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Youth geographies of urban estrangement in the Canadian city: risk management, race relations and the ‘sacrificial stranger’

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ABSTRACT

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Introduction

[We] see from across the political and academic spectra the welcoming of the ‘sacrificial stranger’. Or, the welcoming of the opportunity to affirm an identity by constructing a normative sameness and thereby defining a differing ‘perversity’. (Kearney and Taylor 2005, 19)

I don’t like people who like me because I am a Negro: neither do I like people who find in the same accident grounds for contempt. (James Baldwin 1952)

James Baldwin’s words carry a striking poignancy for any attempt to understand the complexity of race relations and the practices of ‘othering’ in the Americas, and Canada in particular. For example, liberal discourses of multiculturalism often suggest that we must tolerate and affirm the ‘other’ because the ‘other’ belongs to us and is part of who we imagine ourselves to be as citizens of a multicultural nation. ‘Tolerance’ and ‘home’ are therefore seen as the moral signifiers of a language of democratic engagement, both of which are deeply felt in the Canadian national imaginary (Kymlicka 2015). Yet, as Kearney and Taylor (2005) and Ahmed (2010) have suggested, this very tolerance is deployed as the foundation of a sometimes invisible ‘normative sameness’ which may serve to mask existing forms of racism and social conflict in urban contexts. Whilst tolerance rests at the epicenter of Canadian imaginaries, Kearney and Taylor’s (2005) ‘sacrificial stranger’ – that person or group who threatens the collective consciousness of such tolerance and
represents a spectacle of unacceptability – also looms large in the public imagination. This is so for two reasons. First, because when sameness is endorsed through discourses of tolerance someone will always be deemed beyond recognition and sacrificed in the name of multiculturalism or normative understandings of citizenship. Moreover, this sacrifice is heightened at those moments when other discourses of social fear and anxiety gather about the new ‘dark phantom of the nation’ (Hebdige 1979). Second, because the historical establishment of white and colonial settler societies across North America, along with rising currents of xenophobia and global conflict, has created a novel set of racial conditions across different scales of Canadian urbanism. Arguably, apprehending the meanings young people attribute to these urban encounters is significant if we are to respond to challenges presented by contemporary urban landscapes of regeneration, decline, heightened security and redrawn neighborhood borders, particularly as these landscapes also reflect changing national economic policies devolved and governed at the scale of the city. To explore the conjoint operation of these discursive expressions, our central goal is to account for these quotidian experiences of race relations, for patterns of social conflict, and for conceptions of strangeness which young people draw upon through discourses of risk and bordering that are highly localized yet informed by unique strains of globalization in two Canadian cities, both of which are ranked in the top five most ‘livable cities’ in the world by the Global Livability Ranking: Toronto and Vancouver, Canada.

We begin with a review of relevant youth studies research as it relates to urban exclusions and concentrate in particular on bordering and the stranger as theoretical devices for the analysis of race relations, social conflict and economic disadvantage among young people (Rumford 2011). This represents a departure from much contemporary youth studies research. It does so by moving toward an interdisciplinary examination of racialization as an organizing construct within neighborhood spaces, as a broader set of social conflicts which are deemed a security threat to normative conditions of citizenship, and as a signifier of urban risk. This allows us to assess how the affective modalities of urban (in)security can be understood not solely as discourses but also as material formations which shape young peoples’ responses to the highly uneven redrafting of neighborhood borders, particularly as they translate into metaphorical borders of citizen and foreigner, or as forms of identity violence which signifies the stranger’s unworthiness in the city.

In support of this approach, we also invoke the importance of the concepts of estrangement and alienation, here drawing particularly upon Kearney’s (Kearney and Taylor 2005) notion of the ‘sacrificial stranger’ as it is brought to life in everyday youth encounters. These terms of analysis are valuable because they offer strong connections with elements of classical sociological theory – as represented in theories of classical Marxism. But for our purposes, their analytical promise has yet to be fully realized because they are seldom made explicit in relation to the changing cultural geographies of scale governing young people’s lives. As Marx understood, alienation and estrangement are simultaneously the experience and the process whereby people are rendered foreign to the world in which they are living. This recognition allows us to reframe estrangement and alienation in relationship to the urban scales, cultural and colonial histories, and forms of social conflict young people experience and must necessarily interpret in their neighborhoods.

Our methodological approach utilizes ethnographic analysis alongside a detailed thematic analysis of young people’s accounts of the tensions they experienced in neighborhoods and schools, and spaces they identified as abject, ghettos or warehouses. These are accounts – sometimes emerging as identity violence – that are charged with resemblances that operate across time and over generations, affording a returning recognition of the stranger as lying at the heart of a history of classification and dispossession, and as that which remains available to the colonial practice of classifying the stranger in order to empower and legitimize oneself in the present. It is this practice, carried within currents of collective memory and recognition as well as in shared and novel experience (Hamilton and
Shopes 2008), that we can see inscribed in much of the visual and interview data collected for this study.

**Mapping young people’s experience of cultural conflict, belonging and danger in the city**

There is a vast cumulative literature which identifies how youth subcultures have engaged in territorial disputes over neighborhood space and identity conflicts (e.g. Thorne 1995; Willis 1977). There is also recent work exploring the ways in which the regeneration of cities has transformed aspects of race relations, risk and urban youth. This work has been seminal in problematizing the character and configuration of subcultural communities as they relate to the politics of immigration, regeneration and diversity (see Berg and Sigona 2013; Meer and Nayak 2015). The thrust of this work is that localized forms of diversity shape the ways in which variations and continuities in race relations within and across youth communities are understood – a central concern for this paper. The combined impact of this work has been to identify the ‘spatial dimensions of the politics of difference’ (Berg and Sigona 2013, 348) as expressed in urban youth cultures. Whilst this work is significant, it leaves much to be said about issues pertaining to insecurity, social risk, bordering and racialization processes, and more particularly about their spatial manifestations in successful ‘multicultural’ cities.

Such omissions have, however, been fruitfully, if indirectly, addressed by research undertaken within different disciplinary traditions. An important example of this research informing the work conducted in this paper indicates that economically disadvantaged urban youth, particularly those living in social housing, are experiencing heightened insecurity, surveillance and increasing racism, in forms which relate closely to global changes in economic and political cultures (Alexander, Redclift, and Hussain 2013; Yoon 2015). Further related research comes from the fields of Sociology and Critical Criminology, suggesting that rising public insecurities and social anxieties play a major part in the creation of significant social divisions in cities and in the associated erosion of social trust (Sennett 2012; Sassen 2011, 2014; Weitzeer and Tuch 2002; James and Dillabough 2017). When such anxieties are present there is a sense that fundamental social securities, including personal security, are under immediate threat and notions of the ‘stranger’ loom large – also known as security anxiety (Lippert and Walby 2012; Dillabough 2015). Such concerns over strangeness are not new in the city. But what has changed is the degree to which images of insecurity have dominated the presentation of the stranger to a public imagination shaped by social media, institutions and urban life more generally and have served to replace more generalized anxieties about social disorder and wider moral panics (Cohen 1972; Minto and Aked 2012). The major perceived fear here is to, ‘achieve a level of freedom from enemies […]’,2 and from the fear and anxiety caused by such threats, […] and their impact on local communities’ (Rumford 2011, 12). These developments have resulted in dramatically heightened experiences of urban exclusion and inequality in schools and cities, particularly for disadvantaged urban dwellers, such as the increased targeting of particular youth communities, and racial harassment in cities where growing affluence and rising poverty are highly visible features of urban life (Wortley and Tanner 2005; Hopkins 2007; Ruck et al. 2008). In the UK, for example, Alexander and Pain (2012) have documented urban insecurities in relation to youth migration (particularly Muslim communities), associated ‘risk communities’ and extremism. These fears – fears that ‘spread like wildfire after a terrorist incident’ (Pain 2009) – are not restricted to the spectacle of the new dark phantom of the nation (Hebdige 1979); young people also fear more generalized threats to their safety in relation to urban transformations. What is perhaps less well understood are the ways in which for urban youth the ‘mundane interactions and modes of negotiating ethnic and cultural difference persist in everyday life’ (Berg and Sigona 2013, 357), and the associated risks and insecurities emerging which combine both the sedimented and the novel in apparently successful ‘multicultural’ cities.
Whilst Berg and Sigona (2013) have pointed to novel forms of urban belonging, an absence of work indicating where cultural and class alienation and estrangement, ethnic enclaving and racial and social interpolation continue to operate in highly diverse multicultural cities still remains. In this respect, regeneration and decline can be seen to operate as mediating forces of urban belonging across cities. Brawley's (2009, 2010) work, for example, is important in directing us toward the idea that these urban expressions are not simply a representation of urban decay and the associated feelings of bewilderment that result from the reconfiguration of city borders. They are also necessarily tied to the history of the organization, governance and privatization of urban public space and the role played in such divisions by race, gender and class, sometimes articulated as expressions of colonial categories – submerged but never expunged.

We now turn to the work of addressing some of the dilemmas and gaps discussed above. We do this through an introduction to our theoretical framework and an analysis of interview and visual data, investigating some of the indirect strains of insecurity operating at micro-level urban scales by way of a study of two distinctive urban neighborhoods in Toronto, Ontario and Vancouver, BC. We also offer some description of the original longitudinal comparative study of youth and social exclusion, of which this paper forms a part.3

Bordering and estrangement as everyday cultural practice: theoretical directions

As represented in the fields of political, cultural and human geography, we wish to argue that young people ‘see like a border’ (see Balibar 2004) and engage in affective forms of bordering – through varied modalities of interpretation – that are both highly localized and particular to wider transnational forces shaping social divisions between young people. Within this context, the organizing concept of race relations can most fruitfully be understood as both a novel and inherited system of identity classification, a response to urban spatial transformations and a set of highly intense emotions about culture, class, conflict and estrangement refracted through the layers of a colonial past and post-colonial present (Ahmed 1999, 2010, 2013). These affective dimensions of affiliating with, or being estranged from, the other are what Etienne Balibar (1995, 2007) refers to as ‘seeing like a border’ and which emerge through the affective registers of young lives.

How are the stranger and the border evoked in these everyday expressions and interpretations of urban life and at the level of the young body? As Kearney argues, the border, danger and strangeness have an enduring history:

With the emergence of the notion of absolute sovereignty […] there is already a danger. What happens to those who are not part of the ‘one and indivisible’ state – the alien, outsider, emigrant, non-resident, non-conformist? […] Does the State isolate them or send them home? (Kearney 2014, 3)

How can a convivial hospitality, often seen as the cornerstone of Canadian nation spaces, emerge, instead of identity violence and hostility when young people feel continually scrutinized and marginalized as abject citizens living at the hard edge of urban life? Following Ahmed (1999, 2010, 2013), we argue that race, migration and other social conflicts are marked on the bodies of young people and those who are classified as a stranger to the state. Race, however, cannot be the only signifier of ‘strangeness’ in highly diverse urban contexts. Indeed, race is typically erased or conflated with other social conflicts when other social references such as homelessness are invoked. Here, a young ethnic minority student, aged 15, from Central America living in the Vancouver Eastside speaks about the unwanted or scary ‘non-resident’:

Interviewer: […] But are they [the homeless, whom the interviewee described as ‘bums’ and ‘natives’] scary? I mean are they [scary] in your mind?

Interviewee: No […] but you just want to be sure you can see what’s coming. […] Yeah. I don’t want a disease. What if they sneeze or something? […]

J.-A. DILLABOUGH AND E.-S. YOON
Interviewer: Do you think people who are homeless give you diseases?
Interviewee: Yes. [...] They live on the streets when it’s raining [...], they get sick or something and they take cocaine [...]. You get diseases from that and [...] it’s my life. I don’t care about other people.

Similarly, in a visual Google mapping exercise where young people were asked to describe their neighborhood, another 15-year-old male participant wrote that:

the area around the school [in Vancouver] is retarded because there are a lot of people who smoke and a lot of weird people [...]. Going to this school isn’t great. [...] it’s one of the lowest rating schools. Though people are very friendly, the Natives aren’t really liked here.

Here we can straightforwardly witness a form of othering expressed as exclusionary language: ‘them’, ‘they’, the ‘Native’, the potentially diseased, the drug user on the street: in other words, outside this young interviewee’s version of civilized urban life. This is essentially a subterranean account of bordering that avoids explicit expression at the surface level and does not – as everyday language – refer directly to the nation-state or to formal territorial borders – but which clearly

**Figure 1.** Photo-narrative of familiar city environments: Male youth, Toronto (16), My Life in the City.
distinguishes between a human state of abjection and other possible states, including the entangled historical states of colonization. Visual data sources – in this case, the Toronto site – point more directly to an explicit visual representation of urban space, security and the urban experiences of alienation (see Figure 1).

These early examples underscore our concern with the ways in which conflicts over the border, abjection and strangeness take shape through youth conflicts, and how young people’s powers may be secured by demoting the stranger to a state of abjection. Ahmed (2010, 20) obliges us to ponder how it is that, ‘differences, otherness and strangeness become properties of bodies and spaces over time’, even though such properties are a function of wider social forces operating beyond individuals. We argue that bordering is therefore a practice that can be represented as a set of conflicts that transcend formal territorial borders. In this sense, Kearney and Taylor’s (2005) formulation of the ‘sacrificial stranger’ is very helpful in conceptualizing how young people come to ‘see like a border’ or engage in the bordering of others. Mawani’s (2009) historical work on ‘colonial proximities’ is also particularly instructive in detailing the relationship between the enduring power of colonial histories and our capacity to witness their traces as encapsulated within young people’s social anxieties about race and social conflict in the present. Mawani’s (2009) historical account of ‘racial (im)purities and cross-racial anxieties’ during Canada’s colonial period powerfully elucidates the ways in which Chinese and Aboriginal peoples were classified by moral inferiorities and perceived unsanitary practices and their nearness – as traces of the past – in the present.

Reimagining young lives in the ‘multicultural’ city

We now look more closely at a subsample of data from our comparative ethnographic study conducted between 1998 and 2012 in Vancouver, BC, and Toronto, Ontario. The study recruited over 60 economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse male and female youth (ages 14–18), initially defined as those attending, ‘demonized or failing schools’ (Reay 2007) in, or near, urban concentrations of poverty. The majority of participants lived in provincially funded social housing, rented accommodation, and in a minority of cases, privately owned working-class properties on the periphery of the urban core. In Toronto, many of the young people were living in a neighborhood commonly named by geographers as the ‘last ethnic enclave’ of intergenerational Portuguese immigrant communities resulting from chain migration from Portugal following World War II. Others participants included two female students from the Congo and two male Indigenous students, with the remainder being first, second or third generation young people from Italian and Greek settler communities.

The Vancouver site had a similar history to the Toronto neighborhood. Up until World War II, the neighborhood had predominantly comprised largely working-class Italian and Greek families, migrating from Southern Europe in search of employment and political stability. However, because of Vancouver’s location on the Pacific Rim, and the history of Chinese labor migration to the city to build Canada’s nationwide railway system at the turn of the nineteenth century, this area had already experienced substantial changes in its demographic makeup, exhibiting a much more heterogenous youth population and extensive diasporic engagement with Asia. There was also a larger population of first generation students from the Middle East and Central and South America, the latter being significant because of its geopolitical proximity to British Columbia.

Methods included open-ended interviews, oral history interviews, media and documentary analyses, photo-narratives, visual mapping exercises and longstanding action-research-based ethnographic methods in schools (e.g., team teaching humanities courses for six month periods). Visual methods were used both as elicitation devices and as data sources drawn upon to obtain a deeper sense of young people’s perceptions of their sense of place and others in the city, as well as how they understood race, security, risk and legitimacy in
phenomenological terms. Team teaching was utilized as a way of building trust with students and to further embed the Principal Investigator and researchers into school life. Other community members, such as former police officers, teachers and youth workers, were also interviewed to obtain a sense of how youth, urban divisions and security were viewed and how they had changed over time.

Ethnographic methods were most appropriate for our methodological approach, as was the emphasis upon a comparative design in order to assess variations and continuities in the ways young people experienced the city as a bordering entity where the struggle for legitimation was always prominent. These struggles for legitimation were also widely influenced by the effects of urban regeneration projects, migration movements and heightened border controls in the post-9/11 period. We concentrated on those aspects of bordering demonstrated by our youthful respondents that most clearly revealed how the border and the stranger could be mapped across different scales of study and spatial settings (see Dillabough and Kennelly 2010; Dillabough and Gardner 2015). What is particularly important to note is the persuasiveness of the forms of othering as they take place, and their specific relation to the urban geographies of belonging and legitimacy. Through systematic comparisons we sought to track those dominant metaphorical associations which are most significant for rethinking how borders and space come together to elicit the stranger in expressions of intolerance which unmask popular intimations of Canada’s healthy ‘multiculturalism’.

The substantial duration of this study led to several challenges, particularly in relation to comparisons between place, youth and urbanization. The varied nature of city life and the ways in which youth disadvantage sometimes clusters at the peripheries of the urban core, or is expressed in transient forms in suburban communities, presented just such challenges in determining how to engage in comparison. We also witnessed both striking similarities and differences across place, together with authentic shifts in urban social divisions, that could not have been predicted by simply turning to comparative data on cuts to social benefits and urban regeneration as primary elements of change. Clearly, these latter elements of urban life are significant; however, it is their micro-level manifestation with its variations in the religious, ethnic, economic and cultural complexities of place, risk and temporality which provide a stronger foundation for understanding the nature and character of youth conflicts on the ground. Here, we were able to build upon an interpretive dialogue between diverse but overlapping data sources – including interview data as our primary source. Key dimensions of this analysis involved that which Glaser and Strauss (2012) have referred to as ethnographic content analysis to assess the ways in which thematic consistencies and symbolically relevant content emerged across data sources. This interpretive dialogue meant engaging in ‘constant discovery’ and ‘constant comparisons’ between the textual and visual dimensions of data sources and revisiting these with students and researchers at different stages of the project to further refine and formalize emerging themes. This also involved the reflexive phenomenological analysis of such themes for any emergent reconfiguring of the wider theoretical meanings shaping the study.

From these strategies emerged findings which pointed strongly to a thematic emphasis on the figure of the other and the stranger, forms of racial and cultural estrangement, and urban and neighborhood borders, albeit in different ways. Significantly, the events associated with 9/11 had not taken place when the study commenced in Toronto, Ontario. But the ‘war on terror’ was well underway when we collected data in Vancouver, BC. Hence, some of the bordering being witnessed or the experience of being othered – whilst not always tied to wider social changes or to ideas of the nation directly – clearly impacted on race relations as they were reported in each context. ‘Bordering’ may seem an overly abstract concept for engaging the forms of social relations and conflicts as reported by young people. Yet expressions of concerns about dangers and risks, and about estrangement and states of abjection emerged with a power and a prevalence that makes their assignment to the themes of bordering and the sacrificial stranger a defensible analytical treatment of our data. Through constant comparison of codes across the full range of our data sets,
participants were, to use Balibar’s words, ‘seeing like a border’ although often represented as highly individualized strains of bordering which spoke to wider concerns about the ambivalent constitution of belonging and home.

**Mapping ambivalent cartographies of urban risk, insecurity and abjection: encounters with the ‘sacrificial stranger’**

Young people’s apprehension toward their own neighborhoods was a central feature of their expressions. The presence and behaviors of police and security officers – alongside the prevalence of street workers, drug dealers and homeless communities – were leading constituents of the ways in which young people came to comprehend their neighborhood as either safe or dangerous, as a risk, or as being within or outside their control. Importantly, too, disadvantaged and Aboriginal communities sleeping rough were disproportionately represented in the Vancouver site, many of whom had been forced out of the urban core and toward their adjoining neighborhood as a result of the redevelopment of single-night dwellings closer to the urban core.

The manner in which young people sought to resolve these issues often left them feeling highly ambivalent and insecure about their sense of belonging at the neighborhood level. Cynthia, a 15-year-old girl living in the most marginalized of Vancouver’s neighborhoods, articulates her sense of insecurity, self-regulating conduct and the bordering regimes operating at the scale of an already pathologized neighborhood:

> It’s what some people would describe as the sinful place. You’ve got the prostitutes, the drugs, you got stealing, beating. [...] I’ve been on [street names] at one in the morning coming back from a rock concert, not always the best feeling. You’re trying to keep to yourself. Most important thing you have to worry about when you’re walking down the street, if there drug dealings going on, just ignore it, just walk right by [...].

This narrative is most certainly a representation of what it is like to ‘see like a border’ and to live the border in a practical sense, as these borders clearly reflect how urban life can represent elements of exclusion and a form of self-regulating conduct. In this case, Cynthia’s narrative suggests that young people have intimate knowledge of the associated dangers of living in disadvantaged quarters of the city, a fact of which young people are constantly reminded through media stories and in navigating the city dangers directly. Cynthia is also aware of the ways in which neighborhood borders are expressed through the metaphorical language of place. This apparently ‘sinful place’ exists at the border of the affluent, regenerating and globalizing urban core, and marks the entry point into one of the least affluent neighborhoods in the city. Whilst regeneration projects loom large it retains its symbolic significance as a container for ‘open air’ drug use and a neighbourhood where many disenfranchised Aboriginal communities find themselves (see also Yoon 2015).

Cynthia goes on to describe the identity violence (e.g. ‘hoodlugs’, ‘drug addicts’) taking place in the neighborhood, and associated experiences of estrangement and alienation. Her remarks particularly illuminate the manner in which local schools and identities are perceived, along with her defense of place, and the gendered and racialized undertones her narrative demonstrates:

> In elementary school we had a problem with substitutes or student teachers ‘cause they won’t want to come to an eastside elementary school. ‘They are young hooligans; they are starting their life of drug addicts’. I find it very insulting because it was not like that. [...] It’s hard for the kids. It feels like, what did we do? When I tell somebody I go to [Beacon Hill], they’ll say you are like a gangster chick. It’s labeling, it’s a stereotype.

It is Cynthia’s sense of place that points to her own projected metaphorical position as simultaneously a stranger (‘Gangsta Chick’) and estranged. She asks the researcher, ‘what did we do?’ Her words – albeit indirectly – show us how the border and the stranger are simultaneously comprehended in the city.
Other young people also saw the regular presence of homelessness as a form of stigmatization and drew upon it as a way of engaging in de-legitimating border practices that led to negative portrayals of individuals far worse off than themselves, as with Kearney’s ‘sacrificial stranger’. In particular, the conflation of ‘bums’ with ‘natives’ served as metaphorical representations of abjection for many young people as they strove for that sense of normative sameness. As Timmy states: ‘not to be any racial thing, but First Nations is probably the race that gets picked on the most’. Many also carried with them a sense of superiority when compared to those who were being pushed from the inner core into their neighborhood – the ‘sacrificial stranger’ working in highly grounded ways. Allison (14), from Toronto, responding to a media photograph addressing the forced mobility of homeless groups to the outskirts of the city as a result of provincial legislation making homelessness illegal in Ontario in the late 1990s, remarks that,

[i]t’s these people’s fault that they’re sleeping on the cold ground. They can easily go find a job or can go to welfare. The reason they’re there is because they’re lazy.

And Timmy remarks,

[t]here’s this one guy who asks everyone after I gave him a quarter, he goes to the next person and asks for a dollar. Can I have a dollar? [...] He’s used the same lines over and over again. He’s like I’m homeless. I don’t have social insurance, I don’t have an address and I live on the street [...].

When asked what he thinks they should do, Timmy replies, ‘They should go to church or something. I mean, come on, they give out food and clothes.’

Young people living at the fringe of this urban core, with its transient populations and urban planners’ attempts at regeneration and multinational investment, spend much of their time surrounded by concrete examples of urban exclusion, precarity and insecurity. Police officers are visible on street corners and bars and gates are visible on many of the local shops’ doors and windows. These are tangible and visible bordering security practices that also influence young peoples’ fears of place and highlight how urban spaces of abjection are bordered simultaneously through them.

Whilst some borders appeared invisible, others seemed more tangible. For example, some respondents in the Vancouver site talked more explicitly about the ways in which wider discourses of terror circulating in the public imagination had taken hold at the micro level of everyday discourse. For example, a young male participant (Hussain, aged 15), originating from the Middle East, reported that his Vancouver neighborhood, ‘was [a lot] safer than Iraq’, whilst another ethnic minority youth was regularly referred to as a ‘terrorist’, often named by other young people at the school as ‘Osama Bin Laden’ and who reported laughing about it ‘cause I am not even from Afghanistan’ (see also Dillabough and Kennelly 2010). And still another young 14-year-old male, originally from the Middle East, referred to global fears about terrorism spreading ‘like wildfire’ in his local community: ‘This is what I see on TV but it’s everywhere [...] violence and killing [...]. It’s on my channel. Iraq, Kurdistan TV [...] every single clip you see is some guy holding an AK47. It’s hilarious’.

Sedimented configurations of race relations and anti-migrant sentiments also emerged among the respondents in the Toronto sample, albeit in a different way. Raymond, a 15-year-old Torontonian who identified as First Nations and who felt marginalized by the subcultural youth groups of a largely resettled Italian, Greek and Portuguese community – well known as Gino’s and Gangstas – where he attended school, remarks that his previous residence at the fringe of urban Toronto and the forms of enclavement which ensued,

was a little bit bad, kinda rough and you kind of got pushed out from the city centre [...] And we had to keep moving so I hate making new friends … but now I have to deal with the Italians and Portuguese kids who are like Ginos that listen to techno type music and the thugs listen to rap basically and they just stay in their own groups. (see Figure 2)
This ‘successful’ multicultural hub was clearly not as integrated – according to Raymond and many others attending this neighborhood school – as it is purported to be in the vast literature on successful Canadian multiculturalism (Kymlicka 2015). Yet Raymond indicates, albeit unwittingly, that groupings and classifications remain strong, as does his culturally distinct estrangement from them.

In Vancouver, there were similar remarks about subgroups who were seen to be governing youth conduct outside of classroom time and who were identified as the ‘hardcore’ group. The hardcore group were mostly Latino, ‘Asian’ or something ‘other’ than white Canadian, who were doing ‘bad’ things and were sometimes represented as such in visual elicitation data. These bordering practices were not straightforwardly about whitewashing versus color. And nor do they point toward a straightforward Canadian ‘phantom history’ of colonialism; rather, the subterranean text reflects at a remove those cross-racial anxieties that have been inherited by minority ethnic communities in terms of both static intergenerational class positions and visible histories of migration, colonization and diasporic engagement. The following excerpt is taken from a recently arrived Chinese migrant youth to the area as he reflects on a visual mapping exercise of the good and bad citizen:

Interviewer: So are you saying that it’s easier to think about what a bad citizen?
Yang: Yeah. Because good citizens, they don’t really get noticed. But bad ones do, like, practically everyone knows them, like the bad stuff they do.
Interviewer: [...] the things you listed here, racism, not respecting others, shoplifting, abuse, violence, and robbery, can you talk a little bit about what these mean to you? Like when you say racism, what do you mean by that?

Yang: [...] some people are still like racist nowadays. [...] Because some modern Chinese, they won’t really accept like whites, but no black people [...].

Interviewer: Mmm. Mmm-hmmm.

Yang: So. I think that’s kind of racist.

Interviewer: Yeah. And when you say modern Chinese, who do you mean by that?

Yang: Like older people [...] like age of 30? [...] I think it’s mostly Chinese.

However, once Yang is questioned about the borders and edges of school life and its link to race relations he refers to it as ‘just a joke’:

Interviewer: [...] So do you see racism happening in the school here?

Yang: Um. I don’t think so. Yeah. They really just joke around....like just because [they might] be black [...]

Whilst a sense of othering and the invocation of the stranger – in this case a black body – is present in these words, racism is denied, or treated as a joke. Here the border remains ‘invisible’ or unseen whilst blackness is made visible as a fortifying marker of one difference against another. This is just how Balibar and Kearney refer to bordering, and the making of the foreigner and the stranger where novel frontiers of an earlier colonial identity and associated border zones are reinscribed onto the contemporary urban landscape. Yet such frontiers often remain masked by the language of tolerance or fun and are presented as ‘politically uncontroversial’. Brown (2008) points to the significance of tolerance as a form of depoliticization because it is often articulated through liberal ideals:

liberalism is not analytically synonymous with democracy [...] The double ruse on which liberalism relies to distinguish itself from culture – on the one casting liberal principles as universal; and on the other privatizing culture – ideologically figures liberalism as untouched by culture and therefore incapable of cultural imperialism [...] liberalism casts itself as being uniquely tolerant. (p. 23)

We interviewed some young people who had encountered police, highlighting the intensity of growing police presence and brutality in the area. Freddy plots an account of policing in his neighborhood where the spatialization of race relations, alienation and social conflicts (see also Wilkinson 2003) point to the source of disorder:

Some of them are nice. Some of them are really beyond their rights because they are into power. I was going to say that police officers are like a gang. Where a gang has a mission to it, a police force has one. I’ve been involved with the police. They’re very aggressive when you’re not resisting, like a fight, or anything. They get really aggressive. It might be really racial. I think a Caucasian person would try to use more force against a coloured person. [...] It’s kind of like the ghetto of East Vancouver.

Many young people also reported feelings of increased risk and sometimes these fears were conflated with an ‘orientalized’ way of speaking back to the legacy of Vancouver as a colonial settlement in the early segregation of Chinese labor immigrants: ‘I know this is not a safe place … I see the people on the street and the Chinese people hate us [...]’ (Shareen, 15, a Cambodian Canadian, Vancouver).

Another respondent referred to Chinatown, ‘as a place that is infested with drugs and stinks’. Randy tells us the following:

Randy: I moved around from Chinatown to [a new place]. [...]
Randy: [name of new neighbourhood]. [It’s a] better neighborhood.
Interviewer: [...] How would you describe it as better? [...]
Randy: Because there was a lot of bad people [...] Druggies. And around the school there are a lot of fights and its dangerous. It’s always dangerous and [...] scary.
Additionally, a youth worker reported in an oral history of youth work in the neighborhood that, ‘[t]here was all this covert racism even though … they [the kids] never went to Chinatown, like they would never try that […]; they were separate worlds and how did we integrate these worlds’. Here we can witness the stranger and the urban borders of legitimacy as social forces dividing ‘spatial communities of belonging’. Communities of belonging,

involve the legitimation of passing as an individual and a story of progress … if passing can be seen as threatening it is in the making visible the fractured history that is concealed in identity … passing, then, is […] rather as an encounter with others in which there is a moral crisis reading. (Ahmed 1999, 94)

We cannot blame young people for securing their own sense of entitlement over others even as it represents a ‘moral crisis reading’ directed toward those ‘strangers’ who are less fortunate than they. As the youth worker went on to remark about youth disadvantage and the city’s history (see also Dillabough, McLeod and Oliver 2015),

kids [on the eastside] couldn’t be seen on the West side, especially the white working class girls … couldn’t even think about attending schools there … and if you asked, they didn’t want to but they hated it here, we all hated it here, dreaming of less drunks and a nice life.

In both Vancouver and Toronto, some young people resorted to intimidation and violence as a way of protecting and defending their own working-class identities or their own ethnic enclaves. We witnessed a kind of ‘surplus masculinity’ at work as male working-class pride kept the gender order of the neighborhood intact (e.g. Gangsta boys and Gina girls), whilst disrupting more traditional racialized and gendered boundaries of the city. Timmy, for example, tells us about the strict street rules of border violations and their manifestation as territory and security in the open spaces of young people’s urban existence and simultaneously points to the changing cultural nature of the space:

Around the school is all messed up, you know? Like, there’s that machete incident in You know? […] then they all got pissed off at each other, and after school one of the guys took a machete and tried to swing at the guy’s head, and then the guy does this [gesturing with hand]. And he loses, like, all his three fingers.

Timmy’s narrative highlights the background noise that violence seems to play at different scales of urban Canadian life, particularly as it relates to gender, weapons (e.g. the machete) and the mobile and bordered nature of gang culture in Vancouver, and those bordered others who were often identified by Vancouver participants as ‘Fresh of the Boats (FOBS)’, and seen by many as non-citizens because of recent migrants’ language barriers. And Tony (a 14-year-old self-identified Portuguese Gangsta from Toronto), tells us about pipes, pepper spray and garbage cans alight and in flames in the school hallways – a new frontier zone between the ‘Thugs’ and ‘Gansta Boys’ who ‘like to act tough’ and ‘own and control the space’. Here territory is owned and controlled through more traditional, enclosed and protected fronts and bordering but still emerges at a geography of scale which is grounded in a very particular history of migration, marginalization and containment (see Figure 3).

But perhaps an activity where students were asked to write to potential newcomers about life in Canada points most starkly to the bordered nature of identity, the myths about multicultural cities and the ‘sacrificial stranger’ in neighborhoods of substantial deprivation and conflict. In this exercise, Jimmy (aged 15, Afro-Caribbean Canadian) wrote the following:

You may have heard this is the land of freedom and opportunity. Well your foreign ass has been lied to […]. Here in Canada we aren’t all lovely. Some of us are very racist and you may get discriminated against, you could even get beaten/clubbed/stabbed/random poked. Another thing is if you don’t speak good English you might not be able to get a job and two you probably can’t read this letter so you are screwed. […] Even if you do get a job your pay may be lower because of your ethnic origin […]. The fourth reason applies for only some foreigners, perhaps you have heard of Chinatown, India town or the Japanese Mall […] Don’t get me started on the gangs. If you can see past all that then come to Canada!!!
Conclusions

The accounts of young people, alongside the sample of visual material we have presented, identify some of the metaphorical and symbolic borders associated with urban schools and neighborhood spaces and their power in shaping young people’s feelings of security and belonging. These accounts resonate, if in different ways, with previous studies associated with youth, safety and urban transformations. Our approach does however signal the significance of spatializing bordering practices and youth experiences of estrangement as they relate to contemporary urban encounters as they are expressed through conflicted border narratives within ‘multicultural’ cities, both in relation to wider transnational conflicts and also in highly localized contexts with particular colonial histories of race, migration and culture. Homelessness, novel race relations and identity violence, for example, are just some of the ways in which urban regeneration and urban housing cuts shift young people’s urban imaginaries about safety whilst masking wider forms of bordering and exclusion. Borders, enclaves and varied states of legitimacy, recognition and abjection do indeed exist – as expressed by young people on the urban scene – but they are more or less visible and highly uneven across the spatial urban landscapes of Canadian
cities. These narratives are only intelligible when assessed, as Ahmed (1999) suggests, in relation to the urban geographies of historical sedimentation, the surplus effects of colonial legacies and new moral crises over legitimate identities (e.g. terrorists) that are made and remade in the city. There are spatial communities of belonging and bordered geographies of the city, but they are not always comfortably inhabited or integrated in highly diverse multicultural cities. Importantly, too, race is sometimes erased or sacrificed, through the presence of liberal multicultural tolerance and through the invocation of the stranger. Young people’s words and images demonstrate the proliferation of accounts of Richard Kearney’s ‘sacrificial stranger’, sometimes positioning them as inferior whilst simultaneously depoliticizing urban risks. We hope that our work serves as a context for better understanding how risk, alienation and estrangement take shape through forms of ‘boundary maintenance’ expressed by young economically disadvantaged and disenfranchised Canadians, particularly as they relate to urban transformations and historical sediments which appear in new ways under the ruse of ‘multicultural happiness’ (see Ahmed 2010). We have also offered an analytical framework and a methodology for viewing urban youth conflicts as part of, and not outside, the sometimes dark underbelly of liberal multiculturalism as it steers young people toward individualized tropes of identity as a stark feature of urban life, rather than gathering them within those forms of social trust called from us as we each struggle to claim our ‘rights to the city’ (Harvey 2008). As Newman (2006, 143) writes: ‘We might not necessarily see the lines, but they order our daily life practices, strengthening our belonging to, and identity with, places and groups, whilst […] perpetuating and re-perpetuating notions of difference and othering.’

Notes
1. The Economics Intelligence Unit conducts this ranking but does not account for cost of living in its calculations.
2. For this and all other quotes, ellipses inside square brackets indicate a truncated excerpt.
3. An overview of the original project is presented in Dillabough and Kennelly (2010).

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