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## **Prayers to Kāli: Practicing Radical Numinosity**

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## **Prayers to Kāli: Practicing Radical Numinosity**

Abstract: Prayers to Kāli is an invocation of the radical-sacred as a way into decolonization, liberation, and healing. The radical-sacred, as I conceive of it, is broadly to do with the work of retrieving our spiritual dimensions as an inextricable part of queer, and decolonial futurities. The construction and performance of decolonial, queer-feminist theory, and knowledge discourses as fundamentally located in communities of coalition, new modes of resistance and cosmologies, form the theoretical foil of this paper. The broader aim of the paper is to highlight the significance of spiritual, corporeal, and emotional knowledges in the work of decoloniality and dismantling systems of oppression. I locate this exploration within the narrative specifics of contemporary spirit-poetry from Tamil Nadu; a radical, border site where these connections and dimensions of decoloniality, gender, desire, and resistance play out.

Keywords: radical-sacred, decoloniality, spirituality, feminism, healing, resistance

### **Introduction: The Spiritual as Decolonial**

Prayers to Kāli is an invocation of the radical-sacred as a way into decolonization, liberation, and healing. The vocabulary of liberation and healing – such as practices of mindfulness, stillness, deep compassion and gratitude – have found enormous purchase in contemporary capitalist milieus. The particular forms of healing that are made possible by many spiritual practices belong to a cosmic heritage. In this sense, they are modes of inhabiting both ourselves and the world, open to us all (I refer here, to the reservoir of spiritual wisdom, and healing that simply *is*, as much as the earth, mountains, oceans, forest, and sentient beings *are*). This is not to say that connecting with, and drawing *from*, this reservoir is equally straightforward for all). However, it is of crucial importance that this is contextualised by the ways in which Euromerican colonial-imperial violences targeted and systematically annihilated these cosmic heritages, as well as peoples who inhabit and bear them. The practice(s) of decolonised

spirituality that I explore in this piece, is thus an intensely political act which cannot and must not be read as either individualistic or neutral. Decolonised practices of spirituality are also to be read as a moral-material resistance to the utilitarian harnessing of spiritual modes and practices within systems that are inherently exploitative. The radical-sacred, as I conceive of it then, is broadly to do with the work of retrieving our spiritual dimensions as an inextricable part of queer, and decolonial futurities. The explicitly feminist framing and articulation of “decolonizing spirituality”<sup>1</sup> is integral to its practice, and politics, not least because of the gendered framings of affect, spirit, and embodiment both within and without the academy. Euromerican, hetero-masculine logic, styles of writing, language and narrative demanded in the academy play very particular gatekeeping roles and police what we are and are not permitted to speak of as scholars, practitioners and activists. Thus, the invocation to the warrior- goddess-mother Kālī in the title, as well as the theoretical and analytical work of this paper centres queer-femininities and the particular registers of resistance that they offer. While I do not use gendered tropes in any essentialist sense, my practices of love, healing, theory and decoloniality are firmly grounded in work and imaginaries of queer women of colours throughout this piece. Prayers to Kālī is both of, and at, a multitude of thresholds. Analouise Keating suggests that what distinguishes borders and thresholds, is that borders often begin from breakage, and thresholds, from connectivity<sup>2</sup>. Following her own approach of post-oppositionality, I do not understand this distinction to be binaristic, or exclusive, but rather, as necessary twin-processes for the radical work of resistance, decolonisation, and transformation. In that sense, this piece has breakage running through it, breakage not so much as an ending, rather as a breaking open into futurities, multiplicities and possibilities. I imagine thresholds as emerging within and between borders and breakage, as spaces where we are required to

entirely *be*. In spiritual work, this kind of radical being might be articulated as a full presence, and willingness to look, listen, and work deeply, with all its extant risks. Both the theory, and the poetic sites I explore in this paper are illustrations of such thresholds. This piece is invested in the interstices of doing theory and theorising doing. I choose the awkwardness of theorising over theorising to distinguish it from the meta-mode of *Theorising* as well as to mark its move away from the imperialism and hetromasculine construction of *Theory* in Euromerican constructions of social sciences and humanities. The work of *theorising* is rooted in decolonial and black queer feminist practice as it speaks directly to the pseudo-binaries of theory-praxis. I also locate my writing geographically, politically, and affectively in discourses of what Barbara Holmes terms the two-thirds world<sup>3</sup>. The construction and performance of decolonial, queer-feminist theory, and knowledge discourses as fundamentally located in communities of coalition, new modes of resistance and cosmologies, form the foil of what this paper explores more specifically. Two preliminary questions that helped to frame this piece are as follows:

- (1) What does it mean to invoke the sacred in the academy?
- (2) What are the ethical considerations, fears, and uncertainties braided into such an endeavour?

I begin here with some reflections on how these prayers to Kālī came to be, and why I articulate them in the mode of the sacred. I also want to foreground the ways in which I use ‘reflexivity’, and ‘positionality’, in the sense that I do *not* use them as typical devices of ‘method’. This piece is constitutively dependent on a constant, fluid movement between self-world, and to this end, I discuss relevant elements of autobiography throughout the piece, rather than in a single section. The next section picks up on some of these threads, and discusses some theory-praxis frameworks,

mostly drawing on the work of feminists-of-colours. This discussion unpacks how and why the deployment of corporeal, emotional, and spiritual knowledges are so important to the work of decoloniality and dismantling systems of violent power. From here, I begin to locate these frameworks into the narrative specifics of contemporary spirit-poetry from Tamil Nadu, which is the border or threshold site where I want to explore the various connections and dimensions of decoloniality, gender, desire, and resistance. Much of the poetry relates broadly to hindu<sup>4</sup> spiritual and religious practices; this is partly circumstantial and partly in aid of providing a focussed analysis and in no way negates or excludes the extraordinary diversity of spiritual and religious practice found in Tamil Nadu and India.

The Tamil Poems that I have chosen to work with are translations, which bears some significance. The poets and their translators I engage with in this piece are: Malathi Maithri and Sukirtharani translated by Lakshmi Holmström, and N.D. Rajkumar translated by Anushiya Ramaswamy. I do not use these poems as a purely literary device, nor am I aiming for a formal analysis. It is also important to note that these poets do not self-identify as spiritual or religious poets, and they come from specific locations which I discuss in due course. Similarly, the readers of this work are a diverse group, and engage in the poems both through Tamil, and English, and, I do not consider the poems through the lens of the audiences who partake of them (though that is not to say that this is not a significant factor in its own right). I am primarily interested in the transformative and connected ways in which the particular poems I engage with, embody and perform the sacred as resistance, anger, liberation, and love. In my understanding, these poets' work embodies the work of "Nepantleras"<sup>5</sup>: border beings who travel between worlds, unmaking and remaking them in different iterations of ferocity and gentleness. I use poetry specific to Tamil Nadu because it is where my

emotional, intellectual, corporeal, spiritual and political journeys run together, in a complex space I call home. The use of translations is both a necessity and an indication of my elite, postcolonial, and amputated location in which the emphasis on English, and later, Hindi education, overshadowed my Tamil<sup>6</sup>. Working with translations of these poems (which in turn helped me read and understand the Tamil originals) is a powerful symbol of my own privileges, fractures and dislocations not only along linguistic lines, but also caste, class, sexuality and gender lines.

The final section is envisioned as a threshold which invites us to journey further into these realms of spirit; as feminists, queer-kin, and as “companion species”<sup>7</sup> I bring some of my personal experiences as an offering, because these journeys require enormous vulnerability, and trust. The syntax of an invitation recognises that it is entirely voluntary, and also that it may not suit everyone’s ways of doing and living. It is also not an invitation to an “unmarked universalism”<sup>8</sup> where differences, conflict and pain are flattened. An invitation into *Nepantla* is cognisant that the commitment to “post-oppositionality”<sup>9</sup> requires a deep acceptance of multiplicity, oppositionality, and the right to refusal. It recognises that the journey is perilous.

The next section unpacks some of the complexities, risks and contexts of engaging with sacrality and spirituality as an important component of border-threshold and decolonial work. I also introduce and explore some of the theoretical paths and literature which will help to frame the third section where I work in the poetic site of the practice of radical numinosity. Working from and in a queer, two-thirds world feminist space means that many of the conventional, taken-for-granted understandings of theory, and method are already rendered suspect. Focussing on the realms of sacred-spiritual practices makes theory-method paths even more nebulous, and I move between thresholds of framing relevant scholarship as well as practicing taking imaginal,

embodied, and spiritual knowledges as legitimate and equal to their intellectual and empirical counterparts. The specifics of particular identities, communities and practices will therefore be explored in the third section, allowing some room for the work of theorising the spiritual to take root and shape.

### **Working in Border-Thresholds: *Theorying* Radical Numinosity**

Sacred-spiritual modes are *not* institutionalised religion, and as a threshold, they help to bridge, not widen, the perceived distance between spiritual and secular<sup>10</sup>. Following the work of many Black, queer, and two-thirds world feminists, I approach sacred-spiritual paths as ways of seeing, living, and acting. They form important ethical, emotional and corporeal axes along which many people organise and inhabit their worlds. Sacred-spiritual paths are also a particularly important part of indigenous and global southern identifications, histories, and erasures. The ways in which myth-cosmologies have, for example, been excised from the histories of colonised peoples, is a particularly insidious form of erasure, and one that has left enormous wounds, silences, and yearnings that we have as yet to articulate, and grapple with.

Articulating the sacred in the academy is complex, as it is fraught. Complex, largely owing to the polydimensionality of what the sacred denotes, and connotes, as well as because of the ways in which academic disciplines deal with sacred-spiritual matters. I deploy the terms sacred and spiritual interchangeably, not because they are exactly the same, rather because of the ways in which they are marginalised and reified, particularly within ‘mainstream’ social science usage. I do not use sacred-spiritual as oppositional to the secular, simply because I do not believe that modes of sacred-spiritual knowing are fundamentally in conflict with secular modes of knowing. They do however, question the totalising discourse of certain dominant models of political



community, and ‘rational-empirical’ ways of living. As Rao et al.<sup>11</sup> point out, the notion of historiographical writing as bound to one mode of expression is both inaccurate, as well as deeply colonial. I want to clarify here that I am not attempting to dissolve modes of thinking or writing in the way of many Euromerican postmodern narratives (though this too, is useful and necessary at times). The point is not – as Rao et al clarify – that there is no difference between forms of ‘mythical’ writing and ‘empirical’ writing, but that these forms are intertwined and in relationship with each other. Thus, “what constitutes history is not a given, in some universal sense, but practices specific to time and place”<sup>12</sup>. They further argue that history is found in a variety of modes of writing, speaking, and literary production, and that, the nuances of myth, folk tale, personal narratives and structural-political narratives are easily understood, if only we are open to recognising them as interdependent and connected, and equally valuable. Following this thread, I want us to consider the serious implications of what it means then, to erase an entire way of inhabitation and identification (in this case myth) deeming it unfit for the ‘rational’, ‘modern’, and ‘secular’ subject. For feminists of colours writing in the mode of the sacred, this constitutes a grave wounding, and a violence.

The task then, of decolonizing spirituality and transforming it from an object of study to a mode of being-knowing-doing is no simple one. The perils of this endeavour, as Alexander points out, emerge from “the dangerous diffusion of religious fundamentalism... and because structural transformations have thrown up religion as a primary site of contestation”<sup>13</sup>. This however, only reinforces the need for “reclaiming the sacred”<sup>14</sup> because “the majority of people [and] women in the world- cannot make sense of themselves without it [the sacred]”<sup>15</sup>. The fear involved in trying to articulate the sacred in the academy is also succinctly encapsulated by what Harish Naraindas refers to as “prevarication”<sup>16</sup>. Prevarication here is meant “not in the sense of

deliberately lying, or attempting to mislead, but a kind of refusal to answer the question directly either out of politeness, and/or a possible hiatus between the professional and the personal”<sup>17</sup>. It is in this context then, that I find myself at a personal and professional threshold of trying to work through this prevarication, and to fully inhabit the dismantling of walls around sacred, secular, and scholarly identifications. I do not aim, or claim to address the full theoretical, methodological and personal gamut of what these processes of dismantling entail. I am, in a limited sense, only trying to open up the modality of the sacred-spiritual here, as a way into threshold-border-decolonial work. The hyphenation of threshold-border-decolonial, are meant to represent what I understand as the intimate contiguity between border as breakage and threshold as connectivity which I alluded to in the introduction, and both of these as being necessary to decolonial movement.

This work is not new, and I draw on the powerful, and courageous lives, works, and stories of feminist kin – scholarly, activist, ancestral and spiritual – to frame and narrate it. Although not new, it is work that is decidedly marginalised, silenced, and shrouded in shame. The shame of women, of spirit, and of abjected beings, both human and non-human. Shame is both a powerful, and significant marker here, and, it connects to the spiritual and to the body, which contributes to their abjection in realms marked as ‘public’, ‘political’ and often, ‘academic’. In my explorations and articulations of spirituality, I link them consciously and deliberately to queerness, women(s), and beings who have been abjected both materially and epistemically. I am, therefore, also deeply committed to Anzaldúa’s assertion that “spirit is spirit only if it lives in mass, in flesh, in bones, or astral energy fields” (2009, 70).<sup>18</sup>

Another significant imperial-colonial imposition that sacred-spiritual modes rupture, is the modality of linear, clock time<sup>19</sup>. Of particular relevance here, as Paul

Routledge and Jon Simons<sup>20</sup> note in their work is the ways in which spirit and spirituality threaten the analytical, categorising impulse of the colonial-imperial gaze by exploding conventional units of measurement, of which time is deeply significant. Time, in its twenty-four hour, progressive and universal format, is often used as an amputation device, separating communities and cultures (particularly in colonised contexts) from their cosmologies, heritages and ancestors. Bronislaw Szerszynski<sup>21</sup> encapsulates it well:

“with the formation of empire, [...] the ambivalence internal to the divine is recoded onto a new dualism between heaven and earth, between an absolute moralized, intelligible, deterritorialized divine beyond the world and a ‘real’ world of matter deprived of the periodic immersion in immanence and immediacy”<sup>22</sup>

This understanding of materiality and divinity as irreconcilable and separate, is further reinforced by the shrinkage of our imaginal capacities into linear, bounded time. It disrupts the ways in which communities retain their sense of connection and belonging. George Sefa Dei refers to many African communities’ respect for “gerontocracy”<sup>23</sup> or the path of the elders which allows for the creation of communities of knowledge and learning that transcend time and space<sup>24</sup>. Spirit time is deeply multiplicitous, and non-linear, allowing people access to understanding, support, and healing across different times and geographies. The access to ancestral wisdom and energy is an important part of re-remembering, and, forgetting, is usually indicative of terrible pain<sup>25</sup>. Conceiving of time as bounded, linear and irretrievable, is a central part of an imperial-capitalist impulse to erase and sunder. If we cannot remember, we are in a state of perpetual wounding, and if enough time passes, we are left with the wounds, but no memories of how they came to be, or how to nurse them. An important part of why I use poetry to

articulate radical-numinosity is the ways in which it can simultaneously expand, and contract a sense of linear time, and practice different kinds of narrativity and remembrance that nurture healing. This access to healing is vital to the processes of decoloniality, and for the creation of vibrant, nourished, planetary flourishing.

The necessity (and it is a necessity, not a leisurely perused choice) to write in the mode of the sacred comes from a variety of places, both material, and ephemeral, and, in this I take my cue from Anzaldúa's call to "decolonize reality"<sup>26</sup>. For Anzaldúa, imposing literalism on our entire gamut of perceiving, knowing and understanding, is a form of violent silencing. She explores the contours and cores of what she terms "magical thinking"<sup>27</sup> and "imaginal thinking"<sup>28</sup> as full, and integral kinds of knowledge, essential to the processes of navigating, knowing and meaning-making between ourselves and the world. Accepting imaginal, magical, embodied, emotional and spiritual knowledges as equal and necessary to the way we conceive of and experience knowledge is both a radical act of resistance, and of movement. It is in this context that Anzaldúa insists on nurturing imaginal thinking and work. What kinds of questions are we asking of imaginal realities? Why do we insist on speaking to the imaginal in the mode and framework of the literal, and, when this speech fails, we promptly dismiss the imaginal for not passing muster? This dissolution of the membranes which separate the ontic from the epistemic – being from knowing – is profoundly intertwined with the work of decolonising. Epistemic knowing is integrally tied to naming and, as Holmes writes, "naming is an ethereal and transitory act"<sup>29</sup>. The politics and poetics of naming are especially relevant to the modalities of spirituality. It involves what Layli Maparayan describes as a spiritual "coming out"<sup>30</sup> in academia, which is risky, as it is necessary. I use the term writing in the mode *of* the sacred or spiritual to jettison the long, abiding social science tradition of writing *about* worlds, peoples and phenomena,

particularly in relation to the 'otherworldly'.

Like many privileged research beginnings, mine too involves a sizeable dose of narcissism, objectifying- curiosity, prejudice, suffering, and the desire to be, and to do better. Global Southern-decolonial-feminist-queer training usually means political action, and radical speech. For many who do this work, it also means the attendant risks of violence, total commitment and deep love. These violences are often multipronged, operating in epistemic, emotional, and material registers. For many scholar-activist kin, it is their courageous commitment to love as a practice of relating to the world, and an expansive vision of justice that keeps them in these states of danger.

For some academics who come from a mixture of privileged and marginalised intersections, this has meant focussing on the marginalised intersections, and trying to forge connections and do one's best to build connections. The privileged intersections are usually relegated to the section on reflexivity, because it is simply the way we are trained to deal with these contradictions. By naming them, framing them, and isolating them where possible. Inevitably though, if one insists on total honesty as a work ethic, this method ultimately collapses or implodes. Identities and positionalities are messy, and always lived concurrently. Practicing an un-bordered interaction between self and scholarship in academia requires the simultaneous holding of the structural and the intimate, a mode not really afforded by compartmentalized, secular writing.

Thus, sitting amidst your debris, and burning pieces, you think to yourself: what kind of path should I be walking as someone who wields structural privileges of class, caste, and education; traumas of non-conforming sexualities, unwieldy bodies, misogyny, racism, and the wounds and scars of sustained violence? And so, I stumbled onto border paths. The work of, and at border-thresholds, is the never-complete work of

disrobing; revealing layer upon layer, radical silence, deep listening and honest speech. As Anzaldúa reminds us, “if all political action is founded on subconscious irresolution and personal conflicts, then we must first look at that baggage we carry with us before sorting through other folks’ dirty laundry”<sup>31</sup>. If I am committed to dismantling systems of violence, and structural power in *the* World, I must simultaneously be committed to the same within *my* worlds because, as much as the personal is absolutely political, the political is also deeply, unshakeably personal.

I have been resolutely obtuse in my avoidance of specifying what I *mean* by spiritual and sacred. Partly, it is born of an exhaustion with definitions, but more importantly, it is because I have wanted my interlocuters to form your own resonances, and discomforts with, curiosities and fears of, spirituality and sacrality. Alexander understands healing as the heart of spiritual work and as the “antidote to oppression”<sup>32</sup>. Holmes<sup>33</sup> writes of an expansive, and cosmic interconnectedness in her incredible work which brings theoretical physics, cosmology, spirituality and social justice work in polylogue. For Holmes, equality is a deeply spiritual matter, because oppression and violence (she refers specifically to the enslavement of African peoples here) have everything to do with the violation of the spirit and psyche. The discourse of legislation and rights cannot do the work of full healing. Fernandes, in her work sees knowledge itself “as a sacred process of witnessing... rather than... a commodity”<sup>34</sup>. For Audre Lorde<sup>35</sup>, the erotic is the locus of the spiritual, and the loving, desirous tactility between black women, is the place where the body and spirit heal. It is to Anzaldúa that I turn, as I do so many times in my work, for a (not) definition of spirituality. It is “a human yearning and an essential human need to witness the flow of life and the patterns manifested in life, the spiritual is a deep sense of belonging and participation in life”<sup>36</sup>

In my own life, work, and in this paper (as they move together), the radical-

sacred is a threshold I have arrived at after many years of trying different ways to do the work that I was drawn to. It also forms a part of the efforts that two-thirds world and queer-feminist kin are making to bring numinosity into the work of decolonial transformation, challenging a hitherto oblique engagement within disciplinary silos. The process of decolonising primarily requires us to do our “homework before fieldwork”, as Kakali Bhattacharya<sup>37</sup>, simply observes. In this mode, much of the work, for me, has involved what Keating terms “listening with raw openness”<sup>38</sup>, which was accompanied by a new understanding of silence as a transformative, and healing practice<sup>39</sup>. It has also required the deployment of what Chela Sandoval terms “differential consciousness”<sup>40</sup> which requires the shattering of a “unitary self”<sup>41</sup>, that is to say, the conception of the self as a linear, progressive continuity. This shattering of self is to be translated as an opening, not a closing, or a destructive breakage. Alexander refers to “stripping [as] a methodology”<sup>42</sup> when she writes of the need for complete honesty, vulnerability, and openness towards “constituting the practices through which we come to know what we believe we know”<sup>43</sup>. Decolonising the sacred is simultaneously decolonising the self and refusing the amputation of one from the other. Decolonising the sacred requires unrelenting resistance to its annexation by violent, fundamentalist discourses of religions, neoliberal institutions, and nation states. Simultaneously, decolonising the self asks that we do not capitulate to particular discourses of rationality which grant us ‘belonging’ at the cost of sundering intuitive, spiritual, and imaginal parts of ourselves. To accept these amputations, in these modes, is to remain colonised, and alienated from the possibilities of radical futurities. Luis Chasbar notes that, “the languages of many African ethnic groups lack a term to define religion in the European sense, as an activity separate from daily life.”<sup>44</sup> Elsewhere, Moewaka Barnes et al write that *Wairua*, “restrictively translated as spirit or spirituality”<sup>45</sup>, is intrinsic to Maori psyche and

living. Bhakti poets from South Asia, similarly describe their overwhelming feelings of devotion as intimately rooted in materiality, and the mundane everyday. What is noteworthy here is that across a range of diverse global southern, and indigenous articulations, a Euromerican, ‘rational-empirical’ treatment is described as alien, and violent, and, as such, is a critical site of decolonial transformation, resistance, and often, healing.

I wrote earlier that the invocation of the sacred in the academy was fraught because of the ways in which Euromerican and colonial pedagogies have abjected spirituality, but this is not the only kind of danger. Barnes et al. also raise critical questions about the ethics, fears and risks of transplanting *Wairua* into the academic research space without fundamentally violating or flattening it through appropriation<sup>46</sup>, or by forcing it into a system that performs what Rae Langton refers to as the “special silence of illocutionary disablement”<sup>47</sup> where the speaker executes the words, but they do not have the intended effect, and speech is rendered illegible, and unnatural, in a deliberate exercise of discursive power. The “geographies of suspicion”<sup>48</sup> that surround spiritual work must also be engaged with at every stage, knowing that the languages of sacrality and spirituality are constantly being appropriated by violent institutions, and it is too easy for us to slip, wittingly or not, into their thrall. It is thus with infinite care, caution, and love, that I choose to walk this path, because “we simply cannot continue to substitute owning for being, privacy for intimacy or substitute monogamies of the mind for the expansiveness of the Soul”<sup>49</sup>.

Following Alexander’s call to action, this next section explores the entanglements of identity, resistance, spirit and matter, and the possibilities of futurities that they offer. I do this through the expressions and experiences in a selection of contemporary Tamil poems, whose authors write from an explosive array of identities,



genders, bodies and spiritual-political modalities. The embodied theorizing – what Anzaldúa refers to as “autohistoria- teoria”<sup>50</sup> – in these poems, transports us into expansive, energised and, alchemical spaces, full of radical transformations.

### **Kāli Sings in Tongues: Manifesting Radical Numinosity**

The feminist scholarship-praxis discussed in the previous section is an important reminder that, as well as needing to re-imagine the work of theory, there is also a more fundamental need to decolonise our notional and actual formations of knowledge, research and method. As far as ‘method’ goes, I am hesitant to compartmentalise this piece into prescribed parts. This section engages in textual and discursive analyses, with a deeply conscious “processual reflexivity”<sup>51</sup>. That is to say, reflexivity or “autohistoria” as inextricably linked to theory, method, and analysis rather than as a retroactive, strategic component. Richa Nagar<sup>52</sup> writes of the perils of methodology, and the ethical struggles of how to *do* feminist research, and, while her concerns are located in fieldwork, they certainly apply to other modes of research. The *practice* of feminist, decolonial research, as Nagar suggests, must be located in its accountability, and commitment to the communities and peoples it is rooted in. The method of the research is, in this sense, located in its politics, and who it is working with and trying to support, and learn from. In this sense, I do not treat the poetry I work with as ‘units’ of analysis which illustrate my theoretical imaginaries. Rather, the poems are living interlocuters, palimpsestic and agentive, in how they both produce and are produced by a radical decolonisation of sacrality. The ‘poetry-teoria’ that I explore in this section is multifaceted and performed from diverse positionalities. As acts of radical-sacrality, however, there are a few red threads that run through them, and these threads illuminate the different modalities of how the poems re-inscribe the spiritual as a site of expansive resistance, and liberation. The poems emphasize emotional states as a key component of

constituting selfhood, and, illuminate the significance of encountering our deepest wounds as the only sustained path to healing. They also imagine an expansive, embodied futurity of love as both practice, and feeling that is fundamentally imbued with justice and an ethics of compassion. The act of writing is simultaneously about us and the world, us in the world and the world manifesting through us in heteroglossic ways. It is in this threshold that we must be vigilant, and look for our prejudices, our pernicious exoticisations, and our “shadow-beasts”<sup>53</sup>. The medium of poetry as an expression of resistance thus, inhabits and straddles many worlds, and speaks simultaneously from and to, many spaces. The urgency and immediacy of poetic speech, and the particular ways in which it is able to compress a multitude of locations, allows for the dissolution of walls, and unhindered passages between these realities. The poems I work with are, as I indicated in the beginning, threshold sites where the possibilities of interlocution and radical transformation emerge, rather than traditional ‘texts’. My intention here is also to hold the realms of literature-theory as thresholds and treat the contours of their borders as connectors. But the borders here also serve to remind us that they are also at the borders or margins of legitimate and accepted academic discourse. There are particular difficulties and violences that women-of-colours have faced in trying to articulate and create discourses of feminism that centre our lives and journeys. These particularities also mean that coalitions are both more challenging and deeply necessary to us. Quite often, this has meant that queer and two-thirds world feminists have used artistic modes of performance and expression as primary ways of theorising, and it is in this sense that Anzaldúa insists that “we need to give up the notion that there is a “correct” way to write theory”<sup>54</sup>. As alluded to in the introduction, I also want to conceive of poetry-teoria as a space of *nepantla*:

“Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious,

always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries”<sup>55</sup>. I, therefore, explore poetry as connected (though not conflated) with theory, and as a conversation between modes of practice that are also committed to transforming the world<sup>56</sup>.

Contextualising spiritual poetry in India is a long and complex task, and there exists a wealth of excellent literature, both historical, and contemporary, in this field. I want to briefly dwell on some moments of Bhakti spiritual poetry which ranged from about the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century CE in South Asia, as it helps contextualise expressions of spirituality as resistance in contemporary poetry. Bhakti was a radical, fierce, and deeply embodied response to dominant Vedic and classical tropes of Hinduism. Bhakti from the Sanskrit *bhaj* which conveys a sense of sharing, bestowing and service<sup>57</sup>, drew from a combination of indigenous, and sanskritic heritages, but always chose to articulate itself in accessible ways. Poets composed their work in local languages, and overwhelmingly, the modes of delivery were oral, though we do of course, have written transcriptions, often made by disciples or patrons. Karen Prentiss writes that “Bhakti is represented to be as natural as a mother tongue; just as no one lacks a first language, no one is incapable of Bhakti”<sup>58</sup>. Bhakti poet-saints find parallels with Sufi and other poet-saints of mystical spiritual traditions. In the Indian context, they were often (though not always) possessed of revolutionary identity politics. Bhakti is a threshold of immanence and transcendence. It is about liberation, but it focusses on an immersive love for the divine in the social-material world, always walking the borderlands of renunciation and inhabitation. “Everyone has known it. Many choose to forget, defer, deny or dilute it [...] When one does encounter is however, one knows one in in the presence of something fragile, urgent, moltenly alive”<sup>59</sup>. Akka Mahadevi, a Kannada poet-saint, for instance, views devotion, wisdom, deep love, and desire as inextricably linked. Even as she perceives lord Siva as cosmic, beyond infinity, and the primordial source of wisdom

and liberation, she is also a woman madly in love, deeply desirous of her Channamallikarjuna. “He bartered my heart, looted my flesh... took over all of me... I’m the woman of love, for my lord, white as jasmine<sup>60</sup>. In her *Nacciyar Thirumoli*, Andal, the Tamil poet-saint, in conversation with the white conch that her beloved *Thirumal*<sup>61</sup>, raises to his lips (usually to sound a battle-cry) asks it: “Are they fragrant as camphor, or fragrant as lotus [...] do those coral red lips taste sweet?”<sup>62</sup>. Bhakti thus emerges simultaneously as a movement, devotion, emotion and corporeal inhabitation. At the same time however, it is also deeply sceptical of identity-based essentialisms. That is to say, while Bhakti poets offer a full acknowledgement of the materiality and specificity they inhabit, they are also constantly pushing the limits of any bounded sense of self, and narrow identification<sup>63</sup>. Kindling two pieces of a single bamboo tree, one representing ‘male’ and the other, ‘female’, Dasimayya asks: “tell me now, the fire that’s born, is it male or female, O Ramanatha<sup>64</sup>”<sup>65</sup>.

As with most things, Bhakti also comes with the baggage of its historical and social contexts. While it was largely radical, and a voice of ordinary and excluded people, it still suffered from patriarchal exclusions of women and people from the most marginalised caste groups, in proportional terms. In a broad sense, Bhakti poetry makes a sharp, often critical distinction between *bhaktas* (devotees) and non-*bhaktas*: “the people do not even know where it is,/ These, prattling like a flock of parrots –/ However can such ones know you/ O Gogeshwara?”<sup>66</sup> In terms of genderedness, it is quite clear that overwhelmingly, it was male gods who are the subjects of much Bhakti poetry, although in later centuries we see the emergence of Sakta poetry, often dedicated to the goddesses Kāli and Uma<sup>67</sup>. This is not because goddess worship was in any way absent or less relevant, quite the contrary. McDermott speculates that this imbalance might be related to the fact that much goddess worship was in the Tantric tradition, which is

closely guarded and kept secret. Sree Padma<sup>68</sup> notes that goddess religions and worship predate both Buddhist and Vedic worship, and that there was a systematic erasure of indigenous modes and histories of worship. This also serves as an appropriate reminder of Alexander's warning about being vigilant of the ways in which discourses of sacrality are (mis)used. Resistance in Bhakti was also not entirely free of casteist silos or religious bigotries<sup>69</sup>. Holding these important exclusions and elisions, we still find an extraordinary imagination of connectedness and inhabitation in the poetry of Bhakti. It is an orientation to the cosmos, and to divinity that persistently refuses to relinquish love, desire, and embodiment.

Like Bhakti poetry, the contemporary poems that I focus on in this section are also creatures of their times and contexts. They are deeply conscious of identity marginalisations and explicit about violences visited on marginalised peoples by privileged groups and individuals. We see this in the particular articulations of fury, pleasure, and sacrality in Rajkumar's poems as a Dalit man from the *Kaniyan* community. Sukirtharani's poems explore the specific intersections of her identities as a Dalit woman, and her fiery resistance to the ways in which religiosity as a casteist, patriarchal mode violates marginalised Dalit women. Malathi Maithri's poems choose deliberate, and highly visible religious symbols and deities, exploding them into new articulations of marginalised women's resistance. Although my orientation and focus in this piece are on queer-feminist perspectives, I include Rajkumar's work because of the complex ways in which it engages with goddess-centric spiritual resistance. His poems are also a powerful illustration of the ways in which poetic, theoretical, spiritual, and material realities can be articulated as radical resistance.

Let me begin with Malathi Maithri, who, in her poem *Bhumadevi* (earth-goddess) moves effortlessly between the cosmic, the ancestral and the embodied when

she describes a conversation between a daughter and her mother about birthing:

“Amma,/ How did you give birth and survive?”, asks the wondering child, to which her mother answers: “What’s so marvellous in that?/ Think of your granny’s granny,/ who gave birth to the entire world”<sup>70</sup>. Alexander describes the importance of “knowing who walks with us”<sup>71</sup> as a conscious and material acknowledgement of the spiritual presences that we are accompanied by. By invoking her maternal ancestress, and linking her to *Bhumadevi*, a primordial creatrix, Malathi Maithri creates a clear bond between the young girl, her maternal heritage, and the cosmos. The poem goes on to describe how the child falls asleep, dreaming of her grandmother birthing the universe, and in her dream the child envisions herself as “snowstorm and raging wave,/joyous stream and feasting forest,/ and great exploding volcano.”<sup>72</sup>. In a resonant vein, Sukirtharani, resisting caste-gender violence writes: “I myself will become/ earth/fire/sky/wind/water./ The more you confine me, the more I will spill over, Nature’s fountainhead”<sup>73</sup>. This deliberate yet seamless joining between earthscapes, cosmos, and bodies are central to feminist imaginations of spiritual-activism. Affect and embodiment are also clearly enunciated in the poems’ descriptions of different earthscapes, affirming the ways in which emotion and fleshliness are at the heart of life, and creation. This narrative of connectedness simultaneously offers a powerful resistance to the sundering violences of coloniality, misogyny, and casteism discussed in the previous section.

Also significant to radical expressions of spirituality I explore through poetry, is the work of embodied worlding. There is a defiant refusal to be bound to suffering as a mode of living in the work of many poets who belong to communities that have been severely marginalised. Embodied worlding is an integral part of articulating decolonial, radical numinosity, and a step in the direction of the radical work that Anzaldúa

describes: “this step is a conscious rupture with all oppressive traditions of all religions and cultures”<sup>74</sup>. Rajkumar’s searing poetry “communitates that rupture, documents the struggle”<sup>75</sup>. He writes of gods who move freely among devotees, speaking local languages and dialects: “They enter the loose,/ betel- chewing mouth of the/ nappy haired Thangasamy/ Possess him/ Jive in him/ Tell signs in our language/ Eat pig flesh/ Drink arrack/ Smoke a cigar/ And settle down amongst us/ In the ghettos/ Next to sewer ditches/ In the no man’s lands”<sup>76</sup>. Here we see that he is doing the work of worlding by re-casting the narrative of profanity, poverty, pollution and suffering into one of material livedness. Clarke, Manchala and Peacock in their introduction to Dalit theology, explain that the word Dalit, (from the Sanskrit *Dal* meaning broken, or burnt) has a complex relationship to suffering and pain. While suffering, pain and pathos have a very specific significance rooted in Dalit experience, and therefore resistance, the ‘brokenness’ of *Dal* is not the acceptance of abuse and violence. This resonates with the “Coyolxauhqui imperative”<sup>77</sup> of healing, to call back the dismembered and amputated fragments of body, mind, and soul into a new configuration. This new configuration resists oppressive practices of erasing or forgetting in order to ‘move on’. The Coyolxauhqui imperative is about holding both the dismemberment and the healing; and understanding that a full flourishing can only come from a full acknowledgement of one’s wounding. Rajkumar’s insistence on centring this pain is quite clear in his writing.

It is important to understand that the expression of pain as an act of resistance and fury is not an act of flattening out the multiplicity of Dalit experiences. This pain informs spiritual and ritual practices that are aimed specifically at the recognition and redressal of wrongdoing. When Rajkumar is writing of casteist brutality and violence, perpetrated by all strata of dominant castes, he is also writing about resistance, and the need for justice. When he writes about the relentless, unending rape and murder of Dalit

women and girls, he is also writing about their rebirth as furious, avenging goddesses. In *The family to gain religious merit*, a Kollathi girl is raped by a brahmin priest: his payment for blessing her 'upper caste' employers. Rajkumar writes: "*She killed herself/ and now she is back/ the Kollangottu Amman,/ and shrieks for human sacrifice*"<sup>78</sup>. In the same poem he also writes of the brutal murder of a dancer, lured into a false marriage with promises of love who rises again as the forest Goddess *Isakki* "You are my witness, she cried/ To the cacti as she died./ The Dark blue Goddess of the Cactus Fields/ Demands blood-soaked rice"<sup>79</sup>. These goddesses, as Sree Padma explains are "not a symbol for some metaphysical or transcendental otherness"<sup>80</sup>. They are rooted in the materiality of the spaces they inhabit, their bodily experiences, and the desire for justice. The Goddesses will not let us forget; they appear again and again to remind us of the wounding, without which no healing is possible.

Other forms of wounding also appear, accompanied albeit by deliverance and joy. Sukirtharani, in *The only woman in the world*, writes of primordial woman, strong, fierce and independent, wandering the world, and hunting at will; "the first woman, bearing/ no scar on an umbilical cord"<sup>81</sup>. The poet plays with a 'traditional' story from the epic *Ramayana* where an 'unfaithful' woman, *Ahalya* is cursed by her husband to turn into stone for her infidelity, and waits for thousands of years for *Rama* (an incarnation of *Vishnu*) to release her from the curse. In her re-telling, Sukirtharani writes: "Innumerable men turned to stone,/ wait. Aeon upon aeon,/ to be released from their curse/ by the touch of her feet"<sup>82</sup>. Here we see the imagining of a radical, free, strong and joyous woman, combining with the reminder that she has not forgotten, and that justice is being served. These conscious iterations of centring erased histories of wounding, and violence through spiritual and cosmic memory, are a powerful way in which radical-numinosity declares its decolonial intent. Both Rajkumar and



Sukirtharani consciously desist from offering up a platitudinous, empty, peace loving version of divinity. Recognising, as bell hooks does, that a full, radical *practice* of love is much more than biology and psychology. It requires expansiveness and a keen ethical compass: “There can be no love without justice”<sup>83</sup>.

The presence of goddesses and divinities as tropes of knowledge, justice, love and resistance is not limited to particular cultures or religions. These “dykey deities”<sup>84</sup> are embodiments of a queer, sensuous, post-oppositionality, combining shadow and light; eros and rationality. This is not to be misunderstood as the careless appropriation of cultures in a contextless, disrespectful and possessive manner. We might conceive of dykey deities as “transcultural universals”<sup>85</sup> which recast universality (not to be confused with Euroamerican universalism) as deeply rooted in the understanding of the universe as boundless, wholly interconnected, and interdependent.

Lastly, an important aspect of these articulations of spiritual resistance and decoloniality that I find particularly significant is its relationship to pollution and the notion of taboo. While this is clearly connected to the ways in which certain bodies are ex-communicated and deemed impure, it also speaks to the subtler discourses of abjection around things like mortality, disease, poverty, disability and so on. Joseph Prabhakar Dayam makes the important point that Dalit spirituality is deeply invested in these discourses of pollution, having been brutalised by them for many long centuries. He argues that Dalit goddesses often *choose* to be “polluted” and that “to be divine, is to be polluted”<sup>86</sup>. A.K. Ramanujan explains that, “Bhakti depends on touching, merging... breaking the taboos on touch and pollution become central”<sup>87</sup>. More recently, Malathi Maithri expresses this in an evocative poem which she envisions as a conversation between Siva and Parvati as they occupy one half each of the well-known God/dess, *Ardhanareeswara* (literally meaning half god-half goddess). It is an unbearably hot

summer, and *Parvati*, bleeding heavily in the temple's sanctum sanctorum, "asks Sivan to move away/ To offer some relief to her body"<sup>88</sup>. Sivan is greatly offended by this request, and, insisting that they always remain joined, stifles the menstruating, exhausted, and irritated *Parvati* in a vice-like embrace. In response, *Parvati* "rips and throws Sivan away/ With her left hand, and sits down/ Once again in the vacant space/ Of her age-old throne"<sup>89</sup> because she needs some space to bleed, and breathe, in peace. The menstrual taboo is a particularly strong one in India, particularly amongst Hindus where the perceived pollution of menstrual blood means that menstruating women are effectively banished from the house to live, eat, and sleep in isolation. They cannot touch anyone, nor worship, not join the family or community in social activities. Malathi Maithri thus smashes the immanent into the transcendental here by transforming *Parvati* herself, into a bleeding, immanent-transcendent goddess.

Karaikkal Ammaiyar, the Tamil mystic-poet also finds powerful ways of rupturing the conventions and taboos of being a 'good Tamil woman' when she asks Siva to turn her into a *pey* or demoness, that she might worship him unhindered by the world, and reside in the graveyard/crematorium which is one of Siva's sacred spaces. This inhabitation is yet another breaking of taboos. Malathi Maithri in an homage poem to Ammaiyar writes: the demon's features are all woman/ woman's features are all demon/ Demon language/ is poetry [...] Demon language/ is liberty"<sup>90</sup> beautifully demonstrating the collapse of oppositional boundaries, and connecting the medium of poetry to liberation. Ammaiyar's choice to live as a supernatural demoness in the graveyard by Siva's side blurs the boundaries between the sacred and profane; the holy and the grotesque. All that is considered ugly, frightening, ghoulish and fetid, becomes a dwelling place of love, and divinity. In this grotesque threshold, spirits, and supernatural beings reside alongside animals in ferocious harmony "strong ghouls come

together... shouting with joy... A partridge dances, next to it a jackal plays the lute”<sup>91</sup>.

Rajkumar, in his poem, *The frothing toddy-induced stupor*, writes: “the sounds of the birds/ feeding on fruits/ the joyously nesting/ squirrels/ birds/ To appease hunger/ Kaali/ became the Palmyra Tree/ say those who pray here/ pointing to the/ lightning-struck Palmyra”<sup>92</sup>. The image of the ferocious warrior goddess Kaali, co-exists easily with her unending love and desire to nourish the land, and all her children. The “lightning-struck Palmyra”, subtly reminds us of the wounded and violated Goddess’ body, who still chooses to love and nurture her beloved.

For me, this is the space of *Nepantleras*, and *Nagual*<sup>93</sup> (shape shifters) that Anzaldúa speaks of in her work. It is the reason why “navigating the cracks between worlds is difficult and painful”<sup>94</sup>. The work of decolonizing, and walking the path of radical spiritual activism is incredibly difficult, and often terrifying. But much like the world that Ammaiyar is describing to us; the dark, dangerous and frightening forest-graveyard of *Tiruvankatu*, it is the place where the divine resides, dances and exults. In this graveyard of rotting, burning corpses also lies life, wisdom, and liberation.

All the poetic iterations of the radical-sacred I have explored unearth an expanse of hidden woundings and offer us possibilities of resistance and healing. However, discussing such a diverse body of works that cut across so many different contexts is in no way an attempt to conflate them, but rather to be able to illuminate new ways to create and sustain interdependent, non- hierarchical and connected flourishing. Whether it is the enduring presence of dykey deities, reminders from goddesses demanding justice, or divine inhabitations of the grotesque, I propose that we see, in all of them, a powerful summons to dismantle our hard borders of self/other; love/hate, and sacred/secular.

## **Conclusion: The Spiritual *is* Decolonial**

Walking spirit-paths of healing requires tremendous effort, and patience. Walking these paths, we understand that there can be no socio-political transformation without a transformation of interiority, of the self. For me, the wordwork of these poets, theorists, and feminist kin – ancient and contemporary – are both reminder and manifestation of the potential in invoking the radical-sacred. Inviting the sacred in is to be vigilant, and attentive to the morphing manifestations of hegemony. It requires us to critique and resist the articulation of spirit as violent, organised religion, or fundamentalist, nationalistic xenophobia, over, and over again. At an intrinsic level, this work sometimes requires us to stop and be quiet. To not use speech as a way of denying accountability and complicity in order to escape things that we must learn in silence. Being in an oppositional mode constantly, as Holmes writes, causes us to “continue to answer the call to arms long after the battles are over, and often before they’re begun”<sup>95</sup>. The practice of decolonised spirituality, as politics and healing is crucial in our current struggles with deep sorrow, and fear as well as our embodied resistances against violence and suffering. Queer-kin, feminist-kin, women of colours-kin both in the two-thirds world, and centres of Euromerican hegemony have inhabited these complex thresholds of radical resistance, love, healing, and the demand for justice through generations and time-cycles. I offer you my own prayer-dialogue with Kāli, as an invitation to the border-thresholds of radical numinosity and the work of transforming, decolonising, and loving our selves-worlds.

I have been thinking about you – yes, you. I know that in order to keep you in

my life, I must fight. I know that I must constantly struggle to prove myself worthy, and I have done it so long that I cannot remember any other way. But lately, I've been tired, and incapable of battle. Blood-weary. I am forgetting the ululations of killing-courage. My tongue is heavy, and slow, and raspy, my weapons are no longer singing. My fingers cramp, and my head feels like a beaten sheet of gold each time I put on my armour, so I can be near you. I pay such a price for your nearness.

*Now it is time that you learnt new meanings of love and friendship.*

*Now is when you must build bonds that are not incessantly violent, and competitive and cruel.*

*Now you must try, if you can, to stop defending all the time. Nobody is trying to harm you. I have only been protecting you from yourself.*

*Now I must ask you to learn to love me without my weapons and blood-lust.*

*Now, if you cannot do this, I must ask you to leave, and not look over your shoulder. I will be with you if you know how to see. Go with goddesses. Go with grace.*

*The woods will open to you when you are ready.*

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Fernandes, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Keating, *Transformation, Now!*

<sup>3</sup> Holmes, *Race and the Cosmos*

<sup>4</sup> I use the lower case here to distinguish the practices I am writing about from mainstream, Vedic narratives of Hinduism

<sup>5</sup> Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 248

<sup>6</sup> My simultaneous intimacy with, and distance from Tamil both as language, and cultural-spiritual identity have been shaped by my upbringing in a caste, and class privileged brahmin family. Being born and raised in any preponderant caste milieu in India wields symbolic, and structural, caste-based power. In the specific case of brahminism, as the ritually ‘apex’ caste, its historical claim to authority over vedic scriptures has led to the practice of rituals and religion imbued with oppressive beliefs of caste superiority and purity. I then moved to New Delhi as a child, where I was relentlessly abused for being “a dark, stupid *madrasi*”, resulting in an overzealous effort to learn Hindi, while simultaneously erasing Tamil from my psyche. Later, I moved to the United Kingdom where both racism and diasporic kinships further scrambled my notions of belonging. In each place, I wielded slightly different sets of privileges, and experienced different kinds of exclusions, though, of course, the former often softened the latter. This is my space of borders, where I identify and confront my shadow beasts of privilege, my wounds from abuse, as well as participate in social-justice work and coalition building.

<sup>7</sup> Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 2003

<sup>8</sup> Keating, *Transformation, Now!*, Ch 4

<sup>9</sup> Keating, *Transformation, Now!*, Introduction

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<sup>10</sup> See Lata Mani (2009), Leela Fernandes (2001) for detailed reflections on these perceived distinctions between the spiritual and secular. It is also important to note that the idea of the secular is in no way unproblematic, nor is it divested from the religious. I only do not want to place the spiritual in opposition to the secular in the every-day understanding of secular as non-belief in organised religion, and the separation of the same from political life.

<sup>11</sup> Rao, et al., *Textures of Time*, Ch. 1

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 15

<sup>14</sup> Fernandes, *Transforming Feminist practice*, 11

<sup>15</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 15

<sup>16</sup> Naraindas “Of Sacraments, Sacramentals”

<sup>17</sup> Naraindas “Of Sacraments, Sacramentals”, 277

<sup>18</sup> Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 70

<sup>19</sup> See Mani, 2009 for a longer engagement with this concept

<sup>20</sup> Routledge and Simons, “Embodying Spirits of Resistance”

<sup>21</sup> Szerszynski, “Gods of the Anthropocene”

<sup>22</sup> Szerszynski, “Gods of the Anthropocene”, 257

<sup>23</sup> Sefa Dei, “Suahunu,” the Trialectic Space, 833

<sup>24</sup> This is not a move to idealise or orientalise ‘non-western’ cultures, but to take note of important values and practices that have eroded the bonds within communities

<sup>25</sup> See Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing* for a more in-depth discussion

<sup>26</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 44

<sup>27</sup> Ibid 4

<sup>28</sup> Ibid 36

<sup>29</sup> Holmes, *Race and the Cosmos*, 23

<sup>30</sup> Maparyan, *The Womanist Idea*, Ch. 1

<sup>31</sup> Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 152



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- <sup>32</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 311
- <sup>33</sup> Holmes, *Race and the Cosmos*
- <sup>34</sup> Fernandes, *Transforming Feminist Practice*, 20
- <sup>35</sup> Lorde, *Zami, Sister Outsider*
- <sup>36</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 39
- <sup>37</sup> Bhattacharya, “Diving Deep”, 496
- <sup>38</sup> Keating, *Transformation, Now!*
- <sup>39</sup> My work on the radical and healing potential of silence is ongoing, and as such, I do not address it in great detail in this piece. However, I do want to signal to it as an important space for decolonial practice to consider.
- <sup>40</sup> Sandoval, *Methodology of*, Introduction
- <sup>41</sup> Sandoval, *Methodology of*, Ch.2
- <sup>42</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*,17
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid
- <sup>44</sup> Chasbar, *Another World is Possible*, 254
- <sup>45</sup> Moewaka Barnes et al., “Feeling and Spirit”, 313
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid. 317-318
- <sup>47</sup> Langton, “Speech Acts”, 318 (I first encountered Langton’s work through Jacqui Alexander)
- <sup>48</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 323
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid 112
- <sup>50</sup> Keating in Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, xxix
- <sup>51</sup> Nagar, *Muddying the Waters*, Ch. 3
- <sup>52</sup> Nagar, *Muddying the Waters*, Ch. 3
- <sup>53</sup> Anzaldúa 2015 and 2009
- <sup>54</sup> Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 137.
- <sup>55</sup> Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 243

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- <sup>56</sup> See Raghavan, 2017, ch. 5 for a longer discussion on the importance of dismantling barriers between literature and theory.
- <sup>57</sup> Craddock, *Siva's Demon Devotee*, 23
- <sup>58</sup> Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti*, 27
- <sup>59</sup> Subramaniam, *Eating God*, x
- <sup>60</sup> Ramanujan *Speaking of Siva* 107
- <sup>61</sup> Tamil name for Vishnu
- <sup>62</sup> Venkatesan *The Secret Garland*, 7.1
- <sup>63</sup> Special thanks to my anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need to clarify this point.
- <sup>64</sup> Dasimayya's beloved manifestation of Siva
- <sup>65</sup> Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva*, 92
- <sup>66</sup> Allama Prabhu in *I Keep Vigil*, 52; special thanks to my anonymous reviewer for drawing attention to this 'othering' in Bhakti poetry
- <sup>67</sup> See Rachel Fell McDermott, 2001
- <sup>68</sup> Sree Padma, *Vicissitudes of the Goddess* Ch. 2
- <sup>69</sup> Tamil Bhakti poets were sometimes virulently critical of Buddhism and Jainism which they saw as 'external' impositions. Many poets also asserted their dominant caste statuses in the poetry they wrote.
- <sup>70</sup> Malathi Maithri, *Wild Words*, 10
- <sup>71</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 303
- <sup>72</sup> Malathi Maithri, *Wild Words*, 10
- <sup>73</sup> Sukirtharani, *Wild Words*, 85
- <sup>74</sup> Anzaldúa *Boderlands*, 82
- <sup>75</sup> Anzaldúa *Boderlands*, 82
- <sup>76</sup> Rajkumar, *Give Us This Day*, 35

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<sup>77</sup> Anzaldúa *Light in the Dark*, 49. The story goes that the goddess *Coyolxauhqui* was dismembered by her own brother, and he scattered her body parts into the sky and earth.

Anzaldúa suggests that the *Coyolxauhqui* imperative, is the deep desire to heal.

<sup>78</sup> Rajkumar, *Give Us This Day*, 9

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Sree Padma, *Vicissitudes of the Goddess*, 50

<sup>81</sup> Sukirtharani, *Wild Words*, 93

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> hooks, *all about love*, 19. I fully recognise that “justice” is a complex term with a variety of legal-historical implications. I use it here in a more expansive sense, as a combination of ethical and spiritual practice as Leela Fernandes (2003) outlines in her discussion. She expands on the Dalai Lama’s framework of combining love, compassion, harmony etc. with the ethical imperative of avoiding acts of harm and injury against others and it is this kind of configuration that I want to use for justice, in this context.

<sup>84</sup> Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 94

<sup>85</sup> Keating, *Transformation, Now!*, Ch. 4

<sup>86</sup> Dayam in *Dalit Theology*, 145

<sup>87</sup> Ramanujan, *Hymns for the Drowning*, 148

<sup>88</sup> Malathi Maithri, *Proscribed Blood-I*

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Malathi Maithri, *Wild Words*, 27

<sup>91</sup> Craddock, *Siva’s Demon Devotee*, 141

<sup>92</sup> Rajkumar, *Give Us This Day*, 22

<sup>93</sup> Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 322

<sup>94</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 79

<sup>95</sup> Holmes, *Race and the Cosmos*, 31

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