Who Positioned Social Work as the Noble Alternative to Policing?

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Abstract: Events of 2020 further illuminated policing's history of oppression, white supremacy, ableism, sanism, and misogyny (Mohapatra et al., 2020). In response, calls to defund the police and abolish the carceral system that enables state-sanctioned violence became louder, and social workers were elevated as the noble alternative to police (Wilson & Wilson, 2020). This paper examines the positioning of social work as innocent of the surveillance, scrutiny, and criminalization of racialized populations associated with policing. Critically reviewing social work's history with relevant vignettes from the classroom, research, as well as practicum and community settings, we lay bare the profession's checkered history of complicity with racial subjugation. We deconstruct claims of benevolence, good intentions, and ignorance usually held up in defense of ills perpetrated by social workers and conclude that the collective amnesia created by whitewashing social work's history forestalls accountability and transformative practice.

Keywords: policing, social work, racial oppression, accountability, transformative practice

Introduction

In 2020, calls to defund the police and abolish the carceral system that enables state-sanctioned violence became louder in response to police brutality against Black people. Illuminating policing's history of oppression, white supremacy, ableism, sanism, and misogyny (Mohapatra et al., 2020), social workers were elevated as the noble profession to address mental health (Wilson & Wilson, 2020). The collective amnesia that claims it is the anti-oppressive epitome of all helping professions allows the discipline to evade accountability for whitewashing its history as an agent of the colonial state with similar foundations to the police and the prison industrial complex. Thus, social work continues to resist countervailing views emanating from Black and other racialized populations.

This narrative reflection paper posits that social work in its current form is no alternative to policing and the carceral system, critically narrating the profession's historical roots and contemporary manifestations of racism, to interrogate social work's professed anti-oppressive focus with relevant vignettes from the classroom, practicum, research, and the community. Social work has inner work to do around the ways in which the profession upholds white supremacy and its corollary—anti-Blackness—by not dismantling systems and structures of racial domination. White supremacy is predicated on the inherent superiority of white people in mind, body, and spirit (Saad, 2020). It is legitimized through processes of racialization that mark non-white bodies as uncivilised, deficient, and needing regulation (Tuhiwai Smith, 2007) establishing itself as normal, denying humanity to Black and others deemed non-white (Sharpe, 2016). Whiteness is not colour but "a structurally advantaged position … (privileged) standpoint from which White people view themselves, others, and society" (Bilge, 2013, p. 412). White supremacy makes whiteness the standard to which all (racial) "others" aspire but cannot be

(Delgado, 1995; Taylor et al., 2009; Yee, 2005). Whiteness and white supremacy portend overt racism; insidious racism (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001); and racist ideologies, systems, policies, and institutions—the logic that underlies them silences dissent (Yosso et al., 2010), facilitating social work's positioning as innocent and guileless.

Social Work's Roots in Canada: Colonialism and Racial Violence

Social work in Canada has been both an active and passive supporter and facilitator of colonialism and racialization in Canada and the world. The profession has its foundation in Canada at a time when imperialist and colonialist ideas were the norm (Johnstone, 2016; Johnstone & Lee, 2020) and much of Canadian social work and welfare systems relied heavily on Anglo-Saxon fundamentalism. Discourses in social work centered around civilization, morality, and humanity suggest that these are things possessed only by those within the bounds of whiteness, especially British, high-class whiteness (O'Connell, 2009). Canadian social work's roots lie in the charity organization societies (COS) and settlement house (SH) movements originating in Europe, predicated on surveillance, blaming, shaming, and notions of deserving and undeserving poor.

The COS model of "helping" emphasized support for the disadvantaged but offered the absolute minimum support necessary and only when all other options were exhausted (Skinner, 2015). COS worked from a framework of "scientific philanthropy" (Haynes & White, 1999, p. 385) which promoted science-based evaluation, education, and resolution for social problems, such as poverty. A practice that resulted from this view, which characterized the COS movement at the time, was *friendly visiting*—an in-person experience with families and communities that showed those "in need" that they were not alone (Haynes & White, 1999). Despite the stated purpose, the COS movement became philanthropic condescension, as workers disdained the "disadvantaged" through standards imbued with upper-middle class white norms, but which used the shroud of benevolent helping to mask racism (Haynes & White, 1999; Wenocur & Reisch, 1989). The friendly visiting practice facilitated surveillance and control, re-inscribing white privilege through dutiful moral authority to "help" the inferior "other."

The SH approach to "helping" employed more structural approaches to community issues by living in the communities they served (Haynes & White, 1999). They positioned themselves as unlike the COS movement and its practice of friendly visiting, asserting that their approach was more effective in meeting the people's needs (Becker, 1964). SH workers believed that they "[knew] what the poor were thinking" (Haynes & White, 1999, p. 386) and would therefore be better equipped to solve social problems with their "insider" knowledge. However, the SH movement fostered increased surveillance and control over the host community, foisting themselves as the experts even though, as Haynes and White (1999) note, they never fully integrated into the community or lived as community members did. They perpetuated the same norms as the COS movement as their interpretations of the community produced flawed understandings steeped in whiteness, ignoring the community's definitions of the issues (Lundy, 2004). The SH workers' perspectives elevated as truth portrayed a static community already known to the experts, rather than a dynamic, self -determining, creative, knowledge-producing community.

COS and SH movements as progenitors of social work shared a key focus of furthering the settler colonial project disguised as nation-building (Lee & Ferrer, 2014), protecting white sensibilities through essentializing reductionist views of "the other"—failing to challenge the fundamental systems they purported to reform, but rather fitting "others" into oppressive systems (Johnstone & Lee, 2020; Lundy, 2004). What is obscured in the literature on social work history is the role of race and racism in the profession's policies and practices (Este, 2004; Yee & Dumbrill, 2003). Social work actively participates in promoting what Lee and Ferrer (2014) and Este (2004) call the *colour lines*, which separate those who fit into the normative Canadian body politic—white, middle, and upper class, cis and heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.— from those who do not. The resulting push for assimilation of those deigned "other" in the profession's history (Johnstone & Lee, 2020) is social work's active participation in Canada's state-sanctioned targeting, control, and systemic marginalization of Black bodies positioned not just as non-white but as polar opposite of everything pristine and white.

As women dominated the emerging noble profession, it bestowed upon them the prestige that they hitherto lacked—and social workers began to be established as protectors of Canada's (racial) purity (Johnstone, 2018). This process of settler feminism encompasses how white Canadian women (concentrated in social work to the present day) were integral to the management of those on the "wrong side" of the colour line, maintaining and enforcing racial hierarchies. Settler feminism was rife in social work as white women became deeply enmeshed in self-righteously solving the "Indian problem" (Lee & Ferrer, 2014, p. 8), "fixing" Black and Indigenous people considered "wretched and half civilized" (Woodsworth, 1909, p. 194), assimilating immigrants into the dominant Canadian identity (Johnstone & Lee, 2020), and being gatekeepers of resource allocation (Ahmed, 2000).

Social work's participation in racializing and criminalizing builds on its authority to morally rate those seeking support, evaluating their productivity, moral character, and cleanliness (O'Connell, 2009, 2013). These distinctions continued alongside the extraction and monopolization of land by white settlers and the portrayal of Black and Indigenous people as inhuman, immoral, and in need of civilization (O'Connell, 2013). The profession was also plagued by a myth of scarcity, whereby finite resources can only be accessed by people deemed worthy (Brzuzy, 2002; O'Connell, 2013). This myth pitted poor white settlers against (racial) others, thereby actively recruiting them into colonial and racial conquests (O'Connell, 2013). Discourses of respectability and degeneracy in the profession, rooted in eugenics movements, position social workers as those who serve and protect (racial) purity and hygiene (Gibson, 2015; Lee & Ferrer, 2014). Social work, in its bid to achieve prestige as a profession, embraces Eurocentric positivistic fragmentation of communities, of heart and head, of worker and client, robbing them and those they serve of humanity.

Canada has established itself as peacekeeping, kind, and welcoming to all, regardless of their origins, and social work reflects that façade, subsuming Canada's long history of colonial and racial violence under a collective erasure that Pon (2009) calls the ontology of forgetting. Ahistorical renditions of social work whitewash the history of colonial conquest, strengthening the associations between Blackness, savagery, and criminality, to maintain racial hierarchies

which guarantee white settlers land, citizenship benefits, and the rights to sanction others in sociopolitical, economic, and legal ways (Razack, 2002).

Social work is fundamentally an "arm of the state" (Johnstone & Lee, 2020, p. 78), like policing, but it has succeeded in weaving a cloak of exalted objectivity, portraying social workers (mostly, white women) as "responsible citizens, compassionate, caring, and committed to the values of diversity and multiculturalism" (Thobani, 2007, p. 4). They are given the benefit of the doubt and must answer neither for their active participation in white supremacist practices, nor their acquiescence. This positioning allowed social work to gain prestige and respectability while being custodians of the social order of whiteness. Black, Indigenous, and racialized community attempts to resist whiteness were labeled resistant, hostile, and non-compliant (Johnstone & Lee, 2020) because they defied notions of social work's inherent goodness.

The Knee Upon the Neck: White Supremacy and Racism in Practice

In this section, I (Oba, a Black woman) reflect on 14 years of directing a social work practicum program and teaching and conducting research in Canadian universities, both as a pre-tenured and tenured professor: an exhilarating and challenging journey captured in a few vignettes.

Surprise Invalidation

My practicum education role made me privy to challenges faced by Black MSW students seeking placement. For example, a student showed up for her placement interview and was met by a startled clinical director who, gasping in surprise, mumbled that he had not expected a Black student because she did not sound Black on the phone. After the interview, devastated and in tears, she met with me, saluting herself for staying composed but also berating herself for performing the smiling, grateful, subservient student. She questioned if she could ever be hired at that organization even if she completed her practicum there, considering the difficulties Black persons face even when, like herself, they were born and raised in Canada. She asked why he can take away her dream opportunity and how a director who interviews students and staff regularly was surprised at her Blackness, surmising that she would not have got an interview if he knew she was Black. She asked rhetorically, "If they heard an accent over the phone and never called me for an interview, would they admit it was the Black accent? What more must I do to be enough in this country?"

Surprise Inspiration

As a professor, students could not hide their surprise when they saw me walk into the classroom and head for the podium—they would whisper, even point, but the Black students lingered after class to express what seeing a Black professor meant to them. Some shared their scars and bruises from being in the academy, and inspired they wondered—"how did you get away from under the knee?" The theme of not being good enough re-echoed, amplified by tales of being streamed away from academic courses in high school, meandering through low-income jobs, high school remediation, diploma programs, to BSW and finally the master's degree that had eluded them due to being misguided into taking non-academic courses. They spoke of realizing

later how guidance counsellors did them a disservice, while lamenting that the negative attitudes persist despite their tenacity and efforts to improve their lot.

Surprise Solidarity

I became privy to burdens such as poor mental health, doubts about accessing services, and fear of marginalization in group work, or not being called on in class and being centered only in pathologizing discourses. Many incurred excessive student debts from years of meandering either due to the streaming they experienced or their deskilling as foreigntrained professionals. I found myself binding bruised hearts and souls who blamed themselves for financial, emotional, and health problems they faced due to racism. After George Floyd's death, a former student wrote me saying she cried bitterly, as the system had its knee on her neck for years and it took this murder for her to stop blaming herself and begin to breathe again. She said her children now have the vocabulary to openly acknowledge racism without fear which spares them the kind of trauma she faced. She expressed gratitude for the support she experienced from having a Black teacher and finding solidarity with indigenous peers to understand how colonialism dispossesses, and stifles, both racialized immigrant and the First Nations people.

Surprise of inspiration is thus fueled by the surprise of invalidation. People who are invalidated come to accept their erasure. It dawned on me that Black instructors are only considered exceptional because of their absence. Sadly, many have come to accept the abjection inherent in hegemonic discourses, viewing certain positions unattainable because society tells them so. Apart from the years and extra money they spend attaining their dreams, it is extra emotional labour to heal from the wound of the knee even if it gets off the neck. Recovering from invalidation and being inspired is a hard journey. The mainstream does not have to recover from the racial trauma of the knee. They are already always considered fit to attain.

Surprise Connections at the Knee

The student in the first vignette feared she would not get the placement if she expressed her pain. Being labeled an angry Black woman could be grounds for further discrimination, depriving her of getting a foot in the door of the job she seeks at the end of the placement. Similarly, foreign-trained students faced impacts of factors such as gender, race, colonization, accent, and religion—they remain unnamed and unconfronted. For example, a student said a professor gave back papers to other students but threw hers on the table, avoiding all contact in ways that others observed. Students also reported that professors ignore racism in the classroom, "being nice" but not knowing how to intervene when students rush to form groups with their white friends, whom they assume are the knowers, and avoiding Black peers deemed non-knowers, a belief professor appeared to share as they did not address it. I was aware of these issues as a mentor of the Students for Inclusion Diversity and Equity (SIDE) group and as graduate program director in Canadian universities. SIDE members self-organized to hold their school of social work accountable for addressing glaring oppression occurring under their noses. These roles galvanized my teaching about anti-blackness—the inhuman notion of human hierarchy that underlies oppressions and injustices against fellow humans. l teach with respect,

sensitivity, humour, and tenacity, but I ensure we jointly grapple with these tensions to become better social workers and humans.

Surprised by Knowledge

Shock at Black knowledge is prevalent as white supremacy cannot fathom that Black people have anything to offer. It dismisses the sociocultural, professional, and intellectual assets of frontline social workers, instructors, or researchers. Today, I am involved in several prestigious grants, locally, nationally, and internationally, but it was not easy convincing anyone that Afrocentric theories had a place in research or that investigating Black youth perspectives of their experiences was a viable undertaking. I encountered cynicism about my research conceptualization and was told it could not be funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Canada's highest humanities research funder.

In applying for my first SSHRC grant as principal investigator (PI), I applied successfully to the mentorship program at my former university. It matched emerging scholars (recent PhDs) with seasoned grantees, but no internal mentor was found for me. No one was studying Black youth, so I was on my own resisting pressures to change my topic to something that would resonate with funders. I was told it would be hard to convince reviewers to fund a study about Black youth when the "Indigenous problem" was the current priority. I found my own tribe of like-minded scholars and they took the risk with me to resist discourses that make Black and Indigenous people the problem, thus obscuring the "colonizers problem" which we sought to explore.

Furthermore, I had to explain why my proposal referred to "elders" when the study was not about Indigenous populations. I did some educating, explaining that Black communities have elders and that an approach I piloted in my doctoral study entails elders infusing Afrocentric teachings, proverbs and traditions into community participatory research. The thinking that we do racialized people a favour when we include their knowledge is flawed because diverse knowledges broaden our understanding of diverse human phenomena. This goes against current practices that places extra emotional/intellectual labour on those harmed in racial power play. Studying what is happening to Black youth at school was an untapped area as hardly anyone was asking about the knee on their necks. Behold, the study was funded by Canada's topmost humanities research funder, SSHRC, adjudicated by multidisciplinary reviewers belying any idea that social work is more emancipatory than other disciplines. SSHRC adjudicators adjudged it timely, relevant, and necessary to understand. Indeed, grant writing is in itself an opportunity to educate funders and interdisciplinary scholars though we have to master established grant writing protocols and then use them for subversive research by questioning received knowledge and asking the "so what" question. Grant writing was not the goal for me; my *raison d'aitre* continues to be why do I do what I do. Black people embrace double consciousness knowing that white people do not have to understand blackness, but we must honour lived experiences, not conflate performativity with inclusion and fundamentally understand the non-universality of Eurocentrism. Valuing plural epistemologies enhances research, transformative education, and reflexive praxis to the benefit to all.

Knees on Youth Necks: Undeniable and Unignorable

To all Black youth with knees upon your necks, wriggling under the knee of unrequited longing for acceptance and belonging, discovering that social workers help keep the knee in place, I hear you, and this is what I heard.

When social workers come to the school
Everyone whispers, who is going to foster care?
They come and take away people's children,
To strange homes, strange people, and strange ways
People more powerful than your mother and your father
Hydra-headed workers lurking in the shadows.
Sighting them spells, gloom, and doom
Reverberating back to our ancestors in the motherland.
Shattered dreams of a better life, forever mired in shame.
But social workers are supposed to help us, show that we can belong.
Where were you when grief brought darkness at noon day?
When news of yet another Black boy murdered rent the morning air
When I dreaded another day in this place and space
When they called us names, bullied, and punished us so hard.
We wished the ground would open up, take us head long.
Where were you to believe I was wronged, not in the wrong?
When they treated me like charred, scary dirt?
To tell me I am welcome and can belong.
Tone down what?

My skin, name, accent, hair, food, or my parents
Pray, what is left of me then?
Still my parents make me go day after day,
Education is the key, they say.
We the children they prayed for,
Gave thoughtful names amidst pomp and splendour.
Names symbolizing dreams hopes and aspirations.
Yes, my name is audacious and ambitious!
It's my parents first gift to me, harbinger of destiny.
Carrier of my family's hopes, beacon of my destiny.
Tell social workers, don't ruin our families!
Police, teachers have done their worst. Don't take from us our foundation.
Rich or poor, they're our roots, their proverbs light our ways.
Then you come and throw us into the abyss.
Weaponizing social work's ability to control, discipline, and regulate.
You may not incarcerate; but you might as well, because you snuff out our light.
You kill viscerally without the guns.
Social work and police uphold the same ideologies.
Twin peas grown in the soil of white is best, it's all the same.
Killing us softly with smiles or violently with guns.

Discussion: Surprise Social Work is Hardly the Alternative

Although both social work and policing cause harm and are beholden to white supremacy (Kaba, 2021), social work benevolence is juxtaposed with the overt violence of policing, just as the popular rhyme says "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." The harm social work does is minimized relative to police brutality, and social work assumes the pedestal of nobility. The vignettes drawn from my (Oba's) experience however demonstrate social work's participation in discursive epistemic violence. Notions of solving the "Indian problem" (Blackstock, 2009, p. 29) are applied to all identities deemed inferior in culture, spirituality, language, education, and knowledge who must be fixed. To justify taking children from their homes, the government rationalized that Indigenous parents were unfit parents, therefore they were doing Indigenous children a "service" by removing them from their families (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015). This paternalism devastated communities, justifying abuse and deaths of children in residential schools (Blackstock, 2009; TRC, 2015). Today, Black parents are deemed unfit to parent, devaluing cultural practices and removing Black children disproportionately. Black youth today report social workers remain apathetic to them and work for the authorities rather than families (Oba, 2018).

Counternarratives can mitigate the unexamined dismissive nature of rhymes and ahistorical renditions that justify and perpetuate harm! Child welfare in Canada remains based on the same "white, middle-class normativity" (Pon et al., 2011, p. 401) the profession applied to further racial and colonial violence at its inception. It targets all others for surveillance and punishment (Gosine & Pon, 2011), manifesting in policy and practice that condones destruction of Black, Indigenous, and racialized families under the guise of "protecting" children, just like residential schools. The child welfare system purports to promote the best interests of Canada's children, but Black, Indigenous, and racialized children are up against systems mired in norms of whiteness. "Race was a strong predictor of being reported, investigated, misdiagnosed, underserviced, and placed in foster care" (Clarke, 2011, p. 277) among Afro-Caribbean families in Toronto, along with class (King et al., 2017), as race, capitalism, and classism are intimately connected (Gilmore, 2020). For Black children, who are overrepresented in child welfare, this means a higher likelihood of out-of-home placement, longer times in care, and lower chances of family reunification (Clarke, 2011).

Risk-based child welfare language disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities (Featherstone et al., 2014). One recent example is the practice of birth alerts, where healthcare professionals were encouraged to bring families to the attention of child welfare authorities if they were deemed "at-risk" prior to the child even being born (Stueck, 2019). This practice disproportionately targeted Black, Indigenous, and racialized mothers.

White supremacy employs risk-obsessed discourses to discipline racialized families by regulating anything that is inconsistent with Euro-Western parenting approaches, in the absence of race-based analysis that interrogates racism, colonialism, poverty, and pathologizing discourses (Caldwell & Sinha, 2020; Pon et al., 2017). Child welfare, which employs a preponderance of social workers, perpetuates white supremacy by marking racialized families (Almeida et al., 2019; Chilisa, 2012; Giwa et al., 2020; Jeyasingham, 2012; Joseph et al., 2020;

Matias et al., 2019). Cull (2006) notes that the profession and its practices serve as "instrumental tools of assimilation and control" (p. 144). Social work, a tool of the colonial state, weaponizes white supremacy through "helping" practices that force service users to prove they "deserve" services, resources, and support (Maki, 2011). Comparing social welfare surveillance and Jeremy Bentham's (1995) panopticon, social work maintains a white gaze on Black bodies, disciplining those who make missteps that deem them unworthy, being complicit in their early criminalization. For instance, in 2022, a school called police to remove a four-year-old Black boy from school in handcuffs (CTV News, 2022). Institutionalized state sanctioned racial violence remains an enduring threat to young Black lives (Oba, 2020).

Carceral social work is a "form of social work that relies on logics of social control, using coercive and punitive practices to manage BIPOC and poor communities" (Jacobs et al., 2021, p. 39). These practices and their underpinning assumptions maintain the profession as part of the colonial carceral state (Jacobs et al., 2021). From social work's inception to its present, it has enforced racial and colonial violence in various forms in benevolent maleficence, making it insidious and worrisome. Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities are wary about trusting social workers because of this power-wielding profession's benevolent guise.

Recommendations

To begin to address these issues, we feel that there is no better place to start than the work of abolitionist scholars and activists across contexts that recognized the detrimental impacts of carceral logics. Defunding the police is a first step towards addressing institutionalized racism and state-sanctioned violence against Black youth. Culturally appreciative proactive strategies informed by Black-led research are needed to illuminate anti-Blackness across systems and professions. It is not just the police that have knees on the neck of the Black community. We live within societies where surveillance and punishment are extended outside the walls of carceral institutions (Palacios, 2016), of which social work is a key part. Beliefs that Black youth are criminal and delinquent, which are rooted in colonialism, contribute to differential treatment and criminalization of Black people across public institutions, including social work services/programs, hospitals, child welfare, and educational and mental health systems as well as academic or research settings. Racial inequity and disparities exacerbated by the global pandemic offer an opportunity to interrogate discriminatory practices that keep the knee on the neck of the "other" and to harness Black social and cultural capital for more meaningful and equitable helping.

While I (Oba) am a Black scholar whose journal entries inform the vignettes in this study, second author Zerafa is a recent MSW graduate whose graduate studies focused on whiteness and white supremacy. Black advocates and white allies may be labeled loud, non-collegial, and unpalatable, but we model the need for social workers to not ignore violence and harm. As co-authors we denounce the long history of racist atrocities, subterfuge wars, and Indigenous genocide in Canada (Chilisa, 2012), choosing to be no longer surprised at the racism in settler colonial Canada because bystanders only make the perpetrator's knee imprint deeper on Black people. The new dawn sparked by George Floyd's murder must go beyond Black cohort hires to intentionally presenting Black realities in policies, practices, and outcome measures. As a white

woman, I (Zerafa) recognize Black scholars may not be in a hurry to remove the coat of armour and hypervigilance required in a world waging war against Black people's humanity. I recommend that social work must decide on which side of the war it sits, rather than profiting from it with a shudder and a smile—otherwise we are helping to keep the knee of colonialism, imperialism, and benevolent maleficence on Black people's necks.

We are both determined to amplify what Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities have known for centuries. Further research that resists the silencing power of white supremacy is needed to integrate race-based data to inform needed policies, programs, and services that serve, rather than surveil and punish Black, Indigenous, and racialized people. COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter Movement, videos, and social media shed light on Canada's culpability in white supremacy and anti-Black racism and invite white allies such as me (Zerafa) into enhanced solidarity. This can be challenging in academia, where structures at all levels are laden with white supremacy, including hiring, promotion, tenure, and research approval (Baffoe et al., 2014; Joseph et al., 2020). Nonetheless, Black researchers must feel secure to sustain research agendas on race issues. It is no passing fad but an enduring public health issue with grave impacts on the lives of Black, Indigenous, and racialized children, youth, families, and communities. Further, we will not study and celebrate "resilience" of those who survive the knee on their necks while ignoring the very knees that bruise them. In the first vignette, the student got access to an interview, but did not escape the heel of the accent police. At the interview, the heel emerged to crush their now visible blackness, marking them as unable to belong. The heel cannot continue to be downplayed as unconscious bias, because its "unconsciousness" harms and even kills others.

Cross-cultural collaborations like ours demonstrate the importance of surfacing repressed stories though we may not experience them directly. Exposure aids consciousness-raising. Social work education must shift away from layering on issues of race, racism, and white supremacy to courses, relegating them to electives only offered in specific schools or isolated workshops without concerted action to reflect, unlearn, and re-learn. Anti-Black racism courses are needed to shift social work from solely Euro-Western theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and outcomes measures that preclude epistemological diversity, marginalizing the knowledge, voice, and practices of those who do not fit narrow Eurocentric frames. Collaborations, group work, and Black-led research with identified allies recognized as such by the community can facilitate difficult conversations, giving fellow social workers the chance to demonstrate if they want to take the knee of humanity or keep the knee of oppression upon us.

We have feared the angry Black woman trope and the equation of Black masculinity with criminality for far too long to our own hurt and must now ask those horrified by seeing the knee, "What are you doing about it?" Doing nothing is not a choice. You cannot unsee what you have seen!

Conclusion

Through vignettes, we, a Black professor and white research associate, reflect on social work's checkered racist history. These vignettes underscore the need for Black-led research on the

scholarship of teaching and learning in social work to ensure learning shapes praxis. The vignettes illustrate the importance of interrogating one's social subjectivities against the backdrop of justice and liberation in the classroom, the field, and larger society. Social work is not merely an academic discipline; it is a thinking, doing, profession. We must desist from the typical rush to innocence, surprise, or perfunctory statements about supporting equity, diversity, and inclusion or denouncing police brutality. These vignettes illuminate social work's accountability for harm unto others. It behooves those insulated from racial oppression to intentionally, reflexively interrogate their prejudices about differences. Eschewing the complacent belief that people are only punished for doing wrong, we begin to see the prevalence of racial oppression. Black-led research can equip future social workers to be global citizens ready to learn from knowledge holders and recognizing Afrocentric and other innovative research as salient and rigorous, embracing racial, cultural, and spiritual ways of knowing (Chilisa, 2012; Yee & Wagner, 2013).

Diverse lived experiences benefit the whole. At its core social work is complex; therefore simplistic, ahistorical, reductionist, or essentializing renditions of human phenomena are further metaphors of the knee. Injustice prevails in social work and academia, but the social work classroom must start dislodging the knee rather than being custodians of the social order. Adding anti-oppressive concepts to course syllabi and mission statements of schools of social work (Dominelli, 1994; Yee & Wagner, 2013) without naming whiteness and white supremacy merely helps people cope with oppression rather than dismantling its systemic and structural roots (Baines, 2017). Systems fraught with uncontested power and oppressive forces that are so "normal" they are taken for granted obfuscate "the other." The vignettes highlight nuanced experiences that racialized people navigate daily. This disrupts the notion that "the other" just needs to be resilient. Social work cannot be the alternative to policing (Yee & Wagner, 2013), or champion of "diversity," "inclusion," and "equity" (Ahmed, 2007) without addressing systematic subjugation that perpetuates racial and colonial structures of violence. It must model change in habitual practices and policies (Joseph et al., 2020). Whiteness allows organizations to make "empty mentions and discursive power-plays" (Zerafa, 2020, p. 42); they raise issues of oppression and use the language of critical theories without having to engage with them on a critical and meaningful level. Social work seeks to be progressive without disrupting hegemony (McLaughlin, 2005) or doing the hard work of democratizing, celebrating itself as progressive (Giroux, 2003) amidst neoliberal, neocolonial approaches wherein exchange of capital supersedes social justice in research funding and universities gain social currency by embracing anti-oppressive practice's "double comfort" and self-adulation that disavows the need to excavate, understand, and repair the harm state (Heron, 2005)

In conclusion, while the harm social work inflicts may not be caught on a webcam, the case note, eligibility/safety assessment, and child removal orders steeped in white supremacy and anti-Blackness can be weaponized. We argue that covert police brutality simply metamorphoses into social work's malevolent benevolence which is equally oppressive and unjust. Our narrative as a Black and white duo challenges artificial binaries, models balancing of power, and thoughtful reimagining of self/other dynamics, prioritizing our shared humanity. Together, we will not perpetuate, be silent about, or be surprised by anti-Blackness because we recognize white supremacy, universalism, and normalization discourses, and therefore amplify the Black

experience and the community's voice and insights into what must change to achieve equitable outcomes to the benefit of all people, thus repudiating the flawed white-black spectrum.

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