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An Open Letter to the Marginalized Academic: Divesting from Colonial Indoctrination

Dr. Khadija Boyd

Paulo Freire (1970) stated, “In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.” Academia has historically been evoked by a white, male, heteronormative framework that has limited the space for opposing identities to be marginalized through policies, organizational culture, and social imagery. Although liberation is not a notion employed in academia, assimilation, obedience, and domination serve as the protagonist embedded in the optics within these institutions, often praising the marginalized for how much abuse they can endure under the guise of academic rigor and resiliency. Not only is this violent, it is corrosive and dehumanizing. This open letter will serve as a motivational tool to combat and resist an oppressive system and illuminate the liberatory processes in multiple contexts. Also, ground the idea of liberation in concrete circumstances that demonstrate power and strength in the ongoing praxis and long-awaited triumph over the oppressor and the systems that they employ.

Keywords: diversity, education, inclusion, liberation, oppression, resistance

There is a value placed on higher education since education progresses society and expands culture (Spiel et al., 2018). However, despite its importance, students, faculty, and staff, due to their differing identities, are still navigating through uncomfortable academic spaces because academic success can be

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difficult to obtain when not pursued by a white, able-bodied, cis-gendered, heterosexual, English-speaking American male. Therefore, the education used to develop society and its culture remains firmly rooted in Americanism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy. Amid the increasingly large amounts of publicized acts of discrimination in academia, little to nothing is done to deconstruct the idolized “ivory tower” that pushes assimilation, which remains biased, flawed, and unjust for outliers of the preferred academic prototype. As more and more academics reject assimilation to American mainstream culture, which is epitomized as white (Boyd, 2021; Steele, 1992), we begin to see more faces and hear more voices of those who have been marginalized entering an ongoing revolution driven by the influence of a myriad of identities who have the power to pursue change.

Academia is subsequently the offspring of Eurocentrism (Hatt, 2016), and for far too long, the marginalized have been confined to its ignorance by limiting the possibility of reaching their full potential and becoming so accustomed to oppression that even when they succeed in these spaces, they are led to believe that they are failing. Also, despite modernity, Eurocentrism excludes and creates barriers for differing identities with an oppressive culture, making it difficult for marginalized academics to live centered in their identity. For centuries, the social hierarchies within humanism that have been governed by colonialism have historically evoked a white, male, hetero-normative framework that has tightly controlled academic spaces by permitting the continuous oppression of alternate identities through policies, organizational culture, and stratifications of social imagery. This tactic groups the marginalized into small descriptive boxes that reject and ignore the existence of their identity and separate the marginalized from a position that allows them the ability to impugn their alleged inferiority. Furthermore, assimilation, domination, and obedience serve as the protagonist embedded in the academic culture’s optics, often praising the marginalized for how much abuse they can endure under the guise of academic rigor and resiliency. Not only is this violent, it is corrosive and dehumanizing.

As the marginalized navigate through academia to find a space of belonging, the socially generated problematic nature of social hierarchies includes, but is not limited to, the experience of racial, ethnic, sexual, able-bodiedism, gender, and gender projection (“tom-boy” or “effeminate”) forms of oppression. The nuance in which these intersecting variables are more socially constructed than personally constructed creates an inescapable determinant from oppression

that can block liberation from coming to fruition. The myriad of identities that target the marginalized have been judged, ridiculed, shamed, lived through never-ending nightmares of hatred, and denied the right to openly exist within academic institutions that have continually reinforced the idea that they do not meet the narrow criteria of belonging. At the same time, the institutional notion and falsehoods of diversity, equity, and inclusion statements bring the disillusionment of safety and equality. However, the marginalization of identities cannot be resolved by proclamations of diversity, equity, and inclusion by the voice of imperialist authorities that force assimilation and refuse to reorganize and include the voices of the marginalized. No, in this context, diversity, equity, and inclusion are just the white man's burden repackaged and transformed into new ideologies that preserve heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and the romanticized conception of the "well-intentioned."

Higher education implies that sameness guarantees equality. Under these homogeneous parameters, replicating certain traits, skills, specific ways of thinking, and presenting oneself, which is categorized as agreeable or compliant, can be achieved by colonizing one's mind and whitewashing one's identity (Boyd, 2021; Steele, 1992). The oppressor desires this response and requires the internal suppression of one's identity to force the marginalized into the parameters of their comfort. This comfort comes from dictating how a person looks, speaks, and whom they love to be more palatable to them. The cycle of marginalization insists that the oppressed play a role in their oppression by shaping their cognition into blaming other variables, such as themselves, for the existence of said oppression so that they, the oppressor, may come in and save them. These actions create the identifiable pattern of the white savior industrial complex and the underlying belief that marginalized groups do not have the skills to help themselves (Maurantonio, 2017). However, do not be fooled by the white savior. Like disease mongering, the white savior will create the sickness and then sell the cure creating a codependence that keeps liberation out of the marginalized grasp. The white savior will scream revolution with the marginalized in the morning, then write violent policies to further oppress them by afternoon (Aronson, 2017), solidifying their sense of entitlement and omnipotence over the marginalized and creating a vantage point of perceived superiority.

This harmful indoctrination has created a socialization process that has taught and shaped an internalized position in the oppression structure that wards off any idea of liberation or critical transformation that threatens the founda-

tion of Americanism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy. Although the marginalized have historically revolted against oppressive systems, even on the brink of defeat, the oppressor will conflate their delusions of colonial solipsism to seek empathy for their actions because colonialism always presents itself from the epistemic position of correctness, decency, and morality. Regardless of their intent, the paradigm of colonial indoctrination and other forms of oppression and violence must be rejected as the natural order (Boyd, 2021). As more and more marginalized are becoming their authentic selves, they are discovering that liberation is the way out of oppression. Liberation is the way to free the body from tension, the mind from discriminatory-related anxiety, and beliefs of mediocrity. However, liberation is a transformative experience and will not be given to the marginalized by the oppressor. No, liberation must be fought for, walked toward with feet that never tire because the oppressor depends on the marginalized physical exhaustion, depleted mental health, cognitive dissonance, and belief that the structure of colonialism is the only acceptable way of living.

First, one must truly understand the damage of colonial indoctrination because the oppressor will demonize any attempt at liberation. By manipulating history and filling one's consciousness with lies, the oppressor would lead the marginalized to believe that they are powerless and must accept the options they provide. Tuh! Those who have been marginalized have power and the marginalized identity is not a currency of never-ending worthlessness. Their identity is their power when they rebuff the shame, restrictive gaze, and the indoctrinated internalized indignity of who they are. Once this happens, the systems created to oppress them will collapse. The marginalized must know that the work that will have to be put forward to seek liberation is grounded in self-awareness, clarity, and confidence so that they may openly celebrate themselves to one day shape a world that will not only be free of colonialism but so that they may exist in alignment with their authenticity.

Paulo Freire (1970) stated, "In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform." Therefore, owning one's identity proudly in a space where it has been scorned is a profound act of resistance. When the lines that define and shape an individual refuse to be neat, coming to terms with one's identity challenges all forms of oppression and injustice. Push forward to explore the embodiment of liberation grounded in your identity to tell the stories of the

protests, marches, rallies, and most importantly, the internal and external revolution to transform academia, culture, and society. The marginalized live in a world where social variables create a convergence of bias but know that the overt resistance naturally embodied within their minds and bodies is fundamentally unparalleled. One's authentic identity, joy, and presence are the linear force needed to undermine and destroy oppressive structures and reject the performative change that will ultimately slow liberatory progress. Without any doubt, know that the strength of one's ancestors goes against the dysfunctional pattern of colonialism.

The past struggles of the historically marginalized will illuminate the liberatory processes in multiple contexts and ground the idea of freedom in concrete circumstances where the marginalized must demonstrate their power in the ongoing praxis and long-awaited triumph over the oppressor and the systems that they employ. The most liberating thing the marginalized can do is stop surrendering to the heteropatriarchal, white supremacist ideologies as the foundational ways of life. Your identity is yours and should not be dictated by the scope of colonial indoctrination. Unbind to release oneself from the restraint of assimilation. Resist to withstand the actions of oppression. Never compromise to the fallacies that will only pacify the oppressor. Never waiver because your commitment is to your authenticity. Most importantly, never surrender your integrity so that you may be unrestricted by the truth in your identity while maintaining a steadfast commitment toward your liberation.

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