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(Re)claiming the Garden, (Re)learning to Fly: A Trinity Framework for Liberation in Virtual Graduate Spaces

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Abstract

This reflective article, grounded in Endarkened Storywork and critical autoethnography, is a theoretically rich practitioner piece that contributes to current conversations in online graduate education. It introduces a trinity framework for online graduate (Re)liberation—Black Feminist–Womanist Epistemologies, Decolonial and Liberation Psychology, and Critical Race Theory. This framework holds the transformative potential to reshape the landscape of online graduate education, offering a new lens through which to view and engage with knowledge and learning. Grounded in lived experience as a Black mother-scholar, doula, E-RYT 500 yoga instructor, and educator, the article offers a culturally rooted critique of online graduate education and its epistemic exclusions. The author presents an original liberatory framework, theoretical methodology, and cultural paradigm—Black Liberatory Ancestral Consciousness & Epistemologies (BLACX)—developed through critical autoethnography, communal praxis, and spiritual reflection as a practice of resistance, ritual, and relational andragogy.

Drawing from ancestral wisdom, spiritual epistemology, and storywork—including traditions like *The People Could Fly*—this work reimagines online spaces as sacred sites of transformation and provides a culturally responsive model for course design, pedagogy, and graduate learning. Implications include new possibilities for culturally sovereign pedagogies, institutional redesign, and healing-centered praxis in digital higher education environments.

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Author's Note

Cherina Okikilo Shaw (she/her) is a Black womanist scholar, doula, E-RYT 500 yoga instructor, and doctoral student of psychology whose work centers sacred resistance, ancestral knowledge, and the liberation of Black children and their caregivers. She is the developer of Black Liberatory Ancestral Consciousness & Epistemologies (BLACX), a culturally grounded framework for liberation and relational learning in online graduate spaces. Her work is rooted in the spiritual lineage of priestesshood and ancestral witness, bridging scholarly inquiry with healing traditions. This article is written in the first person to honor traditions of Black feminist scholarship, spiritual epistemology, and storywork as liberatory methodology.

Editor's Note

Readers – Please note that the term *pedagogy* is applied holistically and not literally, as is most often found in research literature in PK-12 education. *Pedagogy* for this article, as with some others in the broader literature, refers to instructional practice for all ages of learners, not only for children.

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(Re)claiming the Garden, (Re)learning to Fly:
A Trinity Framework for Liberation in Virtual Graduate Spaces

As a child, I sat at my grandmother's feet as she read to me Virginia Hamilton's (1985) *The People Could Fly* —a story that planted the seed of knowing I was never bound to the ground. As I grew, I accompanied her to a Black writers' circle where I listened, learned, and laughed with women who were all called "*Auntie*." Only later did I learn that those aunties were Alice Walker, Nikki Giovanni, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Angela Davis—the very voices I now cite in my work. This is Ubuntu in practice: I am because they are, and the next will be because I am. These aunties, by culture and community, along with my grandmother, taught me that transformation is spiritual, political, and communal.

"You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time." — Angela Davis (Q&A at Southern Illinois University Carbondale on February 13, 2014)

That is precisely what I learned in my grandmother's garden. There, revolution was not a metaphor—it was the rhythm of daily life. I did not just learn to till the earth. I learned to till memory. To cultivate vision. To harvest the truths buried in silence, the strength braided into our stories, the healing grown from memory, and the wisdom she could not always speak aloud—but taught in every gesture, every seed, every act of Black womanist care. Through her, I knew I could fly; she whispered wings into my back. Her garden was a literal garden—but it was also a lecture hall, the Black writers' workshop; it was a classroom, a sanctuary, and a strategy for survival. Everything she grew—including me—she spoke love and life into. Her words were the water that fed and sustained me, and her stories were my sun. Through them, I knew I could fly. She grew with intention. And everything I grow now—in community, in scholarship, in spirit—is seeded by her hands. I am because she was. And the next will be because I am.

This work is a love letter—and a liberatory intervention. To my ancestors, to the children I raise—by birth, by community, and by culture. To the village I build with, and to the parts of myself that once believed I had to shrink to belong. Every word offered here is a bloom in the garden of our collective remembering. This offering is not only reflection—it is (Re)clamation, (Re)sistance, and (Re)turn.

Each *(Re)* is distinct yet intertwined: (Re)clamation is the act of recovering what was stolen, silenced, or forgotten—whether cultural, spiritual, or intellectual. (Re)sistance is the

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refusal to be assimilated into academic spaces that demand erasure or neutrality. (Re)turn is the sacred homecoming—to self, to story, to community, and to ancestral knowing.

Together, they form a trinity of epistemic power—a methodological praxis rooted in Black womanist legacy. Throughout this work, I use the prefix *"(Re)"* to mark an intentional spiraling back—not to where we were, but to who we've always been. *(Re)* signals that we are not starting from scratch, but rising from legacy, returning to wholeness, and remembering what was always ours. Each *(Re)* is a refusal of erasure and an act of cultural sovereignty.

As a Black womanist scholar rooted in ancestral wisdom and the healing arts, I navigate online graduate education not only as a student but as a vessel of sacred knowing. I have journeyed through every iteration of online learning—from its early experimental forms in the late 1990s and early 2000s to today's more structured doctoral platforms—not only as a student across undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels, but also as an educator shaping learning in these same digital spaces. As June Jordan (1980) once wrote, *"We are the ones we have been waiting for"* (p. 279). Her words are not metaphors—they are blueprints. My presence here is not accidental; it is legacy manifested. As a Black mother of six, access to online graduate education was not merely convenient—it was essential. It allowed me to stay rooted in my community while pursuing knowledge across distance.

Yet, this format came with profound trade-offs: the isolation of learning without presence, the absence of a culturally competent community, and the added pressure of having to name, explain, and defend Blackness in typed words more often than spoken ones. Over time, however, this tension became alchemy. It transformed disconnection into clarity and silence into assertion. It made me the outspoken advocate I am today.

This reflective piece introduces the BLACX Trinity Framework—Black Liberatory Ancestral Consciousness & Epistemologies. The framework synthesizes Black Feminist–Womanist Epistemologies, Decolonial and Liberation Psychology, and Critical Race Theory. It serves as a culturally grounded, spiritually sovereign lens for understanding the lived experiences of Black women and femmes in virtual graduate spaces. It is both a methodology and a paradigm—one that makes space for ritual, remembrance, and resistance as legitimate forms of scholarship. This paper articulates the theoretical foundation of BLACX and explores its application as a liberatory tool for reclaiming educational autonomy and reimagining online learning as a site of collective liberation.

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My work does not exist in a vacuum—it sits at a crossroads, informed by my identity as a mother, scholar, healer, and cultural worker. I was shaped by generations of women who moved through the world at sacred thresholds, holding space between survival and transformation. From a psychological lens, the intersections I inhabit reflect what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) describes as epistemic resistance—where the act of knowing itself becomes a form of political refusal—and what Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) frames as intersectionality: the interlocking nature of systemic oppressions that shape the lives of Black women. My very presence in online academia exists at these layered crossings, demanding a framework expansive enough to hold both trauma and transcendence. As Maya Angelou reminds us, "I can be changed by what happens to me, but I refuse to be reduced by it" — a widely circulated paraphrasing of her original words, "You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them" (2009, p. xii).

(Re)rooting in Black Feminist–Womanist Epistemologies: (Re)claiming the Matrilineal & Communal

Black Womanism, as articulated by thinkers such as Alice Walker (1983), Layli Maparyan (2012), and Katie G. Cannon (1988), represents a spiritually grounded and communal epistemology shaped by the lived experiences, intergenerational knowledge, and ancestral traditions of Black women and femmes. It centers reciprocal care, cultural integrity, and sacred connection as foundational to intellectual and political life. Rooted in the broader tradition of Black Feminist Thought—drawing on the seminal work of Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and the community-based praxis of bell hooks (2000)—this framework resists Western paradigms of disembodied knowledge and affirms the spiritual, collective, and creative wisdom of Black women as legitimate and necessary forms of knowing.

Through my work in birthing justice; as an oloricha and priestess of Yemaya; and as a community-rooted educator guiding expansive family networks toward liberatory learning paradigms—where Black children are recognized as sovereign beings, whole and uncolonized, born with divine purpose and never to be molded by systems of domination—I live womanism as daily liberation.

Online academic spaces often fragment intellect from intuition, privileging disembodied discourse while penalizing narrative, emotion, and ancestral presence. bell hooks (1994) insisted that classrooms must be sites of wholeness—where intellect and spirit are not severed, but held

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in communion. Similarly, Paris and Alim (2017) called for culturally sustaining pedagogy that honors identity, affect, and story as central to learning—especially in digital contexts where standardization often replaces relationality. But Black Womanism restores wholeness—making space for the body, the ancestors, and the stories we carry. My grandmother taught me to garden—both with soil and with story. In those moments, I learned that knowledge is not always written; sometimes it is whispered, planted, and remembered. As a young woman, I sought the garden—believing it was a place. Now, as a matriarch, I understand: I am the garden. The wisdom I once searched for blooms through me. As Alice Walker (1983) wrote in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Black women's creativity, survival, and spirit are not lost—they are inherited. They bloom in us, always, often in ways that transcend the written and academic. Womanism, then, is not only about recovery—it is about (Re)membering what was always carried and making space for that knowledge in digital academic spaces. Within the BLACX Trinity, this framework affirms our right to bloom unapologetically—especially in spaces designed to uproot us.

(Re)imagining Academic Liberation Through Decolonial and Liberation Psychology: Disrupting Eurocentric Norms

Decoloniality, as defined by Maldonado-Torres (2007), requires that we name and unlearn the systems of coloniality that persist in modern institutions—including the privileging of Western knowledge systems, individualism, and intellectual detachment embedded in academia—even in its digital forms. The pressure to perform, produce, and assimilate to the Western academic culture often erases the sacred, the ancestral, and the culturally grounded pace of knowing. My journey through graduate school has been one of reclaiming time, voice, and ritual. I resist the colonized pace of urgency and instead honor rest, reflection, rhyme, and rhythm. Not that there are not times that call for urgency, but those urgencies must arise from within, not from systems of surveillance, validation, or domination. My papers begin with intentional grounding—a deliberate act of ancestral recognition, cultural alignment, and embodied remembrance that calls spirit into scholarship and restores story as methodology to ensure that my voice is one that honors my ancestors, the sacredness of spirit-led knowing, and the lineage of Black storytelling that made room for my becoming. My research is rooted in lived experience. My scholarship begins with a pause—a moment of breath and reverence. This work is an act of Ubuntu, a quiet offering meant to honor those who came before me and create space

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for those who will come after. In this way, scholarship becomes legacy-making, not performance, my scholarship is ceremony.

When I root my doctoral experience in Black Feminist–Womanist Epistemologies, decolonial psychology (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), and liberation psychology (Martín-Baró, 1994), I am not merely enduring the graduate process—I am rebirthing it through a sacred, sovereign praxis. These frameworks do not sit alongside one another—they form a triadic pulse of psychological and scholarly resistance, forging a paradigm that reclaims education as a healing act. Black Feminist–Womanist Epistemologies offer ancestral grounding and cultural clarity, challenging the cognitive imperialism embedded in mainstream psychology. Decolonial psychology tears at the myth of Western academic supremacy, centering the historical and ongoing impact of colonial violence on consciousness and learning; decolonial psychology insists that educational liberation must include epistemic justice. Liberation psychology calls us to reposition research as praxis—engaging collective trauma, resisting oppressive structures, and pursuing the well-being of marginalized communities. Liberation psychology does not ask how we adjust to systems—it demands we transform them, centering healing as methodology and justice as outcome. Together, they do not support my scholarship—they **are** my scholarship: a rhythm, a remembering, a refusal.

In this convergence, I also draw deeply from Black Feminist Thought—rooted in the call to ensure my voice honors my ancestors, the sacredness of spirit-led knowing, and the generational traditions of Black storytelling—both of which demand that we center the voices of the oppressed, expose systemic inequities, and promote healing as a revolutionary act (hooks, 1994). Together, these intertwined frameworks support a pedagogy of liberation, an approach to learning and scholarship that centers cultural identity, ancestral truth, and radical self-determination. In the context of online graduate education, this pedagogy invites spaciousness, cultural grounding, and communal accountability in digital learning spaces that often prioritize performance over presence, which holds cultural identity, ancestral truth, and radical self-determination at its core.

(Re)framing Through Critical Race Theory (CRT): Naming Systems, Centering Truth

Critical Race Theory, grounded in the work of Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Gloria Ladson-Billings, illuminates how online graduate education, though digital and often decentralized, remains deeply rooted in structures of anti-Blackness, color-evasiveness, and

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racial inequity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In asynchronous, one-to-one course formats, students may experience an almost complete absence of interaction, even with professors, outside of assignment submissions. This structure demands an unspoken assumption of shared worldview, which may be wholly divergent from the student's lived experience, and leaves limited authentic opportunities for clarification, cultural resonance, or meaningful connection. The absence of culturally responsive pedagogy and the expectation of assimilation erode the brilliance and sovereignty of Black scholars (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Sue et al., 2007; Yosso, 2005). In traditions where knowledge is communal, passed orally, and affirmed in relationship, the absence of culturally competent support systems and intergenerational networks can make the graduate journey feel isolating, disheartening, and spiritually disconnected (hooks, 1994; Love, 2019; Yosso, 2005).

Ubuntu calls me to show up in the community, even when the format of online education attempts to individualize the learning process. I know myself through others. I grow through dialogue. And I learn through shared experiences. The absence of community-building in online graduate programs is not just a pedagogical gap—it is a cultural rupture. Ubuntu teaches us that we cannot thrive alone. As the Xhosa proverb says, "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu"—*a person is a person through other people.* This wisdom reminds us that our existence is woven through shared stories, community care, and collective becoming. As the Yoruba say, "Iku tí í pa ojú ẹni, kò sẹ́ni tí kì í pa lójú àná"—*what happens to one today, can happen to another tomorrow*. It affirms our interdependence and insists that our healing and thriving are bound together. I bring this principle into discussion boards, group chats, and peer mentorship. Every act of connection is an act of cultural reclamation (Mbiti, 1969; Murithi, 2006).

Together, CRT and Ubuntu function not as opposing perspectives but as complementary forces within online graduate education—each offering what the other makes possible (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Murithi, 2006). CRT names the structural and systemic violence that underlies inequitable educational environments, providing the critical language to expose erasure, bias, and exclusion. But exposure alone does not heal. Ubuntu offers the relational ethic needed to respond, grounding us in the understanding that justice is not only legal or theoretical, but deeply spiritual and communal. Where CRT reveals harm, Ubuntu makes space for healing. CRT asserts that racism is embedded in institutional structures; Ubuntu insists that our humanity is embedded in one another. CRT equips us to critique power; Ubuntu reminds us to restore connection.

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Together, they offer a model of education that is both analytically rigorous and spiritually whole—one that interrogates systems and rebuilds them around care, dignity, and collective becoming.

(Re)flective Through BLACX: Embodied Convergence

This work follows rigorous narrative inquiry traditions rooted in Black feminist and womanist scholarship, affirming story and self as valid sites of knowledge in educational research. Black Liberatory Ancestral Consciousness & Epistemologies (BLACX) is a foundational liberatory framework, theoretical methodology, and cultural paradigm I developed to center Black epistemic sovereignty, ancestral wisdom, and embodied knowing within qualitative research and online educational spaces. BLACX represents a critical departure from extractive, colonial models of research and teaching by affirming Black ancestral consciousness as integral to psychological, educational, and spiritual inquiry. Rooted in the synthesis of Africentric Thematic Analysis, Black Womanist and Feminist Inquiry, Critical Race Theory, Culturally Responsive Methodologies, and deeply influenced by Decolonial, Liberation, and Spiritual Psychology, BLACX provides a spiritually grounded, culturally authentic pathway for liberatory qualitative inquiry and praxis.

BLACX is a qualitative methodology and more than that—it is a vessel of ancestral memory, a refusal of erasure, and a return to deeply guided knowing. At its core is the BLACX Spiral—a methodological, symbolic, and pedagogical structure that reflects how Black knowledge unfolds: in rhythm, recursion, and revelation. The Spiral is not decorative—it is directional. It guides the researcher through cycles of (Re)flexivity, (Re)sonance, and (Re)clamation, inviting embodied witnessing and culturally sovereign interpretation as valid scholarly acts. BLACX is more than a methodology—it is simultaneously a liberatory framework, a qualitative research paradigm, and a scaffold for curriculum design and pedagogical transformation (Shaw, 2025). It guides not just how we research, but how we teach, learn, heal, and remember. The “X” in BLACX is intentional. It is not a stylistic flourish, but a declaration. It evokes the crossroads—a place of ancestral convergence, decision, and spiritual presence in African cosmology. “X” also honors the radical renaming of Malcolm X, the refusal to accept names assigned by systems of oppression. It symbolizes multiplicity, resistance, and the untamed expansiveness of Black knowing. In this way, BLACX is not simply a framework. It is a naming ceremony, a refusal, and a return. It draws power from the ritual, rhythm, and

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resistance cultivated within Black Feminist–Womanist Epistemologies, Decolonial and Liberation Psychology, and Critical Race Theory. In this context, BLACX is not only a healing framework for students, but also a guide for online course design and faculty training, offering a culturally responsive pedagogy that re-centers relationship, ritual, and cultural safety in virtual spaces by reimagining discussion boards as spaces for ancestral reflection, incorporating ritual check-ins in synchronous sessions, and using the (Re)flexivity cycle as an assignment scaffold within learning management systems. In my faculty development offerings, I guide educators through the BLACX Spiral using reflective journaling, cultural validation mapping, and co-created redesign of course outcomes to align with ancestral and communal values (Blitch Alchemy Education, 2025; Children of the Sun Doula Project, 2025). BLACX honors ancestral witnessing, ritual knowledge, and culturally sovereign storytelling as valid and necessary tools for transforming online graduate spaces into sacred containers for liberation. It is a practice, a pedagogy, and a path forward.

BLACX also lives in the work of the Children of the Sun Doula Project and Queens Village Northern California, where I steward spaces that center Black maternal wellness, intergenerational healing, and culturally rooted care. These initiatives are an extension of the legacy of the Black granny midwife—keepers of ancestral birth wisdom, communal wellness, and radical love. These initiatives provide ritual-informed wellness, educational empowerment, and spiritual care for Black birthing people and their families—translating my doctoral frameworks into daily, life-affirming practice. These initiatives are not only an extension of my academic work, but its heart. In these spaces, the BLACX Spiral guides community circles and curriculum design. For example, doula trainings are structured through the (Re)flexivity, (Re)sonance, and (Re)clamation cycle—where participants engage in reflective storywork, cultural mapping, and applied healing practices rooted in ancestral knowledge. These frameworks, though grounded in Black experience, invite broader intersectional resonance—Like the people who could fly, BLACX invites us to remember our wings—not just as metaphor, but as method, Endarkened Storywork (Toliver, 2022), and embodied refusal, illuminating liberatory possibilities for all those navigating compounded margins. Whether queer, disabled, low-income, or otherwise disenfranchised, students at the intersections may find restoration in these culturally sovereign pedagogies. As Lorde (1988) reminds us, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” (p. 130). This care

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is embedded in every doula circle, every unschooling session, every act of community healing I co-create.

Through my work in community education, leading cultural education platforms, and co-creating the "Parenting and Educating with Head and Heart" initiative, BLACX has evolved into a dynamic, community-responsive praxis. These virtual and in-person spaces operate as sites of cultural reclamation, intergenerational dialogue, and pedagogical healing—supporting Black families in reclaiming knowledge, resisting assimilation, and raising children to thrive as whole, sovereign beings. My direct engagement in these spaces has offered longitudinal insight into how sacred Black pedagogy transforms not only the children, but also the caregivers, educators, and facilitators who participate.

Within this context, BLACX is employed specifically as a communal praxis methodology—one of the three articulated modalities within the framework, alongside its functions as a theoretical model and conceptual scaffold. In this capacity, BLACX moves beyond abstraction and becomes a structured, culturally grounded process for inquiry and collective reflection. Methodologically, it operates through the Spiral's three iterative phases: (Re)flexivity, (Re)sonance, and (Re)clamation—each guiding researchers through cyclical processes of cultural witnessing, relational alignment, and symbolic interpretation.

The Spiral methodology was operationalized using practices anchored in ancestral logic, such as spiral journaling (a reflective, nonlinear narrative process grounded in cultural memory and lived experience) and symbolic resonance dialogues (collective interpretive discussions that trace metaphors, ancestral themes, and affective patterns across community narratives). These methods center community voice and cultural logic over detached analysis, recognizing data as emergent through relationship, rhythm, and return.

Sessions began with ritual grounding—a culturally congruent practice used to honor ancestral presence and align group intention. This established a space of psychological, spiritual, and cosmological safety. Participants were then invited to reflect on prompts such as "What were you taught to forget?" and "Where do your people carry their knowing?" These inquiries served as entry points for spiral journaling, allowing layers of meaning to unfold over time and across sessions.

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Rather than relying on conventional coding frameworks, data were interpreted using symbolic resonance, which privileges recurring metaphors, rhythms, and ancestral codes as indicators of thematic integrity. Interpretive validity was established through Cultural Resonance Validation (CRV)—a structured but culturally embedded feedback method that replaces traditional member-checking with brief, relational consultations from community collaborators (Shaw, 2025). CRV ensures that emergent themes align with communal knowledge, ethical coherence, and symbolic truth.

Researchers, including myself, practiced reflexive positionality throughout the process—documenting our epistemic locations, emotional responses, and interpretive shifts using NVivo-assisted memoing and spiral journaling logs. This was not merely a reflexive gesture but a requirement within the BLACX framework, which sees the researcher not as neutral but as ethically entangled with the knowledge being co-created.

For those seeking to apply BLACX in other contexts, its methodology offers a replicable structure without imposing fixed procedures. Its five core pillars—Cultural Grounding, Spiral Reflection, Symbolic Meaning-Making, Collective Validation, and Relational Accountability—support rigorous, culturally congruent research in ways that remain flexible and context-responsive. BLACX does not offer a checklist; it offers a rhythm—one that researchers must learn to move with, rather than control.

In sum, this application of BLACX as communal praxis methodology affirms that inquiry is not just about generating findings, but about returning to ancestral truth, resisting epistemic violence, and restoring knowledge to the communities from which it was born. It is a methodology of re-membering: one that transforms research into an act of cultural care, relational truth-telling, and epistemic sovereignty.

BLACX not only offers a path of embodied knowledge but also a model for institutional transformation. For faculty and programs committed to equity, adopting a BLACX-aligned pedagogy would mean centering culturally grounded practices, validating spiritual and ancestral epistemologies, and reimagining metrics of success to reflect community impact and personal sovereignty. The application of BLACX across online education offers a blueprint for liberatory redesign, beyond inclusion toward structural change.

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I close this offering in the spirit of June Jordan, whose words have shaped the rhythm and reason of my scholarship. This reflection is not merely personal—it is pedagogical, poetic, and prophetic.

We Were Never Waiting

I did not write this to be understood by those who ask for footnotes to feel.
I wrote this because my grandmother prayed
and my daughters are still flying.
I wrote this because the syllabus
left us out
so I made a new one in my womb,
in my inbox,
in the hands of Black mothers
holding space
when no one else would.
This is not permission.
This is prophecy.
This is praxis.
This is mine.

(Re)turning to Spirit: A Vision + a Blessing

"A wall is just a wall and nothing more at all. It can be broken down." — Shakur (1987/2001, p. 1)

It is essential that our methodological and research courses reflect models of empowerment, liberation, and decolonial thought, particularly within graduate-level online programs where epistemic violence often occurs through silence and omission. These courses must move beyond traditional paradigms of objectivity and detachment to honor culturally grounded ways of knowing, communal learning practices, and transformative inquiry rooted in justice. By redesigning research pedagogy to reflect liberatory values, we not only elevate underrepresented voices but also reimagine knowledge creation itself as a healing, ancestral, and future-building act. When our pedagogy reflects liberation, our research becomes a site of cultural restoration.

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As online graduate education continues to expand, frameworks like BLACX must be considered essential, not supplementary, to cultivating equity, care, and belonging in online graduate education. These learning spaces, while expansive in potential, are often shaped by rigid norms that overlook the cultural, spiritual, and communal dimensions that support authentic graduate-level engagement and transformation.

Online graduate education must evolve to hold the full humanity of its learners. For Black women, femmes, and all sacred disruptors, this means centering cultural wisdom, communal connection, and spiritual liberation. We are not just students. We are seeds of something ancestral. As children, many of us read The People Could Fly, a story of Black transcendence that told us we could lift off from bondage into freedom. We remember that we were born knowing how to fly. That knowledge was passed through stories, braided into our roots, and buried just beneath our skin. May this work be a call to remember, a call to reclaim, and a call to rise—because like the people who could fly, we always could. We only needed to remember.

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