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Diversity and social cohesion: the case of Jane-Finch, a highly diverse lower-income Toronto neighbourhood

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Diversity has increasingly emerged as the core focus of many studies concerning factors impacting on social cohesion. Various scholars have concluded that diversity is detrimental to cohesion. Most of this research, however, draws generalisations based upon quantitative data and fails to account for the impact of inequality, segregation and discrimination, and their interconnectedness to diversity. This research provides an in-depth qualitative analysis of the perceptions of inhabitants of a diverse Toronto neighbourhood regarding formal and informal interactions, common values and attachment. The findings suggest that the internalisation of gendered and class-based racism by inhabitants plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and interactions.

Keywords: diversity; social cohesion; Toronto

Introduction

In recent decades, diversity has occupied a central position in academic and policy debates concerning social cohesion. From politics to journalism, we are witnessing the widespread sentiment that diversity, particularly racial and ethnic diversity due to migration patterns, population movements and increasing numbers of asylum seekers, has an overwhelmingly erosive impact on national identity and is threatening our societal cohesion. The public and political rhetoric, although emotionally based and populist, often relies on a specific line of scholarship which primarily argues that communities with high levels of racial and cultural diversity have lower levels of trust and fewer formal and informal interactions (Putnam 2007; Alesina and La Ferrara 2000, 2002; Costa and Kahn 2003). Thus, according to this logic, for there to be social cohesion, a certain level of homogeneity must be maintained. Such theories have been instrumentalised to advance agendas in favour of assimilating the 'other' into the mainstream (i.e. assimilationism), abandoning multiculturalist and pluralist approaches in the realm of policy and shifting public opinion (Letki 2008). However, while assimilationist tendencies in theory and policy prevail, we have also witnessed the emergence of a wave of counter-theories grounded in the belief that diversity is positive and must be embraced as a trait that can bolster social cohesion (among other things). The contributions of such works are especially notable in the area of social mixing – in terms of both theory and policy practice (see Graham et al. 2009; Camina and Wood 2009; Joseph and Chaskin 2010). Social mixing policies identify and encourage greater mixing across income groups and between ethnic communities as a tool for establishing and strengthening social cohesion (Tasan-Kok et al. 2013).

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These two lines of argument, despite their differences, share one fundamental similarity. They both posit diversity as having a central role in relation to social cohesion, with one putting diversity on a pedestal, while the other seeks its erasure. However, by promoting a one-dimensional relationship between diversity and social cohesion, we lose sight of other important factors that impact on cohesion (such as deprivation, neighbourhood status and institutionalised racism). Research increasingly shows that low neighbourhood status, poverty, stigmatisation of lower-income areas with high concentrations of ethnic minority households, and racial discrimination have a great impact on how inhabitants of an area perceive and interact with one another (Li, Pickles, and Savage 2005; Oliver and Mandelberg 2000; Oliver and Wong 2003). The framing or priming of racial attitudes and interracial relations, the presence of explicit information and implicit cues about racial relations, and the racial coding of crime and welfare in the minds of citizens all significantly influence attitudes towards diversity (Letki 2008). Moreover, there is evidence for the fact that socio-economic polarisation and segregation often develop geographically along racial lines. Thus, neighbourhoods with high rates of poverty and low socio-economic status often tend to exhibit high racial diversity (Hulchanski 2010; Sampson and Groves 1989; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997).

Diversity is a complex concept that encompasses a wide array of categories. Ethnicity is often regarded as the dominant category of diversity, such that many studies have used the concepts of 'diversity' and 'ethnic diversity' interchangeably (Lancee and Dronkers 2011; Talen 2010; Piekut et al. 2012). However, diversity can go beyond the conventional demographic categories and include various collective and individual markers, on the basis of which identity is constructed, from socio-economic class to lifestyles and hobbies. Despite recent efforts to address different categories of diversity within one theoretical approach (e.g. 'super-diversity' in Vertovec 2007; and 'hyper-diversity' in Tasan-Kok et al. 2013), analytical confusion around the notion of diversity remains largely intact as theory has yet to offer an adequate response to the challenges of operationalising the concept. While it is difficult to offer a clear-cut definition of diversity – not least because informants had various subjective understandings of the notion – within the confines of this research, the main categories of diversity addressed include those readily visible, or in the words of Harrison, Price, and Bell (1998), 'surface-level diversity' categories such as age, race and gender, as well as deep-level diversity categories such as religious beliefs, cultural and class-based norms.

In this article, I argue that an overemphasis on the impact of ethnic diversity on social cohesion (in the form of either demonisation or glamorisation) euphemises the problem of structural inequality. The current politics of social cohesion in Western societies seem to be primarily concerned with integrating the 'other' into what is perceived as 'normal' or, in the words of Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Kofman (2005), 'reasserting the view that the progress of groups away from racism and disadvantage lies in convincing them to go mainstream' (529). The concept of social cohesion does not convey the same level of awareness of issues of inequality, racism and exclusion as the concept of social justice (Baeker 2002, 1998; Jenson, 1998). In fact, a depoliticised deployment of the notion through the sensationalisation of diversity and cultural difference can function to divert focus away from the root causes of marginalisation, which is a by-product of economic, political and institutional practices. The prevention of exclusion of marginalised groups relies less on achieving social cohesion and more on addressing power dynamics that perpetuate systemic discrimination and inequity (Baeker 2002).

The main aim of the article is to unpack the perceptions of the residents of a diverse neighbourhood regarding different aspects of social cohesion, in particular common values, formal and informal interactions and neighbourhood attachment. Adopting a

qualitative approach, the article provides insights into socio-economic and political structures underlying inhabitants' perceptions and interactions in the Jane-Finch neighbourhood of Toronto as an example of a highly diverse lower-income neighbourhood. While a number of rigorous qualitative efforts to analyse the relationship between social cohesion and diversity have been made (e.g. Hudson, Phillips, and Ray 2007; Hickman, Crowley, and Mai 2008; Jayaweera and Choudhury 2008; Harris and Young 2009; Noble 2009; Wise and Velayutham 2009; Hickman, Mai, and Crowley 2012; Wessendorf 2013, 2014), the use of qualitative methods is still innovative in this research domain. An in-depth qualitative analysis of the relationship between diversity and social cohesion would be beneficial insofar as it allows us to interrogate the protagonists' perceptions and discursive practices in the light of the socio-economic and political forces that shape and reproduce them, thereby examining the relationship in a more systemic manner. Furthermore, minority groups are often treated as objects of politics rather than political subjects (Però 2013). Engaging with the narratives and experiences of inhabitants (in particular those in the margins) allows the shifting of our gaze to see them as 'subjects' who are influenced by institutionalised racism, exclusion and criminalisation, while simultaneously being subject to essentialised public representations by the state and media.

The structure of the article is as follows. Firstly, a brief overview of the current literature on social cohesion in general and its relation to diversity in particular is presented. Subsequently, the research methodology and the specifics of the fieldwork experience are outlined. After a brief introduction to the case study area and an overview of Canadian multiculturalism respectively, the analysis is presented. In the final section, the research results are discussed along with implications for further research.

Social cohesion

Social cohesion has undoubtedly been a popular notion in urban research and policy over recent decades. While many studies have offered various definitions and operationalisations of the notion, the lack of unanimity around what constitutes, strengthens and undermines social cohesion signals the complex, multifaceted nature of the concept (see Portes and Vickstrom 2011). The definitions of social cohesion provided by the literature generally remain at an abstract level, such as 'the glue that holds society together' (Tolsma, Van der Meer, and Gesthuizen 2009; Maloutas and Malouta 2004), or what makes a society 'hang together so as to ensure that all the component parts of society fit together and contribute to its collective objectives and well-being, and eradicate conflict and disruptive behaviour' (Kearns and Forrest 2000 :996). Detailed elaborations of the concept have often included the breaking down of cohesion into its constituent elements, most commonly outlined as social contacts and social networks, social solidarity, social order, shared values and norms, place attachment and a shared identity (Forrest and Kearns 2001; Tasan-Kok et al. 2013; Letki 2008). Moreover, some scholars have emphasised the conceptual and operational similarities between social cohesion and social capital, and some have used the two concepts interchangeably as a result (Letki 2008; Laurence 2009; Osberg 2003). Focusing on social capital, these studies tend to place more emphasis on social networks, trust and participation in associations in their understanding of cohesion (see also Putnam 1995, 2001). It is clear that social cohesion is a fuzzy concept and admits of various understandings. A rigorous analysis of the phenomenon thus demands a careful operationalisation.

This study specifically examines residents' perceptions regarding the following components of cohesion: common values, formal and informal interactions, and neighbourhood attachment. Common values and norms constitute a widely shared perspective on social cohesion in the literature. Kearns and Forrest (2000) identified common values as a primary component of cohesion, as they enable society to identify with and pursue common objectives and have a set of moral and behavioural norms and codes of conduct in common. Common values are generally considered to reinforce political engagement and participation rather than indifference and apathy, which often characterise modern-day individualism (Bellah et al. 1985; Wilson 1985). An emphasis on common values can also carry integrationist and assimilationist undertones, as it often relies on the construction of an essentialised national identity (e.g. Canadian-ness) which minorities are expected to integrate into. The discourse of integration into national values also relies upon assigning homogenised cultural essences – described as traditional values – to minority groups. The problem is, however, that many of these assigned values stem from orientalist perceptions of non-Western countries (e.g. regarding patriarchy or violence against women as congenial to the national identity of Muslims, Indians and South Asians). The discourse on common values in Western countries such as Canada thus embodies a hierarchy of cultures which is simultaneously shaped by and shaping colonial and imperialist discourses (Bannerji 1991, 2000).

The existence of social ties and networks of varying kinds also plays a quintessential role in creating cohesion in a neighbourhood. Social ties not only help maintain social cohesion but also provide support networks among inhabitants, and prevent isolation and marginalisation (Kearns and Forrest 2000). While previous scholarship has placed a lot of emphasis on the density and strength of social ties, Pahl and Spencer (1997) contended that it is the content, meaning and quality of ties and relationships that are most informative in the study of social cohesion. In addition to ties with family, friends, neighbours, etc., which, in the current study, are regarded as informal ties, another set of social networks, referred to here as formal ties, are deemed important in creating cohesion. Formal ties can be broadly defined as networks of civic engagement, including membership and associational activity in neighbourhood organisations (Kearns and Forrest 2000). Nevertheless, the literature on social capital and cohesion does not consider all social ties to have a positive impact on social cohesion. Laurence (2009) emphasises that, much like common values, social networks and social capital are politicised concepts, given the delineations between good and bad ties in relation to social cohesion in neighbourhoods. Building on Putnam's (2001) framework of bonding and bridging ties, Laurence further contends that bonding ties among racial minority groups are often seen as threatening to the creation and maintenance of cohesion, while bridging ties across groups are perceived as beneficial and non-threatening.

Furthermore, in addition to social ties and common values, another characteristic commonly associated with social cohesion is neighbourhood attachment. Neighbourhood attachment emphasises the emotional experiences and bonds of people with their neighbourhood (Low and Altman 1992). There is a general presumption that strong feelings of belonging and attachment to a neighbourhood positively affect adherence to common values, building social networks, and creating a sense of security, bonds and solidarity, which are collectively important for creating social cohesion (Low and Altman 1992; Kearns and Forrest 2000). However, attachment to one's neighbourhood can have a double-edged impact on social cohesion. One possible downside to place attachment is isolation, namely that people can come to exist in small worlds. This is particularly exacerbated by external forces such as access to affordable housing, racial and

socio-economic segregation and limited mobility for inhabitants of lower-income neighbourhoods. In relation to diversity, place attachment coupled with strong bonding ties among ethnic minorities are commonly perceived to pose a threat to the cohesion of the broader community (on the neighbourhood, city or national scales) (Low and Altman 1992).

Diversity and social cohesion

In theory, diversity is often posited to impact on cohesion dichotomously (in either a positive or negative way). One set of studies, generally comprising quantitative inquiries, ground their argument in the claim that increasing diversity (in particular in relation to ethnicity and socio-economic status) negatively impacts on social capital and connectedness among inhabitants. Perhaps the most notable among such studies has been Putnam's 'E pluribus unum' study (2007), in which he argued that people tend to retreat from social life or 'pull in like a turtle' in the face of ethnic diversity (149) (for other examples, see Kearns and Mason 2007; on the negative impact of diversity on attachment/belonging, see Dekker and Bolt 2005; Greif 2009; Feijten and Van Ham 2009; and on eroding trust, see Stolle, Soroka, and Johnston 2008). Another set of theories (e.g. Kazemipur 2006; Phan 2008; Marschall and Stolle 2004) maintain that diversity reinforces tolerance, acceptance and social interactions among inhabitants. In reality, however, these two patterns are by no means mutually exclusive. The relationship between diversity and social cohesion is rather complex, depending on prior conditions and experiential, historical and personal factors at both the individual and group levels (Laurence and Bentley 2015; Livingston, Bailey, and Kearns 2010). The complexity of the relationship thus casts doubts on the generalisability of either of the two theoretical strands (Schaeffer 2014; Laurence 2009; Van der Meer and Tolsma 2014; Ahmadi and Tasan-Kok 2015). Underlying factors such as socio-economic inequality, neighbourhood status and institutionalised discrimination play important roles in defining the relationship between diversity and social cohesion (see, e.g., Letki 2008; Li, Pickles, and Savage 2005; Oliver and Mandelberg 2000; Oliver and Wong 2003).

Academic and public discourses concerning cohesion often tend to problematise ethnic and racial diversity above any other factor (e.g. socio-economic class and gender). The overemphasis on ethnic and cultural differences overshadows the issue of power imbalance and culturalises our existence. Cultural essentialism proposes cultural descriptions as concrete, static, fixed, objective, consensual and uniformly shared by all members of a group, hollowing them out of underlying social relations and thereby obscuring any understanding of difference as a construction of power (Grillo 2003; Rutherford 1990). Similarly, ethnicity appears as a 'fact of life' that appeals to supposedly natural distinctions to explain cultural differences (Baumann and Sunier 1995). Social existence thus becomes a matter of a cultural essence when the social relations of power that create difference are overlooked (Bannerji 2000). If our cultural differences pose a threat to our societal cohesion, then a solution would be to erase or minimise these differences. However, the homogenisation of cultural traits is arguably not the recipe for success. The approach is often criticised for being grounded in assimilationist notions. Moreover, the very assumption that cohesion is the absence of conflict needs to be revisited. Baeker (2002) suggested a radical change to our approach to social cohesion by proposing that cohesion be regarded not as the absence of conflict (through achieving liberal consensus), but rather as the capacity to manage conflict. In the same vein, diversity can be approached as an 'ongoing negotiation of intersecting and conflicting interests' (Baeker

2002, 183). Only then can the complex relationship between diversity and social cohesion be reconciled without compromising equity and inclusion. Rigorous qualitative research is needed to enable critical reflection on the concepts of diversity and social cohesion without depoliticising or flattening them, and to further develop an understanding of the relationship that reflects its complexity.

Multiculturalism and diversity in Canada

The intersection of cultural diversity with socio-economic polarisation in Canadian cities such as Toronto challenges Canada's claim to multiculturalism and tolerance (Baeker 2002). The seeming mismatch between the promise of multiculturalism in policy and the political reality in Canadian cities such as Toronto has been addressed by various Canadian scholars. Bannerji (2000) argued that there is a considerable gap between the paradigm of multiculturalism and the actuality of immigrant life in Canada, arguing that multiculturalism may have worked less well for racial minorities than for white immigrant groups, as visible minorities evidently have lower relative household income and much higher poverty rates than immigrant groups of European decent (Reitz and Banerjee 2007). They further face various employment difficulties, especially the discounting of their qualifications and work experience (Li 2000). The deskilling of non-European immigrants not only takes place through unemployment and underemployment, but also through the institutional decertification of the professionals among these groups (Bolaria and Li 1988). Canada's Aboriginal communities have also seemingly been excluded from the practice of multiculturalism (see Bannerji 2000). Similarly, Gordon and Newfield (1996) argued that multiculturalism in the 1980s replaced the emphasis on race and racism with an emphasis on cultural diversity, assigning a creative power to racial groups that lacked political and economic power. This has involved the translation of problems stemming from socio-economic injustice into issues of culture.

In fact, despite the positive recognition of diversity, a clear pattern of socio-spatial segregation can be observed in the city of Toronto along ethnic lines. Hulchanski (2010) provides rigorous empirical evidence for the increasing concentration of wealth and poverty, and the consolidation of three different 'cities' within Toronto over the course of 35 years, each with distinct income and racial characteristics. The research also shows that of the three cities, the low-income areas (which exhibit high ethnic diversity and are increasingly located on the periphery of the city) have been facing consistent drops in income levels over the past decades. The 2007 report, 'Losing Ground', by United Way Toronto similarly documented income polarisation, intensified precarity in the job market (a rise in insecure, temporary work without benefits), and an increase in the number of households living in poverty. The polarisation of income combined with a divide between urban and suburban areas in Toronto evidently follows a geographic pattern of race and ethnicity, especially considering that Canada's 10 most ethnically diverse voting constituencies are located in suburban Toronto, where there has been a significant increase in poverty levels throughout the last decade (Mustafa 2013).

Therefore, while multiculturalism and its core discourse of diversity have pushed forward the agenda for recognition, this has limited political impact on marginalised groups (especially in the areas of economic redistribution, social justice and anti-racism) (see also Goonewardena, Rankin, and Weinstock 2004; Goonewardena and Kipfer 2005; Siemiatycki 2011; Rankin and McLean 2015). The present article contributes to the body of scholarship critically interrogating the practice of Canadian multiculturalism by

exploring the lived experiences of Jane-Finch inhabitants with this central discourse, namely diversity, and in particular its relationship to different aspects of social cohesion.

Methods and context

The present article used qualitative research methods to explore inhabitants' perceptions regarding different aspects of social cohesion in a highly diverse neighbourhood. It aspired to answer the question: *How do the inhabitants of a diverse neighbourhood perceive common values, formal and informal interactions, and neighbourhood attachment?* The data for the study was gathered over a two-month period between September and October 2014, during which 50 semi-structured interviews were conducted with inhabitants of the Jane-Finch neighbourhood of Toronto. Our one-on-one conversations usually lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and often took place in informants' homes (unless they had requested otherwise). Alternative locations for interviews included locations within the neighbourhood such as public libraries, cafes, restaurants and other common areas. The conversations mostly centred on inhabitants' perceptions of the diversity of their neighbourhood, particularly in relation to their social interactions with neighbours, their participation in neighbourhood associations, their sense of attachment and the values shared with neighbours. The informants were initially recruited through local associations and later through snowballing. This had implications for the research results, as many of the informants involved in the first two weeks of the fieldwork already had contact with local organisations and demonstrated high levels of community involvement. While the sample represents the diversity of Jane-Finch inhabitants with regard to various factors such as age, ethnicity and socio-economic status, it is predominantly comprised of female informants (36 out of 50). The primary reason for this was that access to male informants proved more difficult, especially access to young racial-minority male youth, due to their low participation rates in local associations. Many conversations with service providers and outreach workers in Jane-Finch similarly revealed that serving and outreach to this group, which in fact is considered most at risk of becoming involved in drugs, gangs and violence in the area, is rather difficult in Jane-Finch. The particularities of the sample were factored into the analysis and are further elaborated on in the 'Data and analysis' section (Ahmadi and Tasan-Kok 2013) (for detailed information about the informants, see Table A1 in the Appendix).

With each informant's consent, the conversations were recorded, transcribed and coded with the use of Nvivo. The texts were later analysed using critical discourse analysis, which allowed for a close interrogation of the meaning and construction of discourses while contextualising them in terms of underlying power structures (Bryman 2008).

The case study

The case study for this research was Jane-Finch, an inner-suburban neighbourhood located in the northwest of Toronto. Jane-Finch was originally developed in the 1960s as a model suburb with a large stock of public housing to host a socially diverse population. The neighbourhood has experienced considerable waves of immigration coming from the Caribbean, East Asia, South Asia, Africa and South America. It currently accommodates more youth, single-parent families, refugees, individuals without a secondary-school diploma, low-income households and public housing tenants than any other neighbourhood in Toronto. The landscape of the neighbourhood consists predominantly of high-rise tower blocks, wide streets and large green areas, adhering generally to the

Table 1. Key characteristics of Jane-Finch and Toronto.

	Toronto	Jane-Finch
Area (km^2)	632	21
Total population	2,503,000	80,150
Age (years)		
0–19	16.1%	43.4%
20–64	69.9%	43.1%
>65	14.0%	13.6%
Percentage of population not born in Canada	50.0	60.0
Persons 25 or over without a school certificate, diploma or degree	18%	35%
Average household income	C$80,300	C$53,900
Unemplovment rate	6.7%	9.2%

Source: Statistics Canada. (2010). 2006 Census of population: Individuals file.[Public use microdata file]. Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from http://www.odesi.ca

principles of Green Cities. In addition to the towers, which mostly accommodate lower-income households, pockets of more affluent detached and semi-detached houses can be found (Ahmadi and Tasan-Kok 2013). The coupling of the neighbourhood's outstanding demographic diversity with a high concentration of lower-income households, welfare recipients and unemployment makes Jan-Finch an appropriate choice for an in-depth analysis of residents' perceptions of diversity and social cohesion in the context of poverty and deprivation (see Table 1).

Both Jane-Finch and Toronto exhibit very high levels of diversity based on their population characteristics. Toronto has experienced increasing diversity due to globalisation, population movement and increased migration over the past decades. However, new immigrants continue to face challenges, such as discrimination in the labour market, limited access to resources and affordable housing, and poor quality of life in the city. Income polarisation, inequality and segregation along class and racial lines have in fact become the defining characteristics of Toronto (Joy and Vogel 2015; Siemiatycki 2011). As a result, many immigrants have settled in inner-suburban areas of Toronto (in particular Scarborough and North York), characterised by their concentrated poverty, high resident turn-over, poor infrastructure, gang presence and gun violence (Joy and Vogel 2015). Table 1 presents an overview of the general characteristics of Jane-Finch and Toronto.

Data and analysis

This section closely analyses the data derived from in-depth interviews with residents to explore their perceptions of common values, formal and informal relationships, and neighbourhood attachment.

Values and perceptions of the 'other'

With regard to values, most informants mentioned that they did not necessarily feel that they shared the same values as others, they did, however, almost unanimously contend that proximity to diversity led them to feel more tolerant towards different cultures, lifestyles and values to a certain extent. Many claimed that they felt different from other inhabitants in the area but respected others' differences.

Gloria, a Jamaican senior and long-time Jane-Finch resident, claimed that living with diversity had broadened her horizons, as she had been able to draw parallels between different cultures through intercultural exchanges with neighbours:

> I talk to the Vietnamese ladies, I talk to the Indians, the Egyptians and guess what? I feel like we were all brought up the same! The food is the same, we just call it different names! It was so funny when you really think, I'm from Jamaica, you are from Vietnam, you are from India but the bringing up of our generation was the same! So I feel like we are not that much different except from the fact that we speak different languages, we are all human beings and we were all brought up with our values. (Female, Jamaican, 61–75 years, private housing resident)

The preceding quote exemplifies how living with diversity can bring about opportunities to exchange values and cultural traits. However, conversations with informants revealed that these exchanges often do not result in the challenging or changing of pre-existing social hierarchies among residents that are due to their class status and ethnic and religious background, which condition how inhabitants perceive one another. For example, Johnny, who is a middle-aged homeowner of Indian descent, claimed to hold values that were more similar to other middle-income homeowners in his street than low-income households living in Toronto housing in other parts of the neighbourhood:

> This part is all retired people and people who have settled down here and bought houses, right? But I think if you go a bit down there is a lot of people living on welfare and so they have [a] different set of constraints. [...] There should be work done, I think, in terms of people getting educated and more civically conscious so that they know their civic duties. That OK, this is a house for us and we can take ownership as opposed to being entitled, like I should get all these programs and then that is it. Turning from a purely welfare mentality. For some of us because of that background and upbringing it comes naturally but for some people it does not happen at all. (Male, Indian, 46–60 years, homeowner)

Implicit in Johnny's statement is a sense of moral superiority in relation to residents who have a lower social and economic status, exemplified by his claim regarding the need for people on welfare to be educated about civic responsibility. Underlying this claim is the assumption that welfare recipients are inherently passive, needy and undeserving of the special treatment they seem to be receiving, all of which are essentialised negative traits attributed to the poor. Other protagonists, such as Rebecca, a young El Salvadorian who was brought up in an Italian pocket of Jane-Finch, shared personal accounts of having experienced discrimination and feelings of inferiority due to their class position and cultural background.

> I was discriminated against by an Italian teacher in Grade 6 and it was hard, I was bullied a lot by a lot of the Italian kids there, and not everyone was friendly. A lot of the teachers were Italian, only one time in Grade 4 there was a black teacher but he had to leave because a lot of the people were racist towards him. And so up until this date there is still an Italian community, [...] I can't relate to them because they are more middle class and higher up so it is hard to relate to and because European countries, they have very different cultures as opposed to Central America. Italian people I feel don't really want to get close. [...] As much as I want to be able to relate to them, I feel like I have done something wrong compared to them so I feel like it is hard to build that connection. (Female, El Salvadorian, 18–30 years, homeowner)

Based on our data, the general attitude towards diversity in Jane-Finch is in line with what Wessendorf (2013) has called 'common-place diversity', referring to a situation in which diversity is experienced by local residents of an area as a normal aspect of their lives due to their everyday lived experiences with diversity. Such awareness of common-place diversity does not necessarily entail either an appreciation of or disdain for diversity. The conversations further revealed a general civility towards diversity (Lofland 1989) in the neighbourhood, meaning that residents often highlighted a positive acknowledgement of diversity while also admitting that it sometimes created tensions (see also Lee 2002; Boyd 2006; Lofland 2012). Furthermore, the residents seemed to have different perceptions of diversity, often associating the term only with aspects that they deemed positive (regarding behaviour and dress code, for example). Thus, the celebration of diversity, although well intentioned, did not go much beyond lip service. The seeming commitment to remain civil towards diversity often went hand in hand with essentialisations and stereotyping on the basis of race, gender, culture, religion and class. This reflects findings of a study by Incirlioglu and Tandogan (1999), in which they contend that when opposing diversity is no longer politically correct, arguments are reformulated to seem objective. For example, rather than saying that certain individuals or groups are not acceptable because they are different, it is stated that their practices are inherently 'less hygienic, less civil, or more dangerous' (57).

In our study, such cultural essentialisations were not exclusive to any particular group or culture. Informants commonly made contradictory statements when talking about diversity, particularly when addressing tension and conflict arising from it. This is exemplified by a quote from Gloria, an elderly first-generation Jamaican migrant, in which she shares her experiences concerning a Muslim neighbour with whom she had a conflict. While she had formerly expressed very positive sentiments towards diversity, she adhered to stereotypes when contextualising the conflict:

> She uses the Muslim card, oh you don't like me because I'm a Muslim. [...] If a Muslim person can come in and terrorise other people, you can't do anything because she is a Muslim. (Female, Jamaican, 61–75 years, private housing resident)

It is important to note the fact that the informant highlights the religious identity of her neighbour above any other factor when putting the conflict into context and, in doing so, uses the expression 'using the Muslim card', which is often invoked to trivialise legitimate accounts of Islamophobia and discrimination towards Muslims.

It is evident from the data that exposure to diversity alone did not outweigh the influence of existing hierarchical structures among inhabitants based on markers such as class, ethnicity and religion, which continued to shape their perceptions of one another. In fact, residents' negative, and at times contradictory, statements regarding diversity signal the fact that civility to diversity often does not go beyond paying lip service to the notion. Therefore, while diversity may be embraced in conversation (perhaps merely for the sake of being politically correct), the influence of internalised negative and stereotypical assumptions on inhabitants' perceptions of one another remains intact.

Formal and informal interactions

With regard to formal interactions, because I used local associations as my entry point into the community, many of the initial informants were inhabitants who had contact with local organisations and were highly involved in community matters. As a result, part of the

sample expressed a high level of engagement with local programmes, while the other (consisting mostly of informants found through snowballing and channels other than associations) demonstrated little awareness and involvement (see also Ahmadi and Tasan-Kok 2015). The inhabitants who showed high levels of involvement (i.e. strong formal relations) mostly consisted of parents of school-aged children, who actively sought neighbourhood services and programmes, and students who engaged in community work as part of their study requirements. In addition, a smaller group also claimed to have sought community involvement to establish social ties.

In contrast, inhabitants who did not proactively seek services often had little or no awareness of the programmes existing in the area. In addition, in our conversations, some participants mentioned that they had experienced negative encounters with social workers and service providers, which resulted in them not seeking any form of support from associations. Bryah, a long-term resident and single mother of Jamaican decent, shared the following anecdote:

> Like the other day I was having a problem with the social assistance worker and every time I spoke to her I would come off the phone in tears. Like why do you need to talk to me like that? I do work or you know I am sick or whatever the situation is. (Female, Jamaican, 31–45 years, private housing resident)

She further noted that her negative encounters with social workers had led to the creation of a sense of mistrust and scepticism towards them, which in turn discouraged her from seeking help and social assistance. People often spoke of similar instances of having experienced neglect, degradation or abuse by social workers who have internalised negative stereotypes regarding people on welfare. Black single mothers on welfare, such as Bryah, were most commonly the targets of such stereotyping.

Thus, issues such as poverty and racism had a strong influence on how residents perceived and whether they became involved in community organisations. The following statement by Juan, a senior Latino resident and community worker, outlines the systemic issues undermining community participation:

> There is another level of poverty which is the ignorance and lack of involvement in the community and something which we may call, particularly when we discuss issues of youth and gangs, the issue of self-exclusion. Self-exclusion happens when people give up on the system. So we are not talking about inclusion, here we are talking about the fact that there are many families and individuals and people who feel that there is nothing in there for them and therefore keep withdrawing back into their small spaces. (Male, Chilean, 46–60 years, homeowner)

Regarding informal interactions, the conversations revealed that individuals did sometimes develop strong ties or mutual support with people from diverse ethnic or cultural backgrounds but only when there were commonalities (shared language, problems, experiences and life stage) and common activities which led to frequent encounters (at school, workplace, common spaces, etc.) (see Ahmadi and Tasan-Kok 2015). Leah, a young resident of Trinidadian decent who was born and raised in Jane-Finch, outlined how commonalities among families with children lead to informal interactions.

> So when we were growing up we would be outside playing with a bunch of children and our parents would bond over our relationship cause they had something in common to talk about so there was this common interest around what we were doing or how we were having fun or,

> now that we are older and a lot of people have moved out of the community that has been refabricated. (Female, Trinidadian, 31–45 years, public housing resident)

Rebecca explains how having in common the experience of discrimination and bullying created solidarity and a connection between her and another classmate:

> I have one friend from my high school who was also bullied and we are like two in one. We are always hanging out together. And she feels the same way as I do, it is hard to make friends. [. . .] It was in the French class and that is how we met. She was being bullied because she was from Iraq. They would call her terrorist and things like that. I was discriminated against because I was Spanish. So I stood up for her and ever since we became very close. (Female, El Salvadorian, 18–30 years, homeowner)

Inhabitants therefore developed informal ties and support networks with other residents who resided or worked in close proximity to them (immediate neighbours and colleagues) provided that commonalities and/or shared activities existed (Ahmadi and Tasan-Kok 2015).

Neighbourhood attachment

Conversations with inhabitants made it clear early on that any understanding of the notion of neighbourhood attachment would be incomplete without a close examination of the stigma surrounding Jane-Finch as a poor area with a high concentration of ethnic minority households. While stigmatisation often pertains to the neighbourhood as a whole, the most negative sentiments – in the mainstream media and public perceptions – are often targeted towards pockets with the highest concentration of Toronto housing and visible minorities, in particular black residents (the intersection of Jane Street and Finch Avenue, from which the neighbourhood takes its name). Anti-black sentiment as well as sexist and paternalistic portrayals of welfare recipients are quintessential elements of the stigma surrounding Jane-Finch. Stigmatisation further exceeds public imagination and delineates policy perceptions and action regarding the area, as expressed by Mauricio, a long-time Jane-Finch resident and community worker:

> The problem that we have is that the powers that be see this area as a wasteland. Because there are a lot of people on social services and many of the buildings are subsidised housing and they don't see it as people trying to come out, in their eyes, they say why bother. (Male, El Salvadorian, 61–75 years, homeowner)

In the same vein, Juan pointed out that the positive talk around diversity does not translate into action, as systemic issues are often left unaddressed:

> In Canada, nobody wants to walk about race but we are seeing race emerging as one of the most frustrating things from a diversity perspective. The discourse is good but the reality is not the same. (Male, Chilean, 46–60 years, homeowner)

The stigma seems to influence neighbourhood attachment in different and often contradictory ways. Among the informants, some actively tried to dissociate themselves from the Jane-Finch intersection, which is highly associated with the stigma (of gang presence, crime, shootings and pick-pocketing among other things). To grasp whether these sentiments derived from personal experiences or were reproductions of normalised negative stereotypes, in instances when these stereotypes were mentioned by informants, I

followed up by asking whether they had experienced any such threats first-hand (see also Ahmadi and Tasan-Kok 2015). The responses made it clear that first-hand experiences of shootings or gang violence at the intersection were close to non-existent among those interviewed. Inhabitants thus seemed to have subscribed to negative stereotypes and stigmatisation not because they had experienced threats themselves, but rather because they had internalised racist representations of ethnic-minority households living on welfare. Gita, a female Indian resident who lived in a privately owned house a few minutes north of the intersection, expressed disdain for the stigmatised part of the area:

> I like my street mostly and the nearby area here. I don't like to go close to the Jane-Finch area, I don't know, because of crime, the black people live there, they bother the people sometimes. (Female, Indian, 31–45 years, homeowner)

This quote shows how people living in very close proximity to the stigmatised intersection can dissociate themselves from it by means of reproducing negative narratives about the area. In contrast, another group of respondents expressed feelings of deep attachment to the stigmatised Jane-Finch intersection, because the stigma helped create a sense of solidarity among those who have felt marginalised by it. Alicia, a single mother of Jamaican decent who has raised her son in the San Romanoway towers on the Jane-Finch intersection, expressed a sense of pride in declaring that the stigmatised area was her neighbourhood:

> Yes! All of it is my neighbourhood. You know what? You always hear the stuff on the media! But it goes in here and out of here because unless you live here you don't know. Yes you have got crime all over, the rich areas, the poor areas, it does not matter. There is crime everywhere. You probably don't know about it, you don't hear about it but if anything goes on here it will get sensationalised. (Female, Jamaican, 61–75 years, private housing resident)

Rebecca also shared her sense of attachment to the area in spite of the stigma:

> What I like about Jane-Finch is that I feel more comfortable with different people of colour because I feel like they understand the same situation. My parents came from El Salvador which is a poverty [sic] country, we came because of the war, there were a lot of gangs so I feel like I can relate to them in that sense in the area. I don't judge them, I understand what they are going through. They are low income. I can relate more to the low income. (Female, El Salvadorian, 18–30 years, homeowner)

As expressed in the quote, it is not a depoliticised understanding of diversity that created attachment, but a solidarity rooted in identity politics as well as shared experiences of isolation and marginalisation that created a sense attachment to the area. Moreover, informants did not seem to negatively associate diversity with their sense of attachment to Jane-Finch, but the normalisation and internalisation of racist and classist assumptions by residents impacted on how they perceived and felt about different parts of the area. This echoes Bannerji's (2000) claim that an overemphasis on diversity obscures and erases any understanding or naming of institutionalised racism and its implications for gender and class.

Discussion and conclusions

In the case of Jane-Finch, the analysis suggests that, regarding the creation of common values, neighbourhood attachment and formal and informal interactions, inhabitants do not perceive diversity as an asset or a liability. While there were instances in which diversity was perceived to have contributed to social cohesion, the positive contributions were often implicit and required the presence of other factors such as commonalities (language, culture, religion, age and political views), shared activities and a sense of solidarity grounded in situated knowledge and lived experiences. In some cases, such notions derived from belonging to the same group (country of origin, age, class, etc.), while in others they spanned different social and cultural backgrounds and identity politics.

The findings demonstrate that living with diversity often created opportunities for cultural exchange and increased recognition; however, the existing hierarchies among cultures and income groups were persistent in shaping and conditioning perceptions and interactions. Civility towards diversity thus went hand in hand with negative stereotyping and essentialisations based on race, gender, religion and class. Similarly, diversity only led to informal interactions when there were commonalities, shared activities and experiences present among inhabitants. Regarding formal interactions, negative encounters with paternalistic social workers and service providers – signalling once again the internalisation of negative stereotypes directed towards lower income ethnic minorities – were the real factors undermining community participation. The impact of poverty, institutionalisation and the internalisation of gendered and class-based racism in shaping residents' perceptions and interactions were thus much more tangible than diversity.

It is important to once again emphasise the benefits of qualitative research in understanding the dynamics of cohesion and conflict in diverse areas, since qualitative analyses can bring to the forefront particularities that are often overlooked in quantitative research. Thus, the important contribution of this article is in shedding light on the role played by negative essentialisations on the basis of class and race (encouraged by mainstream media and policy and internalised by inhabitants), on individuals' formal relationships, informed interactions with and perceptions of one another and their neighbourhood. This further signals challenges to coalition-building and grass-roots organisation among diverse populations, given the emergence and maintenance of hierarchies in places such as Jane-Finch. Without taking these existing hierarchies and power structures into account, it will be unlikely that meaningful bottom-up input and grass-roots involvement will occur.

Further research is needed to unpack the institutionalised and internalised classism and racism inherent in the daily lives of inhabitants and thereby obtain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between ethnic, cultural and religious diversity (as well as their intersection with disadvantage in particular) and social cohesion. Moreover, while much attention has been paid to how diversity impacts on aspects such as social cohesion, social capital and safety in neighbourhoods, the reasons why areas predominantly occupied by racial minority households are often the most disadvantaged are usually left unconsidered. Diversity thereby can function to divert attention away from systemic, structural and inherently political issues, such as institutionalised racism, inequality and lack of infrastructure, which need to be addressed in the debate on social cohesion. Its positioning at the centre of the social cohesion debate, while side-lining inequality and racism, is thereby both problematic and alarming.

While research on diversity has contributed to enhancing the recognition of difference, the issue of redistribution has been largely absent from the debate. Unlike recognition, which can be addressed through harmonious affirmative processes (such as liberal

multiculturalism), redistribution ultimately demands the transformation of long-established unequal power structures (Fraser 1995; Tator, Henry, and Mattis 1998). Addressing redistribution thus requires the politicisation of the debate on social cohesion, one in which diversity is also rearticulated in line with issues of equity and social justice.

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Appendix

Table A1. List of interviewed persons.

y	Pseudo name	Age group (eyars)	Gender	Position in household	Housing	Ethnic group/region
1	Amidah	18–30	f	Daughter	Public housing	Tanzania
2	Heba	46–60	f	Single mother of 1	Public housing	Egypt
3	Gloria	61–75	f	Single	Private housing	Jamaica
4	Vanessa	31–45	f	Single mother of 3	Home-owner	El Salvador
5	Rebeca	18–30	f	Daughter	Home-owner	El Salvador
6	Nicholas	61–75	m	Single	Public housing	Italy
7	Kojo	31–45	m	Single	Private housing	Ghana
8	Kellisha	46–60	f	Wife and mother of 3	Public housing	Guyana
9	Grace	31–45	f	Single mother of 2	Public housing	Jamaica
10	Kim	46–60	f	Single mother of 5	Public housing	Vietnam
11	Jim	31–45	m	Single	Private housing	Ghana
12	Ria	31–45	f	Single mother of 1	Public housing	Jamaica
13	Delilah	31–45	f	Single mother of 2	Private housing	Guyana-Jamaica
14	Odessa	31–45	f	Wife and mother of 2	Public housing	Guyana
15	Holly	18–30	f	Single mother of 2	Public housing	Jamaica
16	Amanthi	46–60	f	Wife and mother of 1	Private housing	Sri-Lanka
17	Evie	31–45	f	Wife and mother of 3	Public housing	Jamaica
18	Anna	31–45	f	Single mother of 2	Public housing	Jamaica
19	Shantel	18–30	f	Single mother of 2	Public housing	Jamaica
20	Eva	31–45	f	Single mother of 2	Private housing	Ecuador
21	Sarah	18–30	f	Single mother of 2	Private housing	White Canadian
22	Kelly	18–30	f	Single	Private housing	Caribbean-Canadian
23	Bryah	31–45	f	Single mother of 2	Public housing	Jamaican
24	Elizabeth	46–60	f	Single	Public housing	Jamaican
25	Jake	18–30	m	Single	Private housing	White Canadian
26	Alphonse	>75	m	Single	Home-owner	Jamaica
27	Neda	31–45	f	wife and mother of 2	Home-owner	Iran
28	Johnny	46–60	m	Father of one	Home-owner	India
29	Nicole	31–45	f	Wife and mother of 1	Home-owner	Philippines
30	Julia	31–45	f	Wife and mother of 2	Home-owner	Argentina
31	Mauricio	61–75	m	Single living with roommate	Home-owner	El Salvador
32	Leah	31–45	f	Single mother of 1	Private housing	Trinidadian-Canadian
33	Ali	46–60	f	Single mother of 2	Public housing	White Canadian
34	Gita	31–45	f	Wife and mother of 1	Home-owner	India
35	Latoya	18–30	f	Daughter	Private housing	(Jamaican-Trinidadian) Canadian
36	Alejandra	61–75	f	Wife and mother of 3	Home-owner	Ecuador
37	Fernando	18–30	m	Single	Private housing	El Salvador
38	Juan	46–60	m	Single	Home-owner	Chile
39	Samantha	46–60	f	Single mother of 1	Private housing	Ecuador
40	Diego	61–75	m	Single	Private housing	Peru
41	Jamal	61–75	m	Husband	Public housing	Jamaica
42	Amara	31–45	f	Wife and mother of 2	Private housing	Nigeria
43	Chioma	31–45	f	Wife and mother of 2	Private housing	Nigeria
44	Edna	61–75	f	Single	Home-owner	St. Vincent

(*Continued*)

Table A1. (Continued)

y	Pseudo name	Age group (eyars)	Gender	Position in household	Housing	Ethnic group/region
45	Jose	46–60	m	Single living with roommate	Private housing	El Salvador
46	Celine	46–60	f	Single	Private housing	Dominican Republic
47	Alicia	61–75	f	Single	Private housing	Jamaican
48	Keela	46–60	f	Wife and mother of 2	Private housing	Trinidad
49	Tenika	61–75	f	Single	Private housing	Trinidad
50	Julio	61–75	m	Husband and father of 1	Home-owner	El Salvador

Note: f, female; m, male.