



## Carriage: A feminist story

Muhammad Khurram

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Bracha says: care-carrying—carriage—as responsibility-in-act  
is what we need in a world  
where trust is dead, yet  
we need to trust in trust  
in its presence, in its immortality: not its resurrection  
because there is so much to care for  
so much that we love, and are loved by  
after all, matter matters, Karen says  
to which, Ursula says: the bag, the net, not the spear  
because we need to care-carry things, each other,  
ourselves across uncertainties, violences, ever shifting  
temporalities and spatialities, nourished and preserved by  
stories that carefully care-carry us  
to which, Sara says: to care is to be vulnerable  
and to be vulnerable is to be anxious  
about that which you care-carry  
you are terrified, your breath always stuck  
to which, Magdalena says: breathe, practice a feminist politics of vulnerability  
because asking for help can be transformative not just for you,  
but also for the one who helps, as Mia says Amoretta said  
to which, I say: thank you all for reaching me,  
I care-carry you all  
to which, Khurram asks: dear reader, who are you care-carrying?  
and will you care-carry (with) me?

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### Critical commentary

This poem speaks of how care is approached by feminists by citing feminists who care about caring and carry this commitment with them. Therefore, I start with Bracha L. Ettinger's notion of carriage. Ettinger defines carriage as simultaneously being both an attitude (caring) and an act (carrying), which means that carriage is seen as an act of responsibility towards ourselves and others. I turn to carriage because I believe that we owe it to ourselves and each other: to care-carry. What happens when we do so? We learn to tell a different story (the net, the bag) about how we carry the world and how the world carries us (matter matters). For example, Ursula Le Guin in *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (2019) argues that, instead of foregrounding the spear as being the heroic and violent tool

that human beings used to survive, our narratives about humanity would change fundamentally if we started to tell stories about the bag that held the spear. Le Guin argues to retell our origin myths to influence our present through changing the material conditions that structure our understanding of who we are as human beings. It is exactly such materiality that Karen Barad, a theoretical physicist, draws our attention to in their book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), wherein they argue for an understanding of agential realism to foreground the agency of matter. Matter is not some inert mass over which humans have agency, rather matter too has its own agency. In other words, humans do not just use the spear or the net, but the spear and the net generate different affects and realities due to their existence. Therefore, Barad stresses the importance of understanding how matter comes to matter, not simply in a linguistic or symbolic manner, but in a deeply material and embodied way, which includes the affects that are engendered by these materialities.

To address the affects that matter generates, I turn to the work of Sara Ahmed because the material dimensions of our lives are connected to our emotions and how those form us on a physical, bodily level. Particularly, I draw attention to Ahmed's articulation of anxiety as a necessary part of carriage because the materiality of our lives includes the inevitable loss that comes with it. After all, matter is not inert, it changes. Regardless of our best intentions to care-carry, to nurture life, loss is something that we also carry with us and something that shapes us. At times it is the inevitability of loss that makes us not to care to prevent the pain that we would feel when the loss occurs. In other words, we learn just how vulnerable and anxiety-inducing caring can be because we are afraid that we will not be able to carry those we care for and will not be carried by them. This sense of vulnerability is frightening and suffocating due to which we teach ourselves that it is better not to feel, not to care. There's only so much a heart can take. However, a feminist politics of vulnerability demands just such a resilience from us. In being soft, in being vulnerable, in embracing the leakiness of our bodies, we challenge the dominant power structures that would have us isolated, individualized, and living without regard for each other and ourselves. Accordingly, in talking about the anxiety attacks leaving her gasping for air, queer crip scholar Magdalena Górska argues that she did find strength in being vulnerable. Her anxiety attacks led to her embodied knowledge about the socio-political situation within which she found herself gasping for air. It was suffocating and empowering to find out how in being vulnerable, she found allies who sought to bring socio-political change to make breathing easier for marginalized bodies. Similarly, Mia Birdsong also tells a story of how we need to give permission to ourselves to ask for help because she learned from Amoretta Morris that sometimes in helping others we learn to be vulnerable. We learn to give shape to our loss and pain as we help give shape to another's pain. Through this process we transform ourselves for the better by recognizing how we do not and cannot live an individualized life cut off from others: we need to care-carry each other. With my poem, I hope that we care-carry, learn to care-carry ourselves and each other.

## Bio

As an Aries Sun with Mercury in Taurus, Khurram has a deep and lasting sense of loyalty once nurtured. Coincidentally, he's also a graduate student of Gender Studies at University of Łódź, Poland, and University of Utrecht, Netherlands. His research interests are informed

by, and grounded in, Cultural Studies, Literary Studies, and New Materialism, all with a pinch of Psychotherapy.

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