

## Dancing With Bones in Dark, Feminine and Magical Realms

By Zainab Amadahy

*\* Note: This article is excerpted from my nonfiction work-in-progress exploring the benefits of invoking ancestors to the building of cooperative and supportive relationships across marginalized communities. In recognition of the wondrous variety and complexity of gender identities, this work uses “they”, “them” and “their” to replace gendered pronouns.*

Darkness is a feminine place. The womb, the tomb, the butterfly's chrysalis. Places of birth, rebirth and transmutation. Reawakening the Divine Feminine requires yielding to the darkness, the wild and the unknown. It means relishing the wind in your Medusan locks as you dance under the protection of *Kaliikada Nvdom* (Full Moon), rather than slither in caves prowled by Perseus.

From what many societies that came before ours have left behind and/or brought forward, it appears we once had an intimate, beneficial and satisfying relationship with the feminine forces of darkness and the beings that reside within. The Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) *Book of the Dead*, the *Popol Vuh* of the K'iché civilization of Guatemala, and the centuries-old Kanaka Maoli (Indigenous Hawaiian) practice of *Lomilomi* healing are examples of how cultures, then and now, have interacted with the dead. In these cultures ancestors do not lie in rest. They are active, vibrant participants in the realm of the living. In these communities, there was, and is, no definitive separation between the dead, the living -- and the yet-to-be-born.

However, if Hollywood movies plotted around zombies, mummies and vengeful ghosts are any indication of mainstream beliefs, the dead are to be feared. To die is to decay, disintegrate, and be consumed by dark, chaotic, incomprehensible and uncontrollable forces; feminine forces that have, over the centuries, been demonized.

Mainstream culture holds that in the eternal dance between syntropy and entropy, structure and decay, life and death, one wants to be partnered with the former. Light, order and organization feel, after all, more predictable. Controllable. Masculine. The male forces of authority and control are often confused with safety and security. Travel bans, walled borders and militarized policing are considered preferable by some to the alternative of toppling the wealthy and powerful, who engineer war, poverty and injustice, from their golden perches. Star Wars fans cheer for the heroes of light and

disdain the dark side of the force. The Brazilian flag that flew over the 2016 Olympic games promises that progress comes with order (*ordem e progresso*), a phrase based on philosopher Auguste Comte's quote: "Love as a principle and order as the basis; progress the goal." Notice how "love" was left out of the equation. The flag was adopted in 1889, one year after Brazil abolished slavery and sought, as a settler colonial nation built in large part by stolen Africans, to consolidate its borders on stolen Indigenous lands. It was an order of sorts, based on white supremacy and colonization. But was it progress? And for whom?

In disorder one finds the impulse to challenge established norms, to transform, to create something new and wondrous. Perhaps it is disorder that informs the progress we seek. After all, with disarray one can counter rigidity. In messiness one is released from the fatigue that results from a compulsion to maintain the sterile. Even decay is sustenance for some.

From stories and art around the globe, we get the idea that light and dark, order and disorder, life and death, align with divine concepts of good and bad or at least desirable and undesirable. At first glance we might imagine the paradigm of yin and yang as antagonistic forces, which, in reality, compliment each other to provide meaning and balance. As many a sage has observed, life loses its significance without the inevitability of death. The dark, the feminine and the magic are labeled as evil but some of us thrive in magical realms. We are inspired and motivated by the darkness. We reclaim the Divine Feminine with full, prior and informed enthusiasm. If that frightens, maybe it's time to let go of the fantasy that humans could or should order the world. No one is in control.

And yet everyone is.

Assigning meaning to one's relationships with the world enables complete control over one's experience of them. In the spaces between relinquishing the need for control and infusing the events of life with a satisfying purpose, one finds self-empowerment. In fully realized self-empowerment there is no need for control over anything. There is only the desire to grow and create.

As harmonies result from the combination of consonant and dissonant musical threads, the forces of light and dark can be enlisted to create wondrous beauty. Hence, invoking the dead into our lives can heighten our joy and help us manifest our aspirations. We can *dance with bones* collectively and reap many benefits from doing so.

Cultivating relationships with ancestors, in any of the myriad forms of our cultural, spiritual and personal practices, can offer opportunities for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual growth. In these times when our fear of difference and otherness has been deliberately and methodically heightened to new levels, *Dancing with Bones* further offers much-needed inspiration, and perhaps the motivation, to build peaceful and fulfilling relationships across communities, lands and histories.

The term “cultivating relationship” covers the gamut of interactions that can range from just thinking about ancestors, to remembering, to learning about, to intentional communication with, or to allowing memories to be released through intricate movements of the dance. One’s belief system will impact their relationship to ancestors, as will intentions and purpose in cultivating relationship. Or not. There is no desire here to convince anyone to change their beliefs. However, it is worth noting that beliefs determine the substance of experience; impose limitations on or expand experience; inform one’s story about experience; contextualize experience; and often determine whether there is an awareness of experience at all. Now that we have medical technologies like fMRIs (functional magnetic resonance imagers), GSR amps (galvanic skin response amplifiers) and SQUIDs (superconducting quantum interference device - very sensitive magnetometers) we know that the body constantly reacts to stimuli of the mind isn’t consciously aware of. In applying these technologies to understand what happens when we interact with our ancestors, much has been learned, including the measurable wellness benefits of any number of practices.

At the same time we celebrate this reframed knowledge, it’s important to recognize that, in addition to fearing the darkness, everyone harbors an anxiety of being defined and limited by the past. That anxiety imposes boundaries on beliefs, imagination and capacities.

Anxiety over confronting or uncovering events from the past further inhibits one’s ability to see themselves as interconnected and interdependent. This keeps us from recognizing beauty in the fact that we impact and are impacted by each other, even across space and time. Such anxiety deters us from engaging in conversations across space, time and social locations even though such discussions can help us expand as individuals, as communities and as a species.

Furthermore, it is intrinsic to the human condition, whether you believe the ancestors are dust in the wind or a grouping of fond memories, worm food or stories on a shelf in

the Cosmic Library, non-existent or omnipresent, there is a great deal to be gained by connecting to the idea (or entity) that generates the highest levels of anxiety, for therein lies the greatest potential for healing both inherited trauma in the body and the frayed strands of the webbing that connect all of life.

To anyone who wants to live peacefully in the present, dancing with bones, can bring you the transformative healing you seek, thus enabling you to invest with abandon in your relationships. In turn, engaging with your relations (plant, animal, cosmic and 2-legged) can increase your self-knowledge, self-acceptance and self-love. After all, how can you know yourself as generous, loving and compassionate without practicing these on another? The inherent outcome of peaceful intentions and cooperative relationships across communities are the natural byproduct, if not the core, of community wellness born of right relationships among its individuals, which in turn is based in personal empowerment. And, there are roles for ancestors to play at every level.