
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Karo Ska: Three Poems

Karo Ska · Tuesday, August 31st, 2021

a map of my mother's pain

my mother almost died at sixteen –
a motorcycle split her head open.
in a coma for four days,

the doctors gasped *miracle*
when she awakened. years later,
she showed off the damage, she parted

her hair & said *look, this is my scar.*
i ran my finger over her
ridge, mapping the geography

of her injury's history, wanting
to find the cartography of why
she never played with me.

it's neurological, she claimed, denying
how her sadistic mother, her alcoholic
brother, her abusive husband erased

the coordinates of her joy. my mother
healed the invisible scars her spirit bore,
with an island of volcanoes & a lava

of prescription pills, until the magma
buried her alive. i'd come home
to find her lying on the couch, an ember

without any fire. lacking friends or hobbies,
she hobbled, hollow through life's paths,
following an outdated map.

the things we deny are misguided
directions getting us lost. so here's
my truth – a nautical chart

of my mother's depression & how
 nothing i did could light up her eyes.
 i am the child she wished she had aborted

or given away, but how could she
 relinquish what she carried for nine months
 when it was in her arms, suckling

her breast? instead, she abandoned me
 in pieces, her spirit dying
 before my eyes. she

denied me a mother, denied me
 a childhood. yet here i am, drawing
 a new map, where i embrace

the cliffs of my pain & plot the coordinates
 of my joy. cliffs i no longer fear
 & coordinates no one will dare erase.

*

days like this i don't want to live

what are the words for *i don't feel good*, words
 for *i'm triggered*, words for *my body sizzles*
like a steak on a grill. i take a shot of jameson,

calm my charred nerves. i am the cow on the train
 tracks who doesn't move despite the blares
 of the horn. i'm not running from my pain,

it's simply too heavy for me to carry. i want to
 call it quits, stop trying to heal, drown
 in my drama. i want to keep drinking until i

pass out. days like this i think about Palestine.
 i think about occupation. i think about war
 & the drones paid for by my taxes. i think about

Kashmir or the Indigenous people
 of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, their land
 submerged by the construction of an american-

funded dam. i think about the world's pain
 & my own, how they intersect & how
 they don't. how i migrated

to america, & how that's settler colonialism. how
 i'm trying to be a solution, but sometimes i'm

the problem. i crave a connection to land i

can call my own – a land that'll welcome
me. i'm trying to heal so i'll have the strength
to fight for liberation. i'm meditating, practicing

yoga, drinking tea (quitting coffee), breathing
intentionally. but some days, i fail & pray
to a bottle, pray for the spirits to calm my ravenous

flesh. sometimes it's the self-destructive habits
that make me feel better. i am not perfect. days
like this i don't want to live, but the ancestors

in my blood tell me it's not my time yet; they give
me a home where i'm not a piece of meat
but a bird of prey with a nest of hungry chicks.

*

a prayer to my ancestors

bengalee ancestors, i call on you,
find you swimming in the rivers
of my bones, your spirits' wisdom
bathing in my marrow. i am

the west bengal muslim migrating
after the 1947 partition

of india. i am
the mukti bahini fighting
in the 1971 war for liberation. i am

the anti-hindi riots. i am
the rickshaw my grandmother pulled,
rescuing hindi girls from
a war not of their making.

i am the lost languages, the lost
recipes across european-dictated
borders. i am the bird

flying over barbed wire, the smuggled
cow lifted by a crane
across the fence. i am the refugee,

starving, searching for a spot
to call home. i am the floods,
the monsoon rains. bengalee ancestors,

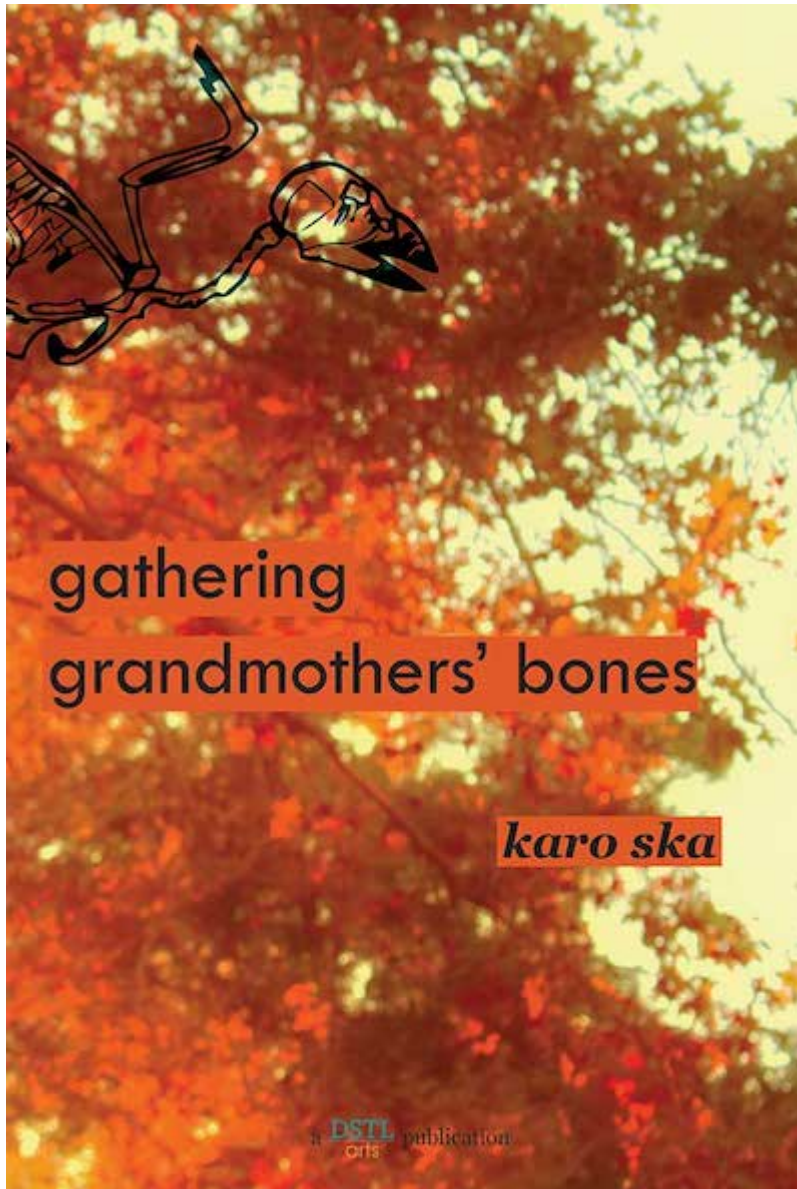
what words can you
gift me? what can you say
to the balkan ancestors residing
in the mountains of my muscles?

i don't know how to scale
the european side of me, their
rejection of me – an avalanche
in my veins, while amerikkka's
falsified promises rage
against the peninsulas of my lungs,
sneaking a flag into my heart. i
pull it out, shred it, burn it. no flags
can make a home in my body. i am
made of people, not nationalities.

Ancestors, we looked at the same sky,
conversed with the same moon. Ancestors,
dream with me, dream

of a world breathing free without
shackles, chains, & police knees.
Ancestors, you conjured

my body into being, protected me, held me
when no one else did. in your eyes,
the ones i see reflected in the mirror, i
see a future, not yet ready, waiting
to be born, & i hope i'm making
your dreams come true.



gathering grandmothers' bones, Karo Ska. [Purchase](#).

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