

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Karo Ska: Three Poems

Karo Ska · Tuesday, August 31st, 2021

### a map of my mother's pain

my mother almost died at sixteen –  
a motorcycle split her head open.  
in a coma for four days,

the doctors gasped *miracle*  
when she awakened. years later,  
she showed off the damage, she parted

her hair & said *look, this is my scar.*  
i ran my finger over her  
ridge, mapping the geography

of her injury's history, wanting  
to find the cartography of why  
she never played with me.

*it's neurological*, she claimed, denying  
how her sadistic mother, her alcoholic  
brother, her abusive husband erased

the coordinates of her joy. my mother  
healed the invisible scars her spirit bore,  
with an island of volcanoes & a lava

of prescription pills, until the magma  
buried her alive. i'd come home  
to find her lying on the couch, an ember

without any fire. lacking friends or hobbies,  
she hobbled, hollow through life's paths,  
following an outdated map.

the things we deny are misguided  
directions getting us lost. so here's  
my truth – a nautical chart

of my mother's depression & how  
 nothing i did could light up her eyes.  
 i am the child she wished she had aborted

or given away, but how could she  
 relinquish what she carried for nine months  
 when it was in her arms, suckling

her breast? instead, she abandoned me  
 in pieces, her spirit dying  
 before my eyes. she

denied me a mother, denied me  
 a childhood. yet here i am, drawing  
 a new map, where i embrace

the cliffs of my pain & plot the coordinates  
 of my joy. cliffs i no longer fear  
 & coordinates no one will dare erase.

\*

### **days like this i don't want to live**

what are the words for *i don't feel good*, words  
 for *i'm triggered*, words for *my body sizzles*  
*like a steak on a grill*. i take a shot of jameson,

calm my charred nerves. i am the cow on the train  
 tracks who doesn't move despite the blares  
 of the horn. i'm not running from my pain,

it's simply too heavy for me to carry. i want to  
 call it quits, stop trying to heal, drown  
 in my drama. i want to keep drinking until i

pass out. days like this i think about Palestine.  
 i think about occupation. i think about war  
 & the drones paid for by my taxes. i think about

Kashmir or the Indigenous people  
 of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, their land  
 submerged by the construction of an american-

funded dam. i think about the world's pain  
 & my own, how they intersect & how  
 they don't. how i migrated

to america, & how that's settler colonialism. how  
 i'm trying to be a solution, but sometimes i'm

the problem. i crave a connection to land i

can call my own – a land that'll welcome  
me. i'm trying to heal so i'll have the strength  
to fight for liberation. i'm meditating, practicing

yoga, drinking tea (quitting coffee), breathing  
intentionally. but some days, i fail & pray  
to a bottle, pray for the spirits to calm my ravenous

flesh. sometimes it's the self-destructive habits  
that make me feel better. i am not perfect. days  
like this i don't want to live, but the ancestors

in my blood tell me it's not my time yet; they give  
me a home where i'm not a piece of meat  
but a bird of prey with a nest of hungry chicks.

\*

### **a prayer to my ancestors**

bengalee ancestors, i call on you,  
find you swimming in the rivers  
of my bones, your spirits' wisdom  
bathing in my marrow. i am

the west bengal muslim migrating  
after the 1947 partition

of india. i am  
the mukti bahini fighting  
in the 1971 war for liberation. i am

the anti-hindi riots. i am  
the rickshaw my grandmother pulled,  
rescuing hindi girls from  
a war not of their making.

i am the lost languages, the lost  
recipes across european-dictated  
borders. i am the bird

flying over barbed wire, the smuggled  
cow lifted by a crane  
across the fence. i am the refugee,

starving, searching for a spot  
to call home. i am the floods,  
the monsoon rains. bengalee ancestors,

what words can you  
gift me? what can you say  
to the balkan ancestors residing  
in the mountains of my muscles?

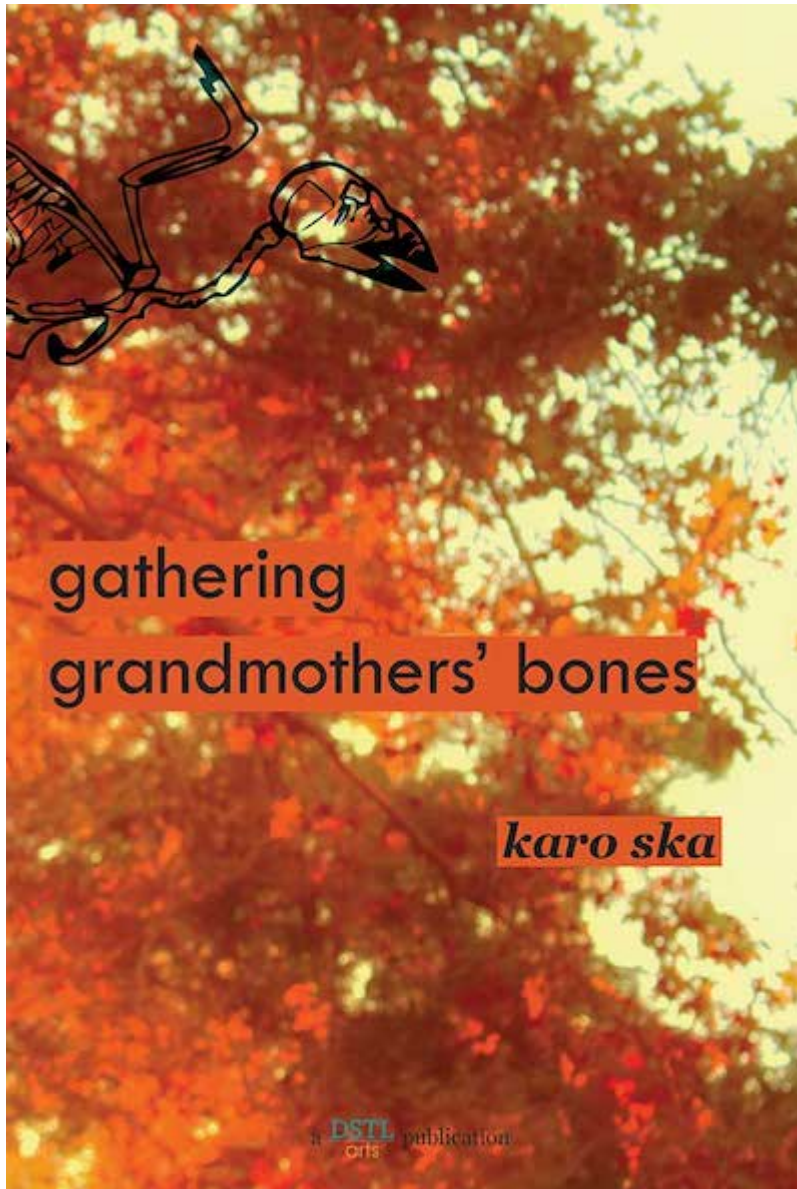
i don't know how to scale  
the european side of me, their  
rejection of me – an avalanche  
in my veins, while amerikkka's  
falsified promises rage  
against the peninsulas of my lungs,  
sneaking a flag into my heart. i  
pull it out, shred it, burn it. no flags  
can make a home in my body. i am  
made of people, not nationalities.

Ancestors, we looked at the same sky,  
conversed with the same moon. Ancestors,  
dream with me, dream

of a world breathing free without  
shackles, chains, & police knees.  
Ancestors, you conjured

my body into being, protected me, held me  
when no one else did. in your eyes,  
the ones i see reflected in the mirror, i  
see a future, not yet ready, waiting  
to be born, & i hope i'm making  
your dreams come true.

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*gathering grandmothers' bones*, Karo Ska. [Purchase](#).

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