We Deserve More Than This

Spirit Murdering and Resurrection in the Academy

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Abstract

Spirit murdering in the academy is pervasive and the impacts on racially minoritized populations are far-reaching and lasting. As Love (2016) notes, spirit murdering is built upon an academic culture that openly embraces racism, at the expense of the minds, bodies, and souls of racially minoritized faculty and students. Over time the spirits, bodies, and minds of Black and Brown people are slowly etched away at and damaged many times beyond repair. Spirit murder takes various forms as we highlight- in the classroom, through the politics of research and service, expectations, and presumed incompetence. This manuscript discusses the ways that spirit murder manifests and underscores the significant and sometimes irreparable damage that occurs when racially minoritized faculty and students have to navigate constant attacks on their minds, bodies, and spirits as they navigate an academy not intended for them in the first place. The manuscript highlights how context matters and how refuge for survival is often found in others enduring the same pain. Moreover, the manuscript provides a call to action for higher education stakeholders to reflect on the systemic and pervasive nature of racism, and work towards disrupting the racist academy, as well as eliminate the culture of toxicity that breeds and promotes spirit murdering.

Keywords: Spirit Murdering, Racially Minoritized Students, Racially Minoritized Faculty

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Introduction

Our mind does not fail us. The academy and society functioning as a system of interlocking forms of oppression, does (Combahee River Collective, 1986; Love, 2016). When we enter academic spaces our bodies, minds, and spirits never know what part will be attacked first. Perhaps it will be our racial, ethnic, national, gender identities and/or sexual orientation. The one thing that remains consistent, is how prepared we are. Academia can impact racially minoritized[1] populations, whether through co-option of work, abuse of labor, inequitable output, unequal distribution of work, mistreatment, or a blatant disregard for the value we bring to academic environments (Johnson & Bryan, 2017).

After all, for many Black and Brown people, our mind is kept open and motivated when our bodies and souls are nourished. When those are attacked, our mind simply survives and tries to get us through the bare minimum- if that; constantly operating under the guise that we are simply not good enough, a result of colonization and white supremacy. Yet, we must show up and combat forms of aggression as best as our ancestors have prepared us, as white rage and dominance tries to disassemble our labor. To not do so, is to risk our collective future which depends on the survival of all racially minoritized people. This manuscript captures our collective story of simultaneously and separately experiencing spirit murder in the academy.

We discuss the nuances of spirit murdering in various contexts from both the faculty and student perspective and discuss how we navigate and move through the effects of spirit murdering in our academic careers. We also highlight a call to action for education stakeholders to recognize the lasting effects of a history rooted in violence, pain, and harm. Ours is a tale of rising after spirit murdering; and the continuation of the pervasive nature of reckoning with and maneuvering through spirit murder in the academy.

Framing Our Journey

Black feminist thought, and specifically standpoint theory as posited by Patricia Hill- Collins, helps frame our journey and experiences with spirit murder. Hill-Collins (2002) puts forward the idea that Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by Black women which creates a unique standpoint. Standpoint theory also notes that individuals experience oppression differently though the standpoint is created based on group experiences (Hill-Collins, 2002). In addition, standpoint theory not only focuses on the experiences and knowledge of Black

women, but also encourages others (non-Black women) to develop their own standpoints (Hill-Collins, 2002). As such, we are committed to not only understanding our positionality, but developing our own standpoint as it helps us make sense of our distinct and shared experiences.

Gabriel is a Mexican,[2] trans*,[3] queer, second-generation United States citizen, and first-generation scholar. Raquel is a Black, multiracial, immigrant, Jamaican woman, and first- generation scholar. Standpoint theory empowers us to develop a deeper understanding of our own epistemological standing while also giving us a starting point for building out our solidarity. Here, we intentionally place the word 'out' in front of our solidarity as we imagine creating liberatory practices in community with others. We find that the first step in this process is to develop an intimate understanding of our own epistemic stances. A significant amount of this work is internal, though it is important to recognize how our relationships can influence and shape our standpoints. Fortunately, we met during a time in which we both were well aware of our own epistemic stances and positionalities. This is what saved us from various directed forms of violence. When Gabe was targeted for being the 'large intimidating man of color,' it was Raquel's eyes who saw the defense mechanism being utilized for protection. She did not ask "why are you being so defensive," instead she demanded to understand what Gabe was defending himself from. When a student asked/stated to Raquel "why are you angry" Gabe did not need to look towards Raquel to understand that once again, anti-Blackness emerged in the space and attempted to squeeze the brilliance out of her while simultaneously leaving her with a mess to clean up. These are instances of violence that motivated us towards action and did not leave us frozen, though we certainly experience those moments too. Our solidarity is not golden, but what makes it strong is our consistent will to continue to learn how to better support ourselves and one another.

Part of building out our solidarity includes techniques such as listening, which is why in addition to standpoint theory we place a large emphasis on storytelling. When we first met, Raquel had recently graduated with her Ph.D., while Gabriel had just reentered a graduate program that attempted to push him out. We could make the case that we have since been developing this manuscript through reflective conversations with each other. Throughout the years we have (re) visited experiences that attempted to mark us, that is, shame/embarrass/silence us, for the purposes of one day sharing our recollected story. Re- as in to do again, collected- as in remembering and claiming it as our own. Upon, reading the call for proposals for this special issue journal that centered 'spirit murder,' we immediately felt validated. For once, not only did we have language for the experiences that we shared in our private conversations,

but there were also editors, and a journal actively seeking/wanting to hear our (re)collected story. What we had once dreamed about, we were now able to carefully detail in a manuscript. Dreaming too is important towards building out our solidarity, but embarking on the experience of writing about our experiences is profoundly powerful and reminds us that we are not alone. Throughout the past few months, we spent a significant amount of time (re)counting, (re)telling, and (re)experiencing, for the purpose of (re)collecting our story. We carefully listened to one another and began to witness common threads in our stories. We grappled with them and intentionally wove them together in the hopes of helping others understand what exactly spirit murder is, what it does, and how we navigate through it.

Our Connection to Spirit Murder

Our writing is connected to spirit, it is an ancestral gift that we do not take for granted. By this, we do not mean that we are the best writers, but we do make every word count. We write with a great sense of purpose, honesty, and intention. Spirit murdering is defined as a direct outcome of racism, where the minds, bodies, souls, and spirits of racially minoritized people are destroyed by employing violent racist attacks on them (Williams, 1987). When the spirit is murdered, teaching and learning cannot effectively continue because our well-being is destabilized and disrupted (Garcia, 2020). Oftentimes, as scholars, writing is a means of radical liberation. By radical we mean that our bodies and minds are centered, and celebrated. For once, all of our identities are not weaponized for our destruction, but instead, they are instrumental for our healing. However, none of this is possible when the spirit is murdered. For a spirit to be murdered means that one is left with just the body. How that body is able to continue in academia is, in part, contingent on our identities (Hines & Wilmot, 2018). Is this not the reason that white, cis, and 'healthy' bodies can survive and thrive in academia? Who can survive consistent and targeted attacks on one's spirit and body? At what point does this stop being metaphorical and become something worth seriously analyzing?

While we walk around campus with a murdered spirit, our body protects itself, arms itself with the community, and a sharp tongue waiting for the spirit to be lifted so that our purpose can continue. A spirit that is constantly murdered, suffers immensely. Spirit murdering encompasses complete paralysis of the mind, soul, and body. For many, paralysis takes place mentally, emotionally, and physically. It shuts down the ability to be productive or abide by the institutional metrics that ultimately define success (Young & Hines, 2018). The same met-

rics that oftentimes murder the very spirit you are expected to use as motivation to succeed. As Johnson & Bryan (2017) posit, the "bullets of rejection, silence, and disrespect" (p. 170) are seen and felt constantly by us in academe.

Literature Review

To provide an understanding of how spirit murder operates, we provide a brief literature review of its use. In "Spirit-Murdering the Messenger" Patricia Williams (1987) analyzes how the law and its language makes action against racism difficult to address and examines the process of spirit murder, specifically how the burden of proof is placed on racially minoritized populations. Since her seminal work, various scholars have addressed their own experiences with spirit murder across various academic disciplines. Love (2016), Hines and Wilmot (2018) wrote about the unique spirit murder that Black children especially face in the classroom by anti-Black racism in the form of policies, practices, and legislation. Beyond addressing how spirit murder impacts Black children in the classroom, scholars have also written about their experiences as educators. For instance, Love (2017) wrote about her spirit murder in the classroom as she witnessed how Black women were left out of memorialization efforts and calls for justice.

Expanding on this focus, the unique experiences of Black male professors in the classroom were explained using metaphorical "bullets of rejection, silence and disrespect" and more specifically, captured how they destroy the humanity of these faculty and their research agendas (Johnson & Bryan, 2017, p. 170). In addition, the experiences of Black women professors in the classroom were captured via critical reflections on how their spirit is murdered in the classroom by way of personal attacks, deflection, denigration of course content, and presumed pedagogical incompetence (Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Young & Hines, 2018).

While spirit murder has not been canonized, scholars have described the racialized and gendered experiences of faculty in institutional spaces. Indeed, minoritized faculty are often positioned at a disadvantage as they are not only expected to complete their work but resolve racist, sexist, and transphobic aggressions in their workplace (Garrison-Wade et al., 2012; Harris & Nicolazzo, 2020; Haynes et al., 2020; Thomas, 2020; Turner et al., 2008). Specifically, racially minoritized faculty cite experiences of devaluation, hypervisibility, marginalization, and exclusion in their workplace which create multiple barriers to their success (Settles et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2008). Despite these challenging experiences, racially minoritized faculty continue to find ways to persist and resist in the academy (Garcia, 2020; Guillaume & Apodaca, 2020; Johnson et al., 2018).

Beyond the experiences of racially minoritized faculty, the experiences of racially minoritized graduate students are also worth considering especially as they are often related to one another (Fuentes et al., 2018). Racially minoritized graduate students have cited financial responsibilities, hostile campus climates, tensions in the workplace, and racial and gendered microaggressions in the classroom as factors that impact their retention (Gay, 2004, Harris & Linder, 2018; Slay et al., 2019; Trent et al., 2020). Racially minoritized graduate students specifically highlight that predominantly white institutions (PWIs) are barriers to their academic success, and access to strong mentorship as a key factor for their success (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Brunsma et al., 2017; Remaker et al., 2019). Scholarship focusing on fostering welcoming and affirming environments for racially diverse student populations is also well documented and cites the importance of mentorship for both racially minoritized graduate students and faculty (Akens et al., 2019; Banks & Dohy, 2019; Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015; Griffin, 2019; Jayakumar & Museus, 2012; Quaye et al., 2015; Young & Brooks, 2008). Indeed, research shows that in supporting racially minoritized faculty, institutions also support racially minoritized students and vice-versa (Benitez et al., 2017; Wright-Mair, 2017).

Discussion

We grappled a lot with the nuances in each section of this manuscript, and carefully discussed the process of unpacking the tensions of each. For example, while we both have experienced murdered spirits simultaneously and on our own, we also experienced moments of joy in toxic environments that sought to break us. We acknowledge that these moments were few and far between, but still want to recognize the tension that accompanies understanding and processing the magnitude of toxic institutional environments. We realize that while the moments of joy we experienced helped us to survive day-to-day, they were not enough to sustain us over an extended period of time. As we note in the sections following, these moments were simply that...moments. This is not a case of a few "bad days at work" but more of an established organized academy grounded in racist policies, practices, and people.

Stolen Space and Time

> *The point is it takes love to name the damage on one's own body, to say, I deserve freedom, here.*
>
> —Brown, 2016

When people say that we all have the same 24 hours in a day, it does not sit right with our spirit, we know that is not the case. Besides

time being socially constructed, time is also compounded and malleable depending on one's circumstance. How one positions themselves or is positioned plays a significant role in how their time is allocated or stolen. As such, when we think of space and time, we are intentionally choosing to acknowledge and reclaim both as our own. Space and time are gifts from our ancestors that we wish to recover as they have been stolen and replaced with multiple forms of oppressive restrictions and spirit murder. Here, we chose to share our experiences about the multiple and nuanced ways that academia and people within it loot from us. We start by explaining how spirit murder starts with our bodies, expands outward towards time and space, and ends by returning to the body. By this we do not mean that the experiences are disconnected, instead, we chose this framing for coherency of the complex situation(s) we endure.

We are tired. When one reads the term, spirit murder, one may not associate the ways that the body, mind, and soul are connected. For us, we understand the emotional, physical, and spiritual as deeply connected. Indeed, our bodies are receptors for harm and too often we do not listen to the warnings. Oftentimes, while our minds can forget trauma, our bodies do not (Van de Kolk & Bessel, 2014). They hold onto our pain as a way of shielding further harm to our minds and souls. To have your spirit murdered is to feel a physical reaction that often results in hospitalizations, new medical diagnoses, and increased awareness around depleting mental health. While our bodies absorb some harm, our loved ones (an extension of our bodies—metaphorically, and literally) also receive harm. When our spirits are murdered, and our bodies are focused on taking care of our wellbeing, our loved ones are left with very little. To be spirit murdered is to oftentimes realize too late that we are unable to give energy to our own family and friends. How can you read a book to your child when your mind is racing, and your body is aching after a student attacked you and your minoritized students in class? When you avoid phone calls with your mother to hide your pain, how do you make sure she knows you still love her? Sometimes it is not about not having enough energy, sometimes it is about being paralyzed because you realize that either way someone is always suffering.

To have time stolen as a people with minoritized identities is to watch your productivity and years of hard work slip away from your hands. As scholars, productivity is not the end goal but a tool of measurement that is too often utilized against us without a critical understanding of stolen time. As such, to have our productivity stolen from us by way of delayed matriculation, research, publications, increased debt, and compounded trauma has left us deeply wounded. From being pushed out, to inundation with student needs and course loads, the stolen time has a severe impact on our material realities. We are not only expected to work within the

allocated time frame but forced to complete the work at all costs. This unfortunately leads to an increased sense of imposter syndrome. For example, beginning to internalize the lack of publications and a research agenda as solely indicative of brilliance; or fears that graduation will never happen and that all of our parents' sacrifices were for nothing. To be spiritually murdered is to know that you are on borrowed time and that at any moment it may be restarted or simply taken from you.

Alongside time, space is critical for not only healthy development but a sense of belonging too. When we refer to space, it is utilized as a term that describes capacity and structures; both physical and organizational/institutional/environmental. When our space is stolen from us, we lose out on opportunities that are critical for our emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing. When you are disconnected from the physical space with colleagues from academic conferences or are unable to visit potential institutions where you will complete your doctorate because your institution refuses or claims to be unable to support you, how do you remain connected? To have space stolen is to also directly have your time stolen from you. It is impossible to carry a high teaching load, run a program with limited faculty, advise multiple students, serve on multiple dissertation committees, all while also trying to stay on course with the outlined metrics for tenure, successful completion of graduate school, and maintaining one's health and wellness. For us, this has meant constantly depending on one another, and our communities. Including leaning on colleagues who graciously share their own borrowed time, resources, and support to encourage us to keep pressing along.

While these efforts allow us to remain afloat, something must be said about consistently running out of bandwidth i.e., being spiritually murdered. Institutions provide tenure to faculty and admit students with the understanding that exploitation and cooptation of work exists, yet they continuously reproduce the same environments with different people. What does it mean for institutions to have a racially minoritized scholar on their payroll who studies exploitative environments, and proceeds to exploit the same scholar and other minoritized graduate students and faculty? It simply does not make sense and perpetuates a devaluation of both faculty and students. Beyond lack of opportunity and acknowledgment of institutional problems, physical location can be an indicator for the success or lack thereof. When several racially minoritized faculty opt to live outside of their school's community, what is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that these employees not only feel, but are safe. When students are called gender and sexual epithets by their housemates, why is there no system in place to secure them housing without an associated cost? These issues must be further explored, and more research and application are both desperately needed to improve

toxic cultures and poisonous spaces to retain talented individuals and build institutional capacity.

The Politics of Research

> *Everyone is familiar with the slogan "The personal is political"—not only that what we experience on a personal level has profound political implications, but that our interior lives, our emotional lives are very much informed by ideology. We oftentimes do the work of the state in and through our interior lives. What we often assume belongs most intimately to ourselves and to our emotional life has been produced elsewhere and has been recruited to do the work of racism and repression.*
>
> —Davis, 2016, p.142

The scholarship of many racially minoritized faculty and students has long been overlooked as not rigorous or objective enough to add value to the academy (Turner et al., 2008). Many of us are penalized for the work we do to name racism, discrimination, and bias present throughout various facets of the academy. This manifests often in the funding we do and do not receive that inevitably count towards our progression in the academy. For faculty this is especially detrimental since acquiring grants is counted towards tenure and promotion decisions. Additionally, for those of us who engage in work that seeks to disrupt and dismantle systemic oppression and are invested in making a difference in society- namely our communities, this heavily impedes our ability to engage in meaningful work. But it is not only funding that impedes our work, it is the overall lack of support we experience by senior faculty, peers, students, and administrators.

Many racially minoritized faculty members lose motivation from constantly being rejected by the academy, i.e., unfunded grants, unaccepted conference proposals and manuscript submissions, scarce jobs, limited or no professional development opportunities, negative student evaluations, and the list goes on. Very few racially minoritized faculty and students have access to time, money, and other resources that allow for notoriety, and those that do have that access are very limited. What that means is that the majority of racially minoritized faculty are working against the dominant academic grain that values whiteness much more than the lived experiences of those with minoritized identities. The literature on racially minoritized faculty highlights that many of these faculty members engage in research that advances their communities (Antonio, 2002; Turner et al., 2008). Many of these faculty members get into their positions to make meaningful contributions to their communities. However, many have instead found themselves bogged down by neoliberal metrics within the academy that ask that they invest more in that than in the meaningful work many hope to do (Wright-Mair & Museus, 2021).

Service and (in/not visible) Labor

The western world would have you believe that only what is written is true.

—Brown, 2016

Cultural taxation is not a new concept, it is used to describe the copious amount of work that racially minoritized people undertake in the academy solely based on their racial and ethnic identities (Padilla, 1994). This includes sitting on diversity committees, mentoring students, being appointed the designated diversity guru in departments, advising on policies and practices, and oftentimes voluntold to do diversity and equity work (Baez, 2000; Guillaume & Apodaca, 2020; Padilla, 1994). Both racially minoritized faculty and students engage in service and most frequently it is not visible, meaning that while we partake in these activities, initiatives, and programs we are not valued or rewarded; rather, we are simply expected to serve because of our racial and ethnic backgrounds (Padilla, 1994). We are also frequently asked to do multiple service initiatives simultaneously, that white faculty and students are not asked (or expected) to do, for example, being asked to serve as director of a program in one's first year on the tenure track or facilitate student leadership conferences. Who is it okay to let down? Is a question we frequently find ourselves asking. This is perhaps a question many people in our situations ask as well: do I turn down my 10th dissertation committee, for the only Black student in the program? Do I say no to the group of Black students who have no advisor for their student organization?

We often go above and beyond to support racially minoritized (and other minoritized students) often at the costs of our health and wellness; because we know if we do not, nobody will. The service and emotional labor go hand in hand and the impacts of both service and the emotional toll of "doing" service work on racially minoritized people are rarely considered. Engaging in anti-racist work is exhausting, to say the least, and requires one to be fully present and engaged at all times. For racially minoritized scholars invested in the transformative work required to truly enact change, this is time-consuming and constant. We are unable to separate ourselves and our identities from the service work especially, as we are centering the experiences of not just ourselves but our communities, and our ancestors.

The commitment of service is arduous, to say the least- it is ironically also the least valued of the tenure and promotion process, but in many instances brings both faculty and students the most fulfillment.

For example, many racially minoritized faculty members formally and informally mentor racially minoritized (and other multiple minoritized) students. This in addition to a full teaching, research, and service load can be extremely time-consuming. Yet as the literature emphasizes these relationships make a huge impact on students and oftentimes drastically change the trajectory of their personal and professional pursuits (Griffin, 2019).

Additionally, racially minoritized faculty members, especially those working at PWIs often only see their racial and ethnic identities represented in the few students of similar backgrounds. Thus, for many racially minoritized faculty, their students are the only people who sometimes understand their experiences. These relationships also feed racially minoritized faculty who more often than not experience hostile, isolating, and unwelcoming campus environments (Diggs et al., 2009; Eagan & Garvey, 2015; Garrison-Wade et al., 2012; Turner et al., 2008). Graduate students are not exempted from the perils of service, as they too are expected to participate in service, unpaid and unrewarded most times along with the expectations that accompany graduate school and balancing one's obligations. The invisibility of labor that both racially minoritized faculty and students engage in is real, the hardest part of doing "service" is the emotional labor that is not only unseen but not cared for.

Sites of Tension

The Office

> *Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.*
>
> —Lorde, 1988, p.97

Historically, an office has been utilized as a space of control and a tool of staff management (Terry, 1958). An office can be considered a space where work is done in isolation; an isolation that is only broken when more work arrives in the form of meetings. Oftentimes it is this work that unconsciously (and many times consciously) contributes to the spirit murdering for which we have gathered to write about. Between meetings with students, staff, and faculty, the office is meant to be a place of productivity. But what do you do when the information technology staff member tells you that they hope you last longer than the previous Faculty of Color who occupied the space? When your choice in music that inspires you is too 'Beyonce' and not classical enough, whose needs are met first? While the office can be used as a space of control, for us, the office is not only a space where work is done but at times a place of refuge. Refuge

is used here as a verb, as in we are constantly needing to create a space where we are both arming and disarming ourselves. A space that is not necessarily tied to a physical or temporal location, but rather one that serves as both a barrier for protection, and a bridge for resistance.

In the disarming process, we allow ourselves to express the emotion(s) that were tightly wrapped around our throats because respectability politics silenced us. Demanded that we be representative but not of our needs; ain't visibility a trap? (Woolf, 1957). Here, we structure a room for ourselves. A room of our own, which we understand and come to honor as sacred. Despite everything occurring outside of the four walls, we breathe. Our lungs perform double duty as we are tasked with not only breathing to live but retaining our composure too. Cups of ginger tea settle our stomachs as we discuss how one of our Black students had presidential elect pins thrown at them. One of us communicates with the Dean of Students while the other determines what the student needs. The next week, we vent about another racial aggression that occurred in the classroom or how campus security failed to protect yet another Black woman from danger. In the hallway we hear a choir of laughter, followed by a white woman making light of how *they* cost the election. The door is immediately shut and today we decide to steal our peace back and center our emotional wellbeing. In our co-constructed fortress we emancipate ourselves from the trenches and create new possibilities. One where Black women do not have to be superheroes. Here trans* people do not have to come out of the closet, because our existence just is. And is that not justice, a world where academia spends its energy revitalizing instead of robbing from us?

In the arming process, the office space is a last-ditch effort for survival. We strategize and imagine how we can move beyond our current reality. It is crucial to find opportunities to develop approaches that aid us in surviving misogynoir, transphobia, racism, and any other form of oppression waged against our bodies. Plans for checking in are made, especially when the subject matter extends outside of the classroom into our immediate personal lives. It is so important to remember that the personal is political, therefore every choice must be handled with a great amount of care and intentionality. Affirmations are sprinkled across the table between us, and we remind ourselves of every sacrifice made to get here. A bang on the door attempts to disrupt the process but instead, we continue by setting high expectations for one another. These expectations include remembering to eat, asking for help, making time for our loved ones, and ensuring that our humanity stays intact. The door swings open, and this time we do not have to get ready because we are already prepared.

The office for us represents one of the many different ways that ra-

cial and gender minoritized people craft resiliency. We silence both the oppressors and one of their favorite children—imposter syndrome. The office is a space of mourning, healing, death, and resuscitation. Here, our office space sometimes reflects the stage of spirit murder we are in. We use those context clues to inform our plan and make sure that we both make it out in one piece.

The Classroom

> *The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.*
>
> —hooks, 1994, p. 204

Within the context of hooks' description of the classroom, we explore the classroom as a physical site of warfare and/or sanctuary and explore the tensions associated with both. For many, the classroom is a site where one's spirit is chipped away at, for some the classroom is a site of protection, for others a site that nourishes and simultaneously drains energy, time, capacity, and ability. This is not unique to racially minoritized faculty, but something experienced also by racially minoritized students. For many racially minoritized faculty and students, this is a physical space that is often hard to navigate and survive as the constant slaughtering of mind, soul, and body impacts one's own ability to learn and succeed. As we think about the classroom as a catalyst, we recognize it is not created equally and for some, the classroom is the very opposite, an opportunity to showcase "knowledge" and "teach lessons" to those who "think" they know better- a space used to punish and negate the knowledge of communities deemed as less than, or not as important. It is a site where many spirits are murdered, without care. But how does the classroom become a catalyzing space?

The literature on racially minoritized faculty experiences notes that the classroom is a space where for many racially minoritized faculty, their knowledge, credentials, and ability to teach is questioned, authority challenged, and frequent reports made to document perceived (mis) behavior (McGowan, 2000; Stanley 2006) this is where the struggle begins, as faculty come prepared with a full armor for the unexpected. It is not enough that we prepare for each class, and carefully develop our craft of teaching. We must also anticipate who in the room will (mis) read our bodies, accents, epistemology, area of expertise, examples, politics, etc., and prepare to react in a way that does not cost us our career.

We also know (faculty and students alike) that many of these classrooms do not give the grace to make mistakes or be imperfect and so many of us go in already prepared for a reenactment of past experiences. We are often surprised when we enter spaces that acknowledge, affirm, and validate us and our knowledge. Many of our spirits are murdered simply because we speak the truth, however, this truth is not absolute and for many white people sharing our knowledge is seen as not "objective" or the "appropriate" truth. If we share our knowledge and experiences with passion we are viewed as "aggressive," "disruptive," "overbearing". If we challenge our colleagues to think outside of the fabricated knowledge they have been taught, we are perceived as trying to brainwash others or not "thinking things through clearly". We are asked to "step out" to ensure a classroom is not disrupted. But who gets to remain in those sacred classroom spaces? While bodies of color are escorted out or dismissed?

The classrooms that do feed our spirits, allow us to feel a sense of belonging in an academy that simply does not love us. In these classrooms, learning transpires, connections are established and we are seen, heard, motivated, valued, and counted as positive contributors of knowledge, even when we seek to disrupt normative discourse with our truths. We learn in these environments that we too matter, regardless of if our bodies/truths/experiences are welcomed or not. We often wonder…is it worth it?

Preparing to Be Murdered

You died. I cried.
And kept on getting up.
A little slower.
And a lot more deadly.

—Shakur, 2001, p.39

This section and its subheading may come across as morbid, but we wish to accurately capture the preparation that our spirits endure and what it is like for them to be murdered. We do not take this lightly, and we wish to honor our experiences by sharing glimpses and examples of the emotional labor behind this process. To be spirit murdered can be swift but it can also be a slow agonizing experience. Regardless of the temporal relationship, our capacity and preparation are unphased as much preparation has already occurred to protect ourselves. Ask any racially minoritized person and they can share a myriad of anticipatory emotions that they experience knowing that something is about to "pop off". Betrayal, guilt, anger, frustration, dreadfulness, exhaustion, fear, amongst

so many other emotions. To work in academia is to carefully position yourself in a constantly moving board game under strict regulations and restrictions. When looking towards one another besides our emotions we find a great deal of inspiration. Despite knowing that a cocktail of emotions is building up, we find strength in mentorship. As a Ph.D. seeker and Ph.D. holder, we try to best support one another knowing that the work is never done. The actions of others oftentimes position us to question our sanity; in these fragmented and disorienting moments is when our coalition-building is most appreciated. As previously shared, we affirm our emotions first (humanize ourselves, honor our feelings however they may show up) and ask questions later (because oftentimes this disavows our experiences and strips us of our agency).

Beyond anticipatory emotions, much planning occurs for spirit murdering. Racial and gender minoritized individuals often plan even when there is no present threat. We learn to never be comfortable as aggression does not come with a warning. In the planning stage, and to avoid the murder of our spirit, we seek help and guidance from others. There is so much labor associated with trying to plan and also prevent your spirit from being murdered. Oftentimes we are met with roadblocks as others may not understand the issue because of their limitations. Once we tried to follow protocol for restorative justice and were met with a meal of disposability, and a glass of respectability politics to accompany it. By disposability, we again refer to the willingness to throw away both our concerns and our service. Many racially minoritized people leave the academy due to this very issue that we are raising. Furthermore, respectability politics runs rampant across all positions and spaces in academia. From silencing racially minoritized students after their speaking up is deemed 'unprecedented', to attempting to punish a racially minoritized faculty member because their support for racially minoritized students to center healing through their assignments, is seen as unfair and biased. In these circumstances, sometimes we find it best to give in.

Giving in—to us, this does not mean surrender. It does however mean acceptance of our circumstance with the specific understanding that we deserve more than this. Because to give even after everything has been stolen from us, is centering our survival first and gifting ourselves with grace. Giving in is also to release ourselves from that which has kept us captive. Is there a freedom sweeter than going on your own terms? For us, this means having difficult conversations about the future and where our needs and talents are better suited. A reader may label this as an escape plan but there is no escaping anti-Blackness and gender oppression bred from white supremacy and colonialism. Instead, we are making future plans because we understand that our ends extend beyond ourselves. We understand that we have others to look out for,

and as such must have a clear understanding of the privilege we hold as scholars. We know that this is not the last time we will be spiritually murdered; therefore, it is necessary to find comfort in our future plans and to finally, rest.

The Re/resurrection (revival and healing) of Spirit

> *If you are alive, you descended from a people who refused to die. Nothing is more sacred than you.*
>
> —Brown, 2016

Every time that our spirit is murdered, we understand that our community as a collective is hurting. As racially minoritized people we recognize our experiences are radically different, space is made for it, but these are instances when we can breathe again. Mentors who care about us, and families who care about us more than our work. We understand that generations to come depend on our healing, now. It is for that reason that when we come back, we bring all of the lessons and familial prayers with us, embracing that there is power in relying on our village (Aguilar-Smith & Flores, 2020). It is not enough to decenter whiteness; we must also tear down the pillars of white supremacy that allow it to go unmarked and unchecked. How much can a counter-narrative do if we still are not listening and are still living within an oppressive regime? During these uncertain moments, we find it crucial to reclaim and prevent our time and space from being stolen by institutions and individuals (Ray, 2019). We allocate time for untamed laughter and unrestricted joy with our people. To disrupt white supremacy is to use everything gifted that we have learned from Black feminists, critical race scholars, and our ancestors.

When we write about resurrection, we are talking about it as a process that is not defined by time and space. For us resurrection means healing, it means physical and spiritual proof that we are still here and not going anywhere. To go through resurrection is to have your spirit murdered but it is also to have foresight. By this, we mean that every time we return, we come back stronger and more prepared. By no means do we romanticize or advocate for grit in the harmful sense. Instead, we are hyper-focused on what we envision our future to be like, and for that to happen we know we must leave our imposter syndrome behind. When we resurrect, we lay our racial and gendered violence down to rest. This means imagining a world where the tenure process and graduate student socialization are done radically differently. It means disrupting academia's comfort as if our life depended on it, because it does. We do not want to talk our way to healing via another listening session or committee, instead, we are demanding change now. Resurrection, after

all, is not just about being in a better environment, it is about coming back and making instrumental changes each time. It is about rebuilding with one another, it is about the space that we allow ourselves to be in. Eventually, we want to be in a space where we are so prepared that no war waged against our bodies, souls, mind, and spirits may triumph. We are still not there, but we must believe that we will get there.

Call to Action

> *Struggle is a never ending process. Freedom is never really won, you earn it and win it in every generation.*
>
> —King,1993, p. xii

To interrupt and disrupt the current state of the academy that more often than not breeds toxic environments in which racially minoritized populations suffer greatly, there first has to be a recognition that PWIs by their very nature allow for their racially minoritized populations to be spirit murdered by upholding whiteness—in policies, practices, actions, and curriculum. These all inflict great pain and harm on those who are often the most vulnerable. There must be a long standing commitment to follow through with action to value and support racially minoritized people, after acknowledging the racist foundation upon which many institutions of higher education have been built. Higher education stakeholders should prioritize treasuring racially minoritized faculty, students and staff, valuing their contributions (be it research, teaching, service), and consciously multiply efforts and resources to support these populations. *Treasuring racially minoritized populations* requires putting humanity and compassion first before the neoliberal desires of the university. It means centering racially minoritized faculty, students, staff, and understanding that their history, along with the current events in the United States makes it difficult to navigate life and academic careers. It is an understanding that many of our experiences, while different, tell stories of deep generational trauma that lives on, and through us. It is the realization that our experiences are unique and that our needs are not all the same. It is *seeing* us for who we are and accepting the multiplicity of identities that we bring to academic spaces. It is seeing us as non-disposable, and recognizing our presence as essential, and acting in ways that illustrate our value.

Valuing our contribution requires the understanding that white knowledge is not absolute. It is not the end-all and be all those of us with racially minoritized identities bring so much to the table, our teaching, research, service, knowledge may look different from that of mainstream academic culture, but it is neither wrong nor useless. “Conscientious, intentional, and critical listening” (Johnson & Bryan, 2017 p. 174) is

what is required from those who embody and enact whiteness, to appreciate contributions from racially minoritized people who historically have been devalued and not seen as important to higher education.

Consciously Multiply Efforts & Resources moves beyond simply recruiting racially minoritized students and faculty to white academic institutions. There should be a deep desire to not only bring racially minoritized populations to campus but to keep them and insist that they succeed and thrive no matter the cost. Becoming aware of the spirit murdering that racially minoritized populations endure in the ivory towers is important- oftentimes we notice that our academic colleagues are "invested" in fighting for racial justice but fail to see how their own colleagues are being murdered within the academy. Then some know and do not care. To lessen division between others, there must be a focus on multiplying efforts and resources that allow racially minoritized populations to feel as if they belong and can succeed and thrive within academe.

Notes

[1] We use racially minoritized to describe people who identify as People of Color. Minoritized is used in this context to acknowledge that People of Color have been given minority status, not because of quantity or because they want to be described as minorities, but because of the limited power they hold because of structural racism (Benitez, 2010; Stewart, 2013).

[2] Here, Mexican is used to describe the ethnicity of the author. It is not used as a racial identification as to not contribute to the erasure of the Black and Indigenous communities in Mexico. Instead of adopting Mestizo (a colonial term used to describe people with indigenous and Spanish blood), no racial identification is provided since an accurate descriptor of race was difficult to name.

[3] The asterisk in Trans* is used as an umbrella term that is utilized here to break away from cis-limiting possibilities. (Tompkins, 2014). Here, the author uses it purposefully as he has yet to arrive at a gender-specific term.

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