

Mothering, Mending Metal and My Son

A Response to the Work of Amira de la Garza

This piece speaks to the ways mothering and scholarship can intertwine when least expected, particularly when race, class, and gender are formulating epistemological factors. Amidst a mothering turning point in my life, when my oldest child was violently attacked in a parking lot at his school, I questioned not only my place as his mother, but because of the effects of the attack, my place in academia as well. My identity as a mother was in flux throughout this crisis—in terms of age and race amidst white doctors and police, and in terms of my ability to be both a mother and a scholar within the rubric of “acceptable” scholarship in academia—I was not trusted in the circle of racist investigation surrounding my sons attack, and I was not believed capable within the circle of chairs in a graduate classroom—specifically because I was unable to attend an event required of the course. More important than either of these, I doubted my ability in both arenas, and came out feeling sure of myself in both. The lessons learned from this experience resonate in the connection between the scholarship of Amira de la Garza, which I was immersed in at the time, and the realizations of my status around and beliefs about mothering a child of colour.

This piece was written during a tumultuous time in my life; a time my dual function as mother and scholar collided in a most unexpected and frightening way. Often my work resonates with my daily life circumstance; usually I plan it that way. This time, however, was unplanned. What I thought would be a weekend retreat—a requirement by a graduate class on critical ethnography—became a moment of introspection on mothering, race, class, and ethnographic methodological reflection far from the physical locale of the retreat. I was unable to be there in body, though through my extensive preparation for the event, I was unable to disconnect in mind, even as circumstances overwhelmed me.

What was supposed to be a physical leaving behind of mothering in order to perform as a scholar ended up being a very physical assertion (for myself and my son) that my mothering can not be left behind, literally or metaphorically. Thus, this piece emerged amidst personal turmoil and within the context of readings I was immersed in, specifically “The Four Seasons of Ethnography” (2000) and “Ethnography as Spiritual Practice” (2003b), both by Amira de la Garza.

I use narrative to argue that mothering, specifically that between a mother and her son of colour, is a contested site of difference and continual negotiation; I draw from Amira de la Garza to name how such a site of contention is also a point of discovery in which difference and negotiation are communal sites of interrogation. In this case, it is my experience of being read as a mother of a non-white son by hospital personnel and police that becomes text to be spiritually interpreted and critically framed. As such, my narrative, interspersed with the theoretic strands in Amira de la Garza’s critical ethnography, speaks to larger issues of cultural acceptance of motherhood when race, gender, and class intervene. To be specific, I argue that in this story my motherhood was in question from the moment I appeared with my son and our race, class, and age difference could be read. At the same time, while motherhood called me to my son’s hospital bed, my place as a scholar came in to question. That is, the perception that I refused to attend an expensive retreat as part of doctoral study coupled with my desire to make my scholarship about personal issues marked me as an outsider. My dual status as mother and scholar was not accepted. This was something I had long felt in the academic hallway, yet never before was it so visible to everyone else.

I must make a note here about style. Narrative reminds of the importance of our stories and the collective responsibility encouraged by sharing those stories. I do not discount the fact that, for me, the narrative I write here is both healing and rebellion. I refuse to separate my work from my experience. They are intertwined, and this co-existence can and often does produce theory—vital to the existing literature on motherhood and mothering. Thus, the reader has a responsibility here to negotiate the presence of language of varying tone and content. Doing so opens the realm of inclusion to mothers and scholars of varying experience—theory as a result of practice.

Getting the story straight

I envision a fight I did not see. Twenty seven minutes of a brown boy/man¹ being held, punched, kicked, yelled at, laughed at, hit harder, snatched from rough rage too late and yet in perfect time by friends pulling up in a white van of safety and ignorance; much like the white man. I want to call it a beating, an attack, an ass kicking. But the man/boy and his allegiance to hegemonic masculinity does not allow it. I know this because the first time I called it such, he groaned from his hospital bed, “you make it sound like I didn’t do anything to protect myself, moommm.” I have not said it again. Out loud. I can not

control my thinking it. I fear the things I think. Perhaps my thoughts are not so powerful in that they are only internal to my own soul. I doubt this logic, knowing, as Amira de la Garza (2003b) writes in “Ethnography as Spiritual Practice” that “the power to name is the power to call into being” (494). Are my thoughts making the boy/man weak? Have I set him up? What assumptions am I taking for granted in this internal dialogue of mine? Am I giving “the man” too much power? Or does he really have it already? What about the boy/man who must survive in this society as a man/boy of colour ... where does this position him? And me as his mother guide?

One of the first questions I was asked by my family at the hospital was about race. Was it white boys who hurt him? Was it because he is brown?²² How to respond. No. I was strangely defensive, not wanting to answer the question, not because I wanted to defend the white man, though I may still have remnants of that strong conditioning, but because I did not want to admit that it was the hands of our people. It was brown hands, brown smiles, golden blood flowing hearts encompassed in brown souls- so much the deeper when couched in the definition from de la Garza (2003b) “that which sees the nature of our existence and experience as a whole” (497), baggy pants, Nike sweatshop cool Cortez shoes, skull caps covering smoothed back black locks, and Allen Iverson wannabe a basketball star shirts, holding in the rage over ownership, property, territory.

So, the story *I am told* goes that it was over a girl at a club weeks back, payback for unfinished business. The story that *I am told* goes that the attacker, or, the hitter, was just scared my man/boy was going to hurt him, so he hit first. The story that *I am told* goes that they did not mean to hold him down. The story *I believe*—and that thus in its realness determines all I see (de la Garza, 2003a: 77)—goes that the parents are sad, all of us, sharing different sides of the same experience. The story *I hope* goes that the whole thing is over. The story still in my head says not hardly. So, back to the question, was it the white man? Was it over race? Ultimately, at the root, I say yes. How could it not be so when the colonization of the white man has made the violence between brown brothers that which separates them from each other, from a common vision, goal, future of rebellion? Am I to be comforted by de la Garza’s assurance that “simple rebellion ... often occurs in the very midst of the oppression?” (2003a: 81) Do the brown boy/men see that they are being used as pawns in their own oppression? Do I see my part?²³ The girl, if there was one, was just a symptom. What does this say about her? About gender, about the dynamics of the brown boy/men and the creamy egg shell skin of the passing for white brown immigrant Iowa woman/girl in question?

I need to know more. There is, as de la Garza quotes Jacqueline Martinez in “An Ethics for Postcolonial Ethnography” (2003a) a “knowing unknown” a phenomenological stance within which one is aware there is a reality associated with one’s existence other than that which was received” (81). Surrender does not come easily here, and I am not yet able to pray for its arrival. I am scared

to know more, I am sorrowful, and angry, and exhausted. And, when I read the words, “even forces experienced as oppositional and destructive or dominating reflect something of the interdependent cyclical world in which we live” (de la Garza, 2000: 637) I find myself defensive again, asking what role my boy/man played(s), what roles I have orchestrated. My urge to control takes over and I have to rein it in, begging myself to relinquish, let go, live real and embrace-full of the journey. I want to engage with “*meditation, reflection, and introspection*” (2003b: 504, italics in original) and I am not yet able to honor the power of the words and images I replay in my mind (de la Garza, 2003b: 504), maybe I am not being honest, but I may just not be willing.

I am trying to put together a reality of culture and community that connects me to my boy/man as the man/boy he sees himself. I am trying to construct an image that reflects the brown hands of this violent act as hands interlocked, joined through oppression, experience, and able to forego the politics of the fight and just re-unite with each other despite their white colonialist manipulated divide and across their differences. These realities I desire do challenge the norms that are inherent in the day to day life of the white high school these brown bodies inhabit daily, but I am guilty of taking something for granted here, a privilege to see past it all perhaps, or a need on their part to do things differently. I am projecting, from within spirituality and desire, yes, but no doubt from a space of “ignorant awareness” (2003b: 501) as de la Garza describes it: How do I cross over? Am I the one who should be doing this work at all? I must remember that “... experience is part of the whole process” (2000: 633).

The first question I was asked at the hospital wasn't really in the form of one. It was an accusing stare, a shameful nod questioning my presence. “Are you the mother?” “The mother?” If you mean of the man/boy, yes, I am his mother. Take me to him please. The deceptively young pale skin of the sandy-haired resident shuddered at the sight of us together, and he asked again, after he was already told, “Are you the mother?” Yes, I reply, do you need verification of some sort? I couldn't focus at the time on the question. After, hours later, as I wait in the small hot room where families pray while their loved ones are cut open, sewed up, invaded with metal plates and pieces of foreign wire, bone, and thread, the questions reappeared. Was it colour? Was it age? Both?⁴

Questioning the answers

The images keep coming back, invading my dreams, begging me to run them through over and over. What if there had been a gun? The burn, the feel of the gravel under his writhing body on the cement parking lot at the local high school. I wander through the hospital seeing the blood splatter, the tears that scream, later I realize coming from me, the phone calls, the priest, pastor, healer, witch, the telling, the wailing, the death, the funeral, the pain so deep, so sharp in my chest, the crumbling of my soul along with the man/boy with the boy/man spirit still in me. I awake in a sweat, not the kind of too hot sum-

mer nights or long rich love making, the kind of stomach wrenching bowel pain and fear gripping me from within. I awake and glance around the plastic white hospital room, focus in on his breathing, the boy so quickly becoming a man, who is healing, is safe, is nowhere close to death.

Amira de la Garza (2000) writes of the four seasons of ethnography based on spirituality and spherical processes. She states “new ideas are only new in that they revisit where we have already been.” De la Garza continues, “History and tradition are fundamental to our current understanding” (628). From this spiritual base I can begin to see that the white colonialist remains ultimately responsible for the hatred between brown boys/men in the high school parking lot of my son’s injuries. And yet, I must take this slowly and remain confident but open in my accusations. I must be able to take them tentatively, Amira de la Garza cautions. I must be able to take the time to envision the bigger picture, that which is always changing, enlarging to encompass us all in the circle of seasons de la Garza acclimates me to. As I come to see the whole of the imagery, I can situate my own responsibility within it, investigate my own positionality and possibly, that of my man/boy son.

All of this is within my own circle of seasons,⁵ of motherhood, of race awareness, of feminism, of mental stability, of personal soul searching, of myself. There are, in fact, many seasons functioning at once within my life, coexisting at different stages, some in preparation as with the spring of ethnographic work, others in autumn and note taking reflection and still others are in coming to the page, to the public, to the inked surfaces of my life as it is today. And still, it is all tentative. I write this, and as I do, I question it, relying on the feelings I experience as I read de la Garza’s (2000) resonating lyrics, attempting to remain aware that “all experience is part of the whole process” (633). More than that, this fear I have at the tentativeness of it all, the desire that I reach some permanent shining goal, is a reminder that when I choose to slow down and look more closely, I can see that as de la Garza (2000) writes, “respect is about looking at something again, getting to really know it. Not rushing” (638). This is not only valuable in the “field” I immerse myself in as a scholar, it is vital to my life as a whole, but in my mothering in particular. It is easy to say I respect my son, that I trust him, that I am proud of what I have taught him. It is much harder to admit questioning his motives, to discuss my fears and personal prejudice towards his choices, his friends, the choices he made that led to his physical destruction.

According to de la Garza, I am in the spring of personal investigation, struggling to acknowledge and take apart my biases and interrogate the multiplicity of my perspectives, those I trot out to make my presence in the classroom I fear I do not fit in more readily negotiable, and those I am still finding my way too, or do not yet know at all. Thus, I am continuously asking myself, what am I doing, why, for what long-term goal? In many ways, I am at crisis, on multiple levels, as a scholar, as a mother to a son considered Black, as a woman of colour, as a fat white body, as a human.

However, though I am in some form (perhaps constantly) in one of my springs, I am straddling a summer, a time of “intense realizations” according to de la Garza (2000: 642). I struggle toward them, trying to be present in myself at all times, running from the visions, hiding behind trees as I simultaneously peek from between the branches trying to focus on the dance I am in rather than the fear camouflaging itself as a thirst for something else (de la Garza, 2000: 642). This crisis state is a learning experience that tests my courage, my ability to “stay” as de la Garza insists is so imperative to learning to transcend. De la Garza’s theoretic strands help me to name the transformative turn I must take as a scholar, mother, and storyteller. Such transformation leads to understanding, in the pre-ethnographic spring of my soul-self and within the larger context of ethnographic fieldwork over multiple seasons. For sure, I am transforming as a mother, losing my boy as he becomes a man—losing the mothering self I had grown so used to as I must change if I want to keep him close.⁶

I am not yet entering my fall, the autumn of my thinking it all through, my time to harvest. At least not with motherhood, race, or scholarship. However, I question this boundary I draw. I wonder what de la Garza would say to my thinking that one can be going through exploration and realization at the same time. For example, as I continue to explore my racial positionality, as I get scared, and sad, and at times angry at my perceived whiteness, at my only emotional brown-ness, at the lack of my physical being, de la Garza (2000) tells me my faults are valuable, leading toward “honest reflection” when embraced instead of thought of as “unwelcome intrusions” (631). I continue to explore my physicality, just as I have come to the realization, the certainty that I am a brown-souled woman. But, is this all still tentative? Is it dependent on my proximity to my son? Is it all twirling round and round, functioning at the same time in spite of or because of each other? Is balance this shaky? (de la Garza, 2000: 634) How do I know when my weight is equally distributed? What are those balancing scales called?

Choices abound daily, every moment of every day. Which shirt I pull over my cold still tired shoulders, how much of the butter I love that hurts my body to drag across the stiff sourdough that I pretend is “close” to San Francisco’s Colombo, whether the coffee I want so badly is okay if this month’s fertility meds really worked and the baby I dream of is on the way, which country road to take into the town I work in that is ambitiously named a city, what to teach, how to talk, what to disclose about the real me today. Each of these choices has ramifications, consequences, real results. Some are more intense than others but all are related to the next. With my boy/man just out of the hospital, police still questioning, racism ever apparent in the small town station with its wanted pictures containing only dark faces, I chose not to attend the Amira de la Garza retreat as I was required to.

This choice was not easy. Deciding to stay with my son meant that I would have to produce a scholarly piece that would take the place of my being with

the other graduate students. I had to prove academic membership in absentia. Part of this requirement was to send the finished product to Amira de la Garza and answer this list of questions:

What are the areas of my life that are the most “me?”

Writing alone what I want, laying in Sean’s arms, hugging Seanna (does it count as me when other people are involved?), my home-life when no one is home but me, what my dogs see when they are the only ones around. Does sitting in memories of teenage motherhood holding my beautiful brown baby count? Have I avoided this question? It is harder than I thought to decide, to decipher when and if there is a “most me” area.

What questions make me “cringe” when people ask me about myself?

What is my ethnicity, what do I want to do when I finish graduate school, have I tried xxx diet, do I like Iowa. Did I *want* my teenage pregnancy? Would I do it again?

What people “trigger” me or make me feel excessively or obsessively negative OR positive about them?

This is a hard one. At least it is today. I often find myself feeling betrayed because I have attached too soon or gotten too close. I am told orphans do this, and I am a ward of the court foster kid from way back. So, often those people who make me feel very positive about them are the same ones who make me feel quite negative about them. I even monitor to this trait within my mothering of my children. There is something major to be learned here about myself, my boundaries, and my family/friend choices but I feel sad and defensive, stubborn even as I write this now. I feel hurt and alone by my own neediness. Pushing this aside, I am often triggered by white men, white women, well, white people in general, my own racism that I am working to face, most often as I look in the mirror. I am triggered by the news and the overwhelming negativity fueled by flashing dark faces.

Do I prefer spring, summer, fall, or winter?

What patterns in my life would tell me this? I hate summer. Really. I hate to be hot, I actually may dislike the sun when it blinds me with its brightness. So, by some law of opposites, I love the winter. The caterpillar that is a totem to me came to me the first time in a freezing Chicago snow. I especially love the winter here with its cold wind and mushy white roads. I love the squeals of sledding that still erupt in the snow from a boy too soon turned man. It is the only time I love the colour white. I write better in the winter, I finish things in winter (degrees, destructive behavior, bad relationships), and I feel better physically in the winter. Fall is nice with its rain and light blowing of coloured leaves. I especially like fall in northern California. I sit a lot in fall, taking things in, acclimating myself. Spring brings my birthday, Ostara, or the spring equinox, and the blooming of the daffodils, the flowers etched along

my breasts next to my son's name. I feel clean in the spring, renewed yet sad to see the winter go, much like the seasons of motherhood as a teenager becomes adult—it is so clean and fresh outside but sometimes I just miss curling up in the dark cold house with my all too familiar blanket that smells of years of his little boy funk.

How much choice do I feel I have had in telling my life story?

Until recently, very little. My story has been told in the pages of court documents, hospital records, psychiatrist journals since I was 5 years old. I have been discussed in essence through welfare reform, debates about what is good mothering on *NPR*, *CNN*, and countless *Time* covers, and the looks when I am found out as a scholar—how could *this* woman be a Ph.D.? I have recently reclaimed this and struggled through the shame of it all, deciding that the story, my story, from my perspective at this point in time is valuable, needed, and necessary for moving forward. I have set about telling it within my work, both scholarly and otherwise, another sometimes sticky endeavor. Do I consider myself the author of my life? Sometimes, depending on how I let myself be affected by negativity, betrayal (real or imagined), my own fear and tentativeness (which until reading Amira's work I have always categorized as a negative thing).

As I answered each question, I imagined the retreat, driving there, relaxing in the backseat of some car with no responsibility except for myself for two days, journaling as a group of similarly committed people in search of spiritual ethnography, enjoying the light of a Chicago night and laughing over wine with friends, old and new. I tend to romanticize things quite easily, and though I knew this was again probably the case, I fantasized anyway, up until the fight. Then, everything was tested. I knew when I heard the details of the surgery and weeks to come that I would not be leaving my home-turf for at least two months, but I quickly pushed it aside, avoided telling friends, co-workers, myself really. It somehow made the whole thing look worse to the outsider looking in that I kept my commitment to read my work at the local independent bookstore. Of course, I needed that break and it was do-able, being 15 minutes from home. I rationalized that I could not go to Chicago because my boy/man had his first jaw tightening the Friday I would be at the retreat, but in actuality, I could have arranged it differently. I could have scheduled it for Monday, or imparted to my partner the importance of his taking off work to make sure all went well and so on. I didn't, choosing to maintain control, and continue functioning on mother-watch, though it still feels little like a choice.

Sometimes the seasons have no end

Spring and motherhood, birth, rebirth, nurturing, pulling closer, letting go, planning, painting, Partnership, autumn is finally securely here, after 19 years of hell, heartbreak and intense love and pain. Soul mates finally accepting each

other for who we are, not the baggage we carry with us from childhood, parents, lovers, mistakes, mistakes, mistakes. Summer heat warns me to watch my back for the sun can burn my too pale skin in an instant—dissertation formulation, research, required writing in a tone others decide is or is not “scholarly.” Personal writing, coming to fruition as a woman secure in her-self for now, the sign of a warm blanket of snow holding me tight all through the winter? I decide more and more which way to go in all these areas every moment of every day. My motherhood is imbedded in every decision.

Time to write this all down ended too fast and I rushed today, back and forth to my computer, in between an appointment for my boy/man’s wire tightening at the hospital where he asked questions, and sat up straight, very much like a man still in a boy’s body only in my mind and appointments of my own. As I drove him back to my home, the house he had not lived at for months before the attack, choosing the rooms of friends and a girl over his family, I felt sad at the thought that he is getting better and would surely leave soon, this time, he says, for his aunts in California.

I turned to the task at hand momentarily at least, glancing out the window and into the wind as it drifted what is most likely the last of this winter’s snow across my yard, I instantly wondered about my own seasons, what was beginning again, and what was coming to a close? What had I learned from Amira de la Garza that I could have never learned had I made the trip to Chicago in person? I learned first hand “the possibility of punishment for one’s personal involvement with one’s research” (2003a: 79). I came to this assessment of my current life as this very punishment, the price for responsibility to one life and neglect of another. The cost for my life being my research on so many intricate levels. Writing it has proven to be something else. Not some fairytale ending (or beginning) that is stirred by the words themselves—rather, the *doing* of the work, the realization that I am in a circular motion, working toward a more rounded self. This finally dawned on me in a more believable way as I thought about the readings, contemplated the writing and drove through the winter mix of snow and hope toward dinner with an academic friend.

I found myself explaining to my colleague that I was reading this work about the four seasons of ethnography and had she ever thought that our lives were really very much the same? She looked at me kind of strange, nodded as though she knew of what I spoke, and moved on to asking how my son’s treatments were going (was this work and my son even connected for her? Without her knowing perhaps?). I knew that she would have to see to believe, that she was what de la Garza calls “too familiar” (2003a: 77) with the language and I smiled, glancing again into the winter of my mind, snow blowing by to confuse me and disorient my own sense of belonging. I sighed and silently repeated to myself one of my favorite lines from de la Garza’s “An Ethics for Postcolonial Ethnography,” where Amira de la Garza (2003a) asserts, “voice is the clear channeling of honest mindful experience” (83).

And yet, directions, like weather, shift

Above, narrative emerges as a tool not only for further self-reflection, but as a means to take apart theory of spirituality, experience, and contested identities; in this case mothering, race, and academia. My story shows how race, age, class, and motherhood are all read within norms both inside and outside of the academy. And when these are read on my body as a teen mother of a non-white son, I am questioned. Academia, though seemingly progressive in many instances, is not immune to the questioning of women with children. Honest and painful, my truth coupled with de la Garza's theory succeeds in pushing me to stronger assertions about race and motherhood for sure.

As I said in the introduction, I have long felt the uneasiness of my mutual identities as mother and scholar. However, it was not until this palpable clashing of those two worlds that I recognized what the conflict really meant—that I had to make choices. And those choices have ramifications. Choosing to stay with my son did not mean I was no longer a scholar, it meant that I was performing a balancing act that opened me up to questioning. Simultaneously, I became more entranced with my work, and all that was left to talk about in terms of race, class, and motherhood specifically. This was the moment when that long held tension felt so clear and visible—to everyone exposed to it.

Yet, I feel the tug of acceptance. What if my “story” is not deemed influential in the theoretical realm I occupy at my institution? What if the connections I am making do not seem to traverse the boundaries of my life? On the other hand, what if, as I assert with the above work, narratives of experience coupled with theory produce new interventions into current frameworks within race and gender scholarship in particular; urging us to question our place in the system of politic laden academia that can often still present mothering in prescribed troupes and conflated imagery? Deemed experimental but highly influential in tone and content, narrative induced theory has the means to change the current literature, if given the opportunity.

Special thanks to Monica Brasile, Aimee Mapes, and Kats Mendoza for their support and guidance—you are the best posse a mama scholar could have.

I shift between boy/man and man/boy at different points throughout here as a signifier of both my reluctance to see my son as a man when he is still my little boy in memory and as a point of clarification in life as a mother and son; he sees himself as a man, he acts sometimes as a boy, he was hit as a man, hurts like a boy and etc.... These words are also intricately connected to race, the “man” often white, who controls much amidst this story, the police, doctors, and so on. “Boy” is a term problematic in its use—rooted in slavery in the United States and utilized as a degrading term to signify lower status in terms of race and masculinity. I reclaim “boy” for my own use here—as a tool in my mind reminding me of his younger carefree days, those that changed

forever with this violent experience.

²My son is described as brown, black, and “of colour” in this piece. A reader asked me recently why the shift, and didn’t I think I needed to stick with one descriptor—was he brown or black? Was he African American or Latino? My son and I discussed this as we read the piece together. He asked that the ambiguity remain for several reasons. One, he is more often than not misread. Two, he resides within a personal community that sees the issues of Latino and African American men as intertwined (not the same, but connected) in such a way that he is resistant to easy descriptive separation. And three, as the events unfolded through this event, he was treated differently based on the moment-by-moment racial ideologies of the people involved. Thus, he asked that the tension between the racial descriptors in this writing remain, as much for the reader to question their need to know specifics as for his own questioning of self.

³As a mother of a child of colour, I am consistently in flux, questioning my own positionality as a woman with white skin who feels such an allegiance with and connection to brown and black tones, I am called trans-racial jokingly by friends who know my story, a woman of colour trapped in a white body who mothers in a distinctly non-white manner. This is all highly controversial and can’t be adequately addressed in this piece. Instead I leave the questioning of such identities and intersections to the reader—I only ask that judgment be suspended long enough to truly investigate the possibilities outside of our racial comfort zones.

⁴As a young mother, I am often questioned about my connection to my oldest son in particular. As he ages, we are thought to be dating, or looked at with strange curiousness in many situations. Add in the racial ambiguity of my sons look and the ways whiteness is inscribed and questioned on my body and attitude and discomfort ensues for those feeling a need to know. Nevertheless, usually I am not directly questioned (verbally at least)—the accusatory tone (was I lying; was I a girlfriend trying to stay in the unit?) made the questioning all the more invasive and upon reflection, stirred my anger.

⁵I embark in this section on connection making between my existence and nature—a theme prevalent in Amira de la Garza’s work and one that I found running constantly through my mind while in vigil at the hospital. It was as though the scholarship I had been reading in preparation for the missed retreat was actually there for me in anticipation of something larger, this crisis in my mothering life. I am still unable to talk of de la Garza’s work without talking of the beating—and I rarely mention the attack without qualifying it with theories I took from my readings of the time—mothering in theory and practice taken to new levels.

⁶Again, I find it hard to separate my work on motherhood, race, and poverty from the mothering I experience with my son. Just as I must sometimes change my position or negotiate contested terrain as a scholar, I find myself at a crossroads where I must let my son go if I want to remain in a place of openness

with him. Should I hold on to antiquated mothering models of his childhood, I will lose his trust. He will not share with a mother who is resistant, judging him, or condemning his choices. Easier said than done on my part—just as with the embracing of new ideas when it means imbedded knowledge must be reconfigured.

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