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Is it "bad" kids or "bad" places? Where is all the violence originating from? Youth violence in the City of Toronto

Ardavan Eizadirad

High profile case studies and their meta-narratives: Racialization of bodies and spaces

Various high profile case studies involving youth violence in the City of Toronto resulted in sentimental public outrage and consequentially evoked an institutionalized and systemic response from the government. This part of the article will examine the meta-narratives of these high profile cases and the problematic nature of their narratives and the role they play in perpetuating a racial hierarchy that normalizes and privileges Whiteness and neoliberal ideologies of pathology and individual deficit amongst minoritized and racialized bodies and spaces. The process of racialization and its implications and consequences are discussed, with particular attention given to critical relationships between race, space, and violence amongst urban environments, specifically the severity of the impact on racialized bodies and communities.

Idealistically, youth are expected to gradually transition through the educational system, and in the process become informed and active citizens of society, where they contribute to the maintenance and progression of the state in various forms or ways through acts such as entering the work force, voting, and making informed decisions. Kassimir and Flanagan (2010) pointed out that "youth civic engagement is not only important in itself, but as critical for the economic and social health of local communities and nation-states" (92). As a result, the state and its institutions have a vested interest in investing in the development and civic engagement of youth, but just as importantly to protect them from harm. Kassimir and Flanagan expand on this point by emphasizing that "youth citizenship—observed and expressed as values, attitudes, knowledge, identities, and practices—is seen as having a direct impact on human and social capital and as creating the political conditions within which socioeconomic development is possible" (99). Hence, youth as a social group, are positioned as having a high value for the wellbeing of any nation due to their untapped potential and their expected impact on the economic and political sphere in the near future.

Because youth are seen as a critical asset to the nation, a social group that must be protected by society, youth violence often receives extensive media

coverage especially when the incident involves death of a young person. Media outlets through their narratives attempt to make sense of what took place causing a young person to die. Like a detective that wants to understand the mind of the criminal, particularly the motives behind the crime, media outlets are interested in piecing together a captivating story that can explain why the event took place. In other words, media outlets and their discourses attempts to explain where the violence is originating from and who or what caused it. The problem arises when media outlets have minimal time to gather and access information for a prime time story. As a result, they embark on this "sense-making" journey by weaving selective information from different sources. As the case studies will demonstrate, the media often resorts to filling in the blanks based on biased and distorted assumptions aligned with neoliberal ideologies of pathology and individual deficit that Other racialized bodies and spaces and represent them as inherently violent. This style of story-telling and "sense-making" masks discussions around how economic, material, and social structures contribute to creation and maintenance of poverty, inequality, and violence.

Youth and gun violence became a high priority issue in Toronto in the year 2005 labelled as "Year of the Gun" where "52 of the 78 homicides for the year involved guns" (James 2012, 38). A prominent case that year was the death of White, 15-year-old Jane Creba who was shot and killed by a stray bullet on a busy downtown street outside of Eaton Centre Shopping Mall on December 26 while out shopping with her sister on Boxing Day. The killing of Jane Creba received prime time and extensive media coverage. What became known of the victim was that she was a well-liked grade ten student who attended Riverdale Collegiate, located within a predominantly Eurocentric Danforth neighborhood (Pazzano 2010). In contrast, what became known of the perpetrators is that they were rival gang members from the nearby "high priority" Regent Park neighborhood, a government housing neighborhood associated with high poverty and crime rates mostly occupied by immigrants and racialized individuals (Small 2010; Jeffords 2014).

Media outlets began weaving together selective information as a means of putting together a meta-narrative that made "sense" of the violence. In this case, the only thing that made sense was calling the crime "senseless." Considering the information available about the crime, such as the race of victims and perpetrators and the locality of the crime and its proximity to the nearby "high priority" neighborhood, a meta-narrative was constructed that positioned the violence originating from Regent Park and spilling over outside of the neighborhood through violent racialized bodies, leading to the death of Jane Creba (Jeffords 2014). The meta-narrative of the Jane Creba case was saturated with binaries and dichotomized ideologies of "good" and "bad" and "innocent" and "guilty" as a means of telling a story that was captivating and dramatic (Small 2010). As James (2012) points out, "the death

of Jane Creba burst the bubble and comfort that gun violence can be contained within racialized spaces" (39).

The media as a central visual medium largely contributes to the construction and production of dominant narratives where specific social groups are racialized, minoritized, and in the process Othered and proclaimed different from Canadians by constantly being depicted in stereotypical roles such as perpetrators of violence. In the case of Jane Creba, the meta-narratives covering the incident emphasized her race, which ideologically and symbolically equated Whiteness with innocence, while simultaneously constructed an oppositional binary that positioned Blackness as violent and guilty (Small 2010; Gee 2012). These narratives align with and are historically connected to a thick colonizing history of positioning white girls and woman as innocents who need protection at all costs from dangerous and inherently violent Black men (Razack 2002). In these discourses, the intersections of race, space, gender, and sexuality become clear in contributing to perpetuating a narrative that has been historically normalized to construct a racial hierarchy that grants Whiteness superiority.

Visual difference is central to colonial discourse. As Frantz Fanon (1963) states in *Wretched of the Earth*, "the colonial world is a compartmentalized world" and "what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to" (3–5). Fanon argues that race is the prominent factor used to create divisions between and amongst people, originating this practice to the roots of colonization. Dei and Simmons (2010) also emphasize race and its social implications by pointing out that "race is the axis on which all differences rest" (112). Through the production of stereotypical hyper visualizations, the intentionality of "racial" segregation in terms of representation deems itself invisible, making inequitable power relations and racist institutional policies and practices invisible through the promotion of colorblindness. Impartial narratives are represented and misrepresented as objective "truths" for the public's consumption in a manner that sews, fine-tunes, and packages selective information depicting a one-dimensional story contaminated with biased assumptions and neoliberal ideologies and market-driven politics. When these meta-narratives and their ideologies are normalized and accepted as "commonsense," it has implications for racialized bodies and spaces as it hides racism behind institutional masks.

Jane Creba's death sparked outrageous reactions from the media, framing the crime as "senseless," and making the inference that the entire City of Toronto was no longer safe. This contributed to creating fear in the public, making people conscious of the possibility that anyone can get shot by a stray bullet while going about their everyday business. As a result, pressure was placed on the government, particularly the mayor and the police task force, to find the perpetrators of the crime and hold them accountable, but also to find a way to ensure the citizens of the city that Toronto was still a safe city.

The extensive coverage of the Jane Creba case contributed to making violence and crime one of the priority issues during the then underway 2006 federal election campaign (CBC News 2006).

In early 2006, while the Jane Creba investigation was still on-going and remained a hot topic, funding was approved and given to the Toronto Police Services for the launch of the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS) (Doucette 2012a). The TAVIS initiative involved the allocation of additional police officers "to neighbourhoods experiencing a heightened level of violence using crime trend analysis, occurrence of mapping, and community consultation" (Toronto Police Services 2014). This was a publicity tactic used by the government and the police to comfort all citizens that the city was still safe and that the government was willing to invest in extra precautions to ensure citizens' safety.

What stands out in Jane Creba's case is the effort, time, and resources the police invested and allocated in making an arrest and getting a conviction. The investigation was dubbed "Project Green Apple" based on Creba's favourite fruit and would "involve as many as fifty police officers reviewing 250,000 wiretap calls and hundreds of hours of videotapes" (Small 2010). Simultaneously, the media continuously provided extensive post coverage of the arrests and the outcomes of the trial months and years after the incident. As a result, on June 13, 2006 the Toronto Police conducted multiple raids at fourteen different locations which lead to arresting of six men and two youth, who were later identified as members of two different street gangs (CBC News 2006). By the year 2010, four individuals had been convicted of crimes associated with the death of Jane Creba: two convicted for second-degree murder and another two for manslaughter (O'Toole 2010). What remains perplexing is that how come such amount of effort, time, and resources is not consistently applied to solve all crimes across the city involving youth and guns? Who decides which cases are more important and who counts as a citizen and who does not?

Youth and gun violence once again became a hot topic in Toronto with the death of 15-year-old grade nine student Jordan Manners on 23 May 2007 at C.W. Jefferys Collegiate Institute, a public high school located within the boundaries of the Jane and Finch neighborhood (James 2012, 92). Manners died in the school hallway as a result of a gun shot wound to the chest. This incident was the first of its kind in the City of Toronto where a student had died within a school. According to O'Grady, Parnaby, and Schikschneit (2010), within forty-eight hours narratives within the media began framing the killing as "a tragedy that had its roots in the very nature of Toronto's black, urban 'underclass'" (56). What made the incident more astonishing was that four days later two 17-year-old male students who attended C.W Jeffrys were arrested and charged with first-degree murder (James 2012, 92). The names of the accused were not released to the public because of

the Youth Criminal Justice Act restriction, but the police did indicate that the accused were residents of Jane and Finch (O'Grady et al. 2010, 56). This information was used by media to further stigmatize Jane and Finch by framing it as a dangerous and hopeless neighborhood where anyone at any moment can become a victim of violence, even in sacred places such as schools.

In the case of Jane Creba and Jordan Manners, the "sense-making" meta-narrative positioned the nearby racialized neighbourhoods—respectively Regent Park for the Jane Creba case and Jane and Finch for the Jordan Manners case—as the origin of the violence. Examining these cases in depth, we can begin to name and interconnect how meta-narratives and their dominant discourse of colorblindness and neoliberal ideologies of pathology and deficit highly influence the understanding of a geographical space and what it comes to represent symbolically and ideologically within the dominant gaze. The process of homogenizing a community, based on "ethno-racial" characteristics portrayed through the meta-narratives of the media, serves as the initial step in segregating communities. What pursues is the assigning of meanings based on representations and misrepresentations largely controlled by the media. It is at this stage that dominant discourses, supported by colonizing and White supremacist ideologies, use their power to establish what is "desirable" and what is deemed "undesirable." Consequentially, the media as an extension of the state and its colonizing practices, through its meta-narratives saturated with biased and distorted ideologies, perpetuates stereotypes associating Whiteness with innocence and being Black as inherently violent.

To move the discussion beyond binaries, it is significant to deconstruct spaces from a historical perspective to gain a better understanding of how a specific geographical space gains a reputation and identity. For the sake of this article, we will examine and deconstruct Jane and Finch as a prominent example, because it relates to the case of Jordan Manners, and because Jane and Finch has a reputation as one of Toronto's most dangerous neighborhoods. As Razack (2002) points out, "spatial analysis can serve as a medium to examine how interlocking systems of domination and oppression operate dynamically and simultaneously, co-constituting one another through each other" (16). It is through such vantage point that the myth of space as naturally evolving is debunked and one can transition to view racialized spaces such as "high priority" neighborhoods as a product socially, culturally, and politically produced within a web of unequal power relations benefiting colonizers at the expense of oppression for the colonized.

Spatial analysis as a tool functions to denaturalize and disrupt what often is accepted as "the way things have always been" through contextualization and historicizing, also known as "unmapping." Razack (2002) point out in *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmappng a White Settler Society* that "unmapping is intended to undermine the idea of white settler innocence—the notion that

European settlers merely settled and developed the land—and to uncover the ideologies and practices of conquest and domination" (5). The holistic and interdisciplinary approach of "unmapping" provides the framework to make visible the legal and social practices that produce and reproduce structural and systematic conditions perpetuating a racial hierarchy and a socially stratified society (Razack 2002, 17). More importantly, "unmapping" provides a counter-narrative that questions what is presented as objective "truth" and "commonsense" knowledge within dominant discourse.

In Canada's Toughest Neighbourhood": Surveillance, Myth, and Orientalism, Richardson (2008) argues that the continuous negative representation of Jane and Finch reproduces an image of the neighbourhood as "uncivilized" space infested with social problems. Richardson situates his argument within a Foucauldian framework raising the question, "What knowledge and power relationships are embedded within depictions of Jane-Finch in popular Canadian newspapers?" (12). This is an important question to consider in understanding how an identity is imposed and inscribed on Jane and Finch and its residents through the meta-narratives depicted by media outlets. In discussing the interconnection between power and knowledge, Foucault (1977) points out,

> We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (27)

As Foucault indicates, the representation of the current "knowledge," in this case what Jane and Finch represents, depends on "power relations" that allow certain narratives to become dominant and accessible for public consumption at the expense of intentional forgetting and silencing of alternative narratives and histories. For example, how often does the news report positive events taking place within the Jane and Finch neighbourhood?

Dominant narratives describing Jane and Finch are embedded with simplistic explanations and overgeneralizations that blame residents of the neighborhood for the social problems of the area. The current neoliberal politics masks racist institutional practices; the intention of "racial" segregation deems itself invisible making inequitable distribution of resources appear as a "natural" phenomenon. Furthermore, the discourse of neoliberal politics and its emphasis on individualistic choices continuously positions residents of Jane and Finch as the source of complete power in control of their circumstances and living conditions, when in reality this is not the case. What needs to be questioned is how is it that from all the neighborhoods in the City of Toronto, Jane and Finch became the city's most notorious violent neighborhood? This requires going beyond simplistic cause-and-effect models of explanation to

considering the social, cultural, historical, and political conditions that contributed to the development of Jane and Finch.

Hulchanski's (2005) report *The Three Cities within Toronto* provides the means to contextualize the development of Jane and Finch in comparison to other neighbourhoods in the City of Toronto. The study provides a comprehensive examination of income polarization among Toronto's neighbourhoods from 1970 to 2005 taking into consideration neighbourhood demographics. Findings indicate the emergence of three distinct cities within Toronto based on income change. "City #1" makes up 20% of the city and is generally found in the downtown core of the city in close proximity to the city's subway lines. The neighborhoods under "City #1" are identified as predominantly high-income areas where the average individual income has increased by 20% or more relative to the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) average in 1970. "City #2" makes up 40% of the city and is characterized my middle-income neighborhoods. Individual incomes in "City #2" have fairly remained the same having undergone an increase or decrease of less than 20%. "City #3" makes up 40% of the city and includes the Jane and Finch neighborhood. The individual incomes in these areas have undergone a decrease of 20% or more.

Other than income, there are other major differences between "City #1" and "City #3" particularly in terms of the number of immigrants and visible minorities living in the areas. Eight-two percent of "City #1" is White compared to 34% of residents in "City #3." As well, the percentage of foreign-born people in "City #1" declined from 35% to 28% between 1971 and 2006, whereas in "City #3" the number of immigrants increased dramatically from 31% of the population in 1971 to 61% in 2006 (11). These statistics contextualize the historical development of Jane and Finch where majority of residents became immigrants and visible minorities beginning in the 1970s. This was due to less restrictive immigration laws and post-war investment by Canada to develop its suburbs and create affordable housing. As the neighbourhood became more populated with immigrants and newcomers, the neighbourhood began gaining "a reputation for ethnic conflict, crime, and violence which continues to haunt it today" (Richardson 2008, 76).

Hulchanski's data demonstrates drastic differences in long-term neighbourhood trends within Toronto, but more importantly it deconstructs the fallacy that neighbourhoods simply evolve "naturally". Long-term trends from the findings indicate that investments and resources are distributed inequitably throughout neighbourhoods in the City of Toronto. Neighbourhoods composed of majority White residents are privileged at the expense of neglecting neighbourhoods composed of majority working class immigrants and visible minorities. For Jane and Finch, the lack of investments in the infrastructure of the neighbourhood along with lack of accessibility to social programs and

resources resulted in "the most ripe of conditions for concentrated urban poverty to develop" (Rigakos, Kwashie, and Bosanac 2004, 17).

Instead of the acknowledging that the urban planning of Jane and Finch was a recipe for failure, the media and its meta-narratives began placing blame of the social problems plaguing the neighbourhood on its residents, targeting them with cultural and racial biases leading to Othering of the neighbourhood and its residence (Zaami 2012, 12). Too often narratives involving racialized and minoritized youth are saturated with phrases such as "known to the police" which can be interpreted in multiple ways, yet within dominant discourse it is often interpreted as "having a criminal record." Media outlets constantly refer to the nearest racialized neighborhood labelled as "high priority" as a means of "making sense" of where the violence originated from. For example, the news outlets report that the crime occurred near Jane and Finch although technically the crime did not take place at Jane and Finch. These subtle tactics by the media and their negative representation of minoritized bodies and spaces perpetuate stereotypes and biased ideologies while simultaneously normalizing neoliberal ideologies. Institutional accountability is dismissed and instead the blame is transferred to individuals and their choices.

The meta-narratives of the media and their representation of Jane and Finch as an inherently violent place contributes to the justification of extra surveillance of the neighborhood by the police. Consequentially, the heavy presence of police in the Jane and Finch neighborhood stigmatizes Jane and Finch "as a foreign place full of foreign citizens" where violence is expected to occur (Richardson, 142). Wacquant (2008) in *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* describes stigmatized neighborhoods as "situated at the very bottom of the hierarchical system of places that compromise the metropolis" where "social problems gather and fester" (1). He goes on to expand that stigmatized neighborhood become known

> to outsiders and insiders alike, as the "lawless zones", the "problem states", the "no-go-areas" or the "wild districts of the city", territories of deprivation and dereliction to be feared, fled from and shunned because they are—or such is their reputation, but in these matters, perception contributes powerfully to fascinating reality—hotbeds of violence, vice and social dissolution. Owing to the halo of danger and dread that enshrouds them and to the scorn that afflicts their inhabitants, a variegated mix of dispossessed household, dishonoured minorities and disenfranchised immigrants, they are typically depicted from above and from afar in sombre and monochrome tones. And social life in them appears to be somewhat the same, barren, chaotic, and brutish. (1)

As a result, Jane and Finch becomes a place of exception where the law authorizes its own suspension. As Homi Bhabha (1983) points out, "the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of

degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (23). In the case of Jane and Finch, 31 Police Division receives additional police officers to patrol the Jane and Finch neighbourhood as part of the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS) which focuses on reducing gun and gang violence in the city. The TAVIS initiative contributes to over policing of Jane and Finch which symbolically and ideologically normalizes Jane and Finch as a naturally violent place through the dominant gaze.

One of the consequences of overpolicing the Jane and neighborhood is the ongoing racial profiling of its residents and the marginalization of the neighborhood symbolically as a "hot spot" for crime and violence (Narain 2012, 81). According to the Toronto Police Services, "the success of TAVIS is not based on the number of arrests made but on the reduction of crime, enhancement of public trust and confidence, and the building of relationships" (Toronto Police Services 2014). Paradoxically, TAVIS has profoundly failed in enhancing "public trust, confidence, and building of relationships" with community residents due to racial profiling and criminalization of Othered bodies in the neighborhood. Racialized bodies are often subjected to random searches and relentless questioning for appearing "suspicious." This process has damaged the image of the police and their relationship with the members of the community to the point where many residents of the Jane and Finch neighborhood do not cooperate with the police.

Because of this vicious cycle of stigmatization and marginalization, residents of Jane and Finch no longer see police serving the function of protecting them. Rather, they view police as a gang of their own constantly looking for a reason to criminalize the residents of the neighborhood. Hence, it becomes important to raise the question, who does the TAVIS program benefit? Is TAVIS being tough on crime or tough on racialized bodies within racialized neighborhoods? What is the effectiveness of TAVIS with its punitive objective? Although the answers to these questions goes beyond the scope of this article, nonetheless these are critical questions that need to be raised to better understand the complexities and the power inequities involved when discussing issues of youth violence. These conversations and meaningful discussions that can arise from them cannot take place as long we are operationalizing the root causes of violence within a framework that places blame on racialized bodies and communities, normalized by neoliberal politics which is saturated with racist ideologies.

When biased meta-narratives become normalized, one of its dangers is that it constructs and reproduces forms of knowledge that oversimplify the causation of youth violence and associate it with deficiency models that pathologize specific races, their culture, and place of residence. When these narratives are accepted as the "truth" without being questioned, it leads to the fixation of certain bodies in time and space by inscribing an identity on them while

simultaneously normalizing Whiteness and giving it a currency of privilege. As Dei (2007) points out,

> An understanding of the process of racialization is central to the integrative anti-racism discursive framework and practice. Racialization in this context refers to the process of ideological, material and symbolic signification of different groups in the dominant's imagination and subsequent positioning of these groups in the social formation. (10)

As it applies to the case of Jordan Manners, the space of Jane and Finch became equated with violence, and within the "dominant's imagination" racialized bodies positioned as those responsible for committing inherently acts of violence. Similarly, Murji and Solomos (2005) problematize how racialization simplifies the public's understanding of social issues and their root causes by pointing out, "as a concept racialization is useful for describing the processes by which racial meanings are attached to particular issues, often treated as social problems, and with the manner in which race appears to be a, or the, key factor in the way they are defined and understood" (3). Within this framework, violence itself is racialized and situated as born from Othered bodies.

One of the implications of racialization is that it blames victims for their circumstances. It takes away from examining the various systematic, structural, and institutional forms of oppression that function to ensure racialized and minoritized bodies remain in inferior positions for the benefit of colonizers. As a result, Whiteness and Racism maintain its invisibility through racialization and marking of Othered bodies (Said 1977; Mohanram 1999; Ahmed 2007). This contributes to the establishment of a racial hierarchy where Whiteness is deemed superior and given currency in everyday situations such as when applying for a job or crossing borders.

Dominant narratives of the media covering youth violence often omit discussing systemic inequities and practices which perpetuate the social circumstances and living conditions in "high-priority" neighborhoods such as lack of access to resources and jobs. Instead the narratives blame the social problems of the community on the residents living within that space, without any attention given to the processes and institutional practices that historically have influenced the neighborhood's trajectory of development leading up to its current conditions. When neighborhoods such as Jane and Finch become racialized, the consequence is that the "bodies in these degenerate spaces lose their entitlement to personhood through a complex process in which the violence that is enacted is naturalized" (Razack 2002, 155). Too often justice is dismissed or ignored for racialized and minoritized youth. Often in cases where the victim is a racialized youth two potential meta-narratives emerge: either the victim is framed as a "bad kid" whose poor choices lead to the violent incident or the victim is labeled a "good kid" who was consumed by the inherently violent living conditions of the nearby racialized neighborhood.

There is a dialectical relationship between physical space, social space, and the identity of bodies moving through the spaces (Lefebvre 1991; Razack 2002). Physical space in its formation and texture not only determines who has access to the space, but it contributes to coconstituting what activities takes place in that space. As Lefebvre (1991) points out, "space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (26). Therefore, it is significant to contextualize spaces as embedded within a web of power relations that dictate its influential power in inscribing an identity on the space itself and the bodies occupying the space. In other words, power is anchored spatially.

Jane and Finch often has its identity imposed upon it by external parties such as media outlets and their meta-narratives and violent hyper visualizations, reflecting the neighborhood's limited power in the identity-making process. This difference in power relations results in race being positioned and interpreted differently in relation to space. Radhika Mohanram (1999) points out, "racial difference is also spatial difference, the inequitable power relationships between various spaces and places are rearticulated as the inequitable power relations between races" (3). It is estimated that the residents of Jane and Finch are from over seventy-two countries and speak about one hundred and twenty different languages. Yet, despite this diversity media coverage disproportionately features Black individuals in negative portrayals of Jane and Finch (James, 34), in the process homogenizing what Jane and Finch represents and what it means to be Black.

Mohanram (1999) contrasts the mobility of White and Black bodies by stating, "Whiteness has the ability to move and the ability to move results in the unmarking of the body. In contrast, blackness is signified through a marking and is always static and immobilizing" (4). Similarly, Sara Ahmed (2007) explores the social and bodily advantages between White and Black bodies,

> For bodies that are not extended by the skin of the social, bodily movement is not so easy. Such bodies are stopped, where the stopping is an action that creates its own impression. Who are you? Why are you here? What are you doing? Each question, when asked, is a kind of stopping device: you are stopped by being asked the question, just as asking the question requires that you be stopped. (161)

In essence, Mohanram and Ahmed are arguing that Whiteness maintains its currency of privilege and its invisibility through continuous racialization and marking of Othered bodies. Racism embedded within neoliberal ideologies and market-driven capitalistic politics works very similar. They both contribute to the establishment of a racial hierarchy where Whiteness becomes associated with privilege and colorblindness promoted as part of the practices of institutions. In other words, racism is masked by colorblind

institutional practices that cultivate the living conditions that further marginalize racialized bodies and spaces.

Racialization has direct implications for the lived experiences of those living in racialized neighbourhoods. The Colour of Justice Network (2011) report called *Racial Justice Report Card for Ontario* points out that "racialized communities experience ongoing, disproportionate levels of poverty." This is supported by the fact that between 1980 and 2000, while the poverty rate for the nonracialized (European heritage) population decreased by 28%, the poverty among racialized families rose by 361%. This indicates that resources are distributed inequitably amongst neighbourhoods, privileging predominantly White bodies at the expense of social exclusion and marginalization to racialized Others.

Poverty is not an independent variable but rather a result of unequal distribution of wealth and resources. Majority of Jane and finch residents and other "high-priority' neighborhoods live in high-rise buildings and rent as part of the Toronto Community Housing initiative which seeks to provide affordable housing to a wide range of individuals, primarily "seniors, families, singles, refugees, recent immigrants to Canada and people with special needs" (Toronto Community Housing Corporation 2014). The high number of high-rise buildings in the neighborhood has implications in terms of the crowding it creates. In *Poverty by Postal Code 2: Vertical Poverty* (2011), United Way "tracks the continued growth of the spatial concentration of poverty in the City of Toronto" indicating that high-rise housing plays a role in this trend (ii). This is done through a longitudinal examination of the City of Toronto Census Data over a twenty-five-year period from 1981 to 2006. One of the key findings of the report is that "poverty is becoming increasingly concentrated in high-rise buildings" (iv). The report identifies the construction of new private sector housing, targeted exclusively for better-off families, as a significant factor in the growing concentration of low-income tenants in the high-rise buildings. Many families end up living in high-rise buildings in poor conditions because they have no other choice. That is all they can afford when it comes to housing.

The elimination of poverty does not serve the interests of a White settler society, because poverty provides the social conditions that make it possible to exploit racialized Others for labour. The United Nations (1997) Human Development Report had a section called "Vested Interests in Perpetuating Poverty" which states,

> Poor people are often seen as an economic burden on society. Yet poverty often serves the vested interests of the economically powerful, who may depend on the poverty-stricken to ensure that their societies run smoothly. A mobile pool of low-paid and unorganized worker is useful for doing the "dirty, dangerous and difficult" work that others refuse to do. In industrial countries many jobs considered menial are taken by immigrants, legal and illegal. With no legal protection

or opportunity for collective action, workers are often exploited, receiving wage far below the minimum. (95)

Therefore, there is intentionality by the state for the containment of poverty; where poverty is located and contained matters socially and politically. For colonizers, the question is not how to eliminate poverty but rather how to funnel poverty and contain it within racialized neighborhoods as a means of exploiting Othered bodies for their labor. Poverty functions as a required component for the smooth functioning of elite spaces, where the "economically powerful" can depend on the "poverty-stricken" to do the "dirty, dangerous, and difficult" work that pays minimal and does not include benefits.

The continual preservation and containment of poverty and violence is part of a cycle perpetuated by interlocking systems of domination and oppression. Racism and sexism, in combination with other "-isms" function through one another at an institutional level as a tool for the advancement of a white settler society. Within such system and its ideologies, the poor and Black are sacrificed for the greater advancement of the nation. The cycle of poverty and violence begins with the government placing newly arrived immigrants who are mostly visible minorities in highly dense and over-populated government housing complexes such as the Jane and Finch area where the residents compete for the limited resources available. Many immigrants are well educated and have earned degrees in their country of origin, but upon arrival to Canada their degree is not recognized or undervalued. This results in many of them having to accept minimal paying jobs as a means of having an income to survive. Simultaneously, this process creates an advantage and more opportunities for those who are Canadian and have received an education as part of the Canadian educational system.

The year 2012 had two high profile cases involving youth violence that received extensive media coverage. The first incident occurred on June 2 inside the food court of the Eaton Centre Shopping Mall located in downtown Toronto. A 25-old man died and seven others were injured, some fatally including a 13-year-old boy (Bosanac 2012). Similar to the Jane Creba shooting, the public nature of this crime in terms of its location made it receive extensive prime time coverage depicting a city which was once again turning violent and unsafe at the hands of thugs and gangs whose members were primarily depicted as racialized youth (Edmiston and O'Toole 2012). The issue of youth and gun violence reached its boiling point when just over a month later on July 16 the city experienced the worst single act of gun violence in Toronto's history. Fourteen-year-old Shyanne Charles and 23-year-old Joshua Yasay died and twenty-one others were wounded at a community barbeque gathering in Scarborough near the Morningside Avenue and Danzig Street area (Doucette 2012b). Media narratives framed the incident from the vantage point that emphasized the history of violence,

particularly gang rivalry, plaguing Scarborough and the Danzig community (Powell 2012).

In 2013, seven teenagers aged sixteen and under were killed by gun violence (Toronto Foundation 2014). As the *Toronto Vital Signs Report* (2014) indicates, it was "the highest number of youth killed by guns in a single year in Toronto in more than two decades, some in broad daylight, some in front of dozens of witnesses" (40). Early in the year, the high profile media coverage was attributed to the death of three 15-year-old boys—Tyson Bailey, St. Aubyn Rodney, and Jarvis Montaque—on various government housing properties within the span of four weeks ranging from January 18 to February 17. All three victims were racialized and minoritized youth who lived in "high priority" neighborhoods. Interestingly, Toronto Star ran a front-page story covering details of all three incidents titled in capital letters: "WHY ARE ALL THE GOOD KIDS DYING?" (Pagliaro 2013a, A1). This made me question whether their lives would have mattered if they were considered "bad kids." Would the "bad kids" have made it to the front page or would they have been given a small area in the back pages of the newspaper? Even though in this instance the Toronto Star narrative was labeling the racialized victims as "good kids," constant references to where the incidents occurred—associations with Jane and Finch, Rexdale, and Regent Park—blamed racialized spaces for the violence enacted on the victims' bodies.

The other prominent case of 2013 occurred on July 27, 2013 when Sammy Yatim, an 18 -year-old Syrian immigrant, was shot and killed on a street car by second-generation Italian-Canadian Toronto police officer James Forcillo (Levinson 2013). What shocked everyone in this case was the way the situation was handled by the police as evidenced by a witness video recording, which was uploaded on YouTube the day after the occurrence of the incident. What later become known, as reported by multiple witnesses who were on the street car, is that Sammy Yatim boarded the Dundas Street West streetcar and created chaos by showing a three-inch knife and exposing himself. He then ordered everyone to get off the streetcar. The video begins at this stage showing the streetcar being surrounded by various police officers. What was disturbing to the public, as evidenced by the video, is that you can hear one of the police officers yelling "Drop the knife!" Officer Forcillo then fires nine shots: three initially followed by an additional six about five seconds later. Approximately thirty seconds later, another officer arrives and tasers Yatim while he is on the ground fatally shot.

The violence enacted on Sammy Yatim's body was part of a deadly collision between the colonizer and the colonized. What could have prompted Officer Forcillo to shoot Sammy Yatim nine times, and another officer to taser Yatim after being excessively shot, when all Sammy Yatim had was a knife? This encounter reaffirms that racialized bodies are noncitizens who do not get the full rights of citizenship and benefits of the law. The shooting of Sammy Yatim

received extensive media coverage, primarily because video was available showing what took place between the police officers and Sammy Yatim. The video raised many questions about how the police handled the situation. Unlike many other situations where police are able to justify the violence that they enact on racialized bodies (Razack 2002), the presence of proof in the form of a clear, visible video limited the interpretations of the incident that often gave the benefit of the doubt to police officers and their unique version of the events.

Three weeks after the incident on August 19, 2013 Officer Forcillo was charged with second degree murder, "only the second time an on duty officer has faced such a serious criminal charge in more than 20 years" (Pagliaro 2013b). Yet the following day he was granted bail "after less than 10 hours in custody" (Pagliaro 2013c). Although initially suspended with pay, in February 2014 Officer Forcillo returned to work on "restrictive administrative duties for Crime Stoppers, which works to prevent and solve crimes through advocacy and receiving of anonymous tips" (Pagliaro 2014a). Isn't it ironic that someone who is charged with second-degree murder is working as part of the Crime Stoppers program to solve other crimes? Would this occur in any other profession? The trial for Sammy Yatim is set to begin in late 2015 yet all the evidence is under a publication ban.[1]

The use of violence on Othered bodies by the state is often justified and forgiven by the criminal justice system. As Razack (2010) point out, "law largely forgives the perpetrators of colonial violence". She goes on to expand, "It often does so either by viewing the instances of violence as exceptional and/or considering that the victims brought the violence on themselves—it is they who are dysfunctional, sick, prostituting themselves, posing a security threat, and so on" (92). Yet the evidence of a video complicates matters in the case of Sammy Yatim. Although charges have been laid, it is still too early to conclude that a conviction is a guarantee. The inscription of violence on racialized bodies by the police is part of the colonial encounter which serves as a teaching moment where racial power is articulated by displaying who counts as a citizen and who does not. By immediately granting Officer Forcillo bail and allowing him to return to work with pay when facing a murder charge, the law protected White privilege and reiterated the notion that, "whether the bodies of the racialized Other were to be killed or colonized, slaughtered or saved, expunged or exploited, they have to be prevented at all costs from polluting the body politic or sullying civil(ized) society" (Goldberg 1993, 187).

Approaches to preventing youth violence: Punitive approach of getting tough on crime vs. preventive and rehabilitory approach of investing in social programs and communities

Often high profile youth violence cases provoke a form of state and government response. In the case of Jane Creba, the provincial government

responded by launching Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS), which provides additional police officers for specific neighbourhoods during summer months. The Jordan Manners incident resulted in the assigning of police officers to work within various high schools in the city (Henry and Rushowy 2008). As well, the Jordan Manners incident contributed to Jane and Finch being the constant focus of the TAVIS initiative over the years. In response to the Eaton Centre and the Danzig shootings, Mayor Rob Ford immediately urged Premier Dalton McGuinty to provide additional funding to hire more police officers, stating that he does not believe in "hug-a-thug" approach referring to investments in social programs and their preventive and rehability objectives (Alcoba 2012a). Within a week, Premier McGuinty made the announcement that although he would not provide extra money to hire additional police officers, he would make the five million dollars yearly funding for the TAVIS initiative permanent (Alcoba 2012b). This was a direct provincial investment in attempting to reduce crime through further punitive measures, particularly criminalization of racialized bodies which involves extra policing and surveillance in racialized neighbourhoods. Lastly, the Sammy Yatim shooting prompted an internal review of the police force, specifically examining officers' use of force when responding to emotionally disturbed people (Kane and Pagliaro 2013). As well, Ontario's police watchdog, the Office of the Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD), launched an independent review into the use of force tactics and police treatment of people with mental illnesses (Pagliaro 2014b).

Overall, in terms of government and state response, predominantly the tough on crime approach has been implemented at the local, provincial, and federal level to prevent youth violence as indicated by the case studies discussed in the context of Toronto. In March 2012, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's majority government passed Bill C-10 known as the "Safe Streets and Communities Act" which increases penalties for serious crimes including the imposition of a number of mandatory minimum sentences. Bill C-10 seeks to sentence first-time offenders who are caught with the possession of a gun to a mandatory three-year jail sentence. Others changes pertaining to youth includes courts to consider adult sentences for youth convicted of serious crimes, restricting of conditional sentences, and allowing the publication of the names of violent young offenders when necessary (Galloway and Seguin 2012). This model and its emphasis on punitive rather than rehability measures follows in the footsteps of the United States and its ineffective prison industrial complex system where racialized and minoritized bodies are overwhelmingly incarcerated and over-represented in prisons.

Why would Canada follow in the footsteps of the United States knowing that the tough on crime approach does not lead to drastically reduced crime rates? Who, specifically which bodies, benefits from the implementation of the

tough on crime approach and who is placed at a disadvantage? To put things into perspective:

> In 2012, forty-eight people—mostly young men—were victims of homicide in Toronto. Most of these victims were under the age of thirty and disproportionately large numbers were young Black men as well as members of other racially margin- alized communities. Black men under the age of thirty make up a third of shooting homicide victims. The disturbing nature of this trend is that Black male youth under thirty years old make up 7% of the male population under the age of thirty in Toronto. (Tewelde and Olawoye 2013, 5)

Hence, not only are racialized bodies often victims of crimes, but they are also victims of a neoliberal criminal justice system that masks its racist practices under the label of "tough on crime." The law and the criminal justice system are working complimentary with one another to be tough on crimina- lizing racialized bodies.

The other major approach to preventing youth violence is investment in social programs and communities. In the aftermath of Jordan Manner's death, Premier Dalton McGuinty approached Honourable Roy McMurtry and Dr. Alvin Curling to "spend a year seeking to find out where it (youth violence) is coming from- its roots- and what might be done to address them to make Ontario safer in the long term" (1). This lead to the 2008 publication of *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence.* This report is a rare governmental response that takes a step in the direction of examining the larger picture, seek- ing to find answers by focusing on primary prevention rather than intervention.

Review of the Roots of Youth Violence (2008) makes the argument that "it is only if we find and address the conditions that give rise to that state of mind- walking the streets and entering schools with guns or other weapons and pla- cing no value on human life- we will be able to stop the growing number of youth who think that way" (5). The report identifies numerous immediate risk factors that "create that state of desperation and put a youth in the immediate path of violence". These immediate risk factors are

- having a deep sense of alienation and low self-esteem;
- having little empathy for others and suffer from impulsivity;
- believing that they are oppressed, held down, unfairly treated and neither belong nor have a stake in the broader society;
- believing that they have no way to be heard through other channels; and
- having no sense of hope. (5–6)

The report goes on to outline "the roots" of youth violence, referring to "the major conditions in which the immediate risk factors grow and flourish" (6). These include poverty, racism, poor community planning and design, issues in the education system, family issues, health issues, lack of youth voice, lack of economic opportunity for youth, and issues in the justice system.

Review of the Roots of Youth Violence report dares to speak the truth by naming race and racism and putting a face to it in terms of institutional

practices. The report predominantly names racism and poverty as major systemic barriers contributing to youth gravitating toward violence; "Alienation, lack of hope or empathy, and other immediate risk factors are powerfully, but far from exclusively, driven by the intersection of racism and poverty" (19). Importantly, Dei (2000) deconstructs what racism is and how it works by emphasizing, "Racism is more than an ideology and structure. It is a process" (36). *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* reiterates this definition of racism and guides the discussion toward examining the consequences arising from consistent exposure to racism:

> But while race is not something that can create the immediate risk factors for violence involving youth, racism is. Racism strikes at the core of self-identity, eats away the heart and casts a shadow on the soul. It is cruel and hurtful and alienating. It makes real all doubts about getting a fair chance in this society. It is a serious obstacle imposed for a reason the victim has no control over and can do nothing about. (9)

The report also emphasizes that the worst impacts are within neighbourhoods plagued with poverty, making the connection that "when poverty is racialized, and then ghettoized and associated with violence, the potential for the stigmatization of specific groups is high" (4). From this vantage point we can begin to understand how unequal power relations and practices are perpetuated through racialization of specific social groups and neighborhoods leading to inequality of opportunity.

In order for meaningful macro-level systemic change to take place in terms of preventing youth violence, addressing issues of poverty and racism must be a top priority. Discussions must take place within a framework that goes beyond dichotomized neoliberal ideologies which position root causes of these conditions as originating from racialized bodies and spaces and instead focus on how institutional policies, practices, and representations can work collectively and in solidarity to promote greater social justice and equity. As Walter Mosley (2000) states, "If you can't question the world around you, seeking real answers, then you are trapped by the false answers provided by prejudice" (69).

Moving beyond binaries!

The role of critical pedagogy and anti-racism in prevention of youth violence

Critical pedagogy and anti-racism are action-oriented practices which should be invested in as essential and mandatory tools in primary prevention of youth violence. *The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* directly identifies "A Repaired Social Context: Social Opportunity and Anti-Racism" as one of its essential four pillars needed to collectively move in the direction of creating "sustainable hope and opportunity" for youth (18). The other pillars identified are a youth policy framework to guide and coordinate policies and programs,

a neighborhood capacity and empowerment focus to strengthen communities, and a new integrated governance system to align and sustain effective action to address the roots of violence (32). Within the four essential pillars outlined, anti-racism holds the potential for being the anchor that unites all pillars and makes them work cohesively toward the common end-objective of creating systemic, sustainable change that addresses the roots of youth violence.

Anti-racism and critical pedagogy is about social change and questioning of the racial hierarchy in place that provides power and privilege to selective social groups at the expense of marginalization and exclusion to others (Dei 2000, 34; 2007). At its core, anti-racism and critical pedagogy work to dismantle, deconstruct, and interrupt the racial hierarchy in society, which has been normalized as "commonsense." Together anti-racism and critical pedagogy reinforce the importance of naming, speaking up, and constructively taking actions against racism and other forms of oppression and injustice. As bell hooks (2003) points out in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*,

> Both exercises in recognition, naming the problem but also fully and deeply articulating what we do that works to address and resolves issues, are needed to generate anew and inspire a spirit of ongoing resistance. When we only name the problem, when we state complaint without constructive focus on resolution, we take away hope. In this way critique can become merely an expression of profound cynicism, which then works to sustain dominator culture. (xiv)

Although anti-racism and critical pedagogy might not provide all the answers to issues of youth violence, as action-oriented practices they hold potential for blossoming of new questions, understandings, resolutions, and possibilities emerging from dialogues, discussions, and collaborations. Importantly, Dei (2007) raises the question, "How do we ensure that all members of our communities develop a sense of entitlement and belonging to their spaces?" (6). Critical pedagogy deconstructs the fallacy of the single solution, such as the tough on crime approach, and instead promotes initiatives that involve ideas, individuals, and institutions working collectively and collaboratively in solidarity to address the root causes of youth violence and its complexities. Steinberg (2007) emphasizes this point by stating "Those engaged in critical pedagogy don't need to agree with one another, rather, they need to passionately engage in the radical fire of discursive disagreement. Those who espouse a critical pedagogy must constantly be alert and attuned to the context in which politics, power, and pedagogy intersect" (x).

The process of sparking authentic and sustainable change begins with decolonization of our communities, particularly racialized communities that have been most disadvantaged as a result of continuous exposure to poverty and racism. Critical Pedagogy and Anti-Racism as a practice begin by working toward breaking the systemic shackles of colonization and its historical roots. As hooks (2003) emphasizes "More than anywhere else a

dominator-controlled mass media, with its constant manipulation of representation in the service of the status quo, assaults us in that place where we would know hope. Despair is the greatest threat. When despair prevails, we cannot create life-sustaining communities of resistance" (12). Anti-Racism and Critical Pedagogy strive to prevent those who are consistently exposed to various forms of systemic oppression to reach the state of despair and hopelessness. The process involves formulation of communities of resistance and hope where members can belong, be appreciated for who they are, and through love and reciprocity be involved in various capacities as an agent of social change for the betterment and improvement of the living conditions within the community from a grassroots level. This involves working collectively and striving to find creative and constructive solutions and possibilities to the problems plaguing the community. As hooks emphasizes (2003), "Anti-racist work requires of all of us vigilance about the ways we use language. Either/or thinking is crucial to the maintenance of racism and other forms of group oppression. Whenever we think in terms of both/and we are better situated to do the work of community building" (37). As a result, we must think outside of the box as means of exploring all possible options and approaches and not resort to the limited options and choices provided to us by institutions and their neoliberal ideologies.

Creating sustainable self-governed communities must be at the heart of the decolonization process. Anti-racism recognizes that many racialized bodies have internalized negative ideas about who they are as a result of their lived experiences within a system that historically marginalizes them, racially excludes them through inequality of opportunity, and delegitimizes their way of being and knowing simply due to their race, culture, and place of residence. Therefore, we must collectively as a community work toward re-signifying what it means to be a member of a racialized community. We must through education and service-oriented collaboration give each other hope, and in the process resist, challenge, subvert, and stand up to the superficial and distorted homogenized images of the neighborhood represented by the media and its meta-narratives. Anti-racism and critical pedagogy as empowering practices can enable the construction, production, and sharing of counter hegemonic stories, events, and narratives that displays the beauty and complexity within the neighbourhood.

One of the ways that critical pedagogy and anti-racism facilitate decolonization of communities is by asking new questions from new perspectives and vantage points within a "dialogical framework" that inserts power into the equation. As Freire (1970) indicates in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,

> In order to understand the meaning of dialogical practice, we have to put aside the simplistic understanding of dialogue as a mere technique. Dialogue does not represent a somewhat false path that I attempt to elaborate on and realize in the

sense of involving the ingenuity of the other. On the contrary, dialogue charac-
terizes an epistemological relationship. Thus, in this sense, dialogue is a way of
knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a parti-
cular task. We have to make this point very clear. I engage in dialogue not neces-
sarily because I like the other person. I engage in dialogue because I recognize the
social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this
sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both
learning and knowing. (17)

Within a framework that recognizes dialogue as "an indispensable compo-
nent of the process of learning and knowing," many silenced and unanswered
questions pertaining to youth violence need to be raised and talked about as a
means of striving toward new understandings. Why are so many racialized
and minoritized youth dying at an alarming rate or becoming perpetrators
of youth crime despite government's continuous tough on crime punitive
approach? Why is youth violence concentrated in "high priority" neighbor-
hoods? Are residents of marginalized and stigmatized neighborhoods given
power and a voice to make their concerns known? Is there a process in place
that can facilitate the empowerment of residents as leaders in their communi-
ties? What are multiple ways we can evaluate change in subjective and objec-
tive manners in relation to prevention of youth violence? To what extent is
institutional dysfunction and neoliberal ideologies and market-driven politics
responsible for the perpetuation of the circumstances that place youth on the
path of self-destruction? How can we hold institutions accountable for their
failures? These questions will lead us to move beyond binaries and linear
modes of thinking to imagining new possibilities and approaches to dealing
with youth violence.

In order for decolonization of communities to be effective and lead to
empowerment and breaking free of spiritual enslavement, we must be able
to create decolonized spaces, alter the dynamics of existing spaces, and make
these spaces accessible to allow for the cultivation of racialized and minori-
tized social and cultural capital. Important settings to consider are homes,
schools, businesses, the media, and government agencies. The objective at
the core of creating decolonized spaces is empowerment of one's sense of
identity and the instilling of the belief that one has the potential to succeed
and be an agent of social change in numerous capacities. Simply put, one
has to gain the feeling that he or she matters! As Freire (1970) phrases it,
"the oppressed must reach this conviction as Subjects, not as objects" (67).
Exposure to critical pedagogy and anti-racism within decolonized spaces
can provide youth with the racial literacy that gives them the language to
meaningfully express their concerns, navigate social spaces, and use critical
thinking skills to tackle complex issues in their communities. As Dei and
Doyle-Wood (2009) point out, the struggle for racialized and minoritized
individuals "is the struggle—as living embodiments of knowledge—to be

heard, recognized, acknowledged as human, and the struggle to maintain a sense of agency in the face of normalizing systems of power" (157).

Accessibility to decolonized spaces and mobilization within these spaces will allow for discussion and convergence toward questioning the hierarchy in place and working in solidarity to resist, interrupt, and subvert the hegemonic and normalizing systems of power that perpetuate a racial hierarchy. Yet to reach that stage a sense of hope has to be renewed. In order for a sense of hope to be renewed, especially for racialized and minoritized individuals who are near losing all hope and gravitating toward violence, we must not be afraid to take risks and engage with pain and struggle as a form of pedagogy. We must be willing to expose our own vulnerabilities and to enter an uncomfortable state by asking questions that take us out of our comfort zones. As hooks (2003) states, "Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, revelling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community" (197).

As communities of resistance, we must explore how we can engage pain, anger, and suffering as a means of yielding shared and collective responsibility. How can we, within decolonized spaces, provide mediums that would give youth a voice and a means of creative self-expression for their pain and struggle? How can we use socioculturally relevant mediums to effectively engage the pain and suffering and facilitate it toward growth and constructive collective action? As Cosby and Poussaint (2007) point out, "We have learned over the years that people won't respond to our hurt and to our pain, but they will respond to our anger. So we act out our anger. We live out our anger" (184). Therefore, we must take the time within decolonized spaces to find out where the anger is coming from and how we can work with it and through it for change. This is where critical pedagogy can play an important role. As Steinberg (2007) points out in reference to the role of Critical Pedagogy in the field of education,

> Empowered by the anger we feel from socially unjust practices in the world, we are able to use this anger within the radical practices of our own critical pedagogy. By naming the practices, people, and the ideologies that infect our schools with dishope, test-driven expectations, and socio-economic insults to our students, we (critical pedagogues) create a space for critique and insurgency. (x)

As individuals and communities, once we begin to see a commonality in our various struggles and painful experiences, we can begin healing and recognizing that we are not alone. We can then transition to explore how we can respond to each others' pain, struggle, and anger through constructive, critical, and collective social actions. This can lead to the cultivation of a sense of solidarity, a sense of belonging, and a sense of having agency. To a certain extent, the process itself will be socio-culturally empowering and will prevent some youth from lashing out in anger as a means of voicing their anger and frustrations.

Critical pedagogy coupled with anti-racism adds depth to the process of engaging pain, anger, and struggle by emphasizing collective accountability and shared responsibility. As Giroux (2007) states, "Critical Pedagogy opens up a space where students should be able to come to terms with their own power as critical agents" (1). It is not enough to listen and engage with pain and struggle, but we must go beyond it by channeling negative emotions toward constructive and collective actions that will resist and subvert the hegemonic systems of power. Similarly, Peter McLaren (1998) emphasizes that "pedagogy has as much to do with the teachable heart as the teachable mind, and as much to do with efforts to change the world as it does with rethinking the categories that we use to analyze our current condition within history" (50). This stresses the importance of gravitating away from binaries that frame our modes of thinking along the lines of a hierarchy and transitioning toward exploring multiple and complex ways of rupturing the status quo and disrupting the colonial occupation of one's spirit and community. hooks (2003) supports this approach by emphasizing "when we stop thinking and evaluating along the lines of hierarchy and can value rightly all members of a community we are breaking a culture of domination" (37).

The process of creating sustainable, self-governing communities of resistance whose members work collectively and in solidarity to challenge and resist normalizing systems of power and its dominator culture begins by investing in youth as leaders of today and as critical agents who have the potential to make a difference, rather than merely leaders of tomorrow who are not ready for the challenges and problems of the twenty-first century. We must work side-by-side with the youth and other community members toward developing a critical consciousness (Freire 1970). This translates into getting youth to understand that one bullet impacts a hundred lives and an entire community. Working from this perspective, which acknowledges shared responsibility and the enormous impact of one action and its ripple effect, we can begin to recognize, acknowledge, and understand that we all have a role and a responsibility in preventing youth violence, including the youth themselves. We must provide various social support systems for youth in our various capacities as parents, coaches, teachers, mentors, and/ or community leaders to listen to their concerns, support them, provide them accessibility to decolonized spaces and socio-culturally relevant mediums for the youth to creatively, positively, and constructively express themselves and their emotions, to facilitate their mobilization, and to assist them in voicing their concerns in solidarity through collective actions for change, social justice, and equity. As the *Review of the Roots of Violence* indicates, "most youth who feel connected to and engaged with the broader society, and who feel valued and safe and see a positive future for themselves in it will not commit serious violence" (6).

In conclusion, we have to keep in mind that at the core of our struggle for systemic change is a hierarchy and its colonizing and inequitable power

relations and institutional practices perpetuated through a dominator culture and its meta-narratives. Therefore, we cannot fight systems of oppression alone as individuals! We must fight the systems collectively as communities and in solidarity with one another, keeping in mind commonalities in our goals, values, objectives, and philosophies to end oppression in its various forms. We must continue to question hegemonic narratives and their symbolic and ideological implications for various social groups. We must in solidarity strive to imagine counter-hegemonic possibilities and narratives that oppose, resist, and seek to interrupt the essentialist and determinist deficit discourse perpetuated by dominant meta- narratives in the media and their neoliberal ideologies. We must work collaboratively with the power of ideas, individuals, and institutions and their interconnectedness.

Change is inevitable. But what is significant and what we continuously want to insert into the discussion through anti-racism and critical pedagogy as action-oriented practices is change for whose benefits and at what costs? Pertaining to youth violence, the discussion within dominant discourse and its representations and ideologies should not be about whether an individual is a "good kid" or a "bad kid" or whether the violence originated from a "bad neighborhood." We need to stand up and refuse to allow either/or thinking, often perpetuated through meta-narratives of the media and its misrepresentations, to form the basis of our judgement and modes of thinking. Instead the discussion needs to be about the bigger picture that asks why youth violence continues to be an issue in our society, particularly impacting racialized bodies and neighbourhoods more than others. We need to approach youth violence through a new paradigm that recognizes a human life is priceless and we should be doing all we can as individuals and institutions to prevent all youth from gravitating toward violence. At the grassroots level, this translates into striving to create equality of opportunity by working collectively and in solidarity to challenge injustice and inequity in various spheres of everyday life, with the hope of creating sustainable systemic change where institutions play a pivotal role in eradicating oppression rather than perpetuating it through neoliberal ideologies and market-driven, colorblindness politics.

Note

1. Officer Forcillo was charged with attempted murder, second degree murder, and manslaughter. The trial consisted of an eleven-member jury and began in October 2015. The trial concluded in January 2016, and after 35 hours of deliberations, the jury found Officer Forcillo not guilty of attempted murder and manslaughter but guilty of attempted murder. In a very complex legal case, the jury found that the second round of shots fired by Forcillo was not needed and not in self-defence, hence the guilty attempted murder conviction. Forcillo remains out on bail for now. His sentencing hearing is scheduled for May 2016.

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