

A Black Epistemology for the Social and Solidarity Economy: The Black Social Economy

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Abstract

A Black epistemology in economics is needed to bring ethics back into business. Contributions of racialized people in the economy are ignored. Black and racialized scholars also find that their work is not cited, even by the most liberal-minded social economists. In the Americas, Black and racialized citizens innovate in the social and solidarity economy; yet their work goes unnoticed in the academic literature, or scholars approach them as the “Other” without invoking theory that reflects the very people they are writing about. Although the ills of neoliberal variants of capitalism are known, the diverse economies in which Black folk engage are less understood. Forcing White and European ideas on a non-White experience is limited in what it can do effect social change. Nor can we sever the Western ideologies in the field because it is this very bias why the Black radical tradition and other Black theories come into being. There is no shortage of Black writings on solidarity economics and they can now be housed in Black social economy. A Black social economy epistemology is politicized for goodness, and it is grounded theory, inclusive of the Black radical tradition, and lived experience because of the explanatory powers of these theoretical approaches to disrupt mainstream business and society.

Keywords

African Americans, Afrocentricity, Black social economy, solidarity economy, philosophy, racial capitalism, third sector, social economy, economics, bell hooks, Black women, Garvey, Du Bois, Black feminism, Black radical tradition, radical economics

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Introduction

White supremacy is alive and well in our world today. U.S. President Donald J. Trump has created a space for ultra-right conservatism to become part of the political landscape. In one graduate class, a White student—who I do not believe to be racist—was visibly incensed by my decision to draw on Black Liberation theory—or rather, non-European ideas—when discussing the micro-level economies for non-White racialized people. In his eyes, my failure to draw on canon theories such as “Marxism” in explaining racially marginalized economies was a hindrance. The leftist fixation with Marx, however, is limited in what it can do to explain the lived experience of people of color. This article sets out to focus on Black radical tradition, liberation and grounded theory, and the concept of lived experience of Black feminist thought to infiltrate the social and solidarity economy (SSE).

The matter of racism within the SSE sector is a separate issue and deserves consideration, but in this article I examine various Black “economic” theories. These theories deserve a home and this is what I want to see, that these ideas are part of the Black social economy (Hosseini, 2018). This line of theorizing—the Black social economy—is important in understanding the lived experience of racial minorities in the West, where many live in communities dealing with violence, racism, and discrimination (Agnew, 1996; Alameciak, 2014; Mensah, 2010; Morgan, 2016; Taylor, 2016) and using it may also alter the internal conflicts people of color experience within the sector. These theories by Black thinkers and those who consciously write about the Black experience exist and they are plentiful; however, these theories are simply not being drawn on within the SSE sector. My encounter with White critiques for having attention on building a “Black social economy” has made me think that we should be using this concept to house the plethora of Black political and economic theorists writing on human development.¹ In this day and age, there is a need for Black theories to be considered especially in the study of alternative economics. In part, it is because the study of the Black political economy has arisen in response to the very oppressions and traumas Black people encounter in the diaspora.²

A White supremacist’s killing of nine African Americans in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina in 2015 shocked the world but it was a reminder of the hate crimes against Black Americans in the society (Ellis, Payne, Perez, & Ford, 2015). The 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, the confrontations with La Meute in Quebec later that summer in 2017 and the March 2019 murders of 50 Muslims at the Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch New Zealand have unleashed a racist platform in a number of countries (where Whites are the majority) against minorities and non-White racialized people (Astor, Caron, & Victor, 2017; “Christchurch Shootings,” 2019). Racial tension has increased. And the awakening of the Black Lives Matter social movement in both the United States and Canada makes it abundantly clear that the lives of Black citizens are seen as being threatened (Harriott, 2017). Anti-Black racism in society explains why the SSE (also known as the third sector) is an important lifeline for many racialized people. Although it is important to understand that the

social economy helps non-White racialized people, it is also important that as social economists we open up the literature that examines the lives of the people we study. This article unpacks theories embedded in the Black radical tradition, Black Feminist Thought and other Black political economy theories that can be used to frame issues in the SSE sector.

Applying Eurocentric theories as the only theory to study people of color in business and society should not be the norm. That is not to say that none of the scholarship by White men (or White women) is useful but it should be studied in relation to a Black epistemology because racialized people are the makers of theories and not only there for drawing empirical material from. And it should be understood that I do not advocate to ignore White scholarship altogether because there are ideas such as the community economies theories of J. K. Gibson-Graham (2006) which is useful to racialized people. Just as Black scholars engage in White theories on SSE so too should White scholars working in the sector.

What is the SSE?

A Black epistemology is joined to the Western experience and to excise, would lose the core of its very being because these two experiences are tied to each other. The rebellion writing within the Black radical tradition and other Black writings is due to the hostile and violent society (e.g., colonization, enslavement, ghettos) where the African diaspora find themselves.³ It is also salient to remember that the Austrian-born Karl Polanyi's (1944) *The Great Transformation* is a seminal text for studying SSE because of this idea of the "double movement" in which people will figure out and protest an imposing and elitist commercial system. This "double movement" is a lived experience for Black people who experience racial oppression everywhere. It is not very known to many but Karl Polanyi himself was highly influenced by his early work on the Dahomey Kingdom, which is present-day Benin. In the Kingdom of Dahomey, the markets and warring were carried out as a way to raise one's social status, because living in a community is what mattered most to its people.⁴

There is a plethora of writing on the Black political economy, and bringing in Black perspectives and epistemologies in SSE seems long overdue. Back in an early issue of the *Journal of Black Studies*, Martin O. Ijere (1972) made a bold push for economics to be included into the Black studies teaching curriculum. Fast forward to 2008, two economists Gordon-Nembhard and Forstater (2008) revisit this same matter after several conference discussions, and they too cogently argue for Black political economy to be within Black Studies because of the economic disparities plaguing society. In this article, I build on these bold calls, by Ijere (1972) and Gordon-Nembhard and Forstater (2008), to argue that all of these Black economic writings be housed as the "Black social economy." The Black social economy is the overarching umbrella for whatever writing and knowledge creation takes place about Black people's lives in business and society be housed here. The Black social economy is aware of the risks to Black lives and can be used to understand what is going on.

The SSE is meant to upset things and so should its theorizing. The term SSE has roots in France as *économie sociale* and in Brazil, Spain, Chile, and Colombia as *economía solidaria* and its goals have been clear to transform the economy into one that is open to all (Miller, 2010). The SSE is also referred to as the “Third Sector” or the “Social Economy,” and now added to biblio it is the space in society where the private and public sectors do not dominate and people are the ones leading the work; however, there can be overlapping of the three sectors (Quarter, Mook, & Armstrong, 2018). Very few books like the one by British scholar Ash Amin (2009) *The Social Economy: International Perspectives on Economic Solidarity* which documents SSE case studies from around the world, including Brazil, make it clear that situating the SSE activity and anchoring it in its context is relevant. Working in spaces where Black and racialized people rely on the SSE begs for theorizing that is considerate of this lived experience.

Being Bold is needed to bring social change according to American scholar Ethan Miller (2010) and this is the very meaning of the SSE and those ordinary people who take risks rethinking economics as we know it. The SSE term makes more sense for Black and racialized people because there is a commitment to politicizing the sector and to name the wrongs carried out in business and society that excluded groups want to remake livelihoods and they do so through solidarity and cooperation (Hossein 2018; Akuno & Nangwaya, 2017).⁵ In this article, I have two objectives: the first one being that SSE scholarship and its practice has largely ignored the context, rich histories, theories, and lived experience of Black peoples, and second one being that these Black social economy theories such as the Black radical tradition, Black liberation theory, and Black feminism drawing on the lived experience of racialized people is a necessary framework that SSE practice and theory must engage to truly achieve its goals.

For the SSE to remain a sector of “progressives” committed to the lofty idea that “another world is possible,” then its scholars need to cite works that are local, regional, and speak to the lived experience of the people being analyzed. Black people in the United States and Canada are vulnerable to police brutality and killings (Peck, 2017; Taylor, 2016). Ta-Nehisi Coates’s (2015) award-winning book *Between the World and Me* reminds us of the many young Black men killed in the United States by state officials. Canadian scholar David Austin (2013), in his book *Fear of a Nation: Race, Sex and Security in Sixties Montreal*, also reminds us of the deeply embedded racism in Canada, starting with the very public events at George William University (now Concordia University). To study SSE in the West, then, where violence is occurring, we need to know and apply epistemologies that speak to this reality.

The SSE is not only a place for racially excluded people to meet their livelihood needs. It also provides a space for people to congregate and socialize when they are shut out by the mainstream business and society—and it is the place where they become aware of their exclusion (Knight, 2005; Mirchandani, 2002). For Black people, the SSE is primarily about sharing goods and helping each other. This ethical obligation is precisely what the Community Economies Research Network (CERN),

following the work of Gibson-Graham (2006), strives to keep alive (Dombroski & Healy, 2018). Within spaces that ensure ethical wellbeing, Black and other racialized people who are treated unjustly in business and society figure out ways to redo how they live and get along in the SSE. This is an important point to remember.

The Black Social Economy: A Home for Black Epistemologies in Economics

Certainly not all is perfect in the SSE, and non-White racialized leaders are doing their best from within to make this sector inclusive (Agnew, 1996; Akuno & Nangwaya, 2017; Hossein, 2016). More than two decades ago, Vijay Agnew (1996), in *Resisting Discrimination: Women From Asia, Africa and the Caribbean and the Women's Movements in Canada*, documented the conflicts and class bias that women of color experience not only in their interactions with White feminists but among themselves in building community organizations. In *Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi*, Akuno and Nangwaya (2017) are trying to create a solidarity economy in a state where there is a long history of racism and exclusion of African Americans, and the organizing collectively is not easy to establish but the Black political theorizing can help move the work forward.

Using stories that draw on theorizing that reflects the Black experience, we can move away from a one-dimensional understanding of Black and racialized peoples' role in the SSE. Sociologist Grace Galabuzi (2006) holds that existing social justice institutions need to involve the people who are oppressed, and must be rooted in politicized action to effectively confront racial exclusion head on. For social justice to take root in a society through SSE institutions, racialized people must be the leaders within this sector, both in designing programs (managers and directors) and in funding the work (donors). Non-White racialized people, and especially women, need to be ones not only making decisions in the fight for equity and social change but also in disbursing funds in the social service sector. Despite this need, however, and even though Black and racialized people are leading important work in major cities, the third sector (also called the social economy)—set up to help racially marginalized people—continues to practice cultural and gender exclusion (Hossein, 2016).

Given the social and economic struggles of Black people, an understanding of the Black experience in social economics seems long overdue. In their work on the social economy, many scholars neglect to use theory that matters to excluded groups (Bridge, Murtagh, & O'Neil, 2009; McMurtry, 2010; Quarter, Mook, & Armstrong, 2009, 2018; note that the 2018 edition recognizes a Black social economy). I set out to understand the SSE from a Black experience, addressing the "generic" or White gaze in the social economy literature. From this "generic" perspective, scholars discuss the sector in great detail but make no use of intersectional analysis. In explaining the larger context, the authors miss the experience of non-White people: Sometimes they will add an example, but culture and identity are not part of the framing.

The erasure of people of color from the social economy literature—or their one-dimensional presentation—is problematic. As a vital part of the economy that assists groups whose needs are not met through the state or private sector, the social economy needs to be reflective of Black and racialized people. In the courses I teach, however, I am hard-pressed to find scholarly articles on racialized women leaders in the SSE. The social economics literature draws very little on theorizing that reflects racialized, specifically Black, people. The work of African American bell hooks (1981/2015) has aided me in telling stories of how Black women liberate themselves and their communities and thinking about the various ways progressive arenas can be used as sites for conflict and debate. hooks helps us understand the role of these women in the professional social services sector, as their complete erasure is akin to the one Black women have encountered in the writings on feminism and gender equality in the United States. We see this absence, for example, in the marked lack of stories about Black women activist leaders in the Greater Toronto, an area with a population of 5.6 million people of which 50% are foreign-born. The fact is that many newcomers in Toronto rely on services led by racialized women to help them. These stories, and others, of racialized women leaders must be told—and preferably by people who are responsible to the communities they know.

Academics may find it helpful to turn to liberation, grounded, and lived experience theories, because their starting points are rooted in the real-life experiences of those most threatened by the economics and politics of the day. In this article, I have structured the discussion in two parts. First, I expose the hubris in the theorizing within the SSE and propose a Black epistemology for the field of social economics. My theoretical framing is influenced by my own positionality to analyze the politics of the day and shine light on my own lived experience as a racialized woman of African and Indo-Caribbean descent who self-identifies as Black and writing on the SSE. There is a dire need to use a term like the Black social economy to house the varied thinking on Black political economics. Second, I introduce important scholarship grounded in the Black radical tradition and lived experience concept that is relevant to understanding the SSE field in relation to the very specific historical experience of African people and its diaspora.

A Black Social Economy: Liberation Theorizing in the SSE

Blacks, comprising one of the most disadvantaged groups in business and society, have turned to the social economy for refuge. This article is intended to be the go-to paper for understanding the body of theory referred to as the “Black social economy,” which explains the work that Black and racialized people do both in the economy and in the SSE is “politicized” and it is a theory that has meaning for Black and racialized people. To many, the social economy is viewed as a “safe space” because it is the sector that engages mainly with racialized people—because people of color must seek refuge there when business and the state fails to reach them. Yet, within this “safe space,” hidden forms of racism are at play.

The life of the Black subject is “politicized” because of the context in which the African diaspora lives in the Americas and the SSE sector is viewed as the one sacred safe place to just be.⁶ Black scholars have a challenging task, to engage with White scholarship because its very oppression is what makes Black political economy theorizing relevant. It is in this oppression that lived experience and our theories make sense. What I argue here is for opening up the ways in which we write to be inclusive. It is no longer possible to reject and ignore Black economic writing. Perhaps, this was possible in an era when this scholarship was hidden, but with so much of it out there to be read, scholars, especially those promising radical economics and alternatives, should do the homework and read these philosophies.

This sector has become a critical arena for these excluded people to take part in cultural, social, and economic activities. However, as noted above, the literature lacks theorizing on and documented practice of the African diaspora experience in the social economy. The literature also ignores the indigenous experience or there are many non-Aboriginals writing about their experience. Canadian academics Clifford Atleo (2015) and Wanda Wuttunee (2004) use their own positionality to study the politics of the lived experience of indigenous Canadians and they are writing their own versions of the solidarity economy, and the limits to Western (read White) writing. To understand the Black experience, we need to ensure that *lived experience* is integral to how we examine social economics (Hossein 2016, 2018). This article is meant to assist primarily political economists, political scientists, and economists—faculty and students alike—to rethink what theories they use.

You cannot say you are progressive because you study the racialized experience and cite on mainly Western/White thinkers. A Black epistemology in social economics should be made up of a body of work examining the experiences of people of color that is underpinned by Black liberation and lived experience theory. Social economics sorely lacks such an epistemology. If we were to take the academic literature at face value, all we would know is that the staffing and donors engaged in the voluntary sector are mainly White, and those on the receiving end are mainly persons of color. Researchers who define themselves as progressive and are concerned about the plight of Black and racialized people often draw on Eurocentric values and epistemology to relate to their subjects. The silencing of scholars drawing on the Black radical tradition is an affront to Black and racialized people, who have rich cultural legacy worthy of study. It is thus colonizing to continue to study non-White people using European ideas and to ignore the ideas from the culture of the subjects of study that can explain their experiences.

The Black Radical Tradition and the Underdevelopment of the Global South

It is important to draw on scholarship that engages in narratives that frame the discussion through appropriate culture and location, as this connection matters in the SSE. One example is Eric Williams’ classic work *Capitalism and Slavery*, which was the first work to clarify capitalism’s roots in the trade of Black bodies to make profits on plantations

through forced labor. Capitalism of this variety was cruel and racist in its orientation, as White men believed they had a right to use Black bodies as they saw fit. Today, the slave forts in El Mina, Ghana, and Goree Island in Senegal are reminders of the inhumane treatment of African people. Another work is Stuart Hall's (1992) *West and the Rest*, which defines the colonial discourse that subjugated non-White people and elevated the culture and ideas of White people. Hall reminds us to rethink the power dynamics that gave White colonizers the illusion they were superior to "the other." These authors are part of the radical Black tradition because they offer up a different reading of history. Whites robbed much of the global South of its wealth and resources. As they drained the South's potential, they were able to pursue their own economic growth.

Guyanese historian Walter Rodney's seminal book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* exposes the White colonial racist project—involving the heinous theft and rape of Black people—behind the undoing and underdevelopment of Southern countries. Rodney saw this firsthand in his own country of Guyana, pillaged by various Europeans—Dutch, French, and English—for gold and diamonds, and he documents this same abuse in Jamaica and Tanzania, where British colonialists were able to strip resources from these lands because of the power they possessed.

In South Africa, the law of White supremacy upheld for many decades seemed to have come to an end when the apartheid (legalized racial segregation) system fell in 1990 upon the release of Nelson Mandela. Yet American scholar Tiffany Willoughby-Herard (2015), in *Waste of a White Skin: The Carnegie Corporation and the Racial Logic of White Vulnerability*, argues that the colonial legacy supported by a worldwide racist system continues. Although the Whites have accorded some power to Blacks, they continue to control and manage the economic system. The foreign aid programs by the Carnegie Foundation, for example, thwart Black advancement to further entrench White domination.

Black feminist Gina Ulysses (2007), in her analysis of modern Jamaica, where defiant and self-sufficient higglers (market women) make us rethink market economics, uses her own positionality as a Haitian American living in the United States (as a diasporan). She recreates her sense of loss/belonging to recognize how these societies limit certain segments of the society. In Kingston, Jamaican "brownings" (fair-complexioned people) control the wealth and power, and those most desperate—like the higglers, who are dark-skinned Jamaican women—battle it out in the shanties to carve out a life for themselves and their families. Class and racial bias are rife in this context. Ulysses brings the reader to see the higglers as transnational business women recreating markets between Miami, Panama City, and Kingston on their own terms, despite the racially tiered discrimination they experience at home. Ulysses book is reminiscent of the seminal work of C. Y. Thomas (1988) titled *The Poor and the Powerless: Economic Policy and Change in the Caribbean*, which describes the downward spiral of people of African descent and the occupation of the highest echelons of the economic pyramid by light-skinned and whitened minorities.

The theories of the Black political economy thus counteract Eurocentric framing, providing the historical context for the turmoil of the African people. Colonial masters extracted wealth from countries to develop their own destabilized and "underdeveloped"

countries in the global South. By taking human beings and commodities for its own development, Europe robbed the South of its development. Moreover, White colonizers brought their own agendas in their rule of these countries, destroying kingdoms and setting back the development of many ancient societies. Any activist concerned about the SSE and the plight of racialized people, especially in global South countries, should bring an expertise in Black theories to the work they do.

The crisis of Black underdevelopment in the South is also tied to the experience of Indigenous and racialized people in the West. White colonizers (or “explorers”) terrorized and killed Indigenous peoples in the Americas, even leading to the extinction of certain Aboriginal tribes. Those Aboriginal people who survived were moved onto reserves and had their children taken away and placed in residential schools by the White settlers—all in the effort to destroy them and take the land. Settlers needed workers, and the idea of plantation economics allowed White people to quickly become rich by using slave labour. For hundreds of years, the White man used slaves in plantation fields across the Americas, including in Brazil, the Caribbean, Colombia, Canada, and the United States. The Haitian people won its independence in 1804 and defeated the institution of slavery and the ideas of its French masters. C. L. R. James’ (1989) book *Black Jacobins* recounts the story of Black people winning the fight against slavery, with leaders like Toussaint and Dessalines. Michel Trouillet (1995) argues that Haitians did the unthinkable when they beat Europeans in war and freed themselves. The cost for rejecting slavery was a hundred years of complete ostracization, as well as a bill for billions of dollars that they owed the French state. Like the work of these radical authors, scholars within the SSE field must cite and draw upon—or as Trouillet would say, they must refuse to silence the knowledge of—the theory that is most relevant to the people it purports to help.

Even after slavery was abolished, White supremacy did not end. Western nations colonized nations where people of color lived. They forced people to conform to their culture and modern ways and dictated how to “develop” and move forward (Brohman, 1995). In the 1960s, African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Patrice Lumumba, and Jomo Kenyatta emerged to take back their countries from Western colonialism. Many took the path of modernization, increasing the gap between the Black elites and the poor. Although a failed experiment, Nyerere (1968) toyed with the concept of villagization, largely based on the principle of *ujamaa*. *Ujamaa* means collectivity and economic cooperation—an esteemed African invention of pooling resources and making cooperative economics relevant in daily life. The Black diaspora in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere continue to honor the concept of *ujamaa* as a day of reverence during the holiday of Kwanzaa, created by its founder Maulana Karenga⁷.

The Black Social Economy: Black Theorizing in the West for the African Diaspora

Blacks in the diaspora are tied to the African continent in various ways, and the theories and ideas that diasporic communities draw on to make sense of their lives are best told by those who have this lived experience. Racism in society and business has had

an undeniable effect on Black people living in the West. Those of the diaspora who were born into it have been contending with it their whole lives, whereas others who emigrate are subject to this distinct form of racism often for the first time in their lives. Many figures who know the Black American experience have carved out a space for the Black plight to be heard, such as Frederik Douglas, Sojourner Truth, Martin Luther King Jr., Elijah Mohammed, Malcolm X, and the Pan-Africanist Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey. Alex Haley's (1976) *Roots: An American Family Saga* was turned into a television series in 1977 documenting the brutalities of enslavement and the slave trade. Isabel Wilkerson's (2011) *Great Migration* also reminds us about African Americans who moved elsewhere in the country to live without fear and violence. No matter where Black folk move in the Western world, they are followed and affected by a deeply entrenched form of racism.

Racism is tied up in the capitalist politics that uses workers and labor of racialized people without consideration. Political economist Manning Marable's (2015) *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* was influenced by Walter Rodney's work revealing the power of extraction by Whites as a deliberate form of racist business. For both thinkers, the roots of extreme capitalism are fundamentally flawed because they are racist in orientation. In other words, America's capitalist plantocracy was born out of bigotry and White supremacy because slaves were used to bring profit to White folk. This racist-infused capitalist system was never about trickle-down economics; rather, it was about entrenching racial bias that would serve to undercut a Black person's labor and sabotage any idea of personal advancement and entrepreneurship.

The plantation system was not sustainable without free labor. White people for centuries used hatred, fear, and violence to subjugate African people to ensure their own personal fortunes. Rich White American families today are the descendants of those who reaped the rewards from the slave-trading capitalist system. The perverse form or market politics using racism has seen poor racialized people in the ghettos as pawns in modern-day racketeering and the drug trade, and in the negative effects of poverty and desperate, risky activities such as prostitution and crime (Marable, 2015). This continued racial bias in the economy has provoked conscientious economists like Mathew Forstater (2007) to revive ideas of Bayard Rustin, who tried without success to pass a budget to ensure jobs for African Americans, arguing that, without a clear economic plan, Black Americans would be damned to live lives of danger, struggle, and conflict.

Racial conflict within business is thus intended in the Western context. Its origins were in the slave trade, and capitalism was born to ensure inhumane activities for the pursuit of profits by White people (Rodney, 1982; Williams, 1944/2004). The concept of "inclusive markets" is mythical, as detailed in Cedric Robinson's (1983) *Black Marxism*, in which he introduces the concept of a racial capitalism that was a deliberate tactic to oppress Black people so that their labor could be misused and undervalued for White prosperity. Individual capitalist business in America is inherently racist, and the idea of it being "inclusive" or trickle-down was disingenuous from the very start.

Markets were designed to adhere to one model. British Margaret Thatcher's famous reference to this as TINA—"there is no alternative"—made the neoliberal privatized

version of business the only option. The idea of sharing ownership of resources in a collective way, such as found in cooperative business, was unacceptable; the only business model pushed was one built on a shareholder system to benefit owners. In John Pilger's (2001) documentary *The New Rulers of the World*, Jeffrey Winters, a political scientist professor at Northwestern University, was astounded and was one of the first academics to speak on this meeting of leading heads of global companies convened in Switzerland to parcel out Indonesia's economy for a corporate multinational take-over. This kind of control to interfere in countries of the South to pursue profits has continued on a global level. And it is Cedric Robinson's concept of "racial capitalism" that clearly shows that the idea that markets are neutral is a fabrication, and that the so-called trickle-down economics are far from inevitable. Extreme forms of capitalism exclude democratic dialogue and ensure that the benefits accrue to White powerful men.

With all this pain and suffering as a people, Black people—the native sons and daughters of the West—of the African diaspora need a place to live, laugh, and play. Maulana Karenga, founder of Kwanzaa and the philosophy of *Kawaida*, pushes forward African love and might so that the Black diaspora can own their legacy of African civilization and uplift themselves (Karenga, 1997). The question is whether the concept of *Kawaida* can be used in business. Can Black people bring a loving aspect to business? Karenga's (1972, 1975, 1997) body of work dares to move Black people forward using their own frame of references and refuses to give way to White people's discovery. He advances that the cultural knowledge is the way to true liberation of mind. For Karenga, Black people must reject control and domination and embrace the philosophy of *Kawaida* embedded in the idea of community outreach. They must dig for cultural treasures that beautifully describe Black people as a group and not be preoccupied with the oppressors' ideas (Karenga, 1972, 1975); Kwanzaa is a major cultural event at the end of every year that signifies the need to root the positive Black experience in everyday living.

The Black political economy corrects the fixation on the marginalization of Black people to also move the discourse towards one of activism. Because Black folks have had to reorganize life in the economy and the society. Temple University's Molefi Kete Asante is the foremost expert and creator of the concept of Afrocentricity in the everyday lives of Black folks. In *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, Asante (2007) lays out the thinking behind this standpoint and its meaning to the African diaspora as a grounded theory about the social situation of Black people under an oppressive racist system. This is the primary reason this literature should be part of the field of economics—that is, because Black people's losses in business are so much a part of the lived experience. Afrocentricity should not be boxed in or limited by a set of prescriptions; rather, it is a grounded theory that can transfer to other contexts containing an African diaspora that feels targeted and attacked. Afrocentricity is based on the lives of Black people, and it is a conscientization related to African people. The SSE is also about improving the economy to better meet the needs of those left out of the system. Afrocentricity restores what it means to Blacks in a specific context, which is a relevant but missing aspect of the field of SSE.

Black epistemology is already rooted in capital, capitalism, and markets. Black and racialized people use theories that work for their own lived experience—these are just not being acknowledged and used within the SSE as they should. The time of forcing critical political economy ideas that are largely Eurocentric is passed. Black and racialized people living in the West seek refuge in the third sector. With our knowledge and the abundance of Black political economic theories, we must move away from silos and ensure that these ideas become core to SSE. Theory used toward understanding how the third sector operates should be drawing on the literature that speaks to liberation and lived experience, precisely as writing on the Black radical tradition has been doing for many years, produced in seminal academic journals such as the *Review of Black Political Economy*.

A Black epistemology has not yet infiltrated the field of social economics—a field that is supposedly antiracist and feminist in its critical thinking because it departs from mainstream economics. The Black radical tradition could disrupt mainstream economics and set a historical reality in interpreting how people of color engage with the SSE. An excellent starting point for such an epistemology would be the Underground Railroad, knowledge of which can be seen as essential to a full understanding of issues of cooperation and the social economy in Canada and the United States. This organization, in which people opposed to slavery worked collectively to free humans, was cooperative in nature. One of the most popular conductors was American slave Harriet Tubman, who was part of this collective effort to assist Black people escape from American slavery to Canada through an intricate system of informal ties. At the *Freedom Center* in Cincinnati, Ohio, the Underground Railroad is viewed as a third sector organization—one that relied on members in the United States and Canada to provide housing, money, transport, food, and support to people escaping from dangerous and torturous lives. Despite the railroad's significance, however, we find no mention in the social economy literature to its role in the beginnings of the cooperativism of this Black experience.

Black scholars in the West who knew slavery and human bondage firsthand carefully considered how economic freedom could liberate Black people. As early as 1907, famed scholar W. E. B. Du Bois (1907), a Harvard-educated African American from Haiti, advanced a theory of group economics among African Americans that counted on White people's need for cheap labor. Du Bois' (1903/2007) powerful work of 1903—*The Souls of Black Folks*—describing collective forms of African business provides historical knowledge that is inspiring for Black Canadians. Du Bois recognized how extreme market fundamentalism changed the nature of society, and he documented how African people and the diaspora engaged in business. According to Du Bois, pooled economic activities helped these people withstand an oppressive White power. The idea of group economics in this way allowed African Americans in racist environments to create cooperative businesses and bond together.

In the 1920s, Jamaican-born social entrepreneur Marcus Mosiah Garvey was another powerful Black liberation theorist. Living in Harlem, New York City, he introduced a philosophy of racial self-reliance in business to counter mainstream business practices (for more details, see Hill & Bair, 1987; K'nife, Bernard, & Dixon, 2011; Lewis, 1987).⁸

He created the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which had an active membership of Garveyites and is still active in Montreal's Little Burgundy (near Atwater market), as well as in a number of American cities, such as Detroit, Washington D.C., New York, Atlanta, and Philadelphia (Marano, 2010). Garvey's own upbringing in colonial Jamaica and his lived experience as a migrant worker in Panama and Costa Rica no doubt affected his teachings (Hill & Bair, 1987). Black people around the world have been deeply influenced by Garvey's teaching on Black empowerment, particularly in advancing notions of self-help. In fact, in my own work on informal banks in Canada and the Caribbean, I found that Banker Ladies have also been inspired by the racial pride and the business ethics of Marcus Garvey (Hossein, 2016). This is the take-home message: Let us draw on the ideas that the people we study are listening to.

Concepts of "self-help" and "co-opting business" in Black liberation theory—ideas that support the community from within—are useful in analyzing the social economy. Booker T. Washington (1901/2013), in his seminal work *Up From Slavery*, gave meaning to the ideas of Black self-help and business, outlining ways that marginalized people in the Americas could be part of the economic system. As one of America's most important leaders, Washington was criticized for his accommodating views on business and industrial trades for Black people. Nevertheless, he used his power to establish the National Negro Business League to assist Black entrepreneurship at a time in U.S. history when Black people were being lynched—and he also funded anti-lynching groups. Black liberation theory is thus crucial in analyzing the social economy of racialized peoples, as it sets the historical context for the analysis of Black people's investment in self-help and mutual aid groups—which they do not only to live well, but for their very survival.

Black Women Scholars on the Economy

Diasporic Black liberation theories are reacting against the erasure of racialized and Black people in the economy. Black women often take the back seat to White people and Black men, watching others and then performing in ways to suit these different groups that hold power over them. As Audre Lorde (1984) explains, Black women watch over everything and then try to create space to live free from interference and they cannot do this with only using the "master's tools." Feminists like bell hooks and Patricia Collins Hill, who examine the erasure of Black women from life and the academe, speak to the importance of lived experience. In *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, hooks (1981/2015) asserts a rightful place for reading Black women, arguing that their life struggle is a form of theorizing. This makes sense when we think of Black Canadian women whose contributions in the economy and society have been erased. In a sector like the social economy, which thrives on the "doing" of things, the concept of lived experience is a good fit for the social economy as a whole, regardless of racial orientation.

Economist Nina Banks' (2005, 2008) papers on Sadie Alexander testify to the life of the first African American to earn a PhD in economics but who retrained herself in law and fought for the human rights of Black Americans because her field would not

hire her as an academic. Studying bias and race in economics and the lived experience of Sadie Alexander explains why we see so few scholars advancing economics that speak to the lives of Black people that are truthful⁹. An influential text in this regard is Patricia Hill Collins's (2000) *Black Feminist Thought*, in which she argues that research on Black women needs to be grounded in lived experience to reach these women. Lived experience is crucial to theoretical analysis of the impact of the activities and actors who are part of the SSE. People on the receiving end of aid and support have lived experience that can support the programming and practice within the sector. Almost all of the Black women leading SSE organizations are from modest socioeconomic backgrounds and are well-educated—some were the first women in their family to go to college. They speak to the struggle that Black women face as they try to lead institutions. African American businesswoman o Madam C. J. Walker defied the odds from starting off as a washing lady to rise to become a millionaire of Black hair beauty product business undeterred by the difficulties she encountered by White society and Black male leaders (Bundles, 2001). In their works, both bell hooks and Hill Collins (1990) argue that Black women have voices and life experiences that can truly explain the hardship they live every day in a White world, and it is these everyday experiences that make the SSE matter to Black people—and especially to women of color.

Canada's Viola Desmond illustrates the notion of self-help. She was a businesswoman in Halifax, Nova Scotia, who was able to support herself, her family, and her community. In the 1940s and long before America's Rosa Parks, Desmond provided job opportunities in cosmetology to Black women so they too could be financially independent. Desmond made history when she refused to move from her paid seat in the front of the cinema house to a balcony and as a result was arrested on site. Whereas she was conscious of her position as a Black woman in a White society, she also knew that the request to move was irrational and immoral. Desmond's act of defiance challenged the racist policy and was only pardoned years after her death (Reynolds, 2016). Desmond's life is also important as a symbol of financial freedom. She understood the larger context of her role in society and business, resisting the racist rules of the day through self-employment and by catering to her own community. This was precisely liberation theorizing: Desmond was able to use her own business expertise to do good in society and to better an oppressed racial group. This important story for Canadians speaks to self-help, that is, creating independence to fight for what you believe in and to bring social change.

Less known is the work of African American economist Jessica Gordon-Nembhard, who wrote on the Black experience in the social economy in *Collective Courage*. Gordon-Nembhard (2014) documents the work of cooperatives and mutual aid, arguing that African Americans had to create "intentional communities" to form their own economic livelihoods. The concept of "intentional communities" is very relevant to the work that Black women do in the economy to help and support their members. This work reveals the disturbing truth that creating one's own business comes with a high degree of risk. Despite the risk, however, Black people keep doing it: claiming and co-opting resources to disrupt the racist business sector. Vijay Agnew, a social scientist

at York University, carried out extensive work in the 1990s with Asian, South Asian, African, and Caribbean women in Toronto. Agnew found that a number of women felt more secure and at ease working for community-based organizations than contending with discrimination in a White-dominated workplace. Black people will find diverse means to engage with the business sector and flood the social economy with inspiring ways of living (Hossein, 2018). The congregating of women of color in the third sector has grown, and the academic literature must reflect on the large numbers of racialized people who earn a living from within the social economy.

Much academic writing is centered on sectoral work, but the people managing and developing programs are influenced by their own life stories. In *Back to the Drawing Board: African Canadian Feminisms*, Njoki Wane, Deliovsky, and Lawson (2002) argue that African Canadians need to assume the position they have taken in making history. African Canadian feminisms hold that the concept of lived experience is an integral part of the story-telling. Tracing one's African roots helps explain why the diaspora engages in the activist work it does. Much of African Canadian feminism is built around the ideas of self-help and mutual aid. As a child of Caribbean parents, for example, I witnessed my own family engage in business as a form of self-help and to assert independence—the notions of family and business are thus often blurred. The ways in which Black people engage in the social economy are rarely, if ever, told. In the U.S. context, Gordon-Nembhard (2014) has broken this silence, unearthing centuries of alternative economic practices by African Americans. Hossein (2016, 2017, 2018) also uses Black liberation theories as a way to correct knowledge about the social economy and to search for gender and racial (and class) bias from within the third sector. The third sector, as a place of support and self-help within a hostile dominant economy, is also a highly politicized environment. Accordingly, Black liberation and feminist theories are embedded in politics, politicizing the plight of the underdog. Such theories force the SSE to take stock of history, informal collectivity, and self-help from within the community.

Race in Society and Business

Hubris exists in the social economy sector, not only among academics but also among many practitioners. Third sector studies are filled with many well-intentioned left-leaning White people who express strong ideas about what the social economy is and is not. However, they fail to create the space for racialized people to own and lead it. Some aspects of the social economy are rejected as being “too informal.” But it is precisely the informality of certain types of actors in the social economy that makes it not only accessible but also safe for excluded cultural groups: People can organize and politicize their work outside of the scrutiny of their oppressors. Through this informal nature, the social economy becomes a true civil society, because the people within it do not have to broker any deals with the mainstream.

One of America's oldest self-help non-profit organizations is Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) in Philadelphia, home to remarkable social change and activism that counters mainstream business. James Stewart (1984) was one of the first

academics to study the Sullivan movement in Philadelphia which found that solidarity businesses around the Black race were the way to help disenfranchised Black Americans. Founded by charismatic Baptist preacher Rev. Leon H. Sullivan (1969) in response to the racism in the business sector against African Americans, OIC carries out work rooted in collective business and self-help. Sullivan (1969) mobilized his congregation to support the OIC movement and opened the first office in Philadelphia, assisting Black youth acquire trade and business skills so they could be self-sufficient and avoid the abuses of a racist society. The work of OIC in Philadelphia quickly spread across the United States, and the organization also opened a dozen country offices in Africa.¹⁰ The Black people engaged in the OIC movement did not focus on conflicts with the state or business, but emphasized the local activities that directly affected people's daily lives. Activists like Sullivan and members of OIC America were fighting for liberation in a society in which they, as African Americans, were denigrated. Black folks in Philly found that organizing below the radar and informally through the Zion Baptist Church was a way to heal and counteract social business exclusion (Hossein, 2013; Stewart, 1984; Sullivan, 1969).

Social economies that focus on formal structures alienate other voices. Black people typically carry out self-help in informal spaces because of the oppression they feel in the larger White-dominated society. Feminists Gibson-Graham (2006) and the CERN collective are in agreement that people everywhere engage in business activities that are ignored because they are collective and sometimes activist in nature. Gibson-Graham (2006) uses the analogy of an iceberg: The formal markets make up the visible tip, with the living economy hidden or submerged below water. Given this reality of the hidden living economy, coupled with the racism and exclusion experienced by certain groups, it is not surprising that the African diaspora would engage in informal activities through the SSE to meet their needs.

In view of this context, it is imperative that SSE scholars approach its diverse economies through ideas from within the community. The prevalence of anti-Black racism and violence is precisely why it is crucial to develop a Black epistemology for the SSE, grounding the work in the varied histories, economies, and philosophies of African peoples who have been systemically excluded by major world events. Researchers who pretend that this reality can be resolved by inserting paradigms that do not speak to the African experience are misguided, failing to capture what is really going on in business and society.

Concluding Remarks

The hubris of White "experts" in the field of SSE speaks more about their own personal politics (Hossein, 2017). There is a need to **POLITICIZE THE ECONOMY** so that it is conscientious of the lived experience of excluded people. Those writing and working in the SSE Sector must engage with theories—such as the Black radical tradition, Black feminist, and other not so radical Black political economy theories—that are rooted in lived experience and Afrocentricity. It is through this kind of conscientization that we can enhance social justice movements within the SSE. A Black

epistemology can speak to the lived experience of the very people who depend on the SSE for their survival and doing so may mean dealing with the limits to Western views on the solidarity economy. It is not acceptable to draw on vulnerable groups without drawing on their own cultural histories, politics, agency, and philosophies. There is no shortage of Black economic theories and the people working in and studying the SSE sector should be incorporating these ideas in their writings and programs. The voices writing on the economics of Black people in the diaspora can now be housed in what is the Black social economy, knowing that there is a rich body of literature in its existence.

Opening up the way we tell stories and going to hard-to-reach institutions is one way of finding the thousands of racialized people who participate and work in the third sector. In field work interviews, I have found that people co-opt resources into racialized communities, and they do this in a way that is grounded in lived experience and group economics—the very essence of liberation theology. The concept of lived experience is important, as it gives rise to Black people’s own knowledge and prioritizes what they have to say about biases they encounter in life. This lived experience of racialized activists has been shaped by the communities they come from. Black and racialized people in the West have a vast arena of theories and concepts from which social economics can draw to discuss how SSE as a field can move toward building inclusive economics.

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Notes

1. Currently, I am working on a project on the Siddi population in India and it is seemingly clear that a Black political economy should consider the lives of African diaspora in other geographical locations (Roy, 2017).
2. An anonymous reviewer deserves credit for suggesting that I make this point.
3. I am in debt to the anonymous reviewer who made this salient point that as unpleasant as Western notions of racial superiority of White people it is this oppression of Black people that has shaped the ideas behind Black political economy.
4. This finding came out of my discussion with Kari Levitt Polanyi in Montreal, Quebec while I was a fellow at the Polanyi Institute for Political Economy in the summer of 2016.
5. In a Black History Month event in Toronto, Ontario, Jessica Gordon-Nembhard (2014) discussing her book *Collective Courage* made the point that the term SSE is a better term for the African American experience because it has an aspect of doing something different than the commonly used term social economy which seems neutralized. Toronto, Ontario, 2017.
6. My book *Politicized Microfinance* is where I first examine and coin the term “politicized” in two distinct ways of being for Black people: One is the notion of being excluded because of identity politics and partisan politics and the second is in the form of action people take to confront the oppression.
7. Karenga gave a moving speech at the annual African Heritage Studies Association when he was recognized for his pioneering work in Black Studies and founding the Kwanzaa holiday for the Black diaspora, Long Beach, California, November 2017.
8. I presented this new project at the *Global Garveyism* symposium held in Richmond, Virginia, on April 23, 2016.
9. At the opening plenary of the 2019 International Association of Feminist Economics annual meeting, Nina Banks made this point the conference attendees (IAFFE meeting in Glasgow, Scotland).
10. I worked in the international headquarters called OIC International in Germantown, Philadelphia (2001-2004) and carried out extensive field trips to a number of the country offices in Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, and Liberia.

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