

A scholar, master energy healer, wily queer Xicana mother, and unreformed midnight scribbler, **Ramona Lee Pérez** holds a doctorate in sociocultural anthropology from New York University and teaches Latino history, food studies, and feminist anthropology. Her writings are published in scholarly books and journals, and the online magazine *Hispanecdotes*. Her latest works address social and psychic transgressions on the road to healing. Interested readers can follow her at <https://wildwomanista.com/> and on Twitter @wild\_womanista.

## Bleeding HeArt

by Ramona Lee Pérez

Flooding is the official term for profuse menstrual bleeding. In my case, it means losing a half-gallon of life force over the course of four bloated and achy days. Slim-fit tampons and pads designed to hide under clothing are woefully inadequate. Who uses those flimsy excuses for panty protection? Try soaking an overnight pad, the kind that rustles like a diaper when you walk, every few hours. Vigilant for leakage, I have trained myself to wake up at night and rush to the bathroom when I feel another wave ready to release from my womb. Rolling over and going back to sleep results in crimson Rorschach blots on underwear, pajamas, sheets, mattress pad, and soaked into the mattress. Scrubbing out stains in the upholstery is inevitable. Calculating the gallons lost over the years, my period qualifies as embodied creation-destruction of apocalyptic caliber, or at least horror movie proportions.

The gynecologist insists that my cycle is within range for perimenopausal women. She suggested herbs like black cohosh and chasteberry to reduce the intensity of bleeding, but I have to take them all month long. Too many missed doses provokes even worse flow. On my last visit, the nurse-midwife gave me a Chinese remedy for hemorrhaging, just in case. My grandmother suffered epistaxis, uncontrollable nosebleeds, during three pregnancies. When she was my age, my mom was rushed to the ER about to go into shock due to out-of-control menstruation. I received a three-unit transfusion after passing out due to blood loss after my son was born. Given this family history, keeping an anti-hemorrhagic on hand is a reasonable precaution.

During heavy flow, my body burns through copious iron, multivitamins with extra B-complex and Omegas, and a boatload of liquids, best as bone broth and nourishing herbal teas. Several factors can exacerbate the current of sanguine fluid. Eating animal flesh makes bleeding more intense, even though doctors tell me to eat meat regularly since I tend toward anemia. Fish, nuts, seeds, and legumes keep me nourished, but I am allergic to other options for vegetarian proteins, so my options are slim. Staying in bed until noon takes the edge off morning dizziness and pervasive body aches. Taking two showers a day, mesmerized by the blood and disintegrating tissue washing down the drain gives me perverse aesthetic pleasure. A daily gallon of water laced with vitamin powder counter-intuitively ameliorates bloating. The more vitamins and the more peeing, the better I feel, but most days go something like this:

“Woke up at 7:00 AM with a brain-flaming headache. Meditated...Cancelled tonight’s live music date with a friend while driving to pain management doctor. Made it back home but couldn’t get to the pharmacy because my head felt like a jack-hammered lead balloon...Took vitamins, herbs and leftover meds, then distracted myself by writing two slamming blog posts. Now I’m done, the headache is still here, I’m crampy, and am bleeding like a stuck pig. Friday night at 7:45, I’m calling it quits...Praying for a more tolerable tomorrow.”

Flow is heavier when there is drama in my life. If I am stressed about work or fighting with my partner, there is more blood. If I have had PTSD-induced nightmares, there is more blood. If there has been social upheaval or a natural disaster, there is more blood. Menstruation becomes a full-body detox, scouring my DNA of histories of violence. A reluctant empath, I get hammered by news headlines. As a rape survivor, I bleed in sync with a rousing #MeToo chorus. As a descendant of Mexican immigrants who walked across the border generations ago, ICE raids make my womb shrink with anxiety. Sexual abuse scandals, mass shootings, deportations and family separation, earthquakes-hurricanes-volcanoes all hit my insides like a car crash. Each scarlet drop scours my system of public hatreds and rampant fear-mongering.

Another factor is synchronization of my cycle with lunar phase. If I menstruate in the darkness of new moon, as women in ancient Red Tents were wont to do, my flow is scant. Half moon flow means wicked PMS and intense vaginal cramps, knee-buckling

lances reminiscent of rape in reverse. Alignment with the full moon brings buckets of blood like the aftermath of a marauding pirate ship. While my natural tendency is towards the new moon, the vagaries of domestic life can shift my cycle just like la luna pulls at the tides. The last time I was consistently in sync with the new moon was two-and-a-half years ago when I was a single working mother living only with my pre-adolescent son. A partner moved in and everything went haywire in less than two months. Hormonal swings that undermined my mental health mirrored the ebbs and flows of our tumultuous relationship.

The purpose of this menstrual meditation is to reflect on the interlaced structure of body-mind-heart-soul-society-ecology-astronomy in a complete articulation of life itself. Each aspect of existence is irrevocably intertwined with all others within the dark space of creation that is the womb. When I bleed, I am simultaneously shedding unused uterine lining produced for eggs that did not fertilize, exorcising past sexual partners—be they old ones to whom I consented or rapists to whom I did not—and am weeping red tears for the dysfunction all around me, the wanton injustices done to people and planet.

Generations of women and the corpus of our flows demonstrates precisely why we need heartfelt menstrual art, like this bloody essay. It reminds us that our bodies, with all those inconveniently messy inside parts, are connected to everything else in the universe—intimate relationships, celestial bodies, breaking headlines, and even those

who posit themselves as our enemies. As feminist music icon Sophie B. Hawkins declares, "We are one body – one life – one spirit – one breath – one dream of life and death – one God – one sex – one star – one trip – one heart – one rocketship." That is why I bleed.