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Three poems on trauma and recovery

When I started writing for and about my children, I realised I was watching them grow beyond their actual biography. On the one hand, I felt compelled to restore for them the memory that their biography as uprooted adoptees could not provide. On the other hand, I also wanted to create for them a vision of the possibility of future blooming as empowered beings. In a nutshell, I used biographical writing to offer them roots and wings. For this reason, while addressing my children, my texts strongly resist the basic requirement of literature for young readers to define the age range of the addressee. Some of my texts address my children as babies, even if I wrote them as they were already older (working on roots also means allowing children to catch up on what they missed), whereas others are clearly meant for them as grown-ups (working on wings implies seeing the potential adult in the child and providing a sense of agency for them to have the future in their own hands).

Here I'd like to present three poems on trauma and recovery.

Hey, people, life is so cool! is based on my daughter's biography and conveys the inner struggle of young children who had a rough start in life and did not receive the love and nurturing care any baby needs and deserves. When a child arrives into the family through adoption, the new parents have a reason to celebrate because they have been waiting for that child for long, but for the children themselves the arrival in a new family is a new trauma adding to their previous losses, so that they have ahead a long and difficult way towards comfort and happiness.

Welcome child is a simple poem to be chanted to any child who did not get a proper welcome into life. Do not forget to accompany the refrain with clapping hands and a bright smile. As developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner notably stated, “every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him or her”.

Ibeji tricks is another poem about adoption, but also one about heritage and about magic. Adoptive children cannot choose their destiny. Obviously, no child can choose their destiny, but for children who are adopted internationally, this sense of one's life being at the mercy of someone else's decision is even stronger. This poem therefore provides children with a sense of agency by creating a narrative where children have their destiny in their own hands (here it is the child who chooses the parents). At the same time, it celebrates the African heritage of Black diasporas by drawing on Yoruba ancestral beliefs about spirit children. Since my children came in “double pack”, the Yoruba myths about *ibeji* (twins) provided the perfect inspiration. So, in the poem a baby spirit is on the look for a home. Since a spirit is too big to fit in one body, that's how it comes that twins are born. According to the Yoruba tradition, Taiwo, the firstborn, is extroverted and adventurous, while Kehinde, the second born and older twin, is more withdrawn and reflective. However, they are part of a single identity. The image of the spirit baby allowed me to create a narrative of agency and to give a positive twist to the displacement and the struggle for survival of children who have been uprooted.

Hey, people, life is so cool!

Do you know who I am?
Kainene is my name.
I was born a fighter,
impossible to tame.

Since I was a baby
I struggled for my life.
I was left all alone,
But I never lost my pride.

I am a buffalo soldier
fighting on arrival.
In the mess of my story
the whole world is my rival.

First of all
you have to know
my memory
was lost long ago.

I will never know
who brought me into this world.
So it all starts with me
in the absence of ancestry.

In the children's home
I was the Queen.
I would never surrender,
kept high my self-esteem.

One day a woman came
and said she was my mother.
Her touch was soft,
her voice was tender,
but she couldn't reach me either.

This was yet another stranger
who came to threaten me.
I fought with tooth and claw
against my unchosen destiny.
(Once abandoned, always abandoned.
Love was not my thing).

The day I crossed the ocean,
stolen from what I knew,
I screamed so loud and wild
I was like born anew.
(But hey, I didn't know yet,
that was to be my second life
and that it would be cool someday
without having to lose my pride).

It called itself a family:
a man, a woman and two kids.
But it didn't look like anything
that could satisfy my needs.

A panther was hidden
under my baby skin,
prepared to attack
whoever tried to reach within.

My new parents were at loss,
didn't know what to do.
All their love could not make up
for all the things I knew.

I knew life can be tough,
a mother hurt her child.
I knew there is no innocence
and people can be wild.

Then slowly something happened,
I started having fun.
This woman I was fighting
in spite of all became my mum.

It all came by itself,
between one struggle and another.
One day my parents said:
Got it, baby, you're a fighter.

And so I live my life,
laughing out loud
while struggling to have it my way
among the crazy crowd.

I have folks who love me,
friends and family all around,
days light as balloons,
it is as good as it sounds.

So let me tell you,
as happy as a fool,
that in spite of all,
hey, people, life is so cool!

Ibeji Tricks

I have many friends like me
Who come from somewhere else
Their parents looked for them
Across the universe.

One was born in Bangkok
Another in Bamako
Two more in Bogotá
And many many many
Like myself in Kiskeya.

My mother always tells me
That I'm her destiny
She travelled long and wide
To find precisely me.

I wasn't in her belly
She kept me in her heart
I was her spirit baby
From whom never she would part.

You see that I was hidden
In a complex geography,
But my mum had drawn her world map
And in the middle there was me.

This me, surprise surprise,
Was not meant to be an I!
It came in double package,
The cherry on the pie!

Kehinde follows Taiyewo,
It is the ibeji's law.
Yoruba or something else
It happens always so.

Two halves of one spirit
One body not enough
In this way I was born
A double rough and tough.

I as a twofold being
Boy and girl
That's what you see
Crossed the ocean in two bodies
To join my family.

When they say I'm adopted
It is that they don't know
That I belong to Mum and Dad
From long long time ago.

Cause I'm a spirit baby
I was already there
When they were little like me
Had not yet become a pair.

I brought the two together
Settled into their heart
Had them fight against all odds
To track me on the chart.

I crossed so many rivers
Travelled so many roads
When I was still a spirit
Looking for a good home.

And finally I found one
There are many like me
Spirit children from far away
Carving their destiny.

Some of them are ibeji
Some other fit in one
But we are all survivors
And warriors on the run.

Welcome Child

Welcome child
Welcome child
Welcome welcome
Welcome child!

For thee I sing
This welcome song
To heal and cheer
Repair the wrong.

You did not get it
When it was time
We'll do it now
And make it rhyme.

Welcome child
Welcome child
Welcome welcome
Welcome child!

When you were born
We were apart
You could not hear
My loving heart.

But now you're there
Forever mine
So I say welcome
And make it shine.

Welcome child
Welcome child
Welcome welcome
Welcome child!

I'm glad you're here
I'm glad you've come
I am so happy
To be your mum!

Because you're special
Because you're precious
Because I love you
Above all creatures.

Welcome child
Welcome child
Welcome welcome
Welcome child!

For thee I sing
This welcome song
To celebrate
Our endless bond

And like a ritual
To make your day
I'll sing to you
And make it sway.

Welcome child! Welcome child!
Welcome welcome, welcome child!

Sabrina Brancato is a scholar in Postcolonial Studies and African Literatures and Cultures. She writes essays, poems and short stories. With six books to her name, she is the author of *Afro-Europe: Texts and Contexts* and the editor of *Afro-European Configurations: Readings and Projects*. Her latest books and projects (in Italian, French, English and Spanish) are aimed at spreading notions of Black Consciousness and Critical Whiteness among young readers and non-academic audiences. To stress the plural backgrounds that shape her views and the multiple sources she draws inspiration from, Sabrina defines herself as a MELTING POeT.