

A Black Perspective on Canada's Third Sector: Case Studies on Women Leaders in the Social Economy

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Abstract: While many Black Canadian women are innovators in the third sector, the contributions of Black people to the social economy go largely unnoticed in the academic literature. The social economy is not only a place of refuge for African-Canadians; it also provides a way for racially marginalized communities to co-opt resources. In fact, racialized Canadians are driven to be active in the third sector by the systemic bias and racism in the Canadian economy and society. To understand the place of the social economy among racialized people, we must recognize that Black and racialized people are not merely on the receiving end of aid and support, but that they lead and work within the social services sector. This paper utilizes Black liberation theory—specifically the concepts of self-help and co-operation—to analyze the work of five Black women leaders in non-profit organizations that reach thousands of people in Toronto. This study confronts the erasure of Black women in the third sector, and argues for the need to link liberation theory with the field of social economics in order to fully understand the significance of the social economy for Black and racialized people.

Keywords: African-Canadian women, third sector, social economy, non-profit organizations, social enterprises, bell hooks, Black women, Toronto, case studies, W.E.B. Du Bois, Black feminism, Black liberation

Résumé : Bien que de nombreuses femmes noires soient innovatrices dans le troisième secteur, les contributions des personnes noires à l'économie sociale ne sont généralement pas examinées par les universitaires. Non seulement l'économie sociale est-elle un refuge pour les femmes noires canadiennes, mais elle fournit aussi un moyen pour les communautés marginalisées sur le plan racial de coopter des ressources. En fait, les Canadiennes racialisées sont poussées à être actives dans le troisième secteur à cause des préjugés systématiques et du racisme au sein de l'économie et de la société canadiennes. Pour comprendre la place de l'économie sociale chez les personnes racialisées, nous devons reconnaître que les personnes noires et racialisées ne font pas que recevoir de l'aide et de l'appui, mais qu'ils dirigent le secteur des services sociaux et qu'ils y travaillent. Cet article utilise la théorie de la libération des Noirs – notamment les concepts d'autonomie et de coopération – pour analyser le travail effectué par cinq femmes noires, toutes des leaders au sein d'organismes sans but lucratif qui aident des milliers de personnes

à Toronto. Cette étude affronte l'effacement des femmes noires dans le troisième secteur et discute du besoin de lier la théorie de la libération au domaine de l'économie sociale afin de bien comprendre l'importance de l'économie sociale pour les personnes noires et racialisées.

Mots clés : Femmes noires canadiennes, troisième secteur, économie sociale, organismes sans but lucratif, entreprises sociales, bell hooks, femmes noires, Toronto, études de cas, W.E.B. Du Bois, féminisme noir, libération des Noirs

1. Introduction

According to the UN International Year for People of African Descent website (UN 2011), at least two hundred million people of African descent live in the Americas—where they face violence, racism, and discrimination (Taylor 2016; Alamenciak 2014; Morgan 2016; Agnew, 1996). Evidence shows that Black men in the United States and Canada are vulnerable to police brutality and killings (Taylor 2016; Peck, 2017): Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015), in his award-winning book *Between the World and Me*, for example, documents the killings of many young Black men in the US. David Austin (2013), in *Fear of a Nation: Race, Sex and Security in Sixties Montreal*, reminds us of the deeply embedded racism in Canada, starting with the very public events at George William University (now Concordia University). As recently as August 2017, a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, unleashed violence against minorities and racialized people (Astor, Caron, and Victor 2017)—revealing that current racial tensions remain intense. The awakening of the Black Lives Matter social movement in both the United States and Canada has made it abundantly clear that Black citizens in these countries feel their lives are threatened (Harriot 2017).

The racism, exclusion, and violence that Black people face confirms the importance of the social economy sector (also known as the third sector) as a lifeline for racialized people. However, while we must recognize that the social economy helps racialized people, we must also recognize the role of Black women as leaders in the social economy—a view that seems to be absent from the literature. This paper is thus timely in confronting the deliberate erasure of Black people as the protagonists in the social economy.

In Canada, the social economy has been defined as “a bridging concept for organizations that have social objectives central to their mission and their practice, and either have explicit economic objectives or generate some economic value through the services they provide and purchases they undertake” (Quarter, Mook, and Armstrong 2009, 4). It is distinct from both the public sector (the government) and the private sector (corporations and for-profit businesses). Although the social economy may seem a catch-all sector for many things, it is where racially

marginalized people who cannot access the state or business sector turn when they need help. Excluded groups, driven by the intense forms of racism in the dominant economy, find refuge in the social economy. Certainly not all is perfect in this sector. But women of colour are endeavouring to make the third sector more inclusive by working from within it (Hossein 2016; Agnew 1996). It is thus a place for Black people to meet their economic livelihood needs when they are shut out by mainstream business and society.

But the social economic sector—or third sector—is also a place where Black people themselves can contribute in meaningful ways to society and the economy. The dedicated role that African-Canadian people, and in particular women, play in the social economy, however, is often absent from the discourse on voluntary and social services. York University scholar Vijay Agnew (1996), two decades ago, documented the conflicts and class bias that women of colour experience not only in interactions with white feminists but among themselves in building community organizations. Hers is one of the few works to analyze the experience of racialized women's groups in Toronto. It is vital to recognize that the social economy sector is one of the few spaces racialized women can participate, and more stories need to be shared in order to move away from one-dimensional understandings of racialized people's role in the third sector.

In participating in the social economy sector, Black and racialized Canadian women become very aware of their exclusion in business and society (Knight 2006; Mirchandani 2002; Agnew 1996). A belief exists in Canada that racism is “not as bad as in the US”; however, many studies have proven this to be a misguided assumption. Joseph Mensah (2010) in *Black Canadians: History, Experience, Social Conditions*, for example, presents evidence to the contrary. In case studies on the Somali and Haitian communities, he shows, through extensive data collection, the racial discrimination these two groups have endured since emigrating to Ontario and Quebec, respectively, in employment, education, and housing. Carl James et al. (2010), in *Race and Well-Being: The Lives, Hopes and Activism of African-Canadians*, demonstrate across four provinces that racism and economic exclusion are detrimental to the health of Black Canadians. Research from 2017 also shows that Canada's racism is not hidden, as the dominant narrative alludes: a recent York University study, for example, proves the systemic bias against Black children in schools (Gordon 2017). Carl James of York University has also made it pointedly clear to the public that the educational system streams Black students away from university. Moreover, the Canadian state has also recognized that post-secondary institution funding has failed to reach a culturally diverse set of scholars, undercutting respect for cultural diversity in the production of knowledge in society (Hannay 2017).

Systemic bias and exclusion of racialized Canadians are deeply embedded in society. As recently as August 2017, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) criticized the Canadian government's inaction on its action plan against racism. CERD suggested that Canada has failed to address a number of issues, including a lack of race-based disaggregated data, systemic racism in immigration policies, racial discrimination in the job market, and anti-Black racism in criminal justice, child welfare, and education ([Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants \[OCASI\] 2017](#)). African-Canadian executive director Debbie Douglas of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants has been one of the few voices to boldly state, "We are looking forward to a robust anti-racism plan from the Government of Canada modeled on Ontario's strategy and implementation plan" (OCASI 2017). To date, this commitment from the Canadian state is missing.

It is not enough for people of colour to congregate in the social economy for help. In order for there to be just and fair allocation of monies to the development process, the resources should be determined by Black and racialized leaders. Ryerson University's [Grace Galabuzi \(2006\)](#), in *Canada's Economic Apartheid*, holds that to effectively confront racial exclusion head on existing social justice institutions need to involve the people who are oppressed, and this movement must be rooted in politicized action. For social justice to take root in Canadian society, racialized people must be the leaders within the third sector, both in designing programs (managers and directors) and funding the work (donors). Racialized Canadian women, as noted above, are innovating and leading important programs to excluded groups. In May 2017, for example, the YWCA, Canada's oldest non-profit, hired Maya Roy, an Indian-Canadian woman, as its CEO ([YWCA 2017](#)). Black and racialized Canadians thus can no longer be relegated to the sidelines as mere recipients of aid agencies or administrative staff, with limited decision-making power. Racialized people, and especially women, need to be the decision-makers in the fight for equity and social change, as well as the ones who disburse the funds in the social service sector. Despite this need, however, and while racialized women are leading important work throughout major cities in Canada, the third sector—supposedly in place to help racially marginalized people—continues to practice cultural and gender exclusion ([Hossein 2016](#)).

This struggle of Black Canadians to find a place in the economy is a historic one. At least 800,000 Canadians are part of the African diaspora in the Americas.¹ The immigration of African-Canadians occurred in stages, resulting in a diverse Black community across Canada ([TVO 2014](#)). In the first stage, Black pioneers arrived in Canada in the 1700s to escape American slavery, settling in southern Chatham and Buxton in Ontario, and in Preston near Halifax, Nova Scotia ([Reynolds 2016](#); [Mensah 2010](#); [James et al. 2010](#)). Harriet Tubman's work along with many abolitionists in the

1850s assisted hundreds of Black fugitives to move to Canada and this effort made her a national icon (Reynolds 2016). An important photo exhibit, *Free Black North*, at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in 2017 documented the use of True Bands, a self-help group to assist the refugees to resettle in Canada. African-American men working as porters on the railroad also immigrated to Canada, settling in Little Burgundy, which historically is a Black community in downtown Montreal (a configuration that is changing through gentrification of the area). In the second stage, Black immigrants came to Canada from the Caribbean region: namely Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados (Austin 2013). Haitians make up the largest Black group in Quebec, and they have been coming to Canada since the oppression of the Duvalier regimes of the 1970s. Indeed, my family emigrated from the Caribbean in 1971, following the changes made by the Trudeau government to immigration policies. The third stage of immigration included Africans from Somalia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya, who settled mainly in Toronto but also in Ottawa and Calgary (Mensah 2010). With the exception of Somalis, who came under political asylum as refugees, many of these Africans came to Canada on the points system and are highly skilled professionals—and as a result represent the group most frustrated by skills-matching in the economy, unable to find jobs in their areas of expertise (Mensah 2010; James et al. 2010; Galabuzi 2006). Finally, a fourth phase of immigration comprises Canadian-born children of immigrants—those who, like me, spent most of their lives growing up in Canada (TVO 2014). As diverse as this population is, all Black Canadians have the common experience that racism affects their access to opportunities in society.

Given the historical social and economic struggles of Black Canadians, an understanding of the social economy of the Black experience seems long overdue. The social economy literature—which includes works such as the *Living Economics: Canadian Perspectives on the Social Economy, Co-operatives, and Community Economic Development* (McMurtry 2010) or *Understanding the Social Economy* (Quarter, Mook, and Armstrong 2009)—primarily speaks to the generic “white” Canadian experience.² I use the term *generic* to highlight the fact that detailed discussion of social economy does not utilize an intersectional analysis, and as a result the authors, in explaining the larger context, miss the experience of non-white Canadians. While studies will sometimes add in an example of such experiences, culture and identity are not part of the framing.

This erasure of people of colour from the social economy literature—or indeed any one-dimensional approach to their stories—is a problem. The social economy is where people whose needs are not met through the state or private sector go—and these are largely Black and racialized people. This is why the social economy must reflect their experiences. While it is important work to map out the social economy

and the various organizations in it, this map will not be comprehensive if it fails to include the issues affecting the contributions of racialized Canadians. Co-operative scholar Ian Macdonald was one of the first Canadian scholars of the social economy to examine the experience of Indigenous peoples in co-operatives, and [Wanda Wuttunee \(2004\)](#) and [Chris Southcott \(2015\)](#) have each carried out separate extensive work on Aboriginal social economies. To date very few have analyzed the Black experience in Canada's social economy or stated why it matters ([Hossein 2017](#), and [forthcoming](#)).

Black people around the globe have been engaging in strategic co-operation as a way to survive for a very long time ([Gordon Nembhard 2014](#); [St. Pierre 1999](#)). Feminist [J.K. Gibson-Graham \(2006\)](#) clearly demonstrates the existence of micro-level experiments diversifying the economy, and argues that these ideas cannot be depreciated. Gibson-Graham's concept of "diverse economies" fits with the argument that African-Canadians, too, are innovating different types of social economies, often below the surface (169). In this paper, then, I set out to understand the Canadian social economy from a Black experience, addressing the generic or white gaze in social economy literature. The work I present here is focused on the Greater Toronto Area, where most African-Canadians reside, but the ideas also resonate with activists in Montreal, Calgary, Oshawa, and Halifax, where large numbers of people of the African diaspora also live ([Statistics Canada n.d.](#)). The work of [bell hooks \(\[1981\] 2015\)](#) has aided me in telling the story of how Black women liberate themselves and their communities—and in thinking about the various ways progressive arenas can be a site for conflict and debate. Famed scholar [bell hooks' \(\[1981\] 2015\)](#) work helped me better understand the role of Black women in the professional social services sector and to become aware of how their complete erasure there is akin to the one they have encountered in the writings on feminism and gender equality in the United States.

Black women's contributions to Canada's social economy are missing or told in ways that undermine the work Black women do. In May 2017, the Writer's Union's editor called for an appropriation prize to give already privileged white males the power to tell the stories of racialized Canadians. Following this, a number of high-ranking journalists from CBC, the *National Post*, *Macleans*, and *The Walrus* retweeted this idea and started to pledge funds towards it ([Dundas 2017](#); [Mendleson 2017](#); [CBC 2017c](#)). It is problematic in Canada that white rich men feel it is legitimate for them to imagine what an Aboriginal person's life, or a racialized or a Black person's life, is like when there are many qualified Black and racialized Canadians doing this work ([CBC 2017b](#)). This is also a wake-up call to present-day scholars working in the social economy sector who do not report on the role of colour play as leaders, or who

do not draw on the knowledge being produced by people of colour to rethink their approach (CBC 2017b).

Some scholars working in social economics are making effort to include diverse cultural and gendered experiences in their research. A case in point is the book *Social Purpose Enterprises: Case Studies for Social Change*, twelve case studies about social-purpose enterprises edited by a group of Canadian academics—Jack Quarter, Sherida Ryan, and Andrea Chan (2015). They define these enterprises as entrepreneurial units attached to a parent organization, usually a non-profit, to support its social service activities. The book admits that Toronto, while a very diverse city, is limited in reflecting on the politics of race and racism within the Canadian context—a fact that limits the kind of social change we hope to see. With the exception of its discussion of Sistering, a non-profit in the west end of Toronto, the book's focus on Black people is limited (and it is worth noting that Sistering is led by a Caucasian woman). For example, although the case of Good Food Markets (which aims to ensure low income communities have access to fresh produce) reveals the problem in racialized communities in the city, the (white) academics in this case study make no mention of the conflict between permanent well-paid managers (most of whom are white) and the racialized communities they work in, or that residents created their own food co-operatives focused on Black empowerment (List of Interviews [henceforward, simply interview] 10).

In a culturally diverse city such as the Greater Toronto Area, with a population of 5.6 million people—of which 50% are foreign-born—the absence in the literature of these stories about Black women leaders is marked. The reality is that many newcomers rely on services led by racialized women to help them. In the courses I teach, though, I am hard-pressed to find scholarly articles about racialized women leaders in Canada's social economy. Despite the fact that Black and racialized women are leading noble projects throughout the city, they have not been considered worthy of academic study. The stories of these leaders need to be told—and preferably by people who are responsible to the communities they know.

In order to truly understand Canada's social economy in a big city like Toronto, we must draw on the self-help ideas from liberation theory to analyze the Black experience. The empirical work in this paper thus reinforces Black liberation ideas of initiative, self-help, and co-opting resources to strengthen one's own community. My interviews with five African-Canadian women in the social economy help shed light on the work they do and the conditions in which they have to fight for resources in Canada, and all of them suggest that no one addresses the institutionalized racism within the third sector. To many, the social economy is viewed as a "safe space," a place of refuge for racialized people when business and the state fail to reach them;

yet within this “safe space” there are hidden forms of racism at play. All five women leaders, in sharing their personal experience leading social economy institutions in Canada, discuss how white power lurks within the social economy, complicating access to goods and services for racially marginalized groups.

In this paper, I have structured the discussion into three parts. First, I expose the hubris in the theory and practice within Canada’s social economy and propose utilizing Black liberation theory to ground the social economy literature in its thinking about various cultural groups. My theoretical framing is in part influenced by my own position and lived experience as an academic and a racialized Canadian woman of Afro- and Indo-Caribbean descent writing on the social economy. Second, I refer to Black thinkers in the Americas who understand the social economy in relation to the very specific historical experience of the African diaspora. Third, I apply the concepts of self-help and lived experience to the study of the social economy in my examination of the lives of five African-Canadian women in the third sector.

2. Theory and Methods

2.1 Liberation Theory and Interviews

Using a mixed qualitative method, I draw on the approaches of both mainstream social economy literature and diasporic Black liberation thinkers to understand the work of African-Canadian women in the social economy sector. For this study, I analyzed newspapers and policy reports about the social economy in Canada. I also surveyed the extensive academic literature on Canada’s non-profit, voluntary social economy sector, which includes the journal of the Association of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research (ANSER), dedicated to work on the third sector as it pertains to Canadians. My paper has also benefited from 15 registered interviews with elite stakeholders in the government and non-profit sector to understand the social economy from a racialized point of view. A number of the interviews are protected because the professionals are afraid of losing their jobs and funding. I interviewed dozens more people who wish not to be listed, but they contributed in this analysis.

The Ontario Nonprofit Network, an apex institution of the entire non-profit sector in the province, was unwilling to discuss the issues of race affecting African-Canadians. It refused on the basis that it does not track issues along the lines of race or culture and pointed me towards ethnocultural groups (email correspondence, 2016). This response by the network signaled to me that I needed to meet with Black leaders in the sector to learn more about issues affecting racially marginalized groups in the city. My interviews since 2013 with five Black Canadian women leaders in the social economy was a way to start uncovering what is happening in the social economy sector in terms of power, access, and race.³

Our exchanges initially started as interviews, but over time they became more of a dialogue than formal sit-down interviews—with a series of informal meetings and discussions about the inner workings of the social economy and the personal struggles of the women. The discussions took a narrative approach, in which the women explained to me the ways they lead in the social economy. My questions were unstructured and centred on their own personal stories of how they became involved in the social economy. I did not write down word for word what they said, nor did I tape them. I wanted our interactions to be free and spontaneous, and I respected their right to privacy. It should also be mentioned that many of my contacts who are hyphenated Canadians working in the social economy would not share their identities for fear of losing jobs and their grants. Whiteness and the power linked to white people within the social economy are topics that are not discussed. Many of the people who have decision-making powers with regard to allocating money to the social economy are white and privileged ([INCITE! Women of Color against Violence 2009](#)). For this reason, the issue of divulging too much in a very “white” sector is a very real threat for Black women who work in the social economy. In many instances, I have been privy to information these women would not normally share with researchers, and I respect this confidence and do not identify them in order to avoid jeopardizing their funding. The very fact that they feared revealing who they are when discussing racism in the social economy is an illuminating finding in itself, and requires future research beyond this project.

2.2 Personal View on the Social Economy

Within the academe, I struggle with the neutrality of social economy scholarship. Like many practitioners of colour, I too feel alienated by the whiteness that emerges from the literature. The elitist orientation of the social economy does not address cultural politics within the social economy ([Hossein 2014](#)). This deliberate effort to avoid race and racialized issues in the social economy is an aspect of what I define, as noted above, as the generic approach. The literature that does refer to theorists fails to draw on thinkers who are from the cultural communities embedded in the social economies. This omission on the part of people mapping out the social economy contributes to the obscuring of a Black perspective necessary to understanding third sector politics for racially marginalized groups. In fact, when I share Black theorizing, colleagues often point me to mainstream white thinkers to help me to “understand” the social economy the way they do.

My own lived experience is a tool for analyzing the literature. Black and feminist theory has helped me to confront the bias ingrained in society head on. In previous work, I have likened my critiquing of the social economy to “academic detective

work”—exposing truths within the critical thinking arena (Hossein 2016). Writer Audre Lorde (1984) has said that Black women have always been the “Watchers”—as they mimic the attitude and behaviour of the white dominant culture / oppressors while hiding their own views and taking in how other people operate. I am an academic detective in the sense that I unearth issues that may create tension and uneasiness in the field. This kind of work requires breaking down what we believe to be the norm and making sure that facts from below the surface are also included in what we know about how people participate in the third sector.

Having grown up in Canada, I know first-hand that people of colour organize life and economics in ways that are informed by non-white theorists. For me, it makes perfect sense to analyze the ideas of Black theorists who can relate to persons of African descent, especially when examining the social economy. Black theorists often speak to the ways Black people and other racialized people organize. Because the social economy sector is a form of refuge from a society that has been unkind to them, it is often below the radar in terms of criticism. A case in point would be the modern notion of “crowd funding”; yet, Black and Caribbean people have always had a form of “crowd funding” when they emigrated, as it provided a means to support each other’s projects: from life events (e.g., birth, marriage, sickness, funerals) to starting new ventures (e.g., a new business, trips, education). Caribbean immigrants often swap services to help each other out: for example, my father would do people’s taxes in exchange for home repairs. Such bartering of trades is all part of the diaspora’s interaction in the social economy. Black people, and mostly women, pool money to save and lend to each other when commercial banks are inhospitable to them (Hossein 2014). Yet, these kinds of stories are absent from the literature on the Canadian social economy.

There have been a few important exceptions to this in recent years. Quebec-based scholars such as Eric Shragge and Jean Fontan (2000) and Marguerite Mendell (2009) have made an effort to include international voices in the social economy. An important contribution to Canada’s diverse social economy is Chris Southcott’s (2015) *Northern Communities Working Together: The Social Economy of Canada’s North*, and Wanda Wuttunee’s (2004) *Living Rhythms: Lessons in Aboriginal Economic Resilience and Vision*, which show the diverse ways in which Aboriginal people organize their social economies in a white-settler environment. Some of the standard texts on the social economy in Canada, however, fail to take a cultural approach in order to truly understand the cosmopolitan nature of the country, and this makes it unclear what it means to be racialized Canadians in the social economy. Quarter, Ryan, and Chan (2015) show that only certain non-profit organizations have managed to seek out funding to pilot businesses to keep their programs from being cut. Organizations

run by Black Canadians in Canada's most populated city seem to be overlooked for analysis as case studies, or they are not accessing these funding opportunities, which is even more problematic. There is a need to document the work of non-profits led by and serving racialized communities.

As a racialized Canadian woman who grew up in the Greater Toronto Area and who has had extensive professional experience in international economic development, I am sensitive to the Eurocentric and male lens that tends to occupy the field of community development (Brohman 1995). Vestiges of the white gaze still linger in the literature on the social economy. This has made Southcott's and Wuttunee's work on the social economy of Aboriginal Canadians so useful in rethinking what the social economy means for Black people in Canada. White male privilege is seemingly embedded into the Canadian social economy, creating a hierarchy of politics, gender, race, and class. The Aboriginal take on the social economy removes the traditional "understanding" of Canada's social economy and frames the discussion in a new meaningful way (Southcott 2015). Still, the stories of the Black experience in the social economy remain absent. Often the work that people of colour do is relegated to "community-based" research, and not viewed as living social and economic projects that can contribute to changing the way we live our lives. In order to change this colonial manner of engaging in the development of Toronto's communities, those of us who write on the social economy need to turn to theorizing that reflects racialized people in the social economy. It will take a conscious effort to engage in case studies that speak to the Black and immigrant experience.

3. Theorizing for Racialized People in the Social Economy

African-Canadians, composing one of the most disadvantaged groups in business and society, have turned to the social economy for refuge. This sector has become a critical arena for these excluded people to partake in cultural, social, and economic activities. To understand the Black experience means that we need to ensure that *lived experience* is integral to how we examine social economics (Hosseini 2016). This study applies a Black liberation theory that is strongly informed by Black feminists writing in the United States and Canada who argue that we must use personal life experiences as theoretical underpinning in examining the experiences of people. The work I present here highlights the experience of Black Canadians in the social economy, taking into account the relevance of Black liberation and self-help theory as a way to study this sector.

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 in Canada are mainly

white Canadians, and those on the receiving end are mainly persons of colour. In Toronto, racialized people do not control how money is being used in the sector. Understanding Canada's social economy from a Black experience means unravelling or disrupting what we know about the Canadian social economy. This paper does this by inserting Black women leaders as vital actors in Canada's social economy. The readings and theory used toward understanding how the third sector operates in a culturally diverse city like Toronto should thus interact with theories of Black liberation, because these theories matter not only to racially marginalized people but also to the very women leaders who manage community projects in the city.

Black liberation theory has not infiltrated the field of the social economy—a field that is supposedly anti-racist and feminist in its critical thinking. But there is much in this theory to offer the Canadian social economy: its use would disrupt mainstream thinking and set a historical reality in interpreting how people of colour engage with the third sector. An excellent starting point is the Underground Railroad, an organization through which people opposed to slavery worked collectively to free humans through an intricate system of informal ties and co-operation. This story is essential to a full understanding of issues of co-operation and the social economy in Canada and the United States. Harriet Tubman was part of this collective effort, assisting enslaved Black people to escape from the United States to Canada. In a recent CBC round table on Black history in Canada, Black Canadian scholar Afua Cooper at Dalhousie University noted that the work of the Underground Railroad in creating a safe passage to freedom for slaves is usually the only thing that is known about Black people's lives in the country (CBC 2017a). At the Freedom Centre in Cincinnati, Ohio, the Underground Railroad is viewed as a third sector organization that relied on its members in the United States and Canada to provide housing, money, transport, food, and support to people escaping from dangerous and torturous lives. Despite this, there is little reference in Canadian social economy literature about the Underground Railroad's role in the beginnings of the co-operative nature of this Black experience.

The European origins of capitalism and industrialization have often co-opted the story of the social economy in Canada. An edited collection, *Business and Society: A Critical Introduction*, by a group of Canadian scholars (Birch et al. 2017), has drawn on the literature to restate what has already been said many times before—that the root of capitalism is tied to despicable slave trade (Williams [1944] 2004). Racism within the plantations has laid the groundwork for centuries of pain, suffering, and conflict (see Taylor 2016; Coates 2015; Wilkerson 2011; Thomas 1988). In *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, Isabel Wilkerson followed the stories of people who could no longer take the racial violence and abuse in the South

and simply left the region a bit at a time—fundamentally altering the demographics of the United States. It was the careful planning and tapping into the solidarity networks to assist them to up and move that impressed me the most in this story.

Black scholars and writers in the West who experienced slavery and human bondage first-hand and who descend from this legacy have had to think long and hard about the ways in which economic freedom could liberate Black people. As early as 1907, famed scholar W.E.B. Du Bois, a Harvard-educated African-American with Haitian roots, advanced the theory of group economics among African-Americans, counting on white people's need for cheap labour. Du Bois's powerful piece *The Souls of Black Folks* of 1903 described co-operatives and collective forms of African business, a historical knowledge that is inspiring for Black Canadians (Du Bois [1903] 2007). Du Bois knew very well 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 has thus allowed African-Americans to create co-operative businesses and bond together in racist environments.

In the 1920s Jamaican-born social entrepreneur Marcus Mosiah Garvey was another powerful Black liberation theorist who travelled to Canada, introducing a philosophy of racial self-reliance in business to counter mainstream business practices (see K'knife, Bernard, and Dixon 2011; Hill and Bair 1987; Lewis 1987; Martin 1983).⁴ Garvey toured Toronto and Halifax and inspired African-Canadians in their social economic lives. In Toronto, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) had an active membership of Garveyites; the UNIA is still active in Montreal's Little Burgundy (near Atwater market) among some of the city's aging Black population (interview 14; see also, Marano 2010 and Martin 1983). Garvey's own upbringing in colonial Jamaica and his lived experience as a migrant worker in Panama and Costa Rica no doubt made a mark on his teachings (Hill and Bair 1987; Lewis 1987). Black people around the world have been deeply influenced by Garvey's teaching on Black empowerment in advancing notions of self-help. In fact, in my own work on mutual aid groups in Canada and the Caribbean, I found that Banker Ladies (the women who managed mutual aid groups) have also been inspired by the racial pride and the business ethics of Marcus Garvey (Hossein, forthcoming).

Black liberation theory concepts of *self-help* and *co-opting business* to support the community from within are thus useful tools in analyzing Canada's third sector. Booker T. Washington, in his seminal work *Up from Slavery* ([1901] 2013), 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 US 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 allows them to relate to the historical explanations of their own self-help and mutual aid. In carrying out my own field work in Toronto's low-income communities, I was struck by how many people know the work of Garvey, "Booker T," and Tubman and could refer to it in speaking about their own business exclusion in society. Lesser known is the work of [Jessica Gordon Nembhard \(2014\)](#), one of the few women economists writing on the Black experience in the social economy; in *Collective Courage*, Gordon Nembhard documents the work of co-operatives 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 social economy to help and support their members.

Diasporic Black liberation theories react against the erasure of racialized and Black people in the social economy. Black feminists such as [bell hooks \(\[1981\] 2015\)](#) and [Patricia Hill Collins \(2000\)](#), who examine such erasure in the academe, speak to the importance of lived experience. In *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, hooks asserts a rightful place for reading Black women, arguing that their life struggle is itself a form of theorizing. This makes sense when we think of Black Canadian women whose contributions in the economy and society have been erased ([hooks \[1981\] 2015](#)). In a sector like the social economy, which thrives on the "doing" of things, the concept of lived experience is a very good fit for the social economy as a whole, regardless of racial orientation. An influential text in this regard is Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), in which she argues that research on Black women needs to be grounded in lived experience in order to reach these women. Lived experience is crucial to theoretical analysis of the impact of the activities and actors who are part of the social economy. People on the receiving end of aid and support have lived experience that can support the programming and practice within the sector. Almost all Black women leading social economy organizations are from modest socio-economic backgrounds and are well-educated—some are 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. Many have also witnessed racism and its effects on people they know and love. Like hooks, Hill Collins argues 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 social economy matter to Black people—and especially to women of colour.

Canada's Viola Desmond is another figure who is relevant to the notion of self-help from within, as a businesswoman who was able to support herself, her family, and her community. She even provided skills training and job opportunities in cosmetology for other Black women so they too could be financially independent. Desmond made history when she was arrested for refusing to move from her paid seat in the front of a cinema house to the balcony—an act of defiance that challenged the racist policy in Halifax, Nova Scotia (Reynolds 2016). The symbolic significance of her life lies in her financial freedom. She understood the larger context of her role in society and business. She found the racist rules of the day morally repugnant, and was able to resist because she was self-employed and catered to her own community. This is precisely the liberation theory Marcus Garvey, Booker T, and Du Bois stressed in their work on co-operation and self-sufficiency for people who were okay financially to be in a place to speak out against injustice. This is an important story for Canadians, one that speaks to self-help and to being independent so that you can fight for what you believe in and bring social change. The African-Canadians interviewed in this study are educated and could have chosen to work in lucrative fields, but they use their talents to bring social change in society and the marketplace with the work they do. Each one of them made a conscientious decision to work in the social economy as a site of protest and to make a difference. Through their work they create opportunities for racially excluded groups. Each of the women is personally vested in the communities she works in. For them, lived experience matters: this is why they do what they do.

In claiming and co-opting resources for Black communities, and leading projects for their communities, Black women disrupt the Canadian social economy. In her extensive work in the 1990s with Asian, South Asian, African, and Caribbean women in Toronto, Vijay Agnew (1996) found that a number of women felt more secure and at ease working for community-based organizations, rather than contending with discrimination in a white-dominated workplace. The congregating of women of colour 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.

While much academic writing is centred on sectoral work, the people managing and developing programs are influenced by their own life stories. In *Back to the Drawing Board: African-Canadian Feminisms*, Njoki Wane, Katerina Deliovsky, and Erica 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 very much part of the storytelling, and tracing one's African roots helps to 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, I witnessed my own family engage in business as a form of self-help and to assert independence—the notion of family and business is thus often blurred.

All of these ways in which Black people engage in the social economy are rarely, if ever, told. In the US context, [Gordon Nembhard \(2014\)](#) has broken this silence, and she has unearthed centuries of alternative economic practices by African-Americans. [Hossein \(2016, and forthcoming\)](#) uses Black liberation theory 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 both embedded in politics and politicize the plight of the underdog. Such theories force the sector to take stock of history, informal collectivity, and self-help from within the community.

4. The Black Experience in Canada's Social Economy

Hubris exists in Canada's social economy, not only among the academics but also among many practitioners. The Canadian third sector is filled with many well-intentioned left-leaning white people who express strong ideas about what the social economy is and what it is not. However, they do not create the space for racialized people to own and lead it. At times, certain 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 accessible to excluded cultural groups. For many Black citizens, the informal nature of this space is what makes it safe: people can organize and politicize their work outside of the scrutiny of their oppressors. In essence, the informal nature of the social economy makes it a true civil society, because the people within it do not have to broker any deals with the mainstream. People can be less concerned about conflicts or about having to negotiate (and compromise) with the state or business. Many activists fighting for liberation, and who experience intense forms of exclusion (and danger), can use this informal structure as a way to heal and counteract social and business exclusion ([Gordon Nembhard 2014; Hossein 2013](#)).

In the Canadian context, those in the social economy focus mainly on formal structures, with the result of alienating Black people. By arbitrarily acknowledging only formal co-operatives or registered non-profits as valid third sector entities, researchers fail to capture the most vibrant aspects of the social economy, which are occurring below the surface. Hubris takes hold when those who write about “understanding” the social economy fail to take into account history, politics, and cultural bias in the social economy. Many of the Canadian-based cases in the social economy

focus on organizations led by privileged white Canadians, who for the most part do not possess the lived experience of the people they serve. Groups who rely on the social economy as either workers or beneficiaries therefore cannot identify with the sector's literature, a sign that this literature does not represent certain cultural groups.⁵

Take, for example, [Jack Quarter, Sherida Ryan, and Andrea Chan's \(2015\) *Social Purpose Enterprises: Case Studies for Social Change*](#), mentioned above, which discusses social purpose enterprises in Toronto. While the text includes cases about Good Food Markets and Sistering, these organizations, which work with racialized people, are often not led by people of colour, and in some cases this has been a contentious issue in terms of race and class (interview 8). Research on the social economy needs to diversify by choosing case studies led by people of colour. Cases that receive academic attention can benefit from investments and grants. In 2015, for example, Ontario premier Kathleen Wynne's Liberal government allocated \$4 million to the Social Enterprise Development Fund (SEDF) to support businesses with a social conscience ([Toronto Star 2015](#); interview 5; interview 6). Many of the recipient organizations were clearly tied to academics or were entities that had close ties to well-positioned elites (interview 3; interview 4). Furthermore, many of the organizations and leaders receiving this funding are not of the "consciousness-raising" kind, nor are they themselves rooted in the most vulnerable communities. At the same time, social economy organizations run by racialized Canadian women who actually have lived experience and are engaged in radical conscious work do not receive the funding they need to become financially viable. As a Black Canadian academic researching the social economy, I have learned that "lucky" non-profits with the right social networks are able to access grants to pilot for-profit businesses within their institutions that they count as "socially enterprising."

Overlooking the talent of racialized people is not a new practice. In *Collective Courage*, [Gordon Nembhard \(2014\)](#) explains that African-American organizations have for centuries endured sabotage and harassment by white elites who did not want to strengthen these community-based institutions. In the current appropriation debate among Canada's media elite, racialized and Aboriginal people are also asking that they be recognized for their work and talents. A case in point is the Warden Woods Community Centre, a non-profit based in Scarborough (in southeast Toronto). Led by a Black Canadian woman who understands the communities she works in because she comes from these communities, the community centre has tried to pilot social enterprises without any significant funding. Her institution misses out on grants that would allow it to test its social enterprise development. These kinds of organizations—rooted in racialized communities and run by racialized Canadians—need to create social-purpose enterprises (defined as for-profit activities added on to

support the non-profit organization) to support their activities, but many of them cannot do this because they lack the resources and networks that others have. And those who do make the “right” connections often simply do not conform to the mainstream. The social economy organizations that people of colour lead are activist in nature; yet these cases are largely undocumented. The main argument here, then, is that we must recognize the activist nature of Black women in the social economy in order to change how we view Black people’s role in the social economy. Too many of the standard books (mentioned above) on the social economy do not delve into racial bias from within the field.

A number of intersectional feminists who address inequality in society and business have been thinking about pre-existing diverse community economies. J.K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron, and Stephen Healy’s *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming Our Communities* (2013) is one such work that adheres to a feminist tradition that is conscientious about diverse economies and the wider world and about how people of colour actively participate in organizing society. This perspective is more inclusive and gives Black women leaders the space they need to count in the social economy. The global social economy literature that locates the social economy within its cultural context is also very important in capturing the work that racialized people do in the third sector. For example, [Ash Amin, Angus Cameron, and Ray Hudson \(2002\)](#) in *Placing the Social Economy* discuss exclusion from the social economy and argue that this economy must be rooted in its local context. Contextual thinking opens up what kind of organizations count as part of the social economy landscape.

More of this kind of contextual mapping of the social economy—as we see in [Mendell’s \(2009\)](#) work on the Quebec social economy (also see [Shragge and Fontan 2000](#))—is needed for English-speaking Canada, and particularly its most diverse city, Toronto. In fact, [Mendell \(2009\)](#) has argued for a louder political voice for the third sector so that they can be at the policy tables. Addressing cultural issues within the social economy uncovers the domain of whiteness lurking within the voluntary and co-operative sectors, and sheds light on the exclusionary practice within the field. It also means that considering race and culture in the social economy opens up the scope of how to envision the Canadian social economy and exposes the deeply entrenched hubris within it.

5. Black Women Leaders in the Social Economy: Short Case Studies in Toronto

My job is to plant trees and to clear the path and nourish the soil for them to flourish. Once I keep that in mind, whether or not there are resources,

I must continue to take care of the garden. If only one tree survives ... it is enough to replenish the forest. (interview 7)⁶

The social economy is an arena that purports to help people and to expose the injustice of excluded groups. Yet the social economy can also perpetuate issues of inequality and exclusion. Each of the Black women I have followed over the years has endured struggles not only from outside the social economy but from within it when they try to advocate for new ways to help and understand their cultural communities. Here, I focus on stories of these Black women to better understand Canada's social economy and to recognize the contributions of Black people in it.

Few people who write and work on the Canadian social economy can really speak to lived experience. The Black professional in the quotation above has worked in the social economy for more than 20 years and is aware of the obstacles in uplifting her cultural community but remains steadfastly committed to the work. Those of us who know the struggle first-hand depend on in-kind forms of self-help. The discourse on the social economy is dominated by people removed from it, who tend to come from privileged socio-economic backgrounds.

If we are going to talk truth, let's do it. If you look at the Centre for Social Innovation it is led and directed by rich white kids. They are overpaid and enjoy a very different lifestyle from me. They went to private schools, live, work and stay in the downtown core ... and they only ever interact with the likes of the people they purportedly help when we rent their [office] space. These are the so-called "leaders" who get the attention. [It is] ... not us who do the grunt work for our communities. (interview 11)

As noted in the quote above, many of the actors and donors do not know the Black experience and have had little contact with it. According to one, a government official of the City of Toronto, we have people programming activities for children and vulnerable groups who have little knowledge of what they are doing (interview 2). This means that when these individuals provide helpful ideas to community leaders who have extensive field and lived experience, the latter often feel they are being schooled by the "experts"—many of them white and without the relevant lived experience.

The feminist tradition of unraveling the politics of economic possibility gives credit to people's own experience (Gibson-Graham 2006). I analyze the case studies of Black women activists in Toronto in order to document the class, gender, and race-based implications they encounter as they work in the social economy. The women leading social economic organizations in Canada have spent decades engaged in the

social economy for racialized Canadians. They know from their own experience as newcomers what the social economy can do for them. They also know, having worked within the sector, the limits that exist for them. Like the racialized people they serve, Black activists are often on the receiving end of small grants from (white) people who are not aware of the needs of racially marginalized communities. The work they do is difficult, as they try to navigate two worlds: one in which they must conform to white norms and one that is Afrocentric.

The lived experience of African-Canadian women shows that people of their race and class interact with the social economy in very different ways from white middle-class Canadians. The examinations of these women and the organizations they lead demonstrate a need to reflect on case studies that represent the Black experience in the social economy. After two years of sending my students to intern at social economy organizations in racially marginalized communities, I have found a seeming disconnect between the materials they read and what they do on the job. Students were placed in organizations in the social economy, but the cases they studied did not prepare them for those they faced in reality. Black colleagues working in the third sector have told me they are not recognized for what they do. This is why this paper is important, as I carry out an in-depth study of Black Canadian women who are engaged in the front lines of the social economy. This paper will thus be very pertinent for students carrying out placements in organizations located in racially marginalized communities and led by Black women.

The Black women I consider all lead different kinds of social economy organizations. The types of social economy organizations in which they work vary: from small grassroots organizations, to new start-up enterprises, to a well-endowed large non-profit. All of the women have post-secondary degrees, are in their fifties, and have been engaged in community and economic development for at least two decades in low-income urban communities in Toronto. Three of the women I spoke to come from humble socio-economic backgrounds, and one is an outlier with doctoral studies and an upper-middle-class background. The other two still have humiliating experiences as newcomers or through other types of exclusion, such as sexual. As immigrants or children of immigrants, they themselves or their parents have relied on self-help groups and mutual aid in their cultural communities in order to adjust to Canadian life. All of the women leading in the social economy have been educated in the Canadian system, and they have faced persistent forms of discrimination—whether in accessing a university education, buying a house, or advancing their careers. They bring their own personal challenges to the work they do. Not only do they struggle to assist their communities to access funding, but within the social economy they must navigate a complex political system. These women represent at

least 100 years of collective experience, covering the east and west ends of Toronto's most vulnerable communities. Yet, their own roles in the social economy have been overlooked or ignored. One of the interviewed women made it clear:

If I had been in a mainstream organization, I would not have had the opportunities to be a leader. I know that I would not have been in a management role as young as I was if I did not choose this path and to work where I did. I am very clear on this. (interview 9)

After closely working and discussing with these women, it was clear that their stories needed to be shared to increase their individual profiles as well as those of the organizations they work in. Our meetings over a two-year period were two-way dialogues: while they started off as interviews, after working together over time we began to exchange our experiences as Black women in the social economy. The women were most supportive of a publication that could document the work they had been doing in the social economy for decades. One of the women called me a "scribe" or writer who would "tell the truth" and "finally give credit to" them for the work they do. In this section, I give brief details about each woman and the organization she leads.

The first case study is a longstanding member of Canada's social economy who heads up a relatively large non-profit organization in a low-income area reaching thousands of people in Scarborough, Toronto. Trinidadian-born Canadian Ginelle Skerritt holds a university degree, from York University, and she was the first woman to do so in her family. In my meetings with Skerritt, she revealed that her grandmother and mother had a profound influence on her life choices to engage in community development through non-profits. Skerritt was first introduced to *susu* (informal banks) as a savings device as a child in her homeland of Trinidad and Tobago. Her grandmother and mother were active in this African-Caribbean tradition as a way to pool money in Trinidad for business and livelihood needs. After migrating to Toronto in the 1960s, she watched her mother as a newcomer bring these collective banks to Canada and find a supportive community. The family's first home, vacations, and school fees were all made possible through *susu*.

Susu provided her with the money to be the first person in her family to go to university. As a successful professional leading a non-profit, Skerritt has explored the ways *susu* helped her, her family, and her friends, and this is why she has participated and led an adapted version of *susu* for more than a decade. She knows first-hand the difficulties Black Canadians have accessing bank loans and funding in general for their projects. Prior to becoming the executive director of Warden Woods, Skerritt held leadership and key programming positions at the United Nations and Tropicana Community Centre. Warden Woods Community Centre is a roughly

\$2 million multiservice non-profit organization operating in southwest Scarborough in Toronto. The organization was created in the early 1960s as a project of the Mennonite Church in response to the needs of residents in a new government housing project in the Firvalley and Cataraqui communities. Today, Warden Woods is funded primarily by all three levels of government and the United Way, and also engages in fee-based services to recoup some of its costs. The centre provides over 50 programs and services to over 6,000 clients annually out of its main centre and satellite locations ([Warden Woods Community Centre n.d.](#)).

The second case study focuses on a woman who not only has worked in the social economy in various capacities, but has been a resident of the Jane and Finch community for three decades. At an early age, Jamaican-born Canadian Lorraine Anderson immigrated to Toronto in 1989. She is a single mother of five children and lived in the Grassway housing project, also known as “connections.” Growing up in Clarendon, Jamaica, Anderson remembered *pardner*, or *partner* (informal banks) as a young girl. She vividly recalls how she used to listen to the women elders speak about *partner*, and she was often the messenger dropping off payments at the banker lady’s house. Like Skerritt, Anderson joined her first *partner* bank young and continued with this way of organizing when she moved to Canada. In Canada, *partner* gave her many firsts: the first down payment on a house, her first car, and her first tuition for college. The social-purpose business teaching of Marcus Garvey and his struggle against the state and political elites especially inspired Anderson’s commitment to economic development among women of colour in Toronto.

Anderson is the Director of Firgrove Community Learning and Innovation Centre (FLICC), a grassroots organization with an annual budget of less than \$100,000, where the focus is on women and child-care programming. FLICC was started in 2008 as a sewing collective of women, where women, many of whom were low-income single mothers, came together to the centre to sew but also to find camaraderie and discuss social and economic issues affecting their lives. The activities of FLICC provide a meeting point for residents to speak about problems they are facing. The activities have increased, and they now offer child care and tenant advocacy, and are currently working on a social enterprise for catering. FLICC reaches hundreds of people in the Jane and Finch community.

The third case is Ekua Andria Walcott who is Bajan-born and raised and who immigrated to Canada when she was 19 years old to pursue a university education.⁷ Walcott has a master’s degree in social work from York University. She is the executive director of the Harriet Tubman Community Organization (HTCO), an organization that has existed since 1972, and works to cultivate and strengthen humanity through psychosocial education of African-Canadians, as well as to promote culturally

diverse leadership. HTCO has an annual budget of \$350,000. For the past three years, HTCO has shared space with several grassroots organizations. The core of HTCO is to restore dignity and respect to persons of African descent. The organization is rooted in Afrocentric guiding principles, and the youth are educated about their African ancestry, as well as the legacies of Harriet Tubman and her collective organizing to assist slaves. The “I am LOVEE (Live Openly Valuing Everyone and Everything)” campaign to reach African-Canadians is an example of the cultural work that is being carried out to correct societal issues for young people of African descent. Other activities to increase the profile and sense of community include the Tubman Games, Matanga Festival, Kwanzaa Kujichagulia, women’s healing circles, the Young Women’s Program, and summer camp at Adinkra farms. As funding is restrictive and can be difficult to attain for a socially conscious non-profit like HTCO, they also engage in cost recovery activities selling African clothing, arts, and crafts.

The fourth case is Sharon Shelton, the longest-standing executive director at Tropicana Community Services, which is focused on assisting Black Canadians. Shelton was born in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the last of six children, to Eugene Bertrand, a petroleum engineer, and Norma Bertrand, an elementary school teacher. She attended the University of Waterloo, where she obtained a bachelor of arts and a masters of applied science. When Shelton emigrated to Canada in 1984, she struggled to find work in her field of human resources, a situation experienced by many newcomers. She has two children, one of whom was born with a rare genetic disorder, and it is in this life struggle that she is able to connect with people who feel the everyday pressures of life. She understands what the social economy means to persons of colour in Canada.

Her own personal life challenge awakened her to the possibility that she could use her talents in the third sector. Shelton first began her work in the social economy in Ottawa, working at the Canadian Foundation for Caribbean Development and Cooperation. Later in Toronto, she worked with Inter-Cultural Associates, teaching life skills and business English to new immigrant women. Shelton also later worked with the Elizabeth Fry Society, where she developed a successful business proposal to provide skills and employment for women in conflict with the law. Her commitment has been to inject herself into the economy to help women of colour access employment and business services, and she did much of this work while with the Canadian African Newcomers Aid Centre of Toronto at their Skills Development Centre to assist new immigrants who were mainly from Ethiopia and Somalia.

In 1988, Shelton started her work with Tropicana Community Services as the director of the newly acquired program, Alternative Youth Centre for Employment. Tropicana has a \$10 million budget and over 30 programs. Tropicana is known for

its ability to create “small as well as large ripple effects in the lives of thousands of individuals and families and this is what is known as the “Tropicana Effect.” Her focus has been on employment services, and during her three years of as director, the program has grown. In 1991, she took the lead of the organization, and, under her leadership, Tropicana has become a highly successful and respected social service organization in Toronto. Shelton has been at the helm designing innovative community programs that are a model for providing multi-services to Canada’s Black and Caribbean community in the areas of education, prenatal care for young mothers, and job training for youth. One of the most interesting aspects of Shelton’s leadership is her ability to nurture and grow small social economy organizations. In 2010, Shelton created a mentorship program for small community organizations so they could develop their own capacity in the social economy for Black communities, going against the idea that non-profits are in competition. Instead, Tropicana’s leaders felt it important to develop the capacities of smaller non-profits working in racialized communities in Toronto.

James et al.’s (2010) *Race and Well-Being: The Lives, Hopes and Activism of African-Canadians* ties racism to the mental stress and poor health suffered by African Canadians. Despite these findings, however, the social economy literature rarely focuses on how organizations are managing issues of racism and health. In my fifth and final case study, Notisha Massaquoi is the executive director of Women’s Health in Women’s Hands Community Health Centre (WHIWH-CHC), which is focused on primary health care for racialized women in the city. Her story is distinct from the other four cases, as she immigrated to Canada from Sierra Leone and grew up in Newfoundland. Her parents were highly educated: her Sierra Leone-born father was a British-trained doctor and her Trinidadian mother was a British-trained midwife. They were the first Black family to live in central Newfoundland. Growing up in a small close-knit community in Atlantic Canada made her aware of the lack of services for newcomers, and she herself experienced racial exclusion in a homogenous environment. As she told me:

There were no support services for me or my family in Newfoundland. There was nothing we could integrate into. There was racism but as a young child I had nowhere to go for help. I experienced lots of racism all the while my parents were helping these people. (interview 13).

This experience seemed in my view to influence Massaquoi’s life-calling. Massaquoi attended the University of Western Ontario where she earned a bachelor’s degree in 1991. Following this, she immersed herself in activist work around issues for people of African descent, including pioneering work at a feminist non-profit,

London's Women's Community House, at Africans in Partnership Against Aids (APAA), and at Harambee Centres, as well as a year-long medical mission to Jamaica after Hurricane Gilbert. Often she was the first Black Canadian to lead issues concerning racialized women. In 1993–95, she earned a masters in social work and is near completion of her doctorate from the University of Toronto. She did cross over to work in a state agency only to find it too complicated to address issues for her community (information deliberately withheld).

In 1998, Massaquoi joined the WHIWH-CHC senior management team and became the executive director in 2005. It is the only community health centre in North America devoted to racialized and immigrant women's health care. The organization is a \$4.3 million organization with about 50 employees, providing primary health care to thousands of racialized women from a cross-section of different socio-economic backgrounds each year ([Women's Health in Women's Hands 2015](#)). The organization is strategically located in the downtown core and often assists social movements that are occurring in the area. For example, the Black Lives Matter Toronto rallies in April 2016 took place near the offices of the centre and the organization's employees provided water and assistance to the protesters as needed. Ontario's premier Kathleen Wynne has also tapped the centre as one of its lead implementing partners in the provincial violence against women strategy. WHIWH-CHC is also a lead health care partner in the resettlement and health needs of Syrian refugees in the Toronto Area.

In each of the case studies, the leaders, who primarily work in marginally racialized communities, have said that “doing meaningful work in the Black community is sketchy at best because we do not get the funds we need to make change.” In other words, the organizations that are endowed with public funds are the ones restricting development in Black communities. In INCITE!'s book *This Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex*, the clear message is that US organizations that have a socially conscious mandate are losing funding from elites who fear power will shift away from the status quo. Canadian non-profit leaders also fear they will be rejected for funding if they are “too radical” ([INCITE! Women of Color against Violence 2009](#)).

For 18 years in the field I have had to walk into all kinds of spaces. My work here [stated organization] is all about us. How to make racialized people's lives better. What I see in the public spaces is that nobody cares in most meetings I go to. In fact they will do everything they [donors, state agencies, and donors with money] can to block our communities from getting the services they need. (interview 11)

Black women professionals in the third sector are aware of what it takes to develop their communities, but they are also constrained by financial resources and the politics of aid, which can defund them if they do not comply with the rules. Non-profit professionals committed to social change need to know the rules and how to play by them so as not to lose their funding. While this cultivates a distrust of the very system that funds them, they have to know “how to do what they do” in a way that will not offend people but make them feel at ease. One of the women interviewed (who does not want to be named) explained that she is often traversing two worlds, a Black one and a white one:

The feeling of “tokenism” is not only a concept reserved for outside of the social economy. I feel that I am a token in an organization that is supposed to help people who look like me. My colleagues want me there in the office [because] ... it gives them the feeling that they are doing good [work]. I am sure they know I know this about them but they do not care. (interview 12)

Tokenism is also embedded within the social services arena. Black women working inside the social economy often have to tread carefully so as not to offend white colleagues. Scholar and activist hooks writes ([1981] 2015) about the “double bind”: how Black feminists had to downplay the race issue to appease white feminists, and Black women nationalists had to ignore sexism in the Black nationalist movements. Black women thus have had to suppress both racism and sexism to avoid offending those who have power over them. In the case of the social economy, the Black leaders know that white bosses and donors have power over their livelihoods and the monies disbursed to the communities they care about. A Black community leader and activists (who cannot be named) stated, “We are sought out to be closed down or discredited as a way to curb [our] activities” (interview 3). Marcus Garvey, in the same way, was accused of fraudulent crimes by the US government when the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) became one of the largest African-run organizations, with viable collective enterprises (Lewis 1987). People who work in the social economy must tread carefully if they want their funding to continue.

Black people who work in the social economy often feel like they have to stay in the background in order to not offend or threaten white colleagues (interview 7; interview 3). Worrisome racism within the social economy has been occurring. A Facebook post by a Black community activist on 10 May 2017 stated, “I am doing community work for over 10 years and I am still searching for a community where I can unmask and take off some of this armor.” This statement received 70 likes and comments from many racialized and Black people working in the social economy, underlining the racism Black employees experience as they try to develop their own

communities. The lived experience of these Black leaders in the communities reveals that standing out as change-makers can alienate them from their managers and staff, who feel threatened by their experience (interview 2). There is a need within the social economy to take stock of the bias that occurs from within. Although the social economy is trained to empower lower income groups, the same sector can be restrictive and oppressive to the very women of colour who work in these organizations.

6. Concluding Remarks

For too long the Black perspective in the social economy has been ignored. The hubris on the part of “experts” and donors speaks more about their own personal politics than about Black women leaders in the social economy. In the case studies above, the Black women activists know that their personal experience is dismissed and ignored in the third sector. Their knowledge and life experiences of struggle in the community can alienate them from white managers and staff. Black women are not given a voice to speak about the issues that matter to the people they know best. Cultural appropriation has signalled a great need to recognize the work of racialized people and to have them tell their own stories. This paper tries to fill the gap and to give Canadian students new material they can relate to—material that is reflective of a diverse cultural experience in the social economy.

Opening up how we tell stories and pursuing hard-to-reach institutions are ways of finding the thousands of African-Canadians and other racialized Canadians who participate and work in the third sector. This paper sheds light on a few of the Black women leading and managing small and large non-profit organizations, social enterprises, and community organizations in the Greater Toronto area. In my interviews, I found that their focus is to 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. African-Canadians and other racially marginalized Canadians know that “another world is possible,” one that is inclusive, but in order to live and do business in an inhospitable society, they retreat in practical ways, often to informal co-operatives that are hidden from view. Application of 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 (hooks [1981] 2015; Wane, Deliovsky, and Lawson 2002; Hill Collins 2000). This lived experience of Black women in the social economy has been shaped by the very communities they come from.

The social economy organizations run by racialized Canadian women who have lived experience and are engaged in radical conscious work are trying to bring social

change; however, they run into obstacles in doing their jobs. They encounter all kinds of micro-aggressions within the sector; and they must figure out ways to cope when they do not receive the funding they need to become financially viable. In each of the cases considered in this article, the women demonstrate that they are reaching thousands of marginalized and racialized Canadians to make Canada a better place. It is hoped that this paper serves as a springboard to develop a body of literature that speaks to the Black experience in the Canadian social economy. It is heartening to witness the ways in which African-Canadians in the social economy continue to quietly carry out their work and develop culturally appropriate programs that they believe can uplift the lives of excluded people.

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NOTES

I would like to thank the women in this paper for the time they took out of their busy lives to speak to me about the inspiring work they do every day. I dedicate this paper to Ekua Walcott, who devoted her life to community development among African-Canadians. A number of other community experts also talked to me about the Canadian social economy, and I have protected them without revealing their names for a number of reasons. My colleagues at York University such as Miriam Smith, Carl James, and Michele Johnson have been very supportive of my work. York's TD Community Engagement Centre was a wonderful hub for meeting community partners interested in experiential education. I thank Joseph Mensah at York University who gave this paper a thorough read and made many important suggestions. I am thankful for my BUSO students who insisted I write a paper about racialized Canadian women in the social economy field so this knowledge can be shared. Sanjukta Chaudhuri of the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire provided superb feedback on the organization of the paper. Colette Stoeber my trusted proofreader did a very good job. I am also grateful for the advice from the editors of the journal and the anonymous reviewers who gave constructive critiques. This work was generously funded by the Insight Development (IDG) program at the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for the project titled "African Origins in the Social Economy."

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

1. Ongoing interviews and discussions since 2013 with five non-profit leaders: Lorraine Anderson, Notisha Massaquoi, Sharon Shelton, Ginelle Skerritt, and Ekua Walcott.
2. Interview, City of Toronto official, 22 January 2015.
3. Interview, Scarborough-based non-profit, 4 February 2015 (details withheld).

4. Interview, Jane / Finch Family Community Centre, 27 February 2015 (details withheld).
5. Interview, Ryan Locke, Social Enterprise Development Fund (government official), Toronto, 7 April 2015.
6. Interview, Jo Reynolds, senior manager at MaRS Discovery District, Toronto, 18 March 2015.
7. Interview, Black female activist, Toronto, 28 July 2015 (details withheld).
8. Interview, Black farmers co-operative in Toronto, 25 August 2015 (details withheld).
9. Interview in Toronto with a Black male non-profit professional, October 2015 (all details withheld on purpose).
10. Interviews with a Black-owned food co-op in the city, name withheld, several times in 2015 and 2016.
11. Interview, Black activist, Scarborough, Toronto, 26 January 2016 (name withheld).
12. Interview, Black female front-line community worker, Toronto, 26 April 2016 (name withheld).
13. Interview, Notisha Massaquoi, executive director of a non-profit organization, Toronto, 11 May 2016.
14. Interview, Mervyn Weekes, head of UNIA–Montreal branch in Little Burgundy, Montreal, 17 June 2016 and 31 August 2017.

NOTES

1. I use the terms African-Canadians and Black Canadians to speak to the various cultural groups who identify as African descended peoples. Joseph Mensah (2010) also gives a good explanation of his use of the term in his book *Black Canadians*.
2. In the just-released (in early 2018) second edition, Quarter, Mook, and Armstrong refer to Hossein's work on the Black social economy and the idea that racialized people active in the social economy is slowly taking shape in the Canadian consciousness.
3. One of the subjects, Ekua Walcott, executive director of the Harriet Tubman Community Organization, passed away 26 February 2017, before this paper could be published.
4. I presented this new project at the Global Garveyism symposium held in Richmond, Virginia, on 23 April 2016.
5. Books that give an overview of the social economy include [Bridge, Murtagh, and O'Neil \(2009\)](#) and [Quarter, Mook, and Armstrong \(2009\)](#). The latter is focused on the social economy in Canada.
6. Her name is withheld, and she is not one of the five women named in this study.
7. This paper was written before Ekua Walcott's passing in 2017.

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