

ETHICS UNIT

Script

Indigenous Wisdoms, Reclaimed Action: Love Lessons from *Zazu Dreams*

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Paintings by Micaela Amateau Amato from
Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle,
A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era

Usually the Great Ganges is packed with tremendous activity and hoards of people. But arriving so early in the morning, there was only a calm silence, except for an occasional lammergeyer bird dropping its bones, punctuated by the mesmerizing voice of an apparition--the great poet, Rabindranath Tagore; his spirit hovered between Bengal and India, Islam and Hinduism. After his death in 1941, Tagore's ashes had been scattered over the Ganges in Calcutta. Now through the mist,



we could see his floating body as he meditated and chanted on the bank of the river. To our even greater surprise, he knew my name, and turned to us saying:

“Zazu, listen carefully to my words—I want you to remember that the same stream that flows through your veins, flows through the universe in rhythmic measure. In this land of fire and air you are a human estuary. You are a body of water that is connected to the global cycle of water—simultaneously salt and fresh. We are all human estuaries, and must take care of the waters of the world so that we may all thrive. We cannot forget that water supports everything that makes up our lives—humans, animals, insects, plants, the seas, rivers, mountains, the atmosphere, the air. Without water we are nothing at all.”



So goes my interfaith book on cultural refugees and symbiosis. The purpose of today's environmental-justice performance is to generate cross-cultural, interdisciplinary dialogue and action. Reclaiming ancient Jewish and Islamic spiritual-pharmacopeias, the sacred embodied in agricultural systems, and environmental architectural engineering practices are practical solutions to our pandemic of ethnic cleansing and climate crisis.

This performance is intended to illuminate the intersections of history, geography, ethics and symbiosis between ethnic diversity and biodiversity. While encouraging individuals and communities to resist convenience-culture and its inherent self-destructive consequences, this action-based academic performance offers psychological, behavioral, and infrastructural design shifts that embody traditional spiritual intelligence from the Middle East. Principles found in Judaic and Islamic texts and laws that are passed down through oral traditions can be antidotes to industrial consumer-waste culture and its concomitant scarcity (both real and socially constructed).

Ladino proverb: *Una mano lava lo otra, I las dos lavas la cara* (One hand washes the other and together they wash the face)

My performance will focus on *how* we can transform our individual and collective habitual capitalist-consumer-driven behavior through a historical and contemporary commitment to biomimicry and biophilia, love of life. It will demonstrate *how* to engender this psychological metamorphosis—*how* to put theory into action in our daily lives. Embedded in radical interdependency, this embodiment recalibrates our normalized relationship to consumption / disposal habits. This embodiment invokes mutually beneficial solutions that citizen-activists can adopt as we transition from our petroleum-pharmaceutical-addicted cyberculture to a regenerative ecological spirituality.

Semitic diversity reflects the decolonizing, liberatory practice of nourishing interdependent, co-beneficial relationships. Hybrid identities ignite an ethics-of-difference and a politics-of-transformation rooted in an investigation of how to individually and collectively dissolve the calcifying tyranny of certainty—that which obliterates the possibility of difference. Tagore's famous conversation with Einstein titled, "We Think That We Think Clearly, but That's Only Because We Don't Think Clearly," refuted the faulty assumption characteristic of industrialized humans "that the world we see is all there

is.” By highlighting the violence of the closed border (binary-based illusions of our separateness from one another and from our natural worlds), we conjure the multiplicity of the imagination.



Non-binary cultural production is rooted in the fertile ground of ambiguity and contradiction.¹ By engaging this complex web as a process of storytelling in which ambiguity is not a lack of clarity, but offers multiple clarities, we can confront contemporary ecological and humanitarian crises. Living these interrelationships is the foundation for conviviality: compassionate coalition-building and sustainable ecological stewardship. Judaism and Islam, as polymath religions being many things simultaneously, represent the extraordinary resiliency and creativity necessary for unity in diversity. Embodying hybrid cultural identities reflects the potency of biodiversity throughout our cultural ecosystems. As Tagore commands, we *are* estuaries²—dynamic contradictions in balance.³

“[Contradiction] confuses polarity; it baffles those who were moving in a pure, straight line, it uncovers hidden duplicity.”⁴ Semitic oral traditions are replete with such models—the interplay between

¹ In Muslim contexts, the *hamsa* is referred to as the Hand of Fatima, and like other amulets, talismans, and fetishes, it wards off the evil eye—offering good luck, healing, fertility, protection, positive energy, while deflecting destructive emotions, like envy and hatred. Amulets also are used to gain someone’s love. The five fingers of the hamsa are supposed to remind its wearer to use their five senses to experience and express gratitude to the spirit of the universe / G-d. In his post-colonial, magical realist novel, *Midnight’s Children*, Salman Rushdie reminds us “the *hamsa* or is the symbol of an ability to live in two worlds—the physical and spiritual world of land and water and the world of air, of flight” (New York: Penguin, 1980: 267). This symbol remains a cross-cultural bridge among many different peoples. In many Muslim and Mizrahi Turkish traditions, water serves as a talisman. When someone is about to embark on a long *rihla* (journey) a glass of water is sprinkled across the road after them, so their migration will “flow like water.”

² Estuaries continually interflow between river and sea, freshwater and salt water.

³ Let us return now to Tagore and the potency of applying his liminal positionality as a climate justice strategy. He believed in the concept of continuous adaptability to change. Tagore never saw himself as belonging exclusively to any country. Nevertheless, in 1950 his poem “Jana Gana Mana” (written in 1911) was adapted as India’s National Anthem. Tagore and his family were Pirali Brahmins. Found throughout Bengal and split between India and Bangladesh, these Brahmins were stigmatized because their families had converted to Islam. The pejorative term ‘Pirali’ came from Pir Ali, a Brahmin Hindu who had converted to Islam. I invite the audience to play at Tagore’s borders—to thrive among the in-between spaces of rapture and alienation, of ecological collapse and biophilia.

⁴ Hyde 231.

aesthetics, functionality, and border-crossings. Through the vast diversity of Jewish and Islamic communities we can explore the familiar within the unfamiliar —illuminating a recognition of difference—a spiritual, socio-political connection with *the other*, increasingly urgent in our reductive media-saturated, techno-euphoric age. Witnessing history through storytelling is in itself an act of repair where both horror and even humor⁵ can emerge as strategies for making sense of the ‘unspeakable.’



In answer to the question, how can we revive *spiritual intelligence*—an ever-evolving practice that reinvigorates our most vital relationships, I wrote *Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle, A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era*. This quintessential Semitic tale is a call for hospitality and a renewed *Convivencia* (conviviality—referring to the Golden Age of Spain during which Muslim and Jewish literature, science, and arts flourished). *Convivencia* can be framed as the apotheosis of non-binary relationships; historian Americo Castro has said that Spain must acknowledge that Hispanics are historically “½ Muslim, ½ Jewish, and ½ Catholic.”

In contrast, racist legacy survives today in fairy tales taught generation after generation, in children’s songs and rhymes repeated from the cradle to adulthood. Children are taught to recite the sur names of Jewish and Muslim families from Inquisitional 15th century which subliminally perpetuates this hatred and preserves Spain’s law of *sangre de puro*, *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) even today. As with all racial purity and ethnocentrism, the edict of *limpieza de sangre* is horrific—it meant that Moors/Muslims and Jews were systematically eradicated from the global family because of the so-called impurity of their blood.

⁵ “To treat ambivalence with humor is to keep it loose; humor oils the joint where contradictions meets. If humor evaporates, then ambiguity becomes polarized and conflict follows” (Hyde 274).

Understanding historical relationships between the Spanish Inquisition⁶ and contemporary manifestations of erasing cultural difference and ecosystem diversity, Zazu, the protagonist shares: “I understood more and more that there was so much work to be done; that the only way to heal ethnic and racial divisions and the ecology of our global body is to see how we are all intermeshed. We all have to take care of each other.”⁷ The characters become increasingly aware of environmental relationships to humanitarian crises; while in each country they visit, they witness how, for hundreds of generations throughout the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia, symbiosis between humans and nature has been the norm. Along the way, they learn from historic figures such as: Spinoza,



Rachel Carson, Harriet Tubman, Doña Grasi Nasi,⁸ Sol Hachuel,⁹ Inayat Noor Khan,¹⁰

⁶ Congruent with the Spanish Inquisition's *morisco*, a term for descendants of Muslims forcibly converted to Christianity, and *conversos* a term for descendants of Jews forcibly converted, the other-within disrupts cause-and-effect binary codes—the “totalitarian tendency underlying universalism” (Irwin Hall cited in Benay Blend's "Because I Am in All Cultures at the Same Time" I: Intersections of Gloria Anzaldúa's Concept of Mestizaje in the Writings of Latin-American Jewish Women, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/%E2%80%9C-Because-I-Am-in-All-Cultures-at-the-Same-Time-%E2%80%9D-1-Blend/aa8697ce82d466d8aebf905ec650b50f6b8b79d6?p2df>). A language of submission *as well as* resistance from violent conversions to Christianity—including *anusim* (the forced ones), *marranos* or *chuetas* (pig eaters, in the case of Jewish converts), and Muslim *mudéjar* (subjugated or tamed). Taxonomies of sublimated difference rejected being both/and. For example, the island of Majorca 's history of “*quince siglos de racismo*” demonstrates the legacy of the Inquisition continues to infect the lives of the ancestors of those Jews and Muslims who converted to Christianity five hundred years ago.

The term *aljama* was the Catholic Spanish appellation for identifying both Muslim and Jew. While they encourage an acute awareness of the interconnected web of the ancient past with the present, such realizations are intended to undermine marginalization of the Inquisitional cultural pariah. Believed to be crypto, or secret Muslims or secret Jews practicing Crypto-Islam or Crypto-Judaism, these *aljama* families continue to be pariahs in their own homeland. “Home” becomes a dangerous and ambiguous zone within the cultural imagination—a space nourished by a fictionalized and demonized mythology and superstition.

⁷ Cara Judea Alhadeff, *Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle, A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era*. Berlin: Eifrig Publishing, 2017: 26.

⁸ In *The Woman Who Defied Kings*, Andre Aelion Brookes chronicles the amazing journey of *converso* banker, Doña Gracia Nasi (Gracia Mendes Nasi 1510-1569). Doña Gracia fled the Inquisition in Portugal and wandered throughout Europe. In Antwerp where she found sanctuary, she eventually became a financially powerful banker. Doña Gracia lived the end of her life in Turkey where she was seen as the uncrowned Queen of Jewry in the Ottoman Empire. Doña Gracia Nasi developed a secret escape network that saved thousands of her fellow *conversos* from the brutalities of the Inquisition.

⁹ Sol Hachuel, a Jewish female saint who was revered by Muslims and Jews, defied forced conversions in Morocco in the 19th century. She was publicly beheaded at the age of seventeen.

¹⁰ *An interlude from Zazu Dreams: “Remember the Ummah...” She was the same woman from the catacombs in Susa. As she spoke, her face slowly transformed into women I had seen in Ima's books. Ima had told me about women who started underground escape networks for persecuted people or who sacrificed their lives for their undying commitment to empathy*

and ibn Sina, as well as 21st century villains like Nestlé, Merck, Exxon, and Monsanto—Big Pharma,



She was the same woman from the catacomb caves in Iran—the hooded figure who had whispered to me about remembering the *Ummahs*. Cocomiso recognized her voice. As before, she spoke in a language I had never heard, but somehow I still understood her

Big Oil, and Agribusiness giants that stalk planet Earth. *Zazu Dreams* crosses the border between diasporic identities with environmental action. It gleans from *Talmudic* and *Qur'ānic* directives that



Black Gold (oil) to White Gold (lithium): Embodied Energy and The Politics of Batteries/Energy Storage, Solar/Photovoltaic Parks, Wind Farms, Electric Vehicles, Biofuel Crops, Nuclear Regression

“create a just and decent society where poor and vulnerable people [are] treated with respect.”¹¹

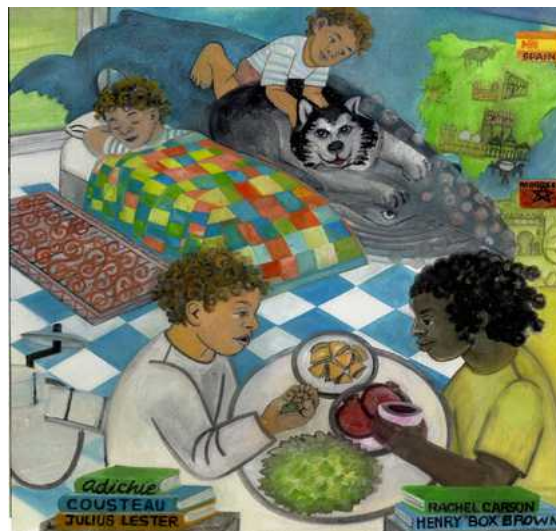
Ladino proverb: *Todo ke tyene ambre, venga y Komen* (Let anyone who is hungry, come and eat with us)

and the common context of struggle—women like Noor Inayat Khan, who survived WWII as long as she did because of her belief in the imagination and her extraordinary commitment to human rights. Khan was an East Indian-American Muslim who became a spy for Britain’s covert unit, the Special Operations Executive who supported an underground resistance network in Nazi-occupied Paris. “Khan took her assignment knowing the average survival time for an underground wireless operator in occupied France was six weeks. She lasted 16 weeks. ...Betrayed by a double agent, she was kept prisoner for almost a year until she was executed at Dachau concentration camp.

¹¹ Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of our Religious Traditions*. New York: Knopf, 2006: 387.



Zazu Dreams is divided into 2 sections—image and narrative, as well as about 400 endnotes of scientific, economic, historical, and literary references. All the human characters in the story are real historical figures. In his dreams, Zazu, an Arab-Jewish, Sephardic boy travels the globe on a humpback



whale, crossing both temporal dimensions and international borders—overlapping vast space and time. The language of Zazu’s family is Ladino—a hybrid of ancient Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Italian, French, and Greek—depending on where the Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews had fled when they were exiled from Iberia and Europe during the various expulsions beginning in the 14th century. In today’s performance my collaborator will read excerpts from the magical realist narrative and I will read the voice of the compendium deriving from Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. This is a story about unlearning what we think we know, and learning love along the way. Time to begin.

This excerpt highlights Einstein’s reference to quantum entanglement—essentially, how all living things—from our microbiome to the macrocosmos—are utterly interwoven.

Chapter Four: “...spooky action at a distance...”¹²

¹² Einstein referred to our quantum interconnections as “spooky action at a distance.” This was how he explained how wormholes link separate points in space-time. Quantum entanglement, one theory to come out of quantum mechanics and string theory, proposes that two entangled quarks (the building blocks of matter) give rise to a wormhole that connects the pair. This entangled pair occupies multiple states—simultaneous opposites (for example, spinning clockwise and

Munshi: Ibn Sina had heard about our encounter. To prevent infections from being caught in the plastic ghost nets, he gave us ground beetles to eat, and instructed me to go to the *hammam*. He gave me amber to rub on my wounds caused by the toxic plastic, and explained how amber is part of his



spiritual-pharmacopeia. He told me that resin is the result of a tree attempting to heal itself. Amber is fossilized resin. Because trees all over the planet were dying from industrial civilization—like deforestation and desertification, amber’s healing properties had become even more powerful.



counterclockwise). “According to Einstein’s laws, gravity “acts to ‘bend’ and shape space-time. ... Gravity itself may be a consequence of entanglement—pairs of particles strung together by tunneling wormholes” (Jennifer Chu, review of Julian Sonner’s research published in the journal *Physical Review Letters* (senior postdoc in MIT’s Laboratory for Nuclear Science and Center for Theoretical Physics). *MIT Technology Review*. Vol. 117, No. 2, 2014).

Cara: Ibn Sina¹³ was the world-renowned ‘Prince of Physicians.’ Because the Shah, the sultan of Bukhara, supported the arts and sciences, ibn Sina was appointed court physician. Ibn Sina was first and foremost a *hakim*, a healer who did not treat disease; rather, he treated people who had diseases. His philosophy was rooted in lived interrelationships; harmony and resonance. Through a combination of philosophy and the natural sciences, he intended to heal the ‘disease of ignorance.’ Ibn Sina represents spiritual intelligence as sacred activism. His historical contributions are another model from which contemporary activists could learn—in this case, intersectionality as a strategy to face climate crisis—a continual interplay between health of human bodies in junction with health of our environments. Like the metabolism of the human body and the earth’s tendency towards homeostasis, the metabolism of our global culture must be scrutinized as a relational organism.

In our magical realist tale, Zazu learns from polymaths like ibn Sina as he searches for possibilities for a more compassionate world in the least expected places where you would think the opposite would be

¹³ Ibn Sina (980-1037AD) was also known as Avicenna, or the Hebrew version, Aven Sina. A forerunner of preventative medicine, ibn Sina advocated good sleep habits, exercise, and even music to maintain healthy bodies. He also focused on pre- and post-natal medical care for mothers and babies. Although he did not know about ‘germs’ or microorganisms (the microscope had yet to be invented), Ibn Sina understood how people could catch measles, smallpox, and tuberculosis from other people, and he introduced quarantine as a means of containing infectious diseases. If Western societies had effectively learned from ibn Sina 800 years ago, possibly better sanitation and nutrition would have developed, instead of pharmaceutical tyranny. Furthermore, he strongly disagreed with medical testing on animals: “The experimentation must be done with the human body, for testing a drug on a lion or a horse might not prove anything about its effect on man” (Ibn Sina’s Rules of Clinical Trials, cited in David W. Tschanz, “The Islamic Roots of Modern Pharmacy,” *Saudi Aramco World*. May, June 2016: 21).

the case: amber,¹⁴ sand,¹⁵ salt,¹⁶ microbes, and even human waste as alternatives to coal, oil, and plastic. When we combine ancestral healing traditions that include medico-magical properties with a deep investigation of modern civilization's addiction to “resources” we can ignite a radical commitment to creative alternatives through non-binary transmutation. We can collectively defy the “poverty of imagination.”¹⁷ that dictates our current states of emergency (climate crisis, institutionalized racism, global poverty, COVID-19 pandemic). We ignite the vital interplay between cultural diversity and biodiversity.

Ladino Proverb: *Ande komen dos, komen i tres* (Where two people eat, three people also can)

¹⁴ The most ancient stone used for personal adornment, amber from the Arabic *anbar* عنبر, also has many medicinal properties. It is used for general cell regeneration, detoxification, and overall illness prevention. It helps to heal the central nervous system, including brain trauma and memory loss, and protects against radiation. It is helpful in ailments of the endocrine system, spleen, and heart. Wearing amber can help ease sore throat, earache, headache, digestive troubles, and babies' teething-pain, in addition to asthma, arthritis, and rheumatism. Holding a piece of amber helps overcome heat exhaustion. Given our intensifying global temperatures and exponential increase in autoimmune disorders, amber is an element we must consider. Amber can be between 50 to 135 million years old. Such amber houses complex ecosystems—many of which are destroyed when their forest habitat is destroyed. It is also used as fuel (<https://www.amberfuels.com/> and <https://amberresources.com/products/>). *Electrum*, meaning Sun, is another name for amber. It has been described as ‘hardened rays of the sun.’ Iranians use the Pahlavi word *kah-ruba* for amber—referring to its electrical properties; in Arabic the word for electricity is كهرباء *kahrabā*. The Greeks named amber *elektron*, from which the English word ‘electricity’ is derived.

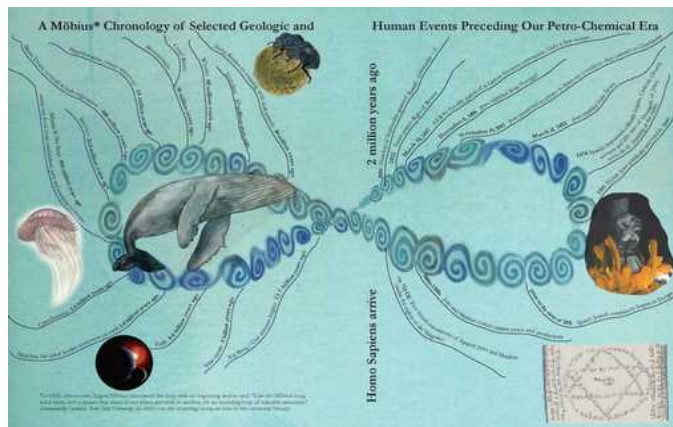
And from the narrative of *Zazu Dreams: I remember my tia Zafira's story*: “Amber protected us when we were first in exile as captives under Nebuchadnezzar, just as it protected us from radiation during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s. They say amber is hardened rays of sun. I burned powdered amber during your primo Zaman's childbirth because it helps in labor and prevents excessive bleeding. We have used it in our rituals to remember the ancient knowledge of our ancestors and to help reconnect with our many past lives. Tfu, Tfu, Tfu! Amber brings balance back because it helps us remember our relationship with the earth” (37).

¹⁵ Sand rejects any stationary state; rather, it is “a world where existence was a series of states” (Kobe Abé, *Woman in the Dunes*. New York: Random House, 1962: 182). Sand is neither solid nor liquid, although it tends to behave like a liquid or gas, and can chemically transform into a solid and a liquid. Both sand and salt are dry liquids—again we see contradiction in action! “Dry sand itself behaves eerily like a liquid, but wet sand behaves more like a solid—as long as it's not too wet” (Michael Welland, *Sand: The Never Ending Story*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009: 51).

As the bookseller in Jorge Luis Borges' *El libro de arena* (*The Book of Sand*) tells Borges, “If space is infinite, we may be at any point in space. If time is infinite, we may be at any point in time” (Madrid: Emecé, 1975: 119). The book he sells him has Arabic page numbers, and is “called the *Book of Sand* because neither the book nor the sand has any beginning or end” (ibid.). Like salt and amber, the interstitial characteristic of sand represents *unity in diversity* while defying the tyranny certainty in which competition arises because one tries to cling to a fixed position: “If one were to give up a fixed position and abandon oneself to the movement of the sands, competition would soon stop. Actually, in the deserts flowers bloomed and insects and other animals lived their lives. These creatures were able to escape competition through their great ability to adjust—for example the man's beetle family” (Abé 15).

¹⁶ Khalil Gibran wrote: “There must be something sacred in salt. It is in our tears and in the ocean.” Salt offers a vivid model of Tagore's philosophical insight that the same stream that flows through your veins, flows through the universe in rhythmic measure. Tagore parallels human blood and water moving throughout nature. This relationship is both beautiful and painful in the Inquisitional context. Blood, sweat, and tears all contain salt; both the skin and the eyes are protected from infectious germs by the antibacterial effect of salt. Salt has astonishing detoxification healing powers—from within our own bodies, as well as salt from the earth. Salt water (manufactured as saline solution) has the same fluid quality as blood plasma.

¹⁷ Matthew Schneide-Mayerson, Brent Ryan Bellamy, and Kim Stanley Robinson, *An Ecotopian Lexicon* Introduction. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019: 5.



This excerpt demonstrates how the intertwined past converges with the present and future to form stories that guide us through climate chaos.

Chapter Eight: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle¹⁸



Munshi: The scent of orange trees filled the air. My cousins, like thousands of other Jews and Muslims who live among indigenous North African Berbers, were preparing for *Hilloula*.

Everyone was excited as boudiers burst with flames, celebrating the great Rabbi Rashi.¹⁸ Tisha and Naim told us that Rashi was persecuted by the Roman and forced to hide in a cave for thirteen years. During his exile, Rashi wrote the seminal Zohar. The Zohar¹⁹ is a spiritual text that channels the energy of Biblical mysteries, revealing the secrets of the Universe—why dinosaurs of our world and our existence.²⁰ This book is written as a receding of spiritual energies, and it is the foundation for the Kabbalah.

Suddenly I made another connection when Momina led us to Aradshah. Rabi's The Cor of Living, she said: "All we can do is to change [history's] course by encouraging what we love instead of destroying what we don't."²¹ As we visited Rabbi Rashi's grave, I began to chime. This is what we must do.

This wasn't only about being at a Ave (hostel plot) in the middle wilderness, desert, and chanting *Andor* (prayer said with a melody) for a very (miraculous) or (affair) (miraculous). This was also about the deepest sense of being spiritual (grateful), while sharing a communal sense of awe (hope) in order to take immediate action.

We prayed to our sacred tradition for an end to fossil-fossil homicide, we prayed for an end to the monoculture of the world.²² We prayed for ecological intelligence to help us figure out how to encourage people to connect the dots between environmental justice and human rights, and act together to stop the suffering of people whose lands and waters are poisoned and stolen, we prayed for a transition from a global extractive economy to a global regenerative economy, we prayed for neo-decolonization agriculture and post-carbon, ethically shared seeds,²³ proper population,²⁴ an end to the epidemic of bee colony collapse, and for a miracle to restore the turtles, whales, dolphins, dugongs, and manatees that had been caught and even though they were large, their plumes²⁵ along their migration routes, connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean.

¹⁸ We are making a false division between the scarab and the dung beetle to emphasize how something historically revered has simultaneously been historically reviled. For instance, in Medieval Christianity, the dung beetle symbolized the sinner and was associated with “foulness and wickedness” (Arthur Evans and Charles Bellamy, *An Inordinate Fondness for Beetles*. 2000: 141)—quite the opposite of its actual role in our ecosystem. In contrast, the ancient Egyptians deified the dung beetle, their most significant religious symbol. It’s persistence and repetition represented both highly rational behavior, and was thought to be governed by the supernatural, symbolizing “the invisible forces that move the sun across the sky in a geocentric universe” (Ibid., 9).

Moroccan Jews from all over the world make pilgrimage each year during *Lag Ba' Omer*¹⁹ into the desert of Ouazzane to visit cemeteries and celebrate the lives of their beloved rabbis who are called *tzaddim*.²⁰ We prayed to our revered *tzaddik* for an end to profit-driven biocide; we prayed for an end to the monoculture of the mind.²¹

Cara: Vandana Shiva decries, “You really need to have a brutal mind. It’s a war against evolution to even think in those [profit-driven] terms.”²²

Munshi: ...we prayed for zero-deforestation agriculture and product chains and ethically shared seeds.²³



Cara: Shiva warns us of the implications of ‘terminator technology’ and ‘terminator seeds.’ Sterilizing seeds means that “farmers are not able to save their seeds, seeds that will destroy themselves through a suicide gene, seeds that are designed to only produce crop in one season. The possibilities of ethically shared seeds are becoming radically diminished as intellectual property rights and utility patents monopolize US agriculture.” In resistance, the Open Source Seed Initiative (OSSI), inspired by the conviviality of open source software, has attempted to protect the Commons and its ‘ethic of sharing.’

Munshi: ...we prayed for an end to the epidemic of bee colony collapse, and for a miracle to convince trawling companies to release the creatures that had been caught and were dying in huge illegal drift

¹⁹ We are interpreting Lag B’Omer, the 33rd Day of the Counting of the Omer, between Pesach and Shavuot, The Bonfire Night as an opportunity to acknowledge one’s personal strength. Following “the biblical account of Joseph instructing Pharaoh to store grain in years of plenty, for the years of drought that lay ahead; Rabbi Nachman tells us that this is a hint that we should do the same in our own spiritual journey” (Yehudit Levy, www.breslev.co.il/articles/holidays_and_fast_days/lag_bomer/building_bonfires.aspx?id=24317&language=english). We must gather all of our positive thoughts and deeds as reminders of our collective and individual wholeness.

²⁰ According to legend, the exiled 18th century Rabbi Amran ben Diwan entered the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron which was forbidden for Jews at the time. He was disguised as a Muslim. When he was recognized as a Jew, he was reported to the Ottoman Pasha who ordered his arrest. Ben Diwan, an internationally revered *tzaddik*, finally fled and returned to Morocco. He is buried under a tree that never burns despite the fire and multitude of candles that have been lit there for centuries.

²¹ In her 2016 lecture with the Institute for Arts and Humanities at Pennsylvania State University, Rosi Braidotti cited Vandana Shiva, who advocates for “an end to the monoculture of the mind.” See also: Dr. Shiva’s *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology*, London: Zed Books, 1993.

²² See Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott, and Joel Bakan’s 2004 documentary film, “The Corporation.”

²³ Rather than treating seeds as software (codes that can be rewritten and patented), a shared distribution of germplasm (seeds) establishes a shared distribution of power. More than ever because of climate disruption, we need a diverse, publicly accessible seed supply. ‘Open-pollinated’ (‘The O.P.’) seeds undermine ownership implied in the intellectual-property system. This commitment to the Commons ensures food security, thus national security (Lisa H. Hamilton, *Linux for Lettuce*, ed. Rebecca Skloot, *The Best American Science and Nature Writing*. New York, NY.: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt, 2015: 75-89). “Knowledge, Humboldt believed, had to be shared, exchanged and made available to everybody” (Andrea Wulf, *The Invention of Nature: The Adventures of ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT, The Lost Hero of Science*. London: John Murray, 2015: 2). In comparison with the Commons in which people belonged to the land (the land did not belong to the people), our modern industrial lifestyle demands diminished public regulation: Privatization “means you take a public institution and give it to an unaccountable tyranny” (Noam Chomsky cited in “The Corporation”).

gillnets along their migration routes, connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean.²⁴



Cara: “The nets not only torture sea life, slowly drowning dolphins, whales, and sea turtles, but they also hurt honest fisherman who catch swordfish locally and legally. Illegally obtained swordfish...cheat fishermen and conscientious buyers in...other countries.”²⁵ Ignoring the ban encourages illegal fishermen to break the law, disrupt solidarity economics, and destroy more life.

Munshi: We silently spoke to Rashbi asking him to help us stop massive underwater sound cannons that cause sea creatures to go deaf.



Cara: Marine activists are attempting to stop the US construction of a military airstrip in Japan that would destroy the last habitat for endangered Okinawa dugongs (a cousin of the manatee).

²⁴ Currently, there is a battle going on in Morocco over a major ban on destructive and unselective drift gillnets. The activists from Oceana fought hard to officially phase them out in 2010. A recent undercover Oceana investigation discovered that illegal nets are being used again in Tangier. Even though the US and the European Union provided financial aid to Morocco to phase out the killer nets, critical enforcement of the ban is failing.

²⁵ Oceana e-newsletter, 2015.



Munshi: We prayed that the SeaVax would do the work it needs to do. These solar-powered ships could potentially clean up the entire Pacific Garbage Patch in the next ten years.

Cara: The SeaVax can suck up to 22 million kg of plastic a year. However, this technology does nothing to address the *roots* of our extraordinarily addictive petro-plastic culture and its concomitant tyranny of waste. Additionally, we now know that industrial-scale harvested solar energy is extremely carbon-intensive—feeding into the illusion of “green” energy and the fallacious “Renewables” Revolution.

Ladino proverb: *El prove I el riko, todos se mesura por un negro piko* (Whether you are rich or poor you have the same grave)

Munshi: Please help us solve the roots of the intersecting crises of marginalized peoples, climate refugees, baby macaques, orangutans, monarch butterflies and their sweetgum trees, the whales and other sea mammals! We prayed for what Mama calls our indigenous social ecology.



Ladino proverb: *Una mano lava lo otra, I las dos lavas la cara* (One hand washes the other and together they wash the face)

This excerpt emphasizes the power of language—both emancipatory language—in this case, Ladino's

dynamic nature, and manipulative language—in this, case mass misinformation about alternative energies.

Chapter Five: “It Takes A Village”²⁶

Munshi: I realized we had been traveling through a system of *qanat*.

Cara: *Qanats* (ghan-AHTS) were irrigation technologies used over two thousand years ago. Today, Iran relies on 50,000 *qanats*. Unlike massive modern electrical-powered water pumps, pipelines, and dams that deplete stores of underground water and dry out oases, the ingenious, practical, and sustainable *qanat*-method of harnessing limited water supplies is perfectly adapted to its arid environment.

Munshi: *Qanats* had been dug into the earth to bring water from the mountains to the desert—strange and bewitching patterns that reminded me of constellations and *mosaics*. Cocomiso was behaving strangely. She began to dig and dig and dig, and dug up what looked like a fossil—a *mosaic* of some kind of animal-reptile that looked like a dog or a big cat! We weren’t sure if it was a real fossil or had been hidden there by Joha the Trickster.



The mosaic opened its fiery mouth, speaking directly to Cocomiso:

Munshi:

“I am not you. I am a mushhushshu
I am a dragon—have you heard?: part serpent, part bird
I live as-both; in-both earth and air, water and land, in Iraq and Iran
I cannot be seen for I breathe the in-between.
But you, dog and boy, know that I am here once you leave our atmosphere
I will speak with candor: my home was split, and now, you must find the amber...”

²⁶ “It takes a whole village to raise a child” is an Igbo and Yoruba (Nigeria) proverb. In 2016, presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton published *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (New York, NY.: Simon & Schuster, 1996).



Cara: The *mushhushshu* is a Neo-Assyrian Iraqi dragon mosaic found at the Gate of Ishtar in Babylon, ancient Iraq.

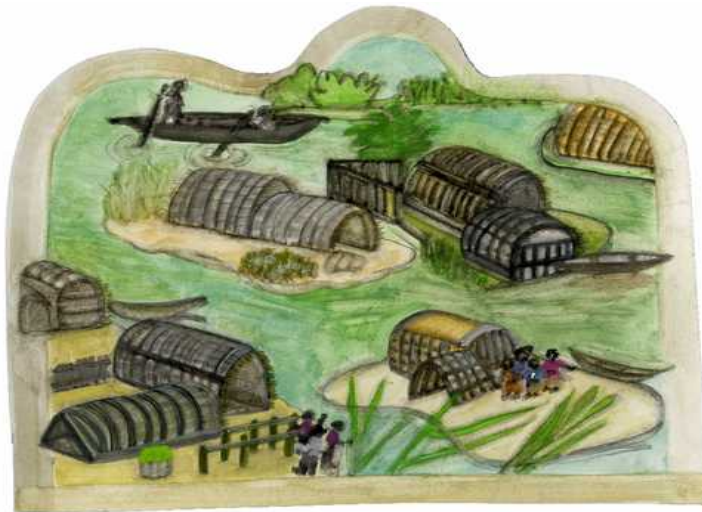
Munshi: What in the world was this scaly creature saying? Were the *mushhushshu*'s words like Ladino 'rhyming songs?'

Cara: Traditional Sephardic rhyming songs were adaptations of biblical stories, particularly from the midrash. Similarly, African-American slaves communicated among themselves in riddles that the white slave owners could not understand.

Munshi: Cocomiso was listening intently. She looked a little perplexed as she unraveled the *mushhushshu*'s words. It continued:

Munshi:

“Those who are deaf to history say it is a sham,
even though Iraq was the birthplace of your Patriarch Abraham
Since you found me, I can finally return to my home in Iraq
I will carry you through as we explore each and every cranny and crack
we will travel across Ancient Mesopotamia,
the land that lies between the two great rivers that now lack



Cara: Surrounded by desert, the ecoregion of the Tigris-Euphrates included shallow lakes, swamps, and vast marshes. An extraordinarily rich agricultural area, this part of the Fertile Crescent was once known as the ‘Cradle of Civilization.’ Now, many nations and mega-corporations fight over ownership of water rights. Irrigation strategies that dam the Tigris-Euphrates benefit Turkish residents, while they reduce Syrians’ access by 40% and Iraqis’ access by 90%. Iraq suffers significant water shortage and reduced crop yields because of drought. Their water infrastructure, like in Flint, Michigan, Newark, New Jersey, and much of the United States, must also recover from years of neglect and conflict. The result of these water battles is deepening violent conflicts over water rights, *not water shortage*—there is plenty of water for all. As with our international epidemic of malnutrition—there is more than enough food in the world, the problem is not quantity, but rather *distribution, infrastructure, and quality*.

Munshi: Across the Tigris-Euphrates Valley river system we go
 Since you found me in the spaces between the sand grains, I know...”

Cara: Sand grains are porous and permeable. The world’s largest accumulations of oil and gas are found in the spaces between sand grains. Like Spinoza as a lens-maker for the microscope and



telescope, Rachel Carson was in awe of the simultaneity of macrocosms and microcosms—worlds literally between grains of sand: She tells us our human senses cannot grasp its scale, a world in which the micro-droplet of water separating one grain of sand from another is like a vast, dark sea.



Munshi: We soon arrived at Babylon's Ishtar Gate, adorned with dragons and canine-like creatures. When I asked the *mushhushshu* how the Mesopotamian King could build a tribute to Ishtar the Goddess of Love *and* also destroy Jerusalem, it snarled:

Munshi:

“Ishtar is not only the Goddess of Love,
Ishtar is the Goddess of War
Festooned between the Tigris and the
Euphrates were the many hearts she tore...
I do not care that I have no dragon's liar, but
this is my home so I no longer have to roam
Once inside the gate
It is my fate to return
to my original fragmented state
But before I shift, remember
we can only heal the rift...”