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(Re)claiming an activist identity as criticalmathematics educators: addressing anti-black racism because #BlackLivesMatter

Reclamando una identidad activista como educadores matemáticos críticos: Encarando el racismo anti-negro porque #BlackLivesMatter

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Abstract

In the 8th annual meeting of the International Mathematics Education and Society (MES-8), Martin (2015) asked the critical question, “where does critical mathematics education stand, and demonstrate unequivocal action, against anti-black racism, racial terror, and global white supremacy?” This question marked a call to action for criticalmathematics educators to think not only about the liberatory and emancipatory possibilities of mathematics education, but to specifically address race and racism more explicitly as a field. Using Powell’s (2012) “futuristic definition” of a criticalmathematics educator as mathematician, educator, and activist, the authors argue that while criticalmathematics educators have successfully pushed educators to consider improved pedagogical strategies for greater equity, more social action is needed to fight racism. The authors advocate for greater attention to Martin’s call to action and the need for criticalmathematics educators to actively and explicitly engage in more unequivocal action against global white supremacy and anti-black racism.

Key-words: Criticalmathematics education; Critical race theory; Antiracism; #BlackLivesMatter; #BlackMindsMatter

Resumen

Durante el 8vo Encuentro Internacional Matemáticas Educación y Sociedad (MES-8), Martin (2015) planteó una cuestión fundamental, “¿En dónde se posiciona la educación matemática crítica y demuestra acción inequívoca contra el racismo anti-negro, el terror racial y la supremacía blanca global? Esta pregunta marca un llamado a la acción para los educadores matemáticos críticos a pensar no solamente en las posibilidades liberadoras y emancipadoras de la educación matemática, sino de abordar de manera más explícita y específicamente la raza y el racismo. Usando la “definición futurista” de Powell (2012) de educador matemático crítico como matemático, educador y activista, las autoras plantean que aunque los educadores matemáticos críticos han conducido exitosamente a que los educadores consideren mejores estrategias pedagógicas para alcanzar una mayor equidad, es necesaria más acción social para luchar contra el racismo. Las autoras abogan por una mayor atención al llamado a la acción que hizo Martin y a la necesidad de que los educadores matemáticos críticos se involucren activa y explícitamente en más acciones inequívocas en contra de la supremacía blanca global y el racismo anti-negro

Palabras Clave: Educación Matemática Crítica; Teoría Racial Crítica; Antiracismo; #BlackLivesMatter; #BlackMindsMatter

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The socio-political context of mathematics and the power of mathematics as a social justice tool has been discussed by many prominent criticalmathematics educators around the world (D'Ambrosio, 2007; Frankenstein, 1983; Gutierrez, 2008; Gutstein, 2012; Leonard, Brooks, Barnes-Johnson & Berry III, 2010; Martin, 2012; Powell, 2012; Skovsmose, 1994; Stinson, 2004). Criticalmathematics Education (CmE) as a field, is deeply committed to critiquing the macro and micro issues that surround inequality in mathematics and schooling. Following the legacy laid by several working groups of criticalmathematics educators, we also use the term “criticalmathematics” as one word to signify the desire that all mathematics be critical (Frankenstein, 2010).

In the 8th annual meeting of the International Mathematics Education and Society (MES-8), Martin (2015) asked the critical question, “where does critical mathematics education stand, and demonstrate unequivocal action, against anti-black racism, racial terror, and global white supremacy?” This question marked a call to action for criticalmathematics educators to think not only about the liberatory and emancipatory possibilities of mathematics or improved curriculum and pedagogy in mathematics education, but to specifically address race and racism more explicitly as a field.

According to Powell (2012, p. 28), the commitment to pedagogic and social action is what defines and distinguishes the work of criticalmathematics educators:

Pedagogic action occurs in and out of school and university classrooms. Social action includes the acts students perform academically and socially, as well as the pedagogic and social acts of their teachers, particularly those who transcend the academy and embrace larger local and international discourses and struggles.

This focus on pedagogic and social action is actualized through the intersecting identities of criticalmathematics educators as mathematicians, educators, and activists (Powell, 2012).

As such, we advocate for criticalmathematics educators to heed Martin's (2015) call and more actively and explicitly take a stand against global white supremacy and engage in more race-based action against anti-black racism. Using critical race theory, we discuss: 1) the ontological obstacles of blackness under systems of global white supremacy; 2) state sanctioned violence against black people and the #BlackLivesMatter movement, 3) the intersecting identities of criticalmathematics educators; 4) white complicity and white ontological privilege; and 5) the future for criticalmathematics educators.

1. CRITICAL RACE THEORY & BLACKNESS AS AN ONTOLOGICAL OBSTACLE

Critical race theory (CRT) is a race-conscious framework that foregrounds race as the central construct for analyzing inequality, human suffering, and oppression. According to Delgado & Stefancic (2001), “critical race theory contains an activist dimension...it not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better” (p.3). Emerging from critical legal studies in the 1970s, CRT made its way to the field of education in the 1990s with Ladson-Billings and Tate’s call for greater theorizing around issues of race in education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Notably, the emergence of CRT in the field of education parallels the work of criticalmathematics educators to more actively stand for social justice and fight against oppressive and dehumanizing structures and practices.

Critical race scholars believe that race is the central structure in society that permeates ideologies, social policy, and legacies of inequality in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In fields of education, CRT scholarship redefines racism as “not the acts of individuals, but the larger, systemic, structural conventions and customs that uphold and sustain oppressive group relationships, status, income, and educational attainment” (Taylor, 2009).The pervasiveness of issues such as inequitable school funding, academic opportunity and achievement gaps, segregation in schools, the implementation of Eurocentric curriculum and assessments, and the school to prison pipeline are all testimony to one of the critical tenets of critical race theory--racism is normalized in society--and it has devastating implications in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

While CRT scholars research a myriad of issues in various fields of study and cultural contexts, according to Taylor (2009, p. 4), there are some similarities found in those that use the framework:

It’s scholarship is... marked by a number of specific insights and observations, including society’s acceptance of racism as ordinary, the phenomenon of white’s allowing black progress when it also promotes their interests (interest convergence), the importance of understanding the historic effects of European colonialism, and the

preference of the experiences of oppressed peoples (narrative) over the “objective” opinions of whites.

These insights mark many of the central tenets of CRT. The normalcy of racism is highlighted by many CRT scholars because it is supported by liberalism and hinders many people from identifying institutional and structural racism in society. Perhaps the lack of outrage and stance against anti-Black racism that Martin (2015) questioned is that many criticalmathematics educators don't identify issues as racist, but instead see problems of inequality primarily through the lens of class. Ernest (2010, p. 16), grounds much of his discussions of structural inequality from a class-based perspective:

School education still serves as a powerful fractional distillation device that separates off different sectors of the population for different rewards. The most decisive factor determining such rewards remains social class or socio-economic status. Students emerge from this distillation device with different levels of cultural capital, and this is convertible into life chances. CmE has the overriding aim of combating these divisive, class-reproductive effects. Nevertheless, all of us in education are in some way complicit with the system that distributes prizes along the lines of cultural capital.

Stephen Haymes (2002) argues that the class analysis fails Black people because the problem of Black lives is one of ontology. It is “through race and therefore as ‘black people’ ” that class is experienced in an anti-black racist society (p. 155). An over reliance on a class analysis “neglects the ontological content of racist epistemologies and beliefs, a content that questions the worth of a people, causing them to justify their existence as human beings on a daily basis” (p. 152). In other words, the problems in education and society are larger than merely systems of rewards and “prizes” distributed as a result of cultural capital.

For Black people, the problem is rooted in a larger ontological issue of being accepted as human. Historically, Black people were not considered human beings but animals, heathens and mere property, with the raping of Black women considered trespassing. From a CRT perspective, the historical significance of race and the process of racialization links contemporary racial inequality with past historical practices (Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011). “The memory of chattel slavery functions by giving historical particularity to the lived context or situation of existence of African American workers in a racist society that considers them ‘black’ ” (Haymes, 2002, p. 156). As such, it is

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problematic when Freire and other critical theorist, and by extension criticalmathematics educators, point to the “working class” as one group with a “universal and transcendental quality, meaning in part that it is beyond any particular lived context or situation of existence.” (Haymes, 2002, p. 156). For Black people, no other major identity marker, such as class, gender, or ability, transcends race as a more defining part of one’s identity.

Mills (1997, 1998) also discusses the ontological significance of blackness born out of European expansionism, or global white supremacy over the last 500 years. The “racial contract” developed from colonialism has determined who is white and non-white, who is human or a full-person, and who is non-human or a sub-person (Mills, 1997). This “contract” has influenced white moral theory and white moral psychology to justify violence and impose a system of white supremacy on those determined to be non-white across the globe. Examples of racial categorization and privilege and oppression related to whiteness and blackness in Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean are plentiful (Rahier, 1999; Sawyer & Paschel, 2007; Telles, 2004; Hernández, 2013).

The “blanqueamiento” policies and practices implemented to whiten the population in Brazil and other Latin American countries, speaks to the historical ontological problem of blackness under colonialism and white supremacy (Jones-de Oliveira, 2003; Rahier, 1999). Black lives, through social, political, and economic whitening policies across Latin America have been targets of state-sanctioned violence to dilute “undesirable” blackness for many years. Hernández (2013) dispels the myth of racial innocence in Latin America and discusses how “customary laws” have also regulated race and erected racial hierarchies that have impact over 150 million Black-Latinos.

The reality of race as the major determining identity marker for Black people in America is evidenced in the 25-year longitudinal study in Baltimore, MD from Alexander, Entwisle & Olson (2014). Alexander and his colleagues followed 800 children in 20 Baltimore public schools for over 25 years, from the time they entered first grade until they were into their thirties. Half of the families were low-income, with most parents not attaining a high school diploma, and 40% of the low-income families were white. This longitudinal study was unique because most urban studies have synonymously positioned “urban” with communities of color, even though white urban poor is more common than not. The results

of this study provide further evidence that institutional and structural race-based discrimination and privilege impacted all spheres of life (Alexander & Olson, 2014, p. 1):

But the consequences have been especially dire for AfricanAmericans. As young adults, AfricanAmerican men had fared much worse than whites in the job market, even though they and their white counterparts had about the same levels of education and the whites reported higher rates of marijuana and heavy drug use and binge drinking. ...It fits a broader pattern evident as far back as high school: About one-fifth of white men who grew up in disadvantaged families had afterschool and summer jobs in these industries important experience that can help secure a fulltime job while not a single AfricanAmerican person did.

The central role that race plays in the lives of Black people, including the categorical advantage that whiteness offers despite other disadvantages (e.g., poverty) is clear. Racism then must be understood as an ontological problem rather than merely just a matter of individual acts. Thus in order to address racism, we must be willing to concede the unique ontological obstacles that people of the African diaspora face. That is, Black people's humanity, not just their beliefs or perspectives, is constantly called into question, challenged and attempted to be negated. Philosopher George Yancy (2013) asked the question, "what does it say about America when to be black is the ontological crime, a crime of simply being?" This ontological problem, and the reality of the legacy of racism in America, is what has led to the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the United States. The point then is that to be anti-racist we must affirm that Black peoples lives matter through a rehumanization of a system that seeks to do just the opposite.

2. #BLACKLIVESMATTER

The #BlackLivesMatter movement in the United States began in 2012 as a response to a long legacy of anti-black racism, white supremacy, and oppression. Black Lives Matter founders explain the movement on their website (About Black Lives Matter, n.d.):

When we say Black Lives Matter, we are broadening the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state. We are talking about the ways in which Black lives are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. ...We affirm our contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression. ...The call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation.

Groves Price, P., & Moore, R. (2016). (Re)claiming an activist identity as criticalmathematics educators: addressing anti-black racism because #BlackLivesMatter. *Revista Latinoamericana de Etnomatemática*, 9(3), 77-98.

This highly decentralized and grassroots movement, founded by Black queer women, recognizes that race, or Blackness, is central to the subordination of Black people of all intersecting identities. Similar to Black liberation movements of the past, they are rooted in the struggle for human rights and dignity. Their proclamation that “Black lives matter” brings attention to the normalcy of institutional and structural racism in American society that clearly sends the message that Black lives do not matter. Because if Black lives did matter, state sanctioned violence against Black people, mass incarceration, and policies and practices that disproportionately negatively affect Black communities and Black people would not be the reality of the Black experience.

The #BlackLivesMatter movement is an “ideological and political intervention” that is guided by principles of inclusion and restorative justice to repair the harm done in Black communities through a collaborative process that is restorative, and not depleting (Guiding Principles of Black Lives Matter, n.d.). At the heart of the movement, is a desire to improve Black conditions by addressing the universal problem facing humankind, survival with dignity (D’Ambrosio, 2007). There are strong parallels in the commitments to improving the human condition and explicitly working against dehumanizing institutions and structures in both #BlackLivesMatter and the intersecting identities of criticalmathematics educators. While #BlackLivesMatter does not explicitly name education as one of the major areas of focus, the editors of *Rethinking Schools* (2015), a coalition of anti-racist teachers and educators, connect education to the larger Black Lives Matter movement:

Black Lives Matter doesn’t just mean Black people don’t want to be shot down in the streets by unaccountable police. As anti-racist teachers and students, we need to expand the slogan to include:

- Stop closing schools in Black neighborhoods.
- Fund schools equitably.
- Support African American studies programs and substantive multicultural curriculum.

When activists staged a Black Lives Matter die-in in Detroit last December, Will Daniels, from United Students Against Sweatshops, told the Nation: ‘As a Black student, my rationale for doing the die-in was that structural racism causes not only

police brutality, but also the starving of majority Black schools. This is a subtler form of violence.’

From a CRT perspective, the normalcy of racism in society prevents us from easily recognizing that school closures are part of a larger legacy of divestment of resources from Black communities to white ones under the guise of cost effective efficiency--one of the dangers that Ernest (2010) identified in being a society obsessed with mathematical and computational thinking. Because racism is endemic, we fail to see that school funding formulas are inherently racist because they are grounded in “colorblind” policies that fail to acknowledge the racism that results in poverty, segregated neighborhoods, and inequitable tax burdens. In schools, we fail to acknowledge that the majority of curriculum and assessment is grounded in Eurocentric knowledge, values, and ways of being because the hidden and explicit curriculum is how we have schooled children under colonialism. All of these taken-for-granted, aptly pointed out by student Will Daniels in the quote above, are also forms of state sanctioned violence, but is rarely viewed as such.

Returning to Martin’s (2015) plea, perhaps one of the reasons that critical mathematics educators haven’t taken a stand specifically against anti-black racism is because many don’t “see” the current conditions facing Black communities as new, outrageous, or perhaps even racist. Just as subtle forms of violence in Black communities as mentioned above are readily accepted by the general public, so too are the realities of overt violence. Even with mathematical evidence, such as the recent Propublica (Gabrielson, Jones & Sagara, 2014) report that found that in America “Blacks age 15-19 were killed at a rate of 31.17 per million while just 1.47 per million white males in that age range died at the hands of the police,” it is difficult for mainstream white Americans to label and address these disparities as institutional racism. While the disproportionate violence Black men and boys in America face at the hands of the police is appalling, in Brazil, state-sanctioned violence against Afro-Brazilians is astronomical and commonly referred to as “O genocídio contra o povo negro” or “genocide against black people” (Freelon, 2016). According to the the Amnesty International report “You killed my son: killings by military police in Rio de Janeiro (2015), some key facts found include:

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- In 2012 more than 50% of homicide victims were aged between 15 and 29, and 77% of them were black.
- 8,471 cases of killings by police officers on duty were registered in the State of Rio de Janeiro, including 5,132 in the city of Rio de Janeiro between 2005 and 2014.
- When reviewing the status of all 220 investigations of police killings opened in 2011 in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Amnesty International found that after four years, only one case led to a police officer being charged. As of April 2015, 183 investigations were still open.

Between the Brazilian state and federal police violence, they have killed more Brazilians in the last five years (11,197) than did all U.S. police combined in the last 30 (11,090) (Associated Press, 2014). The predominant victims of Brazilian police violence are Black people. The Amnesty International (2016) report on Brazil shows that a large number of the police killings are also against black boys, with 10 and 13 year old children being shot down in police operations or in front of their homes. Protest movements similar to #BlackLivesMatter in Brazil have been active for many years. Movimento Negro has been protesting against state-sponsored violence against young black men since the 1970s and now Reajá ou Será Morto (React or Be Killed) is fighting against police violence and the genocide of black people (Freelon, 2016).

Protests against state sanctioned violence against black bodies is not limited to the United States, or Brazil. There is an international solidarity for #BlackLivesMatter that has grown across Latin America because of the ontological problems of blackness under global white supremacy. Photos on Twitter under #blacklivesmatter include Afro-Colombian residents in photos with hands raised in the air holding signs that read “Buenaventura=Ferguson=NYC” (Cohen, 2014). Afro-Colombian journalist of the year, Javier Ortiz has remarked that while international solidarity with Afro-Colombian struggles through #BlackLivesMatter is encouraging, he wishes “commitments to action could be built on something other than Black bodies. It seems like solidarity only comes to us after horror. To exist, you have to have suffered” (Cohen, 2014). Again, the ontological crime of “being” black, of existing, is a reality not just of the United States, but of the world.

The #BlackLivesMatter movement is a reminder that the threats to survival with dignity for Black communities is about structural racism--not interpersonal racism or bias that can be

fixed with diversity or cultural competency training. Alicia Garza, one of the founders of #BlackLivesMatter says (Herstory Black Lives Matter, n.d.):

When we say Black Lives Matter, we are talking about the ways in which Black people are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. ...It is an acknowledgment that one million Black people are locked in cages in this country. ...It is an acknowledgment that Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families. ...#BlackLivesMatter doesn't mean your life isn't important—it means that Black lives, which are seen as without value within White supremacy, are important to your liberation. Given the disproportionate impact state violence has on Black lives, we understand that when Black people in this country get free, the benefits will be wide-reaching and transformative for society as a whole.

Of significance here is the concept that Black liberation is connected to the liberation of everyone. Because of this, #BlackLivesMatter has created spaces for alliances and coalitions to work together to end White supremacy. Ultimately, people from different backgrounds and epistemologies must engage to solve large intersectional structural problems.

3. IDENTITIES OF CRITICALMATHEMATICS EDUCATORS

Criticalmathematics educators are committed to addressing systemic injustice, and the field of CmE has evolved over the last several decades within different contextual climates. As early as the 1950s, African mathematicians expressed growing concerns about the devastating impact of colonialism, neocolonialism, and colonial disruption of Africa's scientific development (Powell, 2012). The 1970s marked a shift in focus from content and programs in mathematics to the increasingly important social and political factors affecting education. In the late 1970s and 1980s, Alan Bishop (1988) challenged the notion of culture-free and value-free mathematics and Brazilian mathematician and educator Ubiratan D'Ambrosio (1985) introduced ethnomathematics, pushing math educators to think more about the connections between math and culture. Conversations among mathematicians and mathematics educators included more critical analyses of Eurocentrism in mathematics and a deeper acknowledgement of the history and contributions of non-Western mathematical systems and epistemologies.

The 1990s also saw the formation of the Criticalmathematics Educators Group (CmEG), where critical mathematics was replaced with one word, criticalmathematics, to signify the

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hope that one day all of mathematics education would be critical (Frankenstein, 2010). A more formalized characterization of a criticalmathematics educator was developed, taking a three-pronged view of a criticalmathematics educator as a mathematician, an educator and an activist (Powell, 2012).

As **mathematicians**, criticalmathematics educators view mathematics as a human construction. Drawing from the work of Bishop (1988), and other math philosophers who understand mathematics as a cultural product, mathematics is viewed as only one way to understand the world. Thus, the work of ethnomathematicians in providing multiple cultural histories and applications of mathematics is central to the more “critical” epistemological work in math education. To this end, mathematics is one vehicle to eradicate Eurocentric models of knowledge, including the “historiography which excluded and distorted, marginalized and trivialized the contributions of women and men from all the world’s cultures to what was then considered ‘academic’ mathematics” (Powell, 2012, p. 26). While some criticalmathematics educators have highlighted the negative impact that epistemological and philosophical misconceptions of mathematics can have in the teaching and learning of mathematics, we believe a more explicit acknowledgement of race is warranted, particularly in light of the ontological problems associated with blackness under systems of white supremacy (Ernest, 1991, 1995, 1998; Skovsmose, 1994; Powell & Frankenstein, 1997).

As **educators**, criticalmathematics educators believe it is their responsibility as teachers to understand the logic and multiple ways of knowing of people, since mathematics is understood as a human construction and only way one to understand the world. Rejecting a mind-body dichotomy, they recognize that phenomena such as math anxiety is real and that learning and achievement problems are due to a myriad of socio-cultural and motivational issues, not cognitive deficits. Believing in Frankenstein’s (1983) Freirean dialogical approach to mathematics, teachers are encouraged to listen well, maintain high expectations of students as co-investigators, and see students as active participants in the educational dialogue (Powell, 2012). Without a doubt, many criticalmathematics educators have dedicated their careers as educators to developing powerful curriculum to engage historically marginalized students in mathematics for greater justice (Gutstein, 2003, 2007;

Leonard et al., 2010; Esmonde & Caswell, 2010). Others have focused on the importance of pedagogical strategies to ensure that mathematics instruction is culturally responsive and accessible to students of diverse backgrounds (Greer, Mukhopadhyay, Powell, & Nelson-Barber, 2009). It is clear that in CmE, the educator identity has been embraced, and historically marginalized students have benefitted from the work that transforms curriculum and pedagogy to counter the dominant ideologies that position them as incapable of mathematics success. While pedagogical activism cannot be underestimated, we believe that Martin's (2015) call to action is for greater activism to dismantle systems of white supremacy that support anti-black racism, something criticalmathematics educators can enact as a part of their activist identity.

As **activists**, criticalmathematics educators are to maintain a coherent set of critical commitments to social justice. It is not enough for teachers to have good intentions. Criticalmathematics educators are “actively anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti- all the other dehumanizing totalitarian institutional structures and attitudes, and they work with themselves, their mathematics classes and their colleagues to uncover, name, and change those conditions” (Powell, 2012, p. 27). In CmE, dehumanization is a history, the result of an unjust order, not a destiny. Because of the recognition of the role of society and structures in mathematics education, criticalmathematics educators are open to varieties of critical perspectives--feminist, Marxist, Freirean, etc-- and adhere to the notion that no definition of CmE is static or complete. We contend that Critical Race Theory should be utilized more by criticalmathematics educators, to uncover, name and change anti-black racism and systems of white supremacy. Thus, a commitment to social justice requires a revisiting how the three intersecting identities of criticalmathematics educators play out in actions against anti-black racism.

In our estimation, many criticalmathematics educators have embodied the identity of educator, and to a lesser extent mathematician, and even less that of activist. We surmise that for the same reasons that structural inequality and racism is difficult to address in society, so too is the case with mathematics and mathematics educators. Attending to what one can more easily implement via curriculum and pedagogy is far more satisfying than engaging in the hard philosophical and reflective work required to critique and find

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solutions to the ontological, epistemological and structural obstacles that systematically oppress certain segments of our society. The “critical” of criticalmathematics education, however, is particularly positioned to “challenge and to change taken-for-granted ideas and conditions of life so as to improve social life” (Powell, 2012, p. 25). This requires that criticalmathematics educators commit to both pedagogic and social action. Pedagogic action and social action occurs in and out of school settings to include the acts students and teachers perform academically and socially, particularly in connection to larger local and international discourses and struggles (Powell, 2012). In other words, a central component of the “critical” for criticalmathematics educators must be tethered to the activism of dismantling systems of oppression and in particular, global white supremacy.

There are many criticalmathematics educators that embrace the educator and activist identities and focus on supporting students to create counternarratives to oppressive dominant ideological master narratives (Martin, 2000, 2012). Interrogating school based mathematical practices, stereotypes, agency, voice, achievement, persistence, and participation are key themes in this research (Martin, 2007; Nasir, 2013; Steele, 1997). Some scholars have also advanced the notion of improving social life to include not only learning mathematics to counter dominant ideological positions, but to utilize mathematics to change social conditions and life. Borrowing from Freire’s (1970) notion of reading and writing the world, Eric Gutstein (2012) applies this idea specifically to mathematics where students can use “mathematics as a weapon in the struggle” (p. 23). Reading the word and the world is about redefining notions of literacy to include not just the reading of text (word), but “the unstated dominant ideologies hidden between the sentences as well” (Kinchloe, 2008, p. 16). When students learn to read the world and the word, they question knowledge and the knowledge production process and recognize that they have the power to be change agents in the world around them (Price & Mencke, 2013). Gutstein (2012) explains that through mathematics education, students need to be prepared to investigate and critique injustice, as well as take action against oppressive structures and actions.

While all of this important scholarship has offered the field great curricular and pedagogical recommendations to increase access and success in mathematics for historically marginalized students, we believe that more can be done, specifically with

regards to addressing anti-black racism. Criticalmathematics educators, because of their commitments to social justice pedagogy, must embody all three identities and consider the moral responsibility of their work to fight global white supremacy.

The question that Martin (2015) posed at MES-8 then remains. Where is the moral outrage and a collective stand from criticalmathematics educators against the current threats to the human condition, primarily the Black human condition? It is helpful for criticalmathematics educators to consider Applebaum's (2010) notion of white complicity and white moral responsibility as a means to productively participate in social justice education. Her approach to addressing white complicity is grounded in white moral responsibility, but is also about engaging in constant vigilance against systems of white supremacy and listening to the voices of people of color for alliance identities.

4. WHITE COMPLICITY, AND WHITENESS AS AN ONTOLOGICAL PRIVILEGE

Despite the high profile killings of Black children and men since the #BlackLivesMatter movement emerged, the (mostly white) education community has remained eerily silent on what is now called the “school to grave pipeline” (Rethinking Schools, 2015). Applebaum (2010) speaks of this silence on matters of race in her conceptualization of “the white complicity claim.” This claim implies that whites must acknowledge their participation in and the benefits of their whiteness from systemic racial injustice. Applebaum (2010, p. 179) writes:

The white complicity claim maintains that all whites, by virtue of systemic white privilege that is inseparable from white ways of being, are implicated in the production and reproductions of systemic racial injustice. Uncovering systemic white ignorance and white denials of complicity that are so prevalent in everyday white discourse and practices and that protect white moral innocence facilitates our understanding of the connection between systemic benefit and the maintenance of the racial system. ...attempts to causally connect benefit and perpetuation of unjust systems do not adequately acknowledge the type of responsibility involved in white complicity. It is important to rearticulate notions of white responsibility in order for white people to be able to acknowledge their white complicity and to form alliances with others to challenge systemic racial injustice.

White complicity is the foundation for white moral responsibility. Consistent with CRT's conceptualization of racism as systemic and institutionalized rather than only acts

Groves Price, P., & Moore, R. (2016). (Re)claiming an activist identity as critical mathematics educators: addressing anti-black racism because #BlackLivesMatter. *Revista Latinoamericana de Etnomatemática*, 9(3), 77-98.

committed by individuals, white complicity requires an ontological consideration of the “...ways in which power circulates through all white bodies in ways that make them *directly* complicit for contributing to the perpetuation of a system that they did not, as individuals, create” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 13). In order to maintain the condition for power, norms “must be reiterated; the subject is precisely the site of such reiteration [thus] one’s ‘being’ as a subject is necessarily complicit in the perpetuation of such norms. As a result, individuals can be “*unwittingly* complicit in sustaining hegemonic social structures” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 59). Thus white complicity is not simply a matter of “doing” but of “being.” Ultimately, just as “being” Black is an ontological obstacle for Black people, being White is an ontological privilege for White people.

While there are growing lists of everyday taken for granted things that one cannot do while Black in America (such as be a 13 year old boy or drink iced tea in a parking lot), Whites experience “white ontological expansiveness” or the tendency to “act and think as if all spaces--whether geographical, psychical, linguistic, economic, spiritual, bodily or otherwise--are or should be available for them to move in and out of as they wish (Williams, 2014; Applebaum, 2010, p. 16). From a critical race theory perspective, this is the embodiment of “whiteness as property” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998). It is difficult for many to accept that all whites, by virtue of systemic white supremacy (which includes white epistemologies and ontology) are implicated in the production and reproduction of systemic racial injustice.

White moral responsibility rejects the precondition of a causal connection in order to determine fault and blame because structural injustice results from the “actions of a multitude of persons along with policies that normalize and rationalize such actions” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 158). White moral responsibility also rejects intentionality as white complicity usually “...often involves unintentional and non-volitional participation in a system” through white habits and practices, as well as systemic benefits (Applebaum, 2010, p. 147).

As white complicity necessitates moral responsibility, it leaves individuals with opportunities for change and disruption of systems of power. If the privileged take responsibility for their role in the perpetuation of systemic injustice and form political

coalitions with the marginalized, it is important that they understand white complicity and white moral responsibility.

5. WHAT NEXT FOR CRITICALMATHEMATICS EDUCATORS?

We return now to Martin's (2015) call to action that specifically asks criticalmathematics educators to more critically embody the activist identity and take a stand and action against anti-black racism, racial terror, and global white supremacy. State sanctioned violence and mass incarceration against Black bodies, police brutality, environmental racism, and the degradation of urban communities and schools all point to significant human rights struggles tethered to the Black experience across the globe. We agree with Martin that criticalmathematics educators must take greater action in the area of race to improve the human condition.

Embracing the activist role as a collective is not new to criticalmathematics educators. For example, in Quebec City in 1992 at ICME-7 educators actively sought to address the crisis in Somalia. Powell (2012, p. 29) writes:

During the meeting [the special one-day meeting of ICM-7], many individuals found it difficult to discuss curricular issues without attending to the crisis in Somalia, a crisis that prevented any form of education for the majority of people. We focused on immediate actions that CmEG could take relevant to ICME-7. We developed a statement noting that the reported number of lives lost in Somalia exceeded the population of Quebec City and, further, that a congress like ICME-7 had a responsibility to speak out on conditions that denied people the fundamental necessities required to sustain life, necessities that are prerequisite for participating in mathematics education. Finally, through a petition, we urged officials of the Congress to express the sentiment of of ICME-7 participants to the secretary general of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, that the UN take immediate action to end this tragic situation. We submitted our statement, endorsed by close to three hundred participants, to officials of ICME-7. As the closing session of ICME-7, the president of ICMI [International Commission on Mathematics Instruction], Miguel de Guzman, read our statement and invited others to sign it, which prompted hundreds of additional signatures. The executive of ICME forwarded the signed petition, containing 503 signatures, and the statement to the UN Secretary General on 31 August 1992.

This action from an international coalition represents taking a stand in support of thousands of Somalis who experienced starvation, death, famine, and disease during a time of great civil unrest. In this case, criticalmathematics educators embraced the activist role to speak out against grave human rights violations, recognizing that life and basic human needs were

Groves Price, P., & Moore, R. (2016). (Re)claiming an activist identity as criticalmathematics educators: addressing anti-black racism because #BlackLivesMatter. *Revista Latinoamericana de Etnomatemática*, 9(3), 77-98.

a prerequisite for participation in education or mathematics. This declaration, however, was not a statement on race, but rather one centered on the concern for basic human rights and dignity.

Far too few criticalmathematics scholars have explicitly addressed the dire circumstances that Black students face, in mathematics education or in life. For example, a brief systematic search of literature in Ebsco (ERIC, Education Full Text, Academic Search Complete) and Proquest (Social Science Articles) using search terms, “Critical Math*” OR “Critical Math* Education” OR “Criticalmath*” OR “Criticalmath* Education,” results in 347 articles (duplicates removed), only 6 of which explicitly use “race” or “of color” in their titles, implying the subject under study. It is our hope that this trend will shift in the near future. Critical race theorists in education proclaim that “if racial equality in education is genuinely valued then the control and power that whites currently hold must be addressed” (Zamudio et. al, 2011, p.10).

In this article we have echoed Martin’s (2015) call for criticalmathematics educators to take an unequivocal stand against white supremacy, and anti-black racism. Some of this work might include working in greater solidarity with Black liberation movements such as #BlackLivesMatter or other movements for racial justice within the education community. (Re)claiming the activist identity in criticalmathematics education for racial justice requires intentionality in pedagogical and social action.

There are pockets of activism in solidarity with #BlacklivesMatter in some schools in America. For example, in an elementary school in Seattle, WA, teachers made t-shirts that read “Black Lives Matter, We Stand Together” to start conversations in school and in the community about race because according to one teacher, “it is part of the oppression, the systemic oppression that continues on” (Swaby, 2016). A third grade teacher remarked, “To be silent would be almost unforgivable, and I think we have been silent for almost too long” (Swaby, 2016). The teachers planned to wear their shirts at the annual school event Black Men United to Change the Narrative, where 100 Black men from the community, including prominent leaders, greet students during morning drop off to dispel many of the negative stereotypes of Black men. While the Seattle Public School District fully supported the teachers in their activism, they were forced to cancel the event due to “security threats”

received by the school (Swaby, 2016; Chasmar, 2016). Again, the ontological obstacle of 100 Black men “being” present to welcome students to school with teachers taking a stand in solidarity against anti-Black racism was thwarted by the threat of white violence. The teachers have been criticized for their activist stance from people who have expressed that kids “are there for academics and math, they’re not there to learn the politics of the day” (Mandel, 2016). The teachers, however, are standing their ground in solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the 200 Black students in their school, to acknowledge that their lives matter and name institutional racism.

If criticalmathematics educators do not embrace their activist identity, specifically taking a stand against anti-black racism and global white supremacy, the genocide of Black students will leave little reason to discuss the pedagogical and epistemological obstacles in the teaching and learning of mathematics. Since part of the educator identity for criticalmathematics educators is a rejection of the mind-body dichotomy, acknowledging that Black lives matter is an important precursor to the ability to teach Black minds. And just as criticalmathematics educators felt a responsibility to speak out about the crisis in Somalia, seeing certain life-sustaining conditions as a prerequisite for participation in mathematics education, criticalmathematics educators must also speak out now about the crisis for Black people around the world, as being alive is a necessity for participation in mathematics education. Taylor (2009) says, “it is the refusal to remain silent, and and of itself, that gives strength and empowerment in a society determined to cling to established habits of repression” (p. 12). According to the anti-racist educators from Rethinking Schools (2015), being an effective teacher in today’s society requires taking the Black Lives Matter movement seriously, as it is also an acknowledgement that Black students matter and the conditions that are a threat to their humanity must be addressed.

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