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'Hella Ghetto!': (Dis)locating Race and Class Consciousness in Youth Discourses of Ghetto Spaces, Subjects and Schools

Kenzo K. Sung

Graduate School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, USA

Abstract

Based on analysis of interviews conducted during 2008-2009 in Oakland, California, this paper examines how narratives of inner-city youth reinforce and destabilize mainstream conceptions of 'ghetto.' The paper demonstrates that inner-city youth discourses regarding 'ghetto' spaces, subjects and schools often exemplify a consciousness informed by both counter-hegemonic insights and internalized psychological trauma. In other words, the interviewed youth reconstitute the term 'ghetto' to signify structural and cultural processes of dislocation occurring in their neighborhood through narratives characterized by contradiction. This finding is significant because it questions how to analyze non-white narratives and offers 'dislocated consciousness' as an interpretive lens grounded in the contradictions of subaltern consciousness theorized by W.E.B. Dubois, Frantz Fanon and Antonio Gramsci. By developing the concept of 'dislocation' to illuminate how such youth negotiate, resist and internalize the material and ideological structures that condition their existence, this study contributes to the existing literature on race and class consciousness of urban youth. The paper concludes by exploring how strategies urban youth utilize to come to terms with their lives can provide new understandings of urban communities and schooling.

Keywords

urban education; ghetto; critical social theory; race theory; dislocated consciousness; double consciousness; hegemony

Introduction

'Ghetto' has become a 'common-sense' term in the mainstream American lexicon, most often as a pejorative reference to racially marginalized and impoverished urban spaces. Popular media and academic scholarship have largely focused on the ghetto as a 'real place,' characterized either by disorganized deficit and 'societal waste' (Jencks and Peterson 1991; Feagin and Vera 1994) or particular political and economic histories (Massey and Denton 1993; Anyon 1997). Both frameworks lack attention to how 'ghetto' is employed by inner-city residents, and particularly youth, in complex and historically specific ways that often reinterpret the term as simultaneously oppressive and humanizing. This discursive contradiction informs the paper's central question: how do youth interpret the structural and

cultural factors that make coherent or destabilize hegemonic conceptions of 'ghetto' at this historic moment?

Based on analysis of interviews conducted during 2008-2009 in Oakland, California, this paper examines how the narratives of inner-city youth reinforce and destabilize mainstream conceptions of 'ghetto.' The paper demonstrates that inner-city youth discourses regarding 'ghetto' spaces, subjects and schools often exemplify a consciousness informed by both counter-hegemonic insights and internalized psychological trauma. In other words, the interviewed youth reconstitute the term 'ghetto' to signify structural and cultural processes of dislocation occurring in their neighborhood through narratives characterized by contradiction.

This paper begins by outlining how the structural and psychological processes of dislocation can contribute to theorizing 'ghetto' as a space and state of consciousness grounded in contradiction. The next two sections set the scene by describing the neighborhood where the study was conducted and the methodology used. Following are the findings organized into three sub-sections on the ghetto space, subject and school. The concept of 'dislocation' is developed to illuminate how the youth negotiate, resist and internalize the material and ideological structures that condition their existence. The paper concludes by exploring how strategies urban youth utilize to come to terms with their lives can provide new understandings of urban communities and schooling.

Theoretical Framework

Studying the Ghetto

The colloquial use of 'ghetto' is too often conscripted to essentialize the structured oppression of impoverished and racially segregated communities as pathologically inevitable and isolated from 'mainstream' society. This racial project has its formative roots in postwar 'culture of poverty' scholarship (Elkins 1959; Moynihan 1965). Recent scholars have contested these still popular conceptions by illuminating modern American ghettos as 'real places' and exploring how they developed or can be characterized (e.g. Wacquant 1997; Jargowsky 1998; Gregory 1998; Winant 2001; Lipsitz 2011). One long-standing discussion in this field is whether ghettos are primarily products of class transformations based on deindustrialization and emigration of middle-class blacks (Wilson 1987) or constituted by institutionalized discrimination via racial marginalization in the housing and labor markets (Massey and Denton 1993). Another concerns whether the 'hyperghetto' is a cohesive American institution (Wacquant 2008) or if this conceptualization negates the heterogeneity of organizational density, demographic composition, or government penetration (Marcuse 2007; Small 2008).

These structural understandings of how American ghettos are formed or continue to function offer an important contribution to critiquing mainstream understandings that often either blame, or less often romanticize, the 'black/poor/other' community or culture (Jencks and Peterson 1991; Wacquant 2002). However, Robin Kelley and others challenge this emphasis on material structures and physical spaces as ultimately reinforcing and over-determining the 'inevitability' of the ghetto, thereby reducing residents to objects that simply cope rather

than subjects who also actively try to co-construct the space in which they live (Kelley 1997; Leonardo and Hunter 2009; Chang 2010; Paperson 2010; Barganier 2011; Paula forthcoming). This is not to claim that oppressive structures have no psychological or cultural effects on individuals living in ‘ghettos.’ Instead, scholars like Kelley argue that the oppressive processes, or ‘technologies of power’ (Foucault 1995), which characterize the ghetto are oppressive and traumatic but never totalizing in that they also create new opportunities for counterhegemonic understanding and action that structural accounts too often minimize.

In order to attend to such complexities, this paper employs the idea of dual ‘dislocations’ to investigate how the discursive representations of the ghetto by urban youth function as both a hegemonic and counterhegemonic device. Specifically, the procedures of material and ideological dislocation of the ghetto space from a modernity enveloped in whiteness lead to a second psychological dislocation of the ghetto subject characterized by a ‘double’ or ‘conflicted’ consciousness. These two related definitions of structural and psychological dislocation offer an alternative analysis of ‘ghetto’ to understand how inner-city youth make sense of the contradictory conditions of their existence that simultaneously produce internalized psychological trauma and a productive capacity for agency.

Dislocated Ghetto Space

The above dialectic is born from the material contradictions of modernity represented by urban (white) metropolises and their dislocated (black) ghettos. Describing the world as a ‘planet of slums,’ Davis argues that ghettos are oppressive and reproduce oppression precisely because they symbolize the dislocated debris of an ‘accumulation by dispossession’ that lie in the shadows of glittering metropolises and the white ‘exclusionary citizenship’ that they represent (Davis 2006). Similarly, Leonardo and Hunter (2009: 143-144) explain that one consistently popular understanding of the modern ‘urban’ is that of the black ghetto ‘jungle’ that threatens to challenge the hegemony of whiteness and white space.¹

Paperson expands on these frameworks by arguing that the modern ghetto draws on a longer legacy of racialized colonial spaces which are intimately linked to, but always dislocated from, the metropole and its (white) cosmopolitan citizen. For Paperson, the ghetto is dialectically constituted by: 1) ‘exercises of power’ that dislocate the ghetto via material conditions of oppression that intersect racism and capitalism, and 2) decolonial strategies and practices of freedom constituted “within, despite, and because of this colonial exercise” (Paperson 2010: 7). In other words, the ghetto should be understood as primarily constituted through the material and ideological consequences of being dislocated from modernity rather than as simply a physically impoverished or racially isolated area.

In particular, as hegemonic understandings on race and the ghetto have become increasingly entangled and essentialized in mainstream discourses, the critique of ‘race relations’ as a field is eminently applicable in understanding why ghetto needs to be reinterpreted. Many

¹The association of ‘urban’ with ‘jungle’ is accompanied by two other spatial associations: 1) civilized, ‘urbane’ cosmopolitanism and 2) authentic non-white identity (Leonardo and Hunter 2009).

race theorists argue that race must break from essentialist classifications of most empirical 'race' studies, which often categorize positivist difference or depict 'race relations' as though such distinctions exist a priori rather than historically constructed through processes such as nation-building (Omi and Winant 1994; Mills 1999) or imperial conquest (Miles and Brown 2004; Hsu 2013). In contrast, Omi and Winant's (1994) theory of 'racial formation' re-conceptualizes how discursive and material struggles constantly reinforce or renegotiate existing social constructions, such as ascriptions of blackness and whiteness, within broader structures and legacies of power.

Study of the ghetto must also analyze the dislocation of the ghetto as a historic outgrowth of relational oppression rather than a pre-existing condition. By this formulation, the framework of the ghetto as dislocation rejects the theory of isolation and revises the ghetto as both defined by and the negation of modernity's metropole, thereby highlighting that separation *is* a relationship and not the absence of one. Thus, while Massey and Denton's isolated ghetto is similar to Paperson's dislocated ghetto, the former frames the ghetto as the impoverished real place caused by factors like racial isolation. The latter defines the ghetto as the procedures of dislocation from the metropole of which isolation is but a symptom and highlights the underlying relations between the two (Paperson 2010: 12).

Ghetto Dislocated Consciousness

The material and ideological dislocations which constitute the ghetto space also create real psychological effects characterized in this paper as a 'dislocated consciousness.' This concept of dislocated consciousness as an ideological framework was heralded a century ago in W.E.B. Dubois' analysis of racism's effects on the black psyche. Like the dislocation of the ghetto, black subjectivity for Dubois is constituted by a double consciousness constituted by a dislocating 'veil.' Dubois theorizes black double consciousness as born of the internalized contradiction of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of" whiteness, which veils black subjectivity and objectifies African Americans as simply a 'problem' while simultaneously offering glimpses through this veil to perceive their own humanity (Dubois 2005: 7). This contradiction of racial dislocation from an embodied consciousness, via the veil, defines black identity for Dubois.

Many race scholars draw from the seminal work of Dubois as a foundation for their own research. For example, Tate maintains that the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is fundamentally "rooted in Dubois's philosophy of double consciousness" (Tate 1997: 224). However, current race scholarship often characterizes double consciousness as simply being "gifted with second sight" and minimizes the psychological estrangement and trauma of trying to keep "from being torn asunder" that Dubois argued such subjectivity induced (Dubois 1995: 7). Such methodological reliance on the unrestrained agentic potential of non-white narratives runs counter to Dubois' concept of a double consciousness. Highlighting this apparent contradiction is not to question the importance of non-white accounts of their struggles and lives. Rather, the goal is to explore how non-white narratives are also partially defined by the internalized trauma of racism, dislocating the idea of a fully 'legitimate/valid consciousness' into a psychological borderland defined by both counter-hegemonic insight

and internalized racism that Dubois and other scholars have documented (Clark 1965; Freire 2000; Gordon 2000; Pyke 2010; Steele 2010; Ferreira 2012).²

One seminal contributor to this intellectual lineage is Frantz Fanon, who employs a similar metaphor to Dubois' 'second sight.' Fanon explains the dialectical quality of the black identity as being partially dislocated from an embodied subject position into the arid "zone of nonbeing" (Fanon 1994: 7). As Fanon clarifies, "[n]ot only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man... It is a third-person consciousness" (1994: 110). This awareness of being widely perceived as sub-human is a dislocating procedure in two ways: first, black existence is dislocated in relation to whiteness as a hegemonic reference point to measure one's humanity. Second, the 'epidermalization' or internalization of this ideology produces a black identity which tries to dislocate itself from the black body, thereby creating a "consciousness of the body" as "solely a negating activity" (Fanon 1994: 110). Thus, Fanon characterizes black-on-black violence, one primary characteristic of both the modern ghetto and the traditional colony, as a pathological manifestation of this "third-person consciousness" that cannot be separated from the psychosis of black self-hatred as an epidemiology of oppression.

In this paper, the concept of 'dislocated consciousness' is used to illuminate these contradictions of non-white consciousness as well as the reproduction of the structurally dislocated ghetto as simultaneously dependent upon and destabilized by such a conflicted awareness. Similar to Fanon's analysis of the black psyche as having the potential to legitimate the colonial structures and white cultural hegemony as much as disrupt them, Antonio Gramsci also theorizes how the subaltern has "two theoretical consciousness (or one contradictory consciousness)," which ultimately serves both to legitimate the existing capitalist social order and offer counterhegemonic potential (Gramsci 1971: 333). In trying to clarify why people often act in ways that are contradictory to their own social class self-interest, Gramsci explains that they exhibit a 'contradictory consciousness' that incorporates both 'common-sense' understanding generated by elites striving to legitimate their power and kernels of 'good-sense' which partially penetrate such hegemonic ideologies and provide opportunities for alternative understandings. While Gramsci never explicitly attends to the intersection of race and class, his conceptualization of the relation between contradictory consciousness and hegemony is influential among scholars of race and class alike (Femia 1975; Hall 1986; Omi and Winant 1994; Miles 2004; Domingo 2011). For example, Willis argues within a Gramscian framework that subaltern youth often exhibit a consciousness that partially penetrates the contradictions of their lives and becomes the basis from which the youth act to simultaneously contest and legitimate the structures of their oppression (Willis 1977).

Drawing on Dubois, Fanon and Gramsci, this paper applies the concept of dislocated consciousness to explicate the psychological effects of structurally and ideologically racialized dislocation on urban youth. As with the 'lads' Willis analyzes, the interviewed

²The focus on how racism affects the consciousness of youth racialized as non-white does not negate the fact that whites are also subject to a racialized consciousness that is based on a different set of contradictions which CRT and whiteness studies elaborate on elsewhere (Leonardo 2009; Picower 2009; Ullucci 2011).

urban youth in this study are not outside the hegemonic structures of the ‘ghetto,’ but rather often de-stabilize ‘commonsense’ usage and offer counterhegemonic insights via a dislocated consciousness characterized by both agentic potential and internalized trauma.

Oakland's San Antonio District

The San Antonio district is an urban neighborhood located in eastern Oakland, one of the largest cities in the sprawling San Francisco Bay Area metropolitan region of California. One of the three most ethnically diverse urban neighborhoods in the U.S. with a host of vibrant micro-communities, the San Antonio also struggles with issues of poverty, violence, scarce employment opportunities, and lack of investment in infrastructure like schools (Maly 2005).³

Developed in the 1920-50s as an affluent neighborhood with white-only housing covenants, by the 1960-70s African-Americans were transitioning into the San Antonio as whites exited to the surrounding suburbs (Johnson 1993; Self 2005). During the 1980-90s a second influx of new residents from Latin America and Southeast Asia led to another major demographic shift (Younis 1998). The 1980-90s was also the height of Oakland's crack cocaine and gang violence epidemics, the effects of which still haunt the neighborhood. Continued socio-economic problems in and around the San Antonio were evident in the interviews, where more youth associated the start of 2009 with the police killing of Oscar Grant (Bulwa 2009) and the housing foreclosure crisis (Schafran 2012) than the swearing in of President Barack Obama.⁴

The San Antonio district continues to be overwhelmingly poor, non-white and foreign-born. In 2000 roughly 95% of the residents were non-white, with racial/ethnic composition disaggregated as 38% Asian, 29% Latino, 22% African-American, and less than 6% white (US Census 2000).⁵ Roughly one third of adult residents had below a ninth grade education, half did not graduate high school, and fewer than 10% graduated from college (US Census 2000). The median income was \$30,413 for a family of five, which is significantly lower than the median income for either Oakland (\$40,055) or Alameda County (\$55,946) (US Census 2000). Nearly 75% of the residents rent and a clear majority qualify for income-based government assistance.

A majority of San Antonio residences are single family homes with a scattering of apartment complexes. The few commercial streets lack banks or supermarkets and mainly house small family-run restaurants, liquor stores, and auto repair shops among the numerous vacant storefronts (Hickey et al. 2005). There are minimal job opportunities in the San Antonio and most youth work low-wage, dead-end retail or service positions in the cities neighboring

³4054, 4055, 4059 and 4062.1 were the 2000 U.S. Census tracts defined as the San Antonio.

⁴Oscar Grant was killed by police on January 1, 2009 at the neighborhood subway station. The case became highly charged after bystander videos showed Grant, who was black and lying face down unarmed, being shot in the back by a white police officer (Bulwa 2009). Many local youth strongly felt the Grant case reinforced their personal experiences of police injustice in Oakland.

⁵Latino/Hispanic is considered an ethnic, rather than racial, category in the 2000 U.S. Census. Since residents and media often racialize this category our study chose to use ‘Non-Hispanic or Latino’ percentages for all other racial categories (i.e. – ‘White’ counts all those who self-identified as ‘non-Hispanic/Latino White’). While 2010 U.S. Census data are available, 2000 U.S. Census data are provided because 1) this study primarily focuses on the secondary school experiences of the youth, which correspond to 1999-2006, and 2) neighborhood differences between 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census data are minimal.

Oakland (CEDA 2010). The neighborhood public spaces are a mix of 'urban renewal' style projects alongside longstanding neglect of basic infrastructure (IURD 2004). The San Antonio Park, the most referenced local landmark, exemplifies this conundrum. While the park has a new soccer field, playground and recreation center that are well utilized, the cracked sidewalks leading up to the park are lined with broken street lights and potholes.

Violence and crime are considered Oakland's top public issues. Nearly four out of five of all homicides in Alameda County occurred in Oakland, though the city only accounts for a quarter of the Alameda's population (ACPHD 2006). While not Oakland's epicenter for crime and violence, the San Antonio is a known prostitution hot spot and continues to struggle with high rates of drug dealing, car and home break-ins, gang violence and armed robberies on top of the occasional murder, rape, or aggravated assault. More recent issues in the San Antonio and adjoining neighborhoods include the prolific rise in sex-trafficking of minors and a protracted legal battle over a proposed gang injunction (Bender 2011; Smith 2011).

Oakland schools rank among the lowest statewide and the city's high school drop-out rate (37%) was twice the state average (Tucker 2011). Even among graduates, prospects were slim. For example, in 2005 Oakland High's (the neighborhood high school) graduating class was roughly 400 students. However, less than 50% of these seniors passed enough classes to be eligible for California public university admission, and only half of those eligible (101 students) continued on to a four-year college (State of California 2005). Oakland schools have been subject to intensifying neoliberal reforms since 2000, including heavy penalties for failing to meet federal education accountability standards and a state takeover for insolvency (Noguera 2004; Darling-Hammond 2007; Jani 2009).

While a common refrain among residents is the need for more institutionalized support for youth, San Antonio has a relatively strong set of youth-serving institutions. In addition to the two active Park and Recreation youth centers, the neighborhood is also home to a number of successful community and youth organizing actions (Jeung, 2006) as well as youth-focused non-profit organizations (Maly, 2005). The largest of these organizations, the East Bay Asian Youth Center (EBAYC), was founded in 1976 to meet the needs of underserved Asian American youth. In the 1990s EBAYC responded to increasing inter-racial gang violence in the San Antonio by shifting to a multi-racially inclusive, community-focused model. Currently serving over 2,000 youth, EBAYC runs active daily afterschool programs in all six San Antonio public schools and helped create student-community health centers at the neighborhood middle and high school.

Methodology

This paper draws from a larger qualitative project (see acknowledgements) that analyzes youth experiences of coming of age during a period of demographic and political-economic change in their neighborhood and city. The research team interviewed a total of 38 young adults who reflect the diverse range of race/ethnicity, gender and level of academic attainment among youth in the San Antonio.⁶ Beginning with our community contacts, our research team used snowball sampling (Heckathorn 2002) to find youth (ages 19-24) who

lived in the San Antonio neighborhood in 2000, when most of them were in middle school. In order to avoid having all of our interviewees come from the same network, our research team started our snowball at several nodes and also sampled for range (Weiss, 1994), asking our contacts and interviewees to help us find specific categories of young adults when necessary.

The decision to focus on young adults who grew up in the San Antonio was to provide continuity in experience at one point (San Antonio residence in 2000) and see then what transpired in the decade since, both as a function of neighborhood changes as well as how the youth experienced such changes as they came of age in the San Antonio. The terms “youth” and “young adults” are used interchangeably in this paper to recognize the shifting paradigm among social researchers in a range of fields from youth development to youth violence who now define “youth” as inclusive of people in their teens to early/mid-twenties (Altschuler et al. 2009: 7-8).

The primary method of data collection was interviews conducted at a public café or park which typically lasted 45-120 minutes. Semi-structured interviews allowed for standardized questions and flexibility to follow up on emerging topics (Patton 2002; Merriam 1998). Interview questions focused on: 1) what was it like growing up in this neighborhood, 2) how and why has the neighborhood changed, and 3) whether the changes have affected commonly mentioned issues, such as violence?

Most of the interviews were conducted by the author, a second generation Chinese-American in his thirties who at the time of this research was a University of California at Berkeley doctoral student and a long-standing board member of EBAYC. From 1999-2004, the author taught at the neighborhood middle school and many of the interviewees were his former students or knew him as a teacher. The author's insider status was helpful in terms of gaining access to interviewees and offering a comfortable space to discuss experiences that the youth may not have otherwise shared. All interviews were transcribed and coded using an iterative process moving between data and theory (Miles and Huberman 1994). A formal coding scheme was based on close study of several transcripts with the goal of capturing a range of issues central to the interviewees or research team (Lichterman 2002). Additional codes based on emerging themes were added as coding progressed. Analysis also developed through informal memos written by several team members and shared at monthly meetings. The wide range of disciplines and life experiences represented, including two research assistants who were the same age as the interviewees and grew up in the San Antonio, made our team well equipped to consider multiple interpretations of the data and identify consistencies and contradictions across the accounts collected.

⁶Youth interviewees included 18 women and 20 men and consisted of 13 Asian-Americans (Cambodian, Vietnamese, Mien, and Chinese), 15 Latinos (all Mexican American except for two of Salvadoran and Guatemalan heritage), 8 African-Americans, and 2 youth who identify as mixed race: African-American/Asian-American. Five interviewees attended a four year college full-time at the time of the interview; 26 finished high school (a majority of whom had attended two year community college intermittently, although none completed despite being about five years out from high school graduation); and six did not complete high school. Older community leaders and residents were also interviewed about their perspectives on neighborhood and youth, but this article draws nearly exclusively from the youth interviews.

This paper analyzes how and why the term ‘ghetto’ was organically introduced by a number of youth over the course of the interview even though no interview question used the term ‘ghetto.’ Youth who explicitly employed ‘ghetto’ only constitute one-third of all interviewees. However, coding of youth discourse found that other words are often used as substitutes for ‘ghetto’ (such as ‘thug,’ ‘street,’ or ‘hood’) with similar symbolic complexity by nearly all of the interviewees. Thus, the subset of youth analyzed for this paper seem representative in experience and perspectives to the interviewees generally.

Data analysis strategies of member checking, peer debriefing and data triangulation were implemented to increase finding trustworthiness. Interviewees were encouraged to clarify as a means of member checking to improve finding credibility (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Peer debriefing using other youth interviewees was also implemented to test plausibility of emergent hypotheses and explicate potential underlying perspectives (Spall 1998). Additionally, the author triangulated interview data with field-notes and archival research of community meetings, newspapers and other events to corroborate and increase rigor of findings (Denzin 2006). Lastly, all adult and youth interviewees, as well as other neighborhood residents, were invited to attend a public community forum in the San Antonio where the research team presented and received feedback on their initial in-progress findings.

Findings

While the interviewed youth often use the term ‘ghetto’ as a pejorative reference to local places or people, they also articulate ‘ghetto’ in ways that both illuminate and essentialize the struggles happening in their neighborhood. Applying the concept of dislocation, these articulations of ‘ghetto’ illuminate structural oppression and its effects in three domains that organize this section: ‘ghetto spaces’ as structurally dislocated from the metropole by the state; ‘ghetto subjects’ as blurred between how individuals/groups culturally dislocate themselves from the community through particular behaviors and a shared ‘authentic’ experience of dislocated structural oppression; and ‘ghetto schools’ as a state apparatus that is structurally and culturally dislocated from the youth and neighborhood they are located in.

‘Ghetto’ Spaces

The interviews start by asking the youth to describe their neighborhood. They typically start with the physical environment (houses, parks, etc.) before discussing the ‘diversity’ of the people living in the San Antonio. In doing so, many of the youth initially articulate how such neighborhood diversity offers access to particular experiences and resources, what Yosso calls ‘community cultural wealth’ (Yosso 2005). For example, many youth describe the opportunities to get to know “other diverse groups of people” or how living on a multiracial block was “really cool... people would always say hi to me and my mom.” Additionally, the majority of the youth report having racially/ethnically diverse social networks that they rely on to safely move through their neighborhood – a resource promoted by neighborhood schools and community-based organizations like EBAYC (Lustig and Sung 2012).

However, only focusing on the celebratory aspects of this ‘multicultural-diversity’ discourse minimizes the struggles and frustrations of growing up in the San Antonio. In addition to diverse peer networks, many youth describe nearly endless incidents growing up that too often intersect inter-racial violence, crime, hardened prejudice and institutional racism. Furthermore, many of the youth also challenge the uncritical promotion of ‘diversity as asset’ often heard in mainstream liberal discourse that reimagines diverse groups of nonwhites concentrated in inner-cities as the new ‘cosmopolitan playground’ (Leonardo and Hunter 2009: 147). Thus, the youth seem to celebrate their neighborhood’s ‘multicultural’ character while simultaneously providing numerous examples of how this does not fundamentally change the (re)production of what the youth often labeled as ‘ghetto’ in the neighborhood.

When the youth employed the term ‘ghetto,’ they almost always used the word to describe spaces and people in their immediate neighborhood and lives. At times their use of ‘ghetto’ echoed the stereotypic representations in the mainstream media. Kao,⁷ an unemployed 22 year old Mien-American male with a high school diploma and recently laid-off from UPS, describes the many people who frequent the cul-de-sac where he used to live:

The dead end was – it was ghetto. I with hella people in the back. They would always be smoking all the time doing this and that... Little kids, little black kids who are running around. Like a little boy about nine, there was a cigarette on the ground right and he was like, “that’s weed right there,” and I was like, “you smoke weed?” And he’s like, “yeah” and I was like, “show me,” and he picked up the cigarette and [breathes in deeply and coughs]. I don’t know man, little kids and this is, I don’t want to say poor, but a downward neighborhood, a bad neighborhood.

This image Kao and others paint is easily recognizable because it aligns with decades of hegemonic depictions of a ‘pathological black ghetto’ as the new quintessential American problem beginning after the Second World War (Marable 1983; Allen 1990; Wacquant 2008; Farmer 2010). The conflation of African-Americans with poverty and moral decay is not surprising given the long American history of racial oppression from chattel slavery to Jim Crow segregation laws which justified using racist arguments of white intellectual and moral superiority (Frederickson 1988; Graves 2003; Perlstein 2004). But such historical context is lost in these hegemonic representations that essentialize the ghetto as simply synonymous with black bodies that ‘naturally’ deviate from white, middle-class normative values (Jencks and Peterson 1991; Fainstein 1995).

However, this racial imagination of the ghetto space is complicated by youth narratives that do not confine ‘ghetto’ to predominantly African-American underclass communities. Rather, the youth redefine the ghetto as a ‘diverse’ space inhabited by a variety of residents that have been locally and globally dislocated into the San Antonio over the past few decades. For example, Omar, a 21 year old Mexican-American who dropped out of community college and works in an electronics retail outlet, describes the problems on his block due to more ‘ghetto’ people moving in:

⁷This paper uses pseudonyms for interviewees.

Well, basically a lot of families with a lot of younger people living there. Guess there would be a lot more parties, there is a lot more, what you could say, ghetto people, like ghetto kind of intimidating people. So it would be kind of hard to play outside, and your parents would tell you, “You got to be careful when you play in the backyard now...” Changes, a lot of more colors, like gangs and all that. I would say, there is a lot more Asians right now, so they claim blue. So I see a lot of people, I see a lot more people who like blue.⁸

Omar produces a new racial narrative of a ghetto defined by Asian gang-member neighbors, a revision of the mainstream account offered by the prior quote. Other youth make similar amendments to the hegemonic imagination of the ghetto as synonymous with a large African-American community, reflecting a new demographic reality they know first-hand.

Such perspectives narrate a new economic and racial reality in twenty-first century American ‘ghettos’ that Small and others refer to (Marcuse 2007; Small 2008; Chang 2010). For instance, when Liew, a 20 year old Mien-American female who has a high school diploma and works at a local afterschool program, was asked how she would describe her neighborhood she begins by moving into the third person, stating:

They would think it's ghetto. Oakland. When they hear the word ‘Oakland,’ they think because it's the top murder rate city, they think it's just kinda bad. There's a liquor store on almost every corner, Laundromats everywhere. A lot of Asians and Hispanics... A lot of torn-down houses. A lot of apartments. Yeah. That's it.

According to Liew, visitors would recognize Oakland as ‘ghetto’ because of three prime characteristics: the level of violence, the built environment (including torn-down houses and liquor stores) and the high concentration of “Asians and Hispanics.” When Liew was questioned as to why these characteristics would represent ‘ghetto,’ she responds:

They represent poverty. Like, not everyone in that area is as wealthy as other people so they – we can't live the good life, so – Well, I think it's ghetto because I know if I went to somewhere else I'm not familiar with the area, and everything's so different to me.

Liew exhibits a dislocated consciousness in how she centers her explanation by temporarily dislocated her own subjectivity through her use of hypothetical middle-class suburban visitors recognizing her ‘ghetto’ as defined by poverty, violence, and the presence of “Asians and Hispanics.” The shift to the third-person and then back to a first-person exemplifies the concept of Dubois' ‘second sight’ and Fanon's ‘third-person consciousness,’ highlighting this connected but dislocated nature of ghetto/colonial existence to the ‘universalizing’ standard of metropolitan white humanity (Fanon 1994; Dubois 2005).

Liew's partial penetration of the hegemonic narrative of ‘ghetto’ offers both counter-hegemonic insight and an internalization of ‘otherness’ in how she rearticulates its racial formation. While Dubois' double consciousness referred specifically to American blacks, many youth characterize ‘ghetto’ as much by Asian and Latino bodies as African-American

⁸ ‘Claiming blue’ refers to Crip gangs where blue represents the color of the gang.

ones in a new intersection of racism and multiculturalism turned on its head. That the youth understand that they can be 'ghetto,' even though they are not African-American, is a profound way of theorizing the social construction of race that extends beyond the common scholarly nod to the idea of race as a social concept.

This interpretation also challenges theories of segmented assimilation which articulate (typically Asian or Latino) ethnic enclaves as a protective factor against (black) American underclass cultural deficits (Alba and Nee 1997; Portes et al. 2005). Liew critiques this thesis in her later explanation of how cohesive immigrant enclaves in the neighborhood do not insulate their community from becoming part of the lumpen 'other,' who assimilation scholars largely undertheorized but are implicitly understood to be poor, urban and black. On one hand, Liew seems to internalize her personal and communal failure to escape this American 'ghetto' underclass. On the other hand, this revision reimagines the development of a new counter-hegemonic 'ghetto' bloc that is 'diverse' while continuing to house those dislocated from the privileges of modernity and its metropolis. In other words, the racial project of 'ghetto' is a colonial cartography "where blackness is contained, rather than where black people reside" that simultaneously articulates new sites of oppression and offers new avenues for resistance (Paperson 2010: 10).

The way that the youth reinterpret the relation between race and ghetto space seems insightful. However, Liew's narrative of different non-white 'ghetto' racial bodies becoming almost interchangeable can also be perceived as partially mystifying the history of the American ghetto. For instance, Leonardo and Hunter (2009: 198) explain that the American ghetto has been historically defined as a "racially demarcated space actively constructed by Whites, as a method for containing Black community development and mobility" and question if such formations are flexible enough to accommodate the new version of whiteness and blackness that Bonilla-Silva describes as a 'pigmentocracy' (Bonilla-Silva 2001).

Jaffe expands this contradictory development of the 'black ghetto' as an increasingly powerful discourse that has mobilized dislocated people globally while simultaneously being appropriated as commercialized, consumable commodity (Jaffe 2012). Arguing that other marginalized groups are wrong to try to make parallels with the exceptional history of black oppression, Sexton explains that such a 'people-of-colorblindness' discourse is a twist on Robert Park's analogizing generational white-ethnic assimilation with the 'Negro problem' in the 1930-50s and does not properly recognize the continued centrality of anti-black racism (Sexton 2010). Alexander also explores how such claims are actually in step with a modern racial hegemony that minimizes attention to the new American 'anti-black Jim Crow' regime and what Parker refers to as a 'fourth-person consciousness' of black, ghetto youth (Alexander 2010; Parker forthcoming).

However, many of the youth nuanced their arguments of why their neighborhoods are 'ghetto.' For instance, Liew points out the ongoing dislocation of Southeast Asian immigrants who migrated to the San Antonio in the 1980s and maintain cohesive ethnic communities as well as a continued collective existence dislocated from America's metropole (Ong 2003). For instance, the Cambodian, Mien and (non-ethnically Chinese)

Vietnamese students in Roosevelt Middle School today are largely second and third generation immigrants from refugee families. However, an overwhelming majority continue to face very similar struggles to their African-American neighbors, as did their refugee parents and grandparents over the past thirty-plus years.

A second prevalent explanation intersects structures of race and class in framing ‘ghetto.’ For example, Becky, a 21 year old Vietnamese-American female and local community college student, suggests that high levels of crime and continued lack of resources consign the San Antonio to the ghetto despite its ‘racial diversity’:

Becky: The neighborhood now is more [racially] diverse but it's still ghetto—still. It's like I'm always conscious when I walk to my car and stuff like that because I know my neighborhood is so bad and there's been a lot of robberies lately too... It's still ghetto and there's still drive-bys and a lot of robberies still.

XX: So, it's stayed more the same?

Becky: It's still the same. The ghettos—not ghettos, like the neighborhood I don't think will ever change, so it's still really bad.

XX: Why do you think it won't ever change?

Becky: Well, because like the Oakland or San Antonio district is just really bad, and we don't have a lot of money to be provided. The streets are so bad, the economy—especially the economy now. Especially how we are going to war and the economy is just unstable. I guess like, we're Oakland and we're not really targeted, they don't really want to look at us. I think they have to look at the bigger picture and are probably worrying about other things that's more important.

Becky reiterates that racial/cultural ‘diversity’ as a protective factor for urban neighborhoods does not negate the underlying systemic processes of dislocation that structure ghetto existence. In doing so, Becky highlights the state's role in creating the ‘ghetto’ and that her neighborhood's problems result from structured poverty rather than cultural difference. Unlike the popular media portrayals of pathological ‘ghetto’ individuals as a natural condition with little attention to context, Becky articulates an understanding that their realities are direct results of decisions made by those in power.

The narrative of racial integration and multiculturalism as social uplift is challenged by Becky, who points to continued racial stigmatization and diversion of state resources alongside the psychological effects of such structured dislocation as being at the root of the ghetto space (Dwyer 2010). Thus, Becky destabilizes the ‘ghetto’ space from being defined as inhabited by already pathologized black people to one where structured neglect and racial dislocation to blackness occurs. However, Becky ultimately internalizes her own dislocation as ‘other’ by legitimating the state's decision to structurally neglect Oakland despite her ability to partially penetrate the limitations of this liberal rhetoric of ‘multiculturalism.’ Rather than romanticize the liberal ideology of ‘cultural difference’ or essentialize the pathology of those who live in their neighborhoods, many youth express a similar consciousness that both penetrates into and internalizes hegemonic conceptions of ‘ghetto’ space.

'Ghetto' Subjects

The interviewed youth also commonly employ 'ghetto' in reference to individuals or groups of people in the neighborhood. For these young adults 'ghetto' is not simply an imagined space that is dislocated from modernity or the protective aegis of the state. Rather, 'ghetto' can also refer to an embodied characteristic or subject position.

When the youth described someone as 'ghetto,' the context largely maps onto mainstream usage: as deviating from an implicit 'normative' standard with a negative value attached to that difference (Ayers 2004; Brezina 2008). However, many youth articulate this with more nuance than traditional scholarly usage of 'ghetto subjects,' neither essentializing the term (Jencks and Peterson 1991) nor categorizing it into a reductive binary like "street" and "decent" people (Anderson 1999). Instead, 'ghetto' became a cipher for the youth that switches between connoting how certain people culturally dislocate themselves from the community and referring to a shared 'authentic' experience of structural oppression and dislocation.

This contradictory definition exemplifies the youth's dislocated consciousness, both complicating and reconstituting the term 'ghetto' as in reference to spaces as well as to subject beings as defined by both oppression and agency. For example, Esther and Joannie, two 22 year old Chinese-American females with high school diplomas who work as waitresses at local Chinese restaurants, explore this topic in a conversation about the people outside Esther's home:

Esther: There's a lot of drug dealers and there are a lot of pimps too. And I'm just like, oh my God. There are actually pimps around my neighborhood... What are they doing around—my family wants to move out as soon as possible, it's just so ghetto.

Joannie: Sometimes, I don't care about them though. They are all just trying to make a living.

Esther: You get used to it but it's just so ghetto. My life is in danger, you know? Because people get shot around my neighborhood a lot. They get robbed. I don't want to be one of those victims. So, yeah.

Like many quotes regarding people in the San Antonio, this exchange is multifaceted and highlights the tension between how meaning is both made by and imposed on the youth through conditioning by mainstream society.

One interpretation could be that the drug dealers and pimps, almost always portrayed as archetypal 'ghetto' subjects in mainstream media, are not necessarily either fully being ghetto or ghetto beings in these two youth's minds. In his study on antipoverty policy and the underclass, Herbert Gans expands on the youth's discursive intervention in that most of mainstream media's negative labels "rarely stereotype behavior; more often they transform and magnify it into a character failing" (Gans 1995:12). Likewise, Joannie's assertion that pimps and drug dealers need to 'make a living' recognizes their creative capacity to assert their existence within the structural constraints of the 'ghetto,' a well-documented claim in current scholarship (Wacquant 1994; Sánchez-Jankowski 2008; Copes et al. 2008).

However, this exchange also revolves around a normalization of violence that these figures represent (such as people getting shot and robbed). Through this lens “not caring about them” or “get[ting] used to it” could also be psychological coping techniques alternatively analyzed as internalized or conditioned adaptations, rather than resistance, to structured oppression. Like Becky's apologetics for the state in the section prior, the two youth both partially challenge and ‘apologize’ for these ‘ghetto subjects’ who symbolize adaptive responses to their milieu and the problematic results of such adaptations, including drug addition, sex-trafficking and violent crime, that continue to traumatize the neighborhood.

Thus, the exchange illuminates elements of both internalized oppression and agency in the youth's consciousness. Rather than dislocating such figures into pathological non-beings by ascribing them as ‘ghetto,’ the two youth interpellate these ‘ghetto subjects’ as trying to adapt while not romanticizing the actions or violent consequences of such dehumanizing enterprises. The recounting of neighborhood figures who elided easy classification also comes up in other interviews, such as Becky's portrayal of her neighbors:

Like a month ago [the neighbors across the street] moved out. They were like hella dirty and hella loud, hella ghetto! And they have their music blasting until like 3:00 in the morning and they have their ghetto-ass kids. Like riding their bikes all around and roaming and it looks hella scary right? But they just moved out recently. But my next door neighbor is like this black guy and he's not ghetto at all, he's really nice. He's a really hardcore drug dealer. Like he doesn't send drugs out but he has people coming in at all times of day. It's like 6:00 in the morning and I come home or something and there's some kind of dude knocking at his door. And my sister has seen in the middle of the night he put something in the garbage can and in the morning someone picks it up. Yeah, stuff like that. Like he's got five pit bulls in the back and they're hella dirty. But he's not ghetto, he's private. He don't look scary but you notice those kinds of things.

The youth often invoke the term ghetto to identify behaviors that disrupt the social fabric of the neighborhood rather than a particular occupation or status. Becky distinguishes the ‘nice’ black hardcore drug dealer (who has five dirty pit bulls in the backyard and has people picking up drugs at all times of the day and night) from the ‘hella ghetto’ family that used to live on the block. The drug dealer is not ‘ghetto’ according to Becky because he is nice and ‘private,’ implying that he is considerate of his neighbors and keeps the uglier side of his business removed from the block.

Privacy as a mitigating factor to being ‘ghetto’ illuminates another partial penetration by the youth who implicitly reference ‘normal’ suburban life, popularly characterized as a space where one does not bring work problems home and all issues are dealt with privately. However, what is left mystified is how this imagination of suburbia is part of a larger hegemonic ideology that perceives certain behaviors, such as loitering/rowdiness/promiscuity, as acceptable (and often even encouraged) in touristy areas or college campuses while similar behaviors in ‘ghetto’ spaces are demonized and criminalized. Even so, this non-reductive definition of such neighborhood characters provided by Becky and others captures the inherent contradictions of ‘ghetto’ life in ways that mainstream discourses do not.

The gang-member is another archetypal ‘ghetto’ figure in popular media who becomes ambiguously cast by the youth. While there are numerous instances of gang violence directly impacting the interviewees (ranging from bullets through bedroom walls or car windows to being present when a friend is shot), at times gang members were also perceived as important to the neighborhood. In other words, the youth often asserted a contradictory stance by explaining that gangs can increase street violence but they also often protect their blocks from ‘outside’ crime.

Saysha, a 22 year old African-American female who works at a local youth-focused CBO and goes to community college, explains that her neighborhood is actually safer overall because it is ‘ghetto’:

I think one good thing about having a ghetto neighborhood is they know not to mess with neighbors. So they know that even though it's dangerous or scary to walk around because there's a lot of crack heads around our neighborhood, it's pretty safe against other people because they know not to mess with neighbors.

The ‘ghetto neighborhood,’ with its crack heads and drug dealing gangs, for Saysha is both dangerous and reassuring. Saysha and others thus question the hegemonic narrative of ‘ghetto figures’ as being simply pathological by turning this ideology on its head, explaining that those who are often perceived as ‘ghetto’ can also produce positive effects while not romanticizing these people. Thus, the youth negate the essentializing of these ‘ghetto subjects’ and recognize how discursive and material dislocation creates responses that can be contradictory.

While most interviewees were victims of violence perpetrated by such prototypical ‘ghetto’ figures, the youth often pointed out why ‘ghetto’ or other pejorative identifiers were inappropriate at times. This distinction typically came down to whether such subjects were culturally dislocated from the community and thus could be classified as worthy of exclusion from the neighborhood. While this criterion often did include drug dealers and gang members, the binary was often muddled and subject to discursive slippage.

For example, Adrian, a 23 year old Mexican-American male who has a high school diploma and works the front counter for an optometry clinic, describes his relationship with two friends who used to be gang members and frequently bullied people, including him, in high school before they dropped out:

A lot of the other characters were bullies. You know, the bullies. I was always getting jacked by a couple of bullies before I actually befriended them. Later on they even apologized, “Sorry I jacked you.” “Can I have my dollar back?” “No.” They are pretty cool guys but that's just what they do. They grow up and you know they are bigger than other kids so they take advantage of it... Other than that, besides them jacking you they are pretty good kids. They don't do as well as normal kids in school but they are also not thugs or bad people...

As Adrian points out, even though he was ‘jacked’ (term for robbery that typically involves violence or threat of violence), he wanted to make sure that the perpetrators were not pathologized as simply ‘thugs or bad people.’

In doing so Adrian resists reproducing a hegemonic narrative that reductively defines 'ghetto' subjects as simply "defective personalities or deficient moral types; that they are also family members, churchgoers, or neighbors are immaterial. Indeed, one of the purposes of the labels is to strip labeled persons of other qualities" (Gans 1995:12). Instead, Adrian reasserts the humanity of the interlopers as also struggling to find their place in the social order. His two friends are thus positioned within the more 'universal' trajectory of adolescent development rather than dislocated from their humanity and objectified as inherently deviant or pathological 'ghetto.'

But this narrative also exhibits a contradictory stance that both critiques an over-determination of the 'bullies' criminality and an internalization of violence that sounds similar to battered domestic partners who 'apologize' and rationalize staying with their abusers. Many interviewees gave similar accounts characterized by such 'apologies' that simultaneously seem to normalize violent behavior and offer counter-hegemonic insight into family members, mentors or close friends who the youth refuse to have simply defined by pathology. As Fukushima and others argue, violence in marginalized communities should be conceptualized by such contradiction and duality "where violence is not merely a site of repression, but also one that includes resistance" (Fukushima 29).

Lastly, the interviewees also sometimes turn 'ghetto' on its head as a positive affirmation of resistance to and negation of broader structures of privilege like whiteness. Arlene, a 23 year old Mien-American female high school graduate who works at a local youth-serving CBO, describes her experiences as a student at a new middle school:

The fact that I went to Crocker Highlands [Elementary School], I thought they thought I was – you know, my first year there I got a lot of comments like "Oh she is white washed," "Oh she's different from us, she is not ghetto, or tough enough like us" you know.

Though Arlene grew up in the San Antonio and was part of the same cohesive Mien community as those whom she quoted, she attended an elementary school in the more affluent hills through her family's refugee sponsors. However, when forced to return to her neighborhood middle school her classmates taunted her as being 'white-washed' and not 'ghetto' enough until her cousins vouched for her inclusion in the school polity.

For Arlene's peers, 'ghetto' references the structural dislocation of the school community from the white privilege and constructs a counter-identity that asserts this dislocation as a positive attribute in their social milieu. In the context of the school, Arlene and her classmates appropriate 'white' and 'ghetto' from essentialized figures in white hegemonic discourse (e.g. – black male drug dealer, gangster, etc.) and redefine such classifications in a way that blurs the relation of pathology to agency. Instead of stating that these figures or friends are not pathological at all, the youth reinterpret the concept of dislocation and pathology itself. In other words, their articulations of 'ghetto subjects' create a new dislocated discursive space that offers a constrained agency within structural conditions not of their own choosing.

'Ghetto' Schools

This discursive blurring of the concept of 'ghetto' also arose as the interviewees discussed government institutions. The youth commonly referred to the contradictory role of the state in their community, most often articulated in experiences with people who represent the various state apparatus. While there were references regarding subjects like the 'ghetto' cop and Section 8 public housing official, the figure that was most called into question by interviewees was the 'ghetto' teacher. The focus on teachers is not surprising since school experiences often become a defining element in forming the identity of young adults (Dabach 2011).

Though many of the youth were not enrolled in higher education at the time of the interviews, there was nearly universal agreement on the importance of 'good education' to life opportunities. Also, the youth almost always spoke positively of their college-going friends and negatively of friends who dropped out of high school or college. However, this articulation of the value of schooling was inconsistent with most of the youth's actual school experiences.

Steven, a Chinese-American male in his forties who lives in the San Antonio and has worked closely with youth in the neighborhood over the past 15 years through a local non-profit and church, explains that the youth often complain that their schools are 'ghetto':

I think that the youth would say that there are good teachers and bad teachers. And so just like anything, some of the teachers they will learn from and some teachers they don't like and they won't learn from. And that is sort of the attitude. I don't think they hate school, I don't think they think all Oakland schools are all ghetto because they know that there are good teachers who care for them and try to teach them...

Steven argues that the youth define a ghetto school as one where teachers do not educate or care about their students rather than based on the physical facilities or where the school is located. The descriptor of 'ghetto' is not inherent in the material conditions of school or the race of the teacher, but rather the cultural dislocation of the teachers to the youth and their community (Ching 2012). The 'ghetto' school thus expands on how 'ghetto spaces' are defined by structured dislocation, via the state, from the aegis of the metropole and sorts its 'ghetto' subjects into other modern institutions of dislocation and Foucauldian heterotopia like the prison, the military and the mental institution (Sánchez-Jankowski 1991; Weir 1995; Foucault 2008; Meiners and Winn 2010).

While most of the interviewees graduated high school (and thus already fall in the upper half of all San Antonio youth in educational attainment), many still felt frustrated about their schooling and described acting out accordingly. Examples of such actions included cutting classes, coming to school drunk or high, being violent to other students in school, purposefully trying to get suspended, and other seemingly oppositional behavior. Rachel, a 20 year old Vietnamese-American female attending community college full-time and trying to transfer to a California State University, describes her high school in the San Antonio as 'ghetto.' Reflecting on the inanity of the tardy sweeps where students who arrive late are

herded into a separate room, Rachel describes a strategy that she used to ‘game’ the system with her friends.

I think in high school we were late on purpose to go to tardy to hang out because that's where all the bad people were. And we go in there late just to go in the tardy... I think you get a five minute grace period but after 8:20, you're in tardy sweep. Sometimes they try and chase you around with the security until you get caught. It's like playing tag with the security!

While she made being tardy into a game, Rachel also tried to keep up her education “in terms of what mattered,” and would often return after school to catch up with teachers whose classes she either skipped or attended drunk with her friends earlier that day. When asked why she chose to act out like this, Rachel stated that she did not feel she was learning anything in high school anyway, citing as one example:

In one class, all you had to do was show up, have a journal and write like whatever—you just scribble stuff. Man, my handwriting wasn't even legible! As long as you have pages in there, you pass. That's it. Learn the capitals, that's the only thing that I learned in his class. I remember—I don't even remember it now. The capitals of the states. I remember some of it, but that's all I learned in his class. And it was a history class.

For Rachel and many others, the struggles of trying to succeed in school were compounded by their frustration at the many school personnel who “did not seem to care” or “treated us like we were beneath them.” Also, as with many urban districts, Rachel's high school had a particular racial dynamic of a nearly 95% non-white student body and majority white school staff, including the teacher that Rachel refers to above.

While interpreting teacher intentions from youth accounts is imprecise at best, the interviews demonstrate a pattern of teachers drawing from a deficit model in their interactions with students. These communicative exchanges map onto the body of recent scholarship on how white, middle-class teachers in inner-city schools often unconsciously naturalize and pathologize the differences between themselves and their non-white students, thereby racially re-inscribing the students as ‘other’ and inferior (Picower 2009; Young 2009; Ullucci 2011; Yoon 2012). However, the privileging of whiteness through racial ‘othering’ is not exclusive to white staff in either the interviews or other studies of Oakland schools (Zirkel et al. 2011). Rather, according to the youth, ‘ghetto’ teachers were defined by their intent to simply manage student bodies and ‘keep them busy’ – thus creating a subtractive experience devoid of genuine care for and education of their charges (Valenzuela 1999).

However, Rachel's response to this partial penetration can be read as simultaneous internalization of and resistance to the low expectations placed on her. As Willis explains, youth who partially penetrate the reproductive purpose of schools often decide to give up or actively resist – but both actions ultimately legitimate the categorization of these youth as failures due to their bad ‘choices’ (Willis 1977; McGrew 2011). Thus, even though Rachel's actions of coming to school drunk or provoking school security seem to be born of awareness that she is being denied a meaningful education, in doing so she continues to ensure her placement in the lower tracks and worst classes.

Though the youth pointed to their teachers as the most important factor in their educational experiences, they also identified school structures that did not promote learning or success. Inappropriate class placements, ‘tardy sweeps,’ tracked classes, locking of restrooms, and installation of surveillance cameras were among the numerous examples of problematic policies that the interviewees described. In what Lipman refers to as the state's investment in “new geographies of social and spatial exclusion” (2011: 25), these academic and disciplinary structures are commonplace in a literature on how ‘ghetto schools’ are organized (Ferguson 2001; Sung 2008; Noguera 2008; Welch and Payne 2010; Krueger 2010; Suarez 2012; Nasir et al. under review).

Kwame, a 21 year old African-American male who works in the warehouse of a local retail chain and has a high school diploma from a continuation high school, stated that he dropped out of his neighborhood high school because it was so ‘ghetto.’ When asked to elaborate further on what were the problems at his high school, he explained that one of the primary issues was ineffective policies that were not conducive to disciplining or learning:

So, discipline—really didn't have any. They would suspend you but like most of the kids, like you suspended me – I get to go home. I don't have to come to school tomorrow or the next day. So you're really not hurting me. So discipline, it really ain't discipline basically. But in the end, you end up hurting yourself because you know what I mean? You missing out on that time that you could have been learning something new.

Kwame's narrative was common among the youth, who stated that their schools were less interested in their education than in their management and containment, often despite the best intentions of those staff that actually seemed to care (Wun 2012).

What Kwame and others allude to is what is known as the ‘hidden curriculum’ of schools, referring to how schools sort and control students for the means of legitimating the existing social order for their students and their probable place in it (Apple 2004; McLaren 2007; Kumashiro 2012). Even public school reforms, from improving school discipline or new textbooks to ‘culturally-relevant’ curriculum and practices that focuses on developing student consciousness, do not refute the essential role of schools in this process of social reproduction of spaces and subjects of privilege and dislocation (McLaren 2007; McKinney de Royston 2011). Kwame's response of chronic truancy and premature departure from his neighborhood high school ultimately served to legitimate the school's reproductive sorting function despite Kwame's intentions to resist (Willis 1977).

This does not mean that every student who is schooled in the ghetto must stay in the ghetto. The imperfect correspondence between individual school attainment and class mobility is essential to legitimate the ideology of meritocracy (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Oakes 1985). In other words, the token successes become exceptions that prove the rule and are necessary to maintaining consent among the subaltern (Gramsci 1971). However, as Fanon points out in his personal experiences studying in France, the educational success of the racially-othereed subject does not fully protect against either the structural dislocations of racism or a dislocated consciousness (Fanon 1994).

This permanence of a dislocated reality despite relative ‘success’ was also evident among the interviewed youth. Unlike Willis’ lads who never finished high school (Willis 1977), a majority of interviewed youth had their high school diplomas and steady jobs. Despite the study’s goal of capturing a range of experiences, interviews of ‘successful’ youth were disproportionately high for a city where half the youth graduate high school and unemployment is at nearly 30% and higher for young adults (Tucker 2011). However, even school success did not enable youth to distance themselves from the material and discursive ghetto. When the interviews were disaggregated by educational/occupational ‘achievement’ there was no significant difference in how they perceived their overall school and neighborhood experiences. Those who would most likely see themselves as ‘other’ to the ghetto space still characterized themselves as part of the neighborhood, both in the literal physical sense and figurative teleological sense of their eventual lot in life.

The interviewees’ accounts thus challenge assimilation theories that assume cross-generational ‘success’ will produce inevitable, linear upward mobility in America. These accounts instead reinforce the increasing permanence of the dislocated ghetto where sustained economic recession and state retrenchment often override the traditional avenues young adults employ for upward mobility (Darmody et al. 2012). Schools formed part of an imperfect milieu of institutional technologies that Rios terms a ‘youth control complex’ to keep the youth and their communities dislocated from formal structures of power and thus easily (re)movable should the need arise, whether in terms of labor needs or land use (Rios 2011; Giroux 2009).

Conclusion

By applying the concept of dual dislocation to analyze the interviews, this paper challenges mainstream discourses and shows how youth utilize ‘ghetto’ in ways that capture the contradictions of their own lives. In doing so, the youth offer an alternative way to understand ‘ghetto’ as a dialectical site of racial dislocation and fractured decolonial reimagining, or what De Lissovoy (2012: 466) articulates through a theory of violation as “a broken self to operate in a broken world” irreducible to pure pathology or pure agency. Analysis of these contradictions clarifies four key insights into how structural and cultural processes of dislocation occur in relation to physical and figurative spaces as well as subject beings.

First, the paper conceptualizes dislocation as a ‘dual’ procedure, meaning that ‘ghetto’ can be characterized by both structural and psychological processes of dislocation. The structural processes refer to the material and ideological dislocation of the ‘ghetto space’ from the privileges of modernity, as represented by the metropole and the modern/cosmopolitan/white citizen. The psychological dislocation of the ‘ghetto subject’ is characterized by a dislocated or ‘double/third-person/contradictory’ consciousness that occurs in response to this structural ‘othering’ that Dubois and others describe as simultaneously constructive and destructive. As a theoretical and methodological framework, these two related definitions of ‘ghetto’ offer a lens to understand how inner-city youth respond to the contradictions of their existence in ways that exhibit both internalization of structural racism and resistance to the same.

Second, the youth characterize 'ghetto space' as defined by its increasingly permanent structural dislocation from the material privileges of modernity and whiteness via the state rather than the relative racial diversity or proportion of African-American residents. The hegemonic narrative of racial diversity/multiculturalism promoting social uplift is challenged by the interviewees, who voice how continued racial stigmatization and diversion of resources alongside the psychological effects of such structured dislocation are at the root of the blackened 'ghetto' space. This 'ghetto' differs from traditional definitions as a marginalized urban place where people of African descent have been forced to live. Thus, the youth challenge the idea of racial integration eradicating the ghetto and producing a space of equal entitlement since such entitlement both requires and is defined by dislocation and exclusion.

Third, the youth interviewees also employ 'ghetto' to characterize local residents in similarly non-essentialist and contradictory ways, switching between how individuals/groups culturally dislocate themselves from the community through particular behaviors and a shared 'authentic' experience of dislocated structural oppression. In both cases, rather than simply objectifying such individuals as pathological 'ghetto' non-beings, the youth describe these 'ghetto subjects' as trying to adapt while not romanticizing either the actions or consequences. In other words, the dislocated consciousness of 'ghetto' subjects is based on partial penetrations into the nature of their oppression that offer limited agency within structural conditions not of their own choosing. Thus, instead of stating that these figures or friends are not pathological at all, the youth reinterpret the concept of dislocation and pathology itself.

Fourth, the youth redefine the 'ghetto' school based on whether it is culturally dislocated from the community and reproduces the structural dislocation of the community instead of on its location or physical condition. However, this awareness of the 'hidden curriculum' of ghetto schools and teachers to reproduce the social structure often led to responses by the youth that blurred internalization and agency, and often legitimated their failure as a 'choice' (Toure 2011). Furthermore, even success in school did not enable most youth to distance themselves from the material and discursive ghetto. Thus, the youth's accounts defy assimilation theories based on cross-generational 'success' by reiterating the increasing permanence of the dislocated ghetto where oppressive structural factors, such as deindustrialization and institutionalized racism, largely override the traditional avenues youth employed for upward mobility like schooling.

In conclusion, this paper demonstrates how inner-city youth employ 'ghetto' to partially expose the contradictions of their existence and the limitations of liberal 'remedies,' such as multicultural cosmopolitanism or assimilationist meritocracy, to solve the 'ghetto' problem. In doing so, the youth articulate real difficulties of living in the San Antonio as well as illuminate how mainstream representations further 'ghettoize' dislocated neighborhoods such as theirs to the 'underside of modernity' (Mignolo 2003). The youth thus partially penetrate this hegemonic discourse that imagines them as objects to be feared and removed instead of subjects struggling to assert their humanity with the imperfect means available to them.

Lastly, just as the youth's dislocated consciousness reveals a complex and contradictory understanding of their lives, educational and community-building efforts for social justice and uplift should address the same. Beyond simply ensuring high expectations or innovative curriculum to engage such racialized and structurally dislocated youth, a particular politics that attends to such contradictions must be clarified. Specifically, pedagogies that assume the free capacity of dislocated youth to construct meaning, like from a constructivist perspective, mask the enduring power of hegemonic ideologies that youth partly internalize. Meanwhile, pedagogies that presume the need to instruct youth about their situation miss the capacity of youth to partially penetrate the veil and construct meaning, however circumscribed. Rather, careful attention to both must be made by activists and scholars so that youth experiences and epistemologies in dislocated communities are neither pathologized nor romanticized.

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