



planets,  
gourds  
and  
traveling staffs  
by  
maya odim



breath is expansion.

this breath helps balance

it is the balance. it's the need transformed from selfish desire,

past yearning to reality. this space. when you go ahead and do it you expand. this expansion helps you balance, it is the balance. It is the need transformed from selfish desire, past yearning to reality. this action, whatever you need it to be

have it be.

you have to be

the core of your peace

the life of your life, your story teller. I

really believe

freedom is what's within us. If we recognize what we feel is

freedom and put that into practice we will always work to keep that a

constant.

we will be looking for those freedoms, always. that's why we can't

tell people what makes them free- that's why we have to listen to them about their freedoms. people can try and take your freedom, you can make sure you remain free. no one can give you freedom. freedom can be rooted in the peacefulness of strength. freedom is rooted in community.

hate is not free because hate is rooted in bondage. bondage means,  
not free to move

or change – bound to one position.

when we have decided to believe

what we hate only means these things that make us hate it,

we have bound what we hate

to only mean

deserving of hate.

we have bound ourselves to hating. when we let what we feel we

hate have more of a meaning than only having a negative  
importance for us, we free ourselves from our position of  
hate.

we free.

we free ourselves...we do not make anyone free but ourselves, we

can support the freedom of others. we don't have to justify

separating ourself from any one idea or any one human or

group or love. we leave what does not fit us, we grow where

our roots are nourished. we can respect others roots nou-

rishing. we are not safe if we have identified the enemy/unsafe/

nigger/alien, we are safe if we are not needing to look for

someone to brand as enemy/unsafe/nigger or alien.


we are free.

when we see ourselves as ourselves, continuously growing...falling

and getting up...staying up and staying cool...rooting in our

communities (peace love and respect), we are free. working

to build is building to freedom. you can't build alone

A black silhouette illustration on a white background. It depicts several vertical staffs of varying heights. Some staffs have rounded, gourd-like shapes attached to them at different levels. The shapes are solid black, and the staffs are thin vertical lines. The overall composition is abstract and minimalist.

planets,  
gourds and  
traveling staffs  
by maya odim



this book is dedicated to  
**my family.**

this book is dedicated to  
**my grandmothers,**  
**Dorthy Elayne Jeffries**  
&  
**Emma Marie Cheek**

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planets

**all the time**

speaking forward from where  
    we come running  
a gaggle of  
where we come from,  
running.

through the thickness that  
    places itself forever in  
    front of us  
sometimes we dive, sometimes  
    we push sometimes we  
    pounce...always  
regretting  
sometimes.

even when we say we don't.

sprouting from the skins of  
    our body we lay down  
    the need  
sprouting from our need  
    we lay down the want  
sprouting from the want  
    we hold tight to wishes  
night time, morning time,  
    all the time, sometimes

## story telling

for chaka and rashid

they've always said i talk white with my size ten feet and my nigerian hips bouncing wildly north to cuban salsa's screaming this black america (my body born into soil) the internalisims scaring me into accepting what scars me because i think it's part of the light, when it's not. wearing rings from mother's jewelry box and knocking on solid wood mantels like they don't make them anymore except for the ones on myrtle avenue. and knocking on solid wood like my father every time he passes something put together. looking towards my days with gray hair spinning granma's story from north carolina and warren county, jumbling my words all into paragraphs of tobacco picking and worms in the fields and raising fists Biafran-like not paying attention to what the newspaper says about me. this is my prose piece for all of the essays that didn't get me in... i'm in this with sore hip joints and heavy memories maybe painlessly lifting their scars that leave me wondering about what the point of scars aren't, which is to leave a mark. that leaves me wondering when i will wonder no more. knowing i will only do that once i stop wondering.

i talk "black" with my size ten feet and my nigerian hips bouncing wildly north to cuban salsa's sharing this black american (my body born into soil) screaming how i talk american! telling this how i talk through the libations i'm leaving telling this real loud, how if they try and stop ya from being you, get up and be you somewhere else. oye?

this:

when you work on the core everything else falls into place, don't need a structure to write a poem, don't need a template to make life nice, don't even need these words to carry on, but ya need the ones that came before them cause ya have to know where ya came from to carry on

**el arbol**

this family is growing  
continous looping  
like birds grandmothers reincarnate into, swooping  
circling, tracing pathways  
leaving broken twigs along the trail,  
the past days pathways for new babes  
to capture age  
so they remember where their grandparents play.

this family is big blocks sturdy standing buildings  
each of us, don't matter if we blood related  
got our love to fill in

this family, we are women with strong necks and men  
with strong backs  
we are women with strong backs and men with strong necks

family pedigree  
hailing from the caspian sea  
from cuban mambi waters and nigerian white and green and  
    biafran freedom beams  
from tobacco picking american soil and the sun's gleam

somos humanos  
con corazones palpitando  
aquí estamos  
creciendo porque dónde vamos  
es dónde vamos.

contando las letras de como estamos

he oído de las ritmas oeste africanas palpitando en el parte atrás  
de los dientes de mi mamá  
mezclando con su cuba.

colores rojas que le guían por un par de tiempo  
he oído de los musculos berceros contracting en las piernas  
de mi papá  
palabras en cada corner que compartió pensamientos con él.  
he oído de las letras de mi hermano dino  
anudados  
que en un coronamiento se quedaron en todas partes  
de su cabeza,  
colores brias spraying alongside snap shots  
queeeeeee  
reflected in his pupils

he oído del expresion libre en el parte atrás de la cabeza  
de mi hermano  
chaka,  
su espalda alargando al cielo.  
algunas líneas derechas mostly curvas encima de

olas,  
bebiendo.

he oído de esa familia  
músculos saturados con colores  
protegiendo pictures

al primer momento antes de que tomamos esa verdad...  
y cuando lo bebemos  
y cuanto bebemos  
nadando el sistema  
nadando mi sistema

bailando encima de las habichuelas  
caminando alongside la pared fuera de la escuela,  
dejando lo ir  
se va se va volando la vida



gourds



## cross roads

i've heard that punishment teaches,  
scares ya into not wrongin again.  
punishment scars. stops ya from moving,  
doesn't teach ya at all,

ya gotta learn what needs to be done and what  
can wait to be done.

i've heard that losing somethin makes ya more  
careful...  
to keep a better eye out,  
loss does nothing but sew seeds of regret.  
ya gotta learn to let go.  
i've heard that heart break makes us stronger...  
heart break can stop  
the growth  
but ya learn to keep growing

people talk about tougheinin up, not being too  
nice, not sharing too much,  
someone will take advantage of us!

...gotta continue talking bout what love helps  
build, gotta uplift the trust to live. we have to be  
strong. when will we tell ourselves we  
have to care to not lose, telling ourselves our bad  
days will knock us down and our good days will  
build us up.  
we are not these warriors made of metal hearts,  
we are these warriors  
of skin and bone. these warriors who wail and  
moan, who live and grow  
strong and weak.

**waxing/waning**

just laid there and made noises  
noises like the sound of CTA trains' brakes screeching,  
noises that sounded of sorrow.  
radiating from the stomach  
faaar from the heart, faaar from the brain  
very close to the tongue.

waves clap up loooud and hard! on lake michigan's shores  
kinda sounds like the tongue clapping against teeth,  
saliva

nervousness  
this feeling of nervousness is rooted in unhappiness  
this feeling of unhappiness is rooted in the belief that the past  
could have been different  
than it was,

this feeling of balance, of steadiness  
can only be found once the belief is found that the past  
is as it doooes...  
did.  
no periods needed, doors closed  
windows open

like they say the gods do.

how can the mind be so sure of something the body has yet  
to believe?  
because, because we can reach past the finger tips  
and touch with energy  
because life is not always about being prepared and ready  
because truth is in action cause these people's words can deceive

**coronas**

*wisk* sparking  
*hefvr* spacing  
letting out *feers*  
and using more colors, queens sprinkling from  
the skies rocking three pointed crowns.

with lower legs hanging  
feet up, palms sometimes leaning  
not covering the strength, piecing it.  
not working to prove anything cause you can't  
work like that anyway  
the stars light my path  
draped in black i jump, into memory often

we are north now...

(one time towards the end you looked at me)  
one time towards the end he looked at me and  
said sighing, thinking about weather  
or not  
to use his middle  
"it's hard to let a pretty girl go."

just cause i didn't say it then doesn't mean  
don't speak it now, pretty?  
i am a thinker lover laughter word gurl picture  
maker traveler  
mover  
daughter granddaughter younger sister aunt  
cousin niece, huh  
and pretty is all that you can  
see...when our bodies came out of the phone  
the flood rushed in

u were wearing black and green and your hair  
i was wearing green and blue  
we were these friends as they come before  
    relationships  
and we left flowers everywhere, everywhere,  
    everywhere  
and i am still confused as to how to water them.

we are south of no north now,  
with bukoswki and bobbie humphrey playing  
    that flute singing fly bird  
donald fly,  
think twice think twice think twice,  
    say it three times  
so it sticks to the backs of plumb skinz  
blacks and blues, manchas de la tierra  
don't forget esa tierra (don't forget es la tierra)

**professor**

the unified positions of jazz musics, and mournings,  
and light mornings are of:  
that scratch, that hold  
that thrust as a way of talking about  
composite  
synergies and states  
with questions, interpreting what these questions mean  
organizing their meanings  
and giving a response  
based on reality, or fantasy  
hollering.

the part of the identity is this,  
as how it comes in poetics  
and clacking, clacking loud keys loudly

no more mourning,  
getting caught sleeping on the mother city  
waking up to the horns, scratching  
holding, jazzing

that scratch  
that hold  
mourning lightly in poetics  
and filling the bowl of every color blackness  
the night time blackness  
the green  
the red liberation blackness heard in the musics

**in these steps**

always recognize the spirits, recognize who ya  
    identify as family  
and the ones who have already gone home.  
recognize ya friends, too, here and at home.  
gotta do this before it all, quiet and out loud.

a place right after:  
go where ya feel good and feel good where ya go

a place after that:  
eat well to keep spirit up  
then into moons ya can imagine traveling,  
    imagine traveling  
and setting up home  
living with enough  
enough to spread  
and your arms with space to roam  
    and space to bring friends

## spring

it's been raining for days  
moist and cool in the air like this  
for days

and feeling good, knowing footing wise  
    grandmothers smell lingering in the air too.  
been feeling just ripe thought burning my lips  
chilies burning my lips  
rounding the tops of knees.

its been new looking out the window with the  
    screen pulled back  
sticking my neck faaar

been listening,  
what i speak with now  
are these new moons keep me up  
    remembering well

what i speak with now are the melodies  
growing when they get time  
sun beaming down from the skies  
shining on all these places cause ain't no time  
    to hide!





and

**one moon**

if secrets tear people apart then telling the truth  
must keep them together  
and he told the truth  
that he wasn't ready  
that his tide couldn't rise quite yet  
that his seasons weren't so seasonal and i was  
coming looking for spring in fall.

mute. left me mute.  
with nothing running through, no thoughts,  
words, blank pages, writer's block.  
speakers caught off.  
caught with the guard having already put his  
swords down  
couldn't really talk, could only really look in the  
other direction

so i didn't feel togetha  
thought we had laid down this path to walk on,  
we was walking along  
too long, too short  
either way you couldn't hang,  
sorry if that was unfair, it's, you said you could  
just not quite anything,  
just  
either way we should make sure we're friends  
cause we gotta slooow things dooown  
and you're not sure how they will turn out now  
so we should be clear that:  
either way  
either way  
either way.

speaking honestly is respectful...  
honestly? you crept up on me with that speech  
cause we was laying down patchwork quilts to be  
warm in these chicago winters and i didn't  
care if spring was gonna come cause i was  
ready for some kind journey  
...i guess either way.  
we was runnin, and not that there is any type of  
finish line or any need to get ta one  
we was runnin and wasn't outta breath and  
outta somewhere,  
how do you not know how fast you need to go  
once you start?  
maybe because there is no pace in matters  
of the mind  
it's just try it until you get it right next time.

to be clear, in what you said you needed there  
was nothing i objected to.  
speaking honestly is respectful: and this way,  
i was feelin the blues  
didn't feeeel togetha.  
thought,  
it's gotta be the weather.  
realized,  
it's gotta be nothing, cause once it's gotta be  
sumthin it can't be what its gonna be  
naturally  
gotta fly gotta be free,  
gonna be okay,  
either way

**in recognition of now's truth**

it may just be  
that what I was seein'  
only existed inside  
my own head  
i may have seen the sun when it  
    was rainin'  
or built a sandcastle  
in the midst  
of a windstorm  
but you can't really  
apologize  
for luvin' somebody  
only thing to do is  
paddle with the current  
instead of against it  
'til I get my strength  
back  
lay down lonesomeness  
and share it  
rememberin' the good things  
like  
at least I tried

– cheryl johnson-odim,  
“other women before me”

## H.is I.s P.lenty, H.ow O.urs P.ours

él me cae bien, como el sol le cae al mar  
sin los "comos" ...  
él es un árbol con hojas muchas  
yo, un tambor  
mi pecho imitando el sonido  
palpitando  
nosotros dos paseos llegando dónde llegamos  
sin querer, sin queridos  
somos amigos nuevos  
encontrando el fondo, llegando dónde llegamos.  
a ti llego con mis ojos abiertos  
escuchando a tus talones que me guían  
exactamente como el sonido saltando del tambor  
saliendo de mi tambor  
buscándote  
con tu mano en mi mano te encuentro.  
guardando las piedras y las maderas  
y los sentidos, tu me puedas guardar también?  
a ti yo llego con preguntas, muchas  
las que pueden llenar el mar,  
y cuando te llego, las dejo  
porque aquí veo que las debo dejar.

**maple sugar boy\***

our light trembled in the sky too soon.  
dripping, melting  
till there is no more.

and into the bottom of this box i stay looking  
thinking of its appearing self  
right there right there in the shadows!

those boats not by the water, keeping me thirsty  
drinking water to no avail  
round about in circles my body turns and wails

\*title borrowed from the song, maple sugar boy  
(buffy sainte-marie, album: many a mile)

**don't get it twisted**

i've treated love like a poem i'd write:  
you leave a poem and it's there for you,  
it actually grows in your absence, sometimes  
needs your absence to grow;  
needs you to come back to it so it can be written.  
you leave a love,  
and they just leave you. no coming back  
...don't get it twisted.



**just write**

"Sometimes I can just write fast from the heart  
until I'm healed."

– Patricia J. Williams



traveling staffs



dee jay

beat said:  
all  
and only soul  
light in and full  
wants noise  
the fire  
and time  
long  
fast  
or wild.

would they group  
naked at microphone  
after some music?

rhythm say so.  
have it hit  
beneath life  
...almost anthem, but right.

bass going:  
do make  
to move, do make –to move  
sweetest as song

te

I

¡aquí estamos y no nos vamos!  
aquí estamos y nos vamos pushing up with bent  
elbows  
rising like steam from tea  
hanging heavy in the air  
hitting pitch and smoooooooooth  
riding out,  
wave length ring

i mean this assortment of all of us  
weight sharing, sometimes tipping.

one time, a friend looking exactly like herself  
sent me her thoughts  
her words breaking open meanings:  
telling of how we are a part of her share me vision  
apart of being who we are: who are we?  
doing and going  
banking on it...secrets don't reside here  
got me thinking my people  
got me believing:  
i  
am my own  
hot, sticky  
thick, heavy, meaty you have trouble biting  
through it foundation

mi gente  
got me thinking  
you don't have to know the pain to feel the hurt  
sometimes  
you don't have to know the dance steps to enjoy  
the movement

**II**

double dutch is movement  
bachata is smile  
suya is spice and salsa is this point from which  
hips pivot

**III**

rise pivoting hips  
bending limbs  
hitting pitches in chunk

**for**

we are not finished  
we are writers of our history while living the  
present  
breathing the past, exhaling right now  
lean in  
on whatever or how ever you call it  
land  
whenever how ever you call it  
late night, madrugada  
however long  
four weeks, one moon  
speak it on the wind so it carries  
holds heavy in air  
saturates light  
shows the exact shade you see

go tell it on the mountain

uplift whatcha think  
can't lift no one else till ya uplift yaself  
then bring it home

bring it to what home is for you...don't always  
    have to go down first to come up  
cause when we water,  
life thanks the spirits who bring  
gracious movement here  
handling la tierra  
reaching the skies  
bending backs  
stretching spines  
being with ourselves  
knowing my life is life enough to share it with  
    myself  
it's big enough for the souls of me and stretches  
    with the we

**V**

our sea salts let's not dissolve into water  
our bodies lets keep moving in different  
    directions  
our body minds, when seated rest on thought  
move on action when we collide

## beauty

how did we get started with all these festivities?  
people have been decorating themselves for  
centuries but not like this...  
with all the tucked in changes  
and the rearranges  
just let it fall like it did when u were born baby!

we have to decorate it, but keep it loved  
cause we are what it is just as you are how you is,  
beautiful.

you knew this tho, that's why you care about  
your beautiful  
the thing is you don't need to put anything in  
to do it tho  
just get up in the morning with some soap and  
water and do it yo  
fluid.

cause too much fussin' and fighting' will trash it  
we are not elastic  
and deff not plastic  
so this that we are supposed to look like...  
pass that  
if we move together we can move past this.

it's not about putting up new images cause that  
is the bad ish,  
it's about not needing billboards and adver-  
tisements and magazines to look at like,  
"that's it!"

if you know what you're doing,  
then be what you need.  
go tell it on your mountains and let your words  
breathe:

we are this earth!  
as earth is air!  
as fire is water!  
as day is night!  
we are affected by what is out there,  
    this affecting how it shines inside our light!

this, this right here, this heart  
this is it  
we make our pathways,  
(these histories we leave behind showing  
    what we do)  
this journey is continuous  
our eyes, map these landscapes. sueños, dreams,  
    these threads we quilt our lives with  
gotta keep quilting, gotta keep quilting  
gotta keep our minds right!

you see it's about feeling,  
    and that needed feeling  
comes from the groove that sits in your hips  
comes from the pictures you make with  
    your wrists,  
(the writing, the movement and colors all of it)  
comes from your beauty and how you choose  
    to decorate this

**cop cars**

cop cars creep curiously  
cops come carrying crank  
crack!  
chest  
clank clank,  
creep creep...

nation time

**WHAT TIME IS IT? NATION TIME!  
WHAT'S GONNA' HAPPEN?  
LANDS GONNA' CHANGE HANDS!**

**WHAT TIME IS IT?  
NATION TIME!  
WHAT'S GONNA' HAPPEN?  
LANDSGONNA'CHANGE HANDS!  
WHATTIMEISIT?NATIONTIME!WH  
AT'SGONNA'HAPPEN?LANDSGON  
NA'CHANGEHANDS!**

who's gonna do it?  
probably those here to see the land taken in the  
first place

those figuring

whose words  
strangled  
chewed up,  
spit out by manifest destiny  
mass graves dug by museums, dissected by  
anthropology  
buried by so called saviors  
these overseers who attack and  
rest  
attempt to do for those they infect  
attempt to do for their children too  
and their children's children too...

will be here

the people,  
the humans across the earth shall march  
inspired not by revenge but by avenging the slow  
    killings,  
not having to be oppressed to uprise\*

the people, the humans  
across the earth  
those whose midday mush was seasoned with the  
    spices of flying away  
whose hair was weaving leaving family  
and liberating self  
whose vocal chords stretch(ed) with the  
    exercises of  
negroe spirituals  
ellas y ellos hicieron una promesa solemne:  
    sobrevivir

with feet marching now, legacies coming to  
    travel  
and those resting making their ways through

tomando las manos de ellas y ellos  
los y las, quienes lenguas extranjeros trataron  
    de robar  
vendrán  
levantando

es el tiempo del nación y las tierras cambiara  
    manos!

with voice  
with feet  
with vibrating land...

tomando sus manos  
vendramos vendramos  
traveling on mother earth's land  
re-establishing our nations  
spread out, breaking state lines across the earth

nation time!

those coming who witnessed those who marched.  
(mouths moving simultaneously)  
those who marched having witnessed those  
    defeniendo las fronteras  
who witnessed:  
those drawing nutrition from voice  
drawing strength from down winds  
and strength from  
the tactics  
of  
those fighting against colón-ization  
(and those mother earth cradles)  
    con manos arriba

with hands in the air  
we will come running  
the globe.  
watches on our wrists  
asking,  
what time is it?

nation time!  
what's gonna' happen?  
lands gonna' change hands!

\*quote from a professor

**“by any means necessary as long as it makes sense.” – malcolm x**

i have been the bloody revolution  
carrying buckets full, laughing so politely to the  
kitchen to fix up massa's food  
real well and good  
to the kitchen mammy!  
a la cocina!  
wolf killer in the middle of the oysters,  
don't want no scraps today massa! no sir!

been the bloody revolution  
because i'd rather wash the blood off my hands  
than place my little girl in the hands of hat  
plantation  
been the spinal chords bending overboard on  
ships cause i'd rather be in her belly than  
give my sons  
to whips  
been eyes sparkling in the reflection of star's  
light, with pepper on her heels and a pair  
of wings to fly, been birds  
rising  
as high as i can see, past the mountain we tell it  
on,  
going towards home.  
been the seated and the marching  
the gathering and the making  
i be  
my -ness redefining return  
i am my colors, my white bones, my eyes, my  
fathers and my mothers

### redefining return

washing in the river and forgetting everything except – water  
grows.  
she said,  
history how the western world attends to the dead -Hartman  
heartstrings  
are taut to walk on to cross the Atlantic the other way,  
walking now chained to the longing  
walking now chained to the playing field  
only leveling my chances of physical pain.  
still  
beating my brains and whipping my spirit,  
holding it up by its ankles and raping its birth.  
tarnishing and tarring my memory even after you've taken me  
beating my bloods blue with your stride for nobility

the hide, the pen  
the chain, the want  
the blood, the sweat of manual labor and juegos de baloncesto  
of soaking red and blue bandanas  
the auction block the police issued hand gun  
the ocean, the land  
returning?  
on journey the other way can't only be defined as literal  
    movement,  
has to be: growing yams in ears.  
drying fish for the walk back from the coast  
drying fish 'cause not just the coast gets fish,  
wrapping cloth, patterned life  
wrapping cloth, thinking of what an American identity is  
where do i actually belong, question mark.

the whole country has to think you are American  
our whole country has to think about these identities  
the whole country has to think i will not tell you how your  
    movements move  
our whole country has to think, greeting me – every time i come  
    home telling of the igbo name i have to be greeted by.  
the whole country has to think about losing your mother  
and caged birds  
and knowing your mother but not knowing how her cheeks smell  
and caged birds,  
and knowing good food  
and finding cage doors  
and knowing that not only black birds are caged  
get it?  
and knowing that not only black bodies are in those cages, get it?

what do we see in you  
i see, there is nothing to have to make up for not having the  
cuartos  
or the monedas, the rose shit that isn't really shit  
cause it doesn't smell  
there is nothing to have that needs to make up for what you think  
i am unfortunate enough for not having

redefining my return

this one race – human race thought  
i don't mean like that  
this, where a ring – put a ring on it talk  
don't call me it  
i'm meaning ring out that cloth soaked with define IT  
ring out that heavy cloth  
ring out that cloth sweated in.

for the mine that is only ours,  
for the voice i speak with that is only mine

she said,  
i been to sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots- Straight  
across the brims  
the ones holding cafesitos, habichuelas con dulce  
ropas viejas, flan y mate son dulces

been to sorrow's kitchen and looked him straight between the  
eyes  
and they said  
break  
and i said, can't/won't  
and they say  
paint you nails long, wear your heels high

splash your face with pro-actively created make up  
your self better  
feeeeeeeel better!  
and i say, doesn't feeeeeeeel better  
and they say  
don't look to your people,  
cassavas, turmeric, saffrons,  
look to the standard  
and i say  
look to my people  
and my people aren't only black get it?

## tierra biafra

i imagine covering my face with a million ribbons of straw  
red beads around my eyes  
suya spice on my teeth  
air on my mouth  
mask  
with  
red grains of jolof rice, sweet sugar from chin-chin  
open palms facing my forehead is how i will place it.

on my head i have cloth  
wrapping around my thoughts with turquoise swirl burgundy eye  
drop patterns on top of tan warmth  
impregnated with thought giving birth,  
date seeds in my pockets.  
kola nuts are bitter and so good like all the palm offerings  
i embrace  
like light shining in nigeria  
ni-ge-ri-a  
just like that, in the morning like that.

let me cut my hair down low  
don't ask me how or when it grows  
don't finger it.

abiriba thinks  
igbo woman body is beautiful, soft and sweet smelling good  
with bent joints  
elbows and knees  
not only feet but hands too  
not perfect, makes mistakes too  
that's how abiriba walks  
bendin her back like it's goin outta style

## **peace**

composed of these intricate little  
branches  
lining themselves up like steps of our existence,  
deep  
and smelling good to the soul  
round, circular, heavy weighted, colorful.  
sure footed  
and able to balance,  
to reach,  
to have wing spans  
plural  
amounts and mounds in bellies filling  
so we can fly!  
to stay alive.  
a tener en nuestro paseo  
aquí dentro, dentro  
al fondo  
reaching to the tips of toes  
reaching to the tips of fingers  
spreading to the backs of heads

and out, and out the eyes.  
seeing the sea's blues and remembering old man  
    river's belly,  
sometimes waking at night with the sorrow of  
    indigestion  
the stomach  
in the middle passage  
of thought:  
the deep deep, down by the river's deep  
where the peaceful keep  
bellas, por que los espíritus se hacen así

a daughter of daughters of sons

this sapphire, this moon  
tip toeing at sky's edge and chasing the sun  
along it  
beside it

a long way home





Maya Emma Nnena Ruth Odim is a daughter, younger sister, cousin, aunt, niece and granddaughter. Born in Evanston, raised in both Evanston and Chicago, her family hails from Cuba, Nigeria and North America. Igbo, Cuban and Black American.

She gives thanks to family and friends for motivating her from entry into pre-school through graduation from Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, 2010. She gives thanks to family and friends for motivating her from entry to life to her continuation through these universes. She gives thanks for them teaching her the importance of caring about what you do and who you do this with.

**"Keep your eyes on the prize." - mom**

**"as you change, the world changes with you." - dad**

Maya has facilitated and co-facilitated Poetry/Spoken Word and Creative Writing workshops in various settings in Illinois and Connecticut. She currently lives and works in Chicago, Illinois.

