



**Using a Revolutionary Conscious Praxis (RCP) to
Dismantle the Code of Silence as Internalized Colonialism**

Geraldine (Geri) L. Palmer

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Author Biography: Influencers. Philosophies. Black African American activists. Soldiers. Amiri Baraka. Nikki Giovanni. Angela Davis. James Brown. I'm Black and I'm Proud. Revolutionary. The Black Panthers. The Civil Rights Movement. The Black Power Movement. The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. The assassination of Malcom X. The assassination of Medgar Evers. The Little Rock Nine. Birmingham Church Bombing. Fred Hampton murdered. Huey P. Newton incarcerated. Angela Davis on the FBI most wanted list. I start writing a book of poems dedicated to my son called "For My People." It is lost. I am lost for decades. I wake up and remember. There is no going back to silence.

...Who make dough from fear and lies

Who want the world like it is

Who want the world to be ruled by imperialism and national
oppression and terror violence, and hunger and poverty.

-Amiri Baraka

When I forgot who I am, I became a chameleon. Changing colors. The colonizer did the same. Changed from English to White. There is no going back to silence.

"When you know who you are, you don't have to worry anymore."

-Nikki Giovanni

Often, I desire to run away. It's too much! What can I do, I cry? I can write. Write. Write. I remember, I am the daughter of African kings and queens, of powerful, influential, scholars and activists. I am the dream of those who dreamed for a distant shore, while marooned on a foreign land---with a bent for power and greed. I can write for resistance. I study my Bible. I remember some more. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I am named after my aunt and grandmother. Warriors. There is no going back to silence.

Genocide.

Genocide.

Genocide.

We always knew there was a 'campaign of genocide'

Even when we didn't understand why.

We followed our soldiers and embraced

"...Peace if possible, but justice at any rate"¹

We're still okay with that...

There is no going back to silence.

This, then, is who I am.

For my people.

-Geraldine Palmer

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Corresponding Author: Geri Palmer, Email: gpalmer080@gmail.com

¹ Phillips, W. (1783-1815). The New Nation. <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc0399806>

Using a Revolutionary Conscious Praxis (RCP) to Dismantle the Code of Silence as Internalized Colonialism

This paper is intended as an introduction and a call for questioning psychological sciences. Western sciences, especially sciences that focuses on racial and gender “differences,” have served among the most colonizing influences worldwide. Frantz Fanon’s (1959) term “shameful sciences!” especially applies to social Darwinism and eugenics as forms of scientific racism, scientific sexism, and scientific imperialism. In this contribution, I highlight my struggles as a scholar to recognize these scientific narratives, to decolonize my own praxis as a scholar and a psychology clinician, as well as to address the long standing impact of these ideologies in the academy and society. I argue that In Science We (Should Never) Blindly Trust, and share my suggestions for ways to learn, name, and resist racist and sexist ideological sciences.

Introduction

The “code of silence” embraced among many descendants of the African Diaspora, has its roots in the African/Black African American² experience during enslavement and the Jim Crow era. It is both a historical and contemporary survival strategy and can be used as a means of resistance. The code of silence also has an association with “silencing” a well-known tactic of colonizers as well. The multiple contexts in which the code of silence or silencing are sometimes used may influence why it can be difficult to discern when these modes of communication are most beneficial to employ, if at all. Consequently, rather than protect, these concepts often reproduce and perpetuate



colonialism ideologies.

In a historical context with respect to Africans enslaved, the code of silence can be conceptualized as simply “not snitching” (Dennis, 2013) at all costs. Those who ascribed to the code of silence had a special contempt for those who snitched. Dennis noted that “informants” or snitches were used to police a wide assortment of offending behavior of those enslaved and were deemed especially helpful at preventing and squelching rebellions. Further, distinguishing occurred among informants where some cooperators merely provided information while others actively assisted the slave owner in regulating African misconduct” (p. 287). The decision to speak up or not may have been predicated on a few factors. Weighing in on the side of telling might rest on loyalty or misplaced loyalty to the slave owner, preservation of life, perhaps the thought of attaining freedom, or perhaps a morsel of more food for the family. Accordingly, those who spoke up set the stage for mistrust and disunity among the enslaved Africans, which is theorized by some scholars as an impetus behind the *modern-day code of silence* often

² I use Black/African American because I am striving to honor both the work of South Africans against apartheid with rereading “black” to “Black” and the descendants of Africans who were enslaved in the Americas.

found in many African American communities (p. 287).

Use of the code of silence in contemporary times point to a key element found in the “the talk” Black/African American parents must have with their children, in particular Black males on how to avoid and survive—White police encounters (Mahadevan, Brock, and Prescott, 2020). The thread of survival strongly runs through these discussions and has its origin in the same code of silence found among enslaved Africans as Dennis (2013) pointed out. It can also be argued that the code of silence or silencing used by Black/African American women today is employed paradoxically to protect both White and Black men when confronted with sexual assault. Broussard (2013) explains that the protection for Black men may have its origins in attempting to not add to the heinous atrocities already heaped upon them by the slave master. For White men, this practiced silencing is noted to have its derivation in the lack of legal recourse for Black women if a White man committed sexual assault against them. It was futile during enslavement to speak-up because the repercussions did not fall on the perpetrator, but often felt by the Black woman, and possibly her family. Broussard concluded that there was and remains an unspoken sisterhood of “don't tell” that pervades the Black community today because of the imposition of centuries-old silencing tactics and codes of silence developed to survive. These internal codes are akin to the culture that speaks to “snitching” to the cops or any other authority figure... (p. 375).

Broussard is clear that this silencing and its implications should not be laid at the feet of Black women. In the context of colonialism, enslavement and its aftermath, this practice is a systemic silence and therefore our entire society should be held accountable for it. Broussard believes society should come up

with reparations to pay the debt owed to Black women for their pain and suffering. Conversely, questions do surface such as have Black women been complicit in their own suffering because of their silence? Broussard answers this question by pointing out that the creation and maintenance of racist systems in America have allowed and perpetrated sexual and other abuses on Black women---and thus the onus of responsibility rest on society.

The code of silence or silencing as oppressive has been a major portion of life in American Black society and is a constant reminder that Black/African Americans were not considered human, but chattel property. Forced to construct such strategies to survive has negative biopsychosocial and cultural implications on contemporary generations of Black/African Americans. Frantz Fanon (1965) argues that this psychological oppressive system or *internalized colonialism* was passed down intergenerationally in Black/African American families, and my family (the author) was no exception. My ancestor's positionality was resounding. “Don't tell 'em nuttin!” Thus, the code of silence became my go to, my code of conduct in all circumstances where I determined a threat loomed. I had been taught to survive by embracing the code of silence. Yet, as a young adult who internalized the pain and trauma my ancestors bore, when it came time to make a different decision than employing the code of silence, I was not woke or living consciously at the time. I only understood I needed to survive and with survival comes automatic and unconscious living (Palmer, 2007).

Purpose of the Article

Using a personal story of the author, this article offers an example of how decision making can look when we are living from internalized colonialism. A model is offered for transforming internalized colonialism and

decolonizing our spaces. Additionally, this article is an effort to fill the void in telling Black/African American women's stories where historically they have been erased, ignored and generally unacknowledged. Telling our stories is decolonizing, healing, and transformative.

My Story

I grew up with and was influenced by such notables within the Black Power Movement such as Fred Hampton, Angela Davis and the Black Panthers, Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Malcolm X and more. I was born with a voice and easily gravitated to the frontlines of protests, speaking out, sit-ins in my high-school, and with no misgiving identified with the oppressed. Yet, the fear that something tragic was going to happen to me for using my voice must have weighed heavily on my mother and that fear came out consistently. She likely remembered how the code of silence had kept her and my ancestors alive. She had every right to be fearful having lived through the murders and killings, the attacks, the dehumanization of African Americans: The Little Rock Nine, the Birmingham Church Bombing, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, Jr., Emmitt Till, and so many, many more. "Your mouth is going to get you into trouble someday," she would say. How many times had she heard that from her own mother? She was also a voice. In any case, I heard her. I had learned how to survive.

My Interpretation of the Code of Silence

One day I decided to go along with a friend and steal hair color from the local Kmart. It had happened before---the petty theft---a candy bar here---a make-up brush there...everyone did it...the laughter as everyone tumbled out the store---the feeling of exhilaration...part protest and part rebellion against racism...we were African American teenagers...



All was fun until I was out the door, and this time felt a hand on my shoulder. "Come with me." Now, this adventure was no longer fun... But I knew what to do. My mother's voice and the voice of the ancestors were clear. "Don't tell em' nuttin!"

Upstairs in the store office---a piece of paper was shoved in front of me. No explanation. I was too scared to read I for myself. The fear of my ancestors kicked in. They asked me to sign it. Sign it, never. This was the same as do not say anything.

The police came. Get in the back! I took the long ride (or so it seemed) to the police station. My first time. I was fingerprinted, put in a little holding cell. But I had not talked or signed anything. I was not even afraid at the time of being in jail. After all jail was where African Americans went...jail meant you had protested racism and survived.

...A call allowed to my friend. Tell my mother. One-hundred dollars needed. Bring it. The friend brings it. I can go home. My mother is surprisingly understanding. Forget it happened. But I never forgot. You never forget trauma. The coloniality of silence has far-reaching tentacles.

Not only was the system of the code of silence passed down intergenerationally, so was fear that accompanies the overwhelming need and

quest to survive. Our ancestors lived each day during enslavement fearing they would not survive---and many did not. I took on this pain perhaps by historical or intergenerational trauma passed down socially and epigenetically and lived in constant fear the hand on my shoulder would come. I will not delve into studies that concur around responses from fear here, but conspicuously, I was no longer in that big box store but transported by this traumatic occurrence back to the enslavement camps where the slave master had caught me. At the time I never once thought of the real crime that I had committed. It was the furthest thing from my mind. Psychologically, I was instead an enslaved African with no rights; A Black child with ancestors from the “dark” continent of Africa, uncivilized, guilty, and deserving of punishment. I had, in essence, drank from the water fountain labeled WHITES ONLY.



Wnd News Service, 2014

I was assigned a court date. The case was heard in one of the most segregated and racist south suburban towns in the Chicago south suburban area at the time. I went to court by myself. My name is called---and I go up. No one from the store is there. I am confused again. “What do you plead?” the judge roars. “Guilty”. I say in a very small voice. “Guilty, it is!” The gavel slams. The judge moves on to the next case...was that a snicker?

Life goes on. I am stopped by the police in a western suburb--- was I speeding? Oh boy, I am going to get a ticket I thought. Instead, I had to follow the police to the station...for a ticket? It does not dawn on me at the time White people do not get hauled to the police station for a speeding ticket. A new friend is called. He comes. What is going on? “You have a jacket”, he says after conferring with the police. “What’s a jacket?” I am so not woke. A conviction on your record”. “From what?” More confusion. The judge in the box store case has placed a conviction on my record-- a-misdemeanor--- petty theft.

What I began to realize is the code of silence in the wrong context is not golden. It is oppressive. I had begun to wake up...

Internalized Colonialism

It is my hope that the reader sees there is more to this story than an unwise decision of a young adult to engage in petty theft, although that is here as well. And rightfully, there are consequences for such actions. But rather it is my hope here, that the reader sees my response to this situation as an example of an embedded survival strategy, albeit an absolute necessity in its context, but woefully out of place here. Had I read the document put in front of me, which was simply asking me to sign declaring I would never come into the store again and I could go. The product was a \$2.50 box of hair color.

I believe this situation is an example of Frantz Fanon’s (1965) *internalized colonialism* theory. The literature abounds with studies attempting to conceptualize internalized colonialism or more commonly termed internalized oppression. For the purposes of this article, let us think with Fanon on internalized colonialism. Fanon, a post-colonial theorist and clinical psychologist offered a four-phase model as a classic framework for understanding oppression or

internalized colonialism. The first phase points to colonialism as the forced entry of a foreign group into lands to exploit its natural resources including inhabitants (e.g., Africa). The second phase occurs when the colonizer imposes their culture, obliterating the indigenous culture and recreates the culture as defined by the colonizer. This speaks to the indigenous culture talking on the colonizer's more civilized ways of life in contrast to the colonized people's alleged inferior ways. Once this contrast is set up, the third phase begins, now the colonized are uncivilized and monitoring and policing begin. This sets up the colonizer's ideology of tyranny and domination, such that the stage is set for oppression, which is the crux to maintain this system. Phase three leads to phase four---the establishment of a society where the political, social, and economic institutions are constructed to benefit and maintain the superiority of the colonizer---while at the same time bringing the colonized into subordination. This fourth phase shows up in boarding schools, educational institutions, religious institutions, and more. Fanon's framework illustrates that there is massive biopsychosocial and internal work in constructing the colonized (Okazaki, David, & Abelman, 2007, p. 96). Fanon (1965) further put forward that internalized colonialism is the major psychological effect of colonialism and it also perpetuates oppression (Duran & Duran, 1995; Hill, 1999). Duran and Duran (1995) argued that internalized oppression on an individual and group level most often benefits the colonizer or oppressor, *not the ones oppressed*. When we connect this back to Broussard's (2013) discussion on Black women practicing silencing, it does not protect, it instead, propagates colonialism ideological frameworks of tyranny and domination. Audre' Lorde declared, "*My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you.*" I concur and argue we must stop living automatically and unconsciously but intentionally live on, and with purpose.

There are no circumstances where we, Black/African Americans and/or descendants of the African diaspora, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) should allow ourselves to not be aware of when we are unconsciously perpetuating colonialism. We can do this by thinking with post-colonial theorists, liberators and contemporary Black/African American scholars-activists, activists, practitioners, community psychologists, allies, and co-conspirators.

How Does Silencing Perpetuate Colonialism Ideologies?

I believe it is important in this article to add a brief discussion on how silencing perpetuates colonialism ideology. We must start with understanding that silencing was a core tactic of colonization, and its meaning extends into coloniality, the legacy of colonialism. Across the Americas and Canada, both settler nations, preoccupation with its own language, political discourse, social norms and cultural values have throughout history been imposed and forced on others through colonization (Dénommé-Welch & Rowell, 2017) such as silencing. An example of the impacts of silencing as a colonizing tactic are felt among Indigenous People and Africans captured and forced from their land and enslaved in the Americas (Africans). Within residential or boarding schools, the identities and culture of Indigenous People were erased, and they were forbidden to speak their native mother tongue---in essence, silenced. This same tactic was forced upon Africans, those that were alive when the slave ships alit upon the shores of Virginia. They were not allowed to speak their native tongues in public spaces, and this erased their culture and ways of being. Subsequently, in the Jim Crow era, this silencing showed up in laws enacted that discounted African Americans as a whole person. Consequently, generations of Indigenous People and descendants of the African diaspora experienced the isolation

and annihilation of their own language, culture, and ways of being through the racist form of systemic silencing. In turn, the voice of European settler society in North America has been the voice deemed privileged and rewarded. Dénommé-Welch & Rowell explained that Western culture places great emphasis on speech and voice, both in literal and figurative ways. This can show up either by emphasizing or demarking separation between “dominant” and “minoritized” voices. This has directly and indirectly contributed to forms of oppression and the subjugation of Indigenous and Black/African American racialized voices (p. 13). Gloria Anzaldúa aptly proclaimed,

“...the Anglo with the innocent face has yanked out our tongues, thus sentencing colonized cultural beings to a silenced culture. Drowned, we spit darkness. Fighting with our every shadow we are buried by silence (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 203).

This is not a space we want to live from, and the use of silencing that is not used as resistance hurls us back into darkness. Importantly if we internalize the image of the colonizer, then we construct the colonizer’s reality. Like bell hooks (1997) and the way she rereads concepts as a theoretical stance and a public act of resistance, we want to begin to do the same regarding the code of silence and silencing and view it as an erasure by the colonizer---and instead, we must center and raise our Black/African American voices.

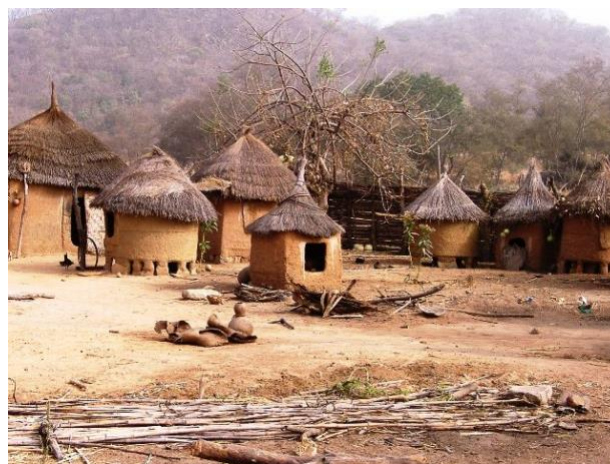
Reclaiming the Village

Where the mothers planted silence...the angry daughters sit to uproot
-Ijeome Umebinyuo

Black Consciousness (BC) Principles

The Black Consciousness movement came about the result of the shutdown of major apartheid organizations in South Africa such

as the African National Congress and Pan-Africanist Congress in the 1960s by government repression (Hadfield, 2017, para. 1). Frustrated with White leadership and the prevailing social issues, Steve Biko and other Black students established a completely Black association, the [South African Students’ Organization \(SASO\)](#). The SASO coined the term Black Consciousness which redefined “black” as an inclusive, positive identity and taught that Black South Africans could make meaningful societal change if they were “[conscientized](#)” or awakened to their self-worth and the need for activism. Youth joined this group and new community, and political organizations were also formed such as the Black Community Programs and Black



Nigerian Village – Society of African Missions

People’s Convention organizations (para. 1). Ultimately, Biko was killed by the South African government---and the movement waned after his death. Yet, core elements of this [Black Consciousness](#) philosophy has been found in contemporary freedom movements. Conceptualized as “an attitude of mind” or “way of life”, Black Consciousness spoke to Black people who believed in their value and that unity was needed to move liberation forward (para. 8). Black Consciousness activists sought to change the mindset of Black South Africans asking them to examine their internal philosophies to build capacity to realize their own freedom. To achieve

liberation under the Black Consciousness movement two realizations were critical: (1) South Africans needed to define “black” as a new positive conception that included all people of color discriminated against by the color of their skin. A Black positive identity would increase Black South Africans faith in their own possibilities; and (2) Black Consciousness activists rejected White liberals as their leaders, which this second element prompted many to view it as reversed racism. Others felt it led to a more “refreshing, emboldened new consciousness” (para. 8). While the Black Consciousness philosophy has its challenges as does any approach or movement toward liberation, the overall concept of core markers such as living through their own “ways of life” was what was lived out. For example, young Black South African women threw away straight hair wigs and skin lightening creams and donned natural Afros. Fanon (1965) argued that Black Consciousness was, and still is, “the psychological manifestation of liberatory self-actualization; the psychic movement away from the reductive, racial designation of ‘the black,’ to the self-affirming identification of ‘Black,’ [an actional agent catalyzing revolutionary socio-political change](#).”

Building on the Concept of the “Conscientized”

Paulo Freire (1971-1993) built on this work of conscientized or *conscientização*³. Both Fanon and Freire engaged in consciousness raising and psychopolitics as processes of helping others to see how they have psychologically internalized political power structures and racism. Fanon (1967) would point to colonial (and contemporary) racism as an “epidermalization of economic inequality” (p. 11). Freire brought forward this conscient advance within educational pedagogy to liberate the masses from

³ The term conscientização refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic

systemic inequity maintained and perpetuated by process, practices and outcomes of interdependent systems and institutions (Jemal & Bussey, 2018, p. 602). Freire, (1970) conceived of “critical consciousness” when working with adult laborers in Brazil. To this end he proposed a cycle of critical consciousness development processes that:

1. involve gaining knowledge about the systems and structures that create and sustain inequality (critical analysis).
2. involve developing a sense of power or capability (sense of agency), and
3. involve ultimately committing to acting against oppressive conditions (critical action) (para. 6).

Freire recognized that unless the workers were able to decode their social condition, oppression would be sustained.

Revolutionary Conscious Praxis (RCP)

Taken together, Black Consciousness principles and Fanon’s and Freire’s work on conscientized, brings us to this point where I offer a three-pronged model Revolutionary Conscious Praxis as an approach to dismantling “silencing” or “codes of silence” and other contemporary positionalities that perpetuate colonialism ideology in any form. From Black Consciousness principles, Fanon and bell hooks (1997), I include in this model:

- A. Freire’s (1970) “critical consciousness” comprised of:
 - Gaining knowledge about the systems and structures that create and sustain inequality (an awakening and critical analysis)
 - Developing a sense of power or capability (sense of agency), and

contradictions, and to act against the oppressive elements of reality.

- Committing to acting against oppressive conditions (critical action) (para. 6).
- B. bell hooks (1997) Reflection on theoretical positionalities which is a:
 - Rereading of imposed labels and terms such as “black” to Black or “private domesticity” to “homeplace of resistance”, and
- C. Critical action which includes:
 - Investigating and examining historical and contemporary concepts that have their origin in colonialism ideologies, racism, sexism, imperialism, capitalism and other terms that speak to social scourges such as subjugation, erasure, racism, and denigration.
 - Centering and raising the voices of BIPOC.

awakening and reckoning among BIPOC must continue. This work must begin with critical consciousness. Prilleltensky (2003, 2008) put forward critical consciousness is often seen as a prerequisite of resistance and liberation. A second step in the model is rereading or theorizing not only from academic or public spaces, but also from the material reality of the lived experiences of BIPOC (hooks, 1997, para.3). From here we can determine when we need to use theoretical stances as acts of resistance. Critical action must follow. Many Whitaker (2020) conceptualizes critical action [as a praxis that requires people to engage in collective work to dismantle oppressive social systems](#). Critical action is human activity and is both theory and practice or praxis. It should not be reduced to either verbalism or activism (Freire, 1970). Vladimir Lenin argues, “Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement” (Lenin, 1966). Lenin further pointed out that the revolutionary efforts to transform spaces radically cannot designate its leaders as its thinkers and the oppressed as doers. Going further, Freire offers, revolutionary praxis must stand in opposition to the praxis of the ruling powers---as they are by nature antithetical. Moreover, critical action is always deliberate and systematic, it either serves the colonizer or the liberation of people (p. 126).

This model is shown in Figure 1:

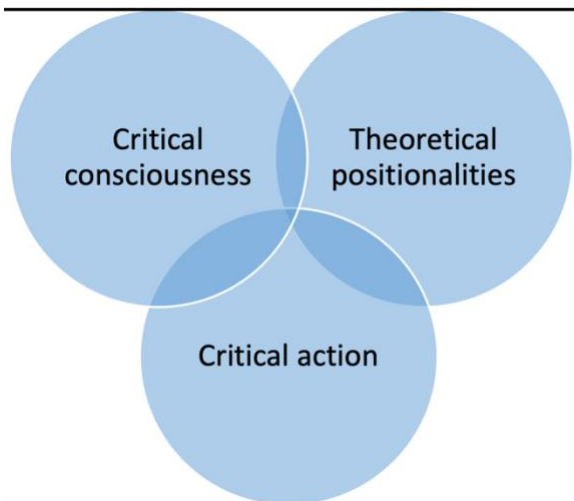


Figure 1: Revolutionary Conscious Praxis (RCP) Model

The negative impacts of racism, an aftermath of colonialism, including experiences of trauma ranging from forcing those colonized to silence to erasure of their culture and identities is heinous at best, and are well documented (e.g., Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Carter, 2007). To this end, the recent

Conclusion

The complexities of the atrocities laid on, and at the feet of African descendants and members of the African diaspora are too numerous to account. Yet, we must begin to take back and use our own stories and disclose these accounts in our writing and our work. We are becoming clearer that the tools used to force silence and fear on Black/African Americans are appalling and evil. In this article I have used one of my stories to highlight the ramifications of the

code of silence, which was by necessity a survival mechanism of Africans and then, Black/African Americans. Yet, when this mechanism morphed into a stronghold, it becomes psychologically damaging and a perpetuation of coloniality ideologies when we fail to discern when, or if we should use it at all. To foster liberatory psyches in future generations of Black/African Americans I suggested a Revolutionary Critical Praxis (RCP) approach towards engagement. I am positioning myself to help break the silence of historical and intergenerational pain by understanding, acknowledging and then speaking (Broussard, 2013). I believe you can do the same. Above all, to those who are reading this that are members of the African diaspora, my sisters and brothers, I am so proud of you. KEEP DISRUPTING AND DISMANTLING THE SILENCE. The ancestors are listening.

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