



Sowing Power: Reclaiming Autonomy Through Plants, Doulaship, and Community Healing: [La Loba Loca in *The Circle: Autonomy Beyond the Nation State*](#)

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Community teacher La Loba Loca recalled a mental image of their grandmother tucking plant cuttings in her shoes while growing up in Santiago. "Lady, why are you worrying about this plant!" Loba gleefully exclaimed during their talk at *The Circle: Autonomy beyond the Nation-State* on Oct 8, 2020, expressing how they were initially amused with their grandmother's actions. Loba would later recognize the importance of studying plants and immerse themselves in traditional healing practices, which they now share with others as a widely-regarded teacher.

Loba is a queer doula (birth assistant), herbalist, educator, and activist based in Albuquerque, where they recently started their Queer Land project. I had previously been introduced to doula practices through a good friend who worked on a summer project to connect maternal health workers to one another. While I grew to understand a doula's responsibilities, I had never heard a doula share their experiences until I attended Loba's talk. Loba shares the healing and farming practices that they've inherited with the public through workshops and podcasts. Interviewer and adjunct professor Vreni Michelini-Castillo calls Loba's form of work "decolonizing knowledge." This term points to reclaiming knowledge that the Western institutional system had taken away—and continues to hide—from nonwhite communities that informed a self-sufficient way of living. During their talk, Loba shared what autonomy means to them, how they came to explore a path of practicing midwifery and herbalism and the importance of learning about menstruation and moon cycles.

Loba interprets autonomy—the capacity to make an informed, voluntary decision—as communal support and sharing. By “depending on each other,” Loba believes that people will be able to reclaim their autonomy instead of relying on the state or government. By growing food, recycling water, composting, and openly sharing healing practices, Loba imagines a future where people rely on one another to be self-sufficient. For example, the greywater system for irrigation can conserve water for the community while increasing soil fertility. Overall, Loba emphasizes the preservation of self-sufficiency as an act of resistance towards the Western hierarchical system that restricts nonwhite and pre-colonial practices.

How did Loba come to discover their path of teaching community healing practices? This influence came from none other than Loba's grandmother. By way of stories, Loba's grandmother explained how her community had taken care of one another without depending on the "medical-industrial complex" for birthing and pregnancy healthcare. For example, Loba's grandmother's community took care of themselves by tracking their menstrual cycles and supporting one another through childbirth. While some of Loba's grandmother's community members expressed that these views were absurd, they still regarded her as an essential part of the community. Truth be told, they would not have been birthed healthily without her. Loba then explains how their grandmother had been protected by her community when the city's officials were trying to get her into trouble. They disapproved of this community's resistance to Western systems based on hierarchy as it threatened their power. Inspired by the stories of resilience of their grandmother's community, Loba dedicated their career to reclaiming their community's traditional knowledge by practicing traditional birth-giving.

Having immersed themselves in community healing practices, such as doulaship and reading moon cycles, Loba realized the importance of being in touch with one's body. They expressed how part of their body's healing process was understanding their menstruation cycles and noticing signs of bodily changes. These practices helped them reclaim bodily autonomy from institutional healthcare, as they had learned to take care of themselves. Exasperated that basic personal care practices had been siphoned out of contemporary consciousness, Loba went to midwifery school to train in doulaship. There, they learned to assist with the birthing process.

Loba found queer representation with other doulas but was put off by the gender-binary language that permeated birth-giving discourse, most evident in the culture of gender reveals. The healer's Queer Land project seeks to reclaim autonomy, build community healing, and claim queer rootedness. Listening to Loba speak at *The Circle*

reminded me to treasure my community and taught me about resistance through reclaiming ancestral teachings. Through this talk, I now understand doulaship's significance as an accessible and inclusive option for maternal care. As an interaction designer, I thought critically about how high-tech healthcare systems have diminished my ability to understand my body—I grew up relying on doctors and pills. If you would like to learn more about Loba's projects, find them on Instagram at @lalobalocashares and listen to their podcast at @wildweedspodcast.

The Circle: Autonomy Beyond the Nation State was organized by Vreni Michelini-Castillo, Adjunct Professor, Critical Ethnic Studies Program, in partnership with the CCA Exhibitions department.

Do you have any questions or opinions about this response? Have you seen an event at CCA you'd like to report on? Please email exhibitions@cca.edu to contribute to our Letters to the Editor series, or to submit to *Review, Rewind, Respond*.

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