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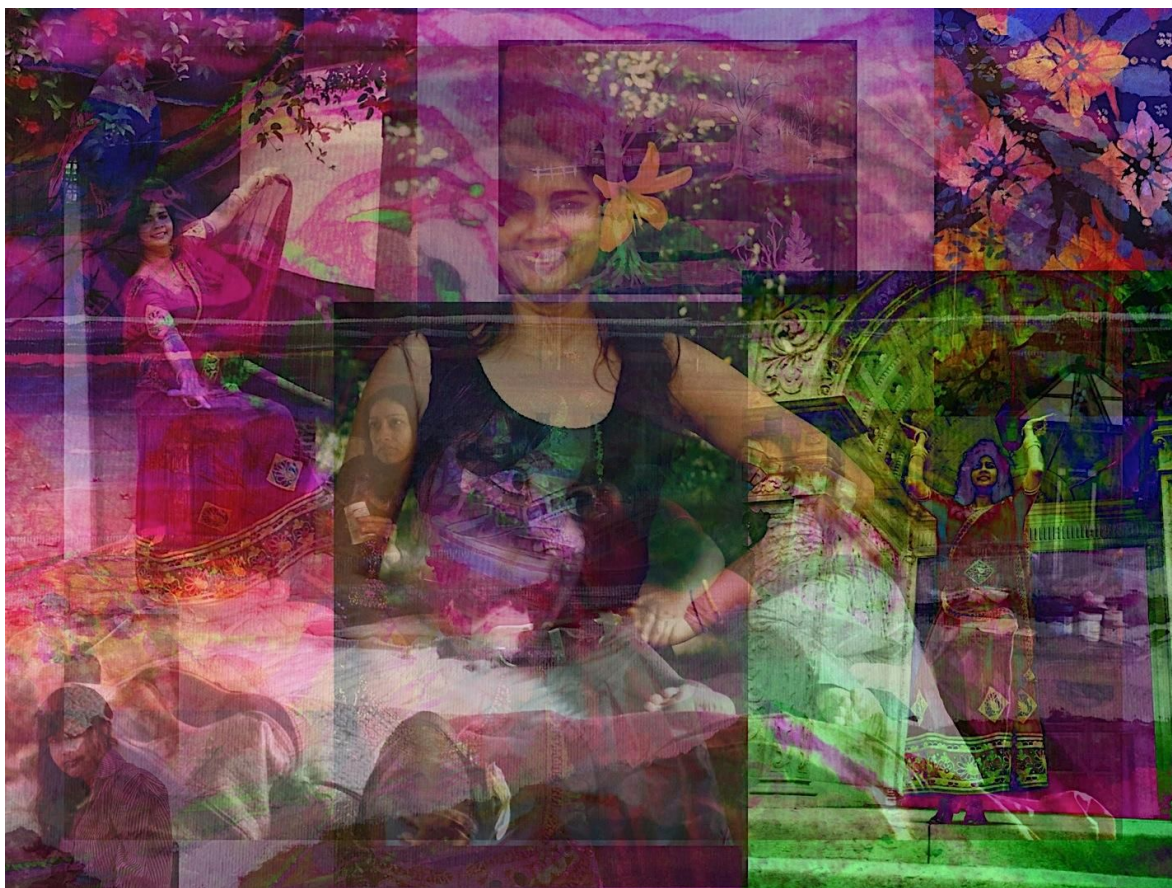
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The Art of Living Archives: **Heartographies in Queer/Feminist Historiography**

Hannah K Higgins



KALEIDOSCOPIC LOVE: An optical collage depicting many composites to my mother's layered and multifaceted life. As films overlap within the frame, like an onion in both its pungency and stratum, my mother, in her serenity and complexity... through her dreaming and doings... paved way to the pluralizing of possibilities, expanding horizons beyond the *then-and-there* and even the here-and-now.

∞

I write this paper in memory of: Shareeza Shireen Ali-Higgins
August 31st, 1957 – May 11th, 2015

Mommy; you are the woman who has taught me how to love.

This paper aims to situate a politics of memorializing as a catalyst to communicate the *intersectional*¹ and *intra-active*² ways in which artists powerfully preserve and construct their own histories through *re-membling*³ the past. As a simultaneous present-day and past-life formulation, the archives of my mother's history, culture, life and death culminate as the locus of my analysis. I want to illuminate how these *traces* of my mother's past are so deeply part of her story and map connections to a larger historical background that is the diaspora. In this endeavor, I utilize a radical *queer political imagination* (Muñoz, 2009) in order to construct an archive of my mother's past as performing glimpses towards *queer futurity* (Muñoz, 2009).

She left evidence of her visions materially to be discovered through the archives. As an Indo-Caribbean woman of color and Muslim immigrant to America, Shireen was a rebel of her time, a dancer even as her father shunned it. She envisioned new worlds and the possibilities that unfold when—amidst hurt, struggle, trauma and tragedy—the daring tap into those innermost utopian imaginings of future, something of what Jacqui Alexander calls *The Crossing*—“that imaginary from which we dream the craft of a new compass” (2005, 8). My mother's dreams will always inform my being, and the passionate necessity I feel for queer/feminist historiography.⁴ My mother is my root. I am a seed of her aspirations. This inter-generational landscape is the foundation of my work.

Mobilizing critical examinations of queerness through a series of archival sources, I begin each section of this paper with an object from my mother's belongings. In an effort to prompt discussion regarding disparate yet resonant connections, each object I have chosen paints a portion of this messy memorialization. I introduce these archival materials as not merely a collection of independent things, but rather to signal a co-constitutive field of relations—material, performative, and discursive. Ultimately, my work aims to

place my mother's life story in *crossroads*⁵ with different forms of queer and feminist analyses.

Material #1

Oral History: Shireen Ali-Higgins

On February 21st 2015, I spontaneously recorded an intimate interview with my mother. The interview took place only a couple months before her death. In this four-minute storytelling, she speaks of what she calls "The Art of Living". I position this material to start my rhetorical track as it explains the title of this paper and what I have come to name this archival production—*The Art of Living Archives*. I refer to this interview as an oral history since my mother recalls a snapshot of her experience within it. I honor her words and share them because of how they *affect* me in new ways each day; illuminating dimensions in the role of representation- its consequences, perils and possibilities, while highlighting the way in which subjects share an intimate relationship to the state. In sickness especially, for working class women of color, the state relationship severs mind from body of subject. This cut suffocates subjectivities through hegemonic pre-established binaries delineating valued work/ers from devalued work/ers, ultimately dictating declining prognoses more forcefully so than "disease" itself. In an effort to suture the state-imposed incisions my mother bore the weight of, this oral history declares itself both personal and political.

When my mother passed away on May 11th 2015, I spiraled into a kind of archival mania. My laptop memory became confidant to me in such fragile moments of mourning, as it remains a storehouse to years of documented memories with my mother. Her closet, her garments, left hanging and depleted, comforted me to a new degree. I think this instinctual passion to create an archive of my mother is precisely the mania necessary to carving space for women and for revolutionary change in history. Given the category of women is not a monolithic one⁶, I use this category similarly to Audre Lorde's declaration of womanhood in "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power". I go on to discuss the woman my mother was through this erotic lens later in my paper.

As a methodology, oral history is a de-colonial tool because it remains outside dominant paradigms of written history, and in this way, the oral history of my mother serves this paper as a queer means of archival production. Karen M. Mason & Tanya Zanish-Belcher note, "Oral history is one method of enhancing the historical record for under- documented groups. It is especially critical for groups that do not create written records" (2007, 349). This resonates given the fact that, for my mother, writing was not the artistic medium through which she chose to communicate her dreams and desires. Painting and performing spoke to her passions with greater vigor. This is a noticeable trend I see in many cultural traditions. Artistic and aesthetic realms remain central mediums through which many women (women of color for generations in fact) have left imprints of their lives. Quilting- cooking- designing- planting- decorating- painting- performing-

avenues through which “outsiders” to the institution of academia gravitate towards and express themselves through, remembering past in hopes of preserving future.

As a woman of color artist, many aspects to my mother’s life have been left out of history; with all of the complexity her story necessarily entails waning in the shadows. Indo-Caribbean women more generally have been left out of popular narratives, overlooked in academia too; thus, I feel it necessary to disrupt this historical erasure of complex subjectivities through the cathartic endeavor of this work— a raw and vulnerable politics of memorializing, irrefutably my own means of mourning and manifesting. With that said, I now attempt to paint a picture in the mind of the reader. It is absolutely necessary that I set the scene of this interview, not merely for the purpose of narrative form; but rather, it is imperative that the body of the reader can actually *feel* my mother’s words in order to understand the intimacy she speaks.

Sitting across from my mother in the living room of her craftsman home, admiring her as she waits for a bowl of freshly cut mangos. She is on oxygen at this point, but she’s up and her spirits are good since she is about to eat her favorite fruit. The recording begins with me asking my mother an unanticipated question:

“What’s your favorite thing about life?”

She voices her reply—

The Art of Living

I am touched, and seeking elaboration, I ask: “What, to you, is the art of living?”

Moved by my mother’s response, I share it with you in the following passage:

The art of living is trying to find happiness in your heart.

For each person, it’s different. You find it with your own personal growth.

There’s a journey you go on, each person...

And as time goes on, you find what real happiness is for you.

I ask, “Do you feel you found real happiness?” seeking further testimony.

The first word to her coming reply stretches in contemplation, — “liliii...”—

Upon pausing for half a second, she then answers:

...I found it and I lost it.

I lost it a few years ago when I forgot myself-- you can't lose yourself.

I lost responsibility of me, put everybody else first.

Yeah... I forgot myself in the picture.

There is something to learn from the *loss* my mother speaks of. Despite the feeling she communicates of responsibility in forgetting herself, I know first-hand that my mother’s experience of “forgetting” is nothing of her fault, nor her choosing. I take my mother’s words as expression of the burdens imposed on her by various state entities. Institutional barriers and the racialized hierarchies that consume them are coercively imposed in the way such concentrations of power and categories of subject come to maneuver their way onto the lap of the individual, inevitably penetrating the psyche, as causative reflections of guilt manifest in the individual under the ruse of coercive state powers (and private

entities). My mother was overworked and underpaid as a businesswoman; yet, still she worked without complaint. She did this deliberately because she worked for her family, and also because it was a means of survival. In order to keep her health insurance while being the sole provider for our family, she was forced to work long hours on a Monday through Friday basis. My mother saw no other option but to continue working; that is, until her Adriamycin-induced⁷ heart attack left her too weak to continue working.

It is said that, "...women's experiences and perspectives shed light on the institutions of which they are a part, providing insight and perhaps a gendered perspective absent from other sources" (Karen M. Mason & Tanya Zanish-Belcher, 2007, 349). I immediately think of the institution of western medicine, of which I will explain further. My mother's recollection in her saying: "I forgot myself ... a few years ago" is indicative of the moment in which her life (and death) came irrefutably dependent on the state. I say this since I know firsthand the "few years ago" my mother recalls, as this interview took place just short of three years after my mother received news regarding her terminal sentence to metastatic breast cancer— a disease she had survived only a year and a half prior to her subsequent terminal diagnosis.

While there are, of course, multiple factors that may have contributed to my mother's cancer metastasizing, the factor that remains incomprehensible still is the medical malpractice, which enabled the dismissal of my mother's life. From patient discrimination to her oncologist failing to follow standard protocol at the crucial moment that my mother was found to be tumor free, I witnessed how the luxury of "health" in America is differentially distributed. I mention this because my immediate family, and mother especially, intimately experienced the violence of the state thread through the medical industrial complex. Areas of social life including, but not limited to, healthcare, as well as state and employer insurance are realms fraught with violent market-based inequality, as these arenas exist and hold power over life, distinguishing barcoded bodies through hierarchies of value that are inherently racist, sexist, classist, homophobic and ableist.

"Oral recordings have the added value of conveying emotion and character in a way that papers cannot" (Karen M. Mason & Tanya Zanish-Belcher, 2007, 351). I reflect on the guilt that my mother's voiced words capture with contemplation and sadness. I mourn the feelings of shame that were displaced onto my mother at the hands of scientific authorities. That I cannot hug my mother any longer- alive in her body, hearts beating skin to skin- because of such forces as the state, necessitates this anger in my mourning. As a means of finding exile, I now turn my analysis to the powerful ways my mother lived a life of reclamation— painting, dancing and performing utopian possibilities through what she described to be: *The Art of Living*.

Material(s) #2: Paintings by Shireen



Shireen was an artist in every sense of the word. But art was more than a passion alone—it was an unconscious manifestation of her profound creativity and imagination. It was creative visualization. It was a mechanism of survival. She utilized empty canvases as a stage to paint her desires into reality. From landscapes, cloudscapes and seascapes, to birds and boats, to abstract, layered mosaics that mimic Islamic pattern paintings, to artworks of atmospheric perspective that leave trees dissolving

(some left unfinished...), my mother was a painter of dreams. Her radical imagination was a creative mechanism towards transcending struggles. Painting was an erotic channel in the way it originated from her innermost “life-force”, infusing that fundamental tapping into *the erotic*— the boundless, free-flowing creativity of women (Lorde, 2007).



[Image 1]: Shireen, mid-twirl, dancing in front of her own creation. The painted mural backdrops this performance. Her dancing shadow is faintly depicted on the hanging mural just left of center.

I wish to focus this analysis through reflections regarding one of her largest painted scenes, a mural that she fashioned for the stage, eventually becoming a performative backdrop that she would dance in front of [see Image 1; pictured above]. Magnificent in size, this piece of art is a feast for the eyes, its presence over six feet tall and sixteen feet wide. The affective depictions within it breathe most at me. I see the mural encapsulating simultaneity in somber mood and utopian longing. This blend of such unencumbered emotive contrasts to visual form joins with José Muñoz's colorful tales of queerness in *Cruising Utopia: The then and there of Queer Futurity*. I point to this work by Muñoz because when I gaze at my mother's mural, I sense futurity in its poignantly painted aesthetic. As Muñoz notes in speaking of Bloch's analysis of aesthetic production, "Indeed, there is a performance of futurity embedded in the aesthetic" (Muñoz, 2009, 87). The colors of the sky— a vibrant spectrum of reds, yellows, and orange, pinks, peaches and purple— juxtaposed by the silhouetted scenery, reminds the journeyer, and the viewer like I, that depth and darkness are but a tone, a saturation, through which imaginative illuminations see sun and sing soulfully to darkness:

*It's a new dawn,
It's a new day,
It's a new life,
For me
And I'm feeling good⁸*



[Image 2, pictured left]: Untitled, (aged) mural painting, acrylic, by Shireen

As dawn breaks day in this mural painting—the carriage, the mule, the rider, are all depicted with backs turned from the canon of the image left. Being with nature is suggested in the journey toward the peculiar

two-headed tree of the image right. I understand my mother's utopian imaginary as the creativity and commitment that went into producing this scene of futurity. As Muñoz says himself, "Queerness, in my view, is also not quite here and no longer conscious. Queerness, if it is to have any political resonance, needs to be more than an identification and to articulate a forward dawning futurity" (2009, 87). With that said, it makes sense for me to believe that this mural of my mother's paints a spectrum of belonging, providing so much to unpack and needing nothing to resolve.

Material #3

Velvet Green Large Photo Album



My third material of analysis [Image 3, pictured above] is a photographic archival artwork crafted by my mother, in memory of her mother. There are

many striking elements to this work and my mother's arrangement of it. The velvety quality of the book itself makes the album feel alive as you hold it. The pages are thick and sturdily positioned with delicate centers. The strategically positioned presentation communicates a message to *handle with care*, an indication of the care and vulnerability imbued within this chapter of her life, as family tree now loses leaves.⁹

Beyond the realm of the aesthetic alone, I aim to highlight two elements of this work in particular. The first is my mother's *revisionary*¹⁰ lens, through which she offers seemingly utopian reflections and depictions of family, her parents in particular. It is no secret to me that, given the history and stories of my grandparents I have heard, my mother remembers this story to recollect the beauty in her family, and the jovial spirit of Trinidad. Her memorialization persists with a graceful optimism and hope, despite my grandparents troubling beginnings and her father's irreconcilable past. My mother's photographic assemblages serve to pursue an enablement towards reconfiguring family traumas, which is precisely what I mean by artists constructing their own history as means to re-remembering their past.

Importantly, trauma cannot be fixed to any one moment in time; instead, it carries within and along a plethora of residues—out of which my mother positions her family history to be a puzzle of possibility, mysterious so and invisible not. It remains that “The memory of trauma is embedded in not just narrative but in material artifacts, which can range from photographs to objects, whose relation to trauma might seem arbitrary but for the fact that they are invested with emotional, and even sentimental, value” (Cvetkovich, 2003, 7-8). I consider this album to be emblematic of such memory— a celebration and embrace of complex and convoluted familial histories, providing a luminescing *disidentification*¹¹ with conventional narratives of trauma, all the while signaling a proud identification with, and longing for, family.

Second, I reflect on this album's presentation as her process of embodying compassion, a necessary foundation to the process of *healing*. I consider my mother's organization of the album as a material through which she distances herself from the crushing narratives of colonialism. But this dismissal is anything but apolitical. Depicting her family travelers in search of “freedom” is my mother's refusal to identify with, and/or internalize therein, the legacies of colonial rule that plague Trinidad's past. This is one way of both grappling with and living among tensions. My mother utilized her artistic capabilities to construct an archival production of her Indo-Caribbean family of Muslim faith that rose. She depicts the borders her family crosses as excursions toward possibilities.¹² Crossing in and out of place and time, this album takes the viewer on a ride to something else; perhaps, in an effort to make tangible those hopeful dreams of a future *not yet t/here*.

Material(s) #4

Her abundant collection of Jewelry

[Image 4, pictured left]: *Gazing Woman, Shadow Of Gold*

Whether on stage, at work, or just out and about, my mother ornamented her life in jewelry. She dazzled her dance performances in bangles of gold, the Hindu bindi that adorned her third eye, and bells that draped her ears and feet. These are some of the ways in which worn jewelries signaled a site of



performativity,¹³ by and for my mother. Her wooden mahogany jewelry armoire houses an abundant collection, often revealing itself unable to close from the surplus of her well-kept jewels. Upon looking inside these cabinets and drawers, one can find a multicultural aesthetic and global history thread throughout. Her collection forwards the notion that subjects can embody new ways of being and seeing self through merging multiple axes of experience to make-up their lives. You see, my mother performed the sort of femininity that resonated *for her*, being and becoming the embodied, strong, fierce woman she had grown to be by her own design. In the words of Simone de Beauvoir: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". Oh, how my mother became. Oh, how part of her still

becomes in me...

Oh, Mommy, how you are gone; yet still, in my life, my longing, my love, I see you.

And together we bloom.

Further unraveling the layers of life in this cove of her belongings, I see the aesthetic blend of her jewelry as moving in and out of characters, and performing various characters remains a central element to the annual celebration in Trinidad known as *Carnival*. The overflowing abundance of objects that glitter I see as depicting an ode to the masquerade of Carnival culture, symbolizing the ways in which she would continue to honor "back home"¹⁴ while living in the States. The Carnival of Trinidad and Tobago is a multifaceted festival of indulgence and resistance, independence and unity. As such, "carnival- esque elements of Creole culture have been integrated into Indian rituals and festivities. Boundaries have thus been rendered more permeable and identities more fluid" (Raimund Schöffner, 2002, 194). Rightfully so, I consider the multifaceted components and cultural influences of my mother's jewelry collection as one of the ways she resisted the pressures of

assimilation upon moving to America. My mother bridged cultural divides through ornamented displays of femininity, embracing her creative and erotic self, her brave womanhood, her cultural roots, and her ethnic identity at once. Each of which she expressed through her dancing, her painting, her fashioning and creating.

Material #5

Dance Performance (turned screen dance)

My mother made all of life a dance, and indeed she was a talented dancer. She taught herself traditional Indian dance, inspired by Bollywood cinema. Certainly dance was more than a feel-good practice for her; it was a mode of connection to the past, it was a performance of her pain and her pleasures, it was the emotion that spoke as a form of resistance. The dance I have chosen to analyze as the final archival material of this paper is my mother performing to “Kehna Hi Kya”, a song that comes out of the Bollywood film titled Bombay. In this performance, my mother is dressed in all white, situating herself to be a blank canvas. Her moves communicate an intimately personal narrative in the romanticized form of the Bombay storyline. She captivates viewers through her use of play of gestures. Her face work strikes deliberate and assertive. Her eyes alone tell a story of depth. Hand and footwork are fundamental components to classical Indian dance. The hand gestures are referred to as *mudras*. She danced, utilizing *mudras*, to point to new directions, *new futures on the horizon*.¹⁵



[Image 5, pictured above]: screenshot of Shireen dancing to “Kenha Hi Kya”, early 1990's; Quality not clear due to effect had from a camera phone recording VHS tape of the performance.

That my grandmother and grandfather share a similarity with the story of Bombay makes this performance that much more meaningful. My grandmother was of Muslim faith and my grandfather was born and raised Hindu. He converted to Islam upon marrying my grandmother on February 24th 1957.

Before their union, and unbeknownst to my grandmother, my grandfather had left a wife and family to never return. Upon his departure and journey in crisis, he met my grandmother, at which point he initiated the relationship non-consensually. Even so, he became the father and husband, but my grandmother's family disapproved so harshly that they ostracized her from family belonging.

In the film, *Bombay*, the Hindu man and Muslim woman who fall in love are, at first, condemned due to the conflicting religious affiliations of their desire; yet, eventually they go on to re-member their family bonds. I think my mother hoped this happy ending would one day come 'round for her own mother, also a woman of dreams and aspirations, though it never was the case. Hence, my mother's performance forms another tribute to her mother. Her imagination, like a bottomless pit, dancing its way through the emotional and sensual vibrations of the music, in realization of the movement healing her own life story.

The lyrics in this song also speak profoundly to the creases of my mother's past. Its words, read and interpreted in English translation, are sung in such a way that speaks to a rupture. Going in and out of character in a junction of conflicting emotions and dispersed temporalities; where, at one verse, the artist is singing desire-some sins as a stroke of love, and, at the next, the chorus reads and repeats an attentive disparagement ("silent and secretive, silent and secretive")...

Gumsum gumsum gup chup, gumsum gup chup - 2

(Silent and secretive, silent and secretive)

Halchal halchal ho gayi teri, honth hai tere chup

(You are all shaken, your lips are silent)

Khalbal khalbal ho gayi teri, baithi hai tu gupchup

(You are all disturbed, you are sitting silently)

Pyaare pyaare chehre lekar dediya ishaara

(With your lovely face you've given us hints)

Dekha teri aankhon mein hai sapna koi pyaara

(We have seen that there is some sweet dream in your eyes)

Humse gori naa tu sharma, kehde humse zara - 2

(Don't be shy of us, tell us a little)¹⁶

The chorus sings to conflict, it gestures on uneasiness, tracing a discomfort and distrust. I am struck by the flips of pain and pleasure, in and out of which my mother retains an artful vision of multiplicities.

So it goes that I may never know for certain whether my mother knew the message of this film. I have no memories of watching the movie as a child, but I do very much remember the song itself, as I witnessed my mother practice and perform to it numerous times, so much so that upon hearing the song for the first time in years, I immediately found myself humming its melody. That musical recognition astonishes me. This speaks to the profound recollections and glue-like resonances that art forms can both encapsulate and evoke. For my mother to dance, for herself, was more than rebellious in opposition to the

restricting norm that she must sit for her father. It was, in fact, an act of political resistance. It was a declaration and an embrace of the woman she knew she could be and longed to become. In this way my mother passionately deviated from “gender-appropriate” behavior, which is queer when we take that term as operationalizing a “...resistance to regimes of the normal” (Warner, 1991, 16).

Conclusion

As I seek to convey some sense of closure to this work, my mother's life, and the materials I have chosen for the purposes of this memorialization, shed light on all sorts of queer futurities; that is, the queerness of the Caribbean diaspora, the queerness of aesthetic productions and encounters, the queerness in the “not yet queer”, and the queerness in writing history for oneself. My mother's life depicts the ways in which art and performance allows subjects to reconstruct and reconfigure histories of trauma in order to build a remembered history of creative perseverance.

Every year in my mother's home country of Trinidad, the festival of revelry, radical performance, and *bacchanal*¹⁷ known as Carnival, brings this queerness to the forefront, starting discourse at that. During Carnival, art in all its forms is utilized as a celebration of independence and release from the confines of society. Carnival serves to turn norms of society upside down. Characters depict themselves in many forms—reclamation, satirical, mockery, and so much more, or shall I say, *mas*!¹⁸ The National Kings and Queens of Carnival is one of Trinidad's biggest traditions. This is an event where designers and performers team up to collaborate in depicting traditional mas characters. This year (2016) round of masqueraders contained a particularly queer performance, situating a powerfully political, intimate and emotional statement center stage. The performance that I am referring to is that of: *The Dying Swan by Ras Nijinsky In Drag As Pavlova*.¹⁹ It is a drag performance on stilts! What could be more loud and beautiful and breathtaking than that?

Designer, Peter Minshall, is responsible for crafting the intricate costume. Performer, Jha-whan Thomas, dances on stilts so tall it seems almost humanly impossible. The entire performance is a fusion of the contemporary and the archaic. In an online news article, another masquerader, Amanda McIntyre who performed The Blue Devil at this same year's event, states, “The Dying Swan- Ras Nijinsky in Drag as Pavlova is a statement on continuity and change in the politics of carnival, the politics of race and the politics of gender” (Amanda McIntyre, 2016). The classical ballet performance is made a queer Caribbean character, dragged and androgynous, making it all the more beautiful; in fact, making it absolutely *Trini to de Bone*!²⁰ You can even hear the *steelpan*²¹ playing music to this elegy of a performance.

The movement and message of the dying swan and my mother's life share a similar story.²² Both beautiful, both full of grace in the act of dying, both artfully creating dance, both controversial in their creation and in their act of

creating. Thus, my mothers life is a microcosm of the diaspora— a story that shows what it is like to be a Caribbean woman, an Indo- Caribbean woman, an Indo- Caribbean Muslim woman, an Indo-Caribbean Muslim woman artist and immigrant in America. Against all odds of success and with every struggle that she met, her spirit persevered through her art and her imagination, resurrecting the past in new and transformed ways. Through the re-remembering of her past, and her dreams of and towards utopian futures, she looked onto the horizon; and, through her living, even in her dying, she made love, gave love, spread love and shed light on all who were fortunate enough to know her or have met her.

There are further considerations that I seek to continue analyzing and re-remembering.

In no way is this story finished. Rather, it is still becoming...



[Image 6, pictured above]:
"The Dying Swan— Ras Nijinsky In Drag As Pavlova"
@ National Kings and Queens of Trinidad 2016
(Photo by Sean Drakes/LatinContent/Getty Images)

Notes

1. **Intersectionality**— In "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color", Kimberle Crenshaw explains the category "women of color" is an intersectional identity as it resists "an either/or proposition" (1242). She asserts, "Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both" (1244).
2. **Intra-active**—In "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning", Karen Barad describes, "The neologism "intra-action" signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction," which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the "distinct" agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements²¹" (33).
3. **Re-membering**— "The editors consider a critical aspect of re-membering to involve suturing 'a coalitional body that has been dis-membered by a history of ideological violence'" (Marci L. Carrasquillo, 228-230).
4. I thank Professor Bettina Aptheker (UCSC Feminist Studies Department) for her crucial role in engaging me with this work as a young becoming scholar. This paper comes out of her course on *Queer/Feminist Historiography*, which I took in the final year of my undergraduate education (particularly at a moment in which my own identity as a queer woman of color was in bloom). Through this course, I was able to fulfill the promise I made to my mother— that I would write my senior thesis about her.
5. **The Crossroads**— In Jacqui Alexander's 2005 "Pedagogies of Crossing", she explains how "The crossing is also meant to evoke/invoke *the crossroads*, the space of convergence and endless possibility; the place where we put down and discard the unnecessary in order to pick up that which is necessary" (Introduction, 8).
6. In Chandra Talpade Mohanty's 1984 work, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, the author critiques and challenges western feminism and scholarship in its universalizing representation of "Third World Woman" by asserting that "woman" is not a monolithic category (333-358).
7. **Adriamycin**, generically called doxorubicin, is the dose-dense chemotherapy drug regimen my mother underwent upon her first diagnosis with cancer.
8. Nina Simone, song "Feeling Good", covered by artist Nina Simone, 1965 album *I Put A Spell On You*
9. Arcade Fire, song "In The Backseat", album: *Funeral* (2004), written by Regine Chassagne, Win Butler, Tim Kingsbury, Richard R Parry and William Butler
10. **Revisionary**— In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999), "Revisionary is meant to signal different strategies of viewing, reading, and locating "self" within representational systems and disparate life-worlds that aim to displace or occlude a minority subject" (Muñoz, Introduction, 26).
11. **Disidentification**— In José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999), he proclaims that, "As a practice, disidentification does not dispel those ideological contradictory elements; rather, like a melancholic subject holding on to a lost object, a disidentify-ing subject works to hold on to this object and invest it with new life" (Introduction, 12).

12. "Disidentificatory performances and readings require an active kernel of utopian possibility" (Introduction, 25). Muñoz. *Disidentifications*.
13. **Performativity**: "-ity" meaning "the quality of"; Argo the quality of performance/the performative
14. My mother always referred to her home country of Trinidad as "back home".
15. **New futures on the horizon**— "Queerness as lyric and modality are thus potentially transformative of a natural order, allowing for new horizons and a vastness of potentiality" (Just Like Heaven, 141). Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia*.
16. "Kehna Hi Kya" chorus lyrics, released 1995 Film: Bombay, Kehna Hi Kya Lyrics Translation. Retrieved from <http://www.hindilyrics.net/translation-Bombay/Kehna-Hi-Kya.html>
17. **Bacchanal**— "commotion, a wild party, a fight between neighbours, family or friends" (Appendix: Glossary of Trinidadian English Source, 2015).
18. **Mas**— "meaning more in Spanish- is a slogan of Trinidad's Carnival culture" (Appendix: Glossary of Trinidadian English Source, 2015).
19. R. (Director), P. (Producer), & J. (Adapter). (2016, February 3). *The Dying Swan - Ras Nijinsky *Controversial Performance** [Video file]. Retrieved May 29, 2016, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNWAOb_QkLI
20. **Trini to de Bone!** — "Pride in oneself for being a Trinidadian" (Appendix: Glossary of Trinidadian English Source, 2015).
21. **Steelpan**— Percussion instrument indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago
22. "This mas fuses two seemingly disparate things: European art and Diaspora art, showing how they are one. Minshall has taken the Moko Jumbie (which leaped across the Atlantic from the West coast of Africa to the Caribbean) and turned it into a ballet dancer." ("The Revenant Andree Bago", *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, 2016) <http://www.newsday.co.tt/commentary/0,223388.html>

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Archival Sources:

- Oral history
- Paintings by Shireen
- Velvet green large photo album
- Her abundant collection of jewelry
- Dance performance (VHS)

The Art Of Living, Interview with Mommy. Ali-Higgins, Shireen. MOV. Glendora, CA. filmed by Hannah K. Higgins, February 21, 2015.

Shireen's Indian Dance. Performed by Shareeza Shireen Ali-Higgins. United States. VHS. Uploaded to YouTube May 12, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-milu3XtMM>