AMRAH SALOMÓN J.*

Drawing on the Difuentes

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It's 1 a.m. My homegirl and I are working on tribal research after our kids are asleep. We are exhausted but driven by curiosity knitted from our connection to the confluence of two great rivers via our O'odham and Yo'emem ancestors. She's found another elder and is thinking through questions for an oral history interview. The next night, we stay up again. The elder's interview released a flood of tears and triggers—the bitter taste after the contamination of sacred rivers, words he remembers in native language despite being beaten in school for speaking it, and how my great-great aunt Carolina was the traditional midwife who pulled him into this world. That shocks me, but the deeper we get into this work, the tighter the weave revealed on our ancestral basket of relations. We push beyond objectivity toward understanding our people and felt experiences. Our families read and critique our work, assessing whether we are dutiful daughters. We text spiritual strategies for carrying these stories another lifetime forward: plant medicines, ceremonies. I tell her about a research roadblock, and she councils, "Wear turquoise and ask ancestors to help."

Descendants are troublemakers. Once I presented a paper on the Mexican revolutionary Ricardo Flores Magón at a historical conference. I was analyzing multiple revisions of one Magón short story about the work of organizers in peasant and slave revolts, which—I argued—revealed what he learned from building relationships with campesinos and tribal nations beyond his circle of educated urban activists, and I speculated, from his own mixed-race Zapotec heritage. But the historians pushed back. One refused to imagine that a mestizo like Magón could identify with a specific tribe and was corrected by Magón's

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family sitting behind him; another countered my account of Indigenous land relations with the claim that Aztecs had forms of private property. "Not all Indians are Aztecs," I said, "and many of us have experience in burning down plantations." Later, during the conference's plenary panel, one old white man even asked the speakers to verify the accuracy of my paper (which was not part of that session). The panel's lone woman of color defended my approach—she, too, saw history as stories about the past that evolve through interpretation. The old white men grumbled. I have not attended a historical conference since.

Unexplainable things happen for descendants in the archive. When I began researching my community in the Yuma archives, the librarian introduced their tribal history expert. When he walked into the library, we both froze. "I know you," he said and asked for my last name. After I answered him, he exclaimed, "I'm a Salomón too!" He turned out to be an extended relative who had been keeping the history of our non-recognized village alive in hundreds of binders in his apartment. Archives hold our ancestors' traces, and I cannot help but think they wanted this encounter to happen.

There is no positivist way to explain why a child in my community dreamt of gold rush miners burning down his village nearly two hundred years ago. The boy's dream led me to the archive where I found that settlers used arson to remove O'odham from around Yuma. What is the research methodology for dreams? Are we allowed in our scholarship to analyze dreams through traditional ways of knowing—that dreams can be powerful but come with responsibilities? If I were to tell the historians at the conference that dreams guide research, descendants don't show up by accident, and ancestral power moves through the archive, they would think I am crazy.

Where is the archive? Library collections, boxes of photos, recipe books, traces of time held in ice and sediment, details within the body, folds of memory. Archival assemblages of information and objects are selected and produced subjectively. Their processes of accumulation must be critiqued. Colonial archives function through strategies of containment to order and figure certain stories. I call this collection compression, an epistemological reduction that can produce control and value. Indigenous descendant encounters with colonial archives are both encounters with ancestors and how they have been violated by colonialism. It is a dual experience of contending with historical trauma and touching that which gives us life. These archives are about us but were not meant to be read by us. This makes us dangerous.

Sometimes the archive is a work of fiction mistaken as truth. And while I am tempted to make corrections when I find errors in the archive, I'm more

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interested in holding it all together—gossip, truth, and lies—and feeling through what it means as a *difuente* to our futurity.

Difunto, the word for ancestor in Spanish, can signify a source or that from which something or someone descends. The Spanish word *fuente* is spring, a source of water. In my pocha Spanglish, I sometimes compound the two words into *difuente*, the best word I have for describing how ancestral stories create and move through me, as descent and source, *profundidad* that is dark matter to the fixity of the archive. I'm often more aware of what is missing in the archive than what is evident, of the *difuentes* and what they would do to the static spaces that the settler archive attempts to maintain. I want to tell a story about my ancestors that can reconnect other descendants back to our community and land, undoing borders. But sometimes, due to how the archive was created, there is no redress found in it other than narrative and poetics, where finding guides are turquoise and dreams let us reimagine the things we have lost by the consumption of colonialism and draw on the strength of those who would strike a flint to its architectures.

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