

Georgia State University

**ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University**

---

Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Theses

Institute for Women's, Gender, and Sexuality  
Studies

---

Summer 8-11-2020

## **Ancestral Wisdom and Spiritual Practices for Healing: Decolonizing Feminist Theory and Pedagogy**

Justina N. Trim

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/wsi\\_theses](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/wsi_theses)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Trim, Justina N., "Ancestral Wisdom and Spiritual Practices for Healing: Decolonizing Feminist Theory and Pedagogy." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2020.  
doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/18021513>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute for Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gsu.edu).

ANCESTRAL WISDOM AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR HEALING: DECOLONIZING  
FEMINIST THEORY AND PEDAGOGY

by

JUSTINA TRIM

Under the Direction of Tiffany King, PhD

ABSTRACT

African-indigenous spiritual practices, ancestral wisdom, and knowledge that pre-dates the institution of colleges and universities can be seen in multiple perspectives. For instance, this knowledge has been revered, or rejected. In this thesis, I advocate for the importance of understanding these spiritual practices and knowledges and regarding them as a form of healing, pedagogy, and rebellion. Finally, I discuss my curation of exhibits and altars that allow people to access the healing and restorative power of ancestral wisdom.

INDEX WORDS: Spirituality, Rebellion, Healing, Altars, Resistance, Caribbean, Gender, Pedagogy, Indigenous, African, Language, Exhibit, Art

ANCESTRAL WISDOM AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES: DECOLONIZING FEMINIST  
THEORY AND PEDAGOGY

by

JUSTINA TRIM

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2020

Copyright by  
Justina Nicole Trim  
2020

ANCESTRAL WISDOM AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES: DECOLONIZING FEMINIST  
THEORY AND PEDAGOGY

by

JUSTINA TRIM

Committee Chair: Tiffany King

Committee: Chamara Kwakye

Megan Sinnott

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Services

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

August 2020

## DEDICATION

To all the powerful and incredible women in my life, thank you. My grandmother, Teresa, is so deeply embedded in my spirit, so I thank her for the ways she resisted by being a pillar of hope and love, even when she didn't realize it. A huge thank you to my parents, Rodicia and Justin Trim who worked diligently to create opportunities for our family, and who embody infinite Caribbean culture, hard work, and dedication. To my sister, Kerlyn, thank you for always being a grounding and loving presence, and for providing the utmost compassion, clarity, and intelligence every day. You are my rock in every single way, my first spiritual influence, my first guardian, my first friend. So much of who I am is because of you. To David, my brother-in-law, thank you for raising me as your own, for your wisdom and kindness, and for your love. You have taught me so much. You are everything! To my brother Andre who died unexpectedly in 2017—thank you for guiding me on this path. I think of you nonstop and I hope to be at least half as wise and compassionate as you were. To my brother Andy, thank you for always reminding me what strength looks like in the flesh.

I have so much gratitude to the 2018 GSU WGSS MA cohort—we experienced something incredibly unique and special together. I could not imagine being in this program without everyone's words of wisdom, all of your humor, and all your stories and strength. Just being in the presence of you all made me feel at home and safe which is exceedingly rare to experience. To riKu, Christian, and Mia—thank you for the best recommendation letters and for encouraging me to apply for graduate school. My community of friends who helped kept my spirits lifted throughout this time in graduate school, specifically my best friends Natalie, Jasmine, Paige, and too many names to insert—thank you.

To all the healers, writers, scholars, teachers, and activists who show up in this work not as a hobby or because it is a job, but because it is inherent, because it is intuitive, and because it is about survival and resistance—this project is also for you.

To my husband, Diego, thank you for always being supportive of my endeavors, for helping me find confidence whenever I hit a writing or creativity block, and for really believing in me. This project is for you too, because to heal is to love and your love has been consistent, sturdy, and unconditional.

I would like to end this dedication with a quote written by Jennifer Carolina Gomez Menjivar from “Caribbean Queens: Bridges between the World of the Living and the Realm of Souls” because this quote really encapsulates the soul of this project, and because the women and people Menjivar names are also who I’m writing this for:

“They are women who use their hands and hearts to transmit the origin narratives of their peoples, women to whom the suffering of their people is equal to their own suffering. These are the wise, mystical women whose position at the threshold of the world of the living and the realm of souls brings forth the clairvoyance to understand their own place in the world, whilst establishing for their families and communities a place in the chain of ontological continuity. In bringing about the physical and spiritual healing necessary to counter the centuries during which African peoples were violently enslaved and put on vessels across the Atlantic Ocean, the women reestablish the sense of knowing self and history that slavery pillaged and plundered.” (Menjivar 217)

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To my committee Tiffany King, Chamara Kwakye, and Megan Sinnott, thank you all for your consistent patience, encouragement, and support throughout this writing process. I'm beyond appreciative for all that I've learned and all the enhancements made to this project. Thank you all for making me realize that the work I am engaging in is important, and how embracing the full scope of this research would also help me embrace myself.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>IX</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1. Purpose of the Study .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1. Decolonizing Academia.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.2 Afro- Caribbean Spiritual Practices .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.3 The Rebellion and Gendered Power (How Afro-Caribbean Spirituality Assisted in Rebellions and Solidified Independence in Caribbean Countries): .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3. METHOD .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>3.1 Research Questions.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>3.2 Methodology:.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>4. ALTAR HEALING.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>5. SPIRITUALITY IN ACADEMIA.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>6. ART/SPIRITUALITY .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>7. THE ROLE OF ELEMENTS.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>8. POETRY FOR EACH ELEMENT.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>10. EXHIBIT SCREENSHOT IMAGES.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>11. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>43</b>

<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>45</b>
------------------------	-----------

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1...Small Altar with Four Elements .....	24
Figure 2...Haitian altar; source: Chicago Reader .....	25
Figure 3...Caribbean Altar; Source: Caribbean Espiritismo (Spiritist) Altars: The Indian and the Congo.....	26
Figure 4...The Element Water is Represented Here.....	33
Figure 5...The Element Earth is Represented Here.....	34
Figure 6...The Element Fire is Represented Here .....	35
Figure 7...The Element Air is Represented Here .....	36
Figure 8...Screenshot of Virtual Exhibit .....	41
Figure 9...Screenshot of Exhibit Image 2 .....	42

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Land is important, you know,” my grandmother used to say to my cousins and I in creole. “It feels everything.”

I think I was too young to really understand the depth of her words or what she meant. My cousins and I were always running around on this large expanse of land in the countryside of Grace, St. Lucia that belonged to our family. We knew the land was good for hiding, getting dirty, and getting into trouble. But my grandmother always wanted to emphasize the importance of the Earth, and sometimes we would listen to her as she cooked, making traditional Caribbean dishes, when she was mixing herbs for treatments, or whenever she was roasting peanuts to sell when she attended church.

One of the things I wished as I grew older is that I listened to her more. She was the descendant of Arawak and African people, and no one in our family preserved the unique knowledge she had inside of her. I remember being in awe of her, watching her go look for specific plants and herbs, watching her pray, watching her be.

One day, I was bit on my arm by a weird bug—it looked like a big flying ant but no one could place it. My eyes swelled with tears looking at the bite become swollen. I started to rub it and watched the bite become even more irritated and painful. One of my cousins who I was playing with took one look at it and said, “It’s time to go to Mum.” We all called our grandmother ‘mum’ affectionately, as she was the matriarch of the family. I walked to her house and outstretched my arm, wiping my tears with my other hand.

“*veni, ish mwen*” “come, my child,” she said and walked into her vast herb closet and found something she knew would soothe the rash. As soon as she put it on my arm, there was immediate relief. I hugged her and then ran off to continue playing with my cousins. I don’t

think I even knew how magical that was, for someone to know how to heal almost anything—and to me, she did.

She spoiled all of us rotten. I looked like her when I was born, like a little Black Indian baby, and because of that there was always an inherent connection between us. Unlike my siblings and my entire family, I did not grow up in St. Lucia. I spent most of my life in the United States, and traveled to St. Lucia once every two years to spend time with the rest of my family. As I grew up, I thought more and more about what it meant to be a bridge, how I felt so connected but also disconnected. I was the only one in my family who didn't speak Creole, and even though I understood it fully, the words were always clumsy on my tongue, ruined with my American accent when I tried to speak it.

My grandmother never made me feel like I was on the outside though. She would talk to me in Creole or patois (*pa-twah*), and embrace me every time she saw me. “You are mine,” she would say and I always felt home in her arms.

When she died, our family felt the generational loss. My mother did not learn her way of the herbs, and while my mom knew many Caribbean dishes, she did not learn the ancient traditional dishes that were passed down, and neither did the rest of my grandmother's children. I did not know that the last time my grandmother was alive was going to be the last time I would smell authentic butter chicken and roti skin, all things she made in her small clay kitchen. It felt like a cultural death when she passed, something deeper than a person or a spirit—it felt like years and generations were lost too.

My grandmother was the wisest person I knew, and yet could not read or write. She saved all the money she and my grandfather did have, to send their youngest child (my mother) to school. As the youngest of my mother's children, I also picked up her love of education. When I

entered this graduate program at Georgia State, I thought often about the sacrifices my family made for me to be where I'm at, and I specifically thought of my grandmother.

I feel her with me. I feel her with all of us.

When my sister had her first child, there were some complications that meant she would have to have a cesarean section. Before the procedure, my sister dreamed of Mum telling her, "You have a beautiful baby boy, don't be scared. He's so beautiful. And he's ready. You're okay. Everything will be okay." Dreams and visions are prominent in our family. We have cousins who have pre-cognitive dreams that predict events. Spirituality has always been present, and even though there was a certain disconnect from traditional practitioners (my grandmother was a staunch Catholic and raised her children to be the same) there were certain things that colonization did not steal or erase.

There was a certain knowingness, a bright intuition, a way with plants, a love for everything natural, things that were 'God-made' not man-made, according to my grandmother. My grandmother was a healer. It wasn't legitimized by academia, or any formal schooling/teaching but it was legitimate nevertheless. She healed us. She healed us through her food, her knowledge, her herbs, her hugs, her love. When she prayed, she prayed for everyone, including all of her great grand-children, never forgetting a single name.

This project is for her. This project is for my family. This project is for the self-proclaimed healers, who had to heal their hearts and spirits from colonization and deep racism, from intense poverty, but never feeling poor, always feeling the abundance of life.

Thank you for enriching mine.

### 1.1. Purpose of the Study

Spiritual practices, for a variety of communities in St. Lucia, Haiti, and Cuba, in addition to other groups that reside within the African diaspora have been recognized and rendered as gateways to ascension and resistance. Indigenous<sup>1</sup> (for the purposes of this project also includes Black and/or African due to indigenous ancestry in the Caribbean and the global south) communities across the world that still practice rituals that emulate their culture, customs, and traditions. It is also important to note that the term ‘indigenous’ will be defined in a multitude of ways throughout this thesis; it can mean indigenous, noting Native and Amerindian communities like the Arawak, as well as indigenous (autochthonous) meaning that it was originated from a particular land base and geographical location.

Many, if not most, of these spiritual practices require the use of herbs, music, chanting, and the most important ingredients—community in addition to self-awareness and introspection. In this thesis, I plan to examine the importance of these practices as well as demonstrate how they have been used and continue to be used to liberate communities from oppression. In the context of colonial conquest in the Caribbean and the Americas since the 15th century western society imposed—and thus suppressed these practices by giving individuals in spiritual community negative connotations like ‘witch’ or ‘bruja’, especially for femme or feminine practitioners. In this project, I consider how feminist theory can be more inclusive of herbalists, spiritual practitioners, and even self-proclaimed shamans (brujas and witches) while

---

<sup>1</sup> The meaning of ‘indigenous’ has been contested over time due to the nuances of the identity. Resources can be found that discusses the history of this term and how it is applicable: The book *Black and Indigenous* by anthropologist Mark Anderson explores the overlap in indigenous and Black identities during ethnographic studies in Central America. “Indigeneity and blackness,” he concludes, “operate as unstable, often ambivalent, and sometimes overlapping modes through which people both represent themselves and negotiate oppression.” In “African indigenous knowledge and research” by, Frances Owusu-Ansah and Mji Gubela, the overlap of African identity and indigenous is also discussed and explored.

simultaneously recognizing their crafts and knowledge as immensely beneficial to the academic community.

The identities and/or ethnicities of Indigenous, African, and Caribbean people will be used interchangeably within this text. I do this intentionally to display the complexities and connectivity of these identities. Many of these Caribbean practices I will be discussing come from indigenous communities (Amerindian, Taino and Arawak) that resided originally in those environments. I also include forms of African spirituality, voodoo, and obeah as Indigenous because these practices originated from Africa and transitioned from earlier forms of spirituality. Due to the slave trade, African lifeways and cosmologies travelled across the diaspora and enslaved Africans kept and protected portions of their spirituality and belief systems to where they were transported as captives. While these identities can definitely be separate and understood as such, it would be a disservice to negate the inherent connectivity between them due to the creolization of these identities and spiritual practices. African people were indigenous to their lands in Africa before they were stolen, so the definition of indigenous is multi-layered and faceted.

To discuss the relevance of Afro-diasporic spiritual practices, I have separated the literature review into sections that will home in on three central points. The first section is titled “Decolonizing Academia.” This section appears first because it is imperative to discuss why academia should be ‘decolonized.’ The texts discussed in this section dive deeply into explaining how crucial it is to be inclusive of a variety of practices and teachings to broaden understandings of the complex power dynamics and worlds we discuss in academic spaces. The second section is titled “Afro-Caribbean Spiritual Practices.” The texts highlighted within this section provide insight into multiple spiritual practices (such as vodou or obeah) and their ways of enhancing and



helping specific communities, as well as identifying women who are leaders within their community. These same women are often ostracized because of the negative connotation of ‘witch’ that was imposed on them due to patriarchy, racism and colonization. The third section is titled, “The Rebellion and Gendered Power.” The texts outlined within this section uplift narratives that support Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices and the ways that they have been used to mobilize rebellion and movement-building in colonial contexts. Finally, what I hope to unearth in this research is how crucial it is to preserve these knowledges. The significance of this research extends beyond the academic community to the world. We should not detach from these knowledges just because they deter from the usual logic we prioritize in the West. According to Barbara Christian, “For people of color have always theorized— but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic” (68). In truth, these knowledges have often been cited as the foundation of survival for many of these groups. We can learn much from them and incorporate their teachings in the way we perceive the world today.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Decolonizing Academia

The texts I am in conversation with in this section illuminate the importance of inclusive modules created by (BIPOC=Black, Indigenous and People of Color) indigenous people and people of color within academia. Damage can occur when the academic community discounts, ignores, or demeans indigenous knowledge, and ways of life cultivated by marginalized communities. This damage can look like erasure, fetishization, racism, and an inherent misunderstanding of the richness and variety in BIPOC culture due to a lack of exposure and education. In “Race for Theory” (1988) by Barbara Christian, “Decolonizing the Anthropocene” (2017) by Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, *Decolonizing Methodology* (2013) by Linda Smith, and *A Third University is Possible* (2017) by la paperson, the authors highlight ways that academia can expand and include multiple teachings and specific cultures in order to diversify and transform homogenous academic spaces.

Barbara Christian (1988) dives into critiquing theory (as it relates to the institution and academia) in “Race for Theory.” Christian makes a distinction between theorizing and theory, as in theorizing is an action that is reiterated, re-formulated, and regenerated as we process various types of information and media. Is theory only valid when articulated with language that is imposed by academia? Do we not create the same limitations, oppressions, and barriers that academia seeks to shift when implementing only one way of theorizing? Christian expands on this by saying, “The race for theory—has silenced many of us to the extent that some of us feel we can no longer discuss our own literature, and others have developed intense writing

blocks...” (69). Christian’s statements directly correlate to the exclusion of indigenous and Afro-Caribbean practices and the ‘othering’ that is imposed on teachings that de-center whiteness.

When the institution and structure of academia has a strict criterion for the way we articulate, theorize, and explore, it leaves out masses of people who were never taught to communicate and express within this standardized paradigm. Christian brings this idea into her argument by saying, “I see the language [academia] creates as one that mystifies rather than clarifies our condition, making it possible for a few people who know that particular language to control the critical scene” (71). If academia’s goal is to understand and expand knowledge—why is this only possible for a group of people who were taught this specific and methodological way to theorize? If academia’s goal is to understand and expand—should that not include the vast knowledges other communities, particularly marginalized communities of color, have curated and created since the beginning of time?

Narratives, literature, folk-lore, story-telling, communion, rituals—these are ways of communication and connection for a variety of communities. Barbara Christian explicitly says this when she interrogates the race for theory. She notes, “I am inclined to say that our theorizing is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language...” (68). Christian garners this is because communities of color prefer more dynamic and shifting language than language that is devoid of emotion and resolve. Does incorporating emotion into our thought processes automatically mean these thoughts are less critical? Is emotion not a valid form of intelligence? Does Westernized abstract logic and thought become prioritized because we have such strong emotional reactions to colonization, slavery, imperialism and other impactful points of history which was dominated by the West? These are additional

questions I seek to unearth in my research, as vulnerability and connectivity is key in order to enhance spiritual practices in Afro-Caribbean cultures.

Our history informs the present. Past ideas and actions directly impact and influence our current mental, physical and emotional state on a personal and global level. Despite the validity of this, these knowledges and sources of information are not always positioned in academic spaces. In “On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene” (2017) Heather Davis and Zoe Todd emphasize the importance of incorporating historical implications into the current debate and narrative around geography, the climate, and the ‘Anthropocene’ which in this text is defined as “the epoch under which ‘humanity’—but more accurately, petrochemical companies and those invested in and profiting from petro-capitalism and colonialism—have had such a large impact on the planet that radionuclides, coal, plutonium, plastic, concrete, genocide and other markers are now visible in the geologic strata (Davis and Todd 765).” This article illuminates connections to the current climate crisis with past and present violent transgressions against indigenous communities.

The scholars argue that the “Anthropocene is not a new event, but is rather the continuation of practices of dispossession and genocide, coupled with a literal transformation of the environment, that have been at work for the last five hundred years” (Davis and Todd 761). They challenge the erasure of Indigenous knowledge and experiences in North America pertaining to the shifting planetary condition. In this article, Davis and Todd make crucial points that criticize the intentionally monolithic view that dissipates the impact of horrific history and the ways it shaped our world today. The term ‘Anthropocene’ was critiqued because it doesn’t encapsulate the fullness of the term as it relates to indigenous communities. According to Davis and Todd, “[Anthropocene] replicates a Euro-Western division of mind/thought from land when

it is framed as the business of ‘research and engineering’ [which is] counter to many Indigenous concepts (Davis and Todd 768)” In this text, prioritizing an emphasis on language and incorporating Indigenous culture is crucial; there is a paternalistic essence that the West emulates by assuming their version and interpretation of any event and analysis reigns supreme without considering the very people whose home and environment they invaded. This article sheds light on the many ways Indigenous knowledge is not considered, forgotten or tossed aside. Indigenous language also has a name for the destruction of the atmosphere. There is a beautiful, slow, rhythmic dance that accompanies Indigenous knowledge, because so much of it is inter-generational. This text elucidates the importance of inclusion—these knowledges are imperative for envisioning an environmentally sound future.

In “Research Through Imperial Eyes,” a section from *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2013), Linda Smith highlights the colonization of research within itself and the projections of specific research on indigenous communities. In this chapter, she interrogates Western modes of research and knowledge and the way Western scholars internalize and contextualize their own personal research and subjects. Smith notes, “Foucault also suggests that the archive reveals ‘rules of practice’ which the West itself cannot necessarily describe because it operates within the rules and they are taken for granted” (Smith 44). This text seeks to pose a bigger question—who are we invalidating when we position certain ‘rules of practice’ or type of research as the prototype?

Smith makes various points and connections to the erasure of indigenous knowledge in research methods, especially as it correlates to Western research modules. Within her research she questions traditional academic ‘rules of practice’ and she argues that, “the West itself cannot necessarily describe [rules of practice] because it operates within the rules and they are taken for

granted” (Smith 44). This statement is key to unearthing the inherent ways academia can prioritize the West and their procedural avenue of research while completely discounting ancient knowledge. Essentially, the West is operating from a point of privilege, and within that point, there is a lack of foresight as to how triggering specific notions of research is prioritized.

One of the important takeaways from this section is Smith’s illumination of the variety of meanings of space and time. Smith argues that the West’s influence on the disbursement of their understanding of these concepts have been projected onto our world-wide culture, completely discounting narratives that have an opposing or different connotation of these aspects of life. She mentions the absolute measurement of space and time in the West and how indigenous communities did not feel the need to measure these aspects—in fact, many of these communities did not see a separation of these concepts. There was no need to quantify or measure something that has deeper meanings—and hence initiated the idea that indigenous people were ‘indolent’ or ‘lazy’ because their day flowed differently, and it wasn’t always in a linear structure. Smith notes, “These concepts [of space and time] are particularly significant for some indigenous languages because the language makes no clear or absolute distinction between the two: for example, the Maori word for time or space is the same” (Smith 50). Smith’s research and text solidifies the importance of incorporating various modules to understand and divulge research, even if this is done in an ‘untraditional’ academic way. Even the idea of what is traditional or not is a discourse of its own. In *Decolonizing Methodologies* Smith allows the reader and the academic community to question academic elitism and domination and its role in the destruction of countless communities across the world.

Similarly, in *A Third University Is Possible* (2017), la paperson explores the ways academic institutions participate in creating additional barriers for marginalized groups of

people. He does this by deconstructing settler colonialism and land theft in addition to introducing the concept of a scyborg. In this text, he defines scyborg as, “[deviating a bit from Donna Haraway’s formulation of the cyborg] as the agentive body within the institutional machinery” (55). The connection of the university to a machine in this text is paramount, and one of the central themes throughout the text. If the university runs like a machine, what are our individual roles in the functionality of this machine?

La paperson also provides additional context to ‘land grants’ and the usage of colonization to benefit university systems. He brings important insight by detailing the history of land grants and incorporating the fact that universities essentially capitalize off of stolen land. La paperson notes,

Land-grant institutions were legally born in 1862, when Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act into law. The passage of the Morrill Act is often narrated as a quiet, civilian accomplishment during the U.S. Civil War. Nonetheless, it was truly intimate to war and to the production of a Yankee North American empire...The act gave federal public lands to (Union) states, allotting thirty thousand acres of recently appropriated Indigenous lands for each senator and representative to stake out. States were encouraged to *sell* these “land grants” to raise money for new public universities that would research and educate American settlers in agriculture, science, and mechanical arts. Land is turned into capital for constructing universities for the principal goal of growing industry...Land as *capital* and not as *campuses* is an innovation of the land-grant university. That is, states are able to trade, develop, and sell land to fund the construction of public universities. (La paperson)

In this text, the ‘third university’ is looked at as a decolonizing agent within the first and second universities. La paperson defines the third university as, “an aim to decolonization, but its attempts at decolonization can range broadly...” (43). He mentions incorporating indigenous knowledge, community organizing, and transnational forms of cooperation as methods that can work to decolonize the university. He positions the third university as a strategizing tool, and strategy is key to mobilizing movements.

la paperson also notes the limitations of existing inside a system that is inherently broken, and he brings awareness to the fact that formulating break-throughs in a decolonization process also means utilizing the same abhorrent system’s resources. He notes, “By necessity, the third world university teaches first world curricula: medicine where hospitals are needed for sovereign bodies; engineering where wastewater systems are needed for sovereign lands; legal studies where the law [is a] de-colonial struggle...” (44). *A Third University* highlights the oppression and violence the university engages in while also offering solutions in decolonizing the aspects Western society has placed on formal institutional learning. *A Third University is Possible* is groundbreaking in that it not only acknowledges the benefits and challenges of structural institutions but it also provides a perspective on utilizing resources to expand knowledge globally.



## 2.2 Afro- Caribbean Spiritual Practices

In the “Importance of Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of African Americans, Caribbean Blacks and Non- Hispanic Whites” (2010) researchers Robert Taylor and Linda Chatters examine the role of spirituality in these specific communities. In their studies, they found that almost ninety-percent of both African-Americans and Caribbean Blacks consider themselves either spiritual or religious. The researchers note the importance of the church within these communities as it is perceived not only as a place of worship, but a place for community-building, mobilizing, and a security blanket for issues that arise. According to the study,

Noted similarities between African Americans and Caribbean Blacks in the importance of religion and spirituality can be traced back to the historical role of religion and worship communities and unique cultural factors operating within these groups. (Taylor and Chatters 287)

Taylor and Chatter’s research illuminates the importance of spirituality for both African Americans and Caribbean Blacks, but their research does not delve into detail about the nuances of spirituality, religion, and the varying differences in Caribbean countries with African-centered religions and specific spiritual practices. In “Ordinary Ethics of Spiritual Work and Healing in St. Lucia, or Why Not to Use the Term *Obeah*” (2017) Marie Meudec focuses on the island of St. Lucia and the negative connotations associated with spiritual work based on the identifying signifier “obeah.” “Obeah” is the word that is commonly utilized in this Anglophone region of the Caribbean to describe spells and witchcraft. However, as Meudec states in the article, many of the people who were referred to as people who engage in “obeah” do not self-identify with the specific term, instead referring to themselves as “traditional practitioners.” Ninety percent of St. Lucians are Catholic, a religion left behind and cemented in the culture due to colonization. Even

though spiritual work is deeply embedded in St. Lucian society, there is intense stigma associated with it, due to the effects of colonization and the domineering religion of Catholicism. According to the article,

Furthermore, practices associated with ‘obeah’ are referred to with paraphrase ‘practices that harm people’ In practice, the notions of ‘doing harm’ or ‘doing evil’ indicate different actions: the action itself, the claiming, and the intention. This might relate to legal and colonial conceptions of obeah that have criminalized the claiming to practice as well as the practice itself (Meudec 26).

This quote reveals the demonization and stigma that has been passed down due to colonial influences. It is this specific ideology that illuminate the mystification of these practices, even within the cultures they are founded in. In *Creole Religions of the Caribbean* (2011), Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert detail significant information about spiritual practices across the African diaspora, including Latin America. Olmos and Paravisini-Gerbert also specify the negative impacts of colonization on spirituality in the Caribbean. In particular, they highlight an account from Charles Rampini, a white settler who traveled to Jamaica and published *Letters from Jamaica* in 1903. Charles Rampini asserted, “There is something indescribably sinister about the appearance of an obeah man” (162). Bessie Pullen-Burry who also wrote about obeah practitioners in 1903 described them as “Generally a most forbidding-looking person, craftiness and cunning being stamped on his features.” (162)

These negative connotations had massive impact on world-wide views of spiritual practitioners—especially among the West. Once these ideas spread across different regions, it widened misconceptions about the inherent spiritual and ritual practices. Most of these accounts

were lacking in accuracy as well as a deeper understanding of the utilization of these herbal remedies for the survival of communities during and after the impact of slavery (162).

### **2.3 The Rebellion and Gendered Power (How Afro-Caribbean Spirituality Assisted in Rebellions and Solidified Independence in Caribbean Countries):**

One of the most powerful uses of African and Caribbean spirituality is the way rituals, practices, and gatherings were utilized to strategize against colonizing oppressive forces. According to *1804: The History of Haiti* (2017) a documentary that included insights from historians and people indoctrinated within Haitian culture, several factors alluded to Haiti being the first free Black republic. The vodou ceremony they conducted after the French and Spanish colonized the island was centered on liberation. This ceremony was conducted in an alligator swamp—a treacherous place that colonizers and new settlers refused to enter due to the danger of alligators and ferocious animals. However, the practice of vodou, and really, any indigenous spiritual practice encompasses tapping into the forces of nature (2017). Vodou, in this context is defined as “a monolithic religion and practitioners recognize a single and supreme spiritual entity or God. The foundation of their religiosity is the service of powerful spirits called the Iwa. The Iwa provide the link between humans and the divine” (Olmos and Paravisini-Gerbert 120).

According to Margarite Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert in *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, the Arawak and Taino people in Haiti had a relationship with the animals and creatures that roamed the land that superseded the colonizer’s knowledge. Receiving messages from the Earth was one of the crucial factors that allowed indigenous cultures to survive. They were able to perceive messages from animals, plants, soil, wind, and weather. It is this perception that contributed to a variety of tribe’s survival. Haitians believed they were tapping into a force

that was bigger than all of them (Iwa) that allowed them to accumulate strategic tools for their rebellion against slave masters.

In “Songs for Ezili: Vodou Epistemologies of (Trans) gender” (2011) by Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, she highlights spirituality as an epistemology, especially as it relates to Afro-Caribbean traditional spiritual practices such as vodou. In this case, the actual belief in spirits and spiritual forces on the whole lays the foundation for understanding a study of thought in which theorists can incorporate and learn deeply from. Vodou itself is a complex system of beliefs that are very layered. Tinsley also refers to *Pedagogies of Crossing*, and emulated Jacqui M. Alexander's view of spirituality as epistemology needing to include transnationalism, migration, displacement, and genocide. Tinsley notes,

What differentiates Alexander's emphasis on the ‘spiritual as epistemological’ from other scholars' is her insistence that this way of knowing the world stands to transform not only African diaspora but also feminist scholarship; that because most of the world's women understand their bodies, identities, actions, and desires in relation to spirits and spirituality, feminism misses the boat—misses the Crossing, misses the Middle Passage—when it fails to take this knowledge base seriously (Tinsley 421).

It is Alexander's and Tinsley's explanation of feminism, epistemology, identity and spirituality that has informed my decision to utilize the identities Indigenous, Caribbean, and African interchangeably throughout my research because to separate them when unpacking the details of spiritual freedom also diminishes the richness of the creation of these spiritual practices and its connection to feminist discourse in the first place.

The understanding of the power of spirituality within these areas is also highlighted with the onslaught of criminalizing voodoo, obeah, and other spiritual practices that were deemed

‘immoral’ from oppressive factors. Criminalization came in the form of ostracizing practitioners and portraying vodou as a devilish religion. According to Olmos and Paravisini-Gerbert, “the return of Catholicism to Haiti in 1860 brought [a state] of repressing vodou and its practices” (119). Hundreds of temples were destroyed, and even more spiritual practitioners were massacred. Despite these efforts, vodou actually strengthened the resolve of the Haitian people—it became paramount to preserve it. Vodou was more than a belief system but a way of life—the very practice that Catholics and traveling missionaries tried to eliminate and diminish is the same practice, in many Haitians’ eyes, that allowed them to be the first free Black republic. This notion in itself cemented the importance of a religion that travelled across the shores of Africa to the Caribbean.

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1 Research Questions

This project seeks to unearth the following :

1. How can we illuminate African and Caribbean spiritual practices as a pedagogy for healing, community-oriented work, and revolution?
2. How can we bring spirituality into academia (whether in classrooms and other spaces)?
3. How does art and altar making constitute ritual and spiritual practices that promote healing?

#### 3.2 Methodology:

According to the aforementioned texts, spiritual rituals and practices such as voodoo and obeah have been present in this world since the beginning of time. There has also been substantial research on a variety of cultures across the world throughout centuries. My methodology is anchored in the creation of art, sacred objects and spiritual practices in virtual and classroom spaces. I am especially inspired by the work of D. Sovini Madison, M. Jacqui Alexander, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Barbara Christian, and bell hooks by centering a way of being and creating knowledge that is not steeped in Western ideals but rooted in accessibility and expanding pedagogy beyond what we can physically see or measure. It is their work that has also amplified my desire to center an art-based method in displaying the foundation of this research.

My methodology contributes to the production of a creative project that creates an atmosphere that showcases the significance of the preservation of rituals and practices, as well as amplifies various art pieces that demonstrate Caribbean spirituality. I envisioned that this

creative project would be presented as an exhibit with replicas and or original objects that project spirituality in both a modern and historical context. Due to COVID-19 and restrictions on gatherings—this exhibit has transferred to a virtual space. Because of Linda Smith’s discourse on the conflation of space and time, and how these concepts were not understood or conceptualized within Maori communities in a Western chronological order, my goal is for the exhibit to be a timeless capsule that encompasses historical connotations, present-day practices, in addition to future implications. Including an art installation in this thesis project was imperative in order to demonstrate the multiplicity in learning and internalizing information. This exhibit will be titled ‘A Space to Dream.’

“A Space to Dream” seeks to cultivate a multi-sensorial space to experience the importance of spirituality for the African Diaspora by incorporating altars, photography, and poetry to seamlessly connect worship, creativity, and education. The exhibit is a love letter to my community, my people, and my ancestors. We learn from each other through an exchange of energy, and an exhibit is the best way to encompass what I have learned and am still learning within a visual module. Words will never be able to do the tenacity, strength, and spirituality of my people justice—but I can try to add visuals to supplement my overall argument.

#### 4. ALTAR HEALING

An altar is a structure in which offerings are made—they are usually used for spiritual purposes across a variety of religions. There is not much research that discusses the importance of altars in St. Lucia, but there was a table that fits the altar’s description in my grandmother’s tiny house. It sat in the corner of her living room. I never heard her refer to it as an altar, but it was where she placed pictures of her children, a candle, flowers and herbs every now and again, and it is also where she sat to listen to the radio—which is part of her sacred alone time. Many of us may have altars without even realizing it or giving them that name—it might be where you put pictures of your loved ones, or objects that are dear to you.

Altars are seen as a source of healing and comfort, and they often help people feel grounded. According to Diane Anderson in her journal article “Creating a Reiki Altar,” she states, “Creating an altar is an ancient tradition used by individuals primarily for the purpose of worshipping God and praying for blessings” (Anderson 15). Altars are not only seen in churches or spiritual sites, but an altar can be created in any space and in any way. There are differing ways to create an altar depending on the religion, but overall it really encompasses curating a space that is sacred in your home—it can be as big or as small as you would like. Anderson states,

“There are no rules when designing your altar. It may be very simple or quite elaborate.

The most important thing is that it be a reflection of you and your ideals. Altars can be of any size and should not be so cluttered as to lose focus and functionality. You may want to include objects that are important in your personal life or in your practice.” (Anderson 16)



The process of creating an altar can be seen as a spiritual practice within itself, because it's about picking specific objects that are meaningful to the individual as well as objects that invoke some type of spiritual connection. Altars can also be seen as a way to heal from ancestral trauma.

In its own way, altars are a tool to see the divine in the everyday. While an altar is deemed a sacred space, it is usually ordained with every-day items that might be in your household, such as a candle or incense stick, a picture of a loved one, or even a plant. According to Stephen Wehmeyer, who wrote "Indians at the Door:" Power and Placement on New Orleans Spiritual Church Altars an altar, no matter how simple or elaborate, can invoke a sense of peace or calm to the person who created it, or is inspired by its structure and what it evokes for them. He states, "The powerful simplicity of this altar nevertheless manages to instill the atmosphere of watchful protection and spiritual intimidation" (Wehmeyer 22). In his research, he unearths the importance of feminism, connection, and spiritual tools in spiritual communities. He emphasizes how altars can be limited in size and complexity depending on where it is placed—whether it is inside a church or a living room. However, he notes the power remains despite any sizing implications. The inner connectivity of altars, other healing modules, and similarities in deities are present and showcases traveling cosmologies. He states, "Those familiar with the religions of the African diaspora will note a number of similarities to several important figures in the pantheons of related African and Afro-Caribbean religions who share similar spheres of influence...and are likewise honored with shrines [and altars] near doorways or thresholds" (Wehmeyer 23).

Altars are often assembled with a variety of objects but those that represent or mirror the four elements are quite popular. The connection of altars and the elements will be fleshed out more throughout this project, but the main point I want to emphasize about altars is that they are their own form of art. As Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley notes in *Ezili's Mirrors*, "a heap of rubble, piled up at random, is the fairest universe" and "you don't make art, you find it. You accept everything as its materials" (Tinsley 67).

In this case, one could argue that not only are altars sacred, they are artistic, that they invoke spiritual intensity because it took time to assemble objects that are perceived to mean the most (which differs among people), with the implication that connection is more complex and one may not even need another person to feel a certain level of intimacy. Connection can be found in a quiet moment, a space, an everyday object, a candle, and within a picture of someone you love. It can be found in contemplation, and it can be found inside of the body by spending time next to a space that could immediately distribute calmness and stability. Because altars are so important in a variety of spiritual practices, I wanted to center them as one of the pertinent modules of healing throughout this project. The usage of altars have been shaped and shifted in multiple geographies and over time, but it remains solid and a way to connect in Afro-Caribbean practices.

My own particular practice in building altars include centering the four elements, and depending on how I'm feeling, my altar can either have a lot of objects (crystals, pictures, herbs) or it may be a simpler structure. The first altar listed is shown in the exhibit. The two altars listed after the first one are examples of what larger altars may look like in the Caribbean.





*Figure 2...Haitian altar; source: Chicago Reader*



*Figure 3...Caribbean Altar; Source: Caribbean Espiritismo (Spiritist) Altars: The Indian and the Congo*

## 5. SPIRITUALITY IN ACADEMIA

There are ways that spirituality reveals itself in academic spaces. It does not have to be in an overt fashion, but bodies in space, communal activities, and the sharing of energy can lend itself to be more spiritual than it may seem. In this way, I am emphasizing spirituality as an epistemology and pedagogy—to not [only] look at spiritual rituals, altar-making, and other practices as sites of gaze and study, but to look at them as a site of knowledge and process within itself through my own experience of teaching students about women, gender, and sexuality studies. In Ezili's Mirrors, Tinsley discusses the importance of expanding epistemology by centering Ezili, a deity in vodou. She states,

“ As a principle of both felinity and imagination. Ezili calls out a submerged epistemology that has always imagined the black mass and madivin as well as black ciswomen create our own value through concrete, unruly linkages forged around pleasure, adornment, competition, kinship, denial, illness, shared loss, travel, work, patronage, and material support.” (Tinsley 435)

Her analysis has grounded me and helped me explore a variety of ways to I enacted certain activities and then observed my students' reaction to these activities in the way they responded, engaged, and finished their work. Classes in the humanities and social sciences tend to be discussion-oriented as it gives all of us the space to theorize and contemplate society at large, the systems that inhabit it, and the way we engage with each other and ourselves through these processes. One of the observations I noticed is that whenever I had my students sit in a circle, they shared more versus when they were in columns. The openness of a circle is revered in spirituality due to the way energy is thought to circulate. According to a spirituality index compiled at University of Michigan,

The circle is a universal symbol with extensive meaning. It represents the notions of totality, wholeness, original perfection, the Self, the infinite, eternity, timelessness, all cyclic movement, God...The circle is also zero in our system of numbering, and symbolizes potential, or the embryo. It has a magical value as a protective agent, ... and indicates the end of the process of individuation, of striving towards a psychic wholeness and self-realization. (Julien 71)

Even in new age spirituality, tarot readings are done in a specific manner in which cards are often laid out in a circular motion. In my observations, I notice that the structure of the space in class makes a huge difference in how discussion is operated, how engaged students are with the material, and just the overall sense of ‘oneness’ that exudes once we get into a flow of thought and understanding. I also encourage my students to be vulnerable—often academia can seem like this looming place in which certain expectations are placed on every student to think and talk in a certain way, despite their upbringings and background (similar to what Barbara Christian notes in *Race for Theory*).

I definitely obtained this idea to incorporate the opportunity for more vulnerability in my classroom due to the ways my professors in the WGSS department exhibited closeness within their own courses. It is clear that we are not emotionally disconnected from the issues of poverty, class, racism, gender discrimination, ableism, agism and other various methods of systematic oppression. Many of our experiences are deeply connected to logical analyses of oppression that exists in the world. I try to encourage this sense of openness by starting class with discussion of current events and a general ‘how is everyone feeling’. We are all in relation with one another, and even if it is for a limited time, there is continuous creation with our thought and conversations. Vulnerability is definitely a part of spirituality, opening up the deepest parts of

yourself for understanding something deep, whole, and all-consuming.

The last activity I truly was looking forward to and having it relate to the healing power of altars was creating an altar together with my students. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all courses had to be distributed online. Several of my students experienced death within their family, had to take care of elderly parents/grandparents, or even got sick themselves due to exposure to the coronavirus. Unfortunately, we were not able to create an altar together but Diane Anderson references altar making with students as an educator, and the intimacy altar-building can solidify in the classroom environment. She states, “For teachers, an altar offers a focal point for the participants and can be incorporated into the class experience. Something as simple as an altar cloth with a candle, a few crystals and some chimes will draw people’s attention and help to create sacred space” (Anderson 16).

Even though I did not get the opportunity to create an altar with my students, I plan to center altar-building in future facilitation activities, presentations, and classroom settings as a way to ground the space and connect with everyone who chooses to be in the space.



## 6. ART/SPIRITUALITY

The purpose of this exhibit is to display the simplicity and power that exists all around us. The exhibit contains two images per element—water, earth, air fire. These images were taken in Georgia, South Africa, and in St. Lucia. A sunflower, and a green landscape showcase the Earth element, a peaceful beach and hot pockets of water springs showcase the Water element, a bird about to take flight and natural steam amplified by the heat of a volcano represents the Air element, and a group of people protesting at the Women’s March in GA 2017 and a fire from a stovetop showcase the Fire element. The center of this exhibit has the alchemy images for each element, and an altar I created at home. A physical exhibit would showcase this much better—but since adapting to a virtual version of the exhibit, I have just the alchemy symbols for the elements and encourage those who read this thesis or resonate with this work to create your own altars at home. The reason for centering the four elements and connecting it to indigenous, African, and Caribbean ancestry demonstrates the tools these communities have used to fight for their survival as well as ground them and connect them to their source of spirituality. In many ways—the spiritual is all around us, and this is what I want to demonstrate in this exhibit.

## 7. THE ROLE OF ELEMENTS

Four elements are identified in the spiritual practices I highlight in this research, and these four elements are also centered in new-age spirituality. Earth, water, fire, air have always been considered sacred, as these are the four elements that are comprised of the world. My use of the elements will be centered in the [virtual] art exhibit ‘A Space to Dream.’ A Space to Dream will be used as a pedagogical tool to amplify space, time, and the connection between these two aspects within spirituality. In “Air, Light/Fire, Water and Earth/Pollen: Sacred Elements That Sustain Life” by Robert Yazzie, who served as Chief Justice of the Navajo Nation, he discusses the sacred connection between the four elements and the world. At a conference highlighting environmental and sustainability issues, he brings awareness to ‘The Fundamental Laws of Dine’ created by Navajo medicine-people, leaders, and lawyers. He states, “Dine' Natural Law declares and teaches that: A. The four sacred elements of life, air, light/fire, water and earth/pollen in all their forms must be respected, honored and protected for they sustain life; The Navajo Natural Law declares all elements are sacred” (Yazzie 193). Yazzie dives deeper into detail about The Fundamental Laws of Dine, and states:

Dine' Natural Law declares and teaches that: "F. The rights and freedoms of the people to the use of the sacred elements of life as mentioned above and to the use of the land, natural re- sources, sacred sites and other living beings must be accomplished through the proper protocol of respect and offering and these practices must be protected and preserved for they are the foundation of our spiritual ceremonies and the Dine' way of life. (Yazzie 195)

There are variation of these teachings across cultures, and as it relates to spirituality, and the divine, it is seen as one of the most fundamental aspects of understanding and respecting life, and

human connection with the Earth. The knowledge of the power of elements are sprinkled all over the diaspora of black and brown peoples. According to M. Jaqui Alexander in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, when discussing the atrocity of the Middle Passage, she notes:

Once they crossed, they graced all things with the wisdom of Ashe. Wind. Sky. Earth. Fire. Thunder...For once they intuited that the human was long intent on capture they all conspired to rest their Truth everywhere. And in the simplest of things. Like a raindrop. And therefore the most beautiful of things, so that Truth and Beauty would not be strangers to one another, but would rely one on the other to guide the footprints of the displaced, and those who chose to remain put... (Alexander 289)

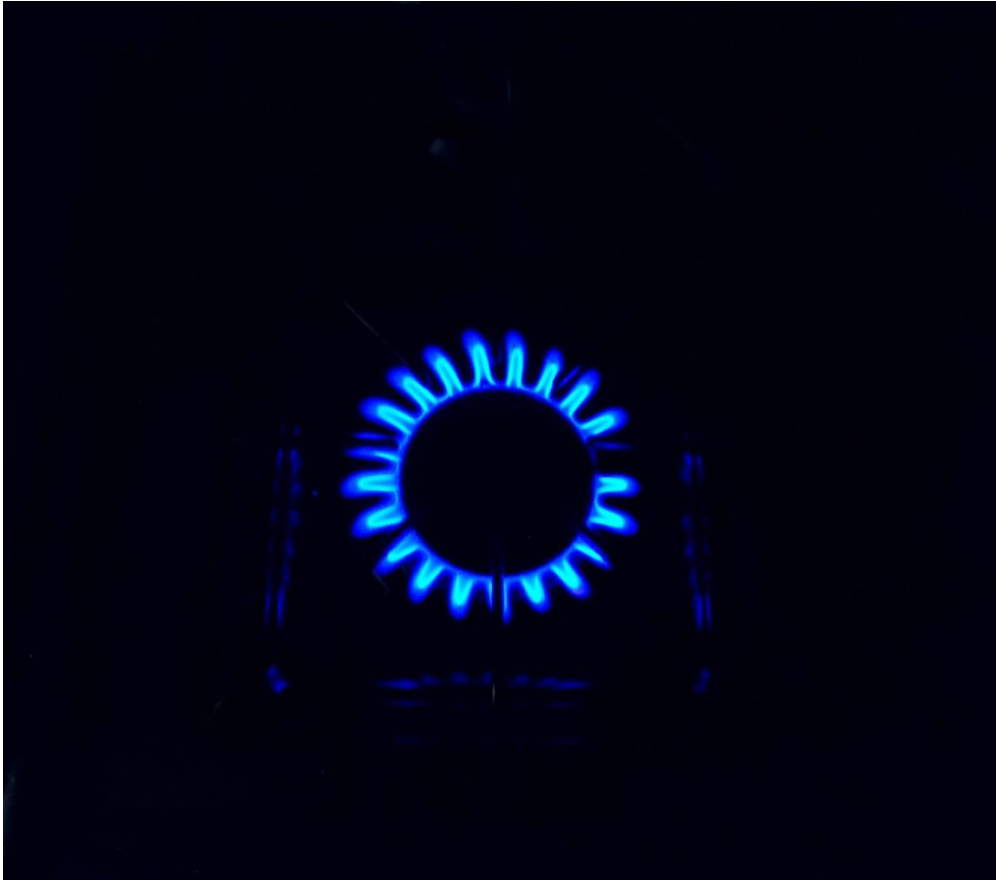
Alexander conceptualizes the exact point of what I try to create in the virtual exhibit. The methodology I seek to center in 'A Space to Dream' is art-based because I wanted to connect the textual analysis with an accompanying visual space. I am hoping the visual module will give the necessary accessibility to the foundation of spirituality that resonates with indigenous, African, and Caribbean culture—the four elements seemed like a good connecting point between these cultures. The center of this exhibit, had it been physical, would focus on elements and altars, and each altar will represent an element. The intention behind altar space is still represented in the virtual version of this exhibit, although it is admittedly missing the emphasis of a physically structured altar. Below are pictures of some of the photos reflected in the exhibit that portray the four elements.



*Figure 4...The Element Water is Represented Here*



*Figure 5...The Element Earth is Represented Here*



*Figure 6...The Element Fire is Represented Here*



*Figure 7...The Element Air is Represented Here*

## 8. POETRY FOR EACH ELEMENT

I included poetry for each element as part of my creative project. Originally, I intended to have the poetry in the physical exhibit to also explain the connection of spirituality and the four elements. I felt a creative writing form as poetry would elucidate and cement the fact that poetry can also be looked at as its own form of intelligence, mystery, and candor. Poetry can be seen as a valid form of interpreting information, so while the altar is the centerpiece of the exhibit, the poetry frames it, to add a written module of healing along with the visual modules that are displayed.

Not all water is soft  
 And sweet and trite  
 Not all water is  
 Grazing or meek  
 And silent  
 There are pockets of water  
 In some parts of the world  
 That can burn the skin  
 Clean off the bone  
 Waters that find  
 A superpower in its malleability  
 And can shock you  
 Water that is too rough  
 For you to enter  
 Water that can protect itself  
 Water that can say no  
 Water that can say  
 "You don't get to invade me"  
 Water that can show us heat  
 And resistance  
 And rebellion  
 On its own  
 By just existing

***-Not all Water***



The Earth does not trust us  
 Not sure if we know how to  
 Save anything  
 Not sure if selfishness is our only nature  
 Not sure if we care about anything  
 That takes something deeper than  
 Transactional interactions  
 Not sure if we know money  
 Is just paper that comes from  
 The foundation of the ground  
 The same thing we cut down  
 With no regard or care or second thought  
 Not sure if we know more than greed  
 And exploitation  
 And extraction  
 And destruction

If Earth is our Mother,  
 Then why do we keep beating her?  
 When Earth is what gives us life,  
 (And if it can give  
 It can surely take)  
 The Earth can decide  
 We do more harm than good  
 Can decide that in order to survive  
 we need to be gone  
 Shouldn't we inherently respect an entity  
 That moves on its own  
 One that can quake and destroy  
 One that can send hurricanes  
 And tornadoes  
 And storms  
 Earth always has to remind us  
 As mothers do  
 That we are allowed to live  
 On this vessel  
 But we don't control a fucking thing  
 When it comes down to it,  
 We control nothing.

***-Earth can decide***

Fire always felt like the abandoned stepchild  
Of the original creations of the world,  
Always too loud  
Never quiet  
Always got somethin' to say  
Never knows how to hush up  
Too much  
Too warm  
Too passionate  
And destructive  
But fire knows that without passion  
Leaves the absence of a full life  
Fire knows the light it produces and the warmth it contains  
And the connection it drives  
Pushes us together and helps us understand love  
Fire knows sometimes  
You have to give it your all  
Or you will have nothing  
To begin with

***-Fire knows***

You know those moments  
Of quiet contemplation?  
The moments when everything  
Feels so still  
So frozen  
Those moments when you can  
Feel the air on your skin  
In your lungs  
You listen to your breath  
You can hear the slightest sound  
You can hear it all  
Those moments you sit still  
In meditation  
And you hear sounds you didn't hear before  
The moment a thought zaps through your mind  
That moment when you finally understand a concept  
Or a theory  
Those moments when you learn about yourself  
By sitting alone  
In deep contemplation  
Those moments are what you need  
In order to take flight  
To really jump  
And experience  
The depth of this dimension  
Funny how the thing we need to live  
Is something we can't see

***-Is air god? (everywhere/in us/around us)***

## 10. EXHIBIT SCREENSHOT IMAGES

### A Space To Dream



*Figure 8...Screenshot of Virtual Exhibit*



*Figure 9...Screenshot of Exhibit Image 2*

## 11. CONCLUSION

Spiritual work is not neatly packaged into boxes that are easily explained or theorized. Theories can support the argument, but it is crucial to note that these ideas existed long before the creation of academic institutions. Obeah and vodou, in particular, are practiced all over the world but originated from Creole or French-speaking countries, and Santeria is practiced in Latin countries with Spanish dialect and origin. The practices, rituals, and methods of these customs will not always translate smoothly into English due to the nuance that the original language of these practices are steeped in, and this language of communication needs to be emphasized. The language also includes spells, chants, and forms of translation that have an intense significance when practicing Afro-Caribbean spirituality.

Some of the main challenges when conducting research and finalizing the project could be allocated to COVID-19. Because of the pandemic, non-essential businesses were closed and social distancing was mandated. These closures, while absolutely necessary, hindered the research I was originally going to include because I did not have access to a library and other work spaces that contained the books I was excited to utilize and explore in this work. Additionally, due to social distancing measures, people were not allowed to gather and so it became impossible to have a physical exhibit, which was the original intent. As mentioned before, my students and I were also unable to create an altar together when courses transitioned online. The entire experience was humbling for me, because as spirituality can teach us, we can only control so much. I had to adhere and shift to all the changes, even if that meant that a good portion of my thesis project would not manifest into what I originally envisioned. However, having to adapt to the changes while conducting this research felt like the praxis to the theory of healing and spirituality—what are the ways we can continue to be grounded when systems,

world-wide oppression, and a pandemic has wreaked havoc on our society? Overall, the shifts due to the pandemic helped me to appreciate this project even more.

I hope to take this research even further by conducting interviews with local and traditional practitioners in St. Lucia, as well as including information specifically from the local offices and schools in the country. Religion and spirituality are often taboo subjects, and when positioned in academia they can be written off as solely a form of emotion without intellectualism and merit, or positioned as more content to create or justify ‘otherness’ even in the social sciences and liberal arts. I am essentially arguing that not only do these spiritual practices inform past and current theories, but that the spiritual beliefs and rituals can be a source of theory within itself. This particular project seeks to challenge outdated notions of thought, and highlight the healing work of spiritual practices that has kept so many people of color alive. ‘A Space to Dream’ is literally that— to cultivate space for communities to commune and envision and appreciate art while simultaneously internalizing it as a radical act of preservation and amplification of culture. The exhibit also seeks to position indigenous spiritual practices as a form of de-colonial work that can be studied, admired, and implemented in academia spaces to shift the narrative of erasure in institutions.

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, M. Jacqui. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Duke Univ. Press, 2005.
- ANDERSON, DIANE. "Creating a Reiki Healing Altar." *Reiki News*, vol. 14, no. 2, Summer 2015, pp. 14–17. EBSCOhost, [search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=awh&AN=114320488&site=eds-live&scope=site](http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=awh&AN=114320488&site=eds-live&scope=site).
- Chatters, Linda M., and Robert Joseph Taylor. "Spirituality and Subjective Religiosity Among African Americans, Caribbean Blacks, and Non-Hispanic Whites." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 47, no. 4, 2008, pp. 725–737., doi:10.1111/j.1468-5906.2008.00437.x.
- Christian, Barbara. "The Race for Theory." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1988, pp. 67–79., doi:10.2307/3177999.
- "Circle." University of Michigan, [umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/C/circle.html](http://umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/C/circle.html).
- Davis, Heather, and Zoe Todd. "On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene." *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, vol. 16, no. 4, 12 Dec. 2017, pp. 761–779., doi:<https://www.acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1539>.
- Mcdonough, Sara. "Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples by Linda Tuhiwai Smith." *Collaborative Anthropologies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2013, pp. 458–464., doi:10.1353/cla.2013.0001.



- Menjívar, Jennifer Carolina Gómez. "Caribbean Queens: Bridges Between the World of the Living and the Realm of Souls." *Romance Notes*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2019, pp. 207–218., doi:10.1353/rmc.2019.0018.
- Meudec, Marie. "Ordinary Ethics of Spiritual Work and Healing in St. Lucia, or Why Not to Use the Term Obeah." *Small Axe*, vol. 21, no. 1 52, 2017, pp. 17–32., doi:10.1215/07990537-3844034.
- Olmos, Margarite Fernández, and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: an Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*. New York University Press, 2011.
- Paperson, La. *A Third University Is Possible*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.
- Stewart, Dianne M. *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Tinsley, Omise'eke Natasha. "Songs for Ezili: Vodou Epistemologies of (Trans) Gender." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2011, pp. 417–436. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/23069911](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23069911)
- Tinsley, Omise'eke Natasha. *Ezili's Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders*. Duke University Press, 2018.
- Wyclef Jean, Kaba Kamene, James Small, Èzili Dantò, Bayyinah Bello, and Marcello Altieri. *1804: The Hidden History of Haiti.*, 2017.
- Wehmeyer, Stephen C. "Indian Altars of the Spiritual Church: Kongo Echoes in New Orleans." *African Arts*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2000, p. 62., doi:10.2307/3337792.
- Yazzie, Robert. "Air, Light/Fire, Water and Earth/Pollen: Sacred Elements That Sustain Life." *Journal of Environmental Law and Litigation*, no. Issue 1, 2003, p. 191. *EBSCOhost*,

search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=edshol&AN=edsh  
ol.hein.journals.jenvll18.11&site=eds-live&scope=site.