Postcolonial Structural Violence: A Study of School Violence in Trinidad & Tobago

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Abstract

The Caribbean region, per capita, is one of the most violent in the world. Trinidad & Tobago (TT), an economic powerhouse, has been bedeviled by violence. Unsurprisingly, school violence has escalated; however, there is a paucity of data. In this case study, I employed a critical peace education and postcolonial studies framework to examine how school violence is conceptualized. The research site - a product of postcolonial educational expansion - is a co-educational secondary school in TT, and is nationally stigmatized for its violent notoriety and persistent academic underperformance. Observations, 33 semi-structured interviews, and 9 focus groups/classroom discussions (with a total of 84 students) were conducted over a 7-month period in 2010, with a 3-week follow-up in 2013. My data illustrate how youth are the main analytic unit in the discourse around school violence; a discourse from which the structural role of the school is mostly omitted, as well as the lingering impact of a contemporaneously bifurcated educational system that was created during the colonial era. These omissions may serve to reinforce/perpetuate TT's class-stratified society; this constitutes discursive violence, but more specifically, as its iteration in this case study, postcolonial structural violence. Such discursive violence is both a neocolonial product *and* enabler of the structural violence that maintains educational inequity in TT.

Introduction

School violence[1] is considered a global 'problem'; in the sense that it affects many nations (Astor, Benbenishty & Marachi, 2006; Benbenishty & Astor, 2008). However, calls for an international analysis of school violence run the risk of reifying it as a putatively homogenized phenomenon. While there are certainly benefits to refracting school violence through the theoretical prism of global political economy, it is imperative to factor 'context' into the analytical calculus. That is to say, manifestations and their 'causes' of school violence may look differently in an economically-advanced/heavily industrialized nation versus a less economically advanced country, or for example in South-East Asia versus Sub-Saharan Africa. There are foreseeable benefits that could be resultant from international comparative studies of school violence, but this would require increased research being conducted within certain under-studied locales.

The Caribbean region, once the epicenter of Western imperialist expansion (Knight, 1990), and now at the margins of the global economy (Lewis, 2013), is a prime example of under-studied locales within the academy. As a result of its unique historical formations and contemporary fragmentations, the Caribbean, a site of myriad hybridities, seems analytically

ripe for exploring globalized phenomena; "[W]ith its trajectory permanently impressed by the twin experiences of colonialism and slavery, the Caribbean has produced an unusual collection of societies with a population mélange that is different from any other region in the world" (Knight & Palmer, 1989, p. 1).

In this article, I draw on school violence research conducted within a secondary school in a Caribbean country (Trinidad and Tobago) to more closely examine what I posit as postcolonial structural violence. My data illustrate how youth are the main analytic unit in the discourse around school violence; a discourse from which the structural role of the school is mostly omitted, as well as the lingering impact of a contemporaneously bifurcated educational system that was created during the colonial era. When my respondents spoke about the influences or 'causes' of school violence, the discourse that emerges is one of an individualizing nature; again it centers on youth, their families, homes, and communities and mostly avoids submitting the structural role of the school to the analytic gaze. These omissions serve to reinforce/perpetuate the class-stratified society of Trinidad and Tobago because power itself remains opaque. This constitutes discursive violence, but more specifically, as its iteration in this case study, postcolonial structural violence.

Through its 'everyday-ness' – imbued by normalized and normalizing discourses - the micro-locale of a school presents opportunities to actually train the magnifying glass upon the intersectionality of the global, the regional and the national; schools are interestingly constituted by all these forces.

Context

The Caribbean Region

The Caribbean region, including islands that stretch from the Bahamas to Trinidad and Tobago (TT) and the Central and South American countries of Belize, French Guiana, Suriname and Guyana, is contemporaneously beset by several issues, many of which intersect with its history. Columbus, in 1492, encountered several indigenous groups residing in the Caribbean: Caribs, Arawaks, Ciboneys, Maya, Garifuna, Surinen and Tainos (Blouet, 2007; CARICOM Secretariat, 2005; Ferguson, 2008). Spanish hegemony in the Caribbean would be subsequently assaulted by French, English and Dutch mercantilist ambitions, launching centuries of battles where islands regularly swapped hands (Randall 2003; Williams, 1970).

If the processes and systems of colonialism and slavery were not enough, indentureship contributed yet another layer of complexity to the Caribbean region. Immediately after abolition and emancipation in 1834, plantation owners turned primarily to India and China to facilitate their need for cheap labor to replace black ex-slaves who were abandoning the plantations in droves (Ferguson, 2008; Ramsaran, 2013). The mid 20th century was marked by much unrest and with World War II adding much energy to the decolonization movement (von Albertini, 1966), the Caribbean too was impacted. The region today features a medley of political configurations: independent states, associated states and colonial dependencies

(Knight & Palmer, 1989). Yet, despite political independence, there are persistent financial constraints and vulnerabilities (Klak 1998); "this compromise between the impulse for sovereignty and a pragmatic sense of economic realism represents an interesting aspect of the complex patterns of ambivalence that underlie the colonial connections in the Caribbean" (Stone, 1985, p. 14).

It is against this backdrop that the contemporary Caribbean finds itself confronting several not too insignificant challenges. Neo-classical economic reforms, rigorously pursued and implemented by Kohl, Thatcher and Reagan in the 1970s and 1980s, dismantled social nets and rendered a great impact on the Caribbean region (Lewis, 2006). Still reeling from the destabilizing effects of that 'lost decade' of structural adjustment programs and burdensome debt (Levitt, 2005), and the cessation of preferential agricultural agreements with Europe (Lewis, 2000), Caribbean "countries face a combustible mix of social disabilities" (Ferguson, 2000, p. 191), including, *inter alia,* increasing poverty, youth alienation and unemployment, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, inter-ethnic tensions, crime, violence, and drugs (Goddard, 2011; Ferguson, 2000; Jules, 2010). More specifically, the region features the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS outside of Africa (Jules, 2010); per capita, has one of the highest murder rates (30 per 100,000 annually), making it one of the most violent regions of the world (UNDP, 2012); and because of its prime geographical location, is one of the top transshipment points for narco-trafficking between consumers in the North and the producers in the South (Goddard, 2011). The international drug trade "generates an estimated US$3.3 billion a year, or just over 3% of the region's GNP….The drug trade has doubtless played a part in the rising incidence of violent crime…[and] has also stimulated the growth of white-collar crime, as traffickers endeavor to 'launder' receipts from the distribution of narcotics through financial intermediaries, especially Caribbean offshore banks" (Goddard, 2011, pp. 575-576).

Trinidad & Tobago (TT)

Relative to other Caribbean countries, Trinidad and Tobago (TT) ranks high on several human development indices when it comes to access to health and educational services and life expectancy (Levitt, 2005). With a petro-based economy boosted by significant oil and natural gas reserves, TT is the world's largest exporter of methanol and ammonia, has a GDP of US $27.1 billion and is considered a regional economic powerhouse (CIA World Fact Book, 2013). However, despite designation as a relatively high-income, non-OECD country (World Bank, 2012), over 21 percent of the population lives below the poverty line (*Trinidad Guardian,* 2012), with increasing inequality in income distribution. This has been coupled with a steep climb in violent crime (Townsend, 2009); from 1998-2008, homicides have increased 555 percent (Katz & Fox, 2010, p. 189), and in 2010 the murder rate in TT outpaced that of the United States by approximately seven times over (*The Economist*, 2011). Therefore, "although TT is considered one of the most robust economies within the Caribbean, wide disparities in income distribution may contribute to the rise in crime or discontent across the country" (Williams, 2012, p. 15). Unsurprisingly, this upsurge in local crime has engendered a corollary

increase in violence in schools, and generated much national concern (Phillips, 2008).

Significance of the study

Within Latin America and the Caribbean, violence is now viewed as a macroeconomic, development and public health issue; "[violence] has emerged as a significant economic, social welfare, health, and governance issue throughout the region" (Moser & van Bronkhorst, 1999, p. v). The spiraling crime and violence in the Caribbean and in TT has even deterred new businesses and international investment (U.S. State Department, 2013).

Despite being bedeviled by increased violence on a national level and in schools, there is a paucity of data (UNDP, 2012), and "there is a serious deficiency of systematic research on youth violence…in the Caribbean" (Deosaran, 2007, p. 95).   Within TT, more survey types of research have been conducted, and very little research of the qualitative sort.

Since violence has risen on the agenda of global discourses, it is no longer exclusively studied by criminologists, thus impelling interdisciplinary analyses. [1] All of these afore-mentioned circumstances, together, provided the space for the kind of study I conducted. By zooming in on a ground-level site of violence, I was able to examine the complicated intersectionality of the historical, the sociological, the global, regional, national and local, and in so doing, I hope to contribute to "open[ing] the debate on violence beyond a frequently misplaced focus on youth…; to suggest new ways to define and approach 'the problem'; [and] to expand the conceptual framework of the discourse on violence" (Spina, 2000, p. xix).

Question and its Theoretical Underpinning

Since several local agencies in TT are aware of the types of violence that occur in schools, I was not interested in replicating this. Instead, I was drawn to how people make meaning of this topic that haunts the national psyche; guided by the premise that violence, and the ways in which people interface with it, is socially constructed. Williams (2005) exhorts us to

> engage in qualitative inquiry to better understand the worlds of others from varied social locations if we want to improve our understanding of violence and our attempts to reduce it…. We cannot address the issue of violence using the same strategy for each of these worlds. We need to understand each world first before designing and implementing violence-reduction strategies…. First we need to understand how young people perceive and rank violence and where they draw the line of acceptable versus unacceptable violence before we can create effective programs (p. 39).

Thus, I asked participants to describe how they conceptualize school violence, as well its 'causes'/influences and its 'interventions', so as to map "the complicated   situatedness of people's perceptions and conceptualizations" (Williams, 2012, p. 45).   The analysis I rendered for this article has been guided by critical peace education and postcolonial theory as

the theoretical framework.

Critical Peace Education

The extremely heterogeneous field of peace education (Apostol, 1974) has many names and forms, including "the areas of human rights education, development education, environmental education, disarmament education and conflict resolution education" (Bajaj, 2008, p. 2). Since "[p]eace is much more than simply the absence of war" (Fry & Miklikowska, 2012, p. 227), peace education's raison d'être is the cultivation of a global culture of peace, and to that end, it is concerned with both negative peace (the cessation of direct violence) *and* positive peace (the upending of structural violence and the realization of social justice)[3] (Harris, 2002; Reardon, 1988).

Some academics and practitioners have extended the construct to what they call 'critical peace education' (Bajaj, 2008; Bajaj & Brantemeier, 2011): "critical approaches in peace education and peace research aim to…analyze power dynamics and intersectionalities among race, class, gender, ability/disability, sexual orientation, language, religion, geography, and other forms of stratification" (Bajaj & Brantemeier, 2011, p. 221); "[m]uch like a kaleidoscope that multiplies mundane objects into a mosaic of colors, textures, and forms, critical peace education interrogates invisible and taken-for-granted notions and assumptions through a juxtaposition of disciplinary insights, critical analysis, and/or empirical research" (Bajaj & Brantemeier, 2011, p. 223).   Structural violence[4], because of its very nature, is often rendered invisible and thus often omitted from analyses of and discourses on school violence.[5] Critical peace education thus urges the researcher to "pay attention to methods, content, and organizational structure…[because] both direct and structural violence manifest personally and in society at large" (Hantzopoulos, 2011, p. 225).

Postcolonial Theory

The 'post' in postcolonialism may be conceptually beguiling, in the sense that colonialism has ended; rather it signals that colonialism's "aftermath is contested" (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews & Woods, 2004, p. 2). Indeed, decades of strident neoliberal global policies and unequal economic growth, demarcated as neocoloniality (Krishna, 2009), have given theorists and practitioners pause. Occupying multiple roles, postcolonialism is both a referent to a periodicity and to a mode of analysis.   As an analytic tool, postcolonial critique "is at once both deconstructive and generative of a research programme that seeks to script the postcolonial into the analytics of international and global politics" (Jabri, 2013, p. 9). In so doing, it can be deployed to "re-narrativise master discourses" (Tikly, 1999, p. 609).

Mobilized toward the field(s) of education (and international educational development), postcolonial theory "has been used to construct a critique of the relationship between development and education and the ways in which such a relationship has served to foster new forms of imperialism" (Bristol, 2012, p. 16). Postcolonial educational research thus comes

with its own ethics:

> Because it inherently challenges and tackles the problems inherited from colonialism, [it] is then ethically charged to participate in a practice of *globalization from below* through a consideration of the historical and cultural politics of education and the particularities of the society within which education is the field of interest. Postcolonial-educational research…represents education and its associated research practices as a dialectical and dialogical space for political and ideological struggle (Bristol, 2012, p. 17).[6]

By crafting postcolonial theory as an actionable tool within the educative sphere, researchers can "examine processes of knowledge production and their role in the creation and perpetuation of (neo)colonial violences and inequalities" (Andreotti, 2011, p. 85); in other words, a corrective tackle on the Caribbean's marginalization from the epistemological storehouse of postcolonial studies (Puri, 2004).

Postcolonial critical peace education research

Postcolonial research, commingled with critical peace education, thus becomes a sort of praxis, which can be utilized to "question, analyze and interrupt manifold forms of violence and inequity" (Shirazi, 2011, p. 291). The Caribbean, with its myriad hybridities, which are themselves a rebuke of master-narrativity, is constituted simultaneously as postcoloniality, and as postcoloniality's interrogator (Puri, 2004, p. 3). This theoretical framework facilitates an exposure of the contemporary structural violence that underpins much of the direct violence and its discourse in TT.

Methodology

Since there is increasing critique of one-size-fits-all programs to 'fix' school violence, it would follow that different school cultures may require customized 'interventions'/'solutions' (Noguera, 2008). The case study is one such tool that permits empirical investigations of phenomena within their "real-life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Although at the time I did not name my case study as such, this methodologically approximates what Vavrus & Bartlett (2006) call a 'vertical case study', which interrogates local action as part of an intricate and wider historical and socio-political web[7]. The in-school study permitted multi-level analyses: from the global, the regional, the national, the local (community and school) right down to the classroom level.

I wanted to spend considerable time at one school site so as to explore the everyday-ness of school violence. I employed purposive sampling to procure the research site based on desired characteristics (Johnson & Christensen, 2008): 1) school in an urban center (since statistics indicate that violence in schools occur more frequently in urban spaces (Noguera, 2008; Phillips, 2008); 2) co-educational (for gendered analyses); and 3) a post-independence school site (former Junior Secondary School) [8]. Impelled by my positionality of someone

who grew up in one of the most impoverished communities in TT and my critical peace education posture, I selected a school, hereafter called Survivors Secondary School[9] (SSS), that was nationally stigmatized for its academic underperformance and violent notoriety; indubitably, a school on society's margins:
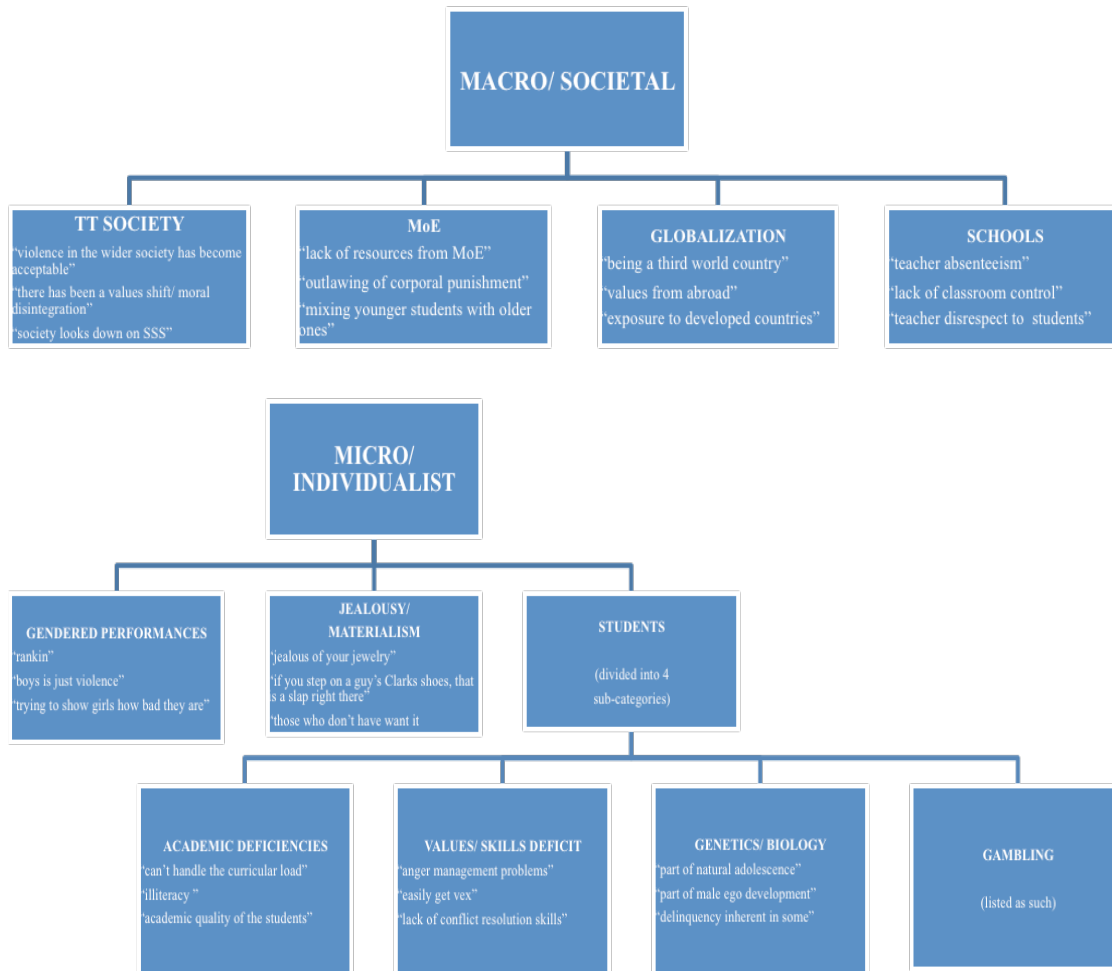
> There are also researchers, scholars and academics who actively choose the margins, who choose to study   people marginalized by society, who themselves have come from the margins or who see their intellectual purpose as being scholars who will work for, with, and alongside communities who occupy the margins of society. If one is interested in society then it is often in the margins that aspects of a society are revealed as microcosms of the larger picture or as examples of society's underbelly (Smith, 2012, p. 205).

Coming from a country, whose educational system is far from comprehensively decolonized, I take up the charge that "researchers and social scientists should attend to the important task of critiquing existing educational structures and understandings" (Abdi & Richardson, 2008, p. 1).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection ran from the start of December 2009 to the end of June, 2010 (seven months), and I employed ethnographic tools such as observations, participant observation, student focus groups and class discussions, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. I conducted 9 focus groups/class discussions with a total of 84 students, 29 in-school interviews (2 administrators, 4 deans, 2 safety officers, 1 guidance counselor/officer, 20 teachers), and 4 interviews with high-ranking, Ministry of Education (MoE) officials.

I wrote copious theoretical and regular memos, and field notes; these, coupled with observations, interview and document data, served as the foundation for a process of inductive analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). See Figure 1 for a sample of my strategy for coding the data for 'causes'/'influences'.

Figure 1: Excerpted Strategy for Coding Data for 'Causes'/'Influences'

Findings/Discussion

Conceptualizations of 'school violence'

Since the prevailing discourse on school violence in TT is youth-centric - i.e. 'youth' is the predominant analytic unit of discourses on school violence - I asked participants to

conceptualize 'school violence', as opposed to mere 'youth violence'. I was interested in the ways in which 'youth violence' and other violences were inscribed. A vast majority of what respondents gave as their conceptualizations of school violence, constituted direct forms of violence, which include, *inter alia*, fighting, carrying weapons, vandalism, cursing, theft, and sexual harassment. A number of teachers characterized school violence as 'rule breaking, 'indiscipline', 'disruption', 'lack of control' and being 'against the norm.' Ms. Nielsen framed it as such:

School violence to me is like when children break the basic rules of the school as

far as controlling their behavior is concerned and they get out of hand. For example, if children are here, if they are supposed to be going to the science block and you tell them ok walk and go and they become very disruptive … to me that is school violence. That's a form of school violence because it means that the behavior is not one that is going to be teachable and the teacher could be at risk …[o]nce they breach those rules I see it as violence. (Interview with Ms. Nielsen, June 1, 2010)

These conceptualizations, by projecting school violence as "an affront to authority, as an obstacle to learning, as an aberrational rebuke of normalcy, and as an anarchic descent into disorder" (Williams, 2012, p. 83), characterize students as 'ungovernable' [10], 'rebellious' and 'untrainable'. By being 'ungovernable', students reveal how the school staff grapple with power or the perception of their power's diminution. The language of disorder and 'lack of control' is perhaps a "vestigial reminder of the colonial obsession with order, hierarchy, discipline and docility" (Williams, 2012, p. 211). [11]

Apart from mostly direct violence centric conceptualizations, almost all participants (over 97 percent) equated 'school violence' with 'youth violence', where references were made to student to student violence and student to adult (i.e. teacher, or other school staff) violence[12]. McLaren, Leonardo & Allen (2000) aver that direct violence, otherwise called material violence, "has become an alibi for our general lack of attentiveness of discursive violence" (p. 68). In other words, a hyper-focus on direct violence among youth distracts attention from other types of violences and how certain discourses inform and shape them.

Youth were frequently portrayed as hyper-aggressive, with Ms. Mungal (a teacher) describing them as "bombs" awaiting detonation (Interview, May 13, 2010). Two other teachers added: "you can't have a one on one interaction or exchanging of words with this person [because] this person is just so aggressive; just can't talk or listen or analyze anything you were telling him. Always in a rage" (Interview with Ms. Boodram, May 3, 2010); and "[t]hey just have a lot of hate that they are walking around with" (Interview with Ms. Mikala, May 13, 2010).

Only two in-school participants made any reference to adult to student violence: "school violence would also include how some teachers decide to handle a situation. Because I have seen those officers in charge…the guards or safety officers…and they use equal force on the children" (Interview with Ms. Wellers, a teacher, May 7, 2010). It was only when I asked the student participants about their likes and dislikes about SSS that they shared descriptions of other types of violences without actually including them within their conceptualizations of school violence. The students' failure to implicate any adult to student violence *as* violence discursively inscribes their own selves as the main analytical units of school violence, and is complicit in the obfuscatory discourse that conceals adults from the analytic gaze. Below, I extensively share some excerpts from some focus groups that reveal instances of adult to student violence:

Stacy:	Sir, if you make a mistake, some teachers yell at you and behave stupidly; she screams at you (Class Discussion 2bWC, June 15, 2010)
Students:	Teachers are too out of timing… Treat us like dogs… The obscene language
Researcher:	Teachers use obscene language?
Students:	Yes, yes. Those teachers are really out of timing. They call you jackass, sir. And punch you in your back, sir. They take advantage of you, they want to 'rank up[13]' and slam door, and destroy the door. Sir, if you ask, if you tell them you don't understand they will say 'what do you not understand'?[14] (Class Discussion 2cWC, June 9, 2010)
Student:	Sir, I think teachers and deans shouldn't call children stupid and things like that
Another Student:	Because well some children are actually bad, but some teachers like to curse you.
Researcher:	What do they say?
Student:	Some teachers just don't know how to talk to you
Another Student:	Yes, they don't know how to speak to people, and that has to change
…Another Student:	[A]ttitudes!
Students:	They call children ass and things like that; the way they say bad things to you
Student:	And make us feel like we are not really doing our best (Class Discussion 3WC, June 16, 2010)
Student:	[T]eachers and deans shouldn't call children stupid
Student:	[B]ecause they are in a school where they are trying to make children uplift themselves but they are bringing them down by telling them those things. And if a student were to react and say something back to them, they would say it's disrespectful (Class Discussion 3WC, June 16, 2010)
Student:	There are some teachers who bring their troubles from home into the school. It's like they might wake up one morning and their husbands might have gotten them vexed, they will then come into the school with a kind of rage. (Focus Group 5SG, June 16, 2010)[15]

These excerpts captured many types/forms of violences: verbal, physical, emotional and psychological, yet they were blindspots in the responses from most participants when they

were asked to conceptualize school violence. A discourse that is direct violence centric and youth centric fogs the analytic gaze from apprehending other forms of violence that are rendered by school staff and even the school system itself:

> By individualizing violence, and eliding any role that structure may play from the analytic gaze, this narrowing discourse runs the risk of pathologizing 'violent' students. This narrowing discourse has obvious conceptual implications for… [critical] peace education, which analytically neglects neither negative and positive peace, nor direct and structural violence, as well as ontological implications for violence prevention" (Williams, 2012, p. 90).

This hyper-pathologization of youth by adults, and even by youth as well, is tantamount to discursive or representational violence (McLaren, Leonardo, & Allen, 2000). In the knowledge production of 'school violence', 'school' is subtracted as a descriptive, and in its place is hoisted the category of 'youth', inscribed as the 'Other' [16], the predominant signifier of violence.

Conceptualizations of the 'causes'/influences of school violence

Data regarding participants' conceptualizations of the 'causes' of /influences on school violence were coded into three broad categories: 1) Environmental (including Home, Communities, Media and Peer Association), 2) Macro/Societal (including (TT Society, Ministry of Education, Globalization, and Schools), and 3) Micro/Individualist (including Gendered Performances, Jealously/Materialism, and Students[17]).

A majority of the influences given (i.e. 40 percent of all influences mentioned) by all participants belonged to the environmental category[18]. For every within-school constituent group (i.e. teachers, students, administrators, deans, and safety officers), participants considered students' homes, communities, media-scapes, and peer associations as the main 'causes' of /influences on school violence[19]. Beyond environmental influences, adult participants mentioned macro/societal influences, whereas students focused on issues surrounding gendered performances and jealousy/materialism as their second highest 'causes' of /influences on school violence. However, schools (or SSS specifically) and macro/societal influences were the two least mentioned for students. Below are some excerpts from the data from which these findings were procured.

Many respondents believed that "how students were brought up" (i.e. how they were socialized) factored in significantly as an influence on school violence. Two teachers, Mr. Singh (in the first quote) and Ms. Faure (in the second quote), spoke of the "baggage" that students brought with them from their homes into school:

> The children are not dealing well with what is happening home and it spills over here. You have a child in your classroom …[and] I have no idea how many of those children slept the night before. I have no idea how many of them had a meal in their stomachs before they came to school. I have no idea how many of

them going home at the end of the day will have to go to someone else's house. I
don't know how many of them may have to work to support younger siblings so
a lot of the times we are *really* not aware of the issues and problems that children
come to us with. Sometimes we get word of it or wind of it because of things that
may have happened in the child's past, but because something caused us to
investigate because of something that happen[s] in our jurisdiction. But when
you [are] not sure what children are coming with, the baggage that they carry it
definitely spills over into the school. (Interview, May 11, 2010)

Ms. Faure:	[T]hey [are] going through insecurities; a lot of pain because some of the things they [have] experience[d] already at a tender age of fifteen or sixteen, adults have not even gone through it.
Researcher:	Things like what?
Ms. Faure:	Well, we [are] looking at rape, incest, abandonment, mother not being morally upright; like you may be living in a one bedroom tenement sort of setting and mother has her boyfriend over when you are trying to sleep. (Interview, May 13, 2010)

These two excerpts are emblematic of the participants' characterizations of students'
homes as predominant influences on the violence that occurs in school. Ms. Nielsen, another
teacher, in implicating the home, inadvertently exposes the intersections between rising rates
of local poverty and the impact on families when a parent emigrates in search of improved
livelihood:

We have the barrel syndrome issues. I call them the barrel syndrome children[20]
where the poor parent, one of them has to migrate to the States, in some cases
two, to work to get monetary gain and the poor children are suffering or are
being killed emotionally and psychologically. Because every child wants to be
with their parents and the most expensive cell phone for a child cannot
compensate for a little touch or a hug or just get up in the morning and say
mommy I love you. And the parents are being robbed of that opportunity. They
leave the children in care of other people who can't give them what they expect
to get. That's how those children are becoming violent. (Interview, June 1, 2010)

There emerged from the data a narrative that the challenges and struggles that students
face in their homes are "hardening them," and in turn de-sensitizing them:

Because they are hardened they don't care about another person. They would say
it, they would verbalise it "I don't care about you. I don't care about this
place…" And this whole thing, to my mind, about not caring about another
person makes them do just about anything I would say (Ms. Seepersad, Interview
on May 19, 2010).

Linked to the notion of homes as one of the main drivers of school violence was the
impact of students' communities. Kwame, a student, spoke to this point:

| Researcher: | What do you all think cause violence in schools? What are some of |

	the causes you all think?
Kwame:	To me, it's the area you are from
Researcher:	The area you are from?
Kwame:	Yeah because if I am from downtown, he is from Carenage, he is from St. James, right, if a fella (a guy) has an argument with one of those fellas I will have to help him because he is from my neighborhood and if I don't help him they will say "boy, you are a sellout." You understand? It's like defending your neighborhood. If you don't defend the neighborhood you can be ostracized/ kicked out from the neighborhood. (Focus Group 5SG, June 16, 2010

The proliferation of gang activity over the past decade in TT (Katz, Maguire, & Choate, 2011) has affected many communities. This proliferation has dovetailed with the increased international drug trade and the presence of small arms in economically-depressed neighborhoods. In the excerpt above, Kwame intimated about 'turf wars' that occur among communities in TT.

While it should be acknowledged that many students do feel besieged within their communities and within their homes, whether it be attributable to sexual, physical or emotional/psychological abuse, neglect, gang warfare or extreme financial deprivations, I posit that the attributive characterization of students' environments (i.e. homes, communities, media-scapes and peer associations) as main contributing factors to school violence is also part and parcel of the 'individualizing' discourse; one in which the main influences of school violence are exogenized, thereby erasing the school space as a potential focal point for analysis. The error made is that "[f]ocusing solely on perceived individual deficits or pathologies as the 'causes' leading to violent behaviors, extreme or otherwise, does not provide an understanding of the complexities involved in this phenomenon" (Robinson et al., 2012), p. 187).

Within the data, participants did offer other 'causes' of school violence beyond the environmental factors; although no other category garnered as much attention. Some participants (adults and students) attributed school violence to such factors as waning morality/spirituality in TT and 'pullin rank'/masculinist performativity. However, the most 'telling' data are those that were negligibly discussed/dissected or not mentioned at all; these 'invisible' data are the scaffolding for my argument around structural violence.

While acknowledging that school violence is constituted by a nexus of influences, less attention is paid to the role that educational systems themselves may play. Conducting international comparative analyses, Baker & LeTendre (2005) contend that "national patterns of school violence are not predicted by the amount of violence among adults in a country but instead are strongly related to the quality of the educational system" (p. 87). Other researchers posit that the

climate and structure of schools can reduce or enhance delinquency. For instance,

academic achievement and adolescents' attitudes towards schools reduce delinquency. Yet some practices in schools are conducive to delinquency, including tracking, disciplinary activities, and the ways that schools influence dropping out or actually push adolescents out of school (Seydlitz & Jenkins, 1998, p. 70).

School policies, practices, curricula, resources and the like all constitute structure (Harber, 2004) and may connive to render structural violence or what some researchers theorize as "systemic violence" (Robinson et al., 2012):

> Systemic violence has been defined as any institutional practice or procedure that adversely impacts on individuals or groups by burdening them psychologically, mentally, culturally, spiritually, economically or physically. Applied to education, it means practices and procedures that prevent students from learning, thus harming them (Epp, 1996, p. 1).

Structural or systemic violence in schools or school systems can inhabit macro-exclusionary practices, standardized tests which may possess alienating cultural biases, gendered differentiated discipline, inflexible zero tolerance policies for regarding infractions[21], bureaucratic and hierarchical structures that resist or do not value teacher and student input, and practices of prematurely labeling students as educationally-challenged, just to name a few (Epp, 1996; Frank, 1996; Monsheath & Cooper, 1997; Watkinson, 1997). Phrased differently, "routinized courses of action and interactions in all educational contexts are imbued with unequal distribution of power that produce and reinforce various forms of marginalization and exclusion" (Ng, 2003, p. 216).

In TT and at SSS, my research study revealed many processes, practices, and discourses that constitute structural violence. The current educational system in TT has been characterized as a dual (London, 1994) or bifurcated (Williams, 2012) educational system, whose genesis can be traced to the colonial era. The bifurcated educational system informs much of what occurs in schools today and yet, within the data, only one participant (Mr. Romany, the school's principal) proffered an interrogation (or more precisely, an intimation of interrogation) of history as an influencing factor on school violence. In this excerpt he makes a link between lack of resources, Ministry of Education planning (or lack thereof), history and school violence:

> [I]f we had enough money we could have done a lot more programs with the students that might not involve a central government. We could have brought in more NGOs to work with the children; we do one on one in some cases, because some of them need that kind of work….
>
> So the child comes in here now, they come with their baggage, they come with their own culture, their level of literacy and numeracy might be pretty low, so therefore you need a special intervention. We don't have a [basketball court], we don't have a sporting area that we could call our own. Frustration? "All of you just run wild, let that out"; we don't have that. It's only concrete buildings! They have the little space in

between and so on; it reminds me of the projects in the States? It kinda reminds me of that. We need special treatment from the government. You can't tell a child who would have come to this school with all of these issues, the problems that they would come with in terms of their learning capabilities and their background, their culture and so on and expect after five years these same children could do as well as a kid who was in the first ninety percent in the country. You can't expect that. A lot of these kids are late bloomers, five years ain't good enough for them; they might need six and in some cases, they might need seven[22]. So from day one now the status quo is telling them that they would have failed, so if the status quo is saying they would have failed, the government is perpetuating that failure by continuing what they are doing. These schools need special treatment. [In] terms of resources, in terms of playing areas, things like remedial teachers, it shouldn't be where it is, but here it is. They should be providing because these children cannot achieve [the] examinations in five years because of where and how they came into the system. So you have to provide for them and that is not being done. We need resources to assist [with] what we have to deal with here… So when you put all these things together, at the end of the day, who's going to be suffering? The children are going to suffer. Because I don't think the ministry … thought out the way these schools were built and who they were sending here, what was going to be the actual outcome then. I don't feel they knew you know. It's only now they are seeing if they could do some [by] patching here and there.   But we need a lot of resources here to ensure that these children here get the same opportunities as those in [name of nearby traditional grammar school (TGS)] college. (Interview, June 8, 2010)

Here, Mr. Romany interweaves a critique of the ways in which SSS and its students have been stigmatized and marginalized by TT society. He adds:

So a lot of time, [the students] come here with no sense of buy-in; they don't want to be here. That's why they write all over [the walls], they destroy, they vandalize because they don't own this. I figure that the status quo that the country has too, indicates that when you come to a school like this, you are like quote unquote garbage; you aren't worth much. You are a failure, you don't do much, you can't do anything really and you are wasting time. (Interview, June 8, 2010)

This excerpt, with its visual imagery of 'garbage', conjures up notions of students' 'disposability', and relatedly but just as damaging, their 'uneducability'. When I interviewed students, they were fully aware of SSS's stigma and its symbolic representation within the national psyche as a violent school where the less academically-accomplished/capable students were placed after the national exams.

SSS, since its genesis in the late 1970s, has been part of numerous reforms. Via a confidential conversation, one participant described SSS as a 'national guinea pig'. De Lisle (2012, p. 65) details the four periods of educational reform that TT has undergone (/is undergoing): 1) 1968-1983: primary and secondary school expansion; 2) 1996-2003: aimed at augmenting the quality of basic education, and focused mostly on primary education; 3)

1999-2009: roll out of SEMP (the Secondary Education Modernization Program), which aimed at augmenting the quality of secondary education;[23] and 4) 2009-2019: Seamless Education reform project, aimed at expanding and improving early childhood education, as well as continuing efforts to bolster the quality of primary and secondary school education. SSS has been significantly affected by these reforms, which have often been implemented without input from SSS administration, teachers or students.

Before the GoTT embarked upon its plan to implement universal secondary school access, students who were placed at SSS after national exams, and schools similar to it, attended school in shifts (i.e. either school in the morning time or the afternoon shift, but not an entire day of instruction as students in the traditional grammar/pre-independence schools). There simply were not enough school placements for every child, thus the GoTT utilized this shift system. SSS was de-shifted about seven years ago, thereby transforming it into a 'regular' secondary school where students would receive a full day of instruction. The educational system, by pursuing universal secondary school access, was therefore inundated with an influx of students who would have otherwise been 'pushed out' of the system at the age of 11 or 12 because of their extremely low results or arrant failure on the national exams. SSS administrators and teachers lauded the GoTT's intent, but decried what they perceived as a deficient and uncoordinated planning process, one from which their voices and input were excluded. The transformation of SSS did not feature any upgrades of equipment for technical/vocational education (upon which this type of school heavily relies) which had been at the school since it was built in the late 1970s, nor did SSS receive any remedial teachers to assist with the many new students who needed these services in preparation for the second set of national exams that awaited them five years later. This localization of a globalized discourse (i.e. the embrace of EFA) has stifled any substantive debate about and action toward educational *quality* and *equity*.

Aside from the various educational reforms implemented, the MoE launched a Violence Prevention Academy (VPA). It included 25 most 'at-risk'/'violent' schools in the country. It was created and led by an American criminologist and SSS was among the selected schools. The VPA, unlike prior MoE reforms that excluded voices from within school communities, was intended to engender ownership of the program from within schools; the stated aim was for schools to choose one issue related to school violence and work together in addressing it, by collecting and analyzing the data, and thereafter crafting and implementing solutions. At SSS, 'gambling' was selected as the school's 'issue' to be tackled. My research revealed that while gambling had decreased on the school compound, gambling was more a symptom of a much deeper issue. Ms. Seepersad, a teacher, explained:

> [the students] gamble for money, they gamble to live, they gamble for food, they gamble for taxi money, they gamble if they want a gold chain. That is their way of earning, getting money so they started having it in school and would have fights as a result; who did not give who their money, all kind of different things. So we had a serious problem. (Interview, May 19, 2010)

Despite the intentionality of the VPA,

> an entire project was created to assist schools with violence prevention [that] omitted the supposed beneficiaries of this project (i.e. students) from the design of both the project and its evaluation. While students did fill out questionnaires about the impact of the project, none of the eighty-four student respondents [in my study] could articulate the VPA's aims and impact (Williams, forthcoming).

As I was wrapping up my data collection at SSS, the MoE, without much notice, and again without input from the SSS community, decided to implement yet another reform: phasing SSS from a co-educational school to single-sex (in SSS's case, all male). The MoE's premise was that since the highest achieving schools in TT were typically single-sex schools, perhaps SSS, and schools like it, would produce better educational outcomes and have 'less violence'. When the MoE official, at a town-hall style meeting, was delivering notice of this recent reform (in 2010) to school staff, it was not revealed that the debate about the putative effects of same-sex schools is far from settled and that the research is inconclusive (Lingard, Martino & Mills, 2009). As Jha & Kelleher (2006) remind us "by focusing simply on…qualifications…, the dialogue [around same sex education] is ignoring other important factors such as structural inequalities, institutional processes…and how the issues tie in with broader concerns, such as social class, economic under-privilege, poverty and ethnicity" (p. 22). [24]

For SSS, all of these reforms, may constitute "project overload" (London, 1993), which places constant strains on diminishing resources. These reforms have been implemented by a hierarchical MoE bureaucracy that neocolonially engineers projects and decisions without the input of the communities (especially students) they are intended to assist or 'fix'.

The deafening silence within my data of any interrogation of these infringements and impositions on SSS affirms the critique that structural violence is perpetuated because power so adeptly conceals it from the analytic gaze. None of the (84) student participants made mention of macro/societal/structural influences on school violence, and among the in-school, adult participants there were few intimations at, but never comprehensive and direct analytic disassemblies of the structural violence that envelops and constitutes SSS, or even critical insights regarding the intersectionality of localized poverty, the globalized drug trade and widening income inequality in TT.

Indicative of discursive violence is the fact that structural violence as a term is not even part of the local discourse. The mostly un-impugned bifurcated system, one which serves to maintain the socio-stasis of a rigidly class-stratified society, is a classic case of postcolonial structural violence. The direct violence centric and youth centric discourses buffer the thick neocolonial structures, processes and practices from substantive critique. Such discursive violence is both a neocolonial product *and* enabler of the structural violence that maintains postcolonial educational inequity in TT.

Mobilizing Policy, Research and Pedagogies for Social Change

Although my 7-month study was anchored within a single school, I was able to observe the 'violences of everyday life' (Kleinman, 2000), and in so doing, to apprehend "the interplay between individuals, relational, social, cultural and environmental factors" (Robinson et al., 2012, p. 187). Few teachers spoke passionately about, what I term, their 'praxes of care'; ways in which they were able to employ creative techniques to make breakthroughs with usually 'hard-to-reach' youth. Many students at SSS complained about their disinterest in dull, unappealing curricula and pedagogies. Therefore, 'praxes of care' and other conscientizational pedagogies can serve to foster on-going dialogic relationships between students and teachers in reflecting *and* acting upon their worlds (Freire, 1990).

However, some argue that such pedagogies and individual teachers alone cannot make all of the difference, because they are facilitated or hindered by larger socio-political, economic, and cultural forces (Hayes, Mills, & Lingard, 2006; Lingard & Mills, 2007). Therefore, more systems approaches to research, policy, and advocacy will be needed. This does not mean that the minutiae of everyday life ought to be ignored; in fact "[w]hat we need is the ability to see wholes as well as parts", so that we may begin to avoid "trying to fix complex, long-term problems…with tools better suited for short-term mechanical problems" (Ricigliano, 2012, p. 21; p. 24). School violence and violence at large in TT signal that there are deeper issues at work. To genuinely and sustainably address these issues will require interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral efforts and collaboration. One potential research approach that may be congruent with these needs is the dynamical systems approach[25], which recognizes the complex, non-linearity of the forces that impel conflict, and usually involves visually mapping the complicated and multi-layered connections of myriad factors. Another approach may be participatory action research[26] since it is guided by a philosophy that "welcomes *all* citizens to participate in decisions affecting their community" (Goldberg, 2013, p. 153).

With that said, TT is well positioned within the Caribbean to help marshal resources and be a leader in the regional efforts to address school violence and violence writ large, since some of the influences on violence exist at the regional and international levels. And through it all, Caribbean governments must be reminded that effective and sustainable efforts to build and make peace ought to involve communities; a veritable "peacebuilding from below" (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2011, p. 233).

Acknowledgments

Notes

[1] This term 'school violence' first appeared in the title of a research journal in 2002 (Benbenishty & Astor, 2005, p. 4)

[2] Education for All (EFA) is an example of a global discourse. Violence and its prevention also discursively occupy a globalized space. Global discourses are often crafted and promulgated by international institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and a wide array of International Non-Governmental Organizations. Global discourses, therefore, possess the capacities to penetrate diverse locales and drive local agendas.

[3] Both Galtung (1969) and Boulding (1978) postulated on negative and positive peace.

[4] Structural violence is distinguished from direct violence. Additionally, there usually is no easily identifiable actor (Galtung, 1969).

[5] This is the crux of my article: characterizing the 'invisibilities' within the discourse of school violence at my research site as structural violence. An acknowledgment of structural violence is an acknowledgement of complicity, and an interrogation of said complicity requires an analysis of how an entire system is maintained and the structurally vested interests that manage to escape accountability.

[6] In this quote, I take 'globalization from below' to mean not a mere localized facilitation of global imperatives but particularized re-writing of globalized scripts. The term, for me, speaks of participation in and ownership of globalizing discourses and forces by critiquing them. Adding to the canon of research on school violence from a postcolonial site is an epistemological form of globalization from below; the act and process of subaltern voices speaking back constitute globalization from below. Postcolonial research, as potentially deconstructive, exposes globalization as not monolithic despite globalization's homogenizing and amalgamative tendencies.

[7] See Bajaj 2012, for a masterful example of the vertical case study employed in a large scale research project.

[8] After independence in 1962, the economic demands for augmented human capital development, and the social desire for increased educational provisions prompted the Government of Trinidad and Tobago (GoTT) to expand the educational system (Campbell, 1992; 1996; 1997). At the time, there existed some (traditional grammar) schools built during the colonial era; these were run by various religious denominations (since about 1863 (Stewart, 1981)). The GoTT built many primary and secondary schools to facilitate mass education; this merely concretized a dual educational system that owed its genesis to the Education Ordinance of 1870: "A dual education system was introduced by which the Government would provide some schools and the religious bodies would be assisted in the provision of others" (Gordon, 1962, p. 16). On the Caribbean's penchant for grammar-type schools (colonial-style), Lewis & Lewis (1985) aver that "this colonial model of education has proved remarkably resilient, difficult to dislodge even today" (p. 159). As a result of differentiated historico-social capital, the traditional grammar schools (TGSs) are

contemporaneously known for their academic performance while the post-independence schools are viewed as being "overpopulated, understaffed, poorly resourced,…associated with low achievement, indiscipline and a consequent high failure rate" (London, 1994, p. 412). A 2004 Ministry of Education (MoE) report stated that some of these post-independence schools are four times as dense as other schools in the system (Phillips, 2008). Additionally, approximately 75 percent of the students who attend the lowest performing post-independence secondary schools come from low socio-economic backgrounds; "the secondary school system seems to be catering to and breeding an entrenched social stratification cycle" (Deosaran, 2007 p. 106). This is compounded by the Concordat, an agreement between the GoTT and the Boards of Management of the religious denominationally-run secondary schools (TGSs) that allows principals of TGSs to reserve up to 20 percent of their student placements with little regard to the national secondary school entrance exam results. London (1989) remarks that this facilitates the admission of students based on "family connections, influence in society, political affiliation and wealth" (p. 287). Despite reforms and attempts at reforms to remedy the wide gap between TGSs and post-independence schools, in terms of educational quality, resources and academic outcomes, "the level of differentiation remains the same or may be increasing" (De Lisle, Seecharan, & Ayodike, 2009, p. 9). As regards direct school violence, most reported incidents occur at the lowest performing post-independence schools (formerly called Junior Secondary Schools) (Phillips, 2008).

[9]   This is a pseudonym I gave to the research site and it is a small ode to the resilience of the students I encountered.

[10] I have procured this notion of 'ungovernable youth' from Foucauldian theorization (via Ball, 1990, and Foucault, 1995)

[11] Noguera (1995) asserts that instead of fostering schools as student-centered environments, attempts to maintain order and control, actually make schools more vulnerable to violence.

[12] Muehlenhard & Kimes (1999) argue that people often define violence that excludes their own behaviors.

[13] "Rank up" or "pullin rank" are emic terms that signify hyper-exertion of authority and power.

[14] This is in reference to when some students seek comprehension about class materials, some teachers apparently become defensive or aggressively unwilling to elaborate/explain.

[15] Here I offer some excerpts from my fieldnotes regarding my observation of an instance of adult to student violence:

I just literally jumped in my seat. My back was to the rest of the room. I was sitting facing the windows that peer into the courtyard observing the movements of the students. I had overheard the safety officer reprimanding a student but I was not prepared for the corporal punishment that was about to be meted out. I heard a lash and a scream. I jumped in my seat….I look around to face the room and the safety officer is standing next to a male student who is being very jittery; after the first lash to his butt he is in pain. He keeps motioning his head to signal "no more." The safety officer said "yuh shudda tink of what

yuh do fuss" (you should have thought of what you did first). The student has more licks to receive. The safety officer motions for him to turn around so as to be able to receive the next lash on his butt. In the safety officer's hand is a cane. The next lash is swift; the student jumps about, writhing, tears are apparent in his eyes now. He refuses to let the tears fall from his eyes. Deans are looking on. Students outside the room passing by are peeking in. I am looking on. Perhaps he is withholding the tears back because of the many spectators to his semi-public punishment. The head dean looks at me. I try to appear unfazed, with my pen and notepad firmly on the desk, away from my documenting hands. I am anything but unfazed. It has only been two lashes and it doesn't seem over. The safety officer motions for him to turn around again. I suppose after the pain dies down each time is when he finds the gumption to turn around again. The third lash is as equally swift but the student prematurely flinches and the safety officer partially hits himself. He says "look yuh makin meh hit meh own self; doh make meh get de pvc eh!" (look, you are making me hit my own self; don't make me get the pvc!). This is when it becomes apparent to me. I had noticed since my first day in the deans' room several pieces of slim wood, and pvc pipes lying upright in several corners. I had not paid those any mind, but now I did. These were perhaps potential canes. My mind is racing back to my own youth when I was caned. I did not like that experience at all. Then again, which child relishes the thought of a caning! My mind racing back to my childhood memories is immediately punctured by another lash, swift, painful. I almost cannot take it anymore. My stomach is churning. When is the end? How many will he receive in total? He is dancing around now, writhing; his facial contortions reveal most lucidly the visible and invisible pains of this moment. Another swift lash descends. And another. The eyes are filled of tears. It is now over. There is near hate brimming with the tears; which turns to solid shame as he must immediately leave the room since he has been dismissed…(January, 2010).

[16] Gayatri Spivak (1999), in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, articulates the notion of 'ideological epistemic violence', and pits center stage the processes and implications of 'representation.'

[17] The "Students" sub-category is further divided into four categories: 1) Academic Deficiencies as influence, 2) Values/ Skills Deficit as influence, 3) Genetics/ Biology as influence, and 4) Gambling as influence.

[18] There is consensus among researchers that there is not a single factor or 'cause' for violence (Cornell, 2006; Eron et al., 1994; Midlarsky & Klain, 2005).

[19] The only group for whom 'environmental' factors did not constitute the number one influence on school violence was, not too surprisingly, the Ministry of Education officials; for them 'schools' were the greatest 'cause' of   school violence. In critiquing schools, they (the MoE officials) often focused on teachers and not on structural aspects of schools per se.

[20] Barrel children are those left behind in TT in the care of a family member when either a father or (usually) a mother emigrates to the United States, Canada or the UK. The parent usually sends clothing, toys, essentials, gifts, etc. to the child and other family members in

barrels (usually around Christmas time), and it is from this practice the term 'barrel child' has emerged. I, too, was a barrel child, from the age of 9 until 17.

[21] See Noguera (1995) for an exposition on how zero tolerance policies in schools may foster the opposite effect.

[22] In an informal conversation with one teacher, she mentioned to me that she had a couple of students who, after five years in Form 5 (Grade 10), had failed most of their national exams and when they repeated one or two extra years of preparation, they passed all of their subjects. This affirmed for her that many students at SSS, and similar schools, are capable of competing nationally but that they needed more time and supplementary resources (informal communication, 2010).

[23] The rollout of SEMP coincided with the global rollout of EFA (Education For All). EFA was crafted in 1990 and re-tooled in 2000. Some of its aims include universal primary school education and improving access to education for girls. It represents a global discourse, impels the deployment and direction of considerable aid, and impacts planning within Ministries of Education across the world.

[24] Three years into this pilot project, the MoE decided to end it. As of September 2013, girls were again being enrolled at SSS. This decision was rendered without much input from the major stakeholders at SSS, and without much evaluation of its impact.

[25] For application of this approach in analyzing intractable conflicts, see Coleman 2011.

[26] Danny Burns (2010) proffers a method that combines systems thinking with the elements of participatory action research: systemic action research: "Systemic action research is a form of action research that locates local action inquiry within a wider system taking into account both the effects that the system has on local issues, and vice versa" (p. 7).

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