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A Seat at the Table in Downtown Toronto Centre East, Canada

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A Seat at the Table in Downtown Toronto Centre East, Canada

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Abstract Drawing on two local examples of community conflict, this paper examines four neighbourhood enclaves in Downtown Toronto Centre East as a way to think about shaping public concepts of belonging. In this area, low and moderate-income populations clash with middle class populations over claims to space. Within these conflictual struggles to stake claims to space are constructions of working class ways of living as disorderly and middle class ways of living as rational. While downtown elites mobilize cultural capital that serves to deliver spaces to the middles classes, the working poor also mobilize to push back at being displaced. These class and race encounters not only highlight the unequal social relations that exist there, but also the power and privilege that is used to create what Cathy van Ingen calls, “boundary consciousness” (2006:160). In this way geographies of privilege are marked on the social landscape of the DTCE. It is critical to note these moves and pay attention to the homogenizing implications for re-visioning urban spaces that contain a rich social mix..

Keywords: revitalization, urban neighbourhoods, belonging, middle class elites, working poor, community conflict

A SEAT AT THE TABLE IN DOWNTOWN TORONTO CENTRE EAST, CANADA

INTRODUCTION

In Downtown Toronto Centre East (DTCE) there is a mixed population based on class, race and sexual identities. There are also power struggles about who belongs there, what shape the buildings will take and what activities are acceptable to those who live and work in the area. In this paper I examine how power operates in this urban setting in ways that sustain social inequalities through effective claims to place. I first introduce this small city neighbourhood area and provide two examples of community conflict as I deploy the image of the table, borrowed from Sara Ahmed (2006). I examine how geographies of privilege unfold and create divides drawn along race and class lines. Finally, I discuss the implications of conflictual community engagement for staking claims to this neighbourhood place as examples of privilege and under-privilege.

Researching in this area has been complex because of the great social disparities within extremely short distances. Because of this, the research focuses on a social history of the area and borrows from critical ethnography, a methodology that situates the researcher as a participant observer and incorporates multiple epistemologies (Kinsman, 1996; Ng, 1993; Whyte, 1973, Foley and Vanezuela, 2008). I did not conduct interviews for this paper, although I do draw on one interview from earlier work in the area. Following Foucault, I focus on power as the relations between individual agency and social interactions. I attend to power as being implicated in what can be said and who can say it (St. Pierre, 2000:496). Further, I examine how cultural capital is used to

mobilize campaigns in some (middle class) residents' interests at the exclusion of others. There are anti-poverty groups who work in the area in ways that resist the move to deliver this area to the upper and middle classes and fight for maintaining places where poor people gather. One campaign launched by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) fought, unsuccessfully, to keep the former Cabbagetown Restaurant open. Their analysis of how and why the middle class gentrifiers opposed this business was that it was not in service of making the neighbourhood safer, but rather a ploy to destroy one of the places where poor people gather. For, as OCAP has commented repeatedly, when places of gathering are broken up, so too are communities (Fumia, 2010). The Anti-Poverty and Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL)[i] has worked with community organizations in Toronto neighbourhoods (and beyond) to support anti-poverty campaigns such as this one that helps to maintain places where low and moderate income people live and gather.

The framing of this paper borrows from Sara Ahmed's book, Queer Phenomenology (2006), as she directs us by the co-heading: Find Your Way. It suggests that we are invited to find ourselves, or, our place of belonging. Yet the book engenders more of a process of losing our way, getting lost, disorientation and marginalization. This is key to understanding what takes place in DTCE. That is, as residents call for an area to be improved, the question must be asked, what improvements and for whom? Who has a seat at the table of such discussions? Revitalizing a neighbourhood is often achieved through discourses of rationalization - that is, replacing disorderly settings with orderly ones. Middle class respectable values (mostly white) underpin the drive for orderly, rational gatherings. As Robbins has discussed, planning that reflects middle class values can have the effect of destroying vibrant, spontaneous working class gathering places (2000).ii It is this sense of middle class values and working class displacement that the notion of being lost and disoriented in the process of reimaging urban spaces shapes who has a place at the table.

Ahmed takes a philosopher's journey into phenomenology and as she does she alerts us to a few images, metaphors and subjectivities. Further, she orients the reader through "different sites, spaces and temporalities" (2). I want to pick up one of her metaphors/images, that of the table. Ahmed's entry into this image that weaves throughout the book is a philosopher's writing table that, at times, morphs into a non-normative queer table. We are compelled by Ahmed to consider the table as both physical object and conceptual place keeper. In the first instance it is something one writes upon, in the second it conjures up a seat at the table reserved for those who belong. A table in this sense is both/either a place to create images, thoughts, lives, etc. at the same time it keeps a place for belonging. This table, and those who do or do not have a seat at it, has a background against which it is placed. This background may be visible and part of our consciousness or may be so familiar as to avoid notice. This image allows us to consider how a backdrop for any table has a past history that is unseen, perhaps unacknowledged but there nonetheless and "allows us to consider how the familiar takes shape by being unnoticed" (37). This image of the table and its background is useful to investigate the practices that sustain unequal social relations in a small neighbourhood.

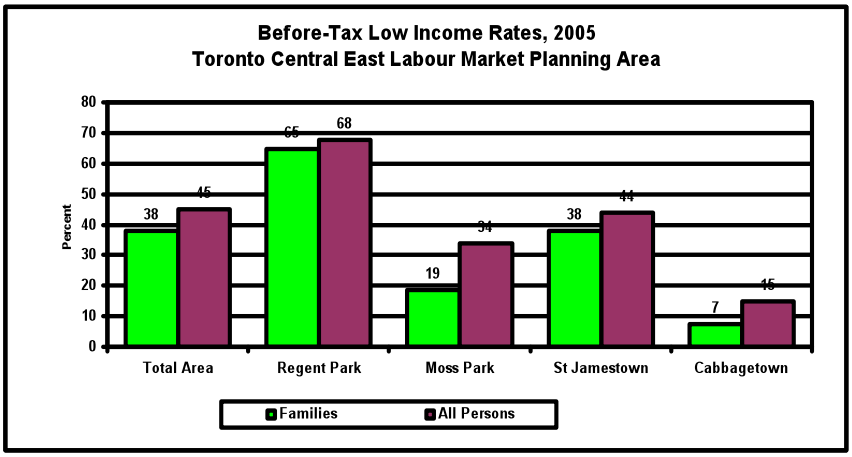
DOWNTOWN CENTRE EAST

Toronto's downtown centre east is a place that struggles to define itself as it draws lines of who belongs where. These lines are drawn along axes of power and privilege that demonstrate in a small way how geographies of privilege operate as a modern day colonial project of inclusion/exclusion; core/periphery, oriented/disoriented (Ahmed, 2006; J.M. Jacobs, 1996; Sibley, 1995; Sassen; 1991). Toronto is nicknamed "the city of neighborhoods" boasting over 140 of them. There are four neighbourhoods that constitute the DTCE. The (neoliberal) branding of each of these areas maintains them as discrete neighbourhoods, yet the reality is they are interconnected in intimate ways because of their spatial propinquity (Fumia 2010). Creating such mythical divides ensures that spaces of respectability are separated from those of degeneracy. Discourses of degeneracy, that is, high density, dirt, disorderliness, and illicit activities

are attached to three of the areas while those of respectability, spaciousness, order, and beautiful homes and gardens are held up as examples of desirability in the fourth. Three of the four different areas, Regent Park, Moss Park and St. Jamestown, are recognizable by high rises, low income, precarious employment, racialized newcomers, gun violence, drug dealing and prostitution (and not by their close community ties that those who live there recognize). The other area, Cabbagetown, is recognized by its continuous stand of renovated 19th century Victorian homes, immaculate front gardens and close community (and not by many of the same behaviours and high crime rates found there as well as in the other three areas). The Cabbagetown table is “set” with ascetics appealing to the middle classes while the table set in the other three areas is “set” with undesirable and illicit behaviours.

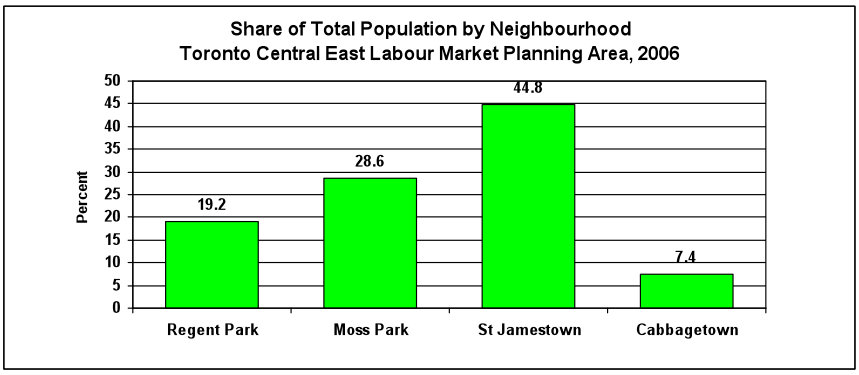
The main business street, Parliament Street, connects and divides the four neighbourhood areas. Representing the widely diverse demographics in this area is a mix of dollars stores, quick cash stores, places to send remittances, a variety of food establishments that reflect the many countries of origins, as well as a handful of medium to high-end restaurants and two struggling home goods/knick-knack type stores for people with disposable income not spent on life’s necessities. It is no surprise that there is a predominance of businesses that accommodate the needs of the lower end of the working classes since Cabbagetown, with its wealth and more stable working population, has a significantly lower population compared to those who live in Regent Park, Moss Park and St. Jamestown (Tables 1&2).

Table 1.



Data Source for all three tables: Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2006. Prepared by City of Toronto Social Development, Finance and Administration Division, 2010

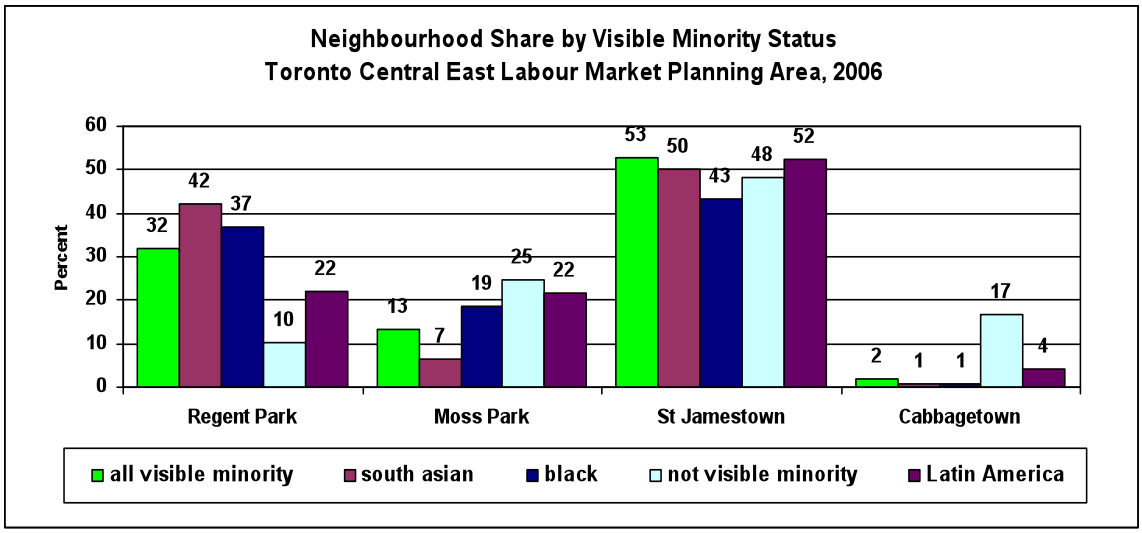
Table 2.



I include the following Table 3 as a way to gesture to what many have written about: that the racialization of urban space is found in places where high levels of poverty exist and where there is a large population of visible minorities, often newcomers (see for

instance Teelucksingh, 2006). This table indicates that the space in the DTCE is demarcated along lines of class and race.

Table 3



The tables show the diversity in the area and begin to tell a story about how race and class privilege operates in structuring spatial and social divisions. I will build on this introduction to further discuss the ways in which privilege operates there.

BRANDING, DISAVOWAL, OWNERSHIP

The development in the DTCE is part of a broader trend that seeks to rationalize urban space within frames of neoliberalism. This is not unlike former waves of urban renewal that sought to transform spaces from slums to cleaner, safer places that occurred in the early 20th century and post WWII (Caulfield, 1989; Ley, 1996; Purdy, 2004). What is different in this current era of urban renewal is the notion that the rationalization of disorderly space is strongly disconnected from the practices that arose during the rise of the welfare state. This was a time when a rise in social housing that provided affordable housing for the working classes to live near their places of work in the city was on the rise. The current era has shifted this emphasis to one where much of the new housing in Toronto is connected to commercial, market-based profits (especially the

condominium explosion) that encourage high turnover and thus, more and more, deliver the urban core to the middle classes (Brenner et al: Kern: 2010). This reflects a process described as the neoliberalization of the city that has been explored by many who link global ascendency of neoliberalism during the late 1970s with a fundamental and massive economic re-ordering of capital-labour relations, competition and monetary regulations that saw uneven restructuring throughout the world economy (Brenner et al: 2002; Bondi, 2005; Harvey, 2005; Kern, 2010). The effects are the uneven development in cities and their suburban surroundings whereby the "goal of such neoliberal urban policy experiments is to mobilize city space as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices, while at the same time securing order and control amongst the 'underclass' populations (Brenner and Theodore, 2005: 12).

Leslie Kern (2010) frames her discussion of urban neoliberalization as it relates to the city of Toronto. Kern specifically focuses on a gendered analysis of condominium dwelling. I agree wholeheartedly with Kern when she asserts that feminist work has engaged with state processes of neoliberalization (Bondi, 2005; Kern, 2010; Kobayashi and Peake: 1994). She insists, "neoliberal urbanism can and should be traced through everyday life and the ways that people construct their identities in relation to the city" (2010:5). As this paper examines how neighbourhoods are demarcated along the lines of class and race, keeping an eye on the broader social geographies of urban revitalization allows us to interrogate everyday life in the form of community involvement. This often replicates the "free market approach" in the guise of a moral imperative for order - namely crime and poverty reduction (Valverde, 2008). Such approaches embolden the hetero/homo normative, middle classes, with the requisite cultural capital and resources, to mould neighbourhood space in their image. Shaping which areas are desirable is not necessarily based on how a city can best serve the people who live in it, rather it is more likely to be predicated on implementing market-driven, neoliberal solutions best suited to convert post-industrial cities like Toronto into a competitive, globalized hub. The current wave of revitalization and new-builds in

Toronto engender higher density living, destruction of social housing and social services in the downtown core (Toronto Star October 2011; Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, 2012) that make it less and less possible for the “underclasses” to find affordable housing in the inner city.

While the city and urban planning plays a large part in making the downtown core a welcoming place where it is possible for people to live and work, there are also more localized and subtle social practices that do the same. The following is an example of how small urban neighbourhoods participate in this larger frame of neoliberalizing city spaces and creating a place at the table.

CONFLATING DESIRABILITY WITH NEIGHBOURHOOD IDENTITY

The following quote from Toronto Life Magazine (October 26, 2011) sums up how place-naming and local branding effectively separates Cabbagetown from the other three DTCE neighbourhoods and in this way attempts to secure for it a reputation of desirability. What underpins this stance is that shaping Cabbagetown as a desirable neighbourhood requires disavowing histories of poverty, working class poor, homelessness and strong communities that support people who are less advantaged. In service of delivering the DTCE spaces to the hetero/homo normative, (mostly) white, upper middle classes, the removal or invisiblizing of “others” is imperative. In the quote below, despite the fact that property crime and crime against people is rated as “high” at the top of the magazine page, the article proceeds to entice the potential homeowner or tourist:

> it’s one of the most sought-after postal codes in the city, especially the Victorian homes east of Parliament.... With a large number of bars, cafés, restaurants and the occasional antique store, this stretch of Parliament exudes an easy-going vibe. Cabbagetown is a showcase of some of the most impressive Victorians in the city. The streets are filled with Gothic Revival, Queen Anne and Second Empire homes, the vast majority of

> which are carefully restored and maintained with colourful gardens. Detached houses north of Spruce Street and east of Parliament can sell for more than $1 million; average size is around 2,500 square feet.

The way in which Toronto Life subtly articulates Cabbagetown, as a space that is unique unto itself, demonstrates the insidious efforts to brand Cabbagetown as separate from the other three areas in the DTCE. Any connection to Regent Park, Moss Park or St. Jamestown is ignored despite the fact that the one main business street, Parliament Street, brings residents from all four areas to it for goods and services. In short, it is impossible to envision Cabbagetown as separate from the other three areas. While there are many examples of attempts to separate Cabbagetown from the other three areas, these attempts are not wholly convincing since it is a comfortable 20-minute walk from the north end of Parliament at St. Jamestown to the south end at Regent Park. In the quote below, in the same issue of Toronto Life, is an admission that Cabbagetown has not succeeded in separating from the rest of the DTCE. This quote also points to the difficulty for Cabbagetown to fully gentrify and deliver the space to the middle classes. Any attempt to do so must treat the surrounding neighbourhood areas as invisible and irrelevant, a familiar colonial trope.

> The area is a long way from being fully gentrified—it's bordered on the south by Regent Park—but if you're in the shade of Riverdale Park or sipping a Jet Fuel latte, you'd never know it.

The quote above refers to one of the other three (crime riddled, disorderly) areas, Regent Park, which at the moment has some "desirability credibility" since it is in the middle of being revitalized. This revitalization is being met with mixed portions of optimism and pessimism about whether re-building the run down high rises can transform a long history of abject poverty and crime into a safe, mixed-class respectable neighbourhood (see Ann Paperny: November 16, 2010; David Fleming: May 10, 2011).iii

The DTCE area is far from being a completed gentrifying project. While many blames high rates of poverty and crime for the area's inability to "rise above" degeneracy, dirt and disorderliness, others have pointed the finger at urban planners, city housing, racialized practices of law and order, and a general lack of commitment to newcomers and where they live as the blame (Fumia, 2010; Purdy, 2004; Sahak, 2008; Veronis, 1999). The association of Cabbagetown with desirability is reflected in moves to separate it from the bordering neighbourhood areas. With a sense of entitlement and ownership, the gay man in the following quote struggles to generously accept that Cabbagetowners have a duty to share a park just east of the whole DTCE, a park that is publicly owned, funded and maintained. He is ambivalent about the use of this public space that at times transgresses middle class, white standards.

> You see some of the women in their saris or different garments… I don't have an issue with that. They go over to the park, umm, that … really frustrate[s] me. …I mean it's a beautiful park and everyone can use it. I mean it's not, we don't own it, but I don't like when people disrespect it. And I notice a lot of times you get people from St. Jamestown going over there and having a big picnic and leaving paper and napkins and stuff like that. […] Because there's such a…private ownership in the neighbourhood. (Interview, 2003)

Here there is a suggestion that orderliness is imperative. Litter is used here, as a signifier for dirt and disrespect. To utter "St. Jamestown" is to conjure up in the local imagination images of poverty, violence and cause for suspicion (as are Regent Park and Moss Park, while Moss Park has the added image of homelessness). The most striking aspects of this quote are the racialized undertones, the overgeneralization and the homogeneous sense of who "disrespects" this public space and the sense of ownership by the "respectable" residents of Cabbagetown. Despite the qualified admission that "we" don't own it, it is clear that there is nonetheless a sense of entitlement. And this sense is not unfounded. The police have worked closely with Cabbagetown residents to transform the neighbourhood from an undesirable place to

live because of noise and issues of safety to a safe haven in the middle of an undesirable downtown space, as hinted at in the Toronto Life quote above.

The tensions that arise from believing, on the one hand, that this area should and indeed is a gentrified space and, on the other, realizing the limits to such middle class wishes, raises questions about who belongs and where.

THE MYTH OF WISHES

Those who have an interest in real estate and local business have a vested interest in convincing potential buyers, tourists and the general public that Cabbagetown is the focus of the area while Regent Park, Moss Park and St. Jamestown are not only separate, but are also invisible and irrelevant. The long-term version of this narrative is that what Cabbagetown has to "offer" will spread to the other three areas. Cabbagetown is near the heart of Toronto's growing urban centre located just a short distance from the main financial district, major shopping malls, upscale shops, theatres, restaurants and so on. This long-term narrative, however, is not only a wishful myth; it is also one that will be very unlikely to occur any time soon. One reason is that there are large numbers of social housing units in the area that are home to some of the city's poorest residents. There are also large numbers of precariously and unemployed people along with important social services on which they depend. While social housing generally in Ontario is in decline, this is an area that continues to house many in need of it.

There is an additional reason that Cabbagetown has been marketed as middle class desirable despite the significant mix. It is protected from high density living with a zoning by-law that limits the building height to 45 feet, whereas Regent Park, Moss Park and St. Jamestown are zoned for high-density, high-rises. Further, in Regent Park, Moss Park and St Jamestown there is a combination of private and public housing, with a predominance of public and social housing in much of the area, whereas Cabbagetown is predominantly private, single family homes. Thus, the very nature of the built space draws very different notions of where home is and makes it easy to spatially, culturally

and racially demarcate who lives where along lines of class and race. The quote below from a Cabbagetown resident also reinforces this claim.

> [There is a] lot of Indian culture, Filipino, Black community. I mean that's predominately what's around. It's funny, my grandma came to stay with us when we were on Wellesley (Street). She said to me one day, "there's a lot of Filipino people who live in your neighbourhood." I said in ours? right in Cabbagetown? She said, "Oh yeah, I see them everyday." I said there's not a lot. She said, "I see them every morning walking in at 8:30 or 9." I said, they are walking into work, they're nannies, they're housekeepers! (Interview, 2003)

The thought that colonial Others (those with no claim to this space) would reside in Cabbagetown is inconceivable to the resident above; here positioned as the colonizer (the One who is rightful owner of space). This response surfaced quickly when I asked in the interview "with whom do Cabbagetown residents co-exist?" The co-existence of the One and the Other must, in this resident's mind, be spatially separated.

In addition to the city encouraging separate neighbourhood enclaves as part of marketing itself as "diverse," local acts by neighbours impose barriers that demarcate race and class. Marketing Cabbagetown as a space for the middle classes, and the correlated vision to expand this dream into Regent Park, Moss Park and St Jamestown, requires a plan to push out the underclasses. The success of this plan requires the dislocation of populations and breaking up of communities. Ahmed argues that in our attempts to find our way, we may get disoriented in the process and lose our way.

The table is being re-set in the DTCE and disorienting those attempting to find a place at it. Beyond simply a contest between the middle and underclasses vying for claims to space, it is important to interrogate how all are disoriented in the shifting of populations in the downtown core. The re-setting of tables in the DTCE requires us to consider how tables both gather and orient and exclude and disorient.

With this backdrop to DTCE and some of the many disparities that I have pointed out, I now turn to two examples of the very specific tables available in this area of Toronto and the decidedly specific rules in play that shape who has a seat at them.

COLONIAL BACKDROP TO THE WINCHESTER

A significant crossroad in this neighbourhood area is at Winchester and Parliament Streets. It is the divide between white middle classes in single-family homes in the middle of the DTCE area (Cabbagetown) and the working poor, racialized populations in high-rises to the north and south of it (Regent Park, Moss Park and St. Jamestown). On the Southeast corner is a building that once housed the Winchester Hotel and Pub and brought this neighbourhood to life in the 1880s.[iv] It housed single men who laboured in Toronto's industries, many of whom had arrived from Ireland during the potato famine. The tavern on the main floor was rough and known locally as "the bucket of blood," signifying its reputation for violent brawls that often spilled out into the street. Excess alcohol consumption has long been associated with this corner and The Winchester had been a concern for many of the moral reformers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (for a comprehensive discussion on moral reform in Toronto see Valverde, 2008).

I mention Marina Valverde's work briefly (2008) to underscore the backdrop of this neighbourhood table, one that is set with legacies of social purity movements. Valverde argues that social purity movements have a long history that relies on demonizing the underclasses and raising the moral tone of urban working classes communities. Key to this is the temperance movement aimed at banning alcohol. The settlement in this area harks back to Victorian Britain and Victorian morality, reinforced in the present by the predominance of British street names and Victorian architecture. Such colonial representations are also tropes of respectability that are cast over the spaces in DTCE. Despite colonial legacies that aimed to recreate the homeland abroad (McClintock, 1995) efforts to gentrify and re-create a bourgeois way of life have failed, since such lifestyles depend on cultural capital, jobs and resources, most of which escape the

majority of those who live in the DTCE. Along with these taken-for-granted narratives of bourgeois respectability that shape the social landscape, what takes place there and who belongs is also shaped by Victorian moral codes of behavior (for a discussion of the colonial legacies infused in the making of the bourgeois classes in Canada see Razack, 2000; Schick, 2000). As if borrowing from Ahmed's notion of the backdrop of the table, Valverde argues "the organization of symbols characteristic of social purity was [and is] invisible precisely because it was familiar" (2008:34). The development of this area, the sense that poor people must live up to a standard of living that is not supported by their wages, social services or culture, nor by society generally, create deep divisions based on class and racial divides (Purdy, 2004). Yet, the assumption that the area is one of bourgeois respectability is aggressively pursued through marketing efforts by realtors and tourism promotions. This legacy and present practice continue to organize who is and is not welcome, who does and does not belong. As we will see, the removal of alcohol from specific areas has been a manoeuvre to remove the undesirables.

CONTESTING CLAIMS TO SPACE

As the area was tamed with the arrival of more women and families and more police presence, The Winchester, too, was the scene of less frequent violent male brawling, although it continued to be a popular "watering hole." The Winchester had become a place for the working classes to gather, drink alcohol, pick up some cheap pub grub, and to socialize. As well, left-leaning gentrifying middle classes held community meetings, and cultural events there. It had the smell and feel of a run-down beer parlour and was well used by the mix of populations in the partially gentrified community. This custom did not, however, translate into sufficient financial gains for the owner, John Bernardo. There were a small number of tables outside and the noise level could reach high levels, especially on payday and weekends. Since the 1990s, directly east of the pub has been inhabited increasingly by gentrifying residents who have complained about the alcohol consumption and noise. As more middle class professionals moved into the area, this corner became a point of contestation. Police were called in regularly

and the space was under the scrutiny of moral watchdogs, much like in the previous century.

The contestation over this corner came into sharp relief when the owner decided he could rationalize the space and make it more desirable to a greater number of customers by turning the pub into a more profitable family-style coffee and donut shop franchise, Tim Hortons. It is projects such as these that bring in market-driven rationalities for shaping new urban spaces (Kern, 2010). It is important to interrogate how these attempts at moral reform, predicated on the removal of alcohol, set against the backdrop of the drive for bourgeois respectability, clearly distinguishes for whom the future space is intended. In other words: who has a seat at the table at the crossroads of the DTCE?

With the support of the local BIA and the Cabbagetown Preservation Association (CPA), Bernardo was set to end his struggle to try to make the tavern profitable by importing a franchise. As people caught wind of these plans, the local Councillor's office, the BIA and the CPA were flooded with complaints, mostly from the (white homo and hetero normative) middle classes who used the space. The middle class downtown elites, unlike newcomers and the working poor, are used to staking claims to entitlement by contacting the authorities (Boudreau, 2000; Sewell, 1993). In this struggle, there was an uneasy alliance between the left-leaning middle class and the working poor, an alliance that split support amongst the gentrifying class. There were cries by organizations like OCAP to maintain the space for poor people to gather and by others that imagined it could be turned into an upscale community pub mirroring similar projects in the west end of Toronto[v] where literary and musical events are held. There were also stalwart claims from gentrifiers to remove alcohol consumption from this corner and "clean up" the area.

The city Councillor called a community meeting at Spruce Court Public School on May 31, 2005, to let people have their say and the 200 plus people present realized soon that the meeting was an attempt at public relations rather than a consultation that would

have any possibility to change events. Bernardo was beyond considering alternative possibilities he believed would not return a profit. The working classes did not spend enough and the spending power of the middle class population was not large enough to make up the difference. Business sense dictated a low-end family donut shop would optimize profits for the owner.

The meeting was telling for three reasons.[vi] First, the people who showed up were not just the middle class gentrifiers but included the working poor, in surprising numbers. A number of people staked claim to the space based on its strong working class history and their attachment to it as a place of community and a place to gather and drink. They were explicit that the move to bring in a Tim Hortons was a strategy to remove alcohol and was an infringement on their way of life. Second, the middle class gentrifiers present were divided into two groups: those who welcomed the change and those who did not. Those who welcomed the change advanced a moral claim that Cabbagetown would not improve unless there were fewer bars, less noise and more family-oriented establishments. Those who opposed resisted the removal their meeting space, a space they were happy to share with the eclectic mix that they either grew up with or that brought them to Cabbagetown. Third, regardless of what anyone had to say, the plans had already been decided.

The contestation over this area was the harbinger of things to come. The conflict, and importantly where it was located, represented how the DTCE would be configured and who would be welcomed there. That this renovation would remove the drinking table frequented by single men, the working poor and some middle class residents and replace it with a family type, coffee-drinking table that would serve respectable crowds of the working and middle classes was significant. What transpired was that with both a moral claim for delivering the space to respectable orderliness (reminiscent of 19th moral reformers) and an economic imperative to improve the business prospects in the area (suggestive of a neoliberal imperative), the BIA was happy to support the venture. As well, the CPA was satisfied that the renovations would adhere to appropriate

standards and improve the streetscape in keeping with an aggressive campaign to beautify the area.

Bernardo said in an interview after the meeting. “Some people have very good reasons to be opposed to this, some do not. They think they should have a bar, but there are (already) 27 bars in the area” (Edwards, 2005). Here the spectre of alcohol once again raises moral alarm bells effectively.

CLASS, RACE, SPACE AND SHIFTING ALLIANCES

Shortly after the heated debates about who this space would serve, the building was renovated and Tim Hortons was established. Tim Hortons has become a regular stop for many, including many of the over 15,000 residents from the highly racialized space of St. Jamestown, a neighbourhood where the top five languages are Tagalog, Chinese, Tamil, Korean and Russian and where over 50% of the population earn less than $20,000 a year per household (Statistics Canada, 2006). The precariously employed or unemployed men and women who frequented the Winchester also returned to claim this corner. For those who advocated for a Tim Hortons, many of the social, economic and moral changes were accomplished. Yet soon after the rhythm of who frequented this newly reformed space was struck, another contestation ensued. This time the social divides were more clearly drawn.

Tim Hortons was not, by and large, a place for the middle class gentrifiers who already had their favoured coffee shops at the trendy establishment, Jet Fuel, (a few shops south) where local Canadian literary and media icons frequent, or the newly established Starbucks (across the street) and always a favourite of the middle classes. Both coffee shops have free wireless, which Tim Hortons does not provide. Unlike the other two coffee shops, Tim Hortons is open 24 hours, a rule that has been fought by residents who have worked hard to eradicate the 24-hour coffee shops that had been sites of drug dealing and prostitution (even pay phones nearby have usage limited to day times to prevent them from being used for after-hours illicit dealings). Consequently, any

possible ongoing class alliance previously struck during the struggle to keep The Winchester as a pub was diminished if not entirely eradicated. The coffee shop spaces reflect the current class divides.

POLICE AND RATIONALIZING SPACE

One of the successful ways that local residents have made changes to the neighbourhood space is to involve heavy police presence. This has produced a rationale for stopping people on the street for questioning, installing surveillance cameras, and even rationalizing traffic flow (it is a maze of one-way vehicular flow). Accordingly, there is constant police presence and a confounding one-way street system aimed to curtail prostitution activities. As Kern forcefully insists, "homelessness, violence, racial segregation in Toronto are not new or the result of neoliberalism, however, rationality structures a new set of responses to urban problems that serves not only to exacerbate …inequalities but also to rein in the potential for social justice oriented remedies" (2010:12).

Once people realize that life in the mixed 'hood is not as orderly or even as safe as the middle class spaces they are used to or that property values are contingent on, they start to worry. This worry splits the possible alliance between classes. I am here reminded of Ghassan Hage's (2000) notion of "worry" whereby he means that we can feel concern about how others are different from us, but it is not until we "worry" that we take action in service of our concern. Hage argues,

> Racism […] [like classism, homophobia, etc.] on its own does not carry within it an imperative for action. One can believe that one's race is better or different than another but there is nothing in this belief that requires one to act against members of the supposed "inferiors." I can believe "they" are different without caring where they live, whether they sit next to me, or whether there are "too many of them." As soon as I begin to worry about where "they" are located, or about the existence of "too many," I am

> beginning to worry not just about my “race” “ethnicity” “culture” or “people” but also about what I consider a privileged relationship between my race, ethnicity and so on and a territory. […] (31)

Not satisfied with breaking up areas where poor people gathered to consume alcohol and cheap food, this same southeast corner of Parliament came under the scrutiny of the moral watchdogs once again.

UNDESIRABLE FEET

The large tables in the former Winchester pub were conducive to long stretches of drinking, eating and socializing that produced a kind of timelessness. There was no urgency to vacate the premises, there were no meal times demarcated as in a more formal sit-down restaurant, and people exercised spontaneity, rearranging movable tables to visit with others; all common to a pub atmosphere. Small, immovable tables meant for small gatherings and orderly fast food and coffee consumption replaced these tables and spaces of spontaneity. The place has been transformed. The newly sandblasted bricks and mortar, restored original embossed tin ceiling and new windows that adhere to the standards demanded by the heritage preservation association obfuscate other transformations. What this façade makeover obscured was the community of people who were pushed out of a space they claimed as theirs. Following a neoliberal rationale, the space now individualizes gatherings and has destroyed community assemblages. In response to the limits imposed on the time people could spend in Tim Hortons, some of those who once used this corner to socialize and gather began to gather unconfined, outside on the northeast corner. They now drink their coffee and sit on their scooters or, for lack of public seating available, stand or sit on the curb, often with their feet dangling over onto the street. They have created an imaginary table around which to gather.

The spectre of this street gathering conjures up, for some, memories of prostitution, loitering, and panhandling activities that gentrifiers have fought hard to remove, with

much success, especially on this corner. With alcohol gone, the trope of alcohol was no longer available. This time, the spectre of feet became the target. Feet, that which are associated with dirt, primitiveness and poverty when imagined as uncovered, and even as weapons for fighting. Feet are depended on for transportation or a leisurely stroll. The worker's feet, and their uses, are different from the gentry's feet. To have feet dangle over the curb onto the street proved too much for the gentrified residents, especially those who lived just east of Tim Hortons. Issues of safety were of course advanced as one reason for concern. The other was the noise. Yet, underpinning all the worry was the history of disorderliness to which this area might revert should loitering feet pollute the street. This backdrop, this invisible familiarity, is what sustained the force of the complaints about the feet, the feet as symbolic of what and who is undesirable, and ultimately for whom the table is/is not set.

The BIA came up with a solution to the dangling feet problem. They proposed a pilot project to locate fixed seating with tables on three corners along Parliament Street, with the corner outside the new Tim Hortons as the first. Neighbours immediately raised the alarm; petitions were circulated and signed by many making it clear that a number of gentrifiers did not want permanent seating, even on a trial basis. With the resources available to this group of middle class elites, they secured a spot on national public radio to debate the pros and cons of this seating proposal. That this was of interest as a story on public radio that caters to white middle class values is no surprise. Perhaps this story was taken up because a fear resonated with listeners, a fear that their entitlement to re-shape the city would be challenged and even perhaps be returned to those who were there before them, or Others who staked a claim irrespective of middle class ways of life. As Julie-Anne Boudreau has carefully outlined, downtown elites in Toronto wield a great deal of political sway and are well practiced when it comes to staking their claim to spaces (2000).

The opposition to the street corners was articulated on air by a Cabbagetown resident who positioned herself as the spokesperson for the neighbourhood (Fumia, 2010). By doing so she claimed the space for gentrifiers and invisiblized others who were not part

of this cohort. She insisted that to make seating available would tempt illicit activities such as the public consumption of alcohol, drug deals, verbal abuse to passers-by, and violence, “just to name a few” of the inevitable activities that would take place. Arguing that Cabbagetown is not ready for this project she insisted that the space needed to be cleaned up of its existing problems before introducing more. Her solution: install more lighting and hire private police or security guards to “flush out” the “problem people” and get them off the streets. This position demarcated who had a seat at the table, or in this case whether there would be a table to negotiate who would have a seat at it. It also more clearly drew the class and racial lines between what could and could not happen in this central space of DTCE further establishing who did and did not belong. The gentrifying residents were persistent and convinced the BIA to reconsider its plans to install seating. The BIA announced in their next newsletter that the plan had been postponed for at least five years at which point they would re-visit it.

Today, this contested corner continues to be highly controversial. For their part, those who claim a seat at the imaginary outdoor table insist that those who opposed the seating project, whom they refer to as “the residents,” don’t realize that having people drinking coffee across the street from Tim Hortons makes the neighbourhood space safer. Referring to the gentrifiers as “the residents” indicates an understanding of who belongs, for a resident is someone who is “at home” because they live in the space. It also indicates a separation between “them” and “us” as many have written about (Ahmed, et al, 2003). Two examples of how the neighbourhood was improved with the presence of people drinking coffee outside the Tim Horton’s were provided for me one day when I joined the small group gathered there.

The first example they told me about was during the garbage strike (summer, 2009). They pointed out that if you looked at all the street corners up and down Parliament Street, “theirs” was the cleanest by far since they were vigilant in cleaning it. The second was later that same summer. A number of people were gathered and socializing in the late afternoon. One person looked up and saw smoke coming from one of “the resident’s houses” across the street. They raised the alarm and fire fighters came and

put out the fire before anyone was hurt. Damage was kept at a minimum. They were very proud of this civic act of responsibility and showed me photos they had taken on a cell phone. When I asked if they knew people were concerned about their feet hanging over the curb onto the street, they protested that if the seating plan had been approved, then their feet wouldn't have to touch the street.

Clearly feet touching the street are not the target of protest. It is what those feet symbolize that worries some. From a middle class perspective, feet that remain stationary on a street corner, when they should be in motion and transporting pedestrians from one place to another, are subject to suspicion and cause for police response. Despite the fact that one of the strong marketing ploys for Cabbagetown is that it is a friendly neighbourhood where people who know each other spontaneously stop and chat, this clearly is an activity only acceptable for some. Gatherings in outdoor public spaces on a street corner, that are too large or noisy, last too long, or are not organized in a middle class rational way are not what makes Cabbagetown an appealing neighbourhood for middle class gentrifiers.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Downtown Toronto Centre East and the people who live there must find their way. Many are dislocated, disoriented and trying to hold onto, or, find places of belonging. While tables offer a sense of grounding as we gather around them with friends and family, they also disorient us through the power and privilege that underpin the creation of them.

There are many who address the uneven effects of urban renewal to argue that cities are spaces where marginalized people are criminalized, stigmatized and displaced by efforts on behalf of middle class interests (Kern, 2010; Smith, 1996; Sassen, 1998). Here I have contributed to these claims by examining how gentrifiers in one small neighbourhood space in Toronto have actively campaigned against whole populations who are working class, racialized and poor. No one wants to live in places where they

are afraid to walk the streets because of violence, harassment and other unsafe conditions. Yet, associating and demonizing whole populations as an underclass, as Sassen (1998) and Valverde (2008) argue, clears a social space for delivering places to the rational, respectable middle classes. Strategies for how to make spaces liveable for a mix of populations, is a claim for social justice. David Sibley (1998) argues that we construct the Other as uncivilized and as an essential part of a colonial encounter. In a space that is locked in a Victorian landscape and consciousness and that actively promotes the preservation of both, it is not hard to imagine social interactions as present-day examples of colonial encounters. These encounters not only highlight the unequal and racialized social relations that exist there, but also the power and privilege that is used to create what Cathy van Ingen calls, "boundary consciousness" (2006:160). As David Harvey contends, "those who have the power to command and produce space possess a vital instrumentality for the reproduction and enhancement of their own power – they can create material space, the representation of space and the spaces of representation" (1993:233, quoted in van Ingen, 2006: 161). The effort expended to separate Cabbagetown from St. Jamestown, Regent Park and Moss Park continues to demarcate populations and spaces by class and race. The privilege that underpins whiteness and middle class-ness has proven to be more of a uniting force than the possibility to unite different races and classes through a shared sense of social justice. As I return to the table, I am reminded of Ahmed's writing table, one whose purpose it is to provide a space on which to create and imagine. The DTCE is in the process of a re-creation and it will be interesting to follow this over the next decade and trace the disorientation of people and how they find their way. Who will have a seat at this DTCE table?

Boundaries and identities are porous and this paper is not meant to gloss over the messiness of how people live their lives in and through spatial boundaries as presented here. While individual claims to space, supported by individual residents, the BIA and the CPA, contribute to how gentrification works to rationalize this small neighbourhood area in the middle of downtown Toronto, it would be wrong to suggest that it could

match the grander neoliberal campaigns for reimagining the city that are supported by the city and buttressed by the state.

The tables are set, we know which ones we are welcome at today, yet in downtown Toronto centre east, there are battles ahead about just how many tables will be available and for whom. We will have to continue to wade through these battles, one dangling foot at a time.

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i The APCOL project is a community-university action research project focusing on how people learn to engage, re-engage, as well as remain unengaged in various forms of anti-poverty activism. It explores this learning in relation to various types of anti-poverty initiatives, campaigns, programming as well as everyday neighbourhood life and biography (www.apcol.ca).

ii Edward Robbins (2000) discusses how middle class urban planners fail to recognize and take into account the notions of orderliness when considering how to plan for a vital neighbourhood that is not homogenously middle class. The resulting failure in a development in Thamesmead, England was due to placing too much emphasis on middle class notions of private property and order at the expense of planning for spontaneous social interactions.

iii This is not the first attempt to clean up and revitalize this area of Toronto (see Purdy, 2004, 2007).

iv It was originally called the Lakeview Hotel and renamed the Winchester after a renovation in 1941. In 1975 it was designated a heritage site (Edwards, 2005).

v For example, The Drake http://www.thedrakehotel.ca and The Gladstone http://www.gladstonehotel.com/hotel.

vi Information about this meeting is taken from my personal notes I recorded during the meeting.