

**A Love Song to Our Pluriverse: Life Writing as Cosmopolitan *Motherwise* Text**

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And what if it is love one is trying to understand, that strange unmanageable phenomenon form of life, source at once of illumination and confusion, agony, and beauty? Love, in its many varieties, and their relations to the good human life, to aspiration, to general social concern? What parts of oneself, what method, what writing, should one choose then? What is, in short, love's knowledge—and what writing does it dictate in the heart?

—Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*

Stepping out of the carriage, Werther sees Charlotte for the first time (and falls in love with her), framed by the door of her house (cutting bread-and-butter for the children: a famous scene, often discussed): The first thing we love is a *scene*. Is the scene always visual? It can be aural, the frame can be linguistic: I can fall in love with a *sentence spoken to me*: and not only because it says something which manages to touch my desire, but because of its syntactical turn (framing), which will inhabit me *like a memory*.

—Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*

Out of the dark womb of night...the Sun represents rebirth.... Human beings no longer insist that they are separate from each other and the rest of the planetary life. The Sun represents the knowledge that we are connected by the eternal rays of the life force, each of us part of a vast organism called "humanity" and the even greater body of the Earth itself....Many people today feel the presence of these soul-lights, and are mobilizing in groups around a central guiding principle that overrides egocentricity and promotes life.

—Vicki Noble, *Motherpeace*

In this essay, I take up the words and wisdom of inspired writers and thinkers such as the above, writing about love and light, and these notions' significance in a cosmic shift presently occurring across geo-cultural differences. Mindful of my own complicated relationship with these phenomena in the world, and of the "memory work" (Mitchell & Weber, 1999) this living and writing call forth as part of my pedagogical and curricular composure, I linger in life writing as both individual and collective research. My aim is to enter into dialogues about "love's knowledge" (Nussbaum, 1992) through hermeneutical questioning (Smith, 1999) in the form of life writing that positions the personal within the cosmopolitan narrative humans are part of. I remember the fibres and fissures of love in my world, and I listen and look for those of others—women and men whose lives have been shaped by this cosmic relational force.

In *Visceral Cosmopolitanism* (2007), Mica Nava, a Jewish German cultural studies scholar situated in and out of London, England, narrates her family's mixed stories of living and migrating across Eastern, Central, and Western Europe against the background of racial, ethnic, and cultural diaspora of the twentieth and twenty-first century. She interweaves her own sojourns across continents in search of her homelands, traceable and untraceable all at once. Nava documents and theorizes these familial narratives as exemplars of a new kind of embodied cosmopolitan identity, one that celebrates, much like Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988), "hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformations that come of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs" (Rushdie, 1991, p. 394). Both Nava and Rushdie, along with a cohort of other contemporary authors across multiple disciplinary threads (Appiah, 2006; Benhabib, 2008; Breckenridge, Pollock, Bhabha, & Chakrabarty, 2002; Derrida, 2001; Mignolo, 2000; Pinar, 2009; Sandercock, 2003), claim that these "love song[s] to our mongrel selves" (Nava, 2007, p. 133; Rushdie, 1991, p. 394) constitute the kind of cosmopolitanism that is indicative of our times, one that attends to the intimate, familial auto/biographical tales that are part of the larger political and sociocultural narratives of our century. Nava, in particular, urges us to establish a visceral genealogy of cosmopolitanism, one that pays homage to the domestic, the vernacular, the intimate dimensions of lives lived in the maelstrom of the new and the old imperial all-too-familiar master narratives, right in "the micro territories of the local: at school, in the gym and the café, *at home*" (p. 135).

Similarly, Madhu Prakash, the Indian American philosopher and educator, challenges me to reconsider notions and definitions of what it means to be *at home* in the cosmos we inhabit as humans among others. No longer, Prakash claims, can we think of ourselves as part of a commonly known universe; instead, she states, humans "are awakening, moving and stimulating the creative imagination of many others...the door is opened for settling in a *pluriverse*" (Esteva & Prakash, 1998, p. 36). In this movement towards a cosmos that is not dominated by "One World," or one nation-state, or one global narrative, we are finding evermore diverse ways to articulate and negotiate the local realities and *terroir* of our lives lived among relationships that matter (Hurren & Hasebe-Ludt, 2009). These are the relationships with those we love, those we cherish, those we admire, those we seek out when trying to make sense of the complicated narratives and conversations (Pinar, 2009) of our lives, and our precarious times (Butler, 2006), and deep public untruths (Smith, 2006). More and more of the narratives coming to the forefront of our conscious collective soul are the maternal voices of the cosmic Mother, and the individual mothers and the grandmothers in our presence and past that have been ignored, forgotten, or resided in our subconscious for

far too long. In her groundbreaking work *Motherpeace*, feminist scholar and activist Vicki Noble (1983/1994) reminds us of the imminent rebirth of a new consciousness that honours ancient matriarchal traditions of Sun Goddess and Mother love, heralding a New Age of light-filled and peaceful coexistence of humans working together with “the warm energy of love...in a circle of healing” (p. 138), to heal the wounds of wars and pollution, and to en/light/en a new collective consciousness of peace and deep maternal caring for our earth and cosmos.

Like Vicki Noble, Madhu Prakash and Mica Nava, and other women writers and scholars, including Hélène Cixous (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997) and Janet Miller (2005), I want to remember the lives of the grandmothers, mothers, and daughters who have inspired our own lives in multiple ways, with their mixed narratives of hope and despair, of sojourning across foreign and familiar landscapes, of migrating in and out of hospitable and inhospitable terrains. Through life writing and auto/biographical stories that “locate the writer in a network of contexts, including family, neighbourhood, community, and cosmos” (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009, p. 205), we can reclaim their voices along with our own. Together with a group of colleagues and co-writers across the western part of Canada, I work collaboratively through life writing in a variety of classrooms and their surrounding neighbourhoods and communities. Together with teachers and students, we ask questions about what is going on in the cosmopolitan sites we live, where students and teachers do the hermeneutic “work of the world” (Arendt, 1997), through thinking about where we live and how we live, through giving reciprocal gifts of listening and loving and languaging through stories. In these interpretive acts, we explore the tensions inherent in entering the new worlds of a cosmopolitan curriculum and pedagogy that address the complex relatedness of self to other in the cosmos of the personal and the public. We claim that when we are in truthful relation with one another, we have the power to better understand our own and others’ stories with/in the world, and through this knowing to ultimately rewrite the world.

In my own life writing in and out of the sites I am situated in, in and out of Vancouver, Canada, I weave the threads of the mixed cultural, ethnic, racial, and linguistic homelands that are part of my identity as a German immigrant to this place, a woman married to a *sansei* (third-generation) Japanese Canadian husband, the mother of a mixed-race daughter, an English language educator with a different mother tongue from the *lingua franca* of the world that has dominated our world for centuries. I weave and work the fibres of my identity into an intertextual métissage (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009) as part of my pedagogical and curricular theorizing about what matters in the relationships between humans dwelling *in* the *humus* of this earth and dwelling *on* the matters that constitute life between teachers and students, mothers and daughters, grandmothers and granddaughters. I return to a birthplace and a history both familiar and strange.

**Two Charlottes, Among Many**

Charlotte and Jakob Lang, with grandson Gerhardt Ludt, Saarbrücken-Fechingen, Germany, circa 1940

Charlotte: a family name—my paternal grandmother's, Charlotte Lang, and my daughter's, Charlotte Hasebe. A name both old and new, part of the mixed linguistic past and present of the life stories of four generations of women in my family. A name re-surfacing in the world all around me, in texts of different kinds: a character in a Goethe *Bildungsroman*; a dedication in a children's book: "To my Charlotte, Love Mom;" a read-aloud sound bite from *Charlotte's Web*; a feature in a German magazine: "Charlotte: Ein Name macht Karriere"... a name that gets on well with/in the world. And so I think of a daughter who lives the promise of that line, and a grandmother whose life I know too little of. I only remember that when she died in her seventies in the small German village where she spent all of her life, she had lived through two world wars, endured the loss of one husband in the first one, raised a son on her own, married again just before the second world war started, only to see her second husband and a second son leave again to fight on the front. After the war ended, my grandmother was blessed to see her sons, one of them my father, start families of their own in the aftermath of this global bloodbath. Both my brothers were born during my grandmother's and mother's evacuation from home while my father fought in Hitler's navy. They remember the harsh stories of the war, and they remember my grandmother too; but I, born a decade later, have few memories of her, even though she lived close by, just down the road from where I grew up. Charlotte Lang died when I was quite young, barely and all I remember of my grandmother is the *scene* of her standing by the old wood-burning kitchen stove singing a sweet German lullaby about a mother separated from her child, *Kommt ein Vogel geflogen*, evoking sentiments of maternal love and longing, and memories of letter writing across vast

distances—a visceral practice I became all-too-familiar with in relation to my own mother after I left home to live first in Berlin, then in Vancouver.

This domestic *scene* and its sounds inhabit me *like a memory*, intense and elusive all at once, evoking both imaginary and material threads of narratives from an almost-forgotten home that I long to know more viscerally. The scene fills me with the desire to grasp the visual and aural ambiguity and elusive incompleteness of this narrative more firmly, more securely—knowing, at the same time, the difficulty of this quest in the face of the recent and not-so-recent deaths of the people in my family who held her memory: my mother, my father, my uncle, my grandfather. I almost came to forget my grandmother’s soft voice and the small footprint she left in the humus of our common birth place, Saarbrücken/Sarrebruck, a place among many imprinted by the large harsh footprints of war and empire building that have mapped our world. It is a city within a territory of mixed national origins, the Alsace Lorraine and Saar regions, tossed back and forth and torn apart between Germany and France over the last century and between the various empires claiming their possession of the territory in previous centuries—Austria, Hungary, Prussia, and throughout it all, the threads and threats of the Holy Roman Catholic and Lutheran Protestant churches with their competing grand narratives (Seck, 1999). Recollecting her childhood and her family’s, Alsatian American writer Fabienne André Worth (2001) commented: “Each generation had a war, and each time Alsace had to become the opposite of what it had just been. French, German and then French, back to German and then French again” (n.p.). Growing up in the post-war period in this region, she writes of her *grandmère* and her *maman* whose lives were caught in the maelstrom of “Alsace’s tormented history, a history I knew through the dinner table stories, the military marches, the patriotic bugles, the wreaths, the minutes of silence, the monuments to the dead” (Worth, 2001, n.p.). My own mother’s and grandmother’s lives were caught in the same grand narrative of war on the other side of the border, in Saarbrücken, my home and that of generations of my family.

After I had moved to Berlin, when writing a thesis about women writers, among them the Brontë sisters, Charlotte and Emily, who spent their short lives struggling with being female in a patriarchal colonial empire, I remembered my grandmother Charlotte in her own place of struggle. I carried her name with me from one continent to another, to a new cosmopolitan colonial humus, and I gave it to my Canadian daughter.



Charlotte Hasebe, a Canadian daughter,  
Vancouver, Canada, circa 1984

Years later, I returned to Berlin and visited Charlottenburg, the imposing palace of Charlotte, Queen of Prussia, with my daughter Charlotte, seven years old and learning about yet another Queen Charlotte in school, in her home in Vancouver, Canada: Charlotte, wife of King Charles III of England, whose name had been imprinted on Haida Gwaii, the West Coast island home of generations of aboriginal peoples denied their names and their histories for centuries. Charlotte and I also visited my grandmother and her great-grandmother Charlotte's weathered grave in the small cemetery of my birthplace. The name *Charlotte* bears an embodied resonance for me—making me remember its legacies and liabilities—making me mindful of the mixed pain and promise of naming our children, our daughters, of renaming the world by remembering the names that are both familial and worldly, names that come from the micro territories we dwell in, and from the grand narratives of our times, names and narratives that must not be forgotten. There is a radiant hope and a “radical wisdom” (Lanzetta, 2005) in such feminist acts of not forgetting, and of forgiving.

With this life writing, my intention is to open up new heart-filled fertile feminist dialogues, to sustain those “lover's discourses” Roland Barthes (1979) speaks of, between divergent worlds. My intention is to honour the legacy of the Sun Goddess and the *Motherpeace* matriarchies Vicki Noble (1983/1994) researched, and to advance a knowledge borne out of love and the love of writing that Martha Nussbaum (1992) speaks of. My desire, like Mica Nava's, Madhu Prakash's, and that of other women writers and scholars, is to engage in embodied conversations and a visceral writing praxis that attend to the new age and new realities of life in micro territories where a “cosmo-polis” (Mignolo, 2000; Sandercock, 2003) mixing of languages, cultures, races, identities, and knowledges, occurs in ever more complex “mongrel” cosmopolitan ways. My hope is that through these new mixed narratives located in the vernacular of everyday women's and men's lives we can indeed

write ourselves into new wise ways of being in the world and knowing of the world. The ontologies and epistemologies of being and becoming mixed thus can constitute meaningful multiple “love song[s] to our mongrel selves” (Rushdie, 1991) *and* to our pluriverse—if taken up ethically and collectively. Life writing about the memories and stories of daughters, mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers—of the goddesses—that have been part of our genealogical individual and collective histories creates a difficult yet necessary and ultimately hopeful dialogical exchange, one that is urgent for our times, one that “may get us a heart of wisdom” (Kadar, 1993) generated out of re-naming and re-writing our pluriverse *Motherwise*, radiantly—lovingly.



Luise Ludt, Saarbrücken, Germany, circa 1945

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