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"I Cannot Hide My Anger to Spare You Guilt": On BLMTO and Canadian Mainstream Media's Response

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ABSTRACT *In this paper, I examine Canadian mainstream media's response to Black Lives Matter Toronto, focusing in particular on two events that occurred in the city in the Summer of 2016 and Winter of 2017. By relying on Critical Race Theory, I argue that a White-dominated press has been unwilling to engage with the message presented by Black activists under the excuse that the tone of the message is overly harsh and threatening to White audiences. After analysing the historical roots of such a claim, I conclude that, in the current climate, there is no space for any dialogue in what remains an oppressor-oppressed relationship across the country, including in Toronto, Canada's most multicultural city.*

KEYWORDS racism; white supremacy; critical race theory; Canada

The quote in the title is from a keynote presentation delivered by Audre Lorde at the National Women's Studies Association Conference in Storrs, Connecticut, in June 1981 (Lorde, 2007). In the presentation, Lorde examines how anger is one of Black women's responses to racism despite the inability and unwillingness of White women, including many female-identified academics attending the conference, to bear witness to that anger. Lorde was pinpointing White women's refusal to listen under the cover that the tone used to convey the message was excessively harsh and was therefore perceived as threatening. Thirty-nine years later, Black individuals, and Black women in particular, are still faced with similar challenges and with White society's unwillingness to listen to the message conveyed by their anger, and the excuse is the same: the tone is too loud and intimidating. In this paper I investigate how the discourse developed in Canadian mainstream media around the actions and speeches of Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO) has operated to silence the concerns raised by the group. The constant attention to the tone rather than content of the message is used to invalidate

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the latter while repudiating the former. My goal is to demonstrate that mainstream media act to uphold White power by silencing and marginalizing insurgent voices critical of White supremacist logic and its legitimacy in Canadian society. Those voices critical of the status quo are portrayed as threatening, unreasonable, and lacking civility, thus making them subject to dismissal. Black women's voice in particular is not only dismissed but also ridiculed and trashed. Here I use the words of Rinaldo Walcott (2018) to refer to "voice" as "something more than orality: voice is about listening and hearing in new intimate ways, and voice is even about unlearning" (p. 151). The methodology adopted applies Critical Race Theory to discourse analysis of major Canadian mainstream media's reports and articles, in order to highlight how discourse remains a powerful tool to perpetuate the subjugation of Black individuals across the country, including in Canada's most multicultural city, Toronto. As I will illustrate, Critical Race Theory is an important tool for understanding how Black lives are positioned and operate in a White-dominated settler society.

As a White female academic, it is not my goal in this paper to convey the message of BLMTO: the group is comprised of individuals who have clearly articulated that message on several occasions and do not need a White filter to explain their concerns. Rather, I want to examine the approach taken by mainstream media outlets, that to this day remain White-dominated, when reporting on the group. The paper begins with a succinct overview of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its contribution to analyzing North American media's failure to give a platform to Black voices. The paper also benefits from the brilliant analysis of whiteness as property developed by Cheryl Harris (1993). If, as Harris maintains, whiteness is a property that confers societal and psychological privileges and benefits, and includes the *exclusive* right of possession, we can understand why Black individuals and groups are prevented from sharing such benefits, including the right to expression. Harris argues that "although the substance of race definitions has changed, what persists is the expectation of white-controlled institutions to determine meaning – the reified privilege of power" (p. 1762). It therefore becomes clear why mainstream journalism intentionally excludes Black voices and reproduces a white narrative that claims the exclusive right to give meaning to the world around us. To validate this point, I examine Canadian media's treatment of BLMTO, with specific reference to two events: BLMTO participation at the 2016 Pride Parade and the speech delivered by Yusra Khogali, one of the co-founders of BLMTO, at the rally in front of the US consulate in Toronto during the National Day of Action Against Islamophobia in February 2017. In both instances, mainstream media response was negative, and focused on the tone rather than engaging with the message. I conclude by asserting that in the current situation there can be no dialogue within Canadian society as insurgent voices are systematically silenced while only the dominant White narrative is given legitimacy. Who

can speak and be heard is decided within a colonial framework that renders the colonized invisible and inaudible.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) developed in the 1970s in the United States as a result of the efforts of a group of civil rights activists and legal scholars (among them Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado) to challenge the belief that the law is neutral; these scholars argued that the law is instead another instrument in the hands of White America to racially discriminate against persons of colour. Although CRT initially focused exclusively on the legal system, through time it has been applied to a variety of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities (Bracey II, 2015; Crichlow, 2015). The reach of CRT extends beyond the United States, and Canadian scholars have often applied it to the Canadian context. One of the main goals of CRT is to contest the dominant assumption that racism is only an occasional occurrence in a society that is portrayed largely as open and accepting of diversity. Scholars in CRT argue that racism and White superiority are instead the norm and are embedded in American (and Canadian?) political and legal structures at all levels (Taylor, 1998). According to CRT, race is a social construction devoid of any biological significance that is "endemic and ordinary permeating all aspects of society" (Rocco et al., 2014, p. 460). As a result of this, racism is normalized and pervasive across society and often goes unrecognized.

Glenn E. Bracey II (2015) maintains that although CRT mostly tackles issues concerning the law and its institutions, it is possible to uncover an implicit theory of state, one that differs from the Racial State Theory (RST) proposed by Omi and Winant in the early 1990s. While both CRT and RST agree that racism is a fundamental element of American culture and society, RST fails to unequivocally recognize the state as a tool for maintaining White dominance. Critical Race Theory, on the other hand, insists that "whites have enjoyed instrumental control of the state since its founding" and such control is "permanent and absolute" (Bracey II, 2015, p. 558). As a White institutional space, the US – but the same can be said for Canada – has been built on racist foundations and "reproduces white dominance by design" in the educational, cultural, legal, and economic spheres. Even the occasional incorporation of a few individuals of colour into state institutions does not significantly alter the situation, as these individuals are largely token figures who either do not represent their communities or lack the power to contest the status quo (Bracey II, 2015). A perfect example is the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States in 2009: while initially the election of a Black person to the highest office in the country was heralded as a cataclysmic change, by the time he left his position in 2017 it was evident that little if anything at all had changed for Black persons across the country. A local example is represented by Toronto Police Chief Mark Saunders who, on 17 April 2015, was chosen as the first Black police Chief of the largest city in Canada and who has been an outspoken supporter of the practice of carding as a tool necessary to increase community safety ("Toronto Police

Chief", 2015) despite widespread evidence that it results in the excessive and unjustified targeting of male Black youth.[1]

Critical Race Theory understands race as a social construction and sees it as an instrument to render certain people more valuable than others, with Whites always ending up at the top of the scale. Accordingly, not all groups are devalued in the same way; for instance, some ethnic groups from Ireland, Southern and Eastern European countries, Asian and Spanish speaking countries whose skin colour is white have been racialized and marginalized at some point in time but have been eventually able to assimilate into the dominant White majority, usually in the span of a few generations. Non-white skinned individuals are instead systematically excluded and portrayed as "others" who do not and cannot belong (Rocco et al., 2014). As Haunani-Kay Trask (2004) notes, "racism is also the psychology of subjugation. The inferior must be made to feel inferior every day, to suffer their subjugation, to be dehumanized" (p. 13). Antiblack racism highlights how across North America, Black people have been the target of a systemic and structural racism that has positioned them as "outside the category of the human" (Crichlow, 2015, p. 190). Délice Mugabo (2016) explains that Afro-pessimism, the idea that "western society is inherently antagonistic to Africanity and Black people," concludes that "the characteristics ascribed to humanness were . . . those denied to Black people" and that "to be human is thus to be anything but Black" (p. 163).

The work of Cheryl Harris (1993) reminds us that among the characteristics of the human is the ability to own property; it is not unexpected then that Black persons across North America were initially denied the right to own property (they were instead objects of property), and that whiteness has been framed "as treasured property in a society structured on racial caste" (p. 1713). Whiteness as property has become an asset that White people are determined to defend and that can only survive as long as it is denied to non-Whites. The law is structured to protect such property as the exclusive preserve of Whites. Harris argues that whiteness is far more than just colour or race, and has in fact evolved into property in order to uphold White supremacy and retain economic dominance over Black and Indigenous peoples, who are considered non-human and therefore unable to partake in the benefits accruing from property rights. In fact, whiteness as property "reproduces Black subordination" (Harris, 1993, p. 1731) and de-humanization. This process of de-humanization also denies Black people of a voice to tell their stories, because it rests on the presumption that only humans (Whites) retain power and control over meaning. Critical Race Theory contends that the way to oppose the suppression and oppression of Black groups and individuals is to pay attention to the voices coming from

[1] Carding refers to the police practice of documenting the personal details of citizens who are stopped, and it usually does not result in charges. Statistical evidence indicates that the overwhelming majority of individuals stopped by the police in Toronto are Black males.

those who have experienced discrimination (Crichlow, 2015; Rocco et al., 2014). In fact, there can be no meaningful dialogue around racism as long as the only voice heard is the oppressor's.

I argue here that North America remains a White supremacist society where only White voices are accepted as legitimate, while the voices of people of colour are discounted, vilified and framed as expressions of excessive anger, irrationality and an innate tendency to violence. North American thought results from centuries of colonialism and remains Eurocentric at its core; within such a framework, whiteness is assumed as the norm while blackness is nothing more than a disturbance that must be isolated and removed (McKittrick, 2011). This is evident when analysing mainstream media across the United States and Canada, both of which remain to this day quite racist (Simpson et al., 2018). As Robert Redding Jr. (2017) notes for the US context, the biggest problem is that media ownership "follows the pattern of White domination in society" with little representation from Black journalists and very few chances for the latter to "make it to the level of management" (pp. 146-147). Even those few Black journalists who are hired are seldom permitted to communicate to – and in the language of – their communities, and are instead told by their White employers what to report and how to frame their stories (Redding Jr., 2017). The attention given in recent years to diversity in the newsroom has failed to consider that adding a few Black faces in front of the cameras or behind the desk does not alter the fact that White people are still running the show, with the result that Black voices are still purged from the news cycle, or when they appear, are presented as unreliable and unreasonable. Black voices expressing anger at the past and current situation of Blacks across the North American continent are especially susceptible to denigration and dismissal by a White society unable to grasp that rage, far from being a negative emotion, "is a means to decolonizing our minds" and "can serve as a tool of empowerment" by allowing Black people to define themselves rather than being defined by their colonizers (Rodriguez, 2011, p. 590).

In the Canadian context, Andray Domise (2017) reminds readers in *Macleans* that the presence of Black opinion columnists in daily publications is extremely tenuous; in fact, the only three Black columnists he was able to identify when scouting daily print publications were Royson James and Desmond Cole for the *Toronto Star*,[2] and Vicky Mochama for *MetroNews* (same owner as the *Star*). A similar conclusion is reached by Mike Sholars (2017), blog editor for *HuffPost Canada*; Sholars adds that the "diversity problem" across Canadian media is not simply a question of numbers solvable by hiring a couple of additional Black journalists, but of the latitude those hired are given to provide their opinion rather than being reduced to token figures who have to parrot a line consistently defined by White

[2] Cole, however, has now left the paper after being asked to refrain from focusing on activism in his columns, a request not made to other well-known White opinion columnists.

interests. If, as Harris (1993) maintains, whiteness is property and confers its holders the exclusive right to give meaning, then we can understand why the press as an institution remains committed to preventing Black voices from asserting themselves and contesting the accepted framework.

Canada presents itself as different from the United States because of its federal policy of multiculturalism that aims at embracing and celebrating all races, ethnicities and cultures. However, as noted by Dominique Rivière (2004), there is a general understanding that multiculturalism is largely limited to the private sphere, and that in public we are all expected to be Canadians, where "'Canadian' is still implicitly White, and (often) implicitly male" (p. 224). According to Rinaldo Walcott (2019), multiculturalism in Canada rests on the celebration of diversity, whose soothing rhetoric and practice have done nothing to address structural injustices and widespread racial inequality. Multiculturalism and diversity cannot erase the reality that Canada, a settler colonial state, has been built and continues to prosper out of the genocide of Indigenous people and the subordination as well as exploitation of Black people. The rhetoric of diversity fails to seriously challenge the power of whiteness, and therefore fails to provide any significant benefit to those who are not White. Further, multiculturalism in Canada operates to present the country as a haven for racialized people, in so doing preventing any engagement with the discourse of race and racism (Gomes & Khan, 2016). In "Sexism, Racism, and Canadian Nationalism," Roxana Ng (1989) explains how racism and sexism are both at the core of Canadian nationhood and work in conjunction to allow the dominant group to retain its hegemony. The same argument is advanced by Jacqueline Benn-John (2016) in her discussion of the oppression Indigenous and Black women in Canada face as a result of colonialism, systemic racism and patriarchy.

In the last few years, in the Canadian context, BLMTO has been one of the most recognizable voices expressing Black anger, and because of this, it has also been one of the most vilified in mainstream media discourse. According to their webpage, BLMTO offers a platform to Black communities in the city to "dismantle all forms of anti-black racism, liberate blackness, support black healing, affirm black existence, and create freedom to love and self-determine" (Black Lives Matter Canada, n.d.). The movement started in 2015 as a Canadian chapter of the larger Black Lives Matter protest movement, which originated in the United States in response to several cases of police brutality, the most notorious of which was the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson. It was at that point that a group of Black activists in Toronto decided to organize in order to protest not only those cases of police brutality in the US but also police killings of Black men across the Greater Toronto area, for example the murder of 33-year-old Jermaine Carby at the hand of a Peel police officer, and of 45-year-old Andrew Loku who was shot dead by Toronto police. If protesting against police violence was the spark that started BLMTO, I agree with Rinaldo Walcott that the movement is not merely an ad hoc response to instances of police violence, "but that it sits in a genealogy of

Black activists' eruptions meant to transform the state as we presently know it" (Simpson et al., 2018, p. 82) in so far as their actions have contributed to pinpoint and denounce the White supremacist logic that is central to the Canadian settler colonial reality.

In the remainder of this paper, I analyze the response to BLMTO across a sample of mainstream media articles and opinion pieces, and argue that this response, far from invalidating BLMTO claims, illustrates how the group is one of the most important current Black prophetic voices in the North American continent. In the Introduction to Mumia Abu-Jamal's *Writing on the Wall*, editor Johanna Fernandez (2015) refers to Cornel West's examination of Black prophetic voices as those voices "committed to illuminating the truth about black oppression and its systemic causes" (p. xxi). These are the voices that "because they speak uncomfortable truths . . . are vilified or swept under the rug" (Fernandez, 2015, p. xxi) by a White supremacist discourse that will not tolerate dissent. Within Canada, BLMTO is among the most recent examples of these prophetic voices, and it is for this reason that their message has systematically been vilified. In fact, as the following two examples will illustrate, BLMTO has a history of refusing to play nice with White-dominated state institutions, and of denouncing in words as well as actions those same institutions for their commitment to White supremacy.

The two episodes I investigate are BLMTO participation and action at the 2016 Pride parade in Toronto, and Yusra Khogali's speech in front of the US consulate in the city on 4 February 2017. In the Summer of 2016, BLMTO was invited to participate as guest of honour at the annual Toronto Pride Parade. During the parade, BLMTO put a stop to the event and refused to let it continue until Pride organizers agreed to a list of nine demands, which included "continued funding for Black involvement; removal of police floats in future Pride Days; prioritizing the hiring of Black trans women, Indigenous people, and others from vulnerable communities at Pride; and the funding for and protection for LGBTQ2SIAA youth of colour" (Burstow, 2016). The Parade resumed 30 minutes later, after Pride Toronto Executive Director Mathieu Chantelois signed a document agreeing to these demands. While some non-mainstream publications such as rabble.ca, NOW, and TORONTOIST praised the group, mainstream media was overwhelmingly critical and presented the group as "an outsider to an imagined Canadian queer community" (Greey, 2018, p. 662). The criticism concerned the fact that BLMTO was perceived as taking over a space that was meant for LGBTQ members without asking permission. However, as explained by scholar and activist OmiSoore Dryden (2016), the LGBTQ community includes Black individuals who have for years denounced the racial discrimination and harassment experienced within the city at large and within the LGBTQ community in particular. Blaming BLMTO for hijacking the parade is an accusation with little to no substance, as this is their space too. In the documentary film, *Track Two* (Sutherland, 1982), about the 1981

bathhouse raids in the city, Fran Endicott, Public School Trustee at the time, comments that "we have to be very careful when we start talking about communities, in terms of gay community or Black community. It is quite obvious that the gay community will also have a number of Blacks as part of that community." Homogenizing the gay community in the image of the White portion of that community is inaccurate and misleading.

Another accusation directed at BLMTO was that by demanding the removal of police floats from future Pride Parades, the movement was bringing an aggressive and divisive attitude to a community that has been trying to bridge the separation and build cooperation with Toronto police after years of tensions which culminated in the 1981 bathhouse raids and the arrest of over 280 men. But what BLMTO has done is not revive old grudges, because for Blacks in the city, and especially Black queer persons, the police force today is no less threatening than it was in the 1980s. As Desmond Cole (2015) notes in a piece for *Toronto Life*, to this day areas with a significant Black population are "heavy policed in the name of crime prevention" and Toronto police continues to card large numbers of young Black men to monitor their activities, despite the individuals not having been accused of any crime. Wesley Crichlow (2014) comments that "Blacks are constructed as a dangerous class by the state" (p. 123), in line with a Canadian history characterized by "a legacy of legalized slavery, state racism and authorized racial discrimination" (p. 124). For some members of the queer community as well, interactions with Toronto police are still marred by danger and distrust; in 2000, a women's bathhouse in the city was raided by six male officers, and in January 2017 cellphone footage emerged of police kicking, tasering, and directing homophobic remarks at a Black man (Tyszkiewcz, 2017). In November 2016, a Toronto police operation in Etobicoke targeting gay men resulted in the arrest of 72 individuals (Khandaker, 2017). Inviting the police as an institution into a space aimed at celebrating a community whose members are constantly harassed by police officers is an oddity indeed, and creates an unsafe environment for those individuals.

Among the journalists attacking BLMTO for their action at Pride was Margaret Wente of *The Globe and Mail*, arguably Canada's major national paper; on 4 July 2016, she defined BLMTO as "the new bully on the block… a tiny group of noisy activists" who "are firmly convinced that they are at the very top of the pyramid of oppression." While dismissing most BLMTO requests as "harmless," she takes aim at the demand to remove police floats from future Pride Parades and labels it as "wrong, and sad, and bad" (Wente, 2016). Ignoring the overrepresentation of Black inmates in Ontario youth and adult jails and the disproportionate number of Black persons stopped and carded by police in Toronto when compared to their White counterparts (Crichlow, 2014), Wente goes on to ridicule BLMTO's claim that the police force is a threatening institution for Blacks across the city and reminds the group that, far from being Ferguson, Toronto is for Blacks the safest place on earth. She concludes by warning readers about the dangers inherent in

conceding to BLMTO demands: "when bullies get their way, they just keep on bullying."

Another voice critical of BLMTO was Sue-Ann Levy (2016) who, from the pages of the *Toronto Sun*, accused the group of being disrespectful and forcing participants at the parade, including the elderly and disabled people, to stand for 30 minutes under the scorching sun only to make the news. She claimed that BLMTO hijacked the parade and transformed it into a political event rather than a celebration. Levy ignores the fact that Pride was born as a political event in direct response to police brutality and has only recently transformed into a consumption extravaganza (Grundy, 2004). If anything, BLMTO has brought the parade back to its origins. By taking control of the space (for a short time), BLMTO reasserted ownership over "Black bodies, our relation to the land, and the spaces in which we exist" (Diverlus, 2018, p. 64), something the White dominant society has historically worked hard to prevent. Here again, we can use Harris' (1993) analysis of whiteness as property to make sense of mainstream media reluctance to let Black bodies take control over what remains a colonized space.

Not to be left too far behind, on 11 July 2016, the *Toronto Star* published an opinion piece by Mark Jamieson, a self-employed businessman in downtown Toronto, branding BLMTO as a group that disrupted Pride to further its own agenda. Jamieson (2016) states that BLMTO "has absolutely nothing to do with the gay, lesbian, transgendered community," and that it was a mistake of Pride organizers to break with its tradition of distancing itself "from political issues not pertaining to members of the LGBT community." Similar concerns were raised by Ray Lam (2017), former member of the Board of Directors for the Vancouver Pride Society, who in *The Georgia Straight*, a free weekly news and entertainment newspaper published in Vancouver, accused BLMTO of using Pride to publicize a platform that had nothing to do with queer rights, in so doing "holding the queer community hostage." As indicated above, such claims fail to consider that the queer community is internally diverse and includes Black persons. Insofar as BLMTO is an expression of the Black community's concerns, it does have a place at Pride. As Sherene Razack (1998) points out in *Looking White People in the Eye*, our reality is characterized by "interlocking systems of oppression" that support and feed on each other; what Black queer individuals experience is not simply the sum of racism and sexism but the interlocking of such systems to produce a distinctive form of oppression. The action of BLMTO was meant to reassert that White queer persons are not the spokespersons for the entire community, and their priorities are not necessarily the priorities of other community members. Furthermore, trying to diminish the oppression faced by Black persons across the country by arguing that queers the world over have it worse, as Lam repeatedly points out in his intervention, is a disservice to all those committed to fighting inequality and discrimination on multiple fronts. Accusing BLMTO of adopting tactics that "create headlines, not change" by stealing the voice and

power of the queer community implies that anti-Blackness is not relevant to queer communities, and erases the lived experiences of Blacks who make up a significant portion of those communities.

Writing for CBC News, Mark Gollom (2016) recognizes that the BLMTO disruption at Pride raised awareness of the group, yet concludes that this was achieved at the expense of Black and gay police officers who have now become a target for discrimination; this despite the fact that BLMTO has made abundantly clear that police officers are welcome to participate in the parade in civilian clothes. The issue has never been individual participation, but the presence of the police as an institution with a substantial history of harassing and criminalizing Black members of the queer community (Khandaker, 2017). According to several experts surveyed by Gollom (2016), the demand to ban police floats and booths also risks derailing "some of the productive relationship-building between police and the gay community that has developed over the years." In the words of Randi Rahamim, principal of the public strategy and communications firm Navigator Ltd. and one of the people contacted by Gollom, the group's tactics might backfire as the public will recognize them as unreasonable, since "what some people perceive as radical moves, don't win over public opinion." Rahamim fails to understand Cornell West's observation, which I referred to above and that is quoted in the anthology edited by Fernandez (2015), that "prophetic voices" are never popular, nor do they seek popularity.

Accusations of unreasonableness and radicalism were repeated all over mainstream media just few months later after a speech Yusra Khogali, one of the co-founders of BLMTO, gave at a rally organized in front of the US consulate in Toronto to protest the travel restrictions placed by the Trump administration on citizens of a number of Middle Eastern countries. During her speech, Khogali referred to the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, as a "white supremacist terrorist," which resulted in a flood of accusations directed at Khogali. Unsurprisngly, first in line to condemn the young Black activist was the *Toronto Sun*, with a piece written by Joe Warmington (2017), who defined the reference to Trudeau as "the height of ugly fiction" coming out of "Yusra Khogali's sometimes loud and offensive mouth." Warmington also condemned as "pathetic" Khogali's reference to Quebec City as "a white supremacist settler colony" and blasted BLMTO for using "vile tactics" and attacking those same people (i.e., the police force) who are working to help address the issue of "black people murdered by black people." Again in the *Toronto Sun*, Anthony Furey (2017) characterized Yusra Khogali as someone with "a track record of inflammatory, divisive rhetoric," and criticized her speech during the National Day of Action Against Islamophobia as well as a series of tweets and Facebook messages she had posted on her accounts since 2015.

The *Toronto Sun* was not alone in taking a critical stance against the co-founder of BLMTO. In a blog on the *Huffington Post*, James Di Fiore (2017) called on Khogali to resign for her "habit of directing violent, hateful

language towards people with white skin" and "inserting hate speech into the ether of Toronto activism," thus compromising the credibility of the movement she helped create. According to Di Fiore (2017), there is a trend detectable in society whereby activists who live in a system affected by racial problems, feel entitled to "make violent, absurd statements, especially against whites," such as Khogali did when labelling the Prime Minister of Canada a White supremacist terrorist, a comment Di Fiore considers "asinine and evidence of a sloppy intellect." While he admits that Black individuals do indeed face a number of challenges in Canadian society, Di Fiore (2017) believes that Khogali has become a liability to the movement, because "if you continuously isolate and vilify white folks – without crafting your language in a way that separates actual racists from white allies – how can you ever expect to grow the movement to a size where the system would have no choice but change for the better?" He advises Khogali to resign "if she really believes black lives matter" because her continued presence at the helm of the movement would only "distract the public with hate" (Di Fiore, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, most of the support Khogali received came from non-mainstream media such as *NOW*, where Shantal Otchere (2017) published a piece defending the veracity of the comments Khogali had made in her speech (including the reference to Trudeau), and *rabble.ca*, which on 20 February 2017 published a commentary by John Baglow not only defending the activist's comments as factually correct, but noting that the attacks directed at Khogali are revealing of how White folks "would prefer that oppressed people remain polite and respectful," in order not to make the rest of us feel "uncomfortable." Any rhetoric that is perceived as stemming from a place of anger is systematically categorized as threatening and therefore illegitimate. In fact, in all the media articles, commentaries, and editorials discussed above, recurring terms used to define BLMTO are "bullies," "radicals," and "unreasonable" activists prone to "holding hostages" and "hijacking" events they have no place in; Khogali herself is defined as "loud," "offensive," as well as using a language that is "inflammatory," "divisive," "violent," and "hateful," By employing these characterizations, the content of BLMTO message is dismissed while attention focuses on the way that message is communicated. In the reminder of the paper, I am going to examine how White supremacy embedded in North American society sustains itself by systematically criticizing "Black prophetic voices" for their tone rather than engaging with the substance of the message these voices are trying to convey.

The claim that Canada is a White settler state built on the dispossession and genocide of Indigenous people is not something new or even contested in the academy and society at large. Also generally accepted is the fact that anti-Black racism does exist in Canada, although it is by and large portrayed as a phenomenon peculiar to a few individuals rather than inherent in the structural foundation of Canadian society. Even mainstream media such as the *Toronto Star* have in the past published editorials and investigations on

the subject. Those who disagree with such claims have largely defended Canada as better and more accepting of diversity than the United States, but have often refrained from vilifying the messenger. In the case of BLMTO, we instead witness a situation where the main focus of attack is the person speaking and the organization they represent, rather than the validity of the argument they are making. I maintain that the reason for this is that those who are speaking are members of the Black community, and Khogali herself is a Black woman. As Dalia Rodriguez (2011) writes, we live in a society where "White words simply carry more legitimacy" (p. 592). While White words are valued, Black words are questioned, and when perceived as offensive to Whites, are "easily dismissed" (Rodriguez, 2011, p. 593) and silenced. Evelynn Hammonds (2001) notes that "the imposed production of silence and the removal of any alternative to the production of silence reflect the deployment of power against racialized subjects" (p. 385). It is the power of Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) that will not tolerate any challenge to its narrative. It is fairly common across mainstream media to read condemnations of Black reactions to constant and documented violence against Black bodies and communities. Such reactions "are consistently characterized as inappropriate, exorbitant, and themselves gratuitous" (Palmer, 2017, p. 33), hence invalid.

White scholars, journalists, and public figures are allowed to speak about White privilege and White supremacy in Canada, even if their claims are occasionally contested, while Blacks, and Black women in particular, are not extended the same privilege. Whereas the speech of the former might be subject to criticism, the messenger of said speech is perceived as having an inherent right to speak, whereas the speech of the latter is systematically discounted because the messenger is perceived as lacking that same right, and this is justified by emphasizing the aggressive and unpolite tone adopted. As Tyrone S. Palmer (2017) notes, "the Black is always already unduly, irrationally 'angry'" (p. 43) and therefore whatever is said is of little consequence, similarly to how adults ignore spoiled children throwing a tantrum. Unless the message is phrased in a reasonable and polite way that is not offensive to White listeners, "Black anger, in response to the psychic (and physical) violence of anti-blackness, has no audience – instead, it is received as irrational, a sign of 'craziness' and Black infrahumanity" (Palmer, 2017, p. 43). By associating rage and irrationality with blackness as its inherent characteristic, Black persons are presented as lacking any humanity since "the human is always already a racial project" (Ferreira da Silva, as quoted in Latty et al., 2016, p. 132). The result is that movements such as BLMTO, which dare to speak back to violence against Black persons and Black communities (Patel & Price, 2016), are increasingly targeted as threatening and violent to society, and therefore rendered marginal and inconsequential.

Faced with these accusations and with the continued violence exercised by the state and its institutions on their bodies and souls, Black individuals and groups such as BLMTO have chosen to resist through their voice and have

refused to be silenced. Such resistance, far from being a new phenomenon, is rooted in a tradition of Black survival embraced by Black social movements over the last two centuries, and captured in the speeches of Black giants of the calibre of Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois. Aldon Morris (2017) recounts Du Bois' response to the student protests at his alma mater, Fisk University, when in the early 1920s the institution's White president, Fayette McKenzie, was accused by Black students of catering to the White prejudices widespread across the South. On that occasion, Du Bois unconditionally supported the Black students who had "the guts to yell and fight" (as quoted in Morris, 2017, p. 13) and speak truth to power. It is not surprising then to see that a large portion of the founders and members of BLMTO are themselves students who carry forward the same spirit of defiance in front of oppression. In breaking the silence and conveying their rage through language, BLMTO has been able to transform individual frustration into group action. What White society finds intolerable is that Black persons and communities are using their voice to challenge White definitions of who they are. By moving from object to subject of discourse, groups such as BLMTO use their spoken rage as a liberating tool against White dominance and supremacy (Rodriguez, 2011).

In the case of Yusra Khogali, what White society found unacceptable was criticism coming from someone who was Black and a woman, two major faults according to the current White supremacist patriarchal system. Dominique Rivière (2004) writes that: "it is the union of 'Blackness' and 'Femaleness' that results in multiple cycles of oppression" (p. 223). Here I see Khogali as advancing and embodying the tradition of Canadian Black feminism. Following Wane (2004), I argue that Black feminism is not merely a set of abstract ideas but is based on action and struggle against oppression, empowering Black women "to survive in a world that seeks to exploit, denigrate, and dehumanize their very existence" (p. 154). Black Canadian women have a history of resisting White racism and patriarchy by rallying, marching, speaking and challenging stereotypes (Benn-John, 2016). As noted by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "a tremendous amount of brilliance, mobilization, organization, and resistance went into having any brown, black or red bodies on the land right now at all" (Simpson et al., 2018, p. 77). In recent times, nobody has shown such brilliance in organizing, mobilizing and resisting as Yusra Khogali, who has refused to be silenced and succumb to the incessant vitriolic attacks against her.

To conclude, I return to the quote I used as the title of this article. In her presentation to the National Women's Studies Association Conference held in Connecticut in June 1981, Audre Lorde (2007) addressed the White female academics in the audience with unapologetic words: "I cannot hide my anger to spare you guilt." She rejected the accusation that anger was counterproductive because it conveyed the message so harshly and loudly that the recipient could not even hear it. Lorde questioned whether it was really her manner and tone that prevented White audiences from hearing, or

the threat of a message that structures deeply embedded in society might change as a result of Black people's choice to fight back and resist their oppression. I believe the latter to have been the case. The reason White persons refuse to engage with the message of groups such as BLMTO is not because we feel endangered by the angry tone adopted but because we cannot tolerate the challenge to our structured world of White privilege. It is the message we find threatening, not the manner. But admitting that much would require engaging with the message and that is a confrontation we are going to lose. Taking aim at the harshness of the words is an easy escape route that allows us not to listen. And yet, listen we must. Black people are not going to be silenced. There comes a moment when oppression becomes intolerable. For Blacks across North America, that moment is now. Unless White society starts listening to Black voices, there can be no meaningful dialogue but just a deafening obtuse White monologue and that is, simply put, intolerable. Dr. Lorde, I am listening.

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