

7. The 21st Century Taxi Driver: An Examination of the Hidden Injuries of Race in Urban Canada

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“I saw the funniest thing the other day ... a White guy driving a cab.”
– Russell Peters, Stand-up Comedian from Toronto

1. Introduction

Canadian narratives on foreign credentials routinely refer to taxi drivers. Stories abound in everyday life regarding immigrants with foreign medical degrees and PhDs forced to drive taxi cabs in order to make a living. In the light of a growing awareness of such wasted immigrant talent, the search for practical and sustainable solutions has acquired a sense of urgency. However, what lacks focus in the dominant public discourse is that the underutilization of immigrant knowledge and skills, observed in the taxi industry as well as other low-pay-low-prestige service sectors, is also an experience almost exclusively reserved for racially visible newcomers. Despite the preponderance of people of colour with devalued credentials, the mainstream public image of the credentialed foreigner in Canada is ‘deracialized’ as a general workplace malfunction rather than a political action. So, to date, the collective consciousness and public articulation of the ‘foreign credentials gap’ is slightly out of sync with the historical reality that underutilized foreign credentialed knowledge is not a generic phenomenon, thereby diverting attention from relevant and critical information needed to ensure sound judgments in social policy. This chapter engages some historical discourses on ‘pushing cab’ in order to illustrate how the taxi industry in contemporary urban Canada has evolved into a ‘brown collar ghetto.’ It argues that the 21st century big-city taxi driver as an ideal type must be understood in the context of global processes, as both a symbol of the foreign credentials gap and as an urban adaptation of people of colour living in the interstices of a dominant White cultural hegemony.

2. The Cognitive Neurology and Sociology of Taxi Driving

British taxi drivers – who are famed for pontificating on any subject under the sun – have been given brain scans by cognitive neurologists at University College London and were found to have a larger “*hippocampus*” compared with other British people (Maguire et al., 2000). Researchers also found part of the hippocampus grew even larger as the taxi drivers spent more time in the job, indicating their brain changes its structure to accommodate their huge amount of navigating experience. It is now hypothesized – at least in British cognitive neuroscience – that driving a taxi is a mind-taxing and mind-building occupation that demands exigent, on-the-job training in many areas of urban geography, as well as city planning, people skills, business

decisions and work smart techniques. On this account, the British Broadcasting Corporation ran a special report with the following words of advice for British citizens – “The next time you are trapped by the stream-of-consciousness ranting of a 'cocky cabbie,' you would do well to remember that when it comes to intelligence, he or she may have the upper hand” (BBC News, 14.03.2000).

The following British news story documents the cognitive neurological theory of how London taxi drivers' brains grow on the job.

LONDON: Cabbies' brains adapt to hold "the knowledge"

Cab drivers' grey matter enlarges and adapts to help them store a detailed mental map of the city, according to research.

Taxi drivers given brain scans by scientists at University College London had a larger hippocampus compared with other people. This is a part of the brain associated with navigation in birds and animals.

The scientists also found part of the hippocampus grew larger as the taxi drivers spent more time in the job.

I never noticed part of my brain growing - it makes you wonder what happened to the rest of it.

David Cohen, taxi driver

"There seems to be a definite relationship between the navigating they do as a taxi driver and the brain changes," said Dr Eleanor Maguire, who led the research team.

She said: "The hippocampus has changed its structure to accommodate their huge amount of navigating experience."

The research confirms something which London's black-cab drivers have suspected for some time - learning their way around the capital is a brain-straining feat ...

The hippocampus is at the front of the brain and was examined in Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scans on 16 London cabbies.

The tests found the only area of the taxi drivers' brains that was different from the 50 other "control" subjects were the left and right hippocampus ...

The posterior hippocampus was also more developed in taxi drivers who had been in the career for 40 years than in those who had been driving for a shorter period ... (BBC News, March 14, 2000)

At the task-specific level of cognitive neurology, the intellectual strength of modern taxi drivers can be articulated as a situational response to the intense exercise of their mental faculties on the job. In this respect, the 'cocky cabbie' syndrome is attributed to an individuals' adaptation to an urban *brain strain*.

However, this chapter will demonstrate that from the wider perspective of the occupational structure, the discourse on the contemporary taxicab driver can also be viewed as an international *brain drain*.

Consider, for instance, that the intellectual mystique of the taxi driver has long been an urban curiosity and the subject of public scrutiny in North America, as well as in the United Kingdom. But the discourse on *cause* here is more closely related to macro-sociology than cognitive neuroscience. Contemporary urban taxi

drivers in Canada are perceived to have a high degree of foreign-academic education often unrelated to the mind-expanding grind of taxi work.

In the 21st century, immigrants to Canada are commonly referred to as *Road Scholars*.¹ The province of Ontario and its capital Toronto is purported to have more foreign-trained doctors driving taxis than any other place in the world.² Their learnedness and educational acumen is recurrently acknowledged as feature of the immigrant experience, not merely a cognitive adjustment to a challenging service occupation. So, the perspicacity of urban Canada's taxicab core is typically achieved *before-the-job* as opposed to *on-the-job*.

Early in the 21st century, the Canadian recording artist Amanda Marshall immortalized the postindustrial taxi driver in a song that reached the top of the music charts in the Great White North, issuing a reproving refrain – “*Don’t assume everything on the surface is what you see...that taxi driver’s got a PhD.*” In contemporary urban Canada, a ‘cocky cabbie’ does not merely signify a taxi driver with amazing powers of navigational memory and recall, who flaunts this prowess. It is a concept associated with an over-educated and often disenchanting immigrant employed in an under-paid service industry. Indeed, today, the occupation of big-city taxi driving is often seen as the quintessential “survival job,” (Wright, 2005) and default occupational category, for over-educated and displaced immigrant workers whose basic survival is contingent upon a fall-back-entry-level position. “Pushing cab” or “driving a hack” is often a source of crushing disillusionment and deep-seated resentment for skilled immigrants. While at the same time it can drive the general public to distraction over the perceived workforce debacle. Accordingly, beneath the surface of the brainy reputation of our low-wage-and-even-lower-prestige big-city taxi driver is a “learning-earning” market incongruity that is typically related to the possession of a foreign-academic degree. The common-sense understanding of this human capital problem (Mincer 1957, 1958, 1970, 1976; Becker 1975, 1996) can be expressed this way: if highly-educated professionals selected by the immigration program often end up working in jobs normally held by less skilled persons from the native-born population, then in effect these immigrant skills are wasted. In a sociological sense, the intellectual acumen attributed to the typical urban taxicab driver in Canada is rooted in the political economy of immigration and not primarily an occupationally enlarge hippocampus. While it may be true that their brains adapt to on-the-job knowledge, the deeper intellectual reputation of big-city taxicab drivers in modern Canada is more directly linked to the underutilization of immigrant knowledge – or, what sociologists have formally designate as the *foreign credentials gap* (McDade 1988; Butler 1993; Conger 1994; Mata 1994; Foster 2006).

The foreign credentials gap has muscled its way into the collective consciousness of the nation and has become part of the dominant cultural discourse on the political economy of immigration in Canada. For instance, Jane Cullingworth, the executive director of Skills for Change, a Toronto agency that works with newcomers, stated the job for agencies like hers isn't helping these newcomers learn new skills – most arrive in Canada skilled and well-educated. Rather, “the challenge is linking the immigrants with the employers and opening the eyes of business

leaders to the talents newcomers can offer ... Toronto has the best-educated taxi drivers, skilled immigrants who can't get a job in their profession in Canada's largest city" (Toronto Star, 11.10.2005). Recently, a national television news service ran a human interest story on foreign medical physicians under the title-caption: "*10,000 doctors drive taxis in Canada.*"³ While preparing *The Night Shift* (2005), a 30-minute television documentary that examines the plight of underemployed foreign-trained professionals in Toronto, filmmaker Jawad Jafry is purported to have come across "the taxicab neurosurgeon" whose foreign-certification has relegated him to driving the night shift in a Crown Victoria in order to eke out a living for his family in Scarborough. [The taxicab-neurosurgeon refused to take part in the film, reflecting what has become a common foreign credentials experiential arc of disillusionment, embarrassment and resentment (Foster, 2008)] Recently, to highlight the baffling exclusion of international trained physicians in the face of Canada's chronic doctor shortage and exasperating "patient wait times" crisis⁴, one prominent social activist caustically commented "[W]hen I want to see a doctor I don't go to the emergency ward of the hospital, I just call a cab." Indeed, even a Federal Minister of Canadian Immigration and Citizenship openly declared in a speech to the Canadian Bar Association in 2003 that the best conversations that he has ever had were with taxicab drivers. Why? "Because they're foreign doctors and they're not recognized" (CP, May 4 2003). The Immigration Minister went on to add that the country faces a shortage of up to one million skilled workers within the next five years, acknowledging the country "needs to honour foreign credentials for professionals such as doctors, dentists and engineers so they are not forced to take menial jobs once they arrive here" (CP, May 4 2003). [Subsequent projections regarding skill shortages continue to climb (Brennan, 2008)].

The foreign credentials gap is typically theorized as a dysfunctional societal condition and a market-system anomaly. In this regard, Canadians from all walks of life are now intently focused on the economic inexpedience and democratic contradiction of foreign-trained doctors, engineers, PhDs and assorted professionals driving taxis, or hustling pizzas, or doing other low-level jobs in society. Yet, what lacks clear focus in the dominant public discourse(s) is that the underutilization of immigrant knowledge and skills is disproportionately experienced by visible minority immigrants (Grant and Sweetman 2004, Li 2003, Picot 2004). Recent, nuanced analysis of income differentials by field of study (Anisef, Sweet and Frempong 2003) reveals that while immigrants tend to be trained in prestigious professions that are associated with the highest incomes within the Canadian labour market (e.g., engineering, physical sciences and commerce), racialized Canadians with foreign training in these fields of study were the ones who tended to be most underpaid relative to White, native born Canadians. Further, other research suggests that the initial wage gap for racialized immigrants is an important pay equity issue because it results from both an undervaluing of the immigrant's professional credentials and from discrimination (Li, 2003; Reitz, 2001). However, the fact that there is preponderance of non-White immigrants with professional foreign credentials that have been devalued in Canada's big-city taxi industry, as well as other sectors of the "secondary labour market," (Falkinger, Josef and Volker Grossmann, 2001) is not

recurrently acknowledge in everyday life; and to the extent that it is acknowledged *at all* it is usually seen as an extenuating and supererogatory circumstance. This indicates that Canada is an exemplar of what Winant (2000, 2006) called a “post-racial society” based on the ideology of colour-blindness and meritocracy. Here, race and the racial dynamics of the foreign credentials gap is not perceived as a structural reality of the political economy, but rather, irregularities in an officially non-racist system (Simmons, 1998; Foster, 2006).

The modern foreign credentials gap must be deconstructed in the context of global processes. Today, some of the brightest minds from developing countries in the “Global South” are being siphoned off by the developed nations in the “Global North⁵,” only to languish at the bottom-end of the workforce division of labour in the secondary labour market. In the last several decades the process of “economic globalization” (Watkins, 2003) – the latest stage of capitalism – has led to the rapid disintegration of the old industrial model of employment. The broad sociological impact of this globalization has been to destabilize local economies and displace indigenous brown and black populations in the South, unleashing tremendous international mass migration movements to international urban centres, precipitating the rise of a chain of world or “global cities” (King 1990; Sassen 1991) that cannot be easily contained in the old nation-state system (Harvey 1996; Hedley 2002). The upshot is, there is now a preponderance of non-White immigrants in the taxi industry, as well as other low-status-low-prestige occupations in the postindustrial society’s secondary labour market, and they tend to face eroding employment norms that regulate the workplace and create racialized “job ghettos” (Allahar and Coté, 1998: 132-3) that are difficult for many to escape. In addition, immigrants of colour who are forced to compete for menial jobs can be shaped negatively in public perception, which in turn takes the onus off of the government who responds with cutbacks and policy-restraints while skilled jobs go unfilled. This vicious circle further heightens competition for menial jobs, and increases under-employment and unemployment. Accordingly, immigrants living in poverty could create pressures – or at least the perception of pressures – on the social safety net, which in turn could lead to public demands for a reduction in social programs and other support for immigrants (Keung, 2005). Therefore, while we can expect that the injustice of the foreign credentials gap will continue to resonate in society, we can also expect the perception of immigrants of colour as a liability or social problem to become more widespread.

This chapter argues that the commonsense “typification” (Berger and Luckman, 1966: 68) in everyday life is out of sync with the historical “ideal type” of the taxi driver (Weber, 1964: 61-5). The 21st century taxi industry in urban Canada has become a reservoir for the reserve-army of wasted immigrant talent, and an insignia for current forms of transnational stratification and labour segmentation built on preexisting forms of “racial urbanisms” (Nightingale 2001). However, despite the preponderance of immigrants of colour with devalued credentials, the Whitestream public discourse of the credentialed foreigner here is “deracialized” (Peny, 1991; Orey and Ricks, 2007) as a general economic glitch and workplace malfunction, rather than a political action. The dominant cultural narratives of the

big-city cabdriver conspire to define the foreign credentials gap as a human capital “selection” and “assessment” problematic as oppose to a racial problematic. Consequently, to date, the collective imagination and articulation of the credentialed foreigner in Canada is slightly out of sync with the historical reality that underutilized foreign credentialed knowledge is also intricately conjoined to racially visible immigrants, who are relegated to “brown collar ghettos.”⁶ Insofar as the workforce ghettoization is not conventionally raised as a “normal” feature of life, it is also not recognized as a violence perpetrated on racialized immigrant workers and their families. Hence, this “erasure of race” (Banerji, 1995) from the dominant public discourse on the political economy of immigration diverts attention from the relevant and critical information needed to ensure sound judgments in social policy.

This chapter examines the big-city taxi driver in contemporary Canada as both a symbol of the foreign credentials gap, and as an urban survival strategy of people for colour living in the interstices of a dominant White cultural hegemony. It postulates that in 21st century Canada – as with other contemporary “postindustrial-knowledge-based-credential societies” (Bell 1973; Collins 1979; Hage and Powers 1992; Marshall, 1994) – driving a big-city taxicab has become an entry level position for a cosmopolitan/Third World intelligentsia, who are required to take on this and other kinds of “contingent work” (Freedman, 1985 Polivka, 1996 Barker and Christensen, 1998 Kalleberg, 2000) concentrated at the periphery of a world economy. In this view, the 21st century taxi driver can be seen as an exemplar of an international division of labour, at the historical juncture of a fundamental transformation from a class based to a culture-and-colour based political economy (Clark and Lipset, 1991). Thus, in this “new world order” (Galbraith 1991; Fukuyama 1991; Richmond 1994) of globalism and diaspora (Cohen, 1997), the taxicab driver is best captured in the persona of “*the racialized immigrant*” – a transnational worker/newcomer trapped in the political and economic cross-hairs of a postindustrial/ postcolonial/ neoconservative moment. This chapter further contends that while preponderance of non-White immigrants in the big-city taxi industry is a normality that often goes unnoticed and unspoken in Canada, its patterned existence nevertheless reflects the dire consequences for labour market outcomes and the quality of citizenship to which racialized group members can aspire.

Through the examination of some historical and contemporary discourses on the taxi driver, this chapter will demonstrate how the underutilization of immigrant knowledge is recycled and articulated through a race-neutral, market-logic of nation-building that conceals a marketplace with inextricably racialized ramifications. While the remarks here concentrate on the political economy, this immigration perspective fuses critical race theory⁷ (theorizing race as an analytic tool for deconstructing patterns of power and inequality) with political economy (the geo-cultural construction of capitalist economics). This work presupposes that any critical understanding of foreign credentials underutilization and discounting must consider “transnational urbanization” (Miyoshi, 1993; Portes, 1999; Smith 2001) as a source of “secondary imperialism” (Dua, 1999) of Canada’s political economy. Hence, in contemporary urban Canada, discourses on the taxi driver represent a connecting link between the global forces (of capitalism, neo-liberalism, and White

cultural hegemony) and a diversified social order of everyday life. In this respect, the typification of the over-educated, visibly transnationalized taxi driver, caught between the core and the periphery of global economy (Wallerstein, 1979, 1982) is no mere local affair or anomaly, but holds the promise for a critical understanding of social transformation.

3. The Taxi Driver in the United States and Canada

Discourses on the 'White Working-Class' Taxi Driver in the Research of Fred Davis and Elizabeth Hoffmann

The popular culture persona of the "Taxi Driver" (1976) in the United States was uniquely captured on the big screen in the image of the tormented, ex-Marine Travis Bickle – the twisted love-child of Western/American imperialism, alienated by the Cold War ideological contradictions of the old military/industrial complex. This film probed the psychological madness within a convoluted, inarticulate, lonely, war-vet cab driver, who lashes out with a misdirected anger like an exploding time bomb at the world that belittled him. Travis Bickle was a 26 year old loner – portrayed by actor Robert De Niro – working as a night-time cabbie cruising the mean streets of New York City, while he obsessively reflects on the ugliness and decadence of urban life around him, and becomes increasingly disturbed over his own estrangement, feeding his urge to lash out. This award-winning film, directed by Martin Scorsese and written by screenwriter Paul Schrader, has subsequently been described as a gritty, disturbing, nightmarish modern film classic, which examines urban alienation through a protagonist who intimately surveys the contours of early modernity from the front seat of his yellow cab.⁸ In this connection, Bickle represents *the working-class anti-hero* epitomized in the American cabbie folklore of the citified-hard-driving-blue-collar "Boulevard Cowboys" (Major, 1970) common at the time in Manhattan, New York, and on the South Side of Chicago – a wild-eye, white-bread, 20th century White-working-class stiff, with a cocky hippocampus steeped in a American bravado ("Who you talkin' to?") and a pathological sense of White entitlement ("You talkin' to me!?!").

This cinematic metaphor of the Taxi Driver has a sociological reference point. Fred Davis' (1959) seminal urban research study of "*The Cab Driver and his Fare: Facets of a Fleeting Relationship*" represents a path-setting analysis into the atypical employment of the big-city taxi driver that anticipated the urban estrangement and class alienation that was later dramatized in the saga of Travis Bickle. Davis set out the parameters for all cab driver sociology to follow, as both an exploration of urban processes (city research) and the historical continuities and discontinuities of the driver-worker ("ideal type" methodology).

In his participant observation study of the Chicago "hack" in the 1950s, Davis identified cab driving as an exemplar of an atypical, blue-collar, manly trade⁹. "Pushing cab" meant that drivers did not occupy a single designated station, window, or office. Instead, they roamed the streets continuously, having contact with a wide variety of people in many different parts of the city, often at night. Their income was always uncertain, and it could be affected by road conditions, generosity of

passengers, weather, skillfulness of dispatchers, personal ability, and luck. Consequently, for Davis, cab driving in 1950s Chicago (“Hog Butcher of the World” as Sandberg immortalized¹⁰) represented a mobile social laboratory for excavation into both “precarious forms of work” (Vosko, Zukewich, and Cranford, 2003; Fudge and Owens, 2006) in the anonymous market exchange system of industrial capitalism; and the “class relationships and antagonisms” that it reaffirmed in the big city. As he observed:

Patently, his status is low, in large part precisely because unlike the professional and other practitioners commanding prestige, he can hardly be distinguished from his clients in task-relevant competence. Not only is the operation of a motor car a widely possessed skill, but a large proportion of fares have, for example, a very good idea of the best routes to their destination, the rules and practices of the road, and the charges for a trip. Though they are rarely as adept or sophisticated in these matters as the cabdriver, the discrepancy is so small that many think they know the driver’s job as well as he does. Periodically, a cabdriver will boldly challenge a difficult and critical passenger to take over the wheel himself. Others, wishing to impress on the fare that theirs is a real services requiring special talent and skill, will resort to darting nimbly in and out of traffic, making neatly executed U-turns and leaping smartly ahead of other cars when the traffic light changes (1959:160).

The taxi industry in 1950s Chicago entailed an occupational dissonance between the cabdrivers “presentation of self” (Goffman, 1959) formed through claims on skill or knowledge on one hand, and the cabdrivers low “social position” (Adler, 2001) determined by industrial market relations on the other.

From the level of capitalist economics, the ‘cocky cabbie’ syndrome took shape in industrial Chicago in the form of a tortured and distorted response to a repressive and alienating work experience. On the one hand, as we learn from Davis research, the fleeting and random nature of the cabdriver’s contact with the passenger was conducive to a sense of exemption from the normal interactive rules of everyday social encounters; allowing for a sense of license in asking probing questions, and “sounding off” on a great many topics and issues than do others who regularly meet the public (Davis, 1959:160). On the other hand, being exposed to labour devaluation, and the public degradation of their work, a certain amount of brash self-assertiveness also served as a resource for a cabdriver in counteracting the constant public threats to the self that the occupational role imposed. Hence, the hard-driving-fast-tongued-mean-streets cowboy *front* was a natural extension of blue-collar alienation in the industrial city.

Davis referred to Goffman’s (1959:151-152) formulation of a category of “non-persons” to characterize the asymmetrical relationship and role of the cabdriver in an industrial society:

Goffman speaks of a category of persons who in some social encounters are treated as if they were not present, whereas in fact they may be indispensable for sustaining the performance. He terms these “non-persons” and gives as an example a servant at a social gathering. Although cabdrivers

are not consistently approached in this way by fares, it happens often enough for it to become a significant theme of their work. Examples are legion. Maresca¹¹ tells of the chorus girl who made a complete change from street clothing into stage costume as he drove her to her theater, More prosaic instances include the man and wife who, managing to suppress their anger while on the street, launch into a bitter quarrel the moment they are inside the cab; or the well-groomed young couple who after a few minutes roll over on the back seat to begin petting; or the businessman who loudly discusses details of a questionable business deal. Here the driver is expected to, and usually does, act as if he were merely an extension of the automobile he operates. In actuality, of course, he is acutely aware of what goes on in his cab, and, although his being treated as a non-person implies a degraded status, it also affords him a splendid vantage point from which to witness a rich variety of human schemes and entanglements (Davis, 1959: 159).

In Davis' view, the occupation of taxi driving in industrial city Chicago, when it was the Hog Butcher of the World, not only epitomized the "deskilling process" (where the driver "can hardly be distinguished from his clients in task-relevant competence") associated with the lowest of the low-status-and-low-prestige service sector, it also implied a degraded social relationship where the typical cabbie actually approached the public status of a "non-person" in Goffman's (1959: 95) sense of the term). Accordingly, any intellectual mystique of Davis' taxi driver was closer to being an example of mental opprobrium than mental superiority.

Driving a big-city taxi in 1950s industrial America was an over-stimulated mind-taxing and mind-building occupation that contemporary cognitive neurologists have associated with the development of an enlarged hippocampus. But in Davis' view, the taxi service industry in this historical moment was actually distinguished more by the depreciation of the driver's work status than their acquired on-the-job knowledge and grey matter. So, while these Chicago boulevardiers, if you will, may have developed 'big brains' and 'fast tongues' through the experiential exigencies of their job, the typical cabdriver in the industrial heartland of America was often subject to social processes of deskilling (by the their clients and the general public) in which they were denied claims on special knowledge or abilities, and effectively denuded of occupational prestige. As a general consequence this in turn tended to lead to their wages remaining relatively low or even falling, and insecurity of their employment increasing.

Here, the hard-driving-fast-tongued-mean-street-smart mystique, or presentation of self, of Davis' Chicago taxi driver, was a defensive reaction, not decisive action. A street-smart façade, and/or brazen manner, and/or daredevil *front* could all serve in one way or another as dramaturgic tools to combat the formidable processes of social invisibility. That is, one way to combat being publicly reduced to a non-person, as well as face-down exposure to the potential risks and perils of the city's mean streets, is to take on the persona of the 'manly' boulevard cowboy. Davis's cabdriver in the mean streets of industrial America represented the working-class antihero, armed with an unwavering sense of urban mean-street justice. As he observed:

Unable, either directly through choice or indirectly through location, to select clients, the cabdriver is deprived of even minimal controls. His trade therefore exposes him to a variety of hazards and exigencies which few others, excepting policemen, encounter as frequently; for example: stick-ups, belligerent drunks, women in labor, psychopaths, counterfeiters, and fare-jumpers (Davis, 1959:159).

So, whereas the old west cowboy was home on the range, the cocky boulevard cowboy was at home among the deranged – the stick-up artists, the belligerent drunks, and assorted psychopaths that still flourish on the fringes and in the cracks of the big city, as it made the historical evolution from an industrial to a postindustrial reality.

...

It is worth of note that Elizabeth Hofmann's (2006) more recent research on pushing cab in mid-western United States is revealing in its similarities to Davis' mid-20th century Chicago. Together, both Davis and Hoffman have framed the historical arc from the age of industrialization to the age of globalization – marking the transition in urban alienation studies from the hidden injuries of class¹² to the hidden injuries of race.

In her study *Driving Street Justice: The Taxicab Driver as the Last American Cowboy*¹³, Hoffmann argues that there are still elements of Travis-Bickle that can be recognized in the contemporary taxi driver in middle America, particularly evident in their typical version of worker solidarity, and the social construction of their White working-class, blue-collaredness. Her work draws on situational theories of distributive and relational justice to explore how acts of street justice – punishing or aiding fellow drivers and passengers – enhance the cabdriver's workplace solidarity in an occupation based on contingent employment and precarious work. (This historical continuity in the trade also finds expression in the Toronto taxi industry which has a tradition of collective defense conceptualized by the term "Code 13," the taxi industry's rallying call for a driver in distress. When a Code 13 is called over the radio, almost every driver in the area who hears the call will assist.)

While everyday people may tend to think of the cabdriver as being "the loser guy, that doesn't take a shower, and runs around and tries to rip people off" (Hoffman, 2006: 32), Hoffmann's taxicab driver is much closer to what she calls "the last American cowboy," facing down blustering city toughs with a frontier-man's courage and true grit.

Like the cowboy, alone on the range, relying on horse and self, the cabdriver handles most difficulties of the job alone. Both the cabdriver and the cowboy uphold the ethics of their occupations, maintaining the street justice or the "frontier justice" of their respective occupational cultures, even when others of their occupation are not present. However, like the cowboy who will band together with other cowboys in time of need, the driver, too, will work with others to ensure that cabdrivers and passengers enjoy safety and justice on the road (2006:32).

As modern mean-street cowboys in small-town-white-bread Indiana these cabdrivers often rode alone, but would come together when the need arose (Hoffmann, 2006: 32). Inevitably, taxi drivers have prided themselves on their physical courage and camaraderie – drivers banding together to help each other in the face of common dangers. This emphasis – as Kimberly Berry (1997) noted in her parallel research in Halifax, Canada – has helped to create a masculine work-culture, as has the fact that drivers have ‘worked for themselves’, choosing their own hours of work and conditions of employment. The need for mechanical skills and the assumption, since its invention, that the automobile was a ‘masculine’ machine have also tended to gender taxi-driving as a ‘male’ occupation. In this manly world, women drivers can (only) fit in to the extent that they are willing to be ‘just one of the boys’.

Hoffman (2006:36) observed that whether accomplished alone or as a group, street justice was an expression of the mid-western taxi driver’s workplace solidarity and encompassed two key norms of safety and justice. In this way, she said ... they evoke an image of the lone cowboy who occasionally relies on others for help in time of need. Just as the cowboy rides alone on the open range, the cabdriver drives alone through the webs of streets, sometimes in the early morning, sometimes in the dead of night, sometimes in the pulse of rush hour. Just as the cowboy would sometimes act outside the law, independently or collectively, and embrace "frontier justice" to enforce the norms of the cowboy code, similarly, the cabdriver occasionally engages in "street justice," alone or in groups, when the cab-driving norms are violated. As I mentioned above, I refer to these solidarity-stimulating, unsanctioned acts by the cabdrivers as "street justice" in order to capture the unofficial, justice-focused nature of their actions (Hoffmann, 2006:135).

In an occupation where danger and unpredictability are ever-present risk factors, as Hoffman (2006: 32) notes, cabdrivers often place a premium on control of their working conditions in order to ensure their safety (physical and financial) on the road; and are predisposed toward situational ethics, in that they expect (require) co-workers, passengers, and managers to treat them even-handedly. Cab driving culture in middle America, she argues, involves a high level of worker solidarity, with drivers relying on fellow drivers for assistance, working together in the face of conflict, and imposing various forms of social control when the cab driving community's norms are violated.

...street justice encompasses both relational and distributive elements. Immediate, results-focused concerns (distributive justice) affected the cabdrivers' feelings of membership and identity (relational justice). In addition, group membership and drivers' identity as taxicab drivers (relational justice) were related to their income and safety (distributive justice). In turn, their shared concerns for both immediate distributive justice and mutual awareness of membership in, and identity with, the taxicab occupation (relational justice) enhanced the cabdrivers' workplace solidarity (2007:44-45).

In Hoffman's city research, street justice involved both punishment of norm-violating behavior and defense of those in need. Means of norm-enforcement ranged from stealing fares from drivers ("long-hooders")¹⁴ who stole others' fares, to abandoning a young woman on the edge of town (for habitual "fare-jumping"). Defense of those in need could involve instances when a cabdriver feared financial harm, such as passengers who refused to pay or threatened to rob the driver, or bodily harm, such as drunken students who threatened to invade the cab or passengers who physically harassed the driver. To ensure street justice on the road the cabdrivers would even sacrifice income, such as missed fares. These costs to the driver underscored the tremendous symbolic component in some of these street justice acts (Hoffmann, 2006:45).

Cab driving in middle America, Hoffmann argues, typically involves a high level of worker solidarity, with drivers relying on fellow drivers for assistance, working together in the face of conflict, and imposing various forms of social control when the cab driving community's norms are violated. Her research illuminates both individual and group acts of "street justice" – underscoring both the innovative, unofficial nature of individual and collective cabbie behaviour focused on ethics of safety and justice. Street justice allows the cabdriver, who works alone and is self-reliant for most job duties, to benefit from the assistance of other drivers and uphold their shared norms, even when acting alone. In this way, street justice strengthens worker solidarity in the cab driving industry, reinforces the courageous fiber of the occupational culture, and helps position working class drivers in their blue-collar struggle for dignity and status recognition.

At the same time, Hoffman readily admits that the particular sample of predominately White taxicab drivers of her study do not fully apply to cab driving in larger transnationalized cities where (as we will see) vulnerable populations of visible minority immigrants tend to be over-represented in the contingent work of this industry, and hence, are more likely to feel the full impact of job ghettoization.

...

Like Davis, Hoffman's thesis related to the 'cocky cabbie' syndrome is that the public devaluation of their labour effectively works to deny taxi drivers access to the mainstream while simultaneously taking away the conventional tools that can be used to build the "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986) necessary to resist exploitation, and democratize and transform society. The cowboy/cabdrivers' "rescue ethic" is an unconventional and situational attempt by taxi drivers to reclaim skill status – in a role in which drivers are deskilled and rendered non-persons as a matter of public definition (Hoffmann, 2006: 46).

Like Hoffman, Davis' 1950s Chicago cabdriver subjects were predominately White working-class stiffs, often subject to an extreme form of social invisibility, forced to manage the "stigma" of a spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963). As he saw it, the taxi driver and client relationship was a case of hyper-anonymity and randomness based solely on the pecuniary principle, thereby, weakening and attenuating social connections, sentiments and constrains. In this respect, the cabdriver in industrial urban America was generally perceived as an object of reproach mingled with slight feelings of public disdain. As such, the role of the taxi

driver in the industrial cities of America was often discredited and diminished, and subject to a Travis Bickle-like ignominy and exposure to all manner of urban blight – decadence, violence and decay. Subsequent cab driver research has consistently found the exposure to risk of physical assault, robberies, and discriminatory treatment is a major historical continuity in the industry (Bidhu, 2001). Taxi drivers in the United States and Canada still experience workplace non-fatal assault and homicidal rates higher than any other occupation except that of police officers and private security guards (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). Statistics on taxi driver homicides across the USA and Canada show that 85% of the fatal injuries are gunshot wounds; 82% of the assaults occur at night, and 74% of the deaths are due to head and neck injuries (Rathbone, 1994); given this, proponents argue that at a minimum protective shield are a relatively low cost and low maintenance technology that would protect drivers in these most common high-risk scenarios. Many big-city taxi companies have taken voluntary steps to install bullet-resistant partitions, as well as global positioning systems (GPS), or vehicular cameras in their vehicles. Meanwhile, continued stress from assaults often leads to physiological and psychological conditions such as fatigue, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and death. As in the past, today most drivers perceive their job as dangerous physically and emotionally, and only continue driving taxis because they do not have other occupational options (Lor, 2003).

Both Davis and Hoffman contour the city activities and practices of the cabdriver in the persona of the cowboy boulevardier, upholding the value and dignity of their work through the situational ethics of “street justice.” Travis Bickle is only the image of frontier grit and justice gone wild – the exaggerated case of the cowboy vigilante’s revenge on his urban tormentors (the city’s assorted psychopaths, counterfeiter, fare-jumpers and the like) and class hierarchies (that rank him at the bottom of the socio-economic totem pole). Yet, Travis Bickle’s obsession and madness frames the historical contours of White working-class alienation, and prescribes the blue-collar de-alienation – ‘courage and comradeship’ – courses of action for the typical cab driver.

In Fred Davis’ ‘industrial America’ and Elizabeth Hoffmann’s ‘middle America’ the *front* of the hard-driving-fast-tongued-mean-streets cowboy was a primary dramaturgic tool – both to combat the formidable processes of public deskilling and social invisibility created by traditional relations of power and subordination in a class society; and to face-down exposure to the potential physical risks and mind-taxing perils of the city.

In the end, public deskilling, social invisibility, and collective solidarity are major continuities in cab history. In many fundamental ways, taxi-driving in the old urban-industrial complex, and its blue-collar vestiges in the present, resemble the atypical, non-standard job experience that dominates the service sector in postindustrial society today. But there is also a fundamental difference. Today, urban centres like New York and Chicago and London and Toronto all belong to or aspire to a special category of world or “global city” (King 1990; Sassen 1991). They all have been more visibly transnationalized in the age of globalization, and they indicate that previous descriptions of the urban experience may no longer be

adequate. Today, global-city research is about urban processes as multiscale phenomena rather than forces contained by national boundaries (Keil and Kipfer, 2003: 336). Global-city formation occurs when urban regions are articulated by increasing ethnoracial diversity and cosmopolitanism and assume their place within international circuits of capital, commodities, services and people (Keil and Kipfer, 2003; Satzewich and Wong, 2003). In the global city, the taxi industry is still both an urban icon and public space. Taxis are still an integral feature of the city's visual landscape, a crucial transit link, and a major contributor to the city's environmental quality. The Yellow and the Checker are still enduring symbols that the city never stops (Taxi 07: Roads Forward, 2007). But today in the global city, taxi driving is a transnationalized industry (Luo, 2004). In this respect, 'pushing cab' is a small indication of a very big circumstance. Today, it provides a glimpse into the postindustrial world of the "North-South Divide" (Therien, 1999), where class relations and workforce stratification are now formed through segmentations of culture and colour. The Travis Bickle-like alienation that once epitomized the White working-class boulevard cowboy in the industrial city has now been transformed along colour lines in the global city. Thus, the hidden blue-collar traumas of the taxi driver in the New York or Chicago or Toronto of yesterday have been recast by economic globalization and urban transnationalism into hidden injuries of race today.

The Contemporary Discourse on the 'Racialized' Taxi Driver in the Research of Abraham, Aparna Sundar and Dale Whitmore:

A newspaper article entitled, *Armed with degrees, they drive our cabs* (London Free Press, 2004-01-17) recites the typical narrative on the symbiotic relationship between globalization and the taxi industry in urban Canada:

Thousands of professionals have been lured to Canadian cities like London with promises of lucrative careers and a prosperous, secure future in a new land. Once they get here, the reality is sobering. And dream-shattering

Maybe he picked you up one day. Maybe he took you to work on a rainy morning.

And while his windshield wipers slapped water away from your view of the outside world, maybe you didn't see the pile of medical books on the passenger seat of his cab.

His name is Dr. Mohommad Farhad Bayat. He's a London (Ontario) taxi driver.

He's happy here because his family is safe.

He's happy here because his children grew up with Storybook Gardens instead of landmine fields, and they go to good schools and will never be forced to fight for any army.

He's happy because his wife won't be killed or threatened, even though her hair shows.

His prayers have been answered.

But not his dreams.

The continuity of the taxi industry as a White working-class, 'blue collar ghetto' has been disrupted in Canadian history by the globe-trotting credentialed

foreigner. Most Canadians are now familiar with the contemporary tales of the *Road Scholar* – the highly-skilled immigrant primarily from a non-White, non-European country who has gravitated to the Canadian urban centres to begin permanent residency stuck behind the wheel of a taxi in order to eke out a living for their families in their adopted home.

Indeed, the modern typification of the urban taxi driver in Canada as an over-educated and disenfranchised and White-challenged immigrant is now so prevalent it has reached the folkloric status of an urban legend. It is almost a rite-of-passage in contemporary urban Canada to know somebody, or to at least know somebody who knows somebody, with a prestigious academic degree and a huge talent from a foreign-Third-World country who is “pushing cab.” As with other urban legends, the fretful tales of “sobering and dream-shattering” survival surrounding Canada’s road scholars confirm the hidden precariousness of contemporary postindustrial living. They are cautionary tales that capture the collective imagination through narratives that contradict the smooth veneer of everyday society. Credentials undervaluation and devaluation are now often seen as a portent of contemporary doom, on a par with lurking terrorists, and unscrupulous companies out to make a buck at any cost. Perhaps unlike many other urban legends, however, the tales of discounting immigrant skills in contemporary society poses a threat to both the commonsense of reality and conventional world view. So, whereas the tale of the crazed killer who makes the telephone call from the upstairs bedroom can unhinge the ordinary sense of security in everyday life – the tale of a the racialized immigrant doctor from Kabul (escaped from Afghanistan’s brutal regimen) who is forced to drive a taxicab because he can’t get licensed to practice medicine in Canada, can unhinge the very tenets of liberal democratic ideology and the values of meritocracy and fair-play. This implies that not only are the values of distributive justice contradicted by the existence of the foreign credentials gap, but also, a great deal of social potential and human capital ability necessary for society’s development and survival are wasted. Therefore, brainy taxicab drivers represent narratives on the foreign credentials gap, within the dominant cultural discourse on political economy that contravenes the democratic merit principle and capitalist market logic of nation-building. They tear a hole in the fabric of conventional reality in ways that demand vigilance of the dominant cultural membership in shoring up – with counter-narratives of immigration “selection” and credential “assessment” contingencies and remedial market-mechanics.

One of the most significant sociological quests to bracket the urban legend and examine the urban facts of the big city taxi driver qua “the racialized immigrant” has been undertaken by researchers Sara Abraham, Aparna Sundar and Dale Whitmore.

Their study, *Toronto Taxi Drivers: Ambassadors of the City A Report on Working Conditions* (2008), represents an important contribution to an understanding of the image versus reality of the taxi driver, and to the deconstruction of the hidden injuries of race. For Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore (2008:22), taxi driving in Toronto is an immigrant industry that has evolved from a blue-collar to a brown-collar ghetto:

The taxi industry has always drawn heavily from immigrant groups, given the relative ease of entry in terms of starting capital. This trend has been accentuated in recent years, with deteriorating conditions causing native-born workers with other options to leave the industry. This, coupled with the changing ethno-racial profile of immigrants to Canada, has led to the preponderance of racialized workers in the taxi industry, as in other low income sectors in the city.

Although the taxi industry has historically employed workers with few other occupational options, until recently Whiteness was still the minimum culturally-sanctioned criteria for “driving a hack.” Yet, the structure of the taxi industry at present in Toronto (according to data obtained from the City, as of October 2006) is distinguished by an ethnoracially stratified division of labour and power consisting of hierarchical industry categories, which include – Ambassador Owner Operators, Standard Plate Owner Operators, Lease Drivers, Brokerages and Shift Drivers at the low end of the ranking system. Moreover, as Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore (2008: 18) found, *shift workers* – who are predominately racialized immigrants that now comprise the backbone of the industry and perform an essential frontline city service – *make less than three dollars an hour*.

The Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore report found that taxi driving in Toronto has become an industry characterized by “a large presence of racialized drivers who have low incomes, little political influence, and face tight regulatory and surveillance control” (2008: 9). Globalization and neo-colonialism have conspired to economically and occupationally peripheralize immigrant drivers of colour in Toronto (internationally drafted to fill the taxi shift workers growing void). The dominant cultural interest in consumer service and “an open market with quality restrictions”¹⁵ has mitigated against “driver interests” – which include health, vacation, unemployment, and pension benefits, health and safety on the job, increased numbers of taxi stands, a minimum income, regulation of flooding in the market, and protection from racial harassment (Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore, 2008:4). In this regard, the contemporary cosmopolitan cab driver in big-city Toronto now symbolizes the invisibility of visible minority interests that have excluded them from political, social and economic institutions, as well as from the official history of Canada (Henry et al., 2000)

Invisibility is a paradox of racialization in Canada that can often have negative consequences, and is operant in many sectors of non-White immigrant labour, where job ghettos are a pervasive component of past and current labour markets in Canada. For instance, in her research on Chinese immigrant women garment workers in Toronto, Rosanna Ng's (2001) found that workplace restructuring and the standard employment relationship continued to erode proportional to the advance of neo-liberalism in Canada, and there has been a major shift in the garment industry as sweatshops move into the homes of immigrant women who turned to home working. For Chinese immigrant women garment workers in Toronto the public and private spheres are merged as these women cope with the demands of paid work and family responsibilities in the same space. Ng situates this phenomenon in globalization and the “recolonization” of Chinese

women as the forces of continental trade agreements, such as NAFTA, deepened the exploitation they experience. Contemporary immigrants of colour have become global draft picks to fill in the void at the bottom rungs of a worldwide capitalist system. As a result, admission to Canada typically means non-White immigrants will face the pervasive prospect of lower incomes, precarious work status and a lack of social mobility.

The modern taxi industry is only one example of a secondary labour market that functions as a repository for wasted non-White immigrant talent. Labour market segmentation theory suggests that the postindustrial labour market is divided into distinct segments (e.g. Reich et al., 1973; Gordon et al., 1982). Workers in the primary segment capture the “good jobs” with stability, high wages and benefits, while workers in the secondary segment obtain either the “bad jobs” with little job security, low wages and few benefits, or they are unemployed. Karl Marx (2001 [1867], 502) famously referred to the workers in such employment relationships as a “reserve army” of labour. The workers in the secondary segment of the labour market absorb the shock of fluctuations in the general demand for labour. In other words, the availability of a pool of ‘flexible’ and ‘dispensable’ workers, who can easily be hired and fired, permits the relative stability of the primary segment, in which workers will keep their jobs when demand of labour temporarily declines. Meanwhile, Mittelman’s (2000) “global division of labour and power thesis” contributes a more nuanced understanding of the new international division of labour in terms of the forces of power that are manifested both physically and socially.

In everyday parlance, immigrants of colour have been “McJobbed.” It is no coincidence, that the term “McJob” (defined as “low-paying and dead-end work”) was among some 10,000 new additions in 2004 to an updated version of the Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, and that people of colour are over-represented in these jobs. Nearly one quarter of employees in North American fast-food industry are non-White; and they are configured at the low-end of the low-end, postindustrial world. For White people, “the McDonaldization thesis” (Ritzer 1998)¹⁶ is often thought to be a starting point, not an end point in society. It represents an entry level position, where new workers gain invaluable basic experience and develop strong work habits. This is why the vast majority of employees are part-time workers. The average work week in the fast-food industry is 29.5 hours. In addition, there is a high turnover rate, where only slightly more than half the employees remain on the job for a year or more. For immigrants of colour, the McDonaldization thesis makes reference to what is often a social holding pattern that accentuates their lack of accredited social capital, their social exclusion, and subsequent experience of social marginality. The McJob world of low-pay, low-prestige, low-dignity, low-benefit, no-future, service sector work is often the dead-end point in the non-White labour market trajectory.

Meanwhile, many skill jobs in Canada go unfilled as immigrants of colour are forced into an intense competition for menial work. In this connection, with the decline of manufacturing jobs in Canada and the a dramatic increase in the number of part-time and casual jobs in the urban service sector, wages at the lower end of the scale tend to fall well behind inflation and rising living costs (including huge

increases in rents); and the chasm between the racialized immigrant poor and Whitemain culture has reached historical dimensions. So, for instance, while Toronto has become one of the most racially diverse cities in the world through immigration, it has also become “a city of economic extremes” where the gap between the richest and poorest residents is now the widest in the country; where average income of the city’s top 10 per cent earners was \$261,000 in 2000, compared with \$9,600 for Toronto’s poorest citizens (Statistics Canada 2003). The upshot is, the struggle of ‘life space’ against ‘economic space’ in 21st century cosmopolitan Toronto mitigates against its avowed sense of multicultural belonging and the national politics of inclusion.

By focusing specifically on the experiences and “first order” accounts of taxi drivers themselves,¹⁷ the Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore (2008) report illuminates the dynamics of power and subordination in a globalized city, reflected in the absence of ‘driver interest’ in the expression of city policy and consultative decision-making. Instead, their research suggest that the values of the dominant White culture are embodied, objectified and institutionalized in the occupational structure of the taxi industry in a way that acts to ‘peripheralize’ minorities as inferior or irrelevant (making “driver interests” invisible in favour of the focus on City tourism and “consumer service.”). In this sense, the preservation of the status quo in the taxi business – through the institutionalization of complex “regulatory and surveillance regimes” that normalize the interests of White economics – empowers groups that already enjoy a favoured position in the labour market: the wealthy owners, and those individuals and constituencies already in positions of power and influence. Hence, credentialed foreigners forced to drive taxi or do other menial McJoe jobs is rooted in the dominant “Whitemain” consciousness of “the Other.” In that this “otherizing” effect is systemic rather than personal, the modern taxi industry has evolved into a complex yet contradictory site of culture-and-colour politics. To be a racialized other in this complex means that immigrants of colour are publicly defined in terms of set of embodied competencies through which they are seen to deviate from the norm. Therefore, insofar as minority relations in the taxi industry remain profoundly anti-democratic and contrary to the principles of a multicultural Canada, the politics of inclusiveness and equitable participation continue to be riddled with paradox.

The work of Walter E. Williams is illuminating here. *The State Against Blacks* (Williams, 1982) argues that the regulation of trades like cab-driving and cosmetology discriminates against African-Americans and other minorities by artificially closing down opportunities for petty capitalism. Inasmuch as immigrants have traditionally used cab-ownership as a social ladder, any regulatory regime that entrenches the privileges of the existing owners inherently favours one ethnic or racial group – the one who arrived at the right time – over others. In cities where cab licenses cost as much as a house, the most recent immigrants have far less hope than their predecessors had to escape being the “captive market of owners and drivers” susceptible to exploitation by brokers, finance companies, and license-holders (Williams, 1982, 1996 – found in Davis, 1998: 6). Williams reminds us that, hierarchical economy is based on hierarchical culture. In Canada, the degree of

cultural distance from the dominant White majority is an important factor in labour market returns. The economics of the taxi industry and institutionalized cultural capital of Whiteness ensure the social reproduction of the current power structure (see Hage 1998). The institutionalization of the embodied competencies and core values of the dominant Whitestream, simultaneously acts to stigmatize minorities as fringe players in Canadian society. As a consequence, driving a taxicab in Canada has become an entry level position for a cosmopolitan/global intelligentsia, who are required to take on vulnerable contingency work that is continuously fraught with occupational hazards and personal risk – up to and including everything from ‘getting stiffed’ (on a fare and/or gratuity) to hold-ups and homicide – and whose only protection from exposure to the distended underbelly of official multiculturalism and unofficial racism is the urban street justice of Code 13 (‘driver in distress’).

Moreover, today the continuity and pervasiveness of hazardous working conditions, combined with the increased social exclusion and marginality of racialized shift workers, has led to the emergence of a ‘Code 13’ in the industry itself. Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore (2008: 24) note two recent catalyzing incidents related to the tragic deaths of Morteza Khorassani and Mahmood Bhatti:

The homicides of two taxi drivers in less than a year (Morteza Khorassani in Sept 2005 and Mahmood Bhatti in May 2006) led to renewed calls for mandating the adoption of protective shields. Proponents argued that cameras did not prevent attacks, but simply aided in investigation after the fact. Following the second homicide, a motion was passed in City Council asking staff to prepare a report on the process of implementing and funding a mandatory taxi shield program. However, the staff proposal for a \$10,000 study of a possible mandatory shield program was quashed before debate in 2007, with the argument being made that the installation of mandatory shields would convey a “terrible image” of Toronto to tourists (Howard Moscoe, Chair of the Licensing and Standards Committee, quoted in Jennifer Lewington, “Council Quashes Plan for Taxi Shield,” *The Globe and Mail* (17 February 17 2007). Drivers state bitterly that the City does not even care about their lives in mandating cameras rather than partitions as safety features for cabs.

Immigrant drivers of colour in Toronto are all too cognizant of their marginalization, and attribute it to two things: to a lack of relevant social capital as racialized workers, and to the absence of a strong organization to represent them (Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore, 2008: 20). These things, of course, are not unconnected. The taxi industry in Toronto naturalizes the “public interest” in a way that privileges dominant cultural norms and values as necessary and superior. Hence, the taxi service industry that racialized drivers now inhabit is only available to them through a proper initiation and adherence to the rigid regulatory and surveillance regime consistent with a City tourism focus. Enforcing the public definition and function of taxi drivers as “the frontline tourist workers for the city” protects against the acquisition of power and status by drivers as racialized others, and at the same time justifies status being deprive. So, for instance, the notion that the “terrible image

conveyed to tourists” (by the installation of mandatory shields) trumps protection against hazardous working conditions for drivers, remains unproblematic and unaddressed. The effect of this naturalized hegemonic discourse on the primacy of tourism is the chronic rationalization of harmful social practices. Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore (2008:3) also argue that there is an inability to see that improving conditions for drivers is integrally related to, and can only have a positive impact on, the quality and viability of the taxicab industry, and the “public interest” more generally. From this perspective, the dominant public discourse operates on the basis of a false dichotomy between consumer and driver interests, which in turn creates a multicultural paradox between the well-being of racialized drivers and the convenience of consumer service.

Another multicultural paradox is the increased public surveillance and disproportionate suspicion surrounding racialized taxi drivers. A study conducted by Monisha Das Gupta (2004) on New York drivers post 9/11 notes: “the intensity of public surveillance in the workers’ lives is related to the fact that they are new immigrants of color.”¹⁸ In New York, this “intensity of public surveillance” has been heightened under the heightened nationalism, xenophobia and paranoia of the post-9/11 period: the study documents the sharp spike in verbal abuse as well as physical attacks, threats and cheating on taxi drivers following 9/11, as well as their inability to speak back because of a “Passengers’ Bill of Rights” that would label such resistance “discourteous.” Similarly, the documentary, *Peace Taxi* (2003), by Riaz Mehmood of the South Asian Visual Arts Collective, examines the reaction of taxi drivers to the events of September 11th in terms of the over displays of “American-ness” of drivers of colour. In New York City, taxi drivers displayed the US flag as a unifying symbol, a specific declaration of allegiance to the “right side” in the battle against terrorism. Some Sikh taxi drivers even added mini-flags to their turbans for extra symbolic protection. In Toronto, Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore’s (2008: 21) note that while most of their “respondents did not make an explicit association between the concern with national security in the period since September 2001 and intensification of xenophobic (racist) surveillance, they did report the ongoing nature of racist abuse, including from the police. Further, there has been an intensification of concern around issues of ‘customer satisfaction’ as reflected in the city councils attempt to respond legislatively to complaints about drivers who do not speak English.”

Ahmet Gulkan (2006)¹⁹, of the Toronto Coalition of Concerned Taxi Drivers argues racial profiling has also become a mobilizing issue:

The current significant issue for taxi drivers in Toronto is racial profiling. Most of them are from different minority groups and are new immigrants and feel they have been taken advantage of. We are trying to represent them and look after their issues. Recently we hooked up with Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) because we had a massive demonstration at Queen's Park against Bill 69, which prohibits Toronto drivers from picking up fares from the airport. At the demonstration, one driver was really brutally beaten and given three serious criminal charges. We hooked up with OCAP and they assisted us with lawyers and helped this guy avoid

criminal charges. He could have gone to jail, or lost his license and plate. In that way, we were very successful and it was a very good example of what happens when drivers organize and get some community activists behind them (Taxi Post, March 16, 2006 www.taxipost.ca).

Legitimate protest and legitimate change in the taxi industry is framed in the dominate public discourse around tourism-consumer needs (such as, regular required training of drivers, language requirements, as well as tight regulation of cab age and condition), as opposed to drivers' labour concerns and the particular vulnerabilities of racialized workers who work alone and at night. For Toronto taxi drivers of colour to be incorporated into the existing institutional/occupational framework means that they consistently face containment and as a matter of natural right. They are confronted with public discourses that not only consign immigrants of colour to the job of "pushing cab," they also routinely rationalize harmful "driver-adverse" practices. Hence, the attempt to promote the interests of drivers and improve working conditions has created an oppositional public domain that is often subject to harsh criticism and public sanctions that have acted to induce acquiescence in many, to cause others to become demoralized and insecure, to fragment drivers amongst themselves, and embitter some drivers against the industry and city council (Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore, 2008:3). Yet, the language of containment and control in the global city has also been the source for the creation of a language of possibility aimed at enabling social change. Racialized taxi drivers have consequently introduced a new "made in Toronto" version of collective solidarity stressing the mediating and political role of outside support.

For instance, in recent years the Toronto Coalition of Concerned Taxi Drivers (made up of independent drivers, Taxi Post, On-time Taxi, The Taxi Association of Toronto, and the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty) has launched the Toronto Taxi Defense Fund to fight back against what they conceive to be "the anti-driver, anti-immigrant worker policies and laws that regulate their workplace and create an immigrant job ghetto." In their oppositional sphere, they argue

Targeting of drivers continues to snowball, and the stories speak volumes of injustice and racism. Recently, an Iranian driver was stopped by police to be given a warning. Once the officer realized he was a Muslim, he was given a series of by-law infraction tickets and he now faces losing his license.

This man has no other way to make a living. Drivers and members of this coalition recently protested the unfair scooping of taxi fairs by limos in a rally at Queen's Park. Drivers were criminally charged after this demonstration. One driver was brutalized by police and is facing the loss of his license. Another driver was singled out as a taxi driver organizer by city bylaw officers and was handed a series of illegitimate fines.

Because of the conditions faced by drivers daily, they cannot face these attacks alone, without solidarity and support. For many drivers, time in court means the loss of hard earned income. Taxi drivers have no choice but to do things that make them easy police targets, just in order to make a living. Taxi drivers have been made vulnerable and have been treated as

second class citizens, because they are mainly an immigrant workforce. This workforce is also the second largest revenue source for the city of Toronto. These day-to-day realities demand support from activists and concerned people. The Toronto Coalition of Concerned Taxi Drivers and the efforts of immigrant workers demanding justice need our solidarity.

< http://users.resist.ca/~gidget/nefac/strike/aug_strike1.PDF>

Driver activism alludes to both the constraining and the enabling dimensions of multiculturalism in a global city. As well as the continuity of traditional camaraderie and a life-way grounded in situational ethics and frontier-like perspectives on street justice, many racialized Toronto taxi drivers have begun to theorize a new solidarity strategy beyond the boundaries of the job and industry. The demand for interpersonal fair play and fair-dealings with the public as well as other drivers and dispatchers and owners (what Hoffmann identified as forms of “relational” and “distributive” justice) is an historical continuity in the taxi industry, held by all those who regularly navigate the mean streets of the big city for a living. But the racialized shift driver’s typical version of worker solidarity in Toronto, and the social construction of their brown-collar job ghetto, advocates for an activism aimed at progressive social change and improvement of the work conditions, built on community alliances that challenge the system from a position of strength. In a word, they have embrace a ‘coalitionism’ in the city politics that legitimates the dynamic richness and resonance of diversity. Through their activism – as Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore advise us – racialized Toronto taxi drivers have advanced a collective program to frame injustice and promote inclusion. Banding together with other marginalized groups and oppositional spheres, in networks of activism, builds resistance to social and political institutions that elevate the hegemonic order of “Whiteness,” and challenges a workplace that normalizes brown-collared job ghettos for the second class citizenship of immigrants of colour.

Of course, driver activism is not new, nor is it a discontinuity in the industry’s history, only relevant to the city of Toronto. Throughout cab history, from the 20th century industrial city to the 21st century global city, drivers have challenged their working conditions and their devalued status in many ways, quite distinct from a Travis Bickle-like meltdown. Both Fred Davis’s hard-driving-fast-tongued “Chicago hack” and in Elizabeth Hoffmann’s mid-American “cowboy cabbie” rallied around a sense of right and wrong, and engaged a blue-collar struggle for self-esteem and status recognition. As we have seen, hard-driving-white-bread-working-class taxi drivers – in industrial America past and mid-America present – continually challenge(d) public definitions of their low occupational prestige . But as Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore (2008) observe, many racialized Toronto cab drivers have come to see that in the global city it is not appropriate simply to generate situational ethics and frontier justice interpretations of social reality. Here, the only way to effectively impact the public definition of a “colour-decoded” reality is to play an active role in the public sphere, through alliances with other oppositional public spheres, and challenge how power and privilege are distributed.

Today in the global city, the cocky cabbie syndrome is manifest in resistance to the hegemonic public spheres that naturalize the consignment of skilled immigrants of colour to the low-wage-low-prestige business of 'pushing cab'. In the new 'made in Toronto' version of collective solidarity, many racialized taxi drivers have begun to theorize the mediating and political role of strategic alliances with other oppositional public spheres in order challenge the system from a position of strength, and claim a share of the ownership of social reality. This counter-hegemonic networking can be viewed as a political project of mobilizing broad, diverse opposition to entrenched economic, political, and cultural power in the City. In this respect, the strategic alliances that have begun to be formed with poverty organizations and other marginalized groups represent a discourse on multiculturalism in Toronto, and Canada more generally, that questions the right of Whiteman culture to dominate other cultures in a way that flattens diversity.

This pursuit of a minority 'voice' in public discussion and discourse offers up a critical multiculturalism. In the case of the Toronto taxi driver this involves a narrative on diversity in the city that goes beyond minorities merely fitting into a pre-existing structural framework – accepting their place in the city's division of labour, and taking on society's "grunt work." In the end, this new cocky cabbie syndrome of the racialized Toronto taxi driver can at the very least call into question the power relations that operationalize the contemporary workplace; hold them up to scrutiny, and expose the cultural contingency of the standards and values that currently rule the City. At best racialized taxi drivers in Toronto can help establish a political project and social movement that challenges institutional authority, resists White hegemony, and transforms society by creating space for other – contributing to a true City dialectic of justice and inclusion.

4. Conclusions: The Hidden Injuries of Race

The intrigue of Russell Peters' observational comedy at the beginning of the chapter – "I saw the funniest thing the other day ... a White guy driving a cab" – is that he re-introduces a narrative of race into Canada's raceless narrative.

Like the court jester who gets to speak the truth to the King, today it can take the sardonic wit (or *rimshot*) of a stand-up comedian to reveal the 'elephant in the room' that the dominant White culture typically ignores, denies, or refuses to acknowledge. Russell Peters knows that what makes the observation of a White guy driving a cab 'funny' is not the preponderance of non-Whites in the Toronto taxi industry, but rather, that this preponderance is a normality that exists without an explicit rule, and generally goes unnoticed, until the rule is violated. So the fact that White guys don't drive cabs is a concealed racial urbanism in the everyday life of the city – hidden by an ideologically entrenched race-neutral-merit-based market logic that obscures the racialization of the contemporary workplace from view. Nevertheless, the social fact is, White guys in Toronto do not drive cabs because cab driving in the in 21st century global city is no longer the preserve of a blue-collared-working-class-stiff – cab driving is the preserve of a cosmopolitan/Third World intelligentsia who have been relegated to a brown-collared ghetto.

Of course, the flipside of this comedy is the tragedy and pathos of the immigrant taxi driver. In Canada, the foreign credentials gap is an urban modifier of racialized workplace relations that involves strong forces and pressures to relegate visible minorities, particularly recent immigrants to the periphery of the economy. Insofar as the workforce ghettoization of immigrants of colour is not conventionally seen as a "normal" feature of life, it is also not recognized as a violence perpetrated on visible immigrant workers and their families.

The study of contemporary postindustrial taxi drivers indicates that this violence and inequity is a logical and predictable result of a society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted. Furthermore, people of colour are not only relegated to brown collared ghettos in Canadian society, this racialization is also typically relegated to a peripheral position within the knowledge-building apparatus of social science as well, through strained narratives on immigration selection and credentials assessment malfunctions and miscalculations. Despite the salience of race in contemporary society, as a topic of scholarly inquiry it remains untheorized. Consequently, race is frequently left aside rather than presented as the primary subject of a reflexive Canadian history. Meanwhile, the absence to the presence of race in both the public and academic discourse on political economy serves to deepened the exploitation people of colour experience, while it simultaneously acts to preserve the status quo of White privilege. In this regard, current discussion about Canadian immigration in general, and foreign credentialed workers in particular, could benefit greatly from a more systematic perspective of the intersection of race and political economy.

Notes

- ¹ See – Burnett, Thane. *Road Scholars*. <http://www.triec.ca/index.asp?pageid=41&int=newsite/newsmedia/inthenews/MediaClippings/SunOct0904.htm>. Accessed June 26, 2008. [This article was originally published in the Toronto Sun, April 9, 2004.]
- ² See – Doc-cabbies to be allowed to practise in Ontario. *India Times*, June 8, 2008. http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/Rest_of_World/Doc-cabbies_to_be_allowed_to_practise_in_Ontario/articleshow/3110149.cms.
- ³ See – <http://www.canada.com/globaltv/globalshows/globalcurrents/healthcare%>. In recent years the media have consistently highlighted the particular difficulty of foreign-trained physicians who are unable to practice medicine in Canada
- ⁴ See - Conference on Timely Access to Health Care. *Health Canada*. February 8-9, 2007 Toronto, Ontario. http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hcs-sss/qual/acces/2007conf/index_e.html
- ⁵ The North-South divide, as used here, refers to both the socio-economic and geopolitical division which exists between the wealthy developed countries, known collectively as "The North", and the poorer developing countries, or "The South". Although most nations comprising the "North" are in fact located in the Northern Hemisphere, the divide is not primarily defined by geography. The term was

coined to differentiate the cultural divide between East and West. The north south divide also refers to the split between the more powerful Northern and the less powerful Southern Hemisphere (see Brandt Report 1980; South Commission 1990).

- ⁶ Brown collar ghettos are defined as the part of Canada's workforce consisting of foreign trained professionals, who are visible minorities and work in low wage menial jobs. Source: Newsletter. Canada Immigrant Job Issues. November, 2003.
- ⁷ See – Crenshaw, K. W. 1995. *Critical Race Theory*. New York: The New Press, 1995.
- ⁸ See – <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0075314/plotsummary>.
- ⁹ This chapter focus on the racial dynamics of cab history. For the examination of gender dynamics of taxi driving as a “manly trade” see, for example – Boyd, Cynthia. 1997. ‘Just like one of the Boys’: Tactics of women taxi drivers,” in Dian, Tye and Pauline Greenhill (Eds.). *Undisciplined Women: Tradition and Culture in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press; Berry, Kimberly. 1997. *The Last Cowboy*. Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts, Atlantic Canada Studies at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada; Davis, Donald F. 1998. Continuity and Discontinuity in Canadian Cab History. *Canadian Business and Current Affairs Urban Assn History Review*. October. <http://www.taxi-library.org/davis.htm>. (Accessed 07.07.08).
- ¹⁰ See – Sandberg, Carl. 1916. *Chicago Poems*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- ¹¹ Reference – Maresca, James V. 1945. *My Flag Is Down*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.
- ¹² See – Sennett, R and J. Cobb. 1972. *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. New York: Vintage Books. (Sennett and Cobb are often credited with rehabilitating class as an analytical category in second half of the twentieth century. By way of contrast, this chapter takes the position that the cumulative impact of globalization in recent decades is fundamentally altering the nature of social stratification, such that traditional hierarchies have declined and new social differences and cleavages have emerged.)
- ¹³ In the Canadian context, Hoffman's (2006) *The Last American Cowboy* is thematically similar to Kimerly Berry's participant observation research of the Halifax taxi industry. See – Berry, Kimberly. 1997. *The Last Cowboy*. Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts, Atlantic Canada Studies at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
- ¹⁴ In the taxi industry, “long-hooding” refers to a driver who misrepresenting his or her location when bidding for a call. As Hoffman (2006:35-36) notes, this is a serious infraction in taxi driver culture in that it constitutes a violation of trust and is seen as stealing another driver's fare, who may actually be in closer proximity.
- ¹⁵ Toronto Task Force to Review the Taxi Industry, Report to Review the Toronto Taxi Industry. 1998. Section 5.2.2 (Toronto: October) <http://www.taxi-library.org/tor98-01.htm>. (Accessed 25. 11.2007).

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- ¹⁶ McDonald's is the world's largest restaurant chain with more than 30,000 restaurants and more than 400,000 employees. As global/multinational corporation it has become both the organizational standard and symbolic icon of the postindustrial service sector.
- ¹⁷ Other reports and recent systematic attempts to study taxi drivers in Canada have primarily aimed at reforming the taxi industry from the perspective of the "public interest" – the interests of consumers, owners, and the City – rather than the "immigrant driver interest." Recent examples are – Report of the By-Law Sub Committee on Taxicab Leasing and Related Matters. (The Thomas Subcommittee Report). 1996. <http://www.taxi-library.org/thomas.htm>. (Accessed 25.11.07); and Toronto Task Force to Review the Taxi Industry, Report to Review the Toronto Taxi Industry. 1998. Section 5.2. (Toronto: October) <http://www.taxi-library.org/tor98-01.htm>. (Accessed 25. 11.2007).
- ¹⁸ Monisha Das Gupta, "A View of Post- 9/11 Justice from Below," *Peace Review* 16 (2) June 2004 – Quote found in Abraham, Sara, Aparna Sundar, Dale Whitmore. 2008. Toronto Taxi Drivers: Ambassadors of the City A Report on Working Conditions. http://www.taxilibrary.org/toronto_taxi_working_conditions.pdf. (Accessed: July 19, 2008).
- ¹⁹ *Taxi Cabs and Capitalism in Toronto*, Taxi Post, March 16, 2006 www.taxipost.ca.

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