

Hating Girls

An Intersectional Survey of Misogyny

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Resistance to Gender-Based Violence and Femicide

Mary Sue Barnett

It was a bright, summer afternoon with the warm wind flowing through the open windows of the car. I heard, “*Where are you going?*” so distinctly that I thought my friend in the car had asked me a question. But she was looking out her window without having said a word. The words so clearly spoken, and heard, I was briefly startled to realize no person in the car was speaking to me. In a few moments I realized I was experiencing something from my own intimate depths—so quiet and still I had been at the retreat center, I was deeply attentive. To experience such a lovely query, so undeniably personal while at once transcendent, my heart began to hold the question, the very sound of the words, on that day and into my future. My listening heart, or mystic heart, is what guides my priesthood, chaplaincy, and human rights advocacy for women and girls today. As this chapter’s focus is an exploration of a mystical healing¹ response to women and girls traumatized by misogynist violence, woven throughout are accounts of my inner experiences, poetic outreach, and embodied resistance that followed that day of hearing, *Where are you going?*

1 Inner Experiences

Hiking along a remote forest trail in early spring, blackbirds and bluebirds singing into the silence, I suddenly perceive a wailing in the woods. I feel it within my being. It rises from my core while also rising from over there, off the trail, down in the woods, in a clearing. The wailing comes from a horrified woman, a victim of violence. Though fiercely wanting to live, she is dying. Desperate to be heard, she

1 Mystical Christianity is a secret well-kept and does not serve empire, or patriarchy, or churchiness, says Matthew Fox. Mysticism is a launching into the depths of the unconscious, into the deep feminine, wisdom, compassion, and heart. It is a deep dive into one’s self/Self where one travels an intimate path toward and with the Divine. I agree with Fox that deep down, each person is a mystic and every mystic is a healer, a conviction that is central to this author’s invitation to the reader. I will use the terms mystic and contemplative interchangeably. For more on mystical Christianity, see Matthew Fox, *Christian Mystics: 365 Readings and Meditations* (Novato, California, 2011).

screams from a crouched position, her cries carried by the wind upward and outward. Though terrifying, I am deep at peace as I walk among the prairie bluestem and periwinkle, purple ground blossoms rising through a blanket of dried leaves, enjoying dappled shade under a wide blue horizon. Tranquility is in knowing that the wild cry of the Holy is sounding from within the very heart of the woman's wailing, summoning, "Step off the trail, descend into the clearing, draw near!"
Spring 2020

A victim and survivor of misogynist violence may be like a female Eastern bluebird that sits at the top of a dead tree—from her barren, lonely perch she sings a distress song. She longs for an end to her isolation and for the dawning of human connections when love can reach her traumatized depths. I open with my experience recounted above to share an available mystical path for healing and resistance in a world that normalizes the ontological inferiority of females, a global landscape where women and girls are terrorized by harassment, sexual assault, stalking, rape, domestic violence, trafficking, and femicide. I invite readers, particularly Christian religious leaders, to turn inward and follow a path of descent into one's own being. In sharing this mystical experience, I hope to herald a way of plumbing the traumatized depths of the soul for redemption, not yet seen nor heard, but longed for. I see it as a gateway into an individual and communal soul space where the female victim and survivor is centered, where healing presence and voices are called to gather around her, and where mystical hope draws hearts to transcend misogynist devaluation of female humanity. This chapter will include guideposts for this inward sojourn including biblical lament, the early Christian desert dwellers, insights from Beverly Lanzetta's *via feminina*, and the wisdom of victims and survivors.

Misogynist physical, sexual, and spiritual assaults perpetrated on a female human being in the world today cause extreme suffering. Biblical lament literature can open doorways of the heart and can shine light on the extremities of female suffering in a misogynist world. If one listens deeply, the multimillennial-old holy words can awaken one to crucial, sacred feminine truths today. The ancient psalmist cries deeply inward to the self, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?"²

Today, how lonely it is for a female human being, raped by a man, to shriek within herself as she feels reduced to a shadowy abyss. The psalmist's plea is also directed to the Holy, "O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for You; my flesh faints for You, as in a dry and weary land where there is no

² Psalm 42:5 (New Revised Standard Version).

water.”³ Today, how painful it is for a female human being trafficked and raped by men, to yearn for Divine Presence as her body, her life, is stolen from her control, from her rightful place in the land of the living.

The ancient city of Jerusalem, personified as Daughter Zion, “weeps bitterly in the night with tears on her cheeks” for “all her gates are desolate.”⁴ Today, how terrifying it is for a female human being brutalized by an intimate partner, to feel completely closed in on herself with no horizon toward which her being can breathe, stretch, and become. Daughter Zion cries out to the people, “Is it nothing to you, all who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow.”⁵ Today, how agonizing it is for a female human being stalked like prey by a man, to feel cut off from safety, untethered in a chaotic existence. Daughter Zion cries directly to the Holy One to see her to see, “how distressed I am, my stomach churns, my heart is wrung within me.”⁶ Today, how horrifying it is for a female human being suffering misogynist assaults to her mind, body, and soul, that she feels contemptible to her God.

The writing of this essay coincides with the 2020 Covid-19 global pandemic when on Sunday, April 5th, Palm Sunday, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for a ceasefire in the horrifying global surge in domestic violence directed towards women and girls following global Covid-19 lockdowns. Guterres said, “Peace is not just the absence of war. Many women under lockdown for Covid-19 face violence where they should be safest: in their homes.”⁷ He urged all governments to put women’s safety first as they respond to the pandemic. Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Nguka announced that as countries around the world locked down, women’s shelters and domestic violence helplines were reporting record calls for help. Women of diverse ethnicity, race, and class sought relief from the terrors of violent men. Government authorities, women’s human rights activists, and civil society partners have flagged increasing reports of domestic violence during this crisis, and heightened demand for emergency shelter. She stated, “We see a shadow pandemic growing; violence against women ... Even before COVID-19 existed, domestic violence was already one of the greatest human rights violations.”⁸

3 Psalm 63:1 (New Revised Standard Version).

4 Lamentations 1:2,4 (New Revised Standard Version).

5 Lamentations 1:12 (New Revised Standard Version).

6 Lamentations 1:20 (New Revised Standard Version).

7 Daniel Klapper, “UN SG calls for domestic violence ‘ceasefire’ after surge related to COVID-19 lockdowns,” April 7, 2020. jurist.org.

8 Phumzile Mlambo-Nguka, “Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic,” April 6, 2020. unwomen.org.

Gender based violence and femicide is a global scourge rendering the world a parched and weary land for so many women and girls. During the spring and summer months of 2020, terror struck women and girls. Rebekah Workman was murdered in her home by her husband,⁹ Karleigh Miller was murdered by her boyfriend in her car,¹⁰ Breonna Taylor was murdered in her home by police;¹¹ three femicides perpetrated in Louisville, Kentucky. Nineteen year-old Black Lives Matter activist, Oluwatoyin Salau was sexually assaulted and murdered in Florida.¹² Fort Hood soldier Vanessa Guillen, who had been sexually harassed, went missing and was later found murdered (#IAmVanessaGuillen movement surges online with hundreds sharing stories of sexual trauma in the military).¹³ A sixteen year old girl was gang raped in Israel while on vacation.¹⁴ Daisy Coleman committed suicide at twenty three after suffering for years with the nightmare of having been sexually assaulted at fourteen years old in Missouri while unconscious and discarded afterwards on her front lawn where she lay lightly clothed for hours in twenty-two degree weather.¹⁵ A thirteen year old girl in Malawi was found screaming for help in a bathroom after she was sexually assaulted by a Catholic Church catechist.¹⁶ Brayla Stone, a seventeen year old transgender girl was murdered in Arkansas, a victim of transmisogynoir femicide. Advocates continue to raise their voices that transgender women of color face multiple forms of discrimination.¹⁷ Sydney Sutherland, a twenty-five year old nurse, was abducted, sexually assaulted, and murdered in Arkansas while out jogging near her home.¹⁸ Nineteen year

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- 9 Gil Corsey, "Louisville murder-suicide case underscores city's fears of uptick in domestic violence," April 14, 2020, wdrb.com.
 - 10 Billy Kobin, "Police: Louisville man charged with fatally shooting woman at Seventh and Hill streets," June 5, 2020, courier-journal.com.
 - 11 Darcy Costello and Tessa Duvall, "Minute by minute: What happened the night Louisville police shot Breonna Taylor," September 15, 2020, courier-journal.com.
 - 12 Giulia McDonnell Nieto del Rio, "Oluwatoyin Salau, Missing Black Lives Matter Activist, Is Found Dead," June 15, 2020, nytimes.com.
 - 13 Johnny Diaz, Maria Cramer, and Christina Morales, "What We Know About the Death of Vanessa Guillen," August 14, 2020, nytimes.com.
 - 14 David M. Halbfinger, "Vacationing Israeli Teen Says She Was Gang-Raped, Shocking the Nation," August 20, 2020, nytimes.com.
 - 15 Lili Loofbourow, "Why Do We Think 'Believing' Rape Victims Is Enough?" August 13, 2020, slate.com.
 - 16 Nyasa Times Reporter, "Catholic catechist arrested for sexual assault on 13-year-old church choir member," August 20, 2020, nyasatimes.com.
 - 17 Elliott Kozuch, "HRC Mourns Brayla Stone, Black Trans Girl Killed in Arkansas," July 1, 2020, hrc.org.
 - 18 Steve Helling, "Suspect in Killing of Ark. Jogger Allegedly Saw Her While Driving, Then Doubled Back to Abduct Her," August 25, 2020, people.com.

old sex trafficking victim Chrystul Kizer awaiting trial for killing her perpetrator was finally released on a \$400,000 bond after spending two years in a Wisconsin jail.¹⁹ Amnesty International reports that women and girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are at increased risk of suffering violations of their rights.²⁰ Tatyana Moskalkova, Russia's High Commissioner for Human Rights, reported the number of calls to domestic abuse hotlines jumped from just more than 6,000 in March 2020 to more than 13,000 in April 2020.²¹ Isabel Cabanillas, a twenty-six year old women's rights activist was murdered in Juarez, Mexico and feminist collectives chanted in the streets, *Ni una más, ni una más, ni una asesinada más, Not one more, not one more murder*.²² And twelve year old Napali, Samjhana BK, was kidnapped then raped and murdered inside a temple near her house.²³ In the first six months of this year, hundreds of thousands of females around the world have been shaken to their core and continue to suffer traumatic reverberations caused by misogynist violence, sorrowing in their depths and crying for relief and compassionate connection. So many have been stolen from the earth, leaving painful voids to be reckoned with.

Misogynist violence is an attack on female humanity and divinity. In a female's spiritual depths where she suffers the trauma, God as a female suffers there with her. Christian leaders around the world today can boldly avail themselves to the safety, relief, and healing of women and girls. Nothing less than a radical spiritual response will reach the suffering depths and losses, and nothing less than a radical spiritual response will drive out the evils of misogyny. This radical spiritual response begins with a hitherto unknown sojourn into one's inner self. It is a path of significant personal risk where the Holy leads one along the terrible way of undoing. Although it is a path leading into new depths of Holy mystery and love, the misogynist world, including male-dominant Christianity, will disparage and reject those who embark on this sacred sojourn.

As stated in the description of my mystical experience above, the wailing comes from my experience of the Holy, the Holy Who hears the cries of women

19 Ryan Brooks, "Chrystul Kizer, A 19-Year-Old Sex Trafficking Victim Who Killed Her Abuser, Has Been Released From Jail," June 23, 2020, buzzfeednews.com.

20 Amnesty International, "Sub-Saharan Africa: Government Responses to COVID-19 should guarantee the protection of women and girls' rights," May 7, 2020, amnesty.org.

21 Moscow Times Reporter, "Domestic Abuse in Russia Doubles Amid Virus Lockdown: Official," May 5, 2020, themoscowtimes.com.

22 Ecleen Luzmila Caraballo, " 'Ni Una Mas': Hundreds Demand Justice for Isabel Cabanillas and Countless Other Femicide Victims," January 27, 2020, remezcla.com.

23 Jagat Khadka, "Victim's family does not wish to see her body before culprit is arrested," September 27, 2020, myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com.

and girls and knows intimately their suffering (Exodus 3:7), Who, compared to light, is found more radiant (Wisdom 7: 30), Who bears sufferings, and through Whose wounds, healing happens (Isaiah 53: 3–5). It is the Holy in female cruciform that echoes the terrifying scream from within the bodies and souls of women and girls who are diminished, desperate, and ravaged. It is the Holy in female cruciform Who calls for courageous, sacred sojourners *to step off the trail and to descend into the clearing*, to walk a steep path of descent into one's inner life. This path of soul wilderness, though likely a fierce unsaying of one's life and vocation as it is, holds within it a broad horizon. In heeding the call of the Holy in female cruciform, one becomes uniquely opened to a radical communal love with power to transform deserts of misogynist terror so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more (Psalm 10:18). Rather than deserts of sexual assault, rape, and femicide, landscapes will become lush forests and gardens of vivid color where women and girls breathe, speak, sing, and dance as fully safe and fully free in their female selves. The Holy in female cruciform sounds a sharp, seemingly impossible, paradoxical call; enter female terror with her/Her to heal it.

In my young adulthood I volunteered for a Rape Crisis Center in Louisville. I sat with sexual assault, molestation, and rape victims in hospital emergency rooms and responded to calls on the crisis line. Called at any hour of the day or night, I was present, bearing witness to her trauma while allowing inner space for my own. It was my hope to bring a perceivable gentleness and respect into the hospital room or over the phone. The muteness of victims was consistently haunting. Even over the phone, I would often simply offer a listening presence to someone who needed loving human connection as she fought to survive. I would hear breathing, soft cries, and so few words. In this I witnessed how misogynist violence, its terror and shock, thrust women and teen girls into inner chaos where their voice, once a vibrant expression of their unique selfhood and deepest being, was submerged, by force, somewhere deep inside.

It was during these years that my understanding of *Wisdom Sophia*,²⁴ began to shift. For some years prior, I had experienced an awakening to the Divine Feminine as overwhelmingly liberating mystery and personal joy. At one point in my young adulthood I experienced a vivid image of an inner door. Upon choosing to open this door into the soul, I felt my existence affirmed with benevolent expansiveness. There are no words for this joy. The divine benevolence

24 Biblical Wisdom, Sophia in Greek, is “simply God, revealing and known,” and “an expression of the most intense divine presence in the world.” Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1992), 91, 92.

of expansive light and possibility within my being was a beautiful grace. In my being I felt profoundly *summoned by Her* as though my own female face and body were enfolded within an inexplicably *intimate*, female divine presence. And then the comfort of this intimacy began to evolve into something new. As I grew into this grace, I began to feel more deeply over time an irreconcilable dissonance between the freedom of the Divine Feminine dwelling within and the caustic misogyny of the world with its male-dominant Christianity. The following lines are woven throughout a poem I wrote during those years; *Clenched firmly and fiercely in Her fist is my red, fleshy heart—and the shift is realized—Wisdom is Struggle, is War, is the Feminine on the Battleground—She blinds from the inside out, from the outside in, all worlds are suddenly, rudely different—in this irrevocable cocoon—the force of Her fight terrifies my life.*

To live into this quaking within my own soul meant becoming distanced from the church where pervasive extremities of female suffering are silenced and perpetuated. Many of my horizons in the world closed, my inner light went dim, and my inner spaciousness constricted painfully. I was left with a solitary cry at my center, at one moment a cry for myself, another moment a cry for another woman's trauma, and another moment, a cascade of weeping that seemed to come from everywhere. It was indeed a wilderness, a barren cathedral, a lone female Eastern bluebird singing a distress song from a lifeless tree. Sitting with female victims during rape exams was my contemplative ascent to the Divine Feminine roaring Her call through my marrow. It was my gradual undoing, a preparation for the strengthening of my heart.

The Divine Feminine is the crucible of munificent and sublime care of female humanity. She Who Is configured to victims of gender-based violence and femicide, invites Her people into the fire. With unimaginable fierceness, She wails from the woods, summoning healers to be near her/Her. Desert Christians in the early centuries of the church chose to dwell in desert landscapes to find God in their center. They detached themselves from the influence of culture and institution. Desert landscapes of rocky terrain, dangerous clefts, and frightening nothingness provided the opportunity for Desert Mothers and Fathers to be still and to hear the Holy speak to the heart. Belden Lane writes that amazing things happen on the edges; "Demons are cast out, lepers are healed, the blind are given sight. Who knows what might happen out there on the boundaries, in the "wilderness," in the wild unpredictability of desolate places?"²⁵ As early Christian mystics settled in the dust of the desert

25 Belden C. Lane, *Desert Spirituality and Cultural Resistance: From Ancient Monks To Mountain Refugees* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & Stock, 2011), 22,23.

to become attuned to the stark call of the Holy, feminist contemplatives today can pitch a tent in their own hearts to become attuned to the wailing of the Holy in female cruciform, she/She who is crouched over in anguish. This is the edge, the desolate place, the liminal space. This is the chaotic unknown where the Holy calls for radical trust, trust that in surrendering one's heart to the suffering, this liminal space of deep interiority will unearth the profound worthiness of femaleness and the feminine, finally unburied from misogynist ruins.

As a young woman making the inner descent, my extended times of solitude and silence led my heart to edges where I *pitched a tent*. For instance, during the early 1990's when Bosnian women and girls were targeted with systematic gang rape, "some as young as twelve or fifteen years old—who endured unimaginable horrors around them,"²⁶ I listened in silence. I felt the horror in silence. The stillness of my heart opened me to their devastation. With full respect for their Muslim faith, the spiritual impact of their suffering in my core, took the form of my faith. These words are woven through a poem I wrote then; *Her Body is in the Garden where the olives grow. Her body is on the kitchen floor, in the desert, in the emergency room, on the dirt floor, in the desert. It is Her. It is You. It is Me—Her Body is on the tree—to reach Her grave in moments prematurely, unnaturally—the girl, the young woman, the old woman—Her feet have memorized the terrain of Golgotha.* Connecting in femaleness, and cleaving in spirit across faith traditions, one can *be* for another.

For women particularly who feel called to embark on an inner descent into the wilderness seeking spiritual nearness to female victims of gender-based violence and femicide, it is important to point out Beverly J. Lanzetta's book *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology* as a rich resource. She writes of the Divine Feminine as breaking into history unveiling a gift for women; "the feminine heart of divinity and the spiritual equality of women."²⁷ She describes the *via feminina*, as a new mystical path in which the undoing or the unsaying of a woman's life involves the explicit work of pulling up "the sources of misogyny imbedded in their souls."²⁸ It is a holy negation of misogynist falsehoods and distortions planted in a woman's and girl's soul. The self-emptying of misogynist toxins is a path of powerful self-discovery in which a woman can begin to see her own face, her own soul held in the light of the Divine Feminine. The light is also a darkness as the process of deep healing

26 Ian Black, "Serbs 'enslaved Muslim women at rape camps,'" March 21, 2000, theguardian.com.

27 Beverly J. Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 13.

28 Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom*, 13.

is strenuous and undergoing transformations is disorienting. Related to this, Lanzetta writes, “A woman’s dark night requires a breaking and tearing of thought patterns and ways of knowing and loving that perpetuate a fundamental falsehood that women *by nature* are less.”²⁹ Ursula King lauds Lanzetta’s *Radical Wisdom* as innovative, pointing out that the *via feminina* necessarily transforms or subverts “the traditional spiritual journey, by turning in two directions,” “inward toward the divine center of the self, and outward toward the world.”³⁰ King and Lanzetta agree that the *via feminina* must include the naming and eliminating of spiritual oppression and myriad forms of gender-based violence against women. The *via feminina* is the mystical pathway to union with the Holy in female cruciform.

Philosopher Ann J. Cahill explores the concept of derivatization in her book, *Overcoming Objectification: A Carnal Ethics*, as portraying, rendering, understanding, or approaching “a being solely or primarily as the reflection, projection, or expression of another being’s identity, desires, fears, etc. The derivatized subject becomes reducible in all relevant ways to the derivatizing subject’s existence—other elements of her being are disregarded, ignored, or undervalued.”³¹ A derivatized woman is required to mirror men’s desires, actions and choices. Beyond those desires, she explains, “a derivatized woman cannot exist, cannot speak, and cannot act.”³² If a woman resists derivatization by claiming a subjectivity beyond the male derivatizer, she is met with male anger and retribution. In sexual derivatization of women, a woman’s body is not targeted and exploited as a *thing*, but “as the sight of her sentience and her potential for agency.”³³ Cahill states that as derivatization involves reducing one being to the subjectivity of another, “then non-derivatization as an ethical imperative demands a mutual, dynamic interaction.”³⁴ Any person traveling the mystical path of inner descent toward nearness with the Wailing Woman, the female Holy in cruciform, will necessarily undergo a profound undoing of sexual derivatization where female subjectivity is never subjected to male subjectivity. The summoning power of the Divine Feminine is the evocation of love and respect for femaleness and the feminine.

29 Ibid., 134.

30 Ursula King, “Pneumatophores for Nurturing a Different Kind of Love,” in *Through Us, With Us, In Us: Relational Theologies in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lisa Usherwood and Elaine Bellchambers (London: SCM Press, 2011), 57.

31 Ann J. Cahill, *Overcoming Objectification: A Carnal Ethics*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 32.

32 Cahill, *Overcoming Objectification*, 34.

33 Ibid., 35.

34 Ibid., 54.

2 Poetic Outreach

Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my skin.

I am like an owl of the wilderness, like a little owl of the waste places.

I lie awake; I am like a lonely bird on the housetop.

All day long my enemies taunt me; those who deride me use my name for a curse.

For I eat ashes like bread, and mingle tears with my drink.³⁵

In her book, *Is Rape a Crime? A Memoir, an Investigation, and a Manifesto*, Michelle Bowdler describes herself in a police car after being raped by two men; “That I am dead seems completely probable.”³⁶ She then describes her rape trauma during the rape kit exam at the hospital emergency room; “I am above my body on the ceiling once more, looking down on a person I do not recognize. She is a tiny girl with no control, eyes covered, feeling like nothing more than an object for the second time in less than a few hours.”³⁷ Equally courageous, Karyn L. Friedman shares in her memoir, *One Hour In Paris: A True Story Of Rape And Recovery*, that years after being raped she continued to feel unsafe in her body as though her body was always under threat. And further, “I was having trouble breathing. I have been plagued with this affliction ever since I was raped.”³⁸ She explains that not being able to catch a deep breath, “remains one of my clearest indications that my body is in distress.” Friedman points to the pervasiveness of rape and the subsequent distress of sexual violence survivors who are pressured to remain anonymous and closeted in a society that blames and shames them. A profoundly generous survivor, she writes, “My hope is that through focusing intimately inward I am able to relate something that others can connect with.”³⁹

Chanel Miller writes of the understanding experienced among survivors in, *Know My Name: A Memoir*, as a connection forged in the haunting aloneness following the assault. For her, it was, “Something slipping out of you. Where did I go. What was taken. It is terror swallowed inside silence.”⁴⁰ She describes

35 Psalm 102: 5–9 (New Revised Standard Version).

36 Michelle Bowdler, *Is Rape A Crime? A Memoir, an Investigation, and a Manifesto* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2020), 16.

37 Bowdler, *Is Rape A Crime?*, 23.

38 Karyn L. Friedman, *One Hour In Paris: A True Story of Rape and Recovery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 46.

39 Friedman, *One Hour in Paris*, ix.

40 Chanel Miller, *Know My Name: A Memoir*, (Viking, 2019), 6.

this aloneness not as pain, hysteria, or crying, but rather, “It is your insides turning to cold stones.”⁴¹ Miller, sexually assaulted behind a dumpster while intoxicated, writes courageously, sharing with her readers details of the intimate harm done to her. Delicately she explains, “After the assault, I felt this need to be touched, but wanted nothing to do with *invade, inject, insert, inside*, only wanted the intimacy of being wrapped up safely in something.”⁴²

In her essay, “Dead to the World: Rape, Unconsciousness, and Social Media,” Cressida J. Heyes offers a philosophical response to society’s trivialization of sexual assault and rape committed against unconscious women. She says for women, sleep “can be a state where we are not self-conscious or surveilled and where we can get a respite from the anxieties of bodily exposure,”⁴³ and she argues “that the sexual assault of a *sleeping* woman threatens her most vulnerable state of anonymity, and her ability to retreat into the night.”⁴⁴ When raped while unconscious, drugged, or sedated, it “exploits and reinforces a victim’s lack of agency and exposes her body in ways that make it especially difficult for her to reconstitute herself as a subject.”⁴⁵

Words of hope and strength spoken by survivors are words that “have been forged in the crucible of scorching turmoil.”⁴⁶ Bowdler, Friedman, and Miller are three survivors, who from the depths of human bravery, have chosen to open themselves to the world. In telling their unique experiences of sexual trauma and the vicissitudes of the healing process, they add vivid, sacred testimony to a global desert landscape of profound body/soul suffering of women and girls. Sharing their inner geography of terror and trauma, survivors are *the* wisdom figures, *the* spiritual leaders, *the* desert mothers with power and knowledge to guide twenty-first century Christian leaders who hear the divine call to pitch a tent near the Wailing Woman.

Cressida describes rape as penetration of the body’s depths that damages a woman’s or girl’s bodily integrity. Within the violated bodily and spiritual depths of women and girls, within the intimate flesh, sinew, blood, and marrow, and within the shallow breath of the soul lying in waste, the Holy is there, in love. Into the deathly stillness and silence, One’s mystic heart can hear Her

41 Miller, *Know My Name*, 7.

42 Ibid., 58.

43 Cressida J. Heyes, “Dead to the World: Rape, Unconsciousness, and Social Media,” *Signs* 41:2, (January 2016): 378, <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/t-and-c>.

44 Heyes, “Dead to the World: Rape, Unconsciousness, and Social Media,” 378.

45 Ibid., 365.

46 Matt Atkinson, *Letters To Survivors: Words of Comfort for Women Recovering From Rape* (Oklahoma City, OK: RAR Publishing, 2011), 8.

say to Her daughter, *I love you. I love you. I love you*, who in turn may not hear for the all the pain. Her presence is Holy dynamism in the chaotic, lonely depths. In Her power, She raises the violated female up to a crouched position, wailing with her and for her. The wail is the beginning of healing. Soothing balm and gentle light will wrap her round and walk with her toward restoration of her beautiful human integrity and agency, woven back into her divine center. Simultaneously, in the spirit of the Mighty One of the Magnificat, the Divine Feminine holds male supremacy by the jugular. Because it is into these very female bodily, spiritual depths that male-dominant Christian leaders so often force their pronouncements of female ontological inferiority in the name of Father God, nothing less than the Holy, in intimate female cruciform, has the power to drive out the masculine evil of rape upon rape.

As a feministic contemplative, my heart is gripped by the pain of female trauma. Noa Pothoven was raped at eleven years of age and then again by two men when she was fourteen. She suffered from depression, anorexia, and attempts at suicide. She was treated in mental hospitals numerous times, having to be placed in a coma in order to feed her when she was dangerously thin. She wrote a book to help others suffering similarly. At age fifteen she went on her own to the end-of-life clinic at The Hague to request euthanasia but was turned down because of her age. She said she could not wait until she was twenty-one to be evaluated for euthanasia. Her parents, family, and doctors tried desperately to help her. She would not eat and drink and finally they decided not to intervene. Noa died on June 2, 2019 in Holland at the age of seventeen. The mystical poem, “Beautiful Noa,” created from a captive heart—my being drawn fiercely into resistance against the sexual violence that brutally severed Noa from the earth while at the same time alighted in the Divine words, *I love you, I love you, I love you*, words imprinted on the wings of mystery bearing a tortured soul into an endless future. The Wailing Woman, within me, near me, and beyond me, is felt to rise upward from a crouched position in the forest, lifting the indescribable suffering into the expanse of divine light and fecundity. Though no longer intimate flesh, sinew, blood, and marrow of the earth, the voice of a femicide victim, *forged in the crucible of scorching turmoil*, can be heard in the wilderness tent pitched within one’s own depths. When we gather as desert dwellers, we are emptied to be paradoxically filled with the Divine mystery holding female humanity lost to misogynist violence. “Beautiful Noa,” rising from the desert transcendence within my own being, compels me to reach outward and to share in the communal *pitched tent*, my verses, so that together we can bring our love to the trauma, assist in the healing, and be in awe of the Holy One’s unfailing powers of recreation against evil. *Come circle now around the*

mountaintop is the future, the locus of new redemptive power, to be founded by feminist contemplatives.

Beautiful Noa
Tell it!
Tell it to
the world,
to countries,
courts,
religions.
Yes, tell it
to The Hague—
Rape is evil.
Shout it down.
Pray it down.
Stalk it.
Exorcize it.
Annihilate it.
It burst into
your “house,”
your body,
Noa.
A fatal toxin
seared your soul,
the sanctuary
of your selfhood,
crushing your girlhood,
stealing your joy.
“I’m still breathing,”
“but no longer alive,”
you explained
as rape trauma
defaced your spirit,
afflicted your being,
though you labored
to heal,
fought to
survive.
Women,
men,

humanity,
Come!
‘Tis the hour
to scale the
mountain,
‘Tis the moment
to trek
the sharp
ascent.
Fueled with
compassion
for her
unbearable suffering,
take the arduous steps.
Driven by
her tragedy,
seek the distant skies.
Drawn into future,
chant the truth—
“Rape is evil.”
“Shout it down.”
“Pray it down.”
“Stalk it.”
“Exorcize it.”
“Annihilate it.”
Women,
men,
humanity,
Come, circle now
round the
mountaintop!
Shhh, listen,
be silent.
You can
sense Noa
in the expanse
of sun
and clouds.
You can
feel Noa

in the softness
 of the breeze.
 You can
 know Noa,
 in shining foliage
 everywhere.
 She is being free.
 She is being created.
 She is being beautiful.
 Beautiful as the sun!
 Shhh, listen,
 be silent.
 'Tis only an
 eternity to
 hear her song.
 Tell this
 to the
 world too.⁴⁷

In the beginning of her riveting speech to an audience of five hundred men titled, "I Want A Twenty-Four-Hour Truce During Which There Is No Rape," feminist activist and writer Andrea Dworkin said she wanted to scream, a scream that would include the cries of the raped and battered and at the center of the scream is women's silence. She pleaded with the men in the audience to understand that women don't have time, some women don't have another day or another week: "we are very close to rape and very close to beating. And we are inside a system of humiliation from which there is no escape for us."⁴⁸ She insisted that if the men were opposed to violence against women then they ought to, "Tell the pornographers. Tell the pimps. Tell the warmakers."⁴⁹ If the men were sincerely opposed to gender-based violence, she persisted, then there are streets in which to go out and organize political opposition. With unwavering strength, she told the men, "I want to see the men's movement

47 Mary Sue Barnett, "Beautiful Noa," *The Feminist Voice* 1, no. 1 (2019): 25. [Printed with permission from the copyright holder.]

48 Andrea Dworkin, "I Want A Twenty-Four-Hour Truce During Which There Is No Rape," in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, ed. Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, and Martha Roth (Minneapolis, MI: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 14.

49 Dworkin, "I Want A Twenty-Four-Hour Truce During Which There Is No Rape," 18.

make a commitment to ending rape because that is the only meaningful commitment to equality ... Ending it. Stopping rape. No more. No more rape.”⁵⁰

As a chaplain in a psychiatric hospital, I witness the suffering of women. I hear their cries. Some raped. Some beaten. Some molested. Some sex trafficked. Their PTSD is often severe. Some self-harm. Some have attempted suicide. When I am called to her side, I go carefully. I see her cower, tremble, weep. Some are mute. Some scream. Some are guarded, hypervigilant. Some hide beneath a bed sheet. When I am near, there is often silence at first. In the silences, I breathe peace into the space. When I speak, I do so softly. And I say, “My heart is with you.” Her healing process is arduous. It is step-by-step. I will walk step-by-step alongside as she paces the halls. As she begins to speak, I listen. There is often despair—I *am not me anymore*.

The spiritual thirst that follows sexual traumatization is profound. It truly is as if the women *eat ashes*. In response to this thirst, I create poetry and prayer to share when there is readiness. Where it is appropriate to the faith tradition of the woman, I share with her my poem, “Mary Magdalene.” As female, Mary Magdalene would have suffered sexual derivatization in her patriarchal context. She knew illness, pain and, grief. Catholic poet and mystic, Edwina Gateley, has written a poem titled “Mary Magdalene,” in her book, *Soul Sisters: Women in Scripture Speak to Women Today*. In the poem she speaks to Mary Magdalene as a soul sister asking her about her suffering; “What sickness wracked your woman body, Mary,” “your spirit was battered in a society that had no place for you. Was your sickness then a soul-sickness, Sister?”⁵¹

Meggan Watterson, in her book, *Mary Magdalene Revealed: The First Apostle, Her Feminist Gospel & the Christianity We Haven't Tried Yet*, shares her lovely personal experience of the impact of discovery of Mary Magdalene's *voice*. She said it was like finding a church that she had always imagined as a little girl, “a place where we're not trying to be better than anyone else, or to be better than who we are in the moment. Everyone, no matter who we are, and everything, is included, especially the body.”⁵² Jean-Yves Leloup, in his book, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, writes that Mary Magdalene “represents a human being who is open and available to true ‘inner knowing,’ and who can ‘see’ in a deeper, clearer way.”⁵³ In her beautiful book, *The Meaning of*

50 Ibid., 19.

51 Edwina Gateley, *Soul Sisters: Women in Scripture Speak to Women Today* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 118.

52 Meggan Watterson, *Mary Magdalene Revealed: The First Apostle, Her Feminist Gospel, & the Christianity We Haven't Tried Yet* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, Inc. 2019), 18.

53 Jean-Yves Leloup, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2002), xxiii.

Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity, Episcopal priest Cynthia Bourgeault writes that Mary Magdalene walked a “path toward inner integration,”⁵⁴ and “is a *transformed* woman,”⁵⁵ and a “wisdom bearer.”⁵⁶ Desert mystics can make accessible the spiritual power of Mary Magdalene to the hearts and bodies of traumatized women today.

When bringing my own “Mary Magdalene” poem to the delicate healing hours of a sexually traumatized woman who is hospitalized, the air lightens, the space expands, and breathing deepens—a space for her to be herself. The dynamism, strength, and resistance of Magdalene in my poem is explored with her as possibility for her own strength of resistance and is given to her as a blessing upon her life. If she is open to touch, I hold her hands. When her trust increases, I bring anointing oil for her embodied *whole self*. Mary Magdalene is a *wisdom bearer* not only for the traumatized woman, but for the Christian leaders pitching a wilderness tent in support of her healing. Because Mary Magdalene is still maligned and marginalized by male-dominant Christianity, it is a double-layered act of religious resistance to centralize both her and a female victim of misogynist violence. The wilderness tent is a place for boldly inviting, uncovering, and integrating rejected, buried feminine wisdoms of the Christian tradition, to listen to the scholars, poets, prophets, and mystics in their own inward depths, and to share these riches in trust and love. I once shared my Magdalene poem with a woman who had just escaped a near lethal domestic violence attack. She announced, *I understand every word!*

Mary Magdalene
 Violence would quell
 your soul
 but you walked
 step-by-step
 away from evil
 Trauma would rout
 your heart
 but you walked
 moment-by-moment
 into the next day
 Tears would becloud

54 Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), 185.

55 Bourgeault, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene*, 175.

56 Ibid., 168.

your path
but you walked
breath-by-breath
into the unknown
Grief would avert
your courage
but you walked
pulse-by-pulse
into the vision
Doubt would rescind
your mission
but you walked
pace-by-pace
into the blaze
Loneliness would shroud
your purpose
but you walked
leap-by-leap
into the luminescence
Trepidation would enervate
your passion
but you walked
caper-by-caper
into the joy
Depression would thief
your hope
but you walked
glide-by-glide
into the tenderness
Death would dissolve
your being
but you walked
wingbeat-by-wingbeat
into the furthestmost
from within
your inmost
through all dark
into all light
with truth
on your lips

with Christ
 as your shield
 with oil dripping
 upon the world
 from your ancient
 holy hands
 its blessed fragrance
 reaching every
 thirsty soul
 from the garden
 into this moment
 the inmost heart
 of this moment
 now and forever
 amen.⁵⁷

3 Embodied Resistance

In December of 1993, I visited the Motherhouse chapel of the Dominican Sisters in Springfield, Kentucky. I had been invited by the Sisters to preach on a Sunday in Advent about my advocacy work for women and girls. Several days prior, a young woman in Louisville lost her life to misogynist violence. Mary Byron, on her twenty-first birthday, was ambushed while in her car in a Mall parking lot. At point blank range, she suffered seven gunshots to her head and chest. The murderer, who had previously raped, assaulted, and stalked her, was an estranged boyfriend who hunted her down immediately after being released from jail. From the pulpit, I spoke Mary's name and lamented the injustice. The tragedy of her rape and femicide was far too profound to be embraced on one night, in one pulpit, in one small chapel. The terror that Mary experienced, the enormity of trauma to her body, to her whole being, could never be contained in one preaching event. The depth and weight of it in my voice felt as though it must push through the chapel walls and ceiling, out into the darkness, over the empty hills of rural Kentucky, and then beyond, so that it could be heard, felt, and carried in communal solidarity to heal it and to cry out together, "Stop!"

57 Mary Sue Barnett, "Mary Magdalene," *The Feminist Voice*, 1, no. 1 (2019): 22. [Printed with permission from the copyright holder.]

Following the formal chapel service that evening, the Sisters and I gathered for interpersonal dialogue. One of the Sisters told a story that has continued to stir with vivid resonance within me over the decades. She shared that years earlier when she preached a homily, a male Catholic priest severely criticized many aspects of her content and delivery. Speaking slightly above a whisper, reluctant to share eye contact, I could see her suffering. The male priest, a representative of a male-exclusive church hierarchy, accosted her personhood, her soul, besieging the holy place within her female self where depth words⁵⁸ are formed and rise to consciousness to share with others. Those who walk the way of the Wailing Woman are desert contemplatives with communal power to rise in word and in body against misogynist forces that aim to silence the holy wisdom of female humanity and their allies.

The path of descent into one's inner desert to hear the Wailing Woman, the path of drawing near to the Holy Who bears the wounds of sexually violated and murdered women and girls, is a path of radical empathy. It calls one to viscerally know the female wounds, to become the one living the *crucible of scorching turmoil* and the one who *eats ashes*. It is from this inner wilderness that one's soul has space to be filled with the wisdom spoken by victims, survivors, and the resistance. It is to hear their longing hearts deeply enough to become a bold embodiment of comfort and resistance in the world. *Stop Rape*, Andrea Dworkin's plea before an audience of five hundred men, becomes a spiritual command that echoes through the soul's loneliness for the love of oneself and others.

In her anthology, *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture*, Roxane Gay gathers voices of victims and survivors across the gender spectrum telling their stories of how they have been marked by rape culture. "When I was twelve years old, I was gang-raped in the woods behind my neighborhood by a group of boys with the dangerous intentions of bad men. It was a terrible, life-changing experience,"⁵⁹ she writes in the opening paragraph of her introduction. For a long time she told herself it was *not that bad* but eventually realized that what she and others experienced was indeed *that bad*. In the chapter titled, "Why I Stopped," Zoe Medeiros writes about what helps her as a rape survivor; she chose a therapist who laughs at her jokes and whose office is located by the

58 According to Karl Rahner, God's word is located in primordial words that emerge from the depth of the human heart. Depth words, spoken from the center of a person, have potential to become sacraments of divine love. See Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*, (New York: Continuum, 1997).

59 Roxane Gay, *Introduction in Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture*, ed. Roxane Gay (New York: Harper Perennial, 2018), viiii.

sea so that following a session, she could, “go stare at something bigger than me.”⁶⁰ About her comfort, she touchingly writes, “Sometimes I imagine black wings. Specifically, I am lying on my bed at night, on my left side, and I imagine someone climbing in next to me and wrapping long black wings over me.”⁶¹

As Roxane Gay’s anthology of rape survivors’ testimonies provide heart-rending content for the responsive desert soul, so Diana E. H. Russell’s anthologies of voices on femicide provide poignant insight. In *Femicide in Global Perspective*, edited with Roberta A. Harmes, she describes femicide as a lethal hate crime that “is on the extreme end of a continuum of the sexist terrorization of women and girls.”⁶² It becomes a femicide whenever a form of sexist terrorism results in death. She identifies the following on the continuum: rape, torture, sexual slavery, incestuous and extrafamilial sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, and serious cases of sexual harassment. The goal of violence against women, she writes, is to preserve male supremacy. Joining voices with Jane Caputi in her volume edited with Jill Radford, *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, Russell and Caputi hold that if the United States were to become sensitized to all the femicides, nonlethal sexual attacks, battery, and pornography and gorenography as hate literature, then this country would have to “acknowledge that we live in the midst of a reign of sexist terror comparable in magnitude, intensity, and intent to the persecution, torture, and annihilation of European women as witches from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries.”⁶³

Dawn Wilcox provides databases of women and girls lost to femicide in the United States. At womencountusa.org, her *femicide accountability project*, she writes, “This is a sacred victim-centered space. Every woman or girl remembered here was precious and irreplaceable. Their absence continues to cause pain for family and friends who loved them.”⁶⁴ It is a prayer of lament to quietly see pictures of their unique and diverse faces, read their names, and learn about their stories—thousands in just the last couple of years. The databases will be a shock

60 Zoe Medeiros, “Why I Stopped,” in *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture*, ed. Roxane Gay (New York: Harper Perennial, 2018), 245.

61 Zoe Medeiros, “Why I Stopped,” 246.

62 Diana E. H. Russell, “Introduction: The Politics of Femicide,” in *Femicide in Global Perspective*, ed. Diana E. H. Russell and Roberta A. Harmes (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 4.

63 Jane Caputi and Diana E. H. Russell, “Femicide: Sexist Terrorism against Women,” in *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, ed. Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 20.

64 “The Databases.” Women Count USA Femicide Accountability Project. Accessed August 1, 2020, womencountusa.org.

to one's internalized normalcy of misogynist violence and will stir heart break in a contemplative desert dweller. Black women are 2.5 times more likely to be murdered by men than white women and disproportionately at risk for intimate partner femicide.⁶⁵ The Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women (#MMIWG2S Missing and Murdered Indigenous Womxn, Girls, and Two Spirit), whose mission is to stop violence against Native women and children, reports on its website that the U.S. Department of Justice finds that American Indian women face murder rates that are more than ten times the national average.⁶⁶

In Juarez, Mexico, mothers of murdered daughters paint pink crosses on telephone poles. In painting them pink, they are "overtly associating crosses with female humanity."⁶⁷ Nancy Pineda-Madrid, in *Suffering and Salvation In Ciudad Juarez*, explains that the pink crosses painted with the victim's name on the crossbar "signals an assault on patriarchal ideology, which has left its imprint on Christianity."⁶⁸ The mothers are issuing "an indictment against the complicity of the church and state in the evil of feminicide."⁶⁹ The mothers refuse to be silent and risk suffering to embody public resistance. Marking public places with pink crosses that connect crucifixion and female humanity, the mothers are waging a battle against Christianity that remains passive in the face of horrific evil perpetrated against their daughters. They are summoning collective consciousness into the desert to struggle in solidarity for emancipatory space for females, to end the crucifixions, to wrench life from death, and to "insist on hope even in the face of terror."⁷⁰

When the United Nations sent out a global message about the shadow pandemic of violence against women during COVID-19 lockdowns and called for a global ceasefire of this violence, a small group of Louisville clergy pitched our tent on the sidewalk in front of Central Presbyterian Church. Knowing well there are wailing women and girls in our own city, as in every city, and aware of the added obstacles to reaching them, we went out in the open. On Good Friday 2020, we stood together on the public sidewalk, collectively embodying hope and resistance via Facebook live. Speaking into an iPhone held by my young adult son, I prayed,

65 "Black Women & Domestic Violence." *Blackburn Center: Standing Together to End Violence*. Accessed August 1, 2020, blackburncenter.org.

66 "MMIWG2S." Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women. Accessed August 1, 2020, cvsanw.org.

67 Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 115.

68 Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez*, 115.

69 *Ibid.*, 115.

70 *Ibid.*, 115.

Eternal One, Who dwells deep within each one of us, open our hearts and ears to hear the cries for help. Open our eyes to see the signs of violence and oppression. Disturb our souls that we feel the pain of women and children who are frightened, in danger, and dehumanized. Give us the courage to learn and respond, to provide safety and relief, and to help rebuild lives. Breathe the power of Your love into those who cry out and help them to know that You are near and You are guiding them.

Rev. Christopher Elwood sang his song “Still Night,”

There's a war
in the neighborhood
behind smiling faces
and picture-pure childhood
Hide the bruises
Don't mind the stifled cries
Avert your gaze
Compartmentalize.⁷¹

Rev. Johanna Van-Wijk Bos prayed, *Let us walk in trust then, trust in the Holy Creator who walks with us as the mother shepherd, who takes her children to her bosom when they falter, who guides us to a place on the other side of patriarchal violence. We join hands with Woman Wisdom who danced at the dawn of creation because of her delight in the earth, in woman and in all human beings. We take the hands of wounded sisters in hope that our weeping at the end of the day will be turned into joy at dawn. Together we take refuge under the wing of the Sheltering Spirit, whose love endures forever, whose favors never fail.*

And Rev. Chris Elwood, sang his song “Pulse of Love,”

Beating with the pulse of love
Breathing in the wind of justice
Walking to the rhythm of hope
Together we will all make a way
Love one another
Just as I have loved you
You are never left alone.⁷²

⁷¹ Words and music by Christopher Elwood, © 2020, <https://soundcloud.com/mundobrewhorizon/pulse-of-love-w-congas>.

⁷² Words and music by Christopher Elwood, © 2020, <https://soundcloud.com/mundobrewhorizon/pulse-of-love-w-congas>.

To step off the trail, to descend into the clearing, to draw near to the Wailing Woman, is a risk to self, especially to women and other marginalized groups. An inner desert sojourn to hear a woman's and girl's lonely cry from a barren perch, to courageously empty oneself to become filled with healing energy to resist misogynist violence, ironically renders women more vulnerable to violence. Backlash is not only real, but a most virile form of misogyny. As such, it is naïve to expect male dominant Christian leaders to respond amicably to women contemplatives who, following their inner authority, challenge them to their core about gender-based violence. The bold wilderness path that draws one into interbeing with the traumatic wounds of women and girls must be done in physical solidarity. Physical solidarity provides not only protection, but presence to one another in the hoped for unfolding of healing light and joy. Men who walk this path are profoundly needed as women's intimate friends and allies whose kenotic, attentive hearts are central to the transformational work.

In this chapter I have compared the distress call of a bird to a sexually traumatized woman to highlight the loneliness and remoteness of her suffering. Another metaphorical step into the ornithology world, that of female birders, will aid in demonstrating both the vulnerability and power of female contemplatives going the way of the Wailing Woman. Female birders often do not have the needed space and safety on the hiking trails to listen, explore, watch, and work. Purbita Saha writes that many female birders experience dismissive comments and sexual harassment; "I've had men touch my hips to correct my perfectly fine birding stance. A ranger at a national wildlife refuge winked and told me about his 'big, loaded gun.' My friends have been propositioned in parks and stalked by drivers along country roads. Not even a 16-year-old can bird in peace without commenters attacking her abilities."⁷³ In response to this, The Phoebes were born. Named after a Titan from Greek mythology whose name signifies brightness, they are a female centric birding group founded in 2017 by Judith Mirembe, Kimberly Kaufman, and Molly Adams, that seeks to "transform the community from its core."⁷⁴ They report that they do not want to separate the birding world by gender, rather their serious resistance to misogyny is grounded in gaining "parity, educating about prejudices,"⁷⁵ and bringing, "men

73 Purbita Saha, "When Women Run the Bird World," Audubon. May 3, 2019, audubon.org.

74 Purbita Saha, "When Women Run the Bird World," Audubon. May 3, 2019, audubon.org.

75 Purbita Saha, "When Women Run the Bird World," Audubon. May 3, 2019, audubon.org.

along with us as we try to create a better, safer culture for everyone.”⁷⁶ Relevant here is Kenn Kaufman’s perspective as a male birder, who writes, “When species have descriptive names, they always describe males. The female Scarlet Tanager wears no scarlet; the female Blue Grosbeak shows hardly a hint of blue.”⁷⁷ Kaufman’s powers of observation sharpened, and he became awed by what he saw as he transcended the male-controlled ornithology field, where birds are classified by male characteristics, by men who are the power-holders with the loudest voices.

Like the feminist Phoebe leading the forest hike in solidarity, donning high powered binoculars and paying close attention to the oft ignored appearance and behavior of female birds, women desert dwellers are the spiritual leaders in physical and spiritual solidarity, gathering in ground zero *tents* to grow radical empathy and public, embodied resistance in and through one another. Together they will search, they will hone their listening for distress calls from the woman beaten in her home, the young woman raped on her college campus, and the girl violated in her bed. Beverly Lanzetta writes that “women contain the salvific potency and enlightening potential of being bearers of the holy. They know and understand She who is ‘not the Remote One, but the One Who is involved, near, and concerned.’”⁷⁸ To draw near the Wailing Woman is to stand at the edge of life and death, where one begins to look into the abyss of misogynist violence, where one becomes aware of the Divine in one’s own flesh as shared with one’s traumatized sisters, and where most of all, Divine Love is felt pulsing through heart, sinew, blood, and marrow. This Divine Love energy, found by way of emptying oneself of the deathly sexual derivatization of women and girls, illumines one’s vision for seeing the long-hidden faces, and sharpens one’s listening for hearing the long-silenced distress calls of victims and survivors. The Divine Love energy is a gathering force for the centering of their truths where the transformational work begins in the world, especially in male-dominant Christianity.

To enter the terror with her/Her to heal it is a radical spiritual response with soul-quaking empathy—a path filled with unknowns in liminal space, it requires deep trust. The global landscape of misogynist violence necessitates feminist contemplatives who will become warriors in solidarity, gripping male supremacy by the jugular and driving out the evil. The Holy, in female cruciform is a force of resistance to *end the crucifixions*. Feminist desert

76 Purbita Saha, “When Women Run the Bird World,” Audubon. May 3, 2019, audubon.org.

77 Ken Kaufman, “I Became a Better Birder When I Stopped Focusing on the Males,” Audubon. March 14, 2018, audubon.org.

78 Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology*, 165.

contemplatives willing to take on Her mantle of female terror are powerful, as their communal soul will be wide awake. The world awaits the unleashing of this fierce Love when female centric desert mystics come face-to-face with traumatized women and girls. They will see in one another's faces, bearers of the Holy. Feminine Divine Immanence will compel them forward as intimate companions on a desert path that will be transformed into lush landscapes. And they will herald the call *Come, circle now round the mountaintop*, where women and girls will breathe, speak, sing, and dance as fully safe and fully free.

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