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## Who Holds the Knife

**Naiomi M. Perera**

### **Abstract**

Ma'Khia Bryant was killed by a police officer on April 20, 2021, at the age of 16. Ma'Khia held a knife, as the officer pointed his gun and fired four shots. Police officers across the globe have taken the lives of many since, and if the current "justice" system is not transformed, they will continue to take many more. Through the following poem, I ask the reader to reflect on the violence and collective suffering that is perpetrated through state power and policing. I ask them to look upon the world through the lens of Foucault's biopolitics and Mbembe's necropolitics, to recognize the insignificance of Ma'Khia's knife within a social order that marks us all as either deserving of life or deserving of death. By including the voice of white supremacist carcerality within my account, I encourage readers to consider how they hold this knife; that is, how they help to fix this violent, punitive system in place. Most importantly, by inviting readers to participate in the healing of collective wounds, I offer an abolitionist call to action. Content warning: this poem contains discussion of state violence, police brutality, and blood.

### **Keywords**

biopolitics, necropolitics, state violence, police abolition, prison abolition

When the cops saw Ma'Khia Bryant, they saw a  
problem to be managed

Well, she should have dropped the knife

When I saw Ma'Khia Bryant, I saw a scared child

When I saw her run Eco Styler gel through her hair  
in a Tik Tok, I saw myself

But my life goes on

Hers gets cut short

Cut out of this world

When state violence takes one of us

The cut hurts us all

The knife sharpens instead of getting dull, and  
moves closer to our throat

Some of us get cut deeper than others

Some find a cut-out where a loved one used to be

They are cut the deepest

These things happen

Why do they happen

Can we stop the bleeding

Can we prevent the cutting

Somebody has to do it

To draw blood

To selectively carve

To cut in the interest of others

To draw out, to extract, to drain

What is the alternative

To triage

To repair

To heal

To move on

I cannot be held responsible for what my ancestors

did

Your ancestors' work is unfinished

Ongoing

My ancestors' work is too

But while we do our work, we bleed

We all bleed

All blood matters

Blood is spilled and we are made to watch

We look upon death, upon murder

Searching for the facts of the matter and finding

our own blood

Who is "we"

Go ahead

Make it about race

Make it about colour

It pours out red

The blood will always be red

It will never be any other colour

Blood can't be blue

And lives can't either

Our bodies alike, our functions at odds

They cut and we bleed

The blood hemorrhages

But it is politics, not biology, that assures its flow

Biopolitics

Necropolitics

Carceral capitalist politics

Don't talk about politics

Then I can hardly speak at all

Find me a subject devoid of politics

An object of truly apolitical speech

Consider what politic apoliticism advances

Please drop it

Please drop the knife

Let it fall

Tend to the wounds

## **Author Biography**

Naiomi Marcia Perera is a Black and South Asian MA student and sociologist at York University who uses she/her pronouns. Her research interests include critical technology studies, race, culture and social regulation. She is currently researching the use of Internet filtering software for the purpose of countering radicalization to violence. She hopes that this research will allow her to develop recommendations for, and additionally, facilitate, the exploration of intervention strategies that do not rely on surveillance and punishment. Naiomi began organizing with the Toronto Prisoners' Rights Project in 2020 and incorporates her abolitionist activism into her thinking and research.