday "quotidian" (Campt, 2017).

PART TWO

Soil And Soul By Jahshana Olivere

"Soil and soul is life's long work. Before it was named, before I was born. Several lives before mine. Two summers ago, I traveled to Soul Fire Farm for week long communion with the land, and there I was reminded of purpose. Atop a rock, oriented towards the water; grounded at a crossroads. Soaked herbs fell over me—clinging to my physical, summoning the spiritual. My ancestors were called and [they] touched [purpose] upon my soul. The message received was clear.

I must open a school. [And so], I continued.

January 2018, I returned to my parents' homeland in Trinidad. In February, I traveled north of home to Oya's festival. I took part and place in forest worship. Whirled by honey and water, time distorted. Circling the altar in song and praise, I was called by the spirit of Sango, hugged by the spirit of Mother Cornhusk. *And so reminded of purpose, I continued.* A month later I visited my aunt in Diego Martin. She asked me, *'Jahshana, What do you want to do?'* I told her, '*I must open a school'.*

My aunt living, told me that in the days leading to her sister's death, her sister was preparing to open a school. My aunt living, told me that a prophetess of her church told her that her sister's dream would be passed down to the generation after. My aunt living, paused and realized *it was me.* Purpose called out to me, brought me over the ocean to homeland soil. Purpose passed down and initiated me. *And so reminded, I continued.* The soil has kept and guided me, and my soul continues to beckon; connecting me to purpose, to the dreams and

wishes of my ancestors. Soil and Soul was born out of the terror, out of my ancestors' deep need to find peace and stable footing. When we struggled to survive, to make sense of our pain; the soil guided us, our souls connected us.

We have come through hell.

And so, *Soil and Soul is continued legacy.* It was born out of the deep need to repair that which has left us and our communities broken and traumatized. Soil and Soul is the cultivated assertion, from generations past, that we can create and sustain spaces that make love and healing possible, that a healthy relationship with the Earth, a sustained relationship with Spirit is our birthright. The distractions to reclaiming are multiple. The blocks designed to surrender spirit, mind and heart continue to relent. But I know my purpose, I know what I have been tasked with.

I am tasked with pushing through anyhow. I am tasked with using my voice, to speak and write my truth. I am tasked with reclaiming my rightful space on this earth. I am tasked with helping to heal my bloodline. I am tasked with teaching. This is the responsibility I was given at birth and this responsibility is legacy.

My mothers before me gave me word and put in me the inclination to write. I must write to live. This way with words has been a practice among the women in my family for generations. I will continue. I must continue. I must uphold tradition. I am writing to uncover the healing traditions and legacies of my bloodline and the communities that I am apart of. I use my words to

uncover, piece together and connect. *I will document and uplift Black Womens' healing traditions*."

"(Pictured above: The Women Who Guide Me*: Janice McQueen, Janys Chapman, Joyce Scott, Nora Chapman, Jahshana Olivierre and Mother Cornhusk*)"

Jahshana The Ecowomanist

Jahshana, standing at about five foot two, is petite and small-framed. Her face is young and her cheeks are full. Her skin is a deep brown hue, smooth and clear. She grew up in Canarsie, a neighborhood in the southeastern part of Brooklyn. According to the 2018 NYC Department of Community Health Profiles, Canarsie is fifty-nine percent Black(2018: 2). It is a large immigrant community where nearly half of its residents were born outside of the United States. Jahshana herself is the daughter of Trinidadian immigrants. Her fondness for Canarsie is shrouded in childhood memories of developing girlhood, and a fusion of immigrant West Indian and Black American culture, but it is also remains a site of trauma for her.

On the day I met her in person, she sported a fresh twist out, leaving a small, but full and kinky afro atop her head. She was still getting dressed as I sat on her dorm room bed. She had invited me over to make candles and I was ecstatic. Her tank top was a shade of green, close to the color of the outside of a honeydew melon. She wrapped a intricately patterned scarf around the perimeters of her edges which matched the green of her top. She wore light blue, seventies style bell bottom jeans that elegantly flared out towards the floor. That day, around the end of March, it was exceptionally warm and sunny, and her outfit matched the weather perfectly. Her New York University (NYU) dorm was bright; the windows are tall and overlooked the Lower East Side. The window ledge on her side of the room adorned pictures of her as a baby; aloe and rosemary plants; and, shells and rocks. A written note that rested on the pot of the aloe read:

Nora ∞
♡
♡Aunty Janys ∞
♡Adinah Durant ∞
♡Herbert Baize ∞
♡Aunty Adolyn ∞

Mother Cornhusk
♡
∞
Aunt Nette
♡

teachers, light workers, healers, saints
joy, community building, circles
resilience, faith

Another poem nearby entitled “Your Affirmation” read:

I am ready to step
into my power.
I am ready to rise,
to shine & to
speak my truth.

The note came from I See You Wellness, a wellness center in Brooklyn focused on providing women of color with ways to engage in healthier lifestyles. There also lied a poem entitled “Granny”, which seemed too sacred for me to read, a paperback version of *Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals*, and an open book I could not see the title of but held the beautiful sentence, “The farmers he stayed with were beekeepers as well, which he took as sign he must be on the right path” on page 127.. Above her desk, *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood…and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education* by Christopher Emdin*, Freshwater* by Akwaeke Emezi, Toni Morrison novels and other novels alike lined her bookshelf.

To contribute to candle making, I brought dried nettle leaves, and rose, patchouli and cardamom-scented incense. As we melted chipped candle wax on the stove, I met Zainab, Jahshana’s roommate and close friend. She calmly leaned on the fridge, and asked me series of

questions that led us to eagerly talk about the Bronx and Mount Vernon. We sat around as the weather permeated a bittersweet kind of warmth—bittersweet because it had probably been that way because of global warming. We shared silence, calmness, and the urge to do nothing without intention as the woman in an interlude of Solange's new album said. We continued to listen to rest of the new Solange album, and laughed as Jill Scott serenaded us with talk of making collard greens, eating grits, and fighting the woman who tried to break up her relationship.

Jahshana's process of making candles is very spiritual, as was the time we spent together. We put the herbs and oils of nettle, ginger and rose into the melted candle wax, struggling to keep the cotton wick centered. She told me to set my intentions for the candle. Inexperienced, I asked her how to do so. "Pray," she said. Again, I asked her how to do so. I had only known the classic, Christian way to pray; on my knees, hands together and head bowed. Jahshana hated this method of praying. It was inactive. She liked to use her body to pray verbally, utilizing her vocal chords to invoke ancestral energies as traditionally done through West African song and dance. Without planning, we exchanged herbs, feeling the need engage in the act of gift giving with each other. I gave her dried nettle leaves. She gave me the dried petals and buds of roses, and loose candle wax. I could tell that we both subconsciously felt guilty for accepting one another's gifts, despite knowing our genuine intentions behind them.

As we waited for the candle wax to dry I offered to buy her lunch, and she kindly dismissed my offer. After I insisted that I had no problem buying her lunch, she paused and mentioned that she had trouble accepting offers from others. I had the same trouble as well, and suggested that perhaps our disinclination to accept gifts had come from our West Indian

upbringing. Whenever I had gone to someone else's home as a child, my mother would always tell me that if my hosts offered me anything such as food, that I was to always say no, even if I was starving. Perhaps it was the seemingly absurd and unsaid norms passed on to us through colonial British social etiquette, and that found their way into how we conducted ourselves in the company of others. We had bonded through gift giving, and engaged in a specific type of communalism I've only ever felt with other Black women and Black queer folk. Being of the diaspora, many of us descend from West African tribes, and continue to carry on the legacy of our ancestral matriarchs by engaging in a ecowomanist communalism to this day. Simultaneously, we also revealed the insidious and protruding nature of colonial-inflicted mannerisms and our tendency to feel the need to give labor as Black women. For centuries we have been forced to assume the role of the (domestic) laborer, always giving—sometimes out of force, sometimes through pure will—and made to feel guilty for receiving. The line between the two causes for our gift giving is thin, but nevertheless it was comforting because we engaged in it on our own terms and genuinely wanted to give to each other as a sign of compassion and care.

On the other side of the room was her roommate's side, whose name I never got. It was rather messy, and seemed like she had never unpacked her things, or was in the middle of moving. "Yeah, she's never here. I don't know where she be at. I'm pretty sure she's scared of me or something." She mentioned her roommate was East Asian, and gave me a look for which I cannot describe because it is a specific wordless look that Black women give each other that only makes sense if you have lived through the experiences of Blackness, and the intricate connection to historical narratives which dictate our lives. The look alluded to prominent anti-Blackness that permeates in East Asian communities, and moved into the racial climate of NYU. Although a

primarily white institution, NYU has a significant amount of East Asian students. Later that afternoon as Jashana, her friends, Zainab and Remi, and I walked around the Lower East Side, Jahshana pointed to a girl walking in the opposite direct of us, slyly pointed to the girl and exclaimed "Yooo. That's her!" The group collectively kissed their teeth, and shook their heads in frustration. A few weeks ago, the group of friends, had been openly interacting and talking in a campus computer lab. Suddenly Jahshana noticed that the table which they were sitting at had begun to shake and asked aloud, to no one in particular, why that had been happening. To their dismay, an East Asian girl, the one who had passed by us on the street, looked at them and starkly said, "I'll stop shaking the table if you guys stop being so loud." Now, this moment would be one where Claudia Rankine debunks what would be termed as a *microaggression* to be so sinister and violent in their manifestations, that the *micro* is not a small, benevolent, or well-intentioned mishap at all. It is instead an aggression in its purest form that alludes to the larger social climate of PWIs, and the historical contexts of attributing noise-pollution and loitering to Black people, particularly low-income Black women seen to be *welfare queens*, *ratchet*, *ghetto*, and a myriad of other social stereotypes. Her treatment as a Black woman in a PWI, has only further contributed to her need for healing.

The Formation of Soil And Soul

In 2015, Jahshana took a break from school because she had been struggling with her mental health. She could not find adequate support from others and had to find a way to nourish herself physically and mentally. “I felt so alone,” she would express as she vented to her friends who, like her, had also been struggling with their own mental health. She felt left behind as her friends we’re more easily adjusting to college. Her high school did not provide sufficient college prep, and she had to figure out how to graduate on her own. Many first generation immigrants and first generation college students like Jahshana have been forced to raise themselves on account of cultural and class barriers that prevent their parents from being able to help them with preparing for a life according to American norms. “Active parent involvement is a privilege,” she says. She feels that she never got the chance to develop, or heal, or to even bear witness to the process of a healing journey. So, as a remedy for her own mental health, she started Soil and Soul. She kept her little sister and her sister’s friends in mind as the first people she wanted to do Soil and Soul with. In search of funding, she came across a grant catered to helping young women with leadership experience, and ended up getting the grant despite applying a day past the deadline. In developing the workshop series, Jahshana experienced plenty of anxiety and pain, and wanted to give up many of times. Though, she managed to push through it and held her first workshop in her family home in Canarsie. Her mom helped her to clean, with setup and to prepare for the event. During the workshop, her sister and her friends each took turns to speak about who they were—an activity where both building identity of the self and community building could happen simultaneously. They took polaroids, played games and activities, and

bonded. The workshop allowed Jahshana to facilitate an environment of learning and self-actualization for the girls as there are few spaces where young Black girls can be in spaces of support and care. Throughout the first workshop series, they directly combated issues of body image, mental health, emotional health, neighborhood violence, relationships, and what self care means for each of them.

Jahshana garnered six more workshops that summer with the girls. She also worked at a school in Manhattan with youth who were struggling at home with their parents, and had to take on the challenge of facilitating a space of healing for both her community, and for herself. One particular girl in her school who was queer, struggled dealing with homophobia coming from her mom. The student was self-harming, and all aspects of her health, physical and mental, were deteriorating. One day, the students mother had called Jahshana and asked her to convince the student to "not be gay." In dealing with such a serious situation, Jahshana remained extra cautious in her approach. She did not want to upset the mother, risking the students removal from the initiative. Nor did she want to vilify the mother through confrontation. It was here where Jahshana had to problem solve while managing her own mental health. For her, every situation is unique, and each calls for its own unique solution. Despite the wrongs of the mother, Jahshana did not see a punitive approach to be any better of a solution as it could have put the daughter in danger of violent acts. Additionally, there are countless cases of Black mothers who are jailed and fined for cases of child neglect, and whose children are put into the system because the situations which poverty and generational trauma put them in are misunderstood. They are instead assigned the "bad" Black mother trope. In the effort to heal generational trauma,

Jahshana came from a place of compassion and understanding that is often not granted to Black women forced into dire circumstances, or who exhibit toxic parenting behaviors. She carefully crafted what language she used with both the mom and the student so that they both felt nurtured and cared for. She assured the student that being in spaces like the workshop would allow her to feel more at home, and more like herself. Using appealing language, Jahshana told the mom that it would help if the mom entered more community building spaces instead of simply telling the mother that she was was wrong or homophobic. Jahshana had opened her arms, and Soil and Soul to the mother, who most likely needed healing as well. Additionally the workshops political stance of decolonization would aid in straying away from colonial forces that contributed to her homophobia, and would allow her to nurture and support her daughter more.

And so, she brought the girls, including the student and her mother, to a Truth and Reconciliation workshop held at the United Nations. The workshop, aimed at intergenerational women, had elders sit in a circle around young girls as their mothers beared witness to it. Many of the girls from Soil and Soul bravely stood up and shared their stories of trauma, struggling in school, and being seen as less than than their non-Black and male peers. They claimed their space, and claimed themselves by declaring who they where, what they experienced and what they stood for. The first workshop series of Soil and Soul gave them the opportunity to build community, with young Black girls being at the locus of it. The relationship between Jahshana and her younger sister strengthened, as did her little sister's relationship with her friends. The space was intentionally made *for* them. They did not happen to find Soil and Soul, they declared it for themselves.

Jahshana has learned since how to address similar issues, and takes each experience from the workshops as a means to learn, and to continue to learn. Soil and Soul is still in its formative stages and may always be as it continues to grow and shift with Jahshana, and the communities which she supports. For the remainder of the year, when she is not facilitating workshops, she is educating herself, learning from life experiences, and learning through others.

In 2017, Jahshana held the second workshop which she entitled *What's Good in My Hood?* It was singular workshop she held as a day long retreat in Canarsie. Using leftover grant money from the first workshops, she worked to open up a community garden in Canarsie where she could engage neighborhood youth through an environmentalist means. *What's Good in My Hood?* was aimed at addressing various forms of neighborhood violence. She managed to facilitate fruitful dialogue around the presence of gangs, gun violence, catcalling, violence between first generation children and their Caribbean parents, and scamming. Both local young Black boys and girls mediated with each other by sharing personal experiences and listening to one another. They also went on a walking tour of Canarsie which taught them its history, including the influx of Caribbean immigrants, as well as conservation efforts around Jamaica Bay, a nearby estuary. They learned about the importance of the natural environment, what it has to offer them, and what they can offer it. They planted in the garden beds, went kayaking in Jamaica Bay, made an herbal medicine bath, and went on an herb walk where they identified native and cultivated herbs growing wild such as lavender, mint and thyme. By coupling conversations about violence with nature, Jahshana was able to introduce a period of release and relaxation to a community that often never gets to indulge in leisure and rest.

The third and most recent workshop was carried on in the format of an intergenerational summer school. There, she sought to teach and learn about herbal medicine for free. For funding, Jahshana applied to a reparations initiative aimed at BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and other People of Color) farmers. The initiative was organized by Soul Fire Farm, a community farm in Albany dedicated to fighting food injustice, and led by BIPOC. Previously, she went on one of their week-long summer farming retreats, and it inspired her to incorporate a stronger sense of environmentalism into Soil and Soul. The reparations initiative, is only one of the many resource programs that Soul Fire Farm provides for BIPOC farmers. Their website reads:

> We raise and distribute life-giving food as a means to end food apartheid. With deep reverence for the land and wisdom of our ancestors, we work to reclaim our collective right to belong to the earth and to have agency in the food system. We bring diverse communities together on this healing land to share skills on sustainable agriculture, natural building, spiritual activism, health, and environmental justice. We are training the next generation of activist-farmers and strengthening the movements for food sovereignty and community self-determination[....]The food system was built on the stolen land and stolen labor of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and people of color. Members of the Northeast Farmers of Color Network are claiming our sovereignty and calling for reparations of land and resources so that we can grow nourishing food and distribute it in our communities ("Reparations Map for Black-Indigenous Farmers", 2018).

As Soul Fire Farm is led by Black communities similar to Canarsie, both Jahshana and the country-wide network of BIPOC farmers seek to address healing through militant, grassroots level community advocacy, and see communal healing to be essential to activist work. As Toni Cade Bambara has stated, "revolution begins in the self and with the self" (1970: 133). Depleted mental health has been a direct effect of systemic anti-Blackness, and was necessary to maintain Blackness as a status of subhuman. Soul Fire Farm, and Soil and Soul work to directly combat these histories.

After securing funding from Soul Fire, she had applied to a local Black owned apothecary and put down a two hundred dollar deposit for an herbal medicine workshop. She quickly regretted her decision as she thought about the how inaccessible this particular apothecary had made herbal knowledge. She thought about the low income people who were the most in pain, and least likely to access ways of healing. She didn't believe that there should be barriers to accessing knowledge, or gate kept by those with economic privileges. Additionally, the owner refused to give Jahshana her deposit back, which further upset Jahshanna. The apothecary was well off and had many customers, and though the apothecary was Black owned, it only seemed to cater to those who were middle class or above. Instead, Jahshana found as many free resources and books on herbal medicine as she could. During the workshops, participants gathered all the knowledge they had on herbs used within their families, shared their medicinal usage, and what they believed each herb meant spiritually. Together, they also learned how to make rosewater, tea leaf mixtures, and tinctures. As with the second workshop series, she taught them how to heal through material sourced from the Earth, and emphasized how well the Earth could support them if they took the time to care about the Earth in return. She also had them write poetry because “the community speaks in poems,” and she wanted to keep the space free of as much academic jargon as possible.

Soothe the Soul: An Installation and Workshop

Following in Jahshana’s footsteps, and exploring my own interest in ecowomanism, I curated an installation and workshop hybrid to bring my research outside the confines of this

academic paper. I facilitated a short workshop on my college campus called Soothe the Soul. I aimed the workshop at Black students, and advertised it during finals week as a call for a moment to destress, and a reminder to prioritize their mental health during stress-inducing times. I made a free zine for my participants(*Figure 1*) on the medicinal and spiritual uses of basic Caribbean herbs. I scanned pages from a 1989 book my aunt had given me many years ago called *Basic Herbs for Health and Healing* by Rashan Abul Hakim a.k.a. Ruddy Duckett. He was one of the owners of a local Jamaican brand and health food store in the Bronx, which sells herbs, tonics, and tinctures of the Caribbean. Focusing on diasporic Caribbean herbs was important to me as they are a mixture of herbs originally indigenous to or were cultivated during slavery in the Caribbean, Africa, Central and South America, and North America. I also included scans from other zines Jahashana had sent me on reproductive health and womb care. Taking in mind the many stories of painful cramps, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, polycystic ovarian syndrome and other menstrual ailments from peers who get periods, I saw this inclusion to be necessary. Their menstrual cycles would often bring on an onslaught of symptoms of depression and fatigue. Many of them have not been able to extensively talk about their symptoms with doctors because their pain is often underestimated by medical staff. Due to the taboos surrounding periods, they had unfortunately learned to just shut up and take the pain. Many different herbs such as ginger, turmeric, lavender, and Jamaican sorrel can make teas, baths, and vaginal steams that help with internal cramping and bloating. They are also good stress relievers when used as aromatherapy.

I created a pamphlet with excerpts from ecowomanist readings that have been integral to my interest in ecowomanism and the execution of this paper. Exceprts included bell hook's *Touching the Earth*, and Alice Walker's definition of womanism from *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens.* I also diagrammed a mind map(*Figure 2*) which demonstrates the positive impact that an ecowomanist approach would have to community-based work as it directly addresses many key issues Black and Indigenous communities face.

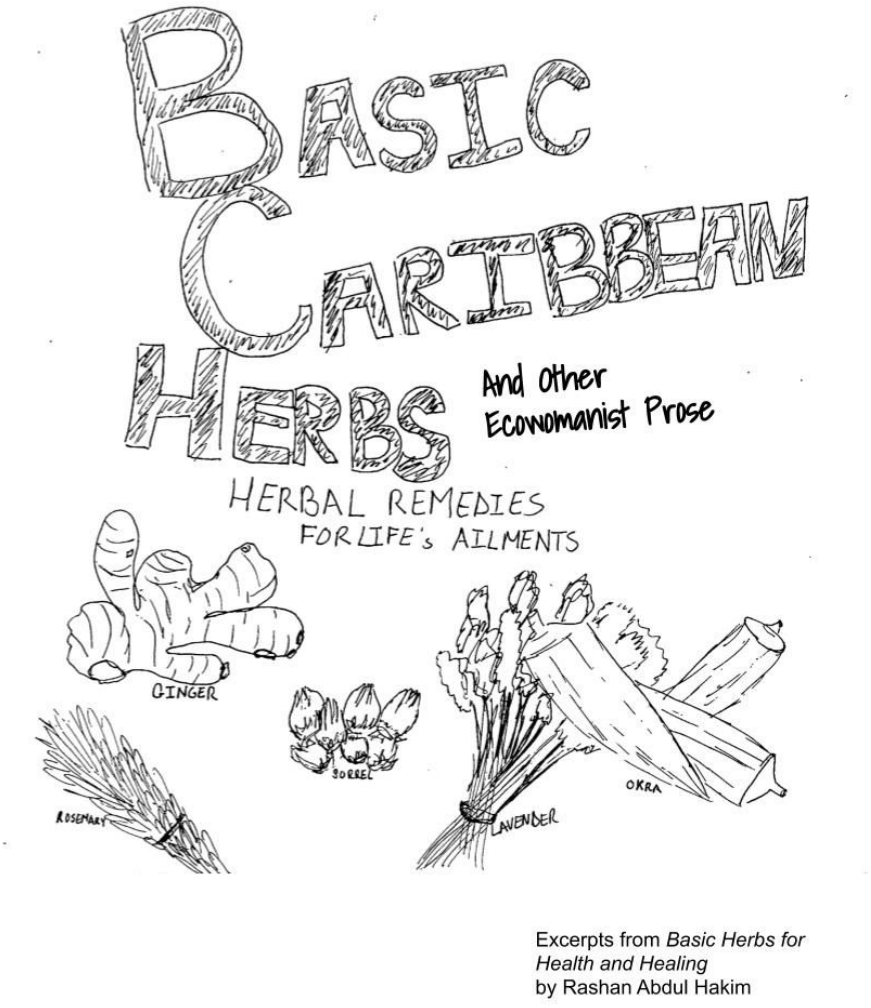

Figure 1. Hand Drawn Cover of Booklet on Caribbean Herbs

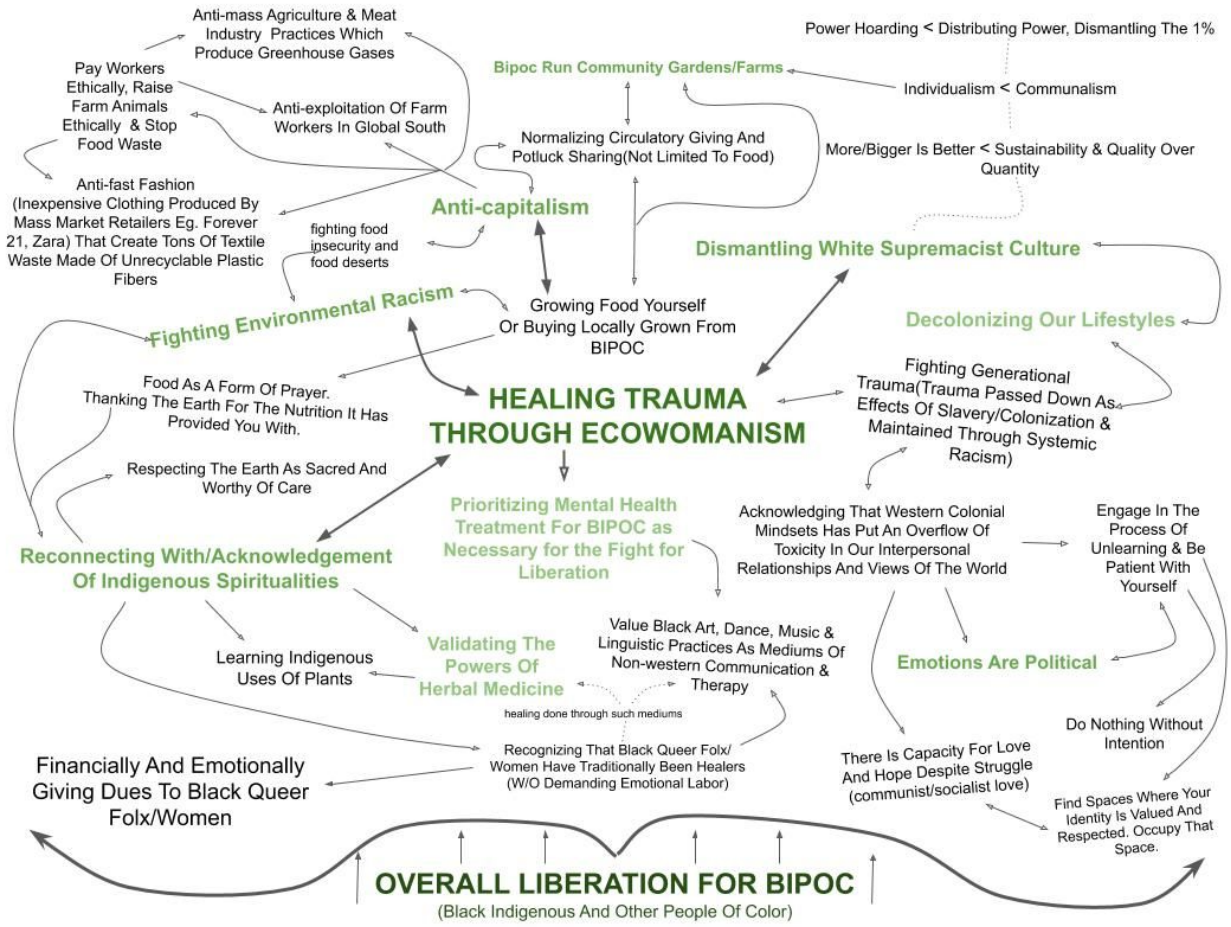

Figure 2. Mind Map

I included an installation by a fellow student and artist, Bree Person, who created a piece entitled *Urban Renewal.* The installation is a wall of faux moss and leaves glued to a green backdrop, and is coupled off with a jail cell door. It was constructed as a commentary on how urban renewal has contributed and pandered to the influx of gentrifiers in low-income Black and Brown neighborhoods. In the process of urban renewal, the infrastructure of dwindling urban neighborhoods is rebuilt with the goal of creating better communities, but this often means making the newer neighborhoods attractive to higher income white folks, and less accessible to low-income Black people. The installation, simply put, demonstrates how spaces such as public parks can receive funding and care for their renewal, but systemic hindrances to a healthy environment, like the incarceration of Black people, remain prominent issues. Politicians who curate the renewals carelessly gloss over the intricate impacts of institutional racism on the local community. They lack the serious thought and engagement with the local community needed to address such problems, and thus do not account for gentrification as a negative consequence to renew. In some cases, politicians even see gentrification as positive change.

In order to create a domestic ecowomanist setting, I set up a station to teach my participants how to weave on a lap loom. The emphasis on weaving was to acknowledge the value domestic labor carries as inherently sustainable and spiritual practices. They are handmade, carefully thought out, and transfer an essence of ecowomanist energy onto whatever they produce on the loom. Weaving, practiced by women all over the Global South, often utilizes recycled fabrics, local grasses and woods, and even plastic to make intricate pieces of art, blankets, tapestries, bags, and so on. I also created a domestic environment by incorporating

various textures within the space. I placed some of the moss covered *Urban Renewal* pieces into the table, as well as: woven baskets from Target and a market in Benin; bamboo, succulent and croton plants; Florida Water; and, physical copies of books on ecowomanism. These objects created an array of texture and color throughout the space, and mimicked the intricacies of nature and nature-sourced textiles produced by women's domestic labor. Additionally, all of the objects, besides Bree's installation, came from my own home setting. They are objects which I believe hold spiritual, feminine, and ancestral energies because they were gifted to me by loved ones, or were objects I put time and dedication into crafting. While all objects were not sourced from ecowomanist labor, objects bought from chain stores such as the baskets from Target, were purchased with sustainability, and its longevity in use in mind.

Finally, I created another station where participants could write letters to their ancestors. I then collected the letters, covered them in herbs, and burned them as a way to release the messages into the universe so that the ancestors could properly receive them through the transfer of spirit. This process acknowledged the importance of honoring and respecting our ancestors, and is a Black diasporic practice that still holds onto Indigenous West African ecospiritual practices. These indigenous practices find the root of spiritual energy in the transference of energy between ancestors, and living family members. The ancestors spirits are believed to be manifested in natural objects like trees, flowers, animals, waterways, the sky and galaxies. Accordingly, the letters encouraged a practice of communalism through the recognition of the interconnectivities of nature, community and health.

The Continuation of Soil and Soul

Currently, Jahshana is seeking to take the time that she is not facilitating the workshops to learn and gather knowledge from the everyday walks of life. She will soon do research in Senegal during the summer, and is looking to educate herself on womb care and reproductive health. Following the first workshop series with her younger sister and her sister's friends, she is seeking to continue on the theme of reconciliation between Black mothers and daughters where they can participate in intergenerational community building and co-teach. Much of Soil and Soul's focus is to make healing accessible to everyone, and through this, Jahshana was able to create a space of vulnerability and honesty for her local community. Her vulnerability also allowed her to learn from bad situations so that she could move onward to making Soil and Soul a more formative and carefully thought out space, while allowing each participant to feel worthy and welcomed. She cultivated an abundance of presence and community despite many setbacks and personal struggles. Many times, she has beat herself up for having to ask for help or for waiting until the last minute to organize. She had dealt with an overwhelming amount of anxiety, but has since had to learned to support, validate, and make a space for her emotions without punishing herself so that she could show up for her community. She has become a healer not just for others, but for herself, as well. Soil and Soul continues to have no fixed definition as it has gone through, and will continue to go through many transformations. It has been youth work, community care, healing, self-discipline, vocational, hands-on, domestic, and a call for revolution through militant tender, loving care. "You don't have to know what [Soil and Soul] is gonna be," all you do have to know is that the work and dedication is there, and that it is

meaningful. In its first stages, Jahshana was ashamed of the work she had done with Soil and Soul because it was not perfect. But now, she remains proud of her commitment despite wanting to give up. She is more open to "fucking up", and to the workshops not coming out the way she originally planned. "Working with youth and learning not to always take shit personally, will test your resilience for sure. The youth will test you. [They will ask],"'Are you really bout it? Do you really care about me?'"

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