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Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

The Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL) project represents a partnership effort across several post

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,

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 -

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.

instance Teelucksingh, 2006). This table indicates that the space in the DTCE is

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

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> 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

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 Cabbagete Tmesn -0(s)-0(sDpec) 1 (le) 1 (her) squi

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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

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

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.

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

> 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

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 sponta-1 (e) -1 (o) g-1 (c)-0.(e)i

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