

Attempted Spirit Murder

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Who Are Your Spirit Protectors and Your Spirit Restorers?

Anita Tijerina Revilla

Abstract

This essay examines Patricia William's concept of spirit murder (1991) as she details the ways that racism and other forms of discrimination have devastating spiritual and emotional long-term impacts on the individual and collective psyche of Black people and other marginalized people in the U.S. I connect William's concept of spirit murder to two other concepts I refer to as spirit protectors and spirit restorers. I argue that people who have been targeted by attempted spirit murder in the academy have either internalized the practice of spirit murder and become spirit murderers themselves, or they have resisted and survived attempted spirit murder in the academy by banding together, protecting each other, and creating spirit restorative teams. Peers, mentors, family, and/or community members have often transformed themselves into spirit protectors and spirit restorers. I pay respects particularly to women, queer people, muxeristas, jotería, and Black Indigenous People of Color, activists, and/or scholars who have been my spirit protectors and restorers.

Keywords: Attempted spirit murder, spirit restorers, spirit protectors

Introduction

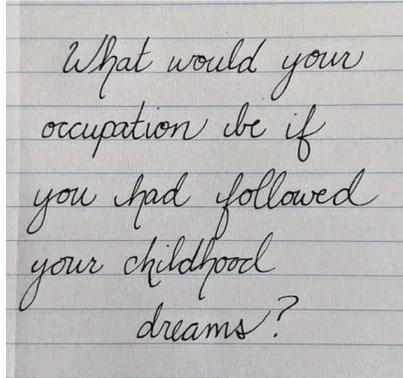
This photo (see Figure 1) reads, "What would your occupation be if you had followed your childhood dreams?" It was shared many times on social media in October of 2020. It seemed to awaken something inside people who read and shared it. I have been asking folks a similar question

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Figure 1

“What would your occupation be if you had followed your childhood dreams?”
Retrieved from social media on October 20, 2020. Author unknown.



for the past 15 to 20 years every time I have given a lecture about spirit murder. “What did you dream of becoming when you were young?” I ask. Each time I have asked, I witness people traveling through time and space back to a time when they felt young, hopeful, vulnerable, scared, or uncertain about their futures. Sometimes they feel delight or joy about their past dreams. Perhaps they dreamt of becoming the president of the United States or becoming a superhero. Maybe they wanted to be a teacher or a doctor, and they became one so they feel accomplished as they recollect their journey. Sadly, many feel sadness, nostalgia, or pain for not being able to attain their dreams. I ask them who or what is responsible for them not having achieved their dreams, and the looks on their faces tell many stories. A handful of times, audience members or students in my classes have shyly admitted that as children, their possibilities and visions for the future were so bleak that they simply had no dreams or expectations. When this happens, I pause, acknowledge the pain they are feeling and ask us to hold that person in tenderness and love. I proceed by discussing the systemic structures of discrimination that likely contributed to making their dreams elusive, as well as the people who might have espoused the ‘isms and ‘phobias that likely helped to kill their dreams.

As I write this essay, I hold all of us who have been harmed by attempted and accomplished spirit murder with deep love and tenderness. Simultaneously, I invoke the power of our spirit protectors and spirit restorers. With this essay, I call in the spirit protectors and restorers to honor them and pay our respects for the work they have done in guiding us and helping us arrive at the places and locations we are in today.

Subject Position

Since subject position is everything in my analysis of the law, you deserve to know that it's a bad morning. I am very depressed. It always takes a while to sort out what's wrong, but it usually starts with some kind of perfectly irrational thought such as: I *hate* being a lawyer. This particular morning I'm sitting up in bed reading about redhibitory vices. A redhibitory vice is a defect in merchandise which, if existing at the time of purchase, gives rise to a claim allowing the buyer to return the thing and to get back part or all of the purchase price. The case I'm reading is an 1835 decision from Louisiana, involving redhibitory vice of craziness. (Williams 1991, p. 3)

Critical race and legal scholar, Patricia Williams opens up her book *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (1991) with this anecdote. She explains that she is reading a case about an enslaved African woman named Kate whose worth is being debated because the plaintiff alleges that he purchased her from the defendant who knew she was "crazy" and therefore "useless." The impact of reading such an incredulous, dehumanizing case is maddening to Williams. She continues,

As I said, this is the sort of morning when I hate being a lawyer, a teacher, and just about everything else in my life. It's all I can do to feed the cats. I let my hair stream wildly and the eyes roll back in my head. So you should know this is one of those mornings when I refuse to compose myself properly; you should know you are dealing with someone who is writing this in an old terry bathrobe with a little fringe of blue and white tassels dangling the hem, trying to decide if she is stupid or crazy. (Williams, 1991, p. 4)

As I read this, I take a deep breath. I put the book down. I move away from it and consider all of the times my students and colleagues of color and I have felt defeated, demoralized, and overall, racially battle fatigued¹ at work or school, felt the madness and rage of defending our worth to our colleagues, supervisors, students, and/or peers, had to read and write the words "disadvantaged," "minority," or tell a sob survival story about our lives just to prove our worth or gain access to an institution, a position, or funding source. These memories are coupled with physical and emotional exhaustion, anxiousness, sleepless nights, and persistent knots at the pit of my stomach, chest, and throat.

I shift my attention to home, to San Antonio, Texas, where my family also struggles with "craziness," bouts of madness, and deep pain. My sister was diagnosed with bipolar and schizoaffective 'disorder.' She is a brilliant and fierce 45-year-old woman, just a few credits short of a bachelor's degree in Chicana history, who twelve years ago entered a

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deep level of illness. As I write this essay, she is experiencing symptoms of delusion, paranoia, and anger because she fears that society is out to get her. She fears that people are trying to hurt her and her kids (two teens, our kids, who I have raised since they were 3 and 4 years old), and she is so disconnected from reality that she thinks that even our mother is trying to hurt her, and thus she has entered a state of madness.² Since subject position is indeed important, I share with you that in this moment I fear for my sister and mother's lives, and I am deeply saddened by the racist, classist, sexist, ableist physical and spiritual trauma that has led to my own sister's spirit murder, which I weave into this piece, as there is no way I can separate what is happening at home and in my heart from what I understand about this concept.

Williams powerfully details the challenges of her work as a Black woman and a law professor struggling to argue for the rights and human dignity of Black people. In chapter one she shares that she is writing this book in a voice that intentionally departs from the traditional Eurocentric legal discourse that ignores the nuances of "complex social problems" such as racism and classism and their impact on human lives and spirits. She says, "Law school was for me like being on another planet, full of alienated creatures with whom I could make little connection. The school created a dense atmosphere that muted my voice to inaudibility" (Williams, 1991, p. 55). As a first-generation college student who grew up in poverty, a queer Chicana activist-scholar who studied at similar institutions, I feel a deep resonance with this. I, too, have felt silenced in the institutions to which I have been granted access. "When I became a law professor," she writes, "I found myself on yet another planet..." (p. 55). It is in this context, that Williams places the concept of spirit murder—that is, from the perspective of a woman who has been othered, silenced, made depressed, enraged by the elitist schools in which she has both attended and taught. Her desire is to articulate the need for justice, use her legal scholarship for that purpose, and educate readers about the missing components of their analyses. Frustrated by the disconnect between her and her colleagues and the field, she details her theoretical perspectives to bring light to racial and class injustices within the legal system.

Spirit Murder and National Tragedies

It is my opinion that the notion and practice of spirit murder traveled across oceans and land in the hands of colonizers, imperialists, and slaveholders. Spirit murderers enacted physical violence and spiritual wounding on others in search of land and alleged freedoms. Spirit murder in physical form has manifested as colonization, war, genocide, lynching, land theft, rape, sexual violence, and police brutality; however,

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the long-term impact that these tragedies have had on the human spirit and the essence of our humanity and dignity has not been fully considered. Over 20 years ago, Patricia Williams argued that our spirits were under attack by racism and other forms of discrimination, and that it behooved *all of us* to contend with these attacks. She warned that we are all responsible for addressing the consequences and ramifications of the legacies of racism we have inherited, especially if we believe in justice and desire a different reality for this nation.

During the lifetime of my parents and grandparents, and for several hundred years before them, laws were used to prevent blacks from learning to read, write, own property, or vote; blacks were, by constitutional mandate, outlawed from the hopeful, loving expectations that come from being treated as a whole rather than three-fifths of a person. When every resource of a wealthy nation is put to such destructive ends, it will take more than a few generations to *mop up the mess* [emphasis added by me]. We are all inheritors of that legacy, whether new to this world or new to this country, for it survives as powerful and invisibly reinforcing structures of thought, language, and law. Thus, generalized notions of innocence and guilt have little place in the dimensions of this historic crime, this national tragedy. There is, however, responsibility for never forgetting another's history, for making real the psychic obliteration that does live on as a factor in shaping relations not just between blacks and whites..." (Williams, 1991, p. 61)

This warning is both haunting and apt as we consider the January 6, 2021 insurrection of the Capitol by supporters of the 45th³ president of the U.S., many of which embody deep levels of racism and sexism and pay no heed to taking accountability for the wrongdoings of this nation. Rather, 45 and numerous of his supporters take issue with activist-scholars' call for this kind of accountability. This is evident in the October 9th White House 2020 Columbus Day proclamation. The presidential administration wrote,

Sadly, in recent years, radical activists have sought to undermine Christopher Columbus's legacy. These extremists seek to replace discussion of his vast contributions with talk of failings, his discoveries with atrocities, and his achievements with transgressions. Rather than learn from our history, this radical ideology and its adherents seek to revise it, deprive it of any splendor, and mark it inherently sinister. They seek to squash any dissent from their orthodoxy. We must not give in to these tactics or consent to such a bleak view of our history. We must teach future generations about our storied heritage, starting with the protection of monuments to our intrepid heroes like Columbus.⁴

Williams' warnings ring incredibly loud given the harmful and spirit murdering presidency we barely survived as a nation. It is clear, from

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these proclamations, that there is no intention to “mop up the mess” but rather to hide the mess and glorify the people who made the mess. As Williams (1991) notes, “The attempt to split bias from violence has been this society’s most enduring and fatal rationalization. Prejudice does hurt, however, just as absence of it can nourish and shelter. Discrimination can repel and vilify, ostracize and alienate” (p. 61). Race scholars have already detailed why colorblind ideology was a failure, and yet here we are still contending with this pushback (Bonilla Silva, 2014). Many did not survive the previous administration’s attacks. We have suffered physical and/or spiritual deaths in our families and communities due to 45’s policies and discriminatory rhetoric.

Williams also shares a story about a civil rights advocate, a Black man who was murdered by a white man and stabbed thirty-nine times. This story provides particular insight to the tendencies of spirit murder, particularly considering intent. She wrote,

A black man working for some civil-rights cause was killed by a white man for racially- motivated reasons; the man was stabbed thirty-nine times, which prompted a radio commentator to observe that the point was not just murder but something beyond. I wondered for a long time what it was that would not die, what could not be killed by the fourth, fifth, or even tenth knife blow; what sort of thing would not die with the body but lived on in the mind of the murderer. Perhaps, as psychologists have argued, what the murderer was trying to kill was a part of his own mind’s image, a part of himself and not a real other. After all, generally, statistically, and corporeally, blacks as a group are poor, powerless, and a minority. It is in the minds of whites that blacks become large, threatening, powerful, uncontrollable, ubiquitous, and supernatural. (Williams, 1991, p. 72)

Hence, it is in the minds of racist people, that is, people with delusions of white supremacy, that Black people and the simple act of working for civil rights and human dignity can be viewed as dangerous, so dangerous and overwhelming that it warrants death—physical and spiritual. I cannot disconnect this notion from the acts of the previous presidential administration that adamantly tried to diminish much of the civil rights legislation and progress that was made over the past three decades, while simultaneously making it physically dangerous for immigrants, refugees, trans and queer people, Black people, poor people and others to gain safety and livelihood in the U.S. As 45’s presidency came to an end, his administration rushed to push forward several spirit murdering proclamations, such as the *Proclamation on National Day of Remembrance for Americans Killed by Illegal Aliens* (a gaslighting declaration horrifyingly coinciding with the Day of the Dead) and the *Proclamation on National American History and Founders Month* which

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denounced Critical Race Theory (CRT), whiteness studies, and diversity initiatives.⁵ 45's administration made no apology for dismissing and enabling the racist, classist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, and citizenist⁶ past and present of this nation. In doing so, they enacted wide-spread spirit murdering tactics that we as a nation will be working to heal from for generations. In fact, the reverberations continue across the country even without 45 as president, as is evident in the anti-CRT legislation being passed in Tennessee and other states currently. Patricia Williams (1991) wrote,

...in Buddhism and Hinduism, death may occur long before the body ceases to function, and life may, in the proper circumstances, continue for a time after the body is carried to its grave. These non-body bound uncompartimentalized ideas recognize the power of spirit, or what we in our secularized society might describe as the dynamism of self-as-reinterpreted-by-the-perceptions-of-others. (pp. 72-73)

The impact of federally-sanctioned spirit-murdering laws and proclamations and their trickle-down effect into classrooms, workplaces, and social spaces led to a variety of unleashed attempts at spirit murder (as they have been doing since the founding of this nation). Thus, some of our students, family and community members, and even fellow teachers, colleagues, and administrators in the school context are functioning in a state of spirit demoralization, fatigue, and/or death due to academic spirit murder. Academic spirit murder may occur when racist, classist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, anti-immigrant, ableist, and/or ageist traumas are experienced in educational settings. Furthermore, academic spirit murder signifies that racism and other forms of discrimination have the power to spiritually and emotionally murder and destroy not only people's dreams but also their very essence and desire to exist. Often, this has led to what William Smith (2007) refers to as "racial battle fatigue" and other varieties of school resistance, rejection, struggle, and/or sabotage. Smith, et. al. (2007) contend that,

The cumulative symptoms of racial battle fatigue are both physiological and psychological (Smith, 2004, 2005a, 2005b). Examples of physiological symptoms include, but are not limited to, (a) tension headaches and backaches, (b) elevated heartbeat, (c) rapid breathing in anticipation of racial conflict, (d) an upset stomach or "butterflies," (e) extreme fatigue, (f) ulcers, (g) loss of appetite, and (h) elevated blood pressure. The psychological symptoms of racial battle fatigue include (a) constant anxiety and worrying; (b) increased swearing and complaining; (c) inability to sleep; (d) sleep broken by haunting, conflict-specific dreams; (e) intrusive thoughts and images; (f) loss of self-confidence; (g) difficulty in thinking coherently or being able to articulate (confirming stereotype); (h) hypervigilance; (i) frustration; (j) denial; (k) John Henryism, or

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prolonged, high-effort coping with difficult psychological stressors; (1) emotional and social withdrawal; (m) anger, anger suppression, and verbal or nonverbal expressions of anger; (n) denial; (o) keeping quiet; and (p) resentment... (p. 556)

Thus, racism literally makes us sick and fatigued, as does battling physical, lethal war. As Black, Indigenous, People of Color, Queer people, and feminists, we have come to understand that race is but one facet of battle fatigue. We are under persistent attack, often inside and outside of our own communities. There are many aspects of our struggles. We experience imperialism, elitism, ageism, colorism, linguistic discrimination, ableism, fatism, speciesism, homophobia, transphobia, and much more. Thus, it is imperative to expand our vision of social justice to be effective at holistic spirit restoration and protection.⁷

Many who remain in academia continue to function as if the attempted murder has not virtually destroyed them, when in fact **it has caused detrimental, irreparable spiritual damage**. Many of us have colleagues, classmates, and supervisors who have been impacted in this way. **Physically, they are alive, but spiritually they have been beat down by the structural, organizational, individual, historical, and contemporary acts of discrimination**. Many of them have internalized these acts of attempted spirit murder. Some may have even begun to believe that we do not deserve access or are unable to succeed in institutions of higher education. Williams (1991) says,

Taking the example of the man who was stabbed thirty-nine times out of the context of our compartmentalized legal system, and considering it in the framework of a legal system that would recognize the moral, religious, or psychological, **I am moved to see this act as not merely body murder but as spirit murder**. Only one form of murder is racism—cultural obliteration, [non-consensual] prostitution, abandonment of elderly and the homeless, and genocide are some of its other guises. One of the reasons I fear what I call spirit murder—disregard for others whose lives qualitatively depend on our regard—is that it produces a system of formalized distortions of thought. It produces social structures centered on fear and hate, a tumorous outlet for feelings elsewhere unexpressed. (p. 73)

Internalized spirit murder is one of the most dangerous weapons of white supremacy. When we believe that we have no value, worth, or dignity, or that our people have no value, worth, or dignity, we are indeed moving toward what Williams calls a **spiritual genocide**. She says, “...I think we need to elevate spirit murder to the conceptual—if not punitive—level of a capital moral offense. We need to see it for the cultural cancer it is, for the spiritual genocide it is wreaking on blacks, in whites, and to the abandoned and abused of all race and ages” (Williams, 1991, p. 78).

Spirit Protectors and Spirit Restorers

As early as 1970, novelist and professor Toni Morrison identified the problem of spirit murder. She recalled a conversation she had with a childhood friend who had prayed that God would give her blue eyes, essentially internalizing what Toni Morrison called the “master narrative,” also anti-black spirit murdering narratives. In an interview, she discussed this experience as the impetus for the first novel she wrote, *The Bluest Eye* (1970). She said:

I remember an incident from my childhood when a very close friend of mine and I; well we were walking down the street. We were discussing whether God exists or not, and she said he did not. And I said he did. But then she said she had proof. She said, “I have been praying for two years for blue eyes and he never gave me any.” So, I just remember turning around and looking at her. She was very, very Black, and she was very, very, very beautiful. How painful. Can you imagine that kind of pain? About that, about color? So, I wanted to say, this kind of racism hurts. This is not lynchings and murders and drownings. This is interior pain. So deep... for an 11-year-old girl to believe that if she only had some characteristic of the white world...she would be okay...She surrendered completely to the master narrative, I mean the whole of what is ugliness. What worthlessness. (Greenfield-Sanders, 2019, 17:05-19:00)

When prompted and asked what the master narrative was and where it came from, Morrison explained to the white male interviewer, “She got it from her family. She got it from school. She got it from the movies. She got it from everywhere...It’s white male life. The master narrative is whatever ideological script that is being imposed by the people in authority on everybody else” (Greenfield-Sanders, 2019, 17:05-19:00). Listening to Toni Morrison tell what inspired her first book, I instantly knew she was referring to the same concept Patricia Williams was referring to as spirit murder. Both racism and internalized racism can lead to incredible defeat. Toni Morrison’s work spoke directly to that phenomenon. Her intent was to interrupt spiritual genocide by offering the counterstories and rebellious spirits of Black people, in particular in the stories of Black women and girls. Not only were her characters resistors of attempted spirit murder, but they were also spirit restorers and spirit protectors. I define spirit protectors and spirit restorers as people, places, organizations, beliefs, and/or practices (they can also be art, poetry, books, music, and dance) that give marginalized people the strength to reject and survive attempted spirit murder and/or restore our wounded spirits, especially in the face of repeated attacks and woundings both inside and outside of institutions of education.

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Consider here, the character and role of Baby Suggs in *Beloved* (1987). As an undergraduate student, I attended Princeton University and had the honor of being taught by Toni Morrison. Simply being her student and the student of Dr. Cornel West evoked a sense of spirit restoration or spirit reclamation—that is, I felt myself becoming more authentically myself as I learned from them, especially because the few students of color on campus flocked to their classes and the collective experience of being in their classroom was life-changing. Several of my professors assigned Toni Morrison’s Nobel Prize-winning book *Beloved*. Every time we read Baby Suggs’ sermon, it evoked a sense of protection and restoration amongst the students of color who felt alienated and dejected amongst their wealthy, often racist and classist peers. Indeed, Baby Suggs was both a spirit protector and restorer to the people in the novel and to those of us who read the book. Baby Suggs summoned Black women, men, and children, formerly enslaved people, into a clearing in the woods and spoke these words.

“Here,” she said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face ’cause they don’t love that either. You got to love it, you! And no, they ain’t in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. No, they don’t love your mouth. You got to love it. This is flesh I’m talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I’m telling you. And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they’d just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver—love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your lifeholding womb and your lifegiving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.” Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh. (Morrison, 1987, pp. 43-44)

This sermon is the ultimate model of spirit restoration and protection. Baby Suggs models how to reclaim one's body and spirit as they literally move out of enslavement and into physical and spiritual freedom.

The sermon is a clear indication that being free of physical enslavement is only partial freedom. Freedom also requires the restoration of people's spirits and minds. It includes the reclamation of people's worth and value, and usually it is our teachers, elders, youth, and/or spiritual leaders like Baby Suggs who bring us out of spiritual death toward spirit restoration and/or spirit reclamation. At times, we have spirit protectors who intervene on our behalf even before spirit murder takes place.

I ask the reader to consider, who are you spirit protectors? Are you a spirit protector? Do you have a spirit restorative team who will help intervene on your behalf in the case of attempted spirit murder? How can you be certain you have not become a spirit murderer yourself? These are the questions that currently guide me and my work in and outside of the university.

Spirit Restorative Teams

I have been mulling over what spirit murder looks like tangibly in our lives for the past 15 to 20 years. I have been asking students and colleagues to think about how spirit murder takes place in our lives and what role we have played in these acts of attempted spiritual murder. Some might assume that because we remain in the academy, we have not experienced academic spirit murder, that is, the death of our will to participate and succeed in academia. However, as Williams (1991) points out, a person's physical body can function even after they have been spiritually wounded or killed. Thus, many academics and student-scholars are functioning in a state of sadness, madness, disassociation, resentment, deep wounding, and are still somehow functionally moving through the process of higher education, jumping the hoops, and even convincing others that the attempts at spirit murder that they have experienced have not defeated them.

Many of us have been witness to these acts. The emotional and spiritual wounds of structural inequality and domination are swift and powerful. Some of us might have even committed spirit murder, whether intentionally or not, on ourselves or others. Our survival in Eurocentric, patriarchal, capitalistic, hetero/cisnormative, citizenist, and ableist institutions has taught us to ignore and silently overcome these violent acts against our spirits. As people enter survival mode, they become seemingly unaware of the depths of wounding they/we are existing in. Some people of color, women, and other marginalized/minoritized

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groups have so internalized the harmful acts and ideologies behind spirit murder that they have begun to reproduce the harmful practices, without awareness or acknowledgement. Internalized oppression, thus, is akin to internalized spirit murder.

Individual, structural, and historical wounding and violence are rampant in the academy, and yet radical and critical scholars all around the world have banded together to become spirit protectors and restorers for one another. Many of us learned first how to protect our spirits through books, activism, community, and family, and later we learned to form networks or teams of spirit protection and restoration (Combahee River Collective 1977; Moraga & Anzaldúa 1981; Lorde 1984; Anzaldúa 1987). We shared, for example, with classmates which classes to take and which professors had spirit killing tendencies and should be avoided. We created spirit protective safety nets and advised each other on what graduate programs to pursue and which ones to avoid. When we entered the professoriate, we signaled to each other that we “had each other’s backs” and worked together in the face of harsh rebuke by racist, classist, sexist administrators, colleagues, staff, or students—this is spirit restorative and protective.

The work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987; 2015) has offered spirit restoring pathways for many of us. In *Light in the Dark*, Anzaldúa (2015) wrote, “The path to *desconocimiento* [unfamiliarity] leads human consciousness into ignorance, fear, and hatred. It succumbs to righteous judgment and withdraws into separation and domination, pushing most of us into retaliatory acts of further rampage, which beget more violence” (p. 19). It is easy to see that the current state of the country continues to be in the depth of *desconocimiento*, the ignorance, fear, and hatred that she describes. Anzaldúa offers *conocimiento* (knowing) as a path to restoration, saying:

... *Conocimiento*, the more difficult path, leads to awakening, insights, understandings, realizations, courage, and the motivation to engage in concrete ways with the potential to bring us into compassionate interactions...*En estos tiempos de la Llorona* we must use creativity to jolt into awareness of spiritual/political problems and other major global tragedies so that we can repair *el daño*. (p. 19)

Anzaldúa’s path to *conocimiento*, signifies a consciousness/awareness and connection to self, community, and history. Ethnic studies, feminist/muxerista (Revilla 2004), queer/jotería studies (Revilla & Santillana 2014) have served as that space of *conocimiento* and reconnection for me. As Anzaldúa indicates, “The healing of our wounds results in transformation, and transformation results in the healing of our wounds” (p. 19.) She explained that this is part of the Coyolxauhqui Imperative (See Appendix B), the crucial need to heal ourselves. Coyolxauhqui is

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the Aztec Goddess, sister of Huitzilopochtli, who was dismembered by her brother. Anzaldúa likens our pathway to Coyolxauhqui's lifelong path toward healing, indicating that there is no end result, but rather an on-going process of remembering, awakening, and healing.

Our imperative is to better understand our wounds and their origins so that we can better heal them. We then begin this process of constantly putting ourselves back together (see Appendix B for an example of my own path of *conocimiento*). There are many paths to healing. In the case of my communities, we have engaged in this process when we have allowed ourselves to love fiercely, laugh, create art, learn, teach, dance, write poetry, tell stories, sing songs, make love/fuck, be silly/petty, and experience great joy and pleasure—shamelessly and with great connection to our truth and authenticity. Furthermore, we must first make a conscious effort to awaken to the knowledge and dangers of the spiritual genocide that threatens us both in academic and community spaces. We must acknowledge that when we begin to internalize the master narratives of spirit murder, we become dangerous to ourselves and others. We must practice deep awareness, deep *conocimiento* in those moments, so that we can interrupt the spiritual violence and instead choose spirit restoration, spirit protection, and harm reduction.

I will ask once more of the reader, will you be a spirit restorer and protector, or will you become a spirit murderer? What role will you play in protecting your spirit and the spirit of others around you? How will you heal the emotional and institutional violence that you have already survived? These questions deserve an intentional and focused response. We cannot afford to be reactive to these needs. Instead, we must be proactive in building out spirit restorative and protective teams with our familias, colleagues, students, and community members.

Lastly, I would like to close this essay with thanking everyone who has protected my spirit (our spirits), my essence (our essence), and my peace (our peace) in the dangerous spaces of the academy. I thank first and foremost my original spirit protector, my mother Delia Tijerina Revilla, Sr. and her spirit of resistance. I thank my fellow *activistas*, *muxeristas*, *jotería*, Raza Womyn de UCLA, the Las Vegas activist crew, *las mariposas de AJAAS* (the Association for Jotería Arts Activism and Scholarship), my lifetime advisor Danny Solórzano, my crews of color from undergrad and grad school, my Vegas activist colleagues, and my Cal State LA *colegas* and students, my fierce teens, *familia*, and my lover who have cherished and protected me when racist, classist, sexist, homophobic, ableist people in the academy have come after my spirit. Thank you for being my spirit restorers and protectors. Thank you for helping me to create the space to reclaim my spirit and truest self.

Notes

¹ See William Smith, et. al. 2007.

² For more on why I use “illness/madness” see the work of Shayda Kafai, assistant professor at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona who uses the word “madness” instead of mental illness to combat the stigma attached to the word mental illness.

³ Recognizing that many readers will be triggered to see the written name of the former 45th president of the United States because of his blatant racism, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and anti-immigrant policies and behaviors, I will instead opt to use the number 45 rather than his name.

⁴ See <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-columbus-day-2020/>. Retrieved on January 26, 2021.

⁵ See *Proclamation on National American History and Founders Month*, October 30, 2020, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-national-american-history-founders-month-2020/>. Retrieved on March 7, 2021.

⁶ Citizenism is a system of advantages that unfairly privileges U.S. citizens. It is the belief in citizen superiority and social, economic, political, and legal discrimination against undocumented immigrants, particularly against poor, working-class, Indigenous, Black, woman, and queer and trans undocumented immigrants. It is U.S. citizen supremacy that allows for the exploitation and dehumanization of undocumented immigrants. (Revilla & Rangel- Medina, 2011).

⁷ See Appendix A for a visual of multidimensional struggle/woundings.

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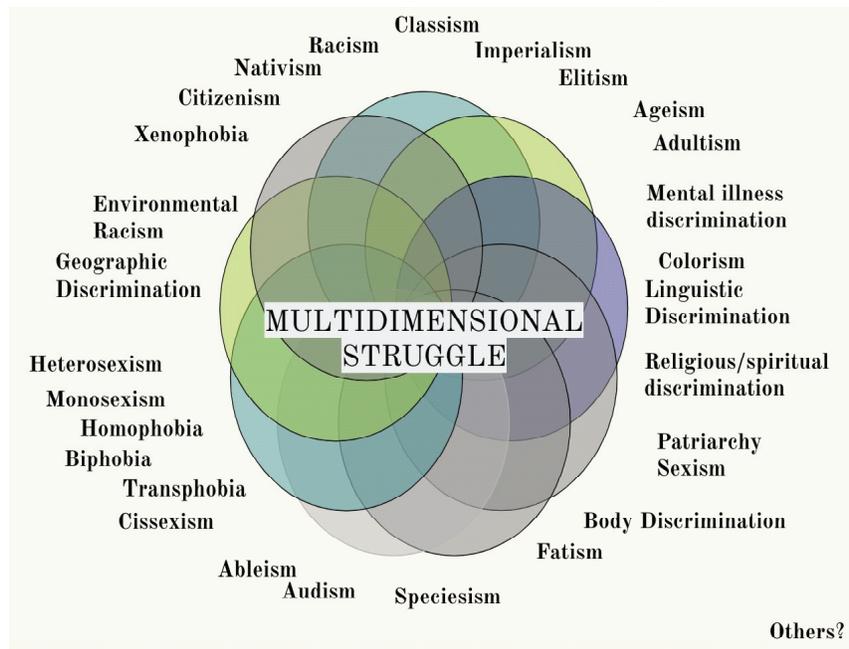
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Appendix A

This image is a visual of the multidimensional struggle and/or multidimensional woundings marginalized people contend with in our society. There are many aspects of discrimination that lead to spiritual (individual and structural) woundings. This image reflects my desire to name these forces of discrimination, the emotional and spiritual violence we experience, and the need to continue adding to this list in order to have a more expansive vision of social justice.



Attempted Spirit Murder

Appendix B

This image is a visual of the Coyolxauhqui Imperative as described by Gloria Anzaldua (2002) and refashioned to include the elements that have caused academic wounding in my journey, as well as the elements of remembrance or “putting myself back together” through ethnic studies, feminist studies, muxerista and jotería consciousness, a multidimensional critical consciousness, a commitment to humanization, dismantling structures of violence, and a focus on truth, joy, authenticity, laughter, and healing.

