



## Joy: Reparations and Access

### Editor's Note

*In the last two and so years of the pandemic, I have been required (unexpectedly) to make home in three (very) different places - Eora Nation (Sydney), Australia; San Rafael, Colombia and now, Huichin (Oakland), USA. As I have moved through layers and practices of home-making, I have wondered about the ongoing violences of colonialism as enacted by working and/or spending tourists, privileged Asian bodies (not unlike my own) and 'educated' folk (like us students at CCA). In order to move this contemplation into action, I have centered listening to those forcefully rendered invisible by political and corporate powers. This has included attuning to and learning from Indigenous elders, guerilla farmers, birds and houseless neighbors (to name a few).*

*Amongst these many teachers, based here in Huchiun, is Tiny.*

*Tiny lives and breathes at the intersection of care, mutual aid, ritual, activism and storytelling. She is the pulse and power of this land amidst the cancer that is capitalism. The cancer that normalizes encampment sweeps and not regenerative housing projects. The cancer that prioritizes profit over people. Privatization over the public. Extraction over care. Tiny teaches me about the many ways that I have been complicit in these violences; and how I might instead center deep care and redistribution in my place-making and art-making. She offers potent insight into what is at stake when we acknowledge land and her original stewards.*

*It is true, this particular practice of listening has cracked my heart wide open, again and again.<sup>1</sup> Listening to Tiny has brought up emotions of shame, rage and disgust. However, it has also propelled me into a deeper gratitude for this land and all that she holds. What a joy it is, to learn from Tiny. To center her words and her pleasure in my heart. To channel my energy, subtle and tangible, into potential worldings that hold poor, Indigenous, disabled, incarcerated, and houseless individuals with CARE and RESPECT.*

*I center joy in my activism, as I understand that we ALL need and deserve joy and that our social structures must reflect this. In this moment, we must prioritize the joy of those most impacted by oppression.*

*I center joy in my social practice, as I believe that the revolution can only happen when those with privilege feel the fullness of their privilege, and engage in care, reparations and redistribution from a place of pleasure (as opposed to guilt or scarcity).*

*I center joy in my community building, because I believe that this sense of aliveness and gratitude can generate an energy field that is vital to our collective liberation.<sup>2</sup>*

*That being said, I acknowledge that I speak from a position of privilege; I take*

---

<sup>1</sup> Lisbeth Lipari speaks about how akroatic *listening*, or *listening otherwise*, precedes compassion. "Listening otherwise calls us to preserve our sense of the vulnerability of all beings, of the sense that everyone suffers without insisting that our sense of the other be rationally comprehensible or even imaginable to us... The compassion of listening otherwise takes us beyond the self and out into the groundlessness and ambiguity of the radical alterity of the other... We are not attempting to transform the world, but we are allowing ourselves to be transformed." Lisbeth Lipari. *Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement*. 2014. Print.

shelter, food and health for granted. I cannot speak to many of the very real struggles and complexities of accessing joy. Tiny can.

Niv Rajendra



Photo credit: Momii Palapaz/PNN

---

<sup>2</sup> I have adapted these centerings from Adrienne Maree Brown's *Pleasure Activism*. AMB creates new narratives about how politics can feel good and how what feels good always has a complex politics of its own. Adrienne M. Brown. *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*. 2019. Print. Pg 13.

**Joy ain't my jam - <sup>3</sup>**

Always thought it was too much like a bougie-hippie version of ...“Happy as a clam”

I know we have to see it and be it to be ok with Mama Earth's sacred land

But it also feels like the tinkling glass gentriFUKer bubbles they build to shield them from us dirty masses

which is all part of their complicit krapitalist silencing scam

U see some of us got easy access to feelings like JOY

And some of us are worried if we even can find enuf food for our baby gurls and baby boys

Some of have roofs and some of us lucky if we got any teeth left or hole-free shoes

Some of us r wet in the rain cuz our blankets don't stay dry when we living the houseless game

Some of us are worried about our next degree program, retreats & vacations with our gurfrens & boi-frens and some of us hope we can sell our bodies another day not to be rained on again

Some of us never utter the word joy - cuz our childhoods barely touched peace much-less toys

I think of all this as I ponder this concept -

I think of Landback, Desecration of Sacred Sites, Scamlord Evictions, Severe abuse Trauma, Incarceration & Houseless for Life

I truly wonder if pieces of Joy will ever be integrated in us poor and houseless people's traumaTized minds

... But please stay reading on Creative gentriFUKers in yo bubbles - AND cult of scholarship having poor peoples of color - this is a recipe for EVERYONE's joy and you just opened the poor people's CookBOOK to dream, conceive and strategize a ploy.

---

<sup>3</sup> As you read my words, please understand that as a colonized and oppressed person in poverty, I do not speak the colonizer's languages with academic precision. Instead, I resist linguistic domination by writing and speaking and creating. There will be typos and different uses of language. These are our voices, our art, and our resistance narratives. More on this in *Poverty Scholarship; Poor People-Led Theory, Art, Words, and Tears Across Mama Earth* by Lisa "Tiny" Gray-Garcia, Dee Garcia, and the POOR Magazine Family. 2020. Digital.



### **The Lie of Private Property, Rent and other Settler “Safety” Lies that only keep Some of us Safe**

How can us poor mamaz, elders and folks holding on by a thread even think about the joy of “keeping us safe” when we are so close to being unroofed, unsheltered and unshowered. How can we embody community love and police defunding when we are barely holding onto dry blankets and constantly scrabbling to collect enough blood-stained colonial paper to keep us inside. How can we spend energy and time on abolishing prisons and living in a joyful and prayerful community when our Black, Brown, Indigenous and poor bodies are exposed to the hating gaze of poLice, politricksters, prison incarcerators and displacing tech hipsters.

There is such a disconnect of the concept of joy itself it feels like a krapitalist lie to me, perpetrated by a lot of privileged people who, as my mama Dee would always say, “Have never missed a meal.”

Joy has always been there in Mama Earth’s gifts, in her water and her flowers, her four-leggeds and winged ones and yet the trauma of scarcity kills the peacefulness needed to see, taste and embody joy.

There was not one morning that my broken traumatized mama woke up and just breathed or rested or dreamt or even slept. It reminds me of my love letter to self-care givers, resters and healers to stop telling this broken mama and so many more the over-facile, elitist advice to “rest.”

That rather I would ask you all to not rest so much, to not continue to seclude yourselves in a sanitized bubble called Joy and recognize that you probably have a little more than you need to keep you safe, and maybe you, the rester and self-caregiver and healer could share some of that with so many of us that never do. **Maybe in fact the artists and creatives who make up these joyFULL art spaces, who might be reading this narrative, could consider coming to the next DegentriFUKation, Decolonization Seminar at PeopleSkool to learn about radical sharing and comeUnity Reparations of some of that protected, safe joy to so many of us who can’t stop won’t stop barely trying to survive.**

Maybe if this is too much of an ask you can just gaze upon your surplus income, healthy paycheck, resources, or occupied/inherited land and see what’s actually



possible to redistribute to those of us who will never taste joy, because we are too busy grinding our broken teeth, shifting our wet blankets or worrying about the location of our next meal.



Original art by Ace Robles - cover of a children's book written by Tiny Gray-Garcia: *When Mama & Me Lived Outside* by poorpress.net—also a still in the new animated short movie of the book by MayaMedia.

### Editor's Closing Note

*Within Tiny's words are many of the complexities and troubles that people facing state sanctioned oppression are required to navigate. Joy is multi-faceted and has a politics of its own. Though Tiny ponders on its access; her own work with Oakland's Indigenous and poor community is in fact seated within joy. Joy not as some "bougie-hippie" unattainable ideal but as an ethics of care, love and collective responsibility. Joy in the rituals of prayer, dance, sound and poetry that open up each of POOR Magazine's<sup>4</sup> rallies and talks. Joy*

*in the sliding-scale cafe that provides groceries and meals to hundreds of houseless families in Oakland.<sup>5</sup> Joy as an act of struggle and resistance intertwined: a woven quilt of the revolution. Joy as self-determination, in creating co-living housing, schooling and nourishment despite the government's active disregard. Joy as the capacity of oppressed people to envision their own creative solutions and have the generosity to share those ideas with folks that have previously turned away from them. Joy is knowing that even in the thick of extraction and ignorance is Mama Earth's divine intelligence, giving strength and stamina to those leading the work in decolonization and collective liberation. Without this, the communal flower would slowly but surely wilt and die.*

*POOR Magazine is built upon values of Indigenous wisdom and has centered land, assembly, communal responsibility and joy in all that they do. Their projects reclaim the truth that is mutualism; with all humans; learning from emergent strategies and collaborations as taught by the land. When Tiny speaks in provocations, it is to have you question the illusion of joy in apathetic privilege. Is that joy*

---

<sup>4</sup> POOR Magazine is a poor and Indigenous people led grassroots arts organization dedicated to providing revolutionary media access, education and advocacy for and to poor, incarcerated, disabled and/or Indigenous folk. Tiny is the co-founder of POOR Magazine. POOR Magazine's initiatives are focused on degentrifying rooted communities of color and re-framing the debate on poverty, landlessness, indigenous resistance, disability and race locally and globally. Their projects range from building actual homes for homeless elders and families, to providing single moms with mutual aid, to podcasting and art-making.

<sup>5</sup> This relates directly to the idea of communal celebration/collective enjoyment as elaborated by Parménides Rodríguez in their text [La Milpa, the Origin of the Communal Flower](#). In sharing food, dance and service with one another, POOR Magazine affirms their communal identity with much joy. Beginning rallies and town-hall sit-ins with celebration and prayer is an integral form of resistance against the spiritual disconnect that has led to much of Oakland's degradation.

*real when comfort comes at the expense of neighbors who cannot feed or safeguard themselves? Is that joy real when comfort comes at the expense of contaminated waters and plants?*

*When Tiny asks you to look inwards at your own abundance, what she is hoping for is that in your thoughtful gratitude you find the capacity for generosity, reciprocity and humility. And in her own work, she will continue to celebrate the power that pleasure and enjoyment (through poetry, dance, theater, dialogue, collective care and more) holds in dismantling our current systems and building new worlds.*

**Tiny (aka Lisa Gray-Garcia)** is a formerly unhoused, incarcerated poverty scholar, revolutionary journalist, lecturer, poet, visionary, teacher and single mama of Tiburcio, daughter of a houseless, disabled, indigenous mama Dee, and the co-founder of POOR Magazine/Prensa POBRE/PoorNewsNetwork. She is also the author of *Criminal of Poverty: Growing Up Homeless in America*, co-editor of *A Decolonizers Guide to A Humble Revolution*, *Born & Raised in Frisco* and - *Poverty Scholarship - Poor People Theory, Arts, words and Tears Across Mama Earth A PeoplesTeXt* which was just released in 2019. In 2011 she co-launched *The Homefulness Project* - a landless peoples, self-determined land liberation movement in the Ohlone/Lisjan/Huchuin territory known as Deep East Oakland,, and co-founded a liberation school for children, *Deecolonize Academy*.

