RACIALIZED TERROR AND THE COLOUR LINE:
RACIAL PROFILING AND POLICING HEADWEAR IN SCHOOLS

by

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Abstract

Through the simple action of covering one’s head with the wrong type of apparel, at the wrong time, and in the wrong spaces, Black and racialized youth exist in a hostile environment where their identities are reconstructed and relabeled according to dominant economic-political needs. This study interrogates and ruptures dominant notions of how space, identity and power are constructed, confronted, engaged, negotiated and resisted by Black and racialized youth in greater Toronto Area (GTA) schools. In an atmosphere of zero-tolerance toward policing youth violence, the anti-gang focus of the Safe Schools headwear policies institutionalize a ‘colour-coded’ link between crime, violence and race. Through ethnographic narrative inquiry this study critically interrogates the multiplicity of ways how the collision between zero-tolerance approaches toward regulating school violence and the policing of specific types of headwear and bodies results in differential outcomes and impacts on Black students and other racialized groups.
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Finally, this work is truly livicated (in honour of) to all of the research participants and to those who have experienced what it is to be treated like a second and third class citizens irrelevant of their societal status. This work is livicated to all who came before Us and who have lent strength, determination and courage to Us as we continue on this journey to declare Our collective humanity and dignity. Truly, who feels it – knows it. Triumphantly we remain the two-thirds world. Free-up the captives.

- RedGold&Green / R-Government.
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Chapter 1 The Groundings

Introduction

At the beginning of this school year, I asked the students in my grade eight media literacy class to illustrate on poster paper what they believed a ‘gangster’ or a ‘thug’ looked like. Unsurprisingly, in a class of twenty-four students from diverse racial/ethnic and cultural backgrounds and various socio-economic circumstances, both females and males illustrated almost identical versions of drawings of what and who a gangster is and how a gangster dresses.

The images that were illustrated by the students were all racialized depictions that associated race, focusing on the African/Black male, with dominant notions of the types of hyper-violence attributed to gangs and gangsterism. Each drawing clearly displayed markers and symbols that derive from dominant notions of gangs and gangster identities. For example each character drawn by the six different groups were detailed brandishing guns, adorned in tattoos and oversized jewelry and were dressed in either baseball caps or do-rags, and wore baggy clothes. One common theme that was found in all of the images was what was missing or not included in the picture. By interrogating the illustrations also from this point of interpretation we can gain a sense as to whom, meaning which societal groups, do not fit the category of gangster. In doing this we can tell that the term gang and all of its associated notions clearly do not apply to members of the dominant group. Hence the term gang is a highly racialized term that is deeply rooted in dominant notions of safety and violence, of civility and barbarism. Clearly such an over-generalization, one that distinctly connects race with notions of violence and crime, should signal a sense of alarm especially for Black people and other racialized groups who have children enrolled in the public school system where they must negotiate daily space, identity, knowledge and power.
The Safe Schools Act (2001) was amended in February 2009 marking the official (textual) removal of the term ‘zero-tolerance’ from Safe Schools legislation as recommended by both the Falconer report (January, 2008) and the McMurtry and Curling report (November, 2008). While the term ‘zero-tolerance’ has been textually removed from school board legislation the problems associated with zero-tolerance style policing and profiling of racialized students in particular remains live and in-tact. In fact it is safe to say that the textual removal of the term from official legislation has satisfied political agendas, however, unfortunately the atmosphere of zero-tolerance and zero-tolerance attitudes prevail in the contact zones of Greater Toronto Area (GTA) schools. Although amendments were made to the SSA the specific anti-gang focus of its (subsidiary) headwear policy remain a cause for great concern in more than a simple call for human rights. In the absence of a textual presence of zero-tolerance, district school boards have instituted preventative measures such as Character Education and anti-bullying initiatives as a responsive attempt to curb gang type violence from taking place in school zones. Attempting to standardize student behaviour by regulating style of dress, particularly focusing on Black cultural forms of dress and its wearers, shows how the collision between headwear policies and a still existing climate of zero-tolerance is experienced in the daily lives of racialized students remains unnoted.

Although there exists much work interrogating the many facets, nuances and departures that exist in the collision between the safe schools discourse and zero-tolerance positions toward regulating school and student safety and violence, in North American and British contexts, there continues to be a lack of research into how ‘Safe School’ legislation and subsidiary policies have had disproportionate differential impacts, in terms of discipline and punishment, specifically on racialized communities leaving much room to challenge traditional dominant positions on this
topic. Here we find our entry point and the opportunity to refocus how this social riddle is thought about therefore leaving an avenue for transformative praxis to take place.

The scope of this study departs from the existing literature in that it critically examines how the discursive construction of headwear policies (subsidiary legislation of the Safe Schools Act, 2001) in Greater Toronto Area schools, function to reproduce and maintain school contact zones as highly racialized spaces interwoven by dominant driven politics of race and criminality. Although headwear policies were inserted into ‘Safe Schools’ practices in the spirit of concern for public safety by eliminating violence through anti-gang control, there exists no literature or study up to date that interrogates how the discursive construction of safe schools, headwear and violence have very real and damaging effects on racialized groups with a particular emphasis on Black people.

In this sense I posit that the dominant discursive construction of the Safe Schools dilemma is invested with an inherent notion of zero-tolerance toward racialized groups and this, whether intentional or not, materially has a dangerously negative and crippling impact on student learning, achievement and social, emotional and intellectual development and health and in many cases has ultimately resulted in deaths (see Manners).

Using an ethnographic narrative inquiry as methodology to conduct this study, the voices of the participants unfold both their individual and collective experiences about coming into contact with school headwear policies and consequently facing disciplinary and punitive actions through the narration of their stories. The ways in how such policy inform the contact zones of GTA schools as highly racialized spaces imbued with notions of violence and dear consequences of discipline and punishment need to be considered in our post-9-11 climate of ‘terror’ where ‘white fear’ and moral panic of a persistent ‘threat’ of violence initiated by the hands of the
“Other” is alarming to say the least and has proven to have dire consequences in many instances for the “two-thirds world” (Itwaru, 1997; lecture) of racialized communities. Through headwear legislation these spaces continue to function to disproportionately target racialized groups with a specific focus on Black students. While academics and educational researchers have written about how zero-tolerance policies disenfranchise and discriminate disproportionately against Black and racialized students in mostly North American and British contexts, there has been no study published that critically interrogates the various ways of how headwear policies function within the Safe School discourse as disciplinary tools and when used as a measuring stick to regulate and standardize student behaviour according to decontextualized ‘universal’ notions of polity, civility, violence and safety, they ultimately result in differential punishment of Black and racialized students. Critics and dominant minded bodies posit that the headwear policy is a ‘necessary evil’ required to ensure the greater safety of the public. However the reality of policing and profiling the heads of racialized groups in order to protect the safety of the ‘greater public’ and a sense of dominant entitlement over knowledge and space needs to be ruptured. No longer can neo-liberal rationales be held up and used as a shield to protect the purity and virtue of the ‘student body’ and the image of the school at the expense of criminalizing racialized communities. This in itself should be read as an unforgiveable form of violence.

**Research Objectives**

The research objectives that guide this study seek to uncover: i) How school is experienced by Black and racialized students in an atmosphere where headwear policies collide with zero-tolerance approaches toward regulating and standardizing student behaviour; ii) through conducting ethnographic narrative interviews this study attempts to focus attention around the connections between the issues of race, racism and power and focus on how cultural
logic and oppositional knowledge may be used in schools to better reflect and capture the diverse realities of racialized communities. In doing so one of the primary aims of this study is to rupture dominant readings of headwear and its wearers and refocus the lens of safe schools around the knowledge and lived experiences of those who are most policed by the policy. By asking the research participants to retell and recount their experiences and stories, this study pushes past the narrow confines of merely reporting about issues of race and racism in schools and critically interrogates iii) how the intersections between time, space and body are highly influenced by the headwear policy.

**Zero Tolerance Meets Headwear and the Politics of Unveiling**

During the struggle for national liberation the Algerian woman’s revolutionary commitment and her instrumentalization of the veil (Fanon, 1965:99) played a role in transforming the Algerian family and was a key influence in shaping how the national landscape was constructed. In the context of the Algerian revolution Fanon wrote, “It is by their apparel that types of society first become known, whether through written accounts and photographic records or motion pictures…the fact of belonging to a given cultural group is usually revealed by clothing traditions” (Fanon, 1965:35). The attitude of commitment of the French officials and administration in Algeria were to destroy the people’s originality, creativity by taking the Algerian woman out of her ‘veil’ and therefore they concentrated their efforts on eliminating the wearing of the veil, which was looked upon at this juncture as a symbol of the status of Algerian women (Fanon, 1965:37). To the domineering, the Algerian woman unveiled announced to the occupier that an independent Algerian system was dislocated and defenseless. Fanon explains:

“Algerian society with every abandoned veil seemed to express its willingness to attend the master’s school and to decide to change its habits under the occupier’s direction and patronage”. Fanon (1965)
Fanon suggests that perhaps this is why the woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizing aggressors. The ability to see and not be seen or caught in the gaze of the dominant is empowering. To the dominant, not having the ability to ‘see’ the whole ‘Other’ is unbearably defeating. Every area of the ‘Other’ must be reordered, categorized and renamed within a hierarchal structure that privileges Euro-American hegemony.

In the aftermath of the suicide bomb attacks carried out by British born Muslim youths in London (2005), Britain’s Prime Minister Tony Blair called the ‘niqab’, a traditionally religious-cultural form of dress for some Muslim women, “a mark of separation” that causes other people from outside the Muslim community to feel uncomfortable. This controversy became public when Britain’s former secretary of foreign affairs, Jack Straw, said that he asks Muslim women in his constituency to remove their niqab when they came into his office, a private space, to see him (Sophie Walker, “Blair Calls Muslim Veil a Mark of Separation – People Must Show their Face”, Tor Star, October 18th, 2006). An increase in controversy surrounding public and private policy and the protection of fundamental human rights specifically for racialized groups has become part of a wider debate that questions notions of identity, safety and violence being posed across European countries like France and Italy who have taken the same position as Britain and has stretched as far as Turkey whose high court objected to promoting a female Muslim teacher because she wore a hijab (head scarf) outside of the school. The Turkish high court found that the teacher was ultimately setting a bad example for principles of the Turkish state although she was not acting contrary to Turkish law which forbids women to wear the hijab to enter schools and other public buildings (“Clash Over Head Scarves”, Trinidad & Tobago Newsday Monday February 13/06 (p.32).
In a Canadian context, the controversy struck when an 11 year old soccer player was ejected from a tournament match in Laval, Quebec for refusing to remove her hijab, the head covering traditionally worn by Muslim women. Her actions re-invoked disturbing issues of race, power and identity. The controversial move prompted the Premier Jean Charest to support the referee's decision. Though the referee's decision also met with Action Democratique du Quebec leader Mario Dumont's approval, it was denounced by others as excessive. The Quebec Soccer Federation announced that it fully supported the rule based on a Canadian Soccer Association policy banning all jewelry and headgear.

At a meeting in Manchester England, the International Football Association Board (the governing body responsible for international soccer rules) upheld the Quebec Soccer Federation's ban on the hijab. Board member Brian Barwick said it came down to a basic application of the rulebook: "there's a set of laws and rules - and Law 4 outlines basic equipment. It's absolutely right to be sensitive to people's thoughts and philosophies," he said. "But, equally, there has to be a set of laws that are adhered to - and we favour Law 4 being adhered to." The decision of the IFAB clearly demonstrates the ongoing shift of power regarding matters of racial justice away from the public domain to behind the closed doors of private spaces. Nationally the controversy and debate sparked by the case of the soccer player brought to the fore the intersection between Islamaphobia and the issue of headwear with safety and violence concerns as well as legal and human rights abuses.

In local settings a study conducted in an Alberta school regarding student perceptions about the meaning of school violence found that the threat of violence in the minds of students was more prevalent than actual physical violence (MacDonald, 1995; Spevak, 2003:10). While
public perception is unfortunately not always based on reality and is infectious (and contagious),
the notion of escalating violence in schools has spread and has been found to affect student
comfort levels. Through a system of profiling, targeting and criminalization, non-dominant
identities find themselves placed on the outside of the ‘public’ domain where they are labeled the
‘sourc’ and target of school related violence as constructed by headwear policies.

While Muslim students have always been faced with the issue of difference in the school
system in this current political climate of ‘terror’ Muslim students have had to increasingly face
racial discrimination surrounding their religious identities, language and cultural expressions (i.e.
style of dress) yet in many instances such acts have remained unreported and are quietly swept
away under the rug of silence. While some may argue that the victims of such discrimination
should be held accountable for their decision to dress ‘differently’ from mainstream attire, the
debate around race, dress and power must be understood in the context of the constant changing
nature of race and racism in the context of a globalized society. Giroux writes, “It is a new
racism that utilizes themes related to culture and nation as a replacement for the now discredited
biological referents of the old racism” (Giroux, 2006:158). I must admit as a teacher in a public
board of education, I have witnessed numerous accounts of Muslim students, females in
particular, who have been discriminated against as a result of wearing their hijab to school.
Whether the discrimination happened on playing fields, or by the tongues of other students, or
the actions and inactions of students and staff, many of the Muslim students left having to sort
out and unpack issues of self-esteem, perceptions of beauty and religious belief and identity.

Fanon’s work, A Dying Colonialism, is instrumental in focusing the lens of this study in
creating an alternative way of deconstructing the narrative interviews in relation and to the how
knowledge is constructed around headwear, safety and gang discourses. In a similar vein of thought, the spirit of the people that acted as the driving force behind the Algerian revolution is not far removed from the essence of daily local forms of resistance to hegemonic domination by racialized communities attending public schools. The data provided by the research participants of this study function to validate the position that prior forms of cultural knowledge, or cultural logic, are deeply invested in the outlawed headwear. By institutionalizing the mandatory removal of headwear of a particular group of people by force acts to completely disconnect the wearers in a trialectic capacity, mind, body and soul. This serves to further disempower students from experiencing a sense of freedom or liberation through their creativity and its connection with space and time.

The late Dr. Frederick Ivor Case wrote that the problems of race and representation in schooling are inherited from Egerton Ryerson’s racial attitude toward Black Canadians, First Nations, Chinese, South Asian, Korean and other racialized communities of our schools, “For many Canadians who are neither of French or Euro-British ancestry … It is only outside of Canada that we are perceived as Canadian” (1977). In our contemporary context this statement can easily be modified to include students from Tamil, Somali, Vietnamese, Afghani, Pakistani, and Middle-Eastern communities. The dominant attitude toward a racially inclusive education that grounds difference and lived experiences, including knowledge systems and spirituality in schooling and pedagogical practices have not changed much. There continues to exist a pyramidal hierarchy of power that privileges and protects whiteness at all costs while rendering the ‘Other’ expendable for the benefit of the dominant. To many students from racialized groups, the school is not perceived or experienced as a happy place but moreover a site of contestation, negation and negotiation. Schools come to symbolize
and represent privately controlled sites of domination and tension as opposed to a place of
security and safety (Case, 1977). Just as in the 19th century cases of the neglect of the educational
needs of Black children, who would often be relegated to the back of the class, complaints
concerning the lack of positive encouragement and representation and reinforcement continue to
be widespread and similar – be it from racialized students of the separate or public system
generally supported by misinformed racist teachers and those who are not-so-innocent whose
collective damage to the minds of our children remains incalculable (Case, 1977).

Case makes the argument that prevailing dominant attitudes continue to lay emphasis and
place moral value on what students from racialized communities are not. Members of dominant
circles tend to label these students and their communities who are injured and assaulted by racial
name-calling, labeling, and differential treatment as sensitive or even hypersensitive. What they
refuse to see is that in many instances racialized students who are labeled oppositional and
difficult or anti-authoritarian/establishment are not suffering from hypersensitivity; but instead
they have matured to the reality of their social situation and are searching for a means to free
themselves from the shackles of being racially-stereotyped, one that adults of all races and
ethnicities sometimes refuse to acknowledge (Case, 1977).

The dominant discursive construction of the safe schools and violence discourse connects
crime and violence to the types of headwear worn primarily by Black students. Through such
constructions specified types of headwear outlawed by school policies naturally assigned hyper-
violent ‘gangster’ type identities to the wearers which calculatedly positions Black and racialized
youth as the primary initiators and aggressors of violence in schools. This dominant construction
of safety and violence has provided the way for the institutionalization of a process of
criminalization of racialized bodies to take place by specifically targeting ‘headwear’ as a marker
of gang violence. As a result, wearing such headwear is strictly prohibited and outlawed from public school buildings, classrooms, hallways, locker rooms, behind closed doors and onto playing surfaces. In doing this it becomes easier for school administration to police and punish racialized groups rather than listen to them or actively work with parents, communities, organizations and social services (Giroux, 2004:98).

This form of domestic militarization via zero-tolerance approaches toward safety and violence allows legislation and standardized policy, such as headwear policies, to function as a tool of social control and surveillance used to target racialized groups. In the end such policies help to preserve the racialized hierarchal system of social organization and reproduce and preserve this racial hierarchy in the public school system at the expense of the already most alienated marginalized of society (Noguera, 2003).

While the Curling-McMurtry report attempted to do ‘justice’ by naming racism as a major contributor to violence in schools the underlying issue of how racism and race is inherently intertwined with power and violence and how this specific network of social relations and its discursive construction manifests itself in schooling contexts was ignored. The continuous magnification of gang violence or what has now been repackaged as ‘youth violence’ in public school contexts has ‘colorized’ racialized youth, with a particular emphasis toward Black youth in particular as the primary sources/agents responsible for the violence and the existing sense of fear of the threat of gangs, ensuing racialized violence and impending doom issued by the hands of ‘thugs’ and ‘gangstas’ who inhabit police designated ‘hot spots’, ‘danger zones’ and ‘at-risk’ communities.

Thus the message remains quite clear: assimilate as fast as possible so we too can become like our fellow white Canadians. It is thought and said that we too must learn how to become
'Canadian’. The absurdity of this thought is expanded by Case, presumably what this means is that South Asians, Black people and Chinese in Saskatchewan should opt for a German-Canadian or Ukrainian-Canadian identity while we in Ontario opt for an Anglo-Canadian identity and those in Montreal for a Quebecois identity. While racialized groups have been enticed to give up their cultural heritage and told to forget about their collective histories for the pottage of material success and rewards, the dominant system has clearly showed that it has no intention on delivering on its promises. Case’s point was later proven by the Royal Commission on Learning (1993-94) which found that the narrative data collected from groups of Black educators, students, community members echoed the research from the seventies, eighties and early-nineties demonstrated that Black youth who were unable to effectively negotiate the white, Eurocentric, middle class school system believed that racism and discrimination were insurmountable barriers to educational success (Head, 1975, Solomon, James, 1990, Solomon, 1992, Dei, 1996). In many instances the contestations that Black students and other racialized groups confront in school result in disengagement and disproportionate numbers of “push-outs” (Dei, 1997) from the schooling process, leaving many students to believe that education offered little possibility for achieving success in this society.

Social Location: The I-Location

“Education without justice is slavery”
- King Emanuel Charles Edwards,
  King Boboshanti

Jacobs (1990) asks, “How do we interpret the action of lifting the hat”? Theorizing the work of Panofsky, Jacobs posits that this form of salute is peculiar to the Western world and is a residue of medieval chivalry: armed men used to remove their helmets to make clear their peaceful intentions and their confidence in the peaceful relations with others. In this sense it seems
obvious that neither an Indigenous Australian nor an ancient Greek person could be expected to realize that the lifting of a hat is not only a practical event with certain expressional connotations but also a sign of polity. Therefore to accurately understand this significance of this ‘gentleman’ action one must not only be familiar with the practical world of objects and events but also with the more than practical world of customs and cultural traditions peculiar to a certain civilization and way of knowing. Leaving your hat on in court, schools or other government institutions is commonly taken as an outward sign of contempt and disrespect.

Ongoing attempts by district school boards in Ontario to standardize and regulate the heads (and subsequently the minds and bodies) of racialized groups via headwear legislation cannot be reduced to a simple matter of safety spawned from the ‘genuine concern’ of the dominant to help ensure the security and safety of the public or a mere attempt to reinforce hegemonic notions of good manners and proper etiquette. The ‘trickle-down’ effect of this in the context of schools further reinforces already existing polarized and racialized spaces and categories of social class in schools. The regulating power of headwear policies function as a tool that lend to the process of reordering and revitalizing public ‘places’ where the fusion of space and experience are imbued with differential meanings about the freedoms to which dominant groups feel a sense of ‘entitlement’ and the consequent breadth of future life options that are available to them. The issue of racial profiling is real and complex and takes many forms and exists in systemic, institutional, private and public spheres. Schools constitute the physical space where particular social, political, economic and psychic relations are forged, nurtured and contested and in this sense they function as sources of identity, constituted within webs of power relations that play a
critical influence in framing the choices and options that are available and accessible to youth from racialized groups and their communities. (Lipman, 128: 2003).

The focus of this work is on how the discursive construction of school headwear policies are linked to a wider set of social policies that function to target, police and criminalize racialized bodies with a particular emphasis toward African/Black peoples. Educational policies such as headwear policies form part of a dominant system of social relations and values, framing what can be done, said or thought and the type of social identities that are produced and authorized to exist in school spaces. Headwear policies in this sense function as a way of monitoring and controlling students, teachers and racialized communities (Lipman, 81:2003).

Too Black, Too Strong

During the late 1980’s rappers, most notably Chuck D from the hip-hop group Public Enemy boldly wore his trademark L.A. Raiders baseball styled cap with the slogan across the front, “Real Men Wear Black”. His simple action, putting the hat on his head, became read as a bold political statement when worn by Black bodies (see Rodney, 1969). In fact, this particular form of headwear and its oppositional symbolism and language was erased and instead this form of headwear became synonymous with gang violence and gun crimes. Here we must recognize that in a North American context, the concept of gang and violence applies exclusively to racialized groups. The administration concluded that the Raiders caps were suspect of gang involvement and we were all sentenced with suspension from school.

The dominant construction of ‘gangster’ connects particular types of headwear, the identity of the wearer and how headwear is worn all became indicative markers of alleged gang/criminal
involvement when in public school spaces. Contemporary Euro-American social traditions and values regarding removing hats in public schools driven by dominant constructions of race, polity and civility, however in a current context the ‘hat’ has now been categorically replaced by ‘headwear,’ and the issue of ‘proper etiquette’ and ‘good manners’ have now been masked by issues of public safety and the threat of ‘outside’ gang violence. Headwear policies and their ambiguous and differential interpretations and zero-tolerance approaches at enforcing standardized behaviour of racialized groups in particular is demonstrative of an ever-growing attempt to insert a universalized system of policing in public schools as one means to assert dominant authority over safety and violence issues in public schools. Headwear policies in this sense function to symbolically solidify Euro-American hegemony over the control of space, resources, knowledge and bodies. This particular approach toward standardizing discipline and punishment brings with it exclusionary practices and deadly implications for all non-dominant groups living in North American diaspora communities. The reprehensible and endless repetition of these raced and criminalized images reproduce racist stereotypes about racialized groups and allow dominant people the freedom and safety to distance themselves from any form of collective responsibility or accountability for the increasing violence that is becoming regularized in public school life (Giroux, 1996:66).

While dominant discursive constructions portray public schools as the ‘natural’ product of the values, capacities, and rights of residents in each community, it is argued that these schools are structurally embedded in, and historically constitute the micro-political terrain where the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed is played out and colonial encounters are resurfaced and revisited daily. Increasingly, law enforcement such as police agencies coupled with militaristic approaches to instituting discipline and punishment have made their way into
public schooling to reinforce the dominant authority structure. Racialized groups perceive such police presence as a continuity of surveillance and differential targeting and containment from the community into the public school. In this sense, the school and its network of components, actively functions as a site of struggle and contestation between the rule-makers and the ‘rule-breakers’ (Solomon and Palmer, 2004). Therefore these ‘public’ edifices represent a polarized and interdependent relationship between dominant groups and racialized subordinate groups, the relative valuation of classes in the dominant culture, and the ‘rightful’ inherited identity positions of entitlement of their youth in the existing social order (Lipman, 128:2003).

**Chapter 2 Discursive Frameworks**

*An Anti-Racism Livity*

"Anti-racism is about power relations. Anti-racism discourse moves away from discussions of tolerating diversity to the pointed notion of difference and power. It sees race and racism as central to how we claim, occupy, and defend spaces" (Dei, 4: 2005).

Dei raises the question, "‘Why should the norms, values, ideas, perspectives and traditions of one social group be adopted as standard by the institutions of society’"? (Dei, 1996) An anti-racist discursive lens provides a necessary theoretical framework to dismantle the existing hegemonic monopoly over the discourse of zero tolerance and headwear policies. Anti-racism education may be defined as, “an action oriented strategy for institutional, systemic change to address racism and the interlocking systems of social oppression,” such as gender, class and sex, to name some of the most prevalent. Anti-racist discourse is critical of race and racism in society and of the continued racializing of social groups for differential and unequal treatment (Dei, 1996). This discursive framework clearly names the issue of race and social difference as issues of power and equity rather than as matters of cultural and ethnic variety.
This study is guided by the principles of an anti-racism paradigm and it seeks to rupture dominant notions of how social power and knowledge is constructed and shared in contemporary Canadian society. By focusing on the institutionalized power and the systemic forces of society that contain a reservoir or privilege for white (heterosexual) males, in particular to access, an anti-racism discursive lens provides a vitally needed space for racialized groups to legitimize their lived experiences in our own voices and through our own lens(es). Daily we are forced to re-encounter, re-experience and revisit sites of hegemonic domination. An anti-racism discursive framework acknowledges this too often denied reality of racialized communities and provides an effective functioning discursive paradigm that can effectively be instituted by teachers and educators\(^1\) to decolonize the minds and the multiple spaces that are continuously raped of power. The reproduction of dominant-subordinate relationships plays a particular function in regulating social identities and roles and critically interrogates how knowledge is produced. This relationship is based upon an imbalance of power sharing between dominant group members and racialized bodies (Thomas, 1984; Lee 1985; 1991; Dei, 1996, in Dei and Johal, 2005). Developing and implementing anti-racist strategies in educational practices and thought is a serious political project. One of the primary goals of anti-racist educators is to transform schooling and education (Dei, 1999:25).

Historical markers of difference based primarily on biological, phenotypic and cultural characteristics have shifted in the wake of a developing globalized political economy (Miles, 1982; Li 1990; Bolaria; and Li 1988; Banton 1979; Dei 1996, 2000).

\(^1\) Although I realize that an anti-racism discursive framework can be used to mould the pedagogical practice of all educators my focus here is specifically on teachers/educators from racialized communities as we must not only educate our students (and apparently staff members too), in a sociably literate way, but must also confront racism and issues pinned to race, in their various discreet and subtle ways, while performing and fulfilling our duties and responsibilities while at work.
The new markers of difference are being made and remade in discourse around language, culture and religion (Rattansi, 2006; Dei, 1996, 2000; Razack, 1995) and are invested with differential social or cultural power and contain serious implications for educational thought and practice, especially when considering how racialized bodies and communities experience schooling practices. Anti-racism locates power relations at the centre of the discourse on race and social difference and critiques how the historically constituted relations of domination and subordination are consciously and unconsciously systemically and institutionally embedded in educational facilities (Dei, 1996:27). This study looks beyond the narrow preoccupation with individual prejudices and discriminatory acts to examine the deemed effects of such practices as opposed to the intentionality. The purpose of anti-racist education is to help create a just and humane society for the well being of all people. This work is a call for political and community engagement including the perseverance of meaningful change in schools, homes and workplaces to promote the values of equity, fairness and justice (Mullard, 1980; 1985; Dei, 1996; Brandt, 1986; Gilroy, 1982; Abella, 1984; Lee, 1985; Thomas, 1984).

This study rejects all claims of neutrality and objectivity and recognizes that one’s position as researcher is highly influenced by lived experiences and in turn plays a major function in shaping how we interpret and see the world as the effects of race have been found to be the most salient form of social oppression in the lives of Black students the other racialized groups attending GTA schools (Dei, 1996; 2000). In fact, an anti-racism framework is most naturally suited to guide this project due to the shared embedded connections between my personal social location, the social location of the interview participants, and the overall context of this study. In developing shared commonalities in terms of difference whether race, histories,
experiences, representation, identity and knowledge production serve as entry points into “grounding up” (see Rodney, Grounding with my Brothers). Anti-racism theory posits that the replication of social norms is perpetuated by societal inequalities towards racialized differences. Dei qualifies, “anti-racism explicitly names the issues of race and social difference as issues of power and equity rather than as matters of cultural and ethnic variety” (Dei, 1996: 25). Moving away from more conventional views of race as being based solely on skin colour, anti-racism finds broader definitions that incorporate one’s personal and social history, religion, and class, as well as the diverse impacts of cultural and political imperialism and colonialism (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Goldberg, 1993; Dei, 1996; Winant, 2000).

This work is of a political nature and it recognizes the urgent need for racialized and marginalized peoples to speak for ourselves and tell our own stories, without the need or desire for the approval and validation of our living experiences from dominant members of society. Telling our stories from an anti-racism framework allows us the opportunity to experience and to share in the various expressions of self-empowerment by allowing us to interpret the world in which we live through our own eyes, taking into account the dynamics of varying social locations, environment, lived experiences and worldviews (Okolie, 2005:242). Dei speaks to the utility of critical anti-racist discourse, he posits:

Anti-racism deals foremost with equity; that is, the qualitative value of justice. It deals with representation; that is, the need to have multiple voices and perspectives involved in the production of mainstream social knowledge. Anti-racism also examines institutional practices to see how institutions respond to the challenge of diversity and difference; understood as the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, language, culture and religion (Dei, 2000: 34).

Anti-racism grounds this work in the embodied knowledge of its participants and it reiterates the urgent necessity for knowledge to be embodied, situated, and raced. In so doing, anti-racist research requires a shift, on the part of researchers, away from ethnographic authority to
discursive and interpretive authority. This is vital in creating a safe space for the voices of racialized peoples to be secured. Giving sound, or access, to the voices which have been historically and traditionally silenced and muted by the social sciences, creates the necessary conditions leading to transformative social action (Wahab, in Dei and Johal, 2005:49).

The Discipline and Punishment of Headwear

Foucault’s theory on discipline and punishment and the origin of the modern prison-complex is instrumental in framing our understanding of how dominant notions of school safety and violence are institutionalized, coded, packaged and marketed as headwear policies and deemed a necessary safety measure in order to prevent gang violence from flaring up inside the school in an attempt to punish better not less (Foucault, 1995:136). By marking the body as an object and target of power (Foucault, 1995:136) this ‘new’ form of disciplinary training is distinctive because it operates not by direct control of the body as a whole but by detailed control over specific parts of the body by achieving the desired results through a set of specified procedures such as the ‘routinization’ of removing headwear and in creating docile, faceless and nameless bodies, making it uneasy to differentiate an individual from the mass. It can be said that a more subtle and pervasive control of the body is a means in itself to the modern control of the soul (Foucault, 1995:135).

According to Foucault the plague that ravished 17th century France was the trial in the course of which one may define ideally the exercise of disciplinary power. Those of the plague were caught up in a meticulous tactical positioning in which individual differentiations were the constricting effects of power that multiplied, articulated and subdivided itself; the great confinement on the one hand; the correct training on the other. The city and its streets were
rendered into a segmented, immobile, frozen space where each individual is fixed in his assigned place with ceaseless inspections and mandatory daily attendance stemming from a system of permanent registration (Foucault: 1995). The binary marking, labeling and exile of the leper led to the existence of a whole set of techniques and institutions for measuring, supervising and correcting the abnormal. Tactics of individualizing disciplines are imposed on the excluded; and on the other hand, the universality of disciplinary controls makes it possible to brand the ‘Other’ a threat to public safety. Whether through the restriction of privileges, suspension and or expulsion the ultimate desire of such legislation was to determine how social control should be best exerted over the body, mind and soul of the condemned. Therefore newly defined measures and ways of considering power resulted in the implementation of new punitive systems of confinement and exclusion that were not relegated solely to the physical removal and exclusion of the leper but also the demonization of the idea of the leper, the ‘Other’ in the popular discourse of society and public imagination.

The birth of modern disciplinary and punitive techniques and locates that the critical shift away from the public spectacle of the scaffold and other brutal forms of public punishment by humiliation and acts of extreme violence toward less painful but more intrusive systems of psychological control over the political technology of the body (the body of the condemned) and its movements. This new “gentle way in punishment” can be said to have effectively shifted issues of race, violence and crime, out of the hands of the public discourse and into the restricted private spaces of district school boards and other dominant controlled institutions. From behind the privatized space of the closed doors of district school boards headwear legislation is discursively constructed in such a manner that through it’s regulation of the routinization of

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2 These exemplary forms of discipline and punishment, that resulted in public execution and the time-table first, occurred late enough in Europe’s ‘Enlightenment’ and typified the punishment of criminals in Europe until about the middle of the 18th century (Gutting, 2005).
movement it functions to control the body through psychologically reformatting discipline and
punishment away from the ‘crime’ and instead focuses on the potential of the suspect, the usual
‘Other’, to harm the ‘citizen’. This approach does not punish to efface the crime but to transform
the criminal, both potential and actual, punishment must bring with it a certain corrective
technique (Foucault 1995:17). Headwear policies like the modern systems of discipline and
punishment require methods that individualize the penalty; the penalty must be adjusted to the
individual character and to the danger that he bears within him for others. In public school
settings headwear policies silently function to reinforce dominant ideas about race and crime and
violence nature. This feature of disciplinary control packaged as headwear policies is one of
many discursive tools used to normalize dominant judgment over the articles of headwear, its
wearers and forms of cultural logic and oppositional knowledge. The idea of normalization is
pervasive in society; the headwear policy helps to provide a scale that is used to rank Black and
racialized students in a differential manner that compares their actions and behaviour to everyone
else.

The decision of district school boards to restrict headwear as a safety measure designed to
protect public school zones from the threat of ‘intruding’ gang violence has worked to the
opposite effect and instead of deterring gang-type violence, it has on the contrary heightened
fears of the possibility of public school zones becoming infected with the stereotypical type of
hyper-violence connected to Black bodies by media sources and popular forms of entertainment.
This ‘moral panic’ strikes up enough white fear that the spatial reorganization and reordering of
the public school and its bodies need to be redefined to better preserve the hegemony of the
dominant power structure and the political challenges of a global economic market.
Panopticonism and Policing Heads

The public school like other modern forms of social institutions is designed with particular architectural structures that fulfill the needs of ‘ordinary people’ while simultaneously targeting racialized bodies that are ‘inside’ permanently visible. For Foucault, Bentham’s ‘Panopticon’ plays a key role in shaping how modern techniques of disciplinary-observatory power take shape in public schools. Foucault suggests that Bentham’s Panopticon, a hierarchal system of observation that maximized its control of prisoners with the use of minimal staff, has come to pervade ‘modern’ society. Bentham’s underlying principle of control is not the fact but the possibility of continuous observation. Through panopticonism the assumption is made that the ‘Other’ is always being observed, inducing a state of consciousness and permanent visibility.

In doing so, this ensures the automatic functioning of dominant power reversing the issue of visibility from the public realm to the unseen safety and security of private space. Through practices of labeling, naming and reordering the body and knowledge, headwear policies function in divisive ways that cause the wearers to be highly visible through non-conformist actions the target, the ‘Other’, is always highly visible. Yet, once the headwear is removed the cloak of invisibility prevails and one’s identity becomes faceless and less threatening to the dominant structure of power. This form of normalization situates the wearers in a ‘network’ of writing and recording in documents, such as suspension records, letters, psychological records, evaluations and assessments, police records and news reports, that provide detailed information about a particular individual and allow power systems to control him or her by formulating categories such as “colours”; “gangster dress” and “gang apparel” that in turn become the basis for knowledge. In the modern age this exercise of power although typically invisible, such as headwear policies, works to effectively control and manage how racialized groups experience
‘school’ in one way by making them highly visible through the involuntary undressing of their heads.

It is in these spaces of control and domination that the possibility of continual observation exists. Like the inmates in the penal system, Black students in public schools are made to feel that they are continuously being observed and hence targeted. The anti-gang focus of headwear policies in a sense provides a certain type of programming and downloading of a state of consciousness and permanent visibility into both bodies and spatial formations that assures the automatic functioning of power and the preservation of dominant hegemony. In this sense, headwear policies function in a panoptic fashion expanding its observational powers past the private confines of the school building into the greater school community and public domain.

*Exclusion and Confinement*

In French society the plague was met by the necessity to have every body and every movement ordered and to sort out all confusion in French society. The political dream spawned from the era of the plague is the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life, each individual his place, his body, his disease and his death, his well-being, through the mediation of the complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power. A sense of fear and moral panic spread across French society that their ‘racial purity’ was threatened by contamination from coming into contact with the lepers of society. The leper was caught in a practice of rejection, of exile enclosure, left among the mass of lepers who became faceless making it uneasy if not useless to try to differentiate an individual from the mass. The leper and his separation; the plague and its segmentations, the first is marked; the second is analyzed and distributed.
Foucault’s work sets the stage and provides a useful framework from which to examine the dynamics of how notions of safe schooling and violence intersect with headwear policies. Whereas the ‘leper’ is symbolic of the ‘Other’, in the context of schooling and safety debates the ‘Other’ takes the shape of primarily bodies from racialized groups who are similarly marked; while the dominant notions of violence and moral panic over the protection of the homogeneity of ‘public space’ is analyzed and distributed by injection into the public’s mainstream. Similar tactics are used to criminalize Black bodies in bandannas or wave caps as ‘gangstas’ or as thugs and bring against them the dualistic mechanism of exclusion through suspension (ibid).

**The Abstract Public: Racializing Social Spaces**

“Racialized spaces are fundamental to how individuals, the state, and institutional practices make sense of and manage ‘race’, race relations and their racism” - (Goldberg, 1993)

The production of the public school as an abstract space contains implicit notions of power that directly impacts how the construction of identities and social space is discursively constructed (Razack 2002:8-10; Foucault 1984:242; McCann 1999:164; Lefebvre 1991:56). How was/is this space, the ‘public school’, first conceptualized in the minds of its planners, architects, administrators, and dominant bodies? Through the continual process of defining and redefining of spaces and bodies, subjective identities are formed in relation to material urban spaces leading to the existence of a mutually constitutive relationship (McCann, 164:199). In this sense the social analysis of space in the context of the public school function both as a conceptual and interdisciplinary methodological tool that allows for the questioning of the evolving of the histories and politics of the racialization of public school zones (Teelucksing, 2006).
Lefebvre’s work, “The Production of Space,” recognizes that the relationship between space and the social takes many forms. According to Lefebvre, social space is a result of the contradictions of concrete space (material space) and the abstract (how space is perceived or mental spaces). Teeluck Singh posits that according to Lefebvre, new, everyday lived spaces reflect both the concrete space and the abstract by ‘balancing’ the trialectics of society, history and geography resulting in the production of new everyday spaces, representational spaces (Teelucksing, 2006:8). Lefebvre’s conceptual triad of social space is most instructive in that it provides a useful framework that can be used to critically interrogate how power issues are masked through dominant processes of racialization (via headwear policies) are intentionally designed to reorganize and compartmentalize space and its subsequent bodies, a process necessary to maintain dominant discursive constructions of the safe schools – youth violence dilemma now faced by many public school in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Henri Lefebvre’s discussion of the social production of space is informed by the material circumstances of everyday life (McCann, 1996:164). In fact the contestations for power over social spaces, much like the racialized geographies of the city, are imported into the school and become institutionalized through dominant discursive constructions that target Black forms of headwear and how such headwear should function in these socio-spatial processes. Lefebvre’s framework lends itself to this discussion about how the central role that imagination and representation play in producing space and constructing identities and knowledge. Lefebvre’s discussion of the social production of space informs and is informed by the material circumstances of daily life. Spatialized struggles between groups to claim space inform how the dominant position regarding the anti-gang focus of the policy reflect a need to adapt the methods of social needed to preserve the public safety by restoring discipline and punishment as a
response to the perceived threat of gang violence ignited by the new tides of non-white faces inside public schools. The current headwear policy in Ontario public schools functions to protect dominant hegemonic interests and preserve their monopoly over how the abstract and material space that forms the ‘public school’ and in its bodies (including the ‘student body’) are conceptualized in the imagination of the ‘public’ and in turn how they are then presented.

Lefebvre defines an abstract space as:

“A space of quantification and growing homogeneity, a merchandised space where all the elements are exchangeable and thus interchangeable; a police space in which the state tolerates no resistance and no obstacles. Economic space and political space thus converge towards an elimination of all differences” (Lefebvre 1979:293).

For an abstract space to become a dominant space two processes must occur.

First, there must be a concerted effort to define the appropriate meaning of the abstract space and the suitable types of activities and the types of people that are allowed to inhabit such spaces (Lefebvre, 1991:156). In doing so the policy clearly leads in turn to the marking of non-dominant bodies, headwear and behaviour as acceptable in the school and those that are not. The policy allows the dominant group to decide which types of dress are conducive to the maintenance of a ‘safe learning’ environment by outlawing headwear that is labeled criminal. This simultaneously identifies the dominant group as authority figures over the physical space of the school and over the construction of what is considered ‘normative’ through the designation of who and what is and is not to be found there (Schick 20002:110).

In fact, the school as an abstract space symbolizes and represents a national story that depicts a unified Canadian history where European heroes are always established as the original inhabitants of the land. Such a narrative conveniently excludes the colonizing process that transformed and continues to threaten Indigenous peoples with geographic, historical and
cultural erasure and disavows and diminishes Canada’s role in the enslavement of Africans, and hesitantly tells of the exclusion and confinement of Asians and Sikhs (Schick, 2002:105). The school emphasizes the need to clearly define itself as a unified, homogenous space that secures white entitlement and authority (Schick 2002:107). This image of homogeneity and unity as exemplified by the public school and its monolithic colour-blind ‘student body’ is a central feature in preserving a dominant sense of entitlement over space and over the production of knowledge and identities. This process of displacement can only be achieved through the ongoing state-sponsored process of fragmentation and marginalization of racialized ‘others’ in a system where whiteness is something that is invested in, a tool used as a means of accumulating property and to keep ‘Others’ from it (Lipsitz in Dei, 2005; McCann, 1999:171).

Interrogating the discursive and spatial constructions of the ‘public school’ provides a more critical reading of how notions of spatial organization collide with ideas of race, class and gender, and ultimately play a highly influential and invisible role when determining how bodies become empowered, disempowered and socially controlled in these contact zones.

*Homeland Security and Erasing Histories*

The second necessary element for producing and maintaining an abstract space is erasing racialized histories from national discourses. Dominant entitlement over abstract space is an impetus to the creation of the headwear policy and has a silently violent impact in the ways in which the ‘school’ is perceived and functions materially. The erasure and restructuring of the history and of the aesthetic landscape of the public school is necessary to carry out the intended functions of the planners, architects and other members of dominant communities (McCann, 1999:1969). It is a space where previous histories have been erased (Gregory, 1994:366) and
transformed into an ahistorical space, devoid of any indications of the social struggles around its production, or traces of the concrete space it replaces. It is within these spaces that the racialized histories of the wearers and the headwear are erased and reconstructed through a dominant gaze. A parallel example of this process can be found in McCann’s analysis of Lexington city. In his analysis, McCann suggests that the power of the state relies on the erasure of non-dominant histories from the landscape. Restructuring and reordering histories allows the reshaping of the physical spaces of the city. Such spaces are made safe for capitalism by attempting to elide and marginalize the city’s racialized geographies and histories.

Erasing racialized histories and experiences directly impacts how knowledge and bodies become compartmentalized. In relation to white people, oppositional knowledge from the public school is achieved in a subtle way through institutionalizing the headwear policy. This is packaged as a necessary measure, and although paternalistic in nature, is born out of a genuine spirit of concern for the safety of all. In reality this can be interpreted to mean the safety of the ‘public’. The public school is a space of continual reconstruction of its ‘landscape’ and valorization of an official national story that inherently privileges the historical experiences of the dominant while simultaneously disavowing and misinterpreting the histories of its Black bodies. The mapping and ordering of Black bodies via the headwear policy aids in regulating public school spaces as exclusionary territories dominated by Euro-American hegemonic patriarchy. The image of a pure abstract space in the context of the public school is centered in the dominant belief to their ‘rightful’ claim to entitlement and authority over the production of space and subjective identities. The creation of Canada as a mental space has required and continues to require a need to categorize, name, order and control the movements of those bodies
who do not fit the national recipe for who is and who is not considered a normative “Canadian” (Bannerji, 1999).

Chapter 3 Methodology: Ethnographic Narrative Inquiry
I-Bodied Connections and Anti-racist Research Practice

“The sharing of resources and information may assist in groups and communities to collaborate with each other and to protect each other.”

_Linda Tuhiwai Smith, (2005:105)._ 

Only the stories, the lived experiences of Black and racialized students who have encountered, engaged and resisted the differential impact of the anti-gang focus of school headwear policies and its related consequential forms of punishment can begin to capture a degree of what they experience daily in school. Designed to preserve school safety and protect the clean image of the ‘student body’, school headwear policies, function to maintain the hegemonic political and economic interests of dominant groups. Through a racially constructed lens the anti-gang focus of headwear policies has been found to criminalize the collective humanity, history and experiences of particularly Black students and others from racialized groups. In the context of the headwear policy, its consumption and commodification of cultural logic and oppositional knowledge as intellectual property, of collective knowledge as public knowledge, and knowledge as value-added, deflects efforts to decolonize minds. Amputated by sets of cultural misinterpretations, driven by Euro-American hegemony, dominant constructions of school safety and violence discourses continue to attack the authenticity of “Other” ways of thought, knowledge and how the lived experiences of racialized groups should be interpreted and negotiated. By assuming authority and expertise over the types of headwear worn particularly by Black students and others from racialized groups, the connection between race and criminality is reaffirmed and coded into the contact zones of schools.
Ethnographic narrative inquiry as a research methodology proved to be the best-suited framework to conduct this study. By implementing such an approach, Dei’s fourth principle in his anti-racism framework, the need to address the marginalization and delegitimization of the knowledge and experience of marginalized and subordinated groups in the education system best took form. As a methodological guide this framework was powerful in that it provided a paradigm that allowed the data and the findings of this study to be co-constructed by both the research participants, through the ‘science that they dropped’ in their narrative submissions and my own lived experiences as both a former student and as an experienced teacher of the said school system. This approach allowed the research process to remain true to the research and learning objectives that guide this study through its grounding in the cultural logic and oppositional forms of knowledge provided by the research participants and its intersectionality with my own similar observations and lived experiences of safe schooling. As a result the ethnographic narrative inquiry as a methodology lends greatly toward developing a powerful and new way of reading how the ‘safe schools experience’ actually comes to be experienced by many Black students and other racialized groups.

Although the languages of racism, imperialism and colonialism have changed, the sites of struggle remain the same. Renaming Black bodies and their headwear and through our own lenses, ones that are no longer based on dominant cultural misrepresentations, is as powerful ideologically as transforming and reprogramming conceptions of race and violence in the eye of the public’s mind. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith best summarizes this thought in stating that the battle to prove the validity of Indigenous knowledge is no longer a primary concern. Instead, Smith urges that the primary concern now should be toward reclaiming authenticity of and control over our own forms of cultural logic, oppositional knowledge, lived experiences and bodies if we are to
disrupt and rupture dominant constructions that connect race and criminality to differential forms of discipline and punishment in school (Smith, 2005:104). Ethnographic narrative inquiry serves as the most efficient and effective methodological tool to meet this necessity. Through deconstructing the multiplicity of layers of the headwear policy we can rupture the dominant constructions of school safety, violence and race and shift the current discourse to a more holistic reading.

By empowering the victims of the policy through capturing their lived experiences via narrative inquiry a space is created to reclaim a collective voice that has been silenced through various forms of discipline and punishment. Reclaiming this ‘voice’ recognizes the need to reconnect and reorder cultural logic and oppositional ways of thought and knowing which have been submerged, hidden, driven underground (Smith, 2005:69) or consumed by the dominant system and repackaged in lactified forms. Through the narratives we gain insight into how the concept of discipline as a way of organizing systems of knowledge and as a means to organizing and controlling bodies through instituting techniques of detail are used to cause racialized youth to experience school as alienating and dislocating through the acts of targeting, exclusion, marginalization and denial. In a school setting Black ways of knowing have been excluded and marginalized from the inception of the headwear policy, a policy specifically designed to institute a form of social control directly over Black bodies.

Foucault suggested that one particular way discipline is distributed is through enclosure, which leaves individuals partitioned, separated by space and time and compartmentalized (Smith, 2005:68). As a methodological tool, ethnographic narrative inquiry provides a way to voice and give sound to the untold stories of how dominant driven interpretations of school safety have a differential negative impact on racialized groups, a story that is missing from the
current literature on this topic. Through the lived experiences of the research participants we can begin to interrogate the various ways in which the headwear policy allows for efficient supervision of Black bodies and for the simultaneous distinctions that are made by coding specific types of non-dominant headwear and their colours. In order to gain any insight into how these forms of discipline and punishment affect racialized groups emotionally, physically, psychologically and spiritually, we must listen to the voices of those who have had to engage the headwear policy. Only in doing so can we learn how such policies function to erase cultural forms of logic and oppositional ways of knowing, living and interpreting where we fit in on the Earth (Smith, 2005:96).

**Sample Selection**

The research participants of this study consisted of six students (at the time the interviews were conducted), two fourteen-year old students in senior elementary school (grade eight); four secondary school students attending different high schools, two in different locations in Toronto and the other two in separate locations in a suburb, Mississauga. The seventh research participant of this study was a post-secondary graduate who had attended three different Toronto secondary schools since district school boards first institutionalized zero-tolerance policies toward headwear in 2001. In choosing such a diverse range of participants in terms of their ages and levels of education allowed for a more nuanced reading of how headwear policies function in schools and how this in turn plays an influential role in how school is experienced by racialized groups. Also, such a wide range of diversity of participants reflects the different levels of understanding of how the policy functions.

All of the participants were directly disciplined and/or punished in one form or another as a result of the types of headwear they chose to wear in school. Overall the participants selected
provided a diverse range of representation of class, age, race, ethnicity and at varying levels in their involvement with education. While we found that students who were attending senior elementary school faced lower levels of suspension when compared to students in the secondary panel, nevertheless, they provided valuable information in gaining insight of how the policy in conjunction with temporal factors are interpreted for teens from racialized groups who in the majority of instances are at the beginning stages of discovering and defining themselves and their identities. The information provided by these interview participants was valuable also because on one hand while the policy determined how their identities were to be constructed based upon dominant notions of ‘universal’ behaviour, hence, institutionalizing dominant notions of gangster’ and in turn directly associating these constructions with specifically racialized groups. While the participants recognized that race and racism played key factors in how they experienced ‘school’, they were unable to navigate through the multi-layered topic of school safety and violence. The narratives provided by the research participants clearly demonstrate how the stigmas and profiles of being anti-authoritarian, difficult and potentially violent were assigned to them and reinforced in the school system instead of aiding them to build positive identities based on their social differences. Yet reality remains true and in saying this I mean that these students, although portrayed by the dominant system as potentially threatening and violent by virtue of the types of headwear worn, providing these young adults with the necessary tools to deconstruct these multiple layers around race, culture and crime was never done. In fact, we can say that thinking about how power dynamics are inherent in this discussion seemed totally alien to these students at such a young age. This signifies that the underlying issues of race, representation and discipline and punishment in education clearly needs to be addressed during their senior elementary years where the school plays a vital role in constructing and
criminalizing identities which ultimately carries new implications once registered in the secondary level.

The narratives highlighted how their identities shift and are continuously being reconstructed depending on how the politics over power and space are negotiated. Although all of the interview participants attended different schools across the greater Toronto area one common theme found in all of their narratives was the issue of public safety. Another common theme found in all of the narratives was how imposing labels upon particular forms of headwear not only criminalizes particularly Black and other racialized groups but also makes the wearers experience daily life in school in a disconnected and disembodied way. This is done to save and protect the sanctity and the sanity of the ‘public’s safety’.

An explicatory letter regarding the background and purpose of this study was sent to colleagues in the field of education asking for referrals of student participants that fit the research criteria to partake in the interview phase of this project. Through the snowball method informal contacts were made with prospective participants across the greater Toronto area. The prospective research participants completed a brief background survey that was forwarded to me. The background survey helped to best choose research participants whose experiences engaging and negotiating headwear most closely fitted the research and learning objectives guide of this study. After contacting respondents by electronic mail to explain the background and purpose of this study, solicitation/informed consent letters were sent to the candidates to partake in the interview process.

Respondents who were not of legal age but who wished to participate in this study were asked to have the informed consent letter signed by themselves and/or legal parent or guardian
and returned in a self-addressed envelope with available contact information such as telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. Research participants who met the legal age requirement received and signed an informed letter of consent. Respondents who agreed to participate in the study returned a self-addressed envelope with signed consent forms. Selected candidates were contacted by telephone and by electronic mail to arrange and co-ordinate interview dates, times and locations. Research participants were given the option to freely opt out of the scheduled focus group and one-to-one interviews including removing their responses to interview questions from inclusion in this study, however, no participant declined participation in this study nor did any research participant express the desire to withdraw from participating in the study at any given point in time. The official legal names of the narrative participants have been changed to pseudonym names in order to protect their identity and anonymity. Participants were not forced to participate or to continue participating in the research without their full consent and none of the research participants were students of mine or that I had been teaching during the time frame that the study took place as to avoid ethical issues and keeping within the standards of practice of the teaching profession.

Profiles

‘Kevin’ self-identified as Bengali but intermittently substituted this identification for a more generic ‘Indian’ identity. At the time of the interviews, he was a fourteen year-old grade eight student attending a senior elementary school in suburban Mississauga. Kevin had lived the majority of his life in Canada having immigrated from Bengal at the age of two. Although he had lived the majority of his life in Canada, he rejected complete acceptance of a ‘Canadian’ identity and preferred to be recognized as Bengali. His reason for forming such a decision resulted from
having to continuously engage in the politics of race and racism primarily stemming from his most immediate perceivable social difference, the brown shade of his skin. Kevin was suspended from school for wearing bandannas on school property and refusing to remove it when ordered to do so.

‘Jamil’ self-identified as an African/Black Canadian, mixed with Filipino ancestry. He attended a senior elementary school located in the suburb of Mississauga. At the time of the interview Jamil was fourteen- years old and he was preparing to enter into high school the following fall. Jamil was labeled ‘argumentative’ and difficult by teachers and administration for saying that the policy was inherently hypocritical in nature for forcing students to remove their headwear on a daily basis. Jamil had been in conflict with the headwear policy for refusing to remove his wave-cap, which resulted in suspension for non-compliance of the school dress code.

Interview participants who were attending secondary school during the time of the interviews ranged from grades 10-12, split between four different G.T.A. secondary schools, two of them located in suburban areas. The narratives provided by the secondary school students highlighted issues of community, representation, temporal factors and how they were disciplined in terms of restrictions and exclusion by suspension. The narratives provided by the interview participants also emphasized the issue of racial profiling and how Black students in particular were assigned criminalized identities.

Felix Gomes was in grade 10 and sixteen years old at the time of the interview and was self-identified as Black person of mixed African and Indian ancestry. He was born in Trinidad and he immigrated to Canada with his parents and family when he was four years old. At the time of the interview he had lived in Canada as a legal citizen for almost twelve years. He attended a suburban secondary school in the northern part of Mississauga, just twenty minutes
west of the downtown core. The school was located in what is historically known as a predominantly white middle-class neighbourhood. Although the racial, ethnic and cultural dynamics of the surrounding area has changed over time due to the movement of racialized bodies into and out of these spaces, the prevailing attitudes around the expected norms of behaviour of this community and of the dominant school culture is still determined by the values, judgments of white Euro-American hegemony. Gomes was suspended from school for failing to comply with a teacher’s request to have Gomes tell of his friends who had been attending an after school ‘open gym’ basketball clinic that they were in violation of the dress code and were therefore responsible to remove their headwear.

Jinx was a grade ten student attending a secondary school in the suburb of Mississauga. Jinx self-identified as an African/Black Canadian of ‘Bajan’ heritage. Rufus attended a local Mississauga high school where I held a short term contract as a history teacher. Although I never taught Rufus, through the lens of anti-racism this interview participant began to engage in the politics of identity, race, culture and power and the impact of these intersections on his religious identity as a Muslim.

Kublai was a grade twelve student in his last year of high school at the time of the interview. He attended an inner-city high school located in the downtown core of Toronto. Kublai self-identified as a Black-Canadian (see Rodney, 1969) and made specific mention of his Guyanese cultural heritage a key part of his identity although he was born in Canada. Kublai discussed his clashes with school staff over the issue of headwear which resulted in the sentencing of disciplinary and punitive measures as a means to correct his ‘inappropriate’

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3 Gomes friends were not registered students at that particular high school and therefore he was dubbed responsible for their non-compliance with the headwear policy, although he removed his wave cap at the initial request, and was therefore suspended from attending classes and the school premises for three days.
behavior. The narratives offered by Kublai recount experiences with practices of racial profiling and targeting of Black students and others specifically from racialized groups.

Maximo self-identified as a Black student; and culturally Jamaican. He discussed how he had been repeatedly disciplined through punitive measures used to correct his non-compliance and insistence on wearing his wave cap in school and/or tying up his hair with a string. Maximo highlighted the issue of a lack of representational practices reflected in the teaching staff and guidance counselors in their respective school locations.

Rue Forpeace, a post-secondary graduate from the last cohort of Ontario students who were required to complete Ontario Academic Credits (O.A.C.) in order to graduate, spoke of issues of knowledge, dualities, criminalization, disavowal of Black woman and lack of community and efforts to build community and representation. Her narratives also highlight and provide a strong knowledge on how racialized students groups differentiate between one another via the headwear policy and of the differential effects and material outcomes of the policy on different student groups. As a Black female, Rue Forpeace’s narratives drew attention to how the headwear policy functions in one sense by targeting Black males in particular to undress their heads in an attempt to reduce gang violence while simultaneously ignoring and disavowing the experience of Black females and how they experience their hair in white dominated spaces and how identities and space must be negotiated amongst peers. The generic nature of the policy ‘underlooked’ this critical point and further functioned to dislocate and disengage Black and racialized students from achieving a sense of positive self-worth.

Rue Forpeace self-identified as a Black female and was twenty-five years old at the time of the interview. She attended two ‘inner-city’ schools in Toronto. Although she spoke of commonalities between her experiences and those of other black students she spoke of
differential politics and the function of power in terms of how discipline, punishment was instituted differentially among Black students and student from other racialized groups. She came directly into contact with the headwear policy while attending a secondary school located in the eastern part of downtown Toronto. Rue Forpeace is a Canadian citizen by birth and self-identifies with both Trinidadian and Jamaican cultural backgrounds via Africa. Rue Forpeace also spoke of a lack of representational practices in both the curriculum and within the school staff and administration. She extended this thought by stating that who was teaching mattered in terms of representational practices but also how they taught was critical in creating a balanced or holistic atmosphere for learning.

**How was the Research Conducted?**

The research aspect of this study was conducted in three stages: collecting the narratives of the research participants through focus group interviews in order to highlight the primary themes and issues most relevant to the research participants. This was closely followed up by conducting in-depth one-to-one or dyadic interviews which were much more specific and further interrogated the key issues and themes mentioned in the focus-group session. All of the interview sessions were recorded and textual notes were kept during the entire narrative inquiry process. All of the information collected during the entire research process such as audio recordings, transcripts and any field notes, were considered confidential and were only accessible by me the principal researcher and the two supervisors of this study. Transcripts of these recordings were made available to participants for validity checking and to ensure that their experiences and collective ‘voice’ had been fairly presented as interpreted and voiced by them. The narratives provided by the research participants were analyzed and coded by theme with a special focus on
commonalities, departures, omissions and cross-referencing the experiences of the narrative participants and with my own personal teaching experiences and those of colleagues in the teaching profession.

The Focus Group

The focus group strategy allowed the emphasis of the interview session to highlight the lived experiences of the research participants rather than my personal experiences as a teacher (Morgan, 2002:pp.146-147). This format provided a necessary space to investigate a larger sample of subjects within a shorter amount of time to collect informational data. Interviewing the seven research participants together in this open format provided great flexibility in terms of planning, organizing and co-ordinating various schedules. The interview session lasted approximately one-hour in length and happened at a local community centre used by Toronto grassroots organization that facilitates an after-school homework and study programs, separate from and not politically connected to any one particular public school. In doing so this strategy helped to evade any possible conflicts of interest between my role as researcher and as an employee of a district school board with the identities and the roles of the research participants as students so that they were not made to feel threatened by the space where the discussions took place. As the principal researcher of this study I ensured that use of the community centre offered a sense of comfort, safety and confidentiality so that the research participants could feel free to speak their minds and lend sound to how their experiences with school left them feeling further dislocated, disengaged and disillusioned with the education system.
The narratives collected from the focus group interview highlighted, in a broad sense, the shared experiences of the research participants coming into contact with the headwear policy of their schools. Through their recounting and reflecting about their lived experiences, their headwear and the notion of identity we discovered many commonalities and in some cases critical differences in how the headwear policies of greater Toronto area schools operate and function toward maintaining the school as a highly racialized space where whiteness is rightness. Key issues that were voiced by the research participants drew specific attention to notions of (i) power, (ii) difference, (iii) accountability and responsibility (of community) and (iv) knowledge production. Reading and decoding the narratives through an anti-racism lens helped to place the knowledge provided by the participants within Dei’s anti-racism framework.\(^4\) Doing this created a stronger contextual understanding about how dominant notions of race and racism are continually manipulated in school and have a determining effect in shaping and reshaping the lived experiences of racialized bodies\(^5\). The narratives collected from the focus group interviews were transcribed highlighting common or reoccurring themes, topics and departures. Excerpts from the transcriptions identified relevant issues for coding the interviews. This process involved sorting themes of race, reading for dualities in how the policy functions materially, categorizing and naming sites of cultural logic and oppositional knowledge. In doing so we learn from the research participants how their identities shift and are continuously being reconstructed depending how the politics over power and space were negotiated. Although all of the interview


participants attended different public schools across the greater Toronto area, one common theme found in all of their narratives was the issue of public safety and the threat of the ‘Other’ and how this notion was reinforced through strategies of labeling headwear and bodies. We learn from the narratives of the research participants how space and bodies are experienced through these forms of disconnection and disembodiment that disproportionately and differentially target racialized groups out of necessity to save and protect the sanctity and the sanity of public safety’.

One-to-One Interviews

Individual interviews were used to confirm data previously collected from the focus group sessions and to critically interrogate specific and key experiences and occurrences that were articulated in the focus group session. This was done to follow up and further interrogate any relevant issues and themes highlighted in the focus group interview. Each one-to-one interview lasted forty-five minutes in length which gave each participant enough time to clarify their thoughts and articulate their specific experiences, emotions and feelings about how their bodies are read and experienced in school contact zones and how the impact of this collision affected the quality of education received. The events and occurrences identified by the research participants took place within their current schooling experiences and by providing them with time to reflect away from the eyes of the other research participants allowed them the opportunity to accurately recall and retell their current lived experiences in school. Through the interview questions the research participants were able to voice in detail their experiences engaging with the headwear policy. Their narrative responses highlighted key knowledge and power issues. Through the narratives they provided during the more intimate ‘one-to-one’ sessions, dominant notions regarding the purpose and meanings of the headwear policy is ruptured. The research participants in this setting were able to speak freely about the
perceptions of the dominant group and how such misperceptions consequentially lead to
differential forms of discipline and punishment and brought light to how the policy functions
differently depending on temporal factors and identity. The narratives collected from the
research participants in this particular setting allowed them to posit oppositional readings of their
headwear, their hair and bodies, giving ‘new’ meanings and values to their identities.

Data Analysis

The data analysis approach of this project was primarily based on the content of the
narratives collected from the interviews provided by the research participants. Their accounts of
their lived experiences, their knowledge, were cross-referenced with field notes and observations
and were reviewed for common themes and significant departures or contradictions. This was
done by searching the narratives for cognitive categories and the making of cultural logic and
oppositional forms of knowledge that help to construct inform knowledge and identity
production. Reoccurring themes and topics found in the transcriptions of the narrative accounts
were isolated and cross-referenced for and commonalities, contradictions and departures.
Categorizing common themes found in the narratives aided in forming a critical comparative
analysis between the how Black and racialized groups are perceived in school and how these
perceptions become materialized, experienced and lived with differential outcomes for all
students.

Why engage in such approaches?

This research methodology posits that knowledge of the social world is inter-subjective
and not objective and flows from the shared meanings and understandings of the interview

6 ‘New’ in the sense of unheard of to the dominant, whether willingly or resulting from ignorance.
participants, and the shared meanings and understandings of the anti-racist researcher. Since Canada perpetuates the image of being a ‘raceless’ or ‘colour-blind’ society (Roswell, 2010; Henry et al. 2002; Bannerji, 1999) the qualitative approach to conducting the narrative inquiries of this study functioned as a practical attempt to bridge the gap between its anti-racism framework and practice by fusing the political and intellectual objectives that guide this study (Dei, 1996; 2000). This study used multiple critical qualitative methods not only as a tool to interrogate and deconstruct the dominant discursive monopoly over how behaviour and the social interaction between students, staff, administration and policy come to be politically positioned by institutionalizing a headwear policy that targets Black and racialized communities under the umbrella/guise of school safety.

A qualitative methodology is a cooperative process that implicitly involves both the interviewer or researcher and the interviewed or research participants. Interrogating the discursive nature of the headwear policy and how it is implemented cannot be separated from the multiple meanings, interpretations and embodied connections brought to this discussion by the subject participants. By revisiting their experiences engaging, negotiating and resisting headwear policies, the research participants met the learning objectives of this study. Through reflecting about how space and power are negotiated, contested and resisted by wearing headwear in school, the research participants were given a legitimate arena to voice how dominant concerns for public safety, as constructed by the safe schools discourse, results in the differential labeling of students leading to practices of racial profiling in public schools.

This study takes the position that there is a need to implement a research strategy that recovers and validates the oppositional forms of knowledge and lived experiences of racialized communities. Such a strategy is aimed at empowering Black and racialized youth to shape their
individual and collective experiences in culturally relevant ways while in public school spaces. A qualitative methodology recognizes that particular knowledge of the world is contained in people’s daily cultural practices and lived social experiences. Although this fact is distorted by dominant ideology, I support the idea that knowledge generated from culture and grounded in the various cultural practices of a peoples’ culture and lived experiences can be empowering, liberating (King, 1999; 113). This is important in validating the embodied connections between the research participants and the knowledge provided in their narratives. This research stresses the importance of using our own lens, as racialized bodies living in a white dominated settler society, to view and interpret our own communities and ways of seeing, knowing and living (King, 1999; Lester-Irabinna, Rigney, 1992).

The critics of qualitative research suggest that counter-narratives (narratives told by oppressed peoples) foster a narrow interpretation of reality, one that is highly influenced by how the interview is conducted and by the wording of the questions raised by the researcher. In response, this work burns all conceptions of neutrality and tramples in rejection dominant notions of objectivity toward conducting narrative research. This study is grounded in the knowledge gained from the lived experiences of the research participants. Grounding this study in the lived experiences of the research participants and using an ethnographic narrative inquiry as the methodological framework is needed in order to bring about social transformation (Dei, 1999). I agree with Lester-Irabinna in that the best way to address epistemic racism in knowledge production and research work is not by simply including local people in either research or by changing their attitudes toward research. Rather, this transformation is achievable by creating spaces for local people to define and control their own epistemologies and ontologies that legitimize their experiences (Lester-Irabinna, 1992).
Chapter 4 Review of Relevant Literature

Voices in the Public Discourse

The following section presents a view of the relevant literature associated with some of the underlying themes in this study. These include issues of discipline and regulation in education, assimilation, constructing safe school approaches, critiques of zero-tolerance policies, and race and education (racial profiling in schools). The majority of studies on zero-tolerance policies have been conducted in the United States and Britain (Gilborn, 2005), studies grounded in a Canadian context have been relatively absent from the literature until recently. Therefore, the following review cites works which are germane, although not precisely from the current study (Zine, 1997). Although it seems as if there has been increased interest in this area, little information exists about this topic in a Canadian context. In addition, not only is there a lack of relevant literature about how such policies impact racialized groups, there is also a lack of scholarship being published by academics and educators from racialized communities in Canada. This is important because although racialized peoples around the world may share similar experiences in terms of their encounters with racism and other forms of discrimination and hegemonic oppression, this does not necessarily mean that all occurrences are experienced and interpreted similarly. If discursive and social transformation is to occur in this area more spaces need to be accessible for the voices and bodies of ‘Canadian’ (in terms of physical location and not social or national identity) scholars, academics and youth from various racialized communities. This is necessary in order to bring new enlightened perspectives and experiences
from a broader range of times, spaces, and social locations that differ from dominant conceptions of school safety and race and violence.

*Situating Suspension within School Violence Discourses*

The shooting deaths of 14 students and a teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado launched a renewed public debate over the implementation of new disciplinary strategies to combat school violence in the United States. The four most widely accepted approaches put forward by Astor, Meyer, and Behre (1999) to reduce school violence suggest: conflict resolution and counselling programs, improving students’ relationships with their teachers, increasing the monitoring of students by security guards and electronic devices, and using suspension and expulsion to remove violent or disruptive students from the school environment (Vavrus and Cole, 2002). Rigid school discipline, codes of conduct, and zero-tolerance have brought a new dimension to the management of student behaviour in schools. A growing concern over the perceived increase in school violence, the prevalence of guns and drug use in U.S. schools in the 1980s and 90s led to more severe penalties with the hope that these would reduce intolerable behaviours in school. Zero-tolerance policies for these and other school infractions were gradually implemented in school jurisdictions across the U.S. and Canada without the benefit of research confirming that such disciplinary measures result in safer schools (Ayers, Ayers & Dohrn, 2001; Casella, 2001; Jull, 2000; Shannon & McCall (n.d.); Skiba and Peterson, 1999) in (Solomon; Palmer, 2004).

Noguera (1995) posits that suspension and expulsion not only serve a punitive function within the school system but also play an important role in combating violence, reaffirming the school as site of safety and security in the eyes of the dominant culture.
Discipline and Regulation in Education

The issue of discipline and regulation in education is not a new topic. In fact, this area of research has been of great interest to academics and has been widely noted in scholarship pertaining to the maintenance of control and order in schools. Although many have analysed the construction, implementation, and effect of disciplinary practices in the context of constructing subjective identities (Foucault, 1977; Ball, 1990), there has been less of a concentrated effort in forming connections between how zero-tolerance policies towards student behaviour and dress affect the implementation of disciplinary modes of authority by teachers and administration.

What are the effects on racialized bodies both inside and outside of the school?

Foucault (1977) questions how punishment has been exercised in modern times and in the Ancien Regime. He posits that the ‘school’ emerges on many occasions as a disciplinary block, similar to that of the prison structure (Ball, 1990:23). Thus, schools exemplify the exercise of power and the emergence of modern-power. The school operates as a site in which techniques and strategies of power are continuously developed and refined (Ball, 1990). Although Foucault advances no historical causes in this discussion, he does provide an insightful analysis of the construction of military installations and its juxtaposition with details of the construction of schools and prisons. The use of the prison analysis is significant in that the prison is a symbolic interpretation meant to help us understand modern power relations (Ball, 1980:17). The inclusion of the subject of prisons into the discussion of schooling and discipline raises pertinent questions such as, how is power exercised and how are people punished? What are the implications for schooling and pedagogical praxis? Dei speaks to the idea that the control over the dominion of power and its subsequent brokerage is a fundamental aspect in constructing dominant knowledge, values, and perceptions as the only valid way of knowing and interpreting
the world in which we live (Dei et al., 2000). This position considers knowledge as contextually specific to its local region and that it should be interpreted through a historical lens taking into account the circumstances of all parties involved.

In the context of this study, although the widespread use of zero-tolerance policies has received significant attention in the United States, Britain and to a much lesser extent Canada, only a handful of scholars have extended the discourse to include an analysis of the ‘school-prison’ complex in a contemporary context. Giroux (2001) posits that the implementation of such policies signal a call for alarm in this age of increasing militarization of not only schools but society in general. The zero-tolerance policies mirror newly passed civic laws in many cities in the United States. By outlawing acts like ‘loitering’ and ‘cruising’ and implementing legislation imposing curfews, it becomes easier for the state to keep youth off the street while simultaneously making it easier to criminalize their behaviour (Giroux, 2001:9). Consequently, the increase of discretionary powers for routine police surveillance has resulted in an increase of random searches, and youth arrests. Similar to the zero-tolerance policies, further consequences of such laws include eliminating intervention programs, increasing the number of youth, especially those with racialized bodies, in prison, and keeping them incarcerated for long periods of time (Giroux, 2001).

Noguera (2003) notes that throughout the United States, schools frequently punish the students who have the greatest academic, social, economic and emotional needs. The study states that in the United States, Black and Latino students are most likely to be suspended, expelled, or removed from the classroom for punishment, and are thus vastly over-represented. In an attempt to break the destructive cycle of zero-tolerance policies and to restore the social contract that underlies schooling, Noguera revisits the purpose of education. Here, Noguera
defends the position that schools in the United States serve three primary functions: First, schools sort children based on various measures of their academic ability and place them on trajectories that influence the economic roles and occupations they will assume in adulthood. Critical educationalists (Giroux, 1983; Apple, 1986; McCarthy, 1990) have highlighted how schools function to reproduce the dominant ideologies of society. This view has provided us with an ‘overstanding’ of how the ideology of public schooling works to maintain dominant values and perspectives and to serve the needs and dictates of capital (Dei et al, 1997).

Noguera explores the vital role schools play in socializing children by teaching them the values and norms that are regarded as central to civil society and the social order through teaching social conventions (i.e. obedience to unquestioned authority) through implicit and explicit means and by instilling a sense of what it means to be ‘normal’ in the lives of students (Noguera, 2003; Gottfredson, 2001; Apple, 1982, Durkheim, 1961). Through this process schools operate as institutions of social control, providing an important custodial function with respect to the type of care given to students and their free movement. Operating as surrogate parents, schools exercise considerable authority over students, and many of their basic civil rights are suspended while they are in school (Noguera, 2003; Cassella, 2001).

**The Construction of School Suspension**

Vavrus and Cole (2002) suggest that removing a student from class is a highly contextualized decision based on subtle race and gender relations that cannot be adequately addressed in school discipline policies. The conditions that predicate an act of suspension are co-constructed by all parties involved and are not always necessarily conditions of violence or flagrant violations of school discipline and conduct policies. The issue of suspensions and
school safety is complex and is much deeper than the acceptance of a binary position, such as the aggressor versus the victim. Vavrus and Cole acknowledge the power differentiation between teachers and students and note that it is the teacher’s (administration, specific groups of students) interpretation of these moments of tension that ultimately determines whether a suspension will occur (Vavrus and Cole, 2002). Suspensions result from a complex sequence of events that together form a disciplinary moment, a moment when one disruptive act among many is ‘singled out’ for action by a teacher. They further contend that this process of ‘singling out,’ disproportionately affects students who are racially/culturally different from their teachers. This idea is supported by Solomon and Palmer’s study (2004) which states that zero-tolerance policies do not take into consideration the social and environmental contexts of interpersonal interaction when deliberating youth infraction of school rules and regulations (Solomon; Palmer, 2004). The emerging research appears to point to a zero-tolerance policy that discriminates against Blacks more than any other racial groups. Jull argues:

School discipline policies based on the principles of zero tolerance reinforce Anglo-Eurocentric sensibilities of right and wrong and the authoritative structures within public education. . . . To claim that social justice can be achieved through the implementation of a so-called unbiased zero tolerance school discipline policy is to believe that discriminatory practice can be eradicated by implementing policies that are blind to personal or individual social and/or cultural contexts.... Equal treatment in an unequal social and academic environment is discriminatory. (Solomon; Palmer, 2004)

Solomon and Palmer argue that in multiracial Canada, the authority relations within its institutions are mediated, to a large extent, by race.

**Zero-Tolerance and Profiling**

The influx of African Caribbean people into Canada following the de-racialization of its immigration policies in the late 1960s made visible a brand of racism that had previously
escaped publicity. Established and entrenched European norms, values, traditions pervasive in
Canadian institutions immediately cast new racialized minority immigrants as socio-culturally
dislocated, dysfunctional, and deviant in their family, community, and school life (da Costa,
1978; Dei, 1996; Solomon and Brown, 1998). To maintain some measure of power and control
in their schools and communities these students developed distinct sub-cultural forms of
behaviour as a response to imposed control. Such a strident sub-culture collided with the
authority of the school causing a spiralling of negative interactions that often led to the
intervention of the police in schools. As Solomon’s (1992) research uncovers:

The police are integral in the schools’ student control mechanism. Their essential
functions are to respond to emergency situations such as fights, to be on duty at
special school functions, to investigate and apprehend trespassers and trouble-
makers on school property, and to be a symbol of authority to uncooperative and
oppositional students. The Jocks [black informants] resent their threatening
presence and their use by the administration to maintain the authority structure.
(Solomon; Palmer, 2004:89).

What has emerged from the literature is the construction of Black students as fearful, deviant,
socially dysfunctional, non-conformist and a threat to the safety and smooth functioning of the
school as a social system (Solomon; Palmer, 2004; Douglas; Downer, 2004; Cassidy, 2005;
Noguera, 2003; Giroux, 2003, 2001). Solomon and Palmer analyse the shift from the
sociological construction to applied profiling.

**Critiques of Zero-Tolerance Policies and its Impact on Schooling**

The following researchers have launched a wide-ranging critique of zero-tolerance and its
impact on schools, their social relations, and the students they serve. Such critiques include but
are not limited to those put forward by Ayers et al. 2001; Jull, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999;
Thorson, 1996; Cole, 1999; Epp, 1999; Larson and Ovando, 2001; Casella, 2001; Solomon,
1992, and Giroux, 1999. The growing popularity of zero-tolerance approaches as the favoured method to secure schools as safe learning environments for students, has enjoyed a particular relationship with the media in that the media and agents of the corporate press contribute to the popularity of such an approach through its sensationalization of violence and misuse of statistics that vilify youth and their culture (Ayers et al. 2001; Jull, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Others have argued that the disproportionate impact zero-tolerance approaches have on the lives of racialized students further leads to the displacement of troubled youth from the controlled social learning environment of the school to their less controlled neighbourhoods where they engage in more serious offences (Ayers et al., 2001; Skiba et al. 2003; Thorson, 1996). The role and responsibility of school administrators' needs to be interrogated in relation to the abdication of their responsibility for students' education and safety to security guards, law enforcement agencies and the juvenile court system (Ayers et al, 2001; Casella, 2001; Solomon, 1992). The "one size fits all" approach of such policies is based on the assumption that such policies are non-discriminatory and treat all students equally. Instead, these policies disadvantage marginalized groups (Jull, 2000; Cole, 1999; Epp, 1997; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Larson & Ovando, 2001; Shannon & McCall, (n.d.); Skiba and Peterson, 1999). Emerging from the research on Black students and institutional structures in Britain, the United States and Canada, are some conceptual and theoretical issues that inform the present study. The nature of power and power relations in institutional settings is top-down, impositional, coercive, and functions under the guise of maintenance of discipline. Essential to the preservation of power and authority is a network of structures: the school, social service agencies in the community, and the criminal justice system that operate in symbiotic relationship with each other (Solomon; Palmer, 2004)
maintaining hegemonic dominance through the reproduction of social differences, inequities and privileges.

**Canadian Findings**

The bulk of research on this topic has primarily investigated the use of zero-tolerance approaches to regulating and standardizing student discipline and punitive measures in British and American settings. Historically there has been little research published surrounding the discourse in Canadian public school contexts. The recent emergence of literature investigating the negative and disproportionate impact of zero-tolerance approaches to student-standardizing disciplinary and punitive measures on Black and racialized bodies in Canadian public schools has slowly shifted the discourse. Prevalent themes identified in the Canadian literature range from anti-Black racism, issues of identity construction, the production of knowledge, white privilege and entitlement over education and issues of increasing human rights violations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005; TorStar, Nov.2005; OHRC, 2005, 2003; Solomon and Palmer, 2004; Pieters, 2003; Ruck and Wortley, 2002).

In Ontario, Zero-Tolerance is based on amendments to the *Education Act* and is euphemistically dubbed the "*Safe Schools Act.*" The amended *Education Act* purports to promote respect, discipline and safety in the province’s public schools. Based on the guidelines of the *Act*, School Boards are directed to devise policies and procedures outlining specific punishments for ‘inappropriate’ behaviours through a greater use of suspensions and expulsions. The *Education Act* allows each School Board to establish policies and implement procedures to ensure compliance with the *Act*. This has left an uneven approach to policy implementation across the province resulting in some boards of education having highly explicit regimes and others with no implementation guidelines in place. Furthermore, even in school boards with
fairly sophisticated policies and implementation strategies, anecdotal accounts indicate
significant glossing over of fundamental issues that make schools unsafe for African Canadian
students (ACLC, 2002) where the notion of tolerance is a confusing piece of rhetoric lacking in
clarity (Gabor, 1995; Thompson 1994). Many Canadians understand the term to be “no
tolerance for unacceptable behaviours,” accompanied by an assurance that there will be a
consequence for each infraction. Recently in Canada the term “zero-tolerance” has come to
mean there will be a predetermined, automatic consequence for serious infractions, with no
discretion on the nature of the punishment. The findings of the report conclude that the zero-
tolerance policy is not enough to ensure school and student safety and it is ineffective in
improving the school climate. Instead, instruction to develop student skills, beliefs and
knowledge is required. Social support in the form of peer programs, parent action and
community policing programs is needed for schools. Efforts to situate the school within a safe
and caring community need to be made. Without these things, school rules will be insufficient to
protect children.

In the report published by the Canadian Association of Principals (CAP), “Zero-tolerance
policies in Context” (2004), the members of CAP favoured the protection of the majority, if
necessary, over the rights of the minority causing the problems. Gabor (1995) reported that
police officers, educators and students were increasingly concerned with school discipline
problems. This report found that disciplinary and punitive sanctions were not preventing the
“hardcore” students from misbehaving in school. The reasons given for this were attributed to
weak youth offender laws, family breakdown, erosion of the school’s authority, peer pressure,
violence in the media and poor rule enforcement (Dalton, 2000). The educational stakeholders
who chaired and authored this report support the dominant position on school safety which is to implement consequences that are consistent, predictable yet flexible with codes of conduct. The contradiction between ‘youth violence’ and the rising concern about school violence suggests that the increased concern due to several factors including; new laws requiring automatic suspensions/expulsions, the media reports, pressure from human rights legislation, increased awareness of civil liability and less lenient attitudes towards bullying (CAP, 2004). Governments have responded to increased concern with new laws and regulations requiring schools to establish zero-tolerance policies, school codes of conduct, school-wide plans to prevent violence and special measures to ensure that students with behavioural disorders are managed properly.

There is a sizable and stable set of knowledge and case law that has been established in Canada regarding student rights and school discipline. The introduction and implications of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Dennis, 1996; Harte & McDonald 1996) has initiated analysis and discussion. As well, corporal punishment (Rettig, 2000; Obrien & Pietersema, 2000) and the Young Offenders Act (Jaffe & Baker, 1999) have both prompted legal and other advice. However, these sources did not include any references to zero-tolerance (CAP, 2004). This project has identified several examples of school uniform/dress code policies in Canada. Requirements for school uniforms are being established in Ontario (Canadian Press, 2000) and Alberta (Suidal, 2000). Ontario has also introducing a requirement that students sing the national anthem (Canadian Press, 2004). This report fails to acknowledge and challenge how race and racism are reproduced and sanctioned in educational institutions through the implementation of the policy.
Wortley and Ruck examine the perceptions of differential treatment of high school students of Black, South Asian, Asian, White and "other" (Aboriginal, Hispanic and mixed-race) racial backgrounds in Toronto in their study, Racial and Ethnic Minority High School Students’ Perceptions of School Disciplinary Practices: A Look at Some Canadian Findings. The results found that racial minority students, particularly Black students, are much more likely than White students to perceive discrimination with respect to teacher treatment, school suspension practices, the use of police by school authorities and police treatment at school. Although there is little quantitative evidence to assess whether the perceptions of the students in this study accurately represents reality, the authors point out that the very fact that racial minority students have these beliefs needs to be addressed because it is "a psychological reality for students which undoubtedly impacts on their schooling experience" and "has important implications if schools are to develop measures to ensure that students from all racial and ethnic groups perceive equal educational opportunity” (ACLC, 2002; Ruck and Wortley, 2002).

Solomon and Palmer (2004) posit that schools function as institutional agents in maintaining and reproducing already existing structural and systemic inequalities within educational settings, having a particular disproportionate negative impact on Black and racialized students. In this sense the public school setting functions as the site and agent of oppression, a space of continual struggle and contestation between rule-makers and rule-breakers (Palmer and Solomon, 2004). The practice of racial profiling of Blacks by institutions and policies such as ‘zero-tolerance’ leads to the disproportionate removal of racial minorities from learning, and contribute to Skiba’s concept, ‘the school-prison pipeline’ (Palmer and Solomon, 2004). The researchers find that zero-tolerance in schooling lead Black and racialized youth to develop distinct ‘sub-cultural’ forms of behaviour in opposition or rejection to imposed control. The
collision between these various ‘sub-cultures’ and the authority of the school often results in negative interactions that have led to an increase in police presence and intervention (Solomon, 1998). From the literature emerges the construction of Blacks as criminal, deviant, socially dysfunctional, non-conformist, fearful and threatening to the smooth functioning of the school as a social system (Palmer and Solomon, 2002).

Anti-Black racism continues to be a central factor in Canada’s public education system. A significant body of evidence illustrates that educational institutions preserve and perpetuate a system of structured inequality based on race. Although racial minority and White students have similar career and professional aspirations when entering the school system, the outcomes are markedly different. This results from a number of factors including curricula that excludes African Canadian histories and cultures, teaching styles that discourage African Canadians, stereotypes that criminalize Black youth and "Zero Tolerance" policies that push high numbers of African Canadians out of the public school system (ACLC, 2002). The African-Canadian legal clinic has found that zero-tolerance policies in Canadian public schooling contexts has led to streaming, increased numbers in drop-outs and push-outs (Dei, 1997), and further exclusion of Black and racialized youth (ACLC, 2002). Institutional and individual racist practices that push Black students out of schools occur in both subtle and overt ways. Individual racist acts include teacher attitudes that convey low expectations and disrespect for African Canadian students and their culture while systemic racism manifests itself thorough a ‘non-inclusive curriculum’ which involves the tacit teaching of social and economic norms and expectations through which the hegemony of racism is experienced and Black students become marginalized (ACLC, 2002).
Chapter 5 Data Analysis: Exercising Power Through Headwear

Racializing Social Spaces

“As politics becomes more racialized, the discourse about race becomes more privatized” Giroux, (2006)

Goldberg suggests that “conquering space is implicated in and implies ruling people” (Goldberg, 1993). Like debris or weeds, whether in an urban or suburban setting, the virtue and the purity of the school and the ‘student body’ needs to be protected and repeatedly cleansed from the threat of being tainted by an influx of symbols, markers and reminders of the strange presence of the ‘Other’ and the infectious threat of violence that accompanies their presence. In an attempt to preserve the hegemonic innocence and safety of the dominant school community, Black (or oppositional) forms of head coverings have been renamed and classified as ‘headwear’ by district school boards. These abstract spaces and their modes of representation reify the images, symbols and architecture of dominant hegemonic power through what Foucault calls pyramidal power (Goldberg, 1993:186) and functions as a form of social control that directly impacts how knowledge is produced and in a material sense how the school is experienced by ‘outside’ bodies.

Goldberg’s explanation suggests that within the concept of modernity the notion of ‘inside’ connotes subjectivity, the realm of deep feelings and truth. Contrastingly, dominant constructions of ‘outside’ suggests physicality, human difference and strangeness, in short it is a space for the ‘Other’. The collision between time, space and identity in school zones has resulted in the differential marking and labeling of bodies and space. Through such a process the school spaces become invested with particular meanings that in turn have devastating effects on how Black and other racialized groups experience their daily school routine. The notion of ‘inside’

7 Abstract space is not homogenous,” though it wishes to appear and be perceived as homogenous, Lefebvre writes; "it simply has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its 'lens'.” (LeFebvre, 1991)
versus ‘outside’ space is established to uphold a sense of hegemonic entitlement over the production of knowledge and space by marking territories and defining the types of bodies or profiles that are allowed to dwell therein and those who should be removed.

In one particular elementary school the ambiguity in the language used in the dress code caused great inconsistencies and differential outcomes of how the policy was applied.

“Students who do not follow the dress code will be asked to change into appropriate clothing or they will be sent home to change. The decision of teachers, the principal or vice principal as to acceptable apparel must be respected”. (PDSB)

Headwear such as hats, hoods, bandanas (gang related clothing or accessories are not allowed), head-ties, do-wraps and wave caps are not allowed to be worn in the school building; and if so they will be confiscated. Similarly, in a local high school the discursive construction of the headwear policy outlines similar dominant concerns or fears of the potential eruption of gang violence. As a preventative measure the school administration and staff automatically attached ‘gang’ and ‘violence’ labels to particular types of headwear and colours depending on the identity of its respective wearers. For example, T-Dot City Collegiate Institute’s headwear policy as outlined in their staff and student code of conduct states:

“T-Dot City C.I. has implemented a “No Headwear” policy in the school, effective September 5th, 2001. The policy is implemented to encourage good manners and proper courtesy, create a consistency across all areas within and outside the school, and to make it easier to identify trespassers to school property. Unfortunately another element has arisen. Gang-related activity in the wider community sometimes comes into the school. Indicators of gang-related activity include but are not limited to the displaying of ‘colours’ (about the head, neck or worn about the wrist, foot or draped from a pocket), hand signals, graffiti, and specific body markings”. Colours – include the wearing of bandanas, do-rags, wave caps, sweatbands, headbands and hair scarves. At T-Dot City C.I. we want the school to be free of any activity associated with gangs. The inadvertent wearing of certain clothes may cause a false association to a gang”.

As the boundaries of inside and outside or public and private shift so do their values leading to differential effects and impacts for racialized groups. The truncated spaces of the school function to preserve its image as a privatized moral sphere independent from the imposed obligations of the public ethic, which often cover up the exclusionary practices extended in the name of a private sphere (Giroux, 2004). The private order and harmony of subjective inner or suburban space commands that its borders are protected from the incursive dangers associated and attached to Black and racialized groups and the always existing potential threat of inner-city type violence from ‘out there’ erupting ‘inside here’. The discursive construction of public school headwear policies, premised by the code of conduct’s dress code represents a clear example of how an atmosphere of zero-tolerance toward policing behaviour by using headwear as a preventative measuring stick to identify potential threats (in the dominant mind) of violence with a particular focus on gang related violence continues to exist regardless of the most recent amendments to the act. In fact, I posit that the discursive construction of public school headwear policies further criminalizes racialized groups and in particular African/Black people while purporting the notion that such policies are highly necessary to effectively combat the problem of ‘youth violence’ from filtering in and out of public school spaces.

**Labeling the Spectacle of Difference**

The convergence between zero-tolerance and racial profiling and targeting of particularly Black and other racialized youth and a zero-tolerance style approach to policing headwear and preventing potential gang-activity or youth violence on school property not only disproportionately penalizes racialized groups, but has created a well beaten pathway from a student in the public school system to being incarcerated in the
penal system. This movement of students is what Skiba (2003) describes as the “school-prison pipeline”. The evidence of a clear relationship between school disciplinary and punitive measures, for example suspension and expulsion, the differential application of such policies particularly designed for social control are by no means neutral or “colour-blinded”. In fact this evidence suggests that racial disparities between student discipline and the connection to juvenile incarceration are indeed intertwined (Solomon and Palmer, 2004: pp.17, 28-29).

An important function of this movement toward the “school-prison pipeline” is the unequal distribution of forms of consciousness to students (Apple, 2004). The designations, categories and linguistic tools employed by educators and district school boards, such as “gangstas”, “thugs”, “at-risk”, gangs and “gangster,” are attached to headwear and bodies and are perceived to have both “scientific” status and to be geared towards “helping” protect the safety of the public. There is little or no realization that the very language that dominant minded bodies resort to is ideally suited to maintain the bureaucratic rationality that has dominated schooling for a very long time. Disturbing is how the headwear policy permits persons to be branded and labeled as violent gangsters based on dominant misrepresentations surrounding race and crime and their lack of understanding around non-European forms of headwear allowing schools to operate as spaces where judgments are formed based merely on circumstantial grounds and dominant beliefs rather than proof in a court of law establishing guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Apple suggests that educators use a particular language to construct and arrange their reality but also that these forms (of oppression) covertly justify a sense of dominant entitlement to status, power and authority.
The manipulation of difference as an instrument of social oppression or as a tool of
disempowerment is one aspect of power that is directly tied into how space and identity are
interconnected and are directly tied to conceptions of how space should be used, shaped and
clearly defined through dominant measures to restrict access. The interviews above clearly
demonstrate how difference as a social category is inherently linked to notions of spatial
entitlement and social control. By difference I am referring to representational practices, the
presence of physical bodies and curricular sophistication (Dei) drawing upon the cognitive
themes found in the narratives. Although I draw upon the work of Hall to ground my discussion
on difference it is not my intention to speak on the processes of ‘Othering’, as Hall (1997) has
already done and his concept of representational space can be directly applied to the various
discursive frameworks of this project.

‘Kublai’ an Indian-Guyanese student born in Canada who self-identified as Black
(Rodney, 1969), a senior high school student in the process of completing his final year of school
at the time of this interview spoke of the resentment that he felt toward dominant staff members
in his downtown Toronto high school for targeting Black students and punishing them for
wearing headwear that is different from dominant norms of acceptable and unacceptable.

“I think they’re just really ignorant they just assume, they don’t even really try to
find out why we’re wearing our headwear”. 

Kublai voiced his disdain for the reluctance and hesitation he encountered from dominant staff
members when having to interact with Black and other racialized student groups in any
significant way that made the students from these communities feel as if they ‘mattered’ or were
worthwhile.

The narratives point to an increasing fear among dominant minded bodies that
‘their’ schools, and in particular suburban public schools, are becoming impure and
tainted with infectious ‘gang’ or ‘youth violence’ incited by primarily racialized groups.

At the root of this culture of violence, both real and simulated, there lies a deep-seated racism that has produced what Giroux refers to as ‘moral panic’ or ‘white fear’ (Giroux, 1996:66). These sentiments are codified in the discursive construction of the headwear policy and in the school safety and violence paradigm.

**White Fear and Moral Panic**

“While violence appears to cross over designated borders of class, race, and social space, the representation of violence in the popular media is largely depicted in racial terms” - (Giroux, 1996:65).

Goldberg’s work, ‘Polluting the Body Politic’ (1993), provides a complimentary reading of how issues of race are directly connected to broader power issues such as how space is constructed and the consequent marginalization of groups of people. The narratives support Goldberg’s reminder that racism is institutionally normalized in and through spatial configuration, just as social space is made to seem natural, a given, by being conceived and defined in racial terms. The moral panic that is attached to the discursive construction of safe schools discussions is heavily weighted in a sense of fear of the always threatening and potentially violent ‘Other’.

The narrative interviews highlighted instances where racialized students, and in particular Black students, were dressed in ‘headwear’ and were wrongfully labeled by school staff as a result of their headwear. In the majority of instances the narrative participants spoke of how they were wrongfully labeled and thus projected as threatening and potentially dangerous to the balance of the moral tone of the schooling environment ending up in disciplinary and punitive sentencing for what many would consider to be minor infractions.
Renaming specific types of headwear worn primarily by racialized groups as ‘gang’ apparel is inherently connected to power discourses. The power to erase, name and attach specific meanings onto ‘oppositional’ forms of headwear and to assign particular identities and to order and re-order the bodies of the wearers is an assumed ‘right’ of the stakeholders of the safe schools debate. The necessity to do so can be thought of as a form of oppressive rage primarily motivated by fear, fear of self. The fear of self embodies the fear and the threat of the loss of privilege and sense of entitlement in society (Dei and Johal, 2005). Johal speaks to this: it is not fear that drives dominant members of society insatiable thirst for power. In fact the opposite is true in that their thirst for power is inherently connected to their inner fears of losing control to their (sense of) spatial entitlement. In which they wish to monopolize and the bodies that they wish to dominate.

In the context of Toronto and the seemingly increase in highlighted ‘youth violence’ and ‘gang’ associated related violence reported by media sources, the construction of this sense of fear is somewhat ironic in light of Maclean’s magazine findings from 2006 which tracked and evaluated numbers from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics in six crime categories to map violent crimes by Canadian cities. The violent crimes included: assault, sexual assault, robbery, breaking and entering and murder. In this survey the city of Toronto ranked twenty-sixth on this list and did not place within the top ten of any of the categories of violent crime or major property crime. Interestingly Regina, Saskatchewan ranked number one (The Eye Weekly, ‘Toronto the Good’ 20/03/08:06) in terms of being the city with the most reported instances of violent crime and major property crime in the nation. In the context of schooling, violence and safety in the greater Toronto area this raises several critical concerns. As a city Toronto is not nearly as violent as other major cities in Canada and while we recognize this statistical fact, an
atmosphere of zero-tolerance continues to exist in public school contexts hence reinforcing dominant constructed notions of danger and potential doom from the threat of hyper-violence connected to ‘gang’ related activities in public school spaces. The narratives collected in this study move past mere quantitative statistics by specifically interrogating headwear policies in relation to dominant discursive constructions of safety and violence that inherently bind race to crime, violence and punishment. These sentiments are codified in the linguistic and discursive construction of the headwear policy and its corresponding profiles that project students from racialized communities as violent, potentially threatening, anti-authority and aggressive people.

An example of this can be found in a conversation that took place between a colleague and I while teaching a summer program for low-level achievers at a local school. In discussing issues connected to safety and violence a white female colleague described to me one of the most frightening moments that she had ever experienced in her eighteen years of teaching. The female teacher, ‘Ursula’, described the setting, a regional basketball tournament that took place in Brampton, a suburb just north of the greater Toronto area. While supervising the playing courts in between matches Ursula observed two boys from opposing teams begin to walk toward each other. Ursula described:

“I saw one Black kid in a red baseball cap walking towards another Black kid wearing a blue t-shirt and I thought, holy shit – here comes the gang war!”

In the end, after mustering up enough courage to confront both boys it turned out that not only were they rivals from local schools, most importantly they were cousins greeting one another prior to the tip-off!

The narratives point to an increasing fear amongst dominant bodies that ‘their’ schools, particularly suburban public schools, are becoming impure and tainted with infectious ‘gang’ or ‘street violence’ incited by primarily Black ‘gangstas’ and other racialized ‘thugs’. The issue of
power is discussed in this section in terms of how different headwear becomes criminalized and codified through the headwear policies. When considered with an anti-racism vision the insidious codifying of racialized differences can be read as one discreet way how dominant hegemony protects its privilege and monopoly by constructing the school culture and the ‘student body’ in its ‘image and likeness’. This is done through the preservation of inequitable spaces and their corresponding identities. These highly defined spaces become active in preserving dominant hegemony. An indication of this can be found in the response of Jamil a fourteen year old South Asian high school student located in a suburban neighbourhood west of Toronto’s downtown core. When questioned about dominant perceptions about wearing a bandanna he responded:

"The school says if they see us wearing headwear it must be a symbol for violence and trouble. They view it all as gang apparel".

Rue Forpeace, a self-identified Black female and graduate from a local east-end Toronto high school corroborates Giroux’s point of view in stating that when in contact with dominant bodies in school settings the headwear policy function as a tool of convenience used to disproportionately target Black people more so than any other student group:

“A Black student is automatically viewed as a threat because they’re Black”.

Giroux theorizes that the codifying and racializing of violence in schooling is directly connected to and influenced by a greater societal merger between fact-reporting and entertainment spheres in media culture that portrays and preserves racialized depictions of violence, crime and gang culture largely in forms of racial coding that suggests that violence and crime are particularly a Black or racialized problem that exists outside of the white suburban neighbourhoods. Spatial control is not simply a reaction to
natural divisions and social pathologies in the urban population but is constitutive of them. So certain types of behaviour are criminalized – hence conceived as pathological or deviant – due to the widely held dominant perception of geographic concentration in the city. Because of statistical variations in location, non-gang related types of crime become unimportant, not widespread, or not harmful, and thus not really crimes at all. This localization of crime serves a double end: It magnifies the image of racialized criminality and predisposition to violent behaviours and it confines the overwhelming proportions of crimes involving racially minoritized groups to racially marginalized space. In the end when placed into dominant schooling settings, racialized people become the symbolic and representational embodiments and reminders of those marginalized spaces - ‘out there.’

Felix Gomes, a grade ten secondary school student of mixed Indian and African-Trinidadian decent attended a suburban secondary school outside of the downtown core spoke about how he was read by dominant bodies when wearing his wave cap in the school gymnasium during an after-school game of ‘pick-up’ basketball with some friends. Gomes and a group of his friends were wearing their wave caps while playing basketball in the school gym. Gomes was ordered by the supervising teacher to remove his headwear and that wearing it was a violation of the official school headwear policy. Gomes pleaded that the official school hours had come to a close therefore he was not technically breaking the rule yet he still removed the headwear. The teacher then insisted that he should also persuade his friends into following his lead. Gomes objected and told the teacher that he refused to fulfill the request and that it was the responsibility of the teacher to do so and not him. As a result of his non-compliance and disobedience for not honouring the teacher’s request to ‘police’ his friends, the group of boys
were ordered to stop their game and Gomes was taken to the head office where he was sentenced to an in-school suspension the following day for potentially threatening the health and safety of the school environment. When asked about how he was viewed by dominant staff members and students in the school as a result of wearing his wave cap Gomes responded:

“White people think its all ‘gangster’. When they see me in my wave cap they think I’m a gang member because I’m wearing it”.

Gomes response is not isolated and it is representative of how dominant projections of racialized images connected to discourses of violence, gang culture, street culture and violent behaviours in the context of Toronto are assigned in particular to Black people and other racialized groups.  

This thought is supported by the narrative interview with Kublai, he states:

“They just look at it like it’s unruly or we’re all thugs, they don’t look at it as if it’s culture.”

Through widespread media coverage non-white groups are racialized and violent images and misrepresentations around crime, violence and drugs are specifically attached to non-dominant groups. Examples of this can be found in media headlines across the Greater Toronto Area over a lengthy period of time. “MP Wants Rapper 50 Cent Banned”(CTV: Wed. Nov. 23 2005); “Rap influences Toronto Gangs”(ibid); “Mafia Movies Influence Gang, Malverns love Godfather flicks, rapper videos, police say - Mob lifestyles spurs moves from drugs to fraud, counterfeiting” (May 13, 2004:Toronoto Star); "Gang Hit" (July 21, 2008: Toronto Sun); "Night of the Gun Thugs: 1 Dead, 4 Hurt: Another summer of violence feared after 3 shootings: (June 8

One may argue that the youth assume criminal profiles willingly through participating in oppositional cultures such as the hip-hop culture. For example when dressed in particular way, for example markers of potential ‘gang’ affiliation based on dress, ie. baggy jeans, over sized t-shirts, 'hoodies', sneakers, headwear and the like, the youth willingly participate in assuming these ‘criminal profiles’ and should therefore remain silent about exercising these identities in spaces designed to reward docile complicity and passivity. The point here however is not to question the degree of compliance of the wearer for participating in ‘gang culture’ as neo-liberal / conservatives have insisted. Instead the focus on how the identities of racialized youth become constructed by universalized sweeping generalizations defining the ‘guilty’ and the ‘innocent’.
1st, 2008 Toronto Star) are exemplary of media headlines linking race, crime and violence as mutually informing categories that filter into the school system having particularly destabilizing effects on racialized student populations. Jamil remarked how he constantly faced uncomfortable encounters with teaching staff and administration in his suburban public school for wearing a bandanna to school during cold days:

"When they see me in my bandanna they think I'm part of a gang or they find me aggressive because of the bandanna…"

Jamil’s experience was not an isolated occurrence similar experiences were recorded in an interview with another fourteen-year old student named ‘Kevin’ who conveyed his frustration upon recalling an incident when he was suspended from his suburban public school for wearing a purple bandanna under his baseball cap. Kevin expressed his frustration for not being allowed to wear his wave cap while on school property and stated that the headwear policy does not accurately illustrate a balanced painting of reality. In short Kevin articulated sentiment that not all gang members dress identical, unlike police, soldiers or peace-keepers.

“It doesn’t have to be gang related, you don’t see gang members dressing identically”.

Jamil also commented that the dominant generalization about headwear and its wearers were simply ‘overgeneralizations’ and in the most basic of senses the headwear policy did not take into account the mere possibility that perhaps students were wearing headwear solely as an accessory to match their clothing on a given day which was in no way connected to any gang affiliations.

"…they don't even check to see if it's for fashion."

This quote speaks to the lack of ‘insider’ information and the absence of particular forms of oppositional knowledge including student input and participation in the creation of the headwear
policy of his school. The other issue here is the denial of self-expression and creative freedom over one’s right to oneself. The purposeful misinterpretation of why youth wear headwear further serves to maintain dominant control over social space, knowledge and bodies by ignoring through disavowal the oppositional meanings of headwear and the contextual histories between the wearers and the headwear. This disavowal functions to maintain the public school as a site of white entitlement, purity and innocence where crime and violence are alien elements unless imported there by members of racialized communities. Kevin’s response clearly signals the dangers of the universalized approach of headwear policies in categorizing alien bodies and ‘strange’ headwear.

“It doesn’t represent gang but categorize it as that and when they see me they think gang and gangster.”

Although a student may not be a gang member or have any gang affiliations once dressed in the outlawed headwear, when viewed through a dominant lens, Black students are easily transformed into the potentially threatening gangster or thug and a dominant sense of fear of the ‘Other’ is projected onto racialized bodies by the simple virtue of the type of headwear they may be wearing.

While none of the research participants were involved with any gang type activity or membership by attaching gangsterized labels attached to their identities proved to carry different social meanings and therefore differential implications and consequences when intersecting primarily with categories of race, class and gender and how these categories collide with similarly dominant constructed notions within popular culture and media. Rue Forpeace discussed how Black males in her high school were deemed and labeled ‘gangster’ by the dominant staff of the school resulting from the type of headwear they wore in conjunction with its colour (red or blue):
“I don’t think they were gang members, but they (the school administration) thought they were.”

This quote touches on issues of how dominant constructed generalizations about who is a ‘gangster’ and how a ‘gangster’ should appear in relation to the headwear policy. When asked if dominant bodies in public school settings respond to white youth wearing headwear in the same manner as their Black peers, Gomes replied:

“When white kids wear it they get called ‘wanksters’. Not even white teachers take them seriously”.

Conversely Forpeace mentions that regardless of the real social identity of the majority of Black males in the three downtown high schools that she attended, those who wore ‘headwear’ were constructed as ‘gangster’ in dominant discursive readings of the body regardless if the person was an actual gang member or not.

“There were people who wanted to be in certain groups but they weren’t actually members of a specific gang”.

In this episode regardless of student objections and attempts to shed these false unfitting labels dominant bodies maintain that highly racialized spaces and identities through policing headwear Black males in particular were regularly targeted by the policy irrelevant of their non-gang membership and associations.

Giroux theorizes on this point, in that how the youth are seen through popular representations becomes indicative of how they are viewed and represented by mainstream society and points to pedagogical practices that offer youth themselves images through which to construct their own identities through which to construct their own identities and mediate their perceptions of other youth formations (Giroux, 1996).

The narratives suggest that racialized representations of violence feed an increasing public outcry for tougher crime bills, such as Bill C-2, and the construction of more industrial-
prison complexes such as the Youth 'Super Jail' in Brampton, and more 'get tough' militaristic zero-tolerance approaches to policy and legislation aimed toward policing particularly Black people and other racialized groups. Not only do these headlines and images reproduce racialized systems of thought onto non-dominant groups but it also renames racialized groups as hyper violent and untrustworthy while quietly distancing and absolving white people from their collective accountability and complicity in their role as enablers and preservationists of a panicked stricken school system that plays a key role in breeding racialized violence and allowing it to be insidiously inserted as a 'normative' aspect of the lives of racialized people living in Canada. In the end the racist coding and representations of Black youth tells us less about how white society configures public memory, stability and how daily life is experienced by racialized groups living in the Greater Toronto area (GTA).

‘Piece-Keeping’ and Moral Responsibilities

“The moral universe of imperialism, as in the moral universe of peace keeping mythologies, is a universe of those who must be saved and those who must do the saving” Razack, (2004).

Razack contextualizes contemporary forms of peace-keeping and suggests that peace-keeping is the manifestation of Rudyard Kipling’s ‘white man’s burden’ (Razack, 2004). Power in this context is not always visible as a form of economic control and it often manifests itself in different forms of ‘helping’ the ‘Other’. Whether it’s providing humanitarian relief to earthquake victims in Haiti, orphans in Africa, providing peace-keepers in Somalia and Afghanistan or attempting to prevent Hollywood style violence from erupting in schools, the everyday world that we all confront in our day to day lives as teachers, researchers, parents, children and so forth is structured not merely by language and meaning by face to face symbolic interactions and
ongoing social constructions; but by the modes and forces of material production and systemic/institutional domination which is related in many ways to material reality and its control (Apple, 132:2004).

Assigning labels leads to the creation of identities and meanings in specific institutions as taking place within a specific context that determines the parameters of what is negotiable, meaningful, safe, threatening, acceptable and intolerable. These categories have important implications for a serious analysis of in-school labeling practices, the use of colour-blind categories by educators and the distribution of different types of knowledge to differently labeled people. The combination between the public school’s use of ‘colour-blind’ perspectives to evade confronting power issues, such as race and racism, and the ways in which public schools serve dominant interests around economic and cultural reproduction, can we safely conclude that public schools to this end function as ‘raceless’ sites where every student and staff member has an equal opportunity to succeed (Apple, 143:2004)?

The “neutral” or colour-blind language of the public school institution may be applicable without actually being appropriate for the scenario; such is the case with the generalized assumptions made in the language of headwear policies. A contradiction can be found between a neo-liberal perspective surrounding the ‘genuine concern’ for help while simultaneously serving to maintain the existing distribution and institutionalization of Euro-American hegemony in society. In other words the ‘helping professions’ play a significant role in that they help to define and refine other people’s statuses (and consequently their own) by the special terms employed leads to the categorization of bodies and the justification of restrictions of physical movements and of moral and intellectual influence are clearly revealed by the political functions language performs and of the multiple realities it helps to create (Apple, 135: 2004).
Barely transformed from its origin in colonialism, peace-keeping provides a form of moral sanction for waging violent policies or peace and violence to fill the mouth of famine, bid the case of the sick, and most relevant to this work, to restore order and safety to the public domain. It is within this sense that anti-gang targeting of headwear policies in schools play a significant role in that they help to define and refine identity by the special terms and the criminal categorization of Black bodies. Ultimately such policies lead to the justification of restrictions of physical movements and moral and intellectual influence are clearly revealed by the political functions that ‘gang’ related language performs and of the multiple realities it helps to create (Apple, 135: 2004).

Assigning labels leads to the creation of identities and meanings in specific institutions as taking place within a specific context that determines the parameters of what is negotiable, meaningful, safe, threatening, acceptable and intolerable. These categories have important implications for a serious analysis of in-school labeling practices, the use of colour-blind categories by educators and the distribution of different types of knowledge to differently labeled people. From the point of ‘genuine concern’ headwear policies are instituted by the dominant for school safety from an increase in gang presence. Headwear policies function in this manner standardized codes designed to control through script the modes of student behaviours in order to ensure the public’s safety from continual threat of an eruption of possible gang violence. Dominant discursive constructions of racialized youth and in particular Black males as prone to criminality and ‘hyper-violent’ functions to preserve a dominant monopoly over power issues surrounding schooling, public safety and violence. The recent increase in media coverage surrounding gang culture and school violence has created a sense of urgency for a ‘peace-keeping’ type solution in the public discourse. Through the use of spatialized tropes of the
Black/racialized presence in public schools in conjunction with media’s persistent attachment to connecting race with gang culture and gun violence injects the public discourse with reinforced notions of racialized violence and terror in the imaginations of white people (Deer, 2006:22). Policing particular types of headwear, with special attention to those articles that are red or blue in colour become an exercise in morality. Theoretically some may suggest that such policies make it easier to detect ‘trouble elements’ and in this sense such legislation will reduce the amount of violent gang activity in school zones. While this assumption may seem rational, the data from the respondents seems to suggest otherwise: that the protection of the health and safety of the dominant public through, in this case, anti-gang legislation, the story of the narratives detail how this is done ultimately by targeting and exploiting racialized groups. This usually becomes a trade-off situation where securing a sense of safety for the dominant comes at the cost of criminalizing racialized “Others”.

For example students who were not gang members of the ‘Bloods’ or ‘Crips’ and who still wore either red or blue colours in their style of dress were labeled ‘gangster’ and considered a potential threat waiting to explode without provocation or warning. Regardless of the assignment of false labels many formed youth groups not out of loyalty to any gang organization but to the community where they resided.

“It was mostly a neighbourhood thing rather than a Blood or Crip thing…”

These students were not official gang members and wore either red or blue for the most part to represent the area where they resided as opposed to any gangster affiliated organization. Black students that wore colours that the school attached to gang culture were targeted and persecuted nonetheless simply by virtue of colour, the colour of dress and the colour of their skin and lack of melanin in the dominant. Many of the Black students wore the colours that represented the
communities were they resided and formed a part of as opposed to their allegiance to organized ‘colourized’ violence.

“...there were people from the school that lived in Victoria Park and there were people in the school who came from Regent Park”.

A common misperception by dominant minded staff took form in their problematization of ‘gang’ violence which speaks to their lack of understanding and knowing of these particular sets of youth and community formations. Rue Forpeace explained that the animosity that existed among some Black students resulted from the geographic location of the communities where they resided and was not driven by a gang war as projected by the dominant.

“It was usually the people from Regent Park who were against the people from Victoria Park”.

Rue Forpeace qualifies this thought in observing that many Blacks students were simply ‘people’ attending school and were in turned labeled and categorized based on the neighbourhood where they lived:

“They were only people who called themselves Bloods and Crips, only in the minds of white people were they considered ‘true gangsters.’”

When violence took place in this context the violence was one community versus another community as opposed to the dominant projection: one gang versus another gang. Let’s be real, youths living in Regent Park who may have access to guns does not mean that everyone in that community are gang affiliates and therefore potential suspects. The stories contained in the narratives clearly point to a constructed geographic division between student groups, East (Victoria Park) vs. West (Regent Park) that has been exploited and functions to promote violence and mistrust between the two communities.

Similarly sixteen year-old grade ten student, Alex Gomes, attended a local high school
approximately twenty-five kilometers west of downtown Toronto confirmed this thought when describing in his narrative how white students are not viewed by dominant staff and administration in the same ways as Black students were in his high school:

“*When white kids wear it they get called ‘wanksters’. Not even white teachers take them seriously.*”

When white students displayed headwear or ‘colours’ in school they received the complete opposite type of treatment than Black students when accosted by, in most cases, dominant staff and administration.

Maximo made specific mention that the hypocritical nature of the headwear policy targeted and policed Black students in particular whereas white male students did not experience similar types of encounters and clashes with school authority figures over their headwear and the policy:

“*White guys don’t get stopped for wearing blue or reds unless they’re with Black people*”.

The language used in school safety discourse translates into short-hand racialized stereotypes supported and fueled by widespread media coverage linking hip-hop culture and rap music with gang violence, drugs, and urban terror. In this space all Black bodies, male and female, are suspect (Giroux, 1996:67). This particular event was enough to stir-up unforgotten memories of ‘past wrongs’ where white people were shot by Black men, such as the death of Jane Creba (Boxing Day, 2005), Vivi Lemonis in what was dubbed the ‘Just Desserts Shooting’, (04/05/1994); the murder of policeman Todd Baylis (10/17/1994); and the shooting of Barbara Turnbull (09/23/1983), have all resurrected historic reminders of the fear of racialized insurgence and the moral panic that accompanies it. An example of this can be seen in the questionable conviction of JSR (2008) although it was well known and clearly evident that he was not
responsible for firing the gun that was used as evidence in the investigation into Creba’s death, moral panic, fear and a thirst for revenge played a major role in the conviction and imprisonment of yet just another ‘hyper-violent’ gang member.

Conversely, if we are to consider the opposite, events where Black or racialized children have been murdered or victims of hyper-violent acts a striking contrast is made when considering the discourse around race, violence and criminality and schooling in the murder of a fifteen year-old Black male student (see Manners, 05/24/07) and in a separate incident the stabbing death of a Tamil student (National Post, 09/11/07).

The narratives collected from Rue Forpeace made specific mention that in two of the three inner-city high schools that she attended this type of hyper-violence or ‘gangster’ type behaviour was not solely attributed to Black communities however in the majority of instances Black people in particular were targeted as opposed to any other non-dominant group. Rue Forpeace expressed:

“Actually I believe that the other racialized groups were equally if not more involved with gangs than the Black students that attended the school”.

For example in an eastern Toronto high school, Black students were continuously targeted by the headwear policy’s anti-gang focus whereas students from other racialized groups who were actual gang members or who participated in other illegal type of activities on school property went unnoticed. Rue Forpeace drew attention to this when recalling a hyper-violent incident that took place at one of the downtown Toronto high schools that she had attended:

“There was a time when a group of Sri Lankan students were sitting outside of the school and a different group of Tamil students pulled up in a car, jumped out, beat them down with a baseball bat and pulled one of them into the car and drove off.’

While Black students were painted and projected by the dominant school culture as ‘gangster’ conversely other racialized groups, in this case Tamil students, were not viewed in the same regard even in situations where they participated in equally violent acts in comparison to the
threat of the ‘gangster’. The participants discussed how the headwear policy and its zero-tolerance style of implementation created further divisions within the student population by reinforcing and supporting racist dominant constructions of Black people being more likely to act out in gang-style forms of hyper-violence while non-Black racialized groups that were involved in similar type activities were spared the gangster label and corresponding treatment because they were not easily or readily identifiable as gangster whether through style of clothes, forms of dress, or the lack of access to guns. Some Tamil students were considered deviant or aggressive the issue of language and the difficulty of ‘fitting into’ Canadian society were usually reasons given to explain their induction and participation into such behaviour. The violence committed by this particular group although considered a crime by our societal standards violent acts were usually committed by and inflicted upon members of the South Asian community and in that sense it did not interfere or threaten the functioning of the white power structure and more likely to assimilate into the ‘Canadian way’ than Black students. Forpeace also spoke of how one particular Asian gang, the ‘Gators’, did not face similar differential treatment as Black students in the same high school and although it was well known throughout the student community of the school that the gang identified with the colour green this was found no where in any of the anti-gang aspect of the headwear policy or school dress code. Forpeace articulated:

“They weren’t considered a real gang because in many instances they were involved with different types of criminal activity plus they were still considered to have academic potential”.

Differential surveillance, targeting, policing and profiling of Black students in comparison to all other student groups involved in gang related activities creates a point to investigate and question the accountability of the politics of whiteness and racialization. The language used in school safety discourse translates into short-hand racialized stereotypes supported and fueled by
widespread media coverage linking hip-hop culture and rap music with gang violence, drugs, and urban terror. In such social spaces all Black bodies, male and female, are suspect (Giroux, 1996:67) while white students continue to use their pigmentary privilege to re-assimilate into whiteness and escape the harsh realities of race and racism in public schooling. Dominant readings of the safe schools issue usually tend to compartmentalize specific types of violence as something specific to particular racialized groups. When such violence takes place in public school contexts where the perpetrator and the victim are both Black it is usually discussed as ‘inter-group’ violence and labeled as ‘gang’ or ‘youth’ violence an issue that ‘they’ must deal with ‘over there’ in ‘their’ community.

The protection of Black and racialized bodies in public school contexts comes secondary to securing the safety of the dominant public. In other words, the safety, protection and well being of the dominant white majority is the main concern of headwear type policies that are designed to target Black communities. Little mention is made of how Black students disproportionately suffer from the dual role as both victim and suspect in these circumstances. Two examples that demonstrate the lack of dominant accountability for importing violence into schools and disproportionately disciplining and punishing Black and racialized groups can be found in the comments of the premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty. When questioned about his lack of action to the amount of violence suffered by Black students in the G.T.A. McGuinty explained that this outbreak in violence in G.T.A. schools is not a priority concern of his government since there are millions of children who attend school every single day in Ontario and they do so safely and without incident. According to McGuinty this is only a problem in ‘some’ communities, suggesting that this type of violence is not an issue in the greater part or whiter part of Ontario.
Similarly, Tony Blair (while still the Prime Minister of England) suggested that recent gang type violence in London’s inner-core should not be treated as part of the general societal crime wave but rather as a separate phenomenon that exists outside the realms of the dominant mainstream, specific in its origin to ‘Black’ youth culture:

"We need to stop thinking of this as a society that has gone wrong - it has not - but of specific groups that for specific reasons have gone outside of the proper lines of respect and good conduct towards others and need by specific measures to be brought back into the fold". (Patrick Wintour and Vikram Dodd, Thursday April 12, 2007. The Guardian)

The comments made by both politicians clearly reflect a sense of disconnection and separation between the imaginary society that white people like to believe that they live in and the lived realities of racialized communities. Through dominant discursive constructions that connect race to hyper-gangster behaviour, a general sentiment of ‘white fear’ is injected into the public’s imagination threatening the intimate relationship between spatial entitlement and racial privilege. While the dominant sense of special security and safety felt threatened by the recent outbreaks in gun violence, the murders of Black students was manipulated by the dominant media and politicians to help form the ‘crisis’ situation\(^9\) which justified renewed cries from dominant interests for stiffer gun control laws, revamped anti-gang legislation (Bill C-24) and an increase in the policing of public spaces such as public schools in order to secure a sense of safety and a ‘peace of mind’. The xenophobic reactions and general sentiment of ‘white fear’, a fear that is connected to a sense of spatial entitlement, suggested that a potential violent crisis was about to erupt.

The narratives suggest that when these occurrences are read with an anti-racism lens a different outcome is fostered. In the public schools attended by these students community representation was a major issue of concern. The lack of a sense of community was present in the dominant

\(^9\) Reminders of …1724; 1764; 1800; 1804; 1816; 1822; 1831…?
school culture and through their headwear wearers were able to express their membership to a particular community as opposed to gang affiliation or group. In the same breath what does say about the lack of accountability and responsibility for this void in the dominant school culture? This reading of the narratives, from the locations of the storytellers, provides an alternate understanding and interpretation of the construction of the dynamics that drive school safety issues. Instead of finding solutions to issues of curricular asphyxiation and amputation (see Dei) and finding concrete ways for teachers to relate to racialized youth and reconnect them to themselves and larger communities, Black bodies become increasingly targeted and profiled and policed as the ‘usual suspects’ because news about gang and youth violence is more perversely sensational and exotic and conveniently fails to consider how the politics of whiteness, racialization and power play significant roles in promoting violence amongst and between racialized groups.

Peace-keeping initiatives in schooling open the door wide to an increased militarization of public space in an attempt to achieve and maintain dominant hegemony over not only those spaces but also the bodies that dwell therein. Public schools are being increasingly patrolled and guarded by police with or without arms. By flooding schools that are predominantly attended by Black students and other racialized groups with increased police presence, SWAT teams and canine units and packaging the entire presentation as response out of a genuine concern for public safety dominant hegemony becomes coded yet is secured. This coded strategy appears to present the police as the ‘peacekeepers’ of everyone’s health and safety and is promoted as such. What is not said however is how this old strategy of colonial war is codified and also silently suggests peace through superior fire power which can ultimately be translated into police involvement and

**Performing the Headwear and Identities**

Over the last eight years of teaching in the public school system one thing is clearly evident: racialized bodies who do not subscribe to the dominant culture of the school are always faced with the daunting task of negotiating space and identity in the contact-zones of the school. Lefebvre argues that social space is not an inert, neutral, and a pre-existing given, but rather, an on-going production of spatial relations. Throughout the interviews this fact was highlighted by all of the participants in their discussion of how the headwear policy and its subsequent (although ‘unofficial’) zero-tolerance method of enforcement served as a means to punish students who resisted the policy and continued to use their headwear as a tool to negotiate space and identity on a school-community level. Racialized students that participated at a competitive level on school teams, in school clubs, school sponsored activities, fundraisers and other such initiatives were not targeted and disciplined in the same manner as those bodies who refrained. In an historical sense it remains true that the more things change the more they stay the same. Racialized students are allowed to wear their headwear if they perform the according to dominant driven notions that are invested in the language of the headwear policy. For example, it was found that Black students in particular were allowed to wear their headwear when specifically competing or participating in the areas of sports, entertainment or in the positive promotion of school initiatives.

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10 “social space" is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity—their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder” (p.73).
The narratives gathered from the interview participants revealed that maintaining the order of the policy did not always take place and that there were occasions throughout the school year where a blind eye was turned to the policy when the scenario was deemed allowable by the dominant school administration and staff and the matter of safety and gang violence became subsidiary and tertiary issues when weighted against promoting and preserving the dominant image of the school. Maximo spoke about this practice of ‘looking the other way’ in his downtown high-school:

“If you’re on the football team you can wear your wave cap or bandanna on the sidelines, on the field, in the change room or gym hall but as soon as you enter into the school without your helmet they’ll tell you to take it off.”

Similarly in another downtown high school located in the opposite part of the city Kublai noted that the same type of practices surrounding the acceptability of headwear during specific times and places was also under-played.

“At my school you could wear it if you’re on a sports team or if it may be cold outside on that day but not on school premises”.

One common re-occurring theme was that Black students who participated and/or excelled on school sports teams at a competitive level did not face the same forms of targeting and discipline and punishment as their peers who did the contrary. In an eastern Toronto secondary school, Black male students were recruited to play on the school’s basketball team. This resulted in differential treatment between Black male students who played sports and those who didn’t. The staff and administration at the school turned a blind eye to team members who were involved in illegal activities or who defied school codes of conduct, dress and behaviour. Rue Forpeace spoke to this point:

“Well, it was something they put up with because it was the basketball program that preserved the school’s reputation”.
When questionable scenarios arose where disciplinary actions (whether necessary or not) may have been enforced, members of the boys basketball team, Black males in particular were not subject to the same types of discipline as their non-athlete peers. In fact, what would be normally considered inexcusable behaviour according to the school code of conduct became excusable if not invisible depending on the identity of the particular student(s). Teaching staff and administration were all complicit in avoiding the responsibility and neglecting the necessary care that was asked of in these types of situations. In one scenario the girlfriend of one of the members of the basketball teams was “choke slammed” on the floor of the school gymnasium one afternoon by her boyfriend, Rue Forpeace explained:

“The players and the issues were mostly just avoided by the teachers and the principal. The guys on the basketball team could get away with murder, literally.”

This differential implementation of policy fostered division amongst and between students and student groups allowing for divisions to take form. Black students who didn’t lend their labour and service to school teams, specifically the basketball team, were viewed as more non-essential to the overall development of the school culture than their counterparts that played on organized school teams. The lack of athletic status and merit of these students served as another marker of opposition. Forpeace continued:

“Black students who didn’t play sports were expendable…they were more policed than the students who played on the basketball team”.

Here the issue of protecting the health and safety of Black students is completely ignored in order to protect the valued reputation and the tight organization of the school’s basketball program. Similarly it was also found that racialized students that performed the ‘gangster’ or the ‘rapper’ role in a theatrical, comedic or dramatic performance or that participated in school wide entertainment initiatives such as talent shows were also allowed to wear the normally outlawed
headwear without fear of persecution or punishment. Jamil explained how the policy functioned in the opposite manner at times at the middle school he attended.

“If there is a presentation on urban dance or something then it becomes acceptable”.

Research participants that ranged between grades 8 – 12 all commented how the policy was not enforced during performances designed to entertain the student body. Maximo discussed how at his high school racialized students were encouraged by dominant staff to ‘dress up’ in their ‘costume’ while performing in order to lend authenticity to the identity they were depicting. Black students where allowed to wear their headwear specifically when performing roles or identities in the areas of promoting the oxymoronic ‘school spirit’, when competing in school sports and for entertainment purposes.

“A talent show is the only time when you can wear headwear inside the school, during the performance. But we have to take off everything as soon as the show is over”.

In a separate interview grade eight student, Jamal, made similar observations with regards to performance:

“They let us wear it because it helps to play the role of who we’re trying to portray”.

What is interesting about this quote is that the grade eight student was unable to make the connection between how the headwear is performed and the reproduction of highly racialized stereotypes which only serve to secure dominant fear and an atmosphere of moral panic which ultimately can have disastrous ramifications for racialized groups.

Lastly, racialized students were allowed to again wear their normally outlawed headwear during school wide fundraising initiatives such as ‘Spirit Day’, ‘Hat Day’, or at pep-rallies designed to promote positive school morale for sports teams. Kublai mentioned that in his downtown high-school the only time in which Black and racialized students who did not participate in athletics or
entertainment were allowed to wear their headwear was during the oxymoronic ‘Spirit Day’ and
‘Crazy Hat and Hair’ day, not without a cost however.

“At my school they let you wear hats on ‘Spirit Day’ but only if you donate money
to the student council”.

This form of bribery becomes acceptable and students are allowed to maintain their own sense of
identity if they are able to literally pay to do so.

In a different scenario two members of the teaching staff at a suburban school outside of Toronto
wore hats with wool sewn into their hats to give the appearance of the matted dreadlocked hair of
the Rastafari to help promote ‘school spirit’ for ‘Crazy Hair’ day. This was done without taking
the time to consider how this may be spiritually insulting to students and other members of staff
of the Rastafari faith. This event could have been used as a teaching-learning opportunity for
staff and students around the spiritual practices of the Rastafari, instead, it was rendered into
simple mockery and baboonery of a form of Indigenous resistance to dominant forms of ongoing
colonialism and racism.

**Resisting the Rape of the Policy**

In an attempt to negotiate a space for themselves despite being targeted by the policy,
staff and administration some Black students refused to stop wearing their headwear to school
while they still recognized the restrictions and possible unpleasantness of discipline and
punishment that they may encounter when entering or exiting the school building. Regardless of
the possible consequences Maximo felt justified in wearing his headwear as to him it played a
role in contributing to establishing his identity in his own way, something that was restricted by
the dominant authority of his high school.
“I wear it anyways even though I know sometimes I might get caught but it’s a part of who I am.”

‘Zero-tolerance’ style policing and peacekeeping through headwear policy has had dangerous ramifications on racialized bodies and has evidently led to the differential treatment of racialized groups. The narrative from Forpeace highlights the lack of desire on the part of the dominant group to understand the different cultural readings and functions of the headwear and that headwear must be read in context and in association with its wearer. In the instances of the narrative participants this was not done and resulted in disciplinary and punitive consequences. In the instance described by Forpeace, she was ordered to vacate the school premises for not removing her head tie.

“I was confused and I refused to take it off because my hair wasn’t in a state to be shown”.

Without discussion Forpeace was automatically labeled as defiant and potentially hostile for strongly opposing the rule of the policy. Her refusal however was rooted in her decision to not allow her head to become a public display since her hair was in the process of being braided. The decision of the dominant authority of the school clearly reflects a horrible gap in a necessary understanding of how compelling Forpeace to display her unbraided hair could be read by other Black students in the school and surrounding school community and lead to ridicule. In this sense, the types of violence that accompany practices of discipline and punishment is often considered to be a necessary form of violence born of exceptional circumstances in public school spaces. A grade twelve student, Maximo, stated that there was no space within his school where he felt safe wearing his headwear out of fear of being suspended. In his narrative interview when asked about this he replied:

“The only place I feel safe with it on is outside of the school building”.
An unspoken sense of violence, experienced by the wearer, is attached to zero-tolerance policies and approaches. By institutionalizing such policies a sense of normalcy prevails and the issue of racial profiling and targeting become viewed as a necessary measure to enforce the safety of hegemonic dominance over the external threat that has trickled into the borders of the school community. It is here that the identities of the wearers and histories and multiplicity of interpretations about headwear and its uses become reconstructed and locked into the symbolic embodiments of white fear and in turn represent an imminent challenge, one that brings along the potential threat of violence to white entitlement and empowerment.

**Slum Clearing and Aesthetic Cleansing**

The concept of slum clearance contains racial dimensions in the idea that were set by colonial officials stemming partly as a result of their sense of ‘fear’ of becoming contaminated by an infectious disease and epidemic plague. This ‘sanitation syndrome’, Goldberg states, caught hold of the colonial imagination as a general metaphor for the pollution of Black people, the stereotypically symbolic embodiment of urban space. The headwear and its associated bodies become representative of that ‘urban space’ and thus a group of people shaping dominant constructed connections between headwear, space, race and violence. The racialized image of the headwear is taken to pollute the picture we are supposed to have of the body politic by reflecting itself in terms of other social pathologies like crime, drug abuse, prostitution and poverty. Maximo spoke to this effect and made mention of how his hair tie (a piece of string) caused great problems for him with school officials once the string was used to tie up his hair:

“I can’t really express myself in school, I mean I like to tie back my hair I don’t like to wear it out it looks all ‘raga raga’ and I don’t want to look like that”.
In this narrative quote although Maximo has his own beliefs regarding his own individual personal aesthetic it is greatly influenced by African-Black culture. It is telling that to this Black student his hair being different than any other group in society requires alternative and differential ways of reading how conceptions of beauty, cleanliness and order in the context of Black students is much different than any other student group.

Maximo’s headwear in this instance serves as a perpetual reminder of the racialized grounds of housing projects or government housing, police ‘hot spots’ and ‘at risk’ communities such as Jane and Finch, Regent Park, Jungle, Thistletown, Jamestown, Flemingdon Park and Malvern. Goldberg suggests that by constructing the ‘projects’ as a space of crime, social disorder, dirt and disease, of teenage pregnancy, prostitution, pimps, and drug dependency; the workless and shiftless, hyper-violent and uneducated, disciplined only by a network of social welfare workers and police officers, presents a generic image without identity, an ahistorical space inhabited by faceless bodies accompanied by reminders of ensuing brutal punishment and disciplinary measures for non-compliance.

The headwear policy ensures the aesthetic cleansing of public school spaces and of the non-dominant bodies who occupy those spaces. Gentrification in this sense serves as one of many subtle methods of reinserting ‘middle class’, white, patriarchal values into ‘central areas’, spaces and Black bodies (Newman, 2002). One of the primary goals of headwear policies is to protect a sense of hegemonic privilege around dominant notions of acceptable behaviour by encouraging and enforcing ‘good manners and proper courtesy’, both inside and outside of the school. Jacobs states, through this process of restoration and redevelopment that the ‘space’ becomes more valuable and more civil through the restoration of ‘good’ and ‘proper’ manners and behaviour via the headwear policy theoretically functions to renovate public school spatial
environments through reinserting and restoring ‘Canadian’ values into public school spaces and its bodies (Jacobs, 1996:75).

By specifically ordering spatial practices and defining which activities may and may not take place in these spaces and which bodies may occupy or may not occupy these spaces, school zones and their non-dominant populations are mapped and during this process what doesn’t fit into the classificatory system of dominant epistemologies is then re-labeled and assigned new meanings. The forced removal of wave caps, dew rags, bandanas, and headscarves constitutes a definite aesthetic desire of the dominant to recreate and restore traditional markers of whiteness into the ‘Canadian’ identity. In this sense the headwear policy plays a significant role in affecting how the daily ordering of power relations that exist within the social space of the public school take shape.

Sibley’s analysis of whiteness and the ‘Other’ specifically focuses on how cleaning products and the conceptual and dialectic relationship clean and dirty are represented in popular media through television commercials. Through the process of cleaning comes purification and the attainment of whiteness by virtue of being clean (Sibley, 1995: 64). Kublai recalled how shortly after the occurrence of the “9-11” destruction in New York city his English teacher, a female from the dominant group made inappropriate comments to him with regards to shaving his beard off of his face:

“...in front of the class she told me that I should go home and shave my ‘goatie’ off my face because it makes me look like a terrorist.”

This quote reiterates Sibley’s suggestion that through popular discourse and policy children are projected as either ‘pure’ or ‘defiled’. While bodies are assigned particular labels the differential meanings invested into bodies and their headwear become frozen in time, or static in relation to racialized spatial formations. Here, nature is constructed into images of sub-urban purity
contrasted with the defiled inner-city. Or wildness as in the jungle is contrasted with notions of Western economic civility and progress (Sibley, 1995, p.64). It is within these spaces that the identities, labels, meanings and power invested in the headwear and its wearers shift when colliding with spatial-temporal factors.

**Compartmentalizing Knowledge and the Body**

The ‘genuine concern’ stance of the anti-gang focus of headwear policies assumes the position that the threat of danger is a problem with the individual as a result of that individual’s violation of the policy rather than interrogating the discursive construction of the policy combined with the assumption that the official definitions and markers outlined in the policy are the only ‘right’ terms and therefore factual and left unchallenged. In reality however almost all attention and action is focused on controlling the collective (student) body through the control of the individual rather than the defining agent, the larger institutional context (Apple, 137:2004). A clear example of this can be seen in the narrative provided by Jamil a grade eight student at the time. Jamil spoke about how his identity as a South Asian male is constantly questioned by his white and other Asian friends when he wears a bandanna around his head.

> “Sometimes my white friends come up to me and ask why am I wearing a bandanna because I’m not Black … and don’t see that my race is being pushed down at the same time”.

This quote depicts how regardless of why Jamil chose to wear his headwear, whether symbolic of an attempt toward solidarity between racialized groups or merely a fashion statement, people from the dominant group insisted and maintained that the bandanna symbolized two things: gang culture; and the Black male. Training the eye to read the body in parts instead of the whole body as one, allows an opening to be created to provide a platform from which the disconnection of
headwear and the wearer from any historical, cultural, political, material or ideological context can take shape.

Dominant discursive constructions of ‘headwear’ and their imagined connections and associations to gangs and the threat of hyper-violence tend to delineate the validity and legitimacy and cultural capital of oppositional knowledge and readings of the headwear from these contextual points of entry. Erasing these meanings and replacing them with dominant construed meanings functions to preserve and maintain compartmentalized and hierarchized knowledge which privileges dominant modes of thought as “universal” and globally exemplary while at the same time answering the dominant cry for an increase in the standardization of restrictions and limitations and the discipline and punishment of racialized communities.

In this sense compartmentalization of the body serves as a form of discipline that functions toward the greater goal of social control defining what and who is acceptable and how notions of acceptability operate.

“Like Goth people they can wear their black make-up, their fishnet clothes, you know whatever, the skateboarders with their ‘Mohawks’ and then there’s us and I wear my braids, it’s a Black style”.

These categories have important implications for a serious analysis of in-school labeling practices, the use of colour-blind categories by educators and the distribution of different types of knowledge to differently labeled people. The modes of interaction in classrooms, the types of control, the generation and labeling of student identities, need to be understood as a dialectical relationship between ideology and material and economic environment. Teacher’s conception of competence of what and who is and who can be a ‘good’ student performance, what is considered important vs. unimportant, what is defined as knowledge, safety vs. violence, appropriate and inappropriate behaviour are not free-floating ideas. These mental projections and
material productions come from somewhere and are influenced by the environmental conditions within public schools which need to be read in the context of existing social conditions and the connections between the ideological and material conditions both inside and outside of the school building (Apple, 133: 2004).

**Routinizing Bodily Movements**

Social and economic control over social space and bodies occurs in public schools not only in the form of institutionalized disciplinary and punitive policies or in the dispositions of teachers but instead by the rules, routines, timetables and the use of bells to keep control and order. In conjunction with the hidden curriculum such processes help to reinforce dominant norms of work, obedience, punctuality, docility and submission. The control over bodies and space is exercised and distributed through the assignment of differential labels that are used to control the meaning of space and its inhabitants, thus functioning as a tool of social and economic control. Since schools preserve and distribute what is perceived to be “legitimate knowledge” – the type of knowledge that we “must have” – i.e. the ‘truth’ - schools in this sense confer cultural legitimacy and capital onto the knowledge of specific groups at the expense of the ‘Others’ (Apple, 61:2004).

Razack notes that the process of ordering the rhythm of one’s daily life influences how people come to know themselves or not. It influences how bodies are known in the spaces in which they exist in relation to other spaces. Through rigid implementation of daily routines “the space comes to perform something in that (particular) social order, permitting certain actions while prohibiting others” (Razack, 2002:9; McCann, 1999:172; Lefebvre, 1991) The policy functions as a code that specifically assigns particular types of behaviour to headwear and assigns silent meanings upon the wearers. By criminalizing the articles of headwear and its
wearers allows the dominant group to exercise the power to decide which types of dress are conducive to the maintenance of a ‘safe learning’ environment and in the good interest of public safety.

In the context of the public school, Black bodies are compelled to follow the daily ‘song’ or the rhythm of the daily routine imposed by the headwear policy. The removal of all headwear upon entering the edifice takes place for two possible reasons. First is to maintain white privilege and entitlement over the abstract space and render it into a highly defined and homogeneously uniform space. The other reason is in response to dominant fears of potential racialized violence. The implications of ‘white fear’ results in further criminalizing Black bodies and further racializes violent crime with particularly Black peoples, Muslims and other racialized groups.

The narratives identify some of the ways in which the policy marked bodies and attempts to standardize the behaviours and thoughts of bodies that inhabit public school zones and the popular imagination of the ‘public’. The construction of the public school as a ‘safe’ public space is impingent upon clearly defining what activities can and cannot take place within those spaces. The headwear policy is symbolic of the dominant group’s sense of entitlement and privilege over naming and defining space, knowledge production, and the bodies of those who are already some of the most marginalized by society. An anti-racism lens takes into account the dynamics of white (male) power and privilege and how power and privilege work together in mutually reinforcing ways to construct social reality for groups in society. An anti-racism lens “interrogates this intersection and the ideology that maintains and supports both whiteness as a social identity and the dominant institutions of society” (Dei, 1996:29).
A pre-service teacher candidate completing his practicum placement at a public secondary school retold how he was repeatedly told by dominant co-workers to remove his ‘tam’\(^{11}\) during the playing of the national anthem each morning. After refusing to remove his headwear the Rastafarian teacher was interrogated by his colleagues and asked to account for his actions (or inaction) by at first presenting a ‘religious membership card’ and an explicatory memo surrounding his ‘strange’ or alien headwear in the staff newsletter. This narrative speaks to the nature of racial profiling and policing of Black and other racialized bodies in the public school system. This point is important to the scope of this work because it clearly demonstrates how the span of the hegemonic gaze that emanates from headwear policies spreads to cover all Black and racialized bodies regardless of their assigned role or status as teachers or students. Black bodies in particular are subject to violence initiated by the dominant group once the privilege, passport and order to the identity of the dominant collective is threatened (Sibley, 1995:01).

The order of this space was sufficiently destabilized by the Rastafarian teacher by not only the physical presence and social readings of his headwear, but also by not allowing his hair to be captured by the dominant gaze. Not allowing his hair to be captured by the lens of the dominant gaze functioned as means of interrogating and paralyzing the legitimacy of the institutional space of dominant hegemony and its connection between ideas of rationality, objectivity and civility as traits that demarcate the white middle-class, male patriarchal reign (Schick, 2002:108). His refusal to remove his headwear upon request shattered the ‘heavens’ of the member of staff who was so boldfaced as to request a form of identification card as proof of religious identity or faith.

\(^{11}\) “Tam” – this reference is to the handmade knit head coverings worn by certain groups of Rastafarians. Usually these are made in the colours of red, gold and green.
The values of the dominant group came into question where the Ras refused to remove his headwear covering. This episode demonstrates how the headwear policy has severe implications for Black and other racialized bodies. Furthermore, the hostility that fueled the encounter demonstrates the shattering of traditional Euro-American hegemonic notions of what public schooling should look and acceptability by reordering the ‘who’, ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of headwear.

The headwear policy comes from a dominant necessity to police and maintain the school as it was imagined and conceptually thought of to function in preserving the dominant structure power relations. In order to preserve this (perceived) space and sense of entitlement, routinization of how the space is experienced by different student groups, not only in a material sense, transforms the space to exist in a mutually constitutive relationship with its ‘users’ (Lefebvre 1991:38-40). In schooling contexts this ‘new’ space is not a positive experience for all student groups however. Racialized groups experience this space differently than students from the dominant group. Through the ordering of daily routines, “the space comes to perform something in that social order, permitting certain actions while prohibiting others” (Razack, 2002:9; McCann1999:172; Lefebvre 1991).

In his final year of high school, Maximo, discussed how he was threatened with suspension for tying up his hair on his way out of the school building. His attempt to wrap a red elastic strip around his hair to hold it in place instead of having his hair appear all “chaka chaka”, meaning unkempt, as opposed to demarcating gang affiliations. Upon leaving the school building one afternoon Maximo was accosted by the principal of the school demanding that it be removed from his hair immediately.

“I was walking out of the school and the VP seen it and said to take it off immediately or I would be suspended”.
Through the process of routinization Black Bodies are expected to immediately comply by removing their headwear and those who do not comply with the code and break the routine are hunted and face the always-existent threat of disciplinary and punitive consequences. In many instances Black students were threatened or received suspensions for resisting the rule of the policy whether for absolute non-compliance through non-removal or whether for doing so in ‘slow motion’.

Defining and naming acceptable and intolerable spatial practices and daily routine in school contact zones has a direct impact on how the lived experiences that connect bodies with those specific social spaces are shaped. Ordering the rhythm of one’s daily life influences how people come to know themselves and how they are known in the spaces in which they exist and in relation to other spaces and people. While Black bodies are connected to dominant bodies in these mutual spaces, Black bodies are disconnected from themselves when moving through these zones and in this sense the ordering of the daily routine and life experience is experienced differently than those of the dominant order. This is shown in the narrative with Rue Forpeace who was left confused as to how the dominant authority of the school showed absolutely no compassion for the issue of her hair and unable to understand the complexity and value of ‘hair’ was weighted differently among Black youth than those from the dominant group and other non-Black groups.

“I was confused and I refused to take it off because my hair wasn’t in a state to be shown.

The headwear policy criminalizes particularly Black youth and members of other racialized groups with its continuous reference and connections made between particularly Black males and gang culture or what has been popularly dubbed, ‘street culture’. The term street culture is
designed from its first sound to privilege whiteness and is spoken of in direct relation to particular racialized groups in society. In this sense we witness how through the assignment of ‘difference’ racialized spaces and identities are constructed and protected. In our political economy street culture is a more sanitized way of saying ‘gang’ culture. In this instance the ‘streets’ are rendered into a monolithic Black street.

**Exercising Discipline and Dualities**

“Discipline is also partitioned, individuals separated and space and time compartmentalized” (Smith, 2005:68).

The use of social difference as a category to reconstruct and re-assign racialized subjective identities is nothing new. However the ways how these differences are institutionalized or codified through the headwear policy and how such policies in turn are used to disproportionately punish and exclude Black and racialized youth in school settings is another key issue highlighted in the narratives that drive this work. The maintenance of white privilege and power is protected in the policy through its codified language that defines gangs and gangsters. In particular Black students noted that the ways in they were observed, watched and observed in school was quite different from their white student counterparts and to a certain degree also from other racialized groups. In fact their experiences tell similar stories about how difference is codified differently depending on which racialized group the students belonged to.

“*Other non-white kids wear the headwear too but they’re not watched like the Black students are.*”

This quote highlights and summarizes one of the many issues surrounding difference and how racialized groups are constructed through assigning differential labels. Differential labeling has peculiar implications also impacting the dynamics between and amongst student groups. Although Black students, males in particular, were at first-sight labeled as ‘gangsters’ or gang
members, in the classroom they were still subjected to differential treatment. The intersection between the discourse surrounding public safety and schooling and gang violence and crime has differential meanings for racialized groups and plays out differently between racialized groups. The effects of this categorization has a direct impact on the development of strong, positive ‘teacher-learner/student’ relationships necessary for academic and social success and well-being.

The interview with Rue Forpeace suggests that although Black students and Vietnamese students are both members of racially minoritized groups, students from those groups that were involved with illegal or gang activities were still subject to differential treatment in the classroom, throughout the school and in terms of the types of disciplinary and punitive measures they received. In one scenario she described that Black students were assigned criminal or violent identities while their Vietnamese and other Asian peers that were similarly involved in ‘gang’ or illegal activities, were assigned the ‘model minority’ tag in the classroom and their bodies rendered invisible in specific spaces.

“...however there were also the Gators who wore green (bandannas) they weren’t part of the school policy because school officials didn’t consider them to be a ‘real’ gang”.

The differential meanings attached to the headwear and its wearers carry specific codes that shift when influenced by spatial and temporal factors. In many instances when Vietnamese and other East-Asian type groups were in violation of the headwear policy they were not targeted or treated in a criminal manner as Black students were, leading to an obvious discrepancy in how discipline and punishment would be served. When asked why she thought this was the case, Forpeace replied:

“...they were students that were seen as smart or more teachable than the Black students.”

This quote draws attention to how headwear policies sanction the attachment of
criminal and violent labels in particular to Black bodies and how this form of naming or labeling has a differential and dangerous impact on how space is experienced and an inherent role in shaping how one comes to know oneself.

The criminalization of Black students was not limited to the hallways and stairwells rather the labels continued into the classrooms. Rue Forpeace remarked:

“The teachers viewed these students as people who there was no point in trying to educate because they were uneducated in the sense that they didn’t have the same potential nor did they possess similar capabilities as Vietnamese gang members”

Dominant meanings and readings of the headwear and of its wearers not only played a role in policing and standardizing the behavior of Black students in particular but of equal importance continued to lock students into disempowering identities within the space of the classroom ultimately impacting the positive development of a healthy learning environment. .

In a separate interview with Maximo who like Rue Forpeace attended an inner-city high school a similar theme emerged in terms of differential policing of students groups that were perceived as gangs. The data found in Maximo’s interview supports the quote from Rue Forpeace in that he also found that:

“Other kids, like the Filipinos wear headwear all the time and some are involved in dirt but they’re not considered a gang or gangster”.

This critical difference between the two groups of people is significant. While moving through the contact zones in public schools the labels assigned to bodies shift. What it suggests is that an Asian student, who may be involved in gang related activities, may be viewed as a potential source of trouble if located in the stairwell or at the back of the school, however, once the body is located in the classroom the previous threatening labels assigned to this student group shifts. What may have been potentially threatening in the stairwell becomes invisible in the classroom.
Although the policy is spoken of in terms of the protection of ‘public safety’ its discursive lens primarily targets and criminalizes Black students above all other racialized groups.

**The Language of Headwear: Oppositional Knowledge and Spatial Entitlement**

“The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed”. - Steven Biko

The historical and even contemporary erasure of the meanings and prior knowledge invested in headwear and its wearers is not merely an attempt to remove a group of people(s) from the construction of our national story or public memory. Instead erasure in this sense spans a much broader terrain and should be thought of as a measure and an exercise of power that functions to assert a verbal claim and a sense of entitlement over both (Willinsky, 1998:36).

Historically, African women and their descendants have regarded the head wrap as a ‘helmet of courage’ that evolved an image of a true homeland whether in Africa or as Africans in exile ‘Egypt-America(s)’. Helen Bradley Griebel speaks to the idea of how cloth when transformed into the head wrap or turban became a form of empowerment to its wearers:

“Tying a piece of cloth around the head is not specific to any one cultural group. Men and women have worn and continue to wear some type of fabric head-covering in many societies. What does appear to be culturally specific, however, is the way the fabric is worn” (in Buckridge, 2004:88).

Africans who survived in the Americas retained particular knowledge of styles of head wraps that are distinctive to their particular ethnic groups. The style of head wrap could be the product of an individual woman or man’s creativity and ingenuity. In some areas of the Caribbean as in parts of West Africa, head wraps were fixed by tradition. The way the fabric was tied and how it was styled on the head conveyed specific messages and meanings about the wearer to the observer.
For example in Martinique and Guadeloupe, the head wrap conveyed the woman’s occupation. There were specific headdresses for the cane cutter, the laundress, the nurse, the house servant and the field worker. In St. Lucia, the style of the head wrap reflected the marital status of women. In Suriname (formerly Dutch Guyana) during slavery, head wraps often consisted of several different brightly coloured fabrics tied together. Each style had a specific name and meaning. The head wrap called “Watch me op de hoek” (known as Angisa in Suriname) would be worn on special occasions such as the wearer’s birthday. A different manipulation of the fabric, called “Feda let them talk” resulted in a phallic symbol that was meant to evoke a sense of erotica. In this style of head wrap the three loose corners were left sticking out representing three tongues. The three tongues implied chatter, idle talk or gossiping. When this style of head wrap was worn it meant that the female wearer was going to meet her lover at the corner.

In Jamaica the head wrap or ‘head-tie’ was used to protect and hide or prevent injuries to the head, as well as to keep infestations of lice and other scalp conditions in check and under cover. It was an expedient article of clothing that would be used as a quick cover-up when there was not enough time to make their hair presentable. The head wrap also protected newly styled hair. For some women, in a Guyanese context, the ‘tie-head’, tied tightly cured headache or “pressure” in the head. Head wraps provided essential protection for women carrying loads on their heads. The “cotta” a coiled donught shape object made of banana leaves and cloth, was placed on top of the head and used to assist balancing loads was symbolically divided into two when a couple decided to divorce. Each party would take half as a means of expressing the “eternal severance of their affection” (Buckridge, 2004:88).
The material effects of the headwear policy play a critical role in reshaping and transforming physical spaces, such as bodies and headwear contain great potential for transformative learning to take place in public schools. The headwear policy can only become effective if the histories, meanings and experiences of racialized students have been erased and disavowed. Once this is achieved the public school much like an urban space such as the ‘city’ is rendered into a safe public zone secured by corporate-nationalistic hegemonic interests. Differential labeling has very different yet real effects and consequences for all racialized groups. The meanings attached to the labels that are used to re-assign identities are invested with a slippery form of differential power. Rue Forpeace expressed this sentiment when asked if her choice of headwear, the ‘head tie,’ was invested with any historical significance to her other than simply a piece of fabric. Forpeace responded by making mention of how ‘headwear’ contained a history that spans long before the introduction of enslaved Africans into the ‘new world’:

“They (the headwear) have histories and it doesn’t even go back to slavery but before. In Africa, people covered their hair and head as well as styled their hair with beadings and braids”.

In the context of this quote it is important for Forpeace to acknowledge that the action of covering one’s head in a public or private space through ‘headwear’ can be traced to its origin in an African context although critics will try to delineate this form of expression as a simple display of popular culture or a popular trend in fashion. This form of historical erasure is an attack on legitimizing difference as a category for social interrogation and reasoning. By disavowing the connection between the headwear, its wearer and history, the space of public schooling remains an empty privatized space of privilege and entitlement and white dominance and superior knowledge.
This sense of dominant entitlement found in public school settings via headwear policies can be expanded and compared in similar ways to how a sense of white entitlement in spaces of higher learning in the academy. This has an interesting connection when considering the dominant group’s collective sense to spatial entitlement and their monopoly over producing ‘knowledge’.

In the context of an anti-gang atmosphere in schools it is safe to say that a Black woman wearing a head-tie is enough symbolically in a visual sense to resurrect memories and a sense of white fear and panic perhaps because the impact of such symbolism is perhaps “too African” for the dominant. Once again we witness that what is considered a normative practice in the livity of racialized people is uprooted from its knowledge base and redefined by the dominant. Rue Forpeace clearly makes the point that there is an evident connection missing between a Black female’s head-tie and the headwear outlined in the anti-gang section of headwear policies.

“Well the head-tie, to me, I don’t see it as being problematic. It’s a cultural thing”.

The head wrap serves in what Buckridge calls a “uniform rebellion”, signifying absolute resistance to the loss of power in terms of self-definition and deculturation. Most white women (including Creole and ‘mixed’ women) believed that European styles of dress were superior to African forms of dress, and most continued to disassociate themselves from the enslaved by devaluing such forms of dress. In the context of the Maroons in Jamaica the head tie served as an emblem and tool in armed resistance movements against the aggressors. Among the Moore Town Maroons, women wrapped their heads in a specific way to signal an act or state of war when fighting the British. Their leader, Nanny, was said to have tied her head wrap in such a way not only to reflect her status as spiritual and political leader but also to use as a safe place to store her bullets during the Maroon wars. The women’s head wrap works like a regal coronet,
drawing the lookers gaze up rather than down. Thus, women wore the head wrap as a queen might wear a crown. A parallel example of this can be drawn from a conversation with two Rastafarian male teachers, members of the Boboshanti order of the Rastafari. The use of the head wrap in this way and the aesthetics of the dress of the enslaved were shaped by the particularities of the unique cultural experiences of being of African descent and surviving as a disenfranchised people in a peculiarly odd Euro-American culture. Although both elementary teachers taught in neighbouring district school boards both identified how the fashion in which their ‘turban-crowns’ are ‘sealed’ upon their heads also draws the lookers energy (gaze) away from the superficiality of their uncut matted hair and redirects their energy upward to the face and head or crown of the speaker.

In a broader historical context it is clear that racialized groups and Africans in particular, the group most targeted by the headwear policy, wear and use ‘headwear’ not only in the care, maintenance and protection of hair but also as a means of communication between the wearers and the greater society as a whole. Rue Forpeace summarizes this thought when contextualizing the historicity of headwear practices:

“People cover their hair for more reasons than just being members of a gang. My grandmother wore a head-tie around and it wasn’t just because she didn’t have her hair done or was a gang member!”

This difference in perspective regarding the meaning, symbolism and function of headwear, between dominant and non-dominant group continues to exist and is played out in school zones. Forpeace identifies this when recalling her initial surprise when ordered to remove her head-tie:

“I was under the impression that the headwear policy was specific to baseball caps and bandannas”.

In her confrontation with the dominant school authority the issue arose as to whether or not the head-tie was actually a bandana or not. The school administration refused to refer to the
headwear in its proper context as a ‘head-tie’ and purposely mislabeled it as a bandana in order to fit the alien piece of cloth into the tightly constructed definitions of the policy. Similarly in the interview with Gomes when asked about the history of his headwear he responded by saying that to him his wave-cap served a cultural function for his particular hair type:

“I wear it to keep the waves in my hair. I’m mixed with Indian so my hair is different. It’s just a part of who I am, it’s not religious or for show”.

Difference in perspectives about the meaning and function of headwear caused some students to be wrongfully persecuted for their choices of headwear, wave caps and head-ties, culturally relevant items that used by Black students to express identity.

Schick’s example of a group of white student’s rejection of a mandatory course on multicultural education taught by an Indigenous instructor in the pre-service teaching program at the University of Saskatchewan is a telling example of a dominant claim to knowledge and validity. The resentment exhibited by the group of white pre-service teachers toward the instructor and the course indicates their sense of ownership or sense of entitlement over rationality, space and knowledge (Schick, 2002:109). When asked about why he chose to wear a green sweatband to school, Jamil expressed that his choice in wearing a green sweatband was not in any way, shape or form connected to gang culture rather it was a reminder of the colour of the flag of his native country, Bangladesh.

“Well depending on what colour I wear, if I wear green that is my country’s flag and I am proud of who I am.”

This narrative speaks to the absence of a true feeling of community and the absence of a sense of belonging experienced by racialized youth that inhibit the alienating spaces of school settings.
Retraining the Eye

In one sense forcing students to involuntarily remove headwear upon entering school board territory can be read as a display of empire over the heads, minds and bodies of particularly Black and other racialized groups. Comparable to other instruments of public instruction within colonial regimes, such as museums, gardens, art galleries, encyclopedia, exposition and travel the headwear functions as a tool to train the eye and the mind surrounding how Black bodies are read through a dominant gaze. The imperial gaze taught and trained the subjective eye through processes of erasure and renaming to divide the world privileging and maintaining empire’s ideas of beauty, exoticism, primitive, civilized, strange, dangerous and safe and in our context even ‘gangsta’ and ‘student’ the headwear policies of Ontario public schools reinforces and maintains these unwritten codes.

The experiences of the research participants point to their efforts to negotiate spatial relations in dominant controlled zones by wearing headwear. Participants did not all wear their headwear for the same reasons however many similarities were found in their responses. While some participants spoke of their selection of headwear in the context of popular cultural trends or ‘style’, others described their headwear in terms of its functionality to serve other oppositional practices of resistance, knowledge production in terms of hair care and symbolic power. This is significant to our discussion on power and how it is extended into public schools. The oppositional knowledge put forward by the participants needs to be recognized as valid ways of knowing and thinking about the world that we live in. The marginalization of racialized voices in our society and the delegitimization of the knowledge, experiences and histories of racialized groups in the education system is a prevalent theme throughout the interviews. “To speak about power in the anti-racism discourse is to speak also about the social construction of knowledge”
(Dei). Anti-racism pedagogy engages the different and multiple ways of knowing in our world in order to advance the course of social knowledge.

Historically the display of ‘Afri-sthetics’ in dress served as a marker to identify those who did not belong as members of the enslaved community, separate from the dominant world. hooks describes this oppositional style of African inspiration as nourishment to one’s capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of an oppositional or ‘radical’ perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternative worlds. The ‘tie-head’ was one of the most popular garments in the oppositional or separate sphere that represented the continuity of African knowledge and ways of thought in the ‘new’ world. It symbolically served as a tool of resistance. Although some white women delighted in ‘exotic’ forms of dress, nevertheless, most white women believed that European dress was superior to African forms of dress and did not want to be even remotely associated with or connected to such.

The narratives collected from the research participants point to their efforts to negotiate spatial relations in dominant controlled zones by wearing headwear. Participants did not all wear their headwear for the same reasons however many similarities were found in their responses. The narrative participants identified how they were targeted and punished regardless of the reason for wearing their headwear. The narrative with Forpeace speaks to the absurd nature of the policy in its attempt to remove specific pieces of headwear worn by Black people from the school. This narrative attacks the hypocritical stance of the policy in that in its attempt to create uniformity in terms of ordering heads in reality it functions to further alienate and frustrate Black students that wear headwear to maintain and protect their hair.

“... I wouldn’t go to school in a t-shirt and underwear. I wouldn’t go to school with my hair in a state”
The refusal of the dominant authority to recognize that Forpeace was wearing the head tie for a culturally specific reason was incomprehensible within the gaze of whiteness and proved to be overwhelming eventually leading to suspension. This is significant to our discussion on power and how it is extended into public schools. The experiences and oppositional ways of thought need to be shifted away from the periphery on the topic of knowledge construction and placed in the centre. The oppositional knowledge put forward by the participants needs to be recognized as valid ways of knowing and thinking about the world that we live in.

Chapter 6 Conclusion
The Politics and Poetics of Headwear

“We do not yet have an education prepared to deal with what has gone into the construction of borders and of boundaries between the East and the West, between the races and cultures that we live within”. (Willinsky, 1998)

The world of the colonized is a compartmentalized world that is designed to disconnect the mind, body and soul trialectic. This form of severance has particular implications for racialized bodies attending public schools. In this world our bodies, as racialialized groups living in white-settler lands, become compartmentalized in specific yet peculiar ways that sever our heads from our bodies, and our minds from our bodies. Through the narratives provided by the research participants a clear picture of how this process of delegitimizing knowledge and experience also becomes delineated and detached from bodies, time and space.

Schools continue to function and operate as places where strangeness prevails and our collective experiences towards asserting our dignity, humanity and intelligence as the ‘two-thirds’ world is reduced to mere opinion and knowledge is devalued and decontextualized. These are spaces where ignorance runs rampant and willful blindness is the preferred form of governance and self-conduct (Fanon, 1963).
The ways in which the body is manipulated and controlled through headwear policies is not coincidental but strategic and calculated. The methods of control over Black bodies through headwear policies can be traced and find their origins in the classical age of Europe where the body was reinterpreted as an object and target of power to be manipulated and controlled when divided and compartmentalized (Foucault, 1963:136). Submission to this project of docility is expected and in this sense the economy of the body became the object of control. Similarly, the functioning of headwear policies focus the compliance and efficiency of the movements of student bodies. The modality of headwear policies allows an uninterrupted, constant-coercion supervision of activity and movement and partitioning of time and space as opposed to its desired result – to eradicate violence from schools. Through the symbolic guise that connects headwear to gang violence dominant control of the operations of Black bodies is carried out in a meticulous and sensationalized fashion. Institutionalizing language that inherently codes Black forms of headwear with notions of violence and criminality is dangerous. In doing so the policy assumes that violence has a clear and fixed meaning when it is actually defined by personal, cultural and institutional values, is dangerous. The danger lies in the space it provides for dominant cultures and agencies to label who is violent, who is civilized, and who is worthy of respect” (Chambliss,1984, in Sohbat, 2003, p. 67-8).

The findings of this research point to some of the problems that arise from labeling students, neighbourhoods and communities via dominant constructed headwear policies. Cassidy and Jackson (2005) determined that the foremost concerns that stem from the differential labeling of students, for example as "severe behaviour," "troubled," or "violent" have long lasting negative repercussions on students. Students from racialized groups who are mislabeled as “thug”, “gangster” and “at-risk” similarly face negative repercussions and consequences even though
many like the research participants of this study had no violent history, gang affiliations or connections.

Foucault theorized that discipline is an act of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements of bodies, space and time. As a system of discipline, headwear legislation individualizes and compartmentalizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes and circulates them in a network of power relations controlled by the dominant and changes according to temporal factors (ibid). Within this web of dominant driven power relations, racialized students, and in particular Black students, who wear headwear find themselves caught in a tightly woven network that connects dominant fears of crime and violence with race, culture and ethnicity. In particular places such as the public school, the need to supervise, to break dangerous oppositional communication and to create a useful space means that the space itself must function and operate as a tightly defined racialized space.

Headwear policies function to maintain a sense of dominant entitlement over these spaces and the bodies that dwell therein by creating partitions between students and school communities. This in turn has created sentiments and feelings of isolation and exclusion by racialized students (Foucault, 1963:143). Through this system of compartmentalizing and partitioning identities, headwear policies function to distribute individuals into spaces where they become isolated, excluded, frustrated, mapped and labeled. In such (school) spaces neither the territory nor the place that one occupies in a classification marks the type of discipline and punishment to be exercised over that particular space and its bodies. Instead the ‘rank’ that one occupies, “gangster”, academic, athlete, or musician, determines how one is to be interpreted in relation to interchangeable temporal factors. Each is defined by the place it occupies in a series, and by the gap that separates it from others (Foucault, 1963:146).
Through a ‘divide and rule’ strategy school administrators continue to target racialized groups by enforcing headwear policies designed for social control in a trade-off for the preservation of ‘public’ safety and the protection of white or dominant sanity without acknowledging or locating how dominant privilege and power recreates the contact zones of the ‘school’ as highly racialized spaces. There are several problems with labeling of children. One problem is that ‘gangster’ behaviour is socially constructed, determined or interpreted by the observer, usually from the seat of dominance.

Labeling makes the child own the problem, and places the onus for change on the child, thus deflecting accountability and responsibility away from the dominant power structure of school boards as possible contributors to an unsafe and poisoned environment. Labeling is demeaning and robs the child of respect and dignity. Headwear policies reinforce exclusionary practices through labeling, locking out certain groups from positions of power and influence. Greene (1991) notes how categorization distances one group from another, sets up barriers of "them" and "us," and serves to undermine notions of community and togetherness. (Cassidy and Jackson, 2005: p.12). Labeling practices are contrary to the fundamental values of the education system, a system that espouses and seeks to encourage students attentiveness to the common good, respect for individuals, appreciation of differences, respect for diversity and inclusiveness (Goodlad, 2001 in Cassidy and Jackson, 2005). Ultimately this form of labeling has a destructive effect on the holistic development of the school environment and further damaging implications for community building and society as a whole. Here we can call upon the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to examine the notion of the right for all children in Canada to have a safe, ordered, and inclusive environment for learning.
Knowledge Construction and Refocusing an Historical Lens

The narratives point to uncomfortable issues of differential forms of criminalization, in particular of Black youth, partly resulting from their attempts to negotiate space and power through expressions of headwear. These forms of resistance, cultural, spiritual and linguistic need to be read and understood in the wider context of (post) colonialism and in the construction of knowledge and power brokerage. Headwear in many instances as identified by the research participants functioned as a symbol of community and thus represents the desire for a sense of community and belonging as opposed to the ‘alternative’ lifestyle offered and supported by dominant sanctioned ‘labels’ and constructions that tend to only criminalize Black and racialized youth and reinterpret and promote their behaviour and expression as suspect, threatening or gang-associated.

One problem in particular that stems in part to this injection of liberalized policy is the continued lack of acknowledgement and legitimization of such acts on the part of the dominant. This form of denial tends to trivialize and downgrade racist acts to mere personal opinion, hypersensitivity and/or an inferior or questionable source of knowledge when in opposition to dominant modes of thought.– their whiteness (Johal-Singh, 2005). The flagrant disrespect and insulting nature of the headwear policy assumes its dominant position over knowledge, cultural logic and experiences. Resistance in this sense is symbolic of the refusal to completely assimilate into Canadian society. Research participants shared a sense of being written-out of the construction of ‘our’ national story in terms of the roles and responsibilities fulfilled by racialized communities while conversely Black students are over-represented in anti-gang initiatives, basketball related activities, anti-violence campaigns and break-dancing. “By ignoring the cultural and social forms that are authorized by youth and simultaneously empowering or
disempowering them, educators risk complicity in silencing their students. Unwittingly this is accomplished by refusing to recognize the importance of those sites and social practices outside of school that actively shape student experiences and through which students often define and construct their sense of identity, politics, and culture (Giroux and Simon, 1989a:3).

**The Accountability and Responsibility of Knowledge**

The experiences and the issues that were highlighted and discussed by the research participants paint a clear picture of how headwear policies function in influencing the construction of the daily lived experiences of racialized youth in schools. Labeling strategies compartmentalize bodies and divide and disconnect wearers from their headwear and heads from a holistic reading of their bodies, minds and souls. By training the eye to refocus and read bodies and specifically racialized bodies in this capacity will lead the shift away from the violent dominant constructions of racialized youth as threatening and aggressive. In many scenarios headwear policies functioned to reproduce pre-existing societal norms around dominant driven ideas of gangs, public safety, race and crime. In fact it can be said that much like the role of the colonial oppressor in its various contexts, policing headwear in schools through headwear policies has provided yet another opportunity to let Black (see Rodney, 1969) people tear at each others throats, a measure designed to attack and exploit the lack of political consciousness and ignorance of the racialized masses (Fanon, 1963).

Those who violate the headwear policy are calculatedly studied in an attempt to identify their spiritual instability and ideological weakness. Bodies that resist the tenets of the headwear policy are targeted, labeled and profiled by dominant schools authorities such as principals, social workers, psychologists, counselors and police officers and in turn become the agents of ‘insurrection’. The potential commitment of these students to liberation is constantly threatened
and distorted by the physiology of poverty, humiliation, violence and irresponsibility. By refocusing the knowledge attached to headwear and its wearers away from its primary focus of gang violence, race and crime and public safety toward a platform that is more socially and historically relevant to those who are most policed by the headwear policy. This thought marks an urgent cry of an historical necessity to institute a political education for the masses of racialized bodies living in ‘white-settler’ lands (Fanon, 1963:88) if we are ever to become “… something we have never been and for which our education and experience and environment have ill-prepared us… We must become bigger than we have been: more courageous, greater in spirit, larger in outlook. We must become members of a new race, overcoming petty prejudice, owing our ultimate allegiance not to nations but to our fellow men within the human community”. 12

12 His Majesty Haile Selassie I address to the United Nations General Assembly October 1963
References


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