When We In/visibilize Our Nobility . . .

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> Dost thou deem thyself a small and puny form,
> When thou foldest within thyself the greater world?
> *Hadith* (qtd. in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Call of the Divine Beloved*)

Un/becoming a Victim

In October 2011, an international faith-based women's rights non-governmental organization (NGO) convened a press briefing for invited members of the United States Congress and their staff in the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. The briefing was an advocacy initiative to address the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)[1]

1 Introduced by the U.S. Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton in 1994, VAWA became the first form of U.S. legislation representing a multidimensional approach to strengthening local, state, tribal, and federal responses to gender-based violence and violence against women and LGBTQ+ communities, specifically relating to crimes associated with dating violence, domestic violence or intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The dual purpose of the bill is to "ensur[e] victim safety and offender accountability" (Office of Violence Against Women). Throughout the years, reauthorizations of VAWA have provided federal grant funding to support relevant community-based initiatives; they have also resulted in a number of advancements, including, but not limited to: stronger criminal laws, housing protections for victims, extending partial accountability for domestic violence to tribal lands, and inclusion of protections for the LGBTQ+ community. Reauthorization of the bill expired in 2019, and at the time of writing this, the U.S. House of Representatives approved reauthorization, H.R.1620 - Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Act of 2021 (www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1620/text) with enhancements, particularly for Black, Indigenous, underrepresented ethnic/racial groups, two-spirit and LGBTQ+ communities, which is currently facing obstacles in the Senate. Responding to the long absence, avoidance, and silence of governmental action regarding Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Transgender, and Two-Spirit People (MMIWGT2S), the first-ever Indigenous person and woman of color to hold a U.S. Cabinet position, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo), has also established a new Missing and Murdered Unit (MMU) within the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Justice Services "to provide leadership and direction for cross-departmental and interagency work involving missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives . . . [and] help put the full weight of the federal government into investigating these cases and marshal law enforcement resources across federal agencies and throughout Indian country" (DOI News). On May 4, 2021, President Joe Biden proclaimed May 5 as the National Day of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Awareness Day, including his

since its reauthorization had expired that year, and therefore, was again up for reauthorization for the 2012 fiscal year. Along with three other women from diverse faith backgrounds, representing religious or interfaith domestic violence organizations and programs, I was invited by the NGO to participate on an Interfaith Domestic Violence Coalition panel for the press briefing. When I was introduced to speak, however, the last words of the introduction caught me off-guard: ". . . and she is a victim of domestic violence."

Despite having jotted down talking points in advance, suddenly, I felt ill-prepared and out of place. An intense sensation of heat overpowered my being. There was no intention to present myself as the victim on display for the event; to be honest, I had never actually shared my abusive relationship history with the conveners. The emcee of the event, a white Christian clergywoman introduced as a "survivor" of domestic violence, shared the obstacles she had faced due to a deficient, broken system. It was a story *she chose* to tell. While there was likely no malintent on the part of the sponsoring NGO, I still could not help but feel exploited and tokenized as the poster "victim" for the briefing. I never consented to such a representation. My nobility was instantly invisibilized, flanking in the shadows of my "trauma." Nevertheless, there was no running away at this point. It was my turn to approach the microphone and share my story. "Thank you for inviting me to speak about this very important issue," I began. "I want to clarify, however, that I do not self-identify as a 'victim' . . ."

The consistent frequency and weight of this gender-based "justice" vernacular was already too familiar. Even when considering the purpose of our gathering and the title of the federal law, the *Violence Against Women* Act, for example, the emphasis clearly falls on the victimized body of women, disregarding the accountability of the perpetrators of that violence. Having experienced all the predetermined stages of "Battered Woman Syndrome," while simultaneously self-diagnosing it on occasion, is another reminder of how such branding creates new, problematic opportunities for those of us who have endured abusive relationships to be systematically beaten up and diminished by ourselves and others—even if only symbolically—over and over again. It becomes a gendered burden to bear. In attempting to identify the "disease," we still become "diseased," pathologizing our experiences of abuse. Despite the shared anecdotes of victimization and trauma that may (or may not) have been expected of me at the congressional hearing, I refused to go there. That refusal was a resistance to how I was introduced, to how I was scripted to perform. Ironically, being introduced as a victim took me completely "off-script" of my own pre-drafted words; yet, it also challenged me to create a new narrative for myself.

commitment to protecting Native communities through the reauthorization of VAWA (The White House).

Simultaneously, I had been volunteering as a "Court Companion and Victim Advocate" at the "Abused Persons Program" (titles that remain), an initiative of the county health department where I lived at the time. Volunteering for the program was a self-prescribed attempt to heal from leaving an abusive relationship (which many, I recognize, are not privileged to do, due to varying circumstances) by hoping to support others who had also experienced domestic or intimate partner violence. Among the program staff and our cohort of volunteers, I was the only one who had openly verbalized experiencing an abusive relationship, revealing a close-up understanding of how "justice" falls short. While I sensed a genuine collective desire to help those victimized by abuse, the program lacked sufficient, relevant educational and economic resources, and most importantly, it lacked any epistemic experience—or what Deer refers to as "the kind of knowledge we gain from experiencing something; a visceral knowledge that can invoke the physical senses and the genius of memory" (14)—from its targeted population, thus neglecting the insightful, vital contributions that could be shared with the program. The dichotomies of "victim" and "offender" used in the space are dehumanizing and diminish the possibility of any inherent nobility. Therefore, despite their good intentions, the program staff's efforts seemed paternalistic and surface-level at most, disregarding the diverse sociocultural contexts of the people they intend to serve. While I shared my perspectives during the training sessions, I am not sure whether anyone was receptive to them. One thing was for certain: the program and the court system only viewed us as "victims."

In such systems, we are inherently victims—before we even arrive, granting us the latitude to perform victimhood; and then, there are those unwritten codes deciphering who deserves protection, who deserves the abuse, who deserves or *should be* "rescued" or "saved," and who should be doing the rescuing or saving; this savior complex extends across many interesting dimensions and planes (Cole). Becoming a "battered woman" not only emerges from a historical, patriarchal normative script. Its imprint deepens when it becomes economized, ethnicized, geographized, Indigenized, and/or racialized, and so on, particularly when examined through the lens of colonial histories—justifying, normalizing, and reproducing diverse forms of violence against Indigenous, Black, ethnic/racial, and gendered bodies (for example, see Deer; Hammad; Hartman; Ritchie; Sharpe). This victimhood is oftentimes internalized, especially for already marginalized and underrepresented communities. Ultimately, if the oppression persists "long enough and effectively enough, you [may] begin to do it to yourself . . . becom[ing] a collaborator" (Baldwin and Giovanni 17).

For five years, I was in a relationship with a man who was economically, emotionally, physically, psychologically, and spiritually abusive towards me.

My former partner's abuse was fueled by evident preexisting insecurities that swiftly avalanched from the "intel" he collected during his frequent violations of my privacy, including reading my journal entries about my interrogations of uninvited advances from men and the details of a gang rape I had endured just a year prior to meeting him. His mother had tragically passed away from advanced ovarian cancer during the early weeks of our courtship. Coincidentally, I was diagnosed with an early stage of ovarian cancer two weeks following her earthly departure. Oddly enough, I assumed my cancer diagnosis would serve as a form of protection or shield from the abuse, perhaps an unyielding bond between us; but instead, it swiftly became irrelevant, invisible. Our relationship ended in 2009, and two years later—two months after that congressional press briefing—I was formally diagnosed with having post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Two years later, we attempted to give the relationship another try, but it had already failed the first time. The relationship was an accelerant to a lingering disbelief in my own nobility. All of my relationships—regardless of shape or form—were mirrors of a distorted reality, reflecting the neglect of my spiritual self.

To be truthful, it has taken me well over a decade to share this personal experience openly and publicly. Obviously, I am not the first to share such an account; nor will I be the last, unfortunately. Initially resistant to being the center of attention, to be centered at all, this story was safeguarded in a silent corner, hidden from view . . . until dear, beloved souls gave me "permission" to share it. The companionate words of Saidiya Hartman on being influenced by DuBois's use of memoir in *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Dusk of Dawn*—inspired by Chandler and Spivak's terminology—confirmed that this "autobiographical example . . . is not a personal story that folds onto itself; it's not about navel gazing, it's really about trying to look at historical and social process and one's own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them" (Saunders 5). Lorde's reference to her personal story in *The Cancer Journals* as "not academic," but rather as "a piece of life-saving equipment" that "kept [her] alive during the time that [she] wrote it" (Lorde et al. 11), likewise encouraged me to reconcile and feel at ease to open up and share this story; the urge to share this *now* is simply because it finally manifested as a rupture I needed to address. And in the words of Lorde, "now it's out there, the umbilical cord is cut, it has a life of its own" (2). It is no longer "mine," nor does it belong to me.

Silence formerly functioned as a protective armor—for my own guilt and shame and for my former partner, from the backbiting, verbal abuse, and judgments projected from others in their attempts to slander his character. In addition to unlearning unjust sociocultural norms and other forms of socialization (we do not often freely speak about "these kinds of issues" in Azeri/Iranian/Persian households),

gossip and backbiting, unfortunately, had already emerged among a number of those privy to this particular slice of my life. Even in the deafening secrets and silence, I heard people talking. Aside from the desire to avoid being "exposed" to and judged by the world, I had no interest in presenting the self-inflicted image of damaged "victim" or recovering "survivor." Both "victim" and "survivor" still give way/weight to the experience of trauma, albeit differently.[2] The thought of others projecting such a negative status upon me felt disempowering. In the same instance, there was no desire on my part to trivialize or delegitimize the injustice or diminish the urgency of domestic/intimate partner/gender-based violence. Similarly, I did not wish to undermine the genuine empathy and aspirations for justice and healing they evoke. Even those secret well-intentioned "intervention" plans among a few clusters of friends deeply rooted in social justice activism, which I learned of years later, backfired in unhealthy, toxic modes, even dissolving friendships. All I desired was to avoid being (mis) represented or replicating the "danger in damage-centered [narratives] . . . [as a] pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community" (Tuck 413), such as women in violent relationships. Tuck suggests considering desire-based frameworks instead.

My desire to seek liberation from the entanglements and fetters of damage and victimhood is neither unique nor limited to my personal experiences with intimate partner, domestic, gender-based, and sexual violence. There are extensive systems and structures in our societies where a duality of visibilized trauma and invisibilized nobility is reproduced and normalized, particularly in the realm of justice. Many have created—through comedy and humor, writing, research, the arts, and social action—humanizing narratives that push back against one-sided or dominant narratives of victimhood (for example, see @regcharging (Charging); Bida; Dougher; Madden; Noah; Rodriguez). Like Tuck, "I invite you to join me in re-visioning [representations] in our communities not only to recognize the need to document the effects of oppression on our communities but also to consider the long-term repercussions of thinking of ourselves as broken"

2 For me, "survivor" has been associated with "surviving": cancer, rape, and domestic violence. Like "victim," therefore, I believe "survivor," as a construct, still anchors an individual's trauma or pain and centers the damage or scars therefrom, limiting it to the human body—not the capacities of the soul—therefore, emphasizing the scars that remain from such experiences, not the healing, growth, and progress. Thus, instead of transcending our pain and suffering—accepting it happened, grieving it, and so on—we become stuck in limbo within a projected and/or internalized, one-dimensional posture of survivor of our own individual and collective making. There is no desire on my part to deny the name "survivor" for those who wish to claim it; it is solely a personal preference not to be perceived as a survivor or surviving. Living is also an option.

(409)—moving beyond satisfaction with representations of desire—moving along to recognition of and belief in our inherent spiritual reality—visibilizing nobility for ourselves and our communities, especially in numerous discourses about (in)justice and (in)equity. Most importantly, in this journey of renewal and reimagination, this visibilizing of nobility demands that we look at members of our human family who endure injustices and inequities—in varying degrees—with new eyes. They are not merely damaged bodies or spiritually disembodied beings, as too frequently depicted, but so much more. They are souls, embodiments of nobility or noble-embodied beings.

Reimagining Resistance, Visibilizing Justice/Nobility

My soul simultaneously aches and smiles whenever I ponder the Bahá'í perspective on the relationship between our inherent nobility and justice: "Justice is a noble quality and injustice an iniquity" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 79), particularly due to the horrific accumulation of dehumanization we are currently enduring. Learning this, however, has also forced me to question how, for decades, I could conceive of the inherent spiritual nobility of others and their justice while denying my own. But if "[j]ustice is a noble quality," what is true nobility, and what role(s) does it play in response to oppression, (in)justice, and (in)equity? What does nobility look like in the face of oppression, and would I recognize it? What examples in the world could I learn and draw from? How can we authentically and humbly engage in social action and the relevant discourses of society to "assail" the injustices and inequities of this world, while concurrently amplifying the spiritual reality—the nobility (and therefore, constructive resiliency) of the soul?

These questions have since evolved into two broader questions that I am still aiming to "perfect." First, how can we reconceptualize and participate in a body politic where we visibilize and center nobility in public discourses and social actions on the various entangled dimensions of injustice and inequity, including academic and activist spaces (and their convergences)? Second, how do exemplary narratives of constructive resilience help us honor and recognize the nobility of peoples and communities without delegitimizing and denying the social forces of oppression that exist and persist in the world? These questions, I imagine, are only a few of those I will live with all the days of my life, on this earthly plane, attempting to humbly explore and learn from.

It is my belief that visibilizing the inherent nobility of human souls is a key ingredient in the possibility of reimagining resistance as constructive resilience. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

> In the world of existence there is nothing so important as spirit, nothing so essential as the spirit of man. The spirit of man is the most noble of phenomena . . . the collective center of all human virtues

> . . . the cause of the illumination of this world. (*Promulgation* 239–40)

Imagine if we all saw one another through this lens: as spirits, as nuclei of human virtues, as radiant lights—even amidst pain and suffering. When reflecting on this imagery, I cannot help but reflect on the analogies described by the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith regarding the entangled relationship between the most globally oppressed communities—as the "pupil of the eye,"—a metaphor distinctly introduced by Bahá'u'lláh for people of African descent—as portals of light, and Indigenous peoples as beacons of light who will become "so illumined as to enlighten the whole world" (*Tablets of the Divine Plan* 32). This spiritual reality cannot be reduced to coincidence. What if narratives of injustice and inequity faced by communities were paralleled by these noble qualities they possess? How might a nobility framework yield new opportunities for reimagining noble souls and their capacities of constructive thought and action in the face of injustice? While I fully advocate the necessity of unearthing and studying all facets of oppression, stopping at the paralysis of damage or victimhood from such oppression seems incomplete, falling short, and even a missed opportunity. Why not, rather, prepare and seek out pathways of transcendence through that oppression?

Today, more than ever, we are immersed in a cumulative amplification and hypervisibility of injustice and inequity on a number of intersecting levels. The global COVID-19 pandemic, combined with a rampant, heightened response to worldly injustices of anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Asian violence, extremes of poverty and wealth, vaccine apartheid, xenophobia, racism, and patriarchy, and the list goes on—despite their persistence for centuries—have been characterized by varying calls for public action. Most of these movements have been motivated by the necessities of collective justice, while others have been fueled by demands for individual liberties. Mass public outcry is usually synonymous with or derived from—but not limited to—terms and concepts such as activism, boycott, demonstration, protest, resistance, and social movements, for example. The most prolific scholars of "social movement studies," particularly those educated and residing within a factory-like white, patriarchal Euro-American system of formal higher education, limit their definitions of collective action to criteria characteristic of contention and oppositionality. These conditions are clearly the most mediatized and popularized, but there are also more humanizing elements of social change that are almost always hidden from view. While the study of social movements is important, these criteria limit the possibilities of social change and the inherent capacities and contributions of humankind, especially the persistent efforts of those categorized and segmented as "marginalized" "oppressed," "underserved," and so on.

Such criteria visibilize negative imagery of collective action, while invisibilizing the inherent nobility of individuals and communities engaged in such action and their pursuit of justice and equity. The intensity of discourses and actions revolving around racial injustice, anti-Indigeneity, and anti-Blackness in the United States and globally reveals that this trend in visibilizing suffering while invisibilizing nobility is nothing new. However, the case for naming and centering inherent nobility is a novel, Bahá'í-inspired perspective.

In the process of spiritually excavating my inherent nobility, I was pulled by the arts and scholarship that would help me on this journey. In my research, I encountered many artistic and scholarly critiques of the hypervisibility of communities and peoples' trauma and victimhood, as well as arguments justifying the necessity to underscore and center their suffering. There were also works that visibilize the nobility of communities that endure injustice and how they constructively respond to systematic oppression. Representations that piqued my attention were those uniquely captured moments that humanize and celebrate individual and collective joy, self-care, and preservation in the midst of suffering just as much as they shed light on anger, grief, and pain. They highlight the *constructive resilience* of communities popularly portrayed on a default setting of "broken," disrobed of our nobility and costumed in descriptors of deficiency or what Walter (2016) calls the "five 'Ds' of data": disparity, deprivation, disadvantage, dysfunction, and difference (80).

In a message to Bahá'í students denied access to higher education in Iran, the Universal House of Justice addressed the historical oppression of their Bábí and Bahá'í spiritual ancestors, as well as their complementary inheritance of a constructively resilient spiritual capacity to advance beyond that same oppression: "You, too, demonstrate such noble qualities and, holding fast to these same principles, you belie the slander purveyed against your Faith" (9 Sept. 2007).

The Universal House of Justice also notes the centuries-long lives of African Americans in the United States as evidence of constructive resilience and calls upon the African American community to continue "to see in the recent turmoil opportunity rather than obstacle" (4 Feb. 2018). Constructive resilience, therefore, requires utilization of the spiritually inherent noble qualities of souls to "transcend" oppression, perceive what is possible "beyond the distress of difficulties [and obstacles] assailing them," and transform themselves and their communities through deeds that advance "spiritual and social development." The beauty of constructive resilience is its reliance upon an internal power of the spirit of peoples and their communities. It also surpasses the quantitative frontiers of "resilience" that have been amplified by social actions and discourses emerging across social media spaces, implying that #StillHere is commonly (mis) interpreted and limited to a *physical*

resilience. Furthermore, constructive resilience is by no means restricted to the Bahá'í community; nor is there a singular method or understanding in which constructive resilience can be achieved (Karlberg).

Sumud (صمود), an Arabic concept meaning steadfastness and "resilient resistance," can be traced back to the tenth century. Palestinian women use *sumud* as an explanation of their daily existence and collective empowerment, particularly through a reaffirmation of their identity, a "preservation" of Palestinian culture, and a "nurturance" of the Palestinian community (Ryan). holt explains how *Rezilience* (a combination of the slang term for reservation, "rez," and resilience), an Indigenous worldview, is an active teaching and learning practice for Indigenous communities to "reclaim, relearn, and reconnect with their ancestral ways of being" (72). *Rezilience* is an example of Vizenor's reference to Indigenous *survivance* (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*; Vizenor, *Survivance*; Vizenor and Lee), a "moving beyond [Indigenous] basic survival in the face of overwhelming cultural genocide to create spaces of synthesis and renewal" (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 53). Survivance echoes the sacredness of the Lakota word *takini*, which is often simply translated to survivor, but it means "to come back to life." *Takini*, is about restoring Indigenous communities and moving beyond survival, recalling stories of the ancestors and the historical trauma inherited, most associated with the U.S. Army's Seventh Calvary massacre of hundreds of Lakota women, men, and children at Wounded Knee in 1890 (Brings Plenty). Sørensen maps *constructive resistance*, referring to "initiatives in which people start to build the society they desire independently of the dominant structures already in place" (49) and relies on Vinthagen's definition, whereby constructive resistance is understood to "transcend the whole phenomenon of being-against-something, turning into the proactive form of constructing 'alternative' or 'prefigurative' social institutions which facilitate resistance" (7). These are only but a few conceptual and theoretical frameworks that, like constructive resilience, visibilize nobility, the highest aspirations of individuals and communities facing oppression in its various forms.

The Universal House of Justice, in another message, praises the Iranian Bahá'í community's establishment of the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) in response to the government's systematic denial of higher education to all its Bahá'í citizenry as representative of "actions [that] are not confined to efforts to seek justice" (1 Oct. 2014). Furthermore, the establishment of the BIHE as an "unrelenting pursuit of knowledge is perhaps one of the most outstanding examples of constructive resilience in the modern age." Alternative peaceful measures to sustain teaching and learning within formal higher education have similarly been implemented through "street academies" in Turkey (Aktas et al.), underground universities in Kosovo (Sommers and Buckland) and Poland (Garlinski), and educational programs

held in private homes, religious institutions, and offices for students in Palestine (Zelkovitz).

Visibilizing Nobility as Meditation

While understanding the constructive capacity of the soul outside of myself, the struggle to see it within me was still very real. After completing a remote session with my psychotherapist, the fog gradually began to clear for me. Several years had passed since my PTSD diagnosis, while trudging along an evolving journey of disentanglement from its fetters. All this time, justice and equity had served as dual interlocking aspirations driving my activism, teaching, research, and writing, but my attempted efforts were constantly falling short. Even my determination to highlight narratives about the constructive, transformative capacities of "marginalized" and "oppressed" peoples and communities seemed rather oxymoronic. Externally, I was wholeheartedly committed to exposing (in)justice and the nobility among the hearts, minds, and souls of "the oppressed" (and the oppressors), but it was in competition with the internal invisibilization of my own nobility, as well as a forgetfulness in the pursuit of justice for myself.

Clearly, this sudden pull to visibilize nobility was new and uncomfortable, especially when related to my own being. Just before our first session had concluded, and with more than thirteen thousand kilometers between our computer screens, my therapist assigned me homework: "Recite a prayer every morning to recognize your own nobility." Mind. Blown. Her instructions were so simple, yet profoundly humbling. Pray for my own nobility?!? Is that actually a thing? Prayers for the ancestors, detachment, tests and difficulties, healing, steadfastness, (in)justice, love, praise of the Creator, my mother and father, my brother, my profession . . . were among the primary motivations for prostration and devotion. Never had praying for my own nobility (let alone recognizing it) been on my mind up to that point. Ever since that moment, I recite the following from *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* daily as part of my morning meditation routine:

> O Son of Spirit!
> I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting. (#13, From the Arabic)

> O Son of Spirit!
> Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created. (#22, From the Arabic)

Reciting these sacred words and absorbing their meaning is equivalent to looking into a new, undistorted mirror that still requires daily meditation and application of my interpretation of those words into action in every phase of my life. In other words, I am still working on truly seeing the nobility and justice of my soul.

Challenging the historically situated Northwestern Hemispheric concept and identity of nobility (Leonhard and Wieland), this spiritual dimension of nobility—not unique to the Bahá'í teachings alone, not only reveals the power of our spiritual ancestral lineage, but also foreshadows the future of humankind and its inherent capacities to heal, transcend oppression, and advance intergenerationally. "A striking aspect of Bahá'í belief," Arbab purports, "is the extraordinary optimism it displays about humanity's future. Such hopefulness would be untenable were it not for a profound conviction, which arises from the Faith's teachings, that the human being was created noble" (175–76). Constructive resilience, therefore, is a sustainable, futuristic, intergenerational response to oppression that is associated with our spiritual afterlives.

Similarly, Smith's argument for "centering the 'pupil of the eye'" also exemplifies a noble spiritual station in defiance of an unceasing racial oppression endured for well over five centuries. According to Smith, "interpretations of the 'pupil of the eye' metaphor that fix upon the spiritual perceptiveness of [B]lack people are in keeping with a tradition of African American thought that was significantly advanced by Du Bois and that attempted to alchemize a history of oppression into a source of pride and inspiration" (13). If the material or physical frame of our bodies and the damage, harm, and trauma inflicted upon them become our primary point of focus, then we reproduce the same gaze that justifies oppression—a perception that humans are reduced to soulless bodies. We then lose sight of the core reality of the identity of our souls and their capacities of inherent nobility to withstand oppression and to do so constructively.

Our Noble Spiritual Afterlives and Futurisms

It is my sincerest hope that calling for the visibility of nobility (and its inherent relationship to the soul) is not mistaken for a desire to avoid, dehumanize, erase, invisibilize, silence, minimize, or disconnect the social realities of bodies or trauma, injustice, and inequity in this world—nor to essentialize or homogenize those social realities. Nor am I advocating for a partial visibility, but rather, inviting you—all of us—to consider one that is whole—one that captures both the corporeal and spiritual reality of humankind. For instance, "[i]dentify[ing] the achievement and exhilaration in [B]lack life is not to mute or minimize racism . . . there is a spiritual majesty of joy in suffering" and an invitation to not only possibly feel Black "pain but also the beauty of being human" (Perry). In a relevant

letter addressed to the U.S. Bahá'í community regarding intensifying racial injustices, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States wrote: "The language we use and the attitudes we take, while not ignoring the harsh realities that exist in the world, should appeal to the nobler aspirations of our fellow-citizens" (25 Feb. 2017). Accordingly, this is not an attempt to deny or delegitimize trauma, injustice, and inequity and their multitudinous effects on peoples and groups, but to celebrate and center fellow souls that are created to endure and move through and break free of the cages of such suffering.

May this be an invitation to all of us—especially to all the souls whose bodies have been and continue to feel or be treated as branded, broken, damaged, erased, inferior, invisible, and/or—as non-human, as well as those souls who, through their words, thoughts, or deeds, choose to read, see, and engage with souls as damaged, non-human, and ignoble—to visibilize nobility. Please join me in this ever-evolving journey to consider why and how visibilizing nobility helps us reimagine resistance as constructive resilience, to realize and celebrate our individual and collective inherent nobility, and to actualize our spiritual reality in our afterlives and our futures.

It is my hope that these closing words and this invitation do not at all suggest that I have forgotten my vulnerability in feeling exposed. Beloved revolutionary spiritual ancestors have been holding my hand, accompanying me along the way. One of my favorite guided meditations of Audre Lorde—"[T]hat visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength" (60)—comforts and assures me of the spiritual implications of being clothed in "nobility," even when feeling naked. We are, after all, spiritually destined to be "dressed in royal robes, to walk in glory for ever and ever" (ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 317). We *all* are created noble, and nobility looks *divine* on us, would you not agree? From the point of our conception—before our physical birth, and beyond—through our spiritual afterlives/futures, our inherent nobility continues to insist, persist, and transform into a new garment:

> O Thou Provider, O Thou Forgiver! A noble soul hath ascended unto the Kingdom of reality, and hastened from the mortal world of dust to the realm of everlasting glory. Exalt the station of this recently arrived guest, and attire this long-standing servant with a new and wondrous robe.
>
> O Thou Peerless Lord! Grant Thy forgiveness and tender care so that this soul may be admitted into the retreats of Thy mysteries and may become an intimate companion in the assemblage of splendours. Thou art the Giver, the Bestower, the Ever-Loving. Thou art the Pardoner, the Tender, the Most Powerful. (#11, ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, *Prayers of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá*)

Although far from completing the work of visibilizing nobility, what keeps me going is knowing we were created noble, and our nobility never dies . . .

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