# Fostering a Sense of Belonging in Toronto – A Case Study of Dixon

by

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## Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## Abstract

Using the neighbourhood of Dixon as a case study, this project examines what factors influence Dixon residents' sense of belonging to their neighbourhood. Interviews conducted with twelve residents outline how characteristics such as a lack of up-keeping of the neighbourhood's physical state, a negative public perception of the community formed by media outlets, and hyper-policing initiatives within the neighbourhood all contribute towards a negative impact on residents' quality of life by influencing their relationship with their space, their community, and themselves. The paper expands on this notion by examining the deep-rooted history of *othering* experienced by Dixon residents, dating back to the 1990's when Somali refugee claimants initially settled into Dixon, earning it the nickname Little Mogadishu. This study is concerned with the lived experiences of Dixon residents and how various forms of political, social, and economic *othering* of their community has shaped their perception of place-belongingness, as well as their distrust in any body of power that can challenge their ability to foster a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood.

## Acknowledgements

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## 1. Introduction: Who is "Diversity Our Strength" for?

The city of Toronto's official motto "Diversity Our Strength" paints a picture of a city occupied by a wide variety of ethnic and racial communities with diverse cultures and backgrounds all coming together and sharing aspects of their individual identities to form what it means to be a Torontonian. Mayor John Tory has even cited refugees and immigration policies as the reason for its diversity, claiming these two factors played a crucial role in the making the city richer and more dynamic, as well contributed towards providing Toronto with a bigger economy (Stone, 2011). The presence of immigrants and refugees helped shape the Toronto's identity, yet many of these ethnic communities have had a difficult time forming a sense of belonging within the city (Ilmi, 2009; James, 2015; R. Murdie & Teixeira, 2011). Whether it is through displacement or a lack of development within their neighbourhoods, several ethnic enclaves have experienced forms of *othering*, in which they feel their interests and well-being are not adequately served by various stakeholders who represent the city of Toronto. This project focuses on Dixon in particular, and through semi-structured interviews with the residents of Dixon I examine the most prevalent causes contributing towards a feeling of alienation and *othering* experienced by its residents. Dixon is an ethnic enclave located in central Etobicoke – a municipality in the west end of Toronto. The neighbourhood was initially home to South Asian and Caribbean immigrants, but since the early-1990's it has been occupied by a predominantly Somali population (hence why it is often referred to as Little Mogadishu) that initially formed the neighbourhood as refugees fleeing Somalia due to the civil war in 1991 (Henry, 2007). This project spotlights the political tribulations faced by the community during

their initial settlement process and by doing so analyses the ways in which their entry into the city set the stage for a series of economic, social, and political processes. These processes contributed towards the *othering* of their community, as well as challenged their ability to form a sense of belonging within the space they occupy (Abdela, 2015; Hassan Ali Mohamed, 2001b; Razack, 2000). At its core, this project spotlights the importance of including the notion of belonging within all planning and development initiatives throughout the city – particularly ethnic enclaves and lower-income neighbourhoods – as a higher sense of belonging amongst residents contributes towards stronger social capital, less political and social polarity, and a better quality of life for all residents of the city.

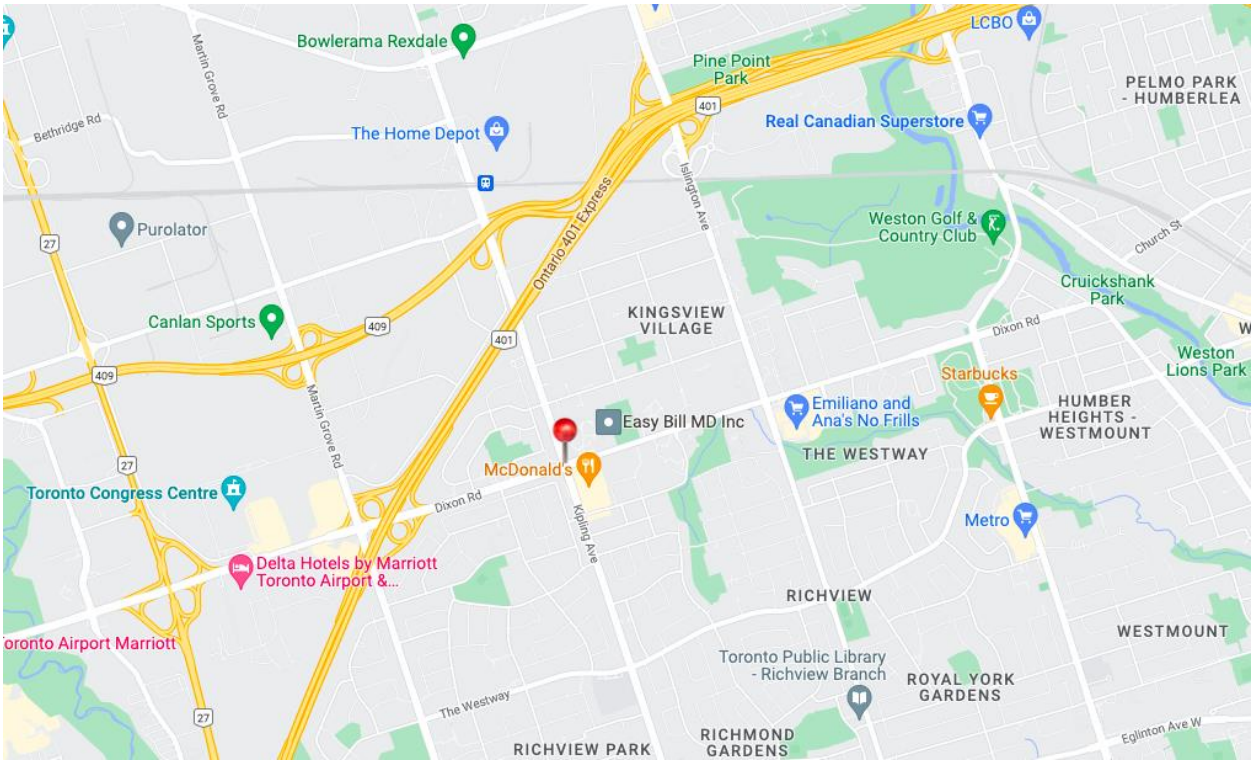


*Figure 1: Dixon located at the intersection of Kipling Ave. and Dixon Rd.* (Google, n.d.)

### *1.1 Research significance: The importance of Dixon and forming a sense of belonging*

At a micro-level, this project sheds a light on Dixon – a low-income neighbourhood occupied by racial minorities play a substantial role in the formation of Canadian identities yet are misrepresented and, in several cases, ostracized by various stakeholders within the city. Similar to other low-income neighbourhoods within Toronto such as Jane and Finch or Regent Park, Dixon upholds a negative reputation – predominantly regarding gang violence and trafficking – but unlike the neighbourhoods mentioned prior, there is an underrepresentation of Dixon in academia that provides a context towards the current physical and social state of Dixon. Using Dixon as a case study, this project sheds light onto the everyday lived experiences of an underrepresented portion of Toronto's population, their relationship with the space they occupy, and the factors that influence it.

At a macro-level, this project challenges the notion of "Diversity Our Strength", by underlining the various political, social, and economical procedures that misrepresent and *other* minority communities within the city. By basing itself within the notion of belonging, this project examines how the various forms of *othering* of minority communities are conducted through a lack of fostering neighbourhood belonging amongst various communities within the city. This project analyses Dixon residents' perception of the roles engaged by various stakeholders representing the city, and by doing so, underlines how the minority communities that strengthen Toronto's economic and social capital are dispossessed both socially and spatially in a manner that ultimately serves the more affluent and (statistically) white population of the city. This project highlights the perception that stakeholders within the city prioritize economic growth through development projects that cater to affluent communities

over the well-being of minority communities within the city, and by doing so create boundaries dictating who can and cannot form a sense of belonging to the spaces they occupy. Ultimately, this project underlines Dixon residents' stance towards an urgency for various stakeholders (city planners, developers, policy makers, etc.) in the city – particularly pertaining Dixon – to challenge the continuous underrepresentation of low-income minority populations within planning policies and procedures by applying a sense of belonging to future policy and development initiatives.

### *1.2 Research Question*

Through a qualitative case approach, this research project investigates the interactions between residents of Dixon and the geographic area in which they reside in. The objective of this study is to analyse the factors that influence Dixon residents' ability to form a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood through an economic, social, and political lens. Amongst these lenses this project also applies focus on the physical form of Dixon to understand how the physical appearance of the neighbourhood impacts Dixon residents' sense of belonging to their neighbourhood. I am particularly interested in examining the perception held by Dixon residents of various actors such as city council, city planners, police officers, and developers that impact the everyday lived experiences of the Dixon community. Ultimately, the goal of this research project is to answer the question - *what are the factors that influence Dixon resident's sense of belonging to their neighbourhood?* In an attempt to successfully answer the initial question, there are three supplementary questions that help guide the study:

1. What are the prevailing economic, social, and political factors that have had the most impact on residents of Dixon?
2. What role do individual stakeholders play towards influencing a sense of neighbourhood belonging amongst the neighbourhood of Dixon?
3. How does the residents' sense of belonging to their neighbourhood affect their sense of self?

These supplementary questions form the main objectives of this project by examining 1. the most prevalent issues affecting the Dixon community, as well as how they are enacted, 2. who are the involved stakeholders are, how they have the ability to influence residents of Dixon, and how they utilize their influence to impact a sense of belonging within residents of Dixon, and 3. whether residents' relationship with their neighbourhood is in any way correlated with their relationship to themselves and their community. These three supplementary questions are ordered in this manner because each individual one provides information that assists in answering the question that follow. By identifying prevalent issues within Dixon, I am able to better understand the role various stakeholder play towards either mitigating or further exacerbating these issues, and upon understanding the role of all stakeholders involved I can better analyse how these processes impact the Dixon community at large.

## 2. Research Method and Methodology

### *2.1 Introduction*

In this chapter I outline how a qualitative research approach best fit my study as let me to take in-depth accounts from my participants, allowing for meaning to emerge from the data collection process, as well as how the nature of semi-structured interviews allowed for open-opened conversations to yield data in a spontaneous (compared to a traditional question-answer interview style) manner. I also outline the details of my interview process such as employing snowball sampling to engage in conversation with close-knit and like-minded individuals within the Dixon community, as well as the importance of fostering trust between the interviewer and interviewee, as it allows an opportunity to engage in conversations that yields richer data. I expand on this point by addressing how an inability to conduct in-person interviews due to COVID restrictions initially acted as a barrier towards fostering trust due to the anonymous nature of phone interviews – an obstacle I overcame by sharing details about myself in an effort to establish comfort for my participants.

### *2.2 Understanding Dixon residents' lived experiences through a qualitative research approach*

This project employed a qualitative research approach, categorizing it as a study that took in-depth accounts from individuals and groups through real world interactions in an effort to gain insight on a particular issue (Kuper, Reeves, & Levinson, 2008). Taking on a qualitative research approach as opposed to a quantitative research approach – a method concerned with the collection of numerical data for statistical analysis – better fit my project as I was concerned

with the real-world accounts of Dixon residents and the factors that impact their relationship with their neighbourhood. In order for me to obtain this information it was beneficial for me to engage in conversational communication that allowed me to not only gain a better understanding of *what* factors impacted neighbourhood belonging within Dixon, but also *why* they did so, whereas a quantitative research approach is better equipped with answering *how much (Kuper et al., 2008)*. A qualitative research approach grants data to be inductive, allowing for meaning to emerge from the data collection as opposed to a deductive hypothesis-based approach, allowing for an adaptable research design that emphasises the exploration process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Lastly, given the nature of my research, a qualitative research method best aligned with my project as it provided me the space to center my data collection around residents' lived experiences, and by doing so ensured the collection of high-quality information that could accurately represent the Dixon community.

### *2.3 Semi-structured interviews to initiate open-ended conversations with Dixon residents*

Semi-structured interviews were the primary mode of data collection for this project, and this method was implemented because it allows for the interview process to move past the traditional question-answer interview format and take form of a managed conversation (Cachia & Millward, 2011). Semi-structured interviews created space for me to prepare a limited amount of pre-determined questions and allow the rest of the information to come from spontaneously exploring topics that come up within the interview process. By doing so, they create more leeway for following up or expanding on particular points without having to worry

about sticking to the confines of the pre-determined questions (Leavy, 2020). This was helpful for my data collection process as I was seeking information from residents about their experiences in Dixon, so a lack of pre-determined questions allows the chance for topics I would not have assumed to raise as an outsider to Dixon to come up and be discussed with greater detail. The conversation-oriented nature of semi-structured interviews gives me as the interviewer the opportunity to become a knowledge-producing participant as I can guide the interview through follow-up questions, something that cannot be achieved through a traditional question-answer interview style (Leavy, 2020).

The (n=12) interview participants for this study were self-identifying residents of Dixon over the age of eighteen. An importance was placed over the notion of *self-identifying* because there are not any pre-determined boundaries dictating what does and does not qualify as Dixon, so it would be counterproductive to implement a self-proclaimed boundary that could potentially limit my findings. Furthermore, my role as a researcher – particularly one that is an outsider to Dixon – is to listen to the information I am being presented, and by dictating what is and what is not Dixon I am excluding an entire population of Dixon whose stories play an important role in presenting Dixon residents' relationship with their neighbourhood (Kim, Badrinathan, Choi, Karim, & Zhou, 2022). I allowed my participants to dictate the boundaries of their neighbourhood, and though my participants had differing views regarding which areas do and do not qualify as Dixon, the general consensus was that the intersection of Kipling and Dixon Rd. is to be considered the center of Dixon, with the surrounding areas contained between Martin Grove Rd and Islington Ave. to also be considered *Dixon*.

Participants were recruited through the use of snowball sampling, in which my initial participants were sent a letter of information regarding the details of the study, as well as a separate letter that they forwarded to their contacts who were deemed an appropriate fit for participation. The initial participants I selected were personal contacts who I knew are currently residing in the Dixon neighbourhood. The letter sent out to my initial participants contained a brief description of the study, and my contact details should they be interested in participating. Five of the twelve participants recruited requested further contact with me via Instagram (written messages and audio calls) in an effort to establish rapport prior to conducting the interviews. The use of personal contacts for recruitment was beneficial because it allowed me to connect with like-minded individuals who share similar experiences as one another (Marcus, Weigelt, Hergert, Gurt, & Gelléri, 2017). Snowball sampling allowed me to gain insight from a *community* of individuals who are connected to one another through other mutuals. This process also allowed me to gain insight of Dixon residents in a manner that I would not have been able to without the word of mouth of my initial contacts (Goodman, 2011). Conversely, snowball sampling also presented limitations as interviewing like-minded individuals created a unique bias that focuses on a particular portion of the population (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). The like-minded nature of my participants acts as a double-edged sword as I was able to yield high quality information, but this information was representative of the Dixon population I was limited to. Furthermore, the majority of my participants fell within the age group of 23-27 years old, which restricted my ability to the perspectives of particular young adults within Dixon.

I had initially planned for the sample size of my interview participants to be 25, but as I was conducting my interviews, I began to experience data saturation in regard to the central

themes of my project, prompting me to stop since continuing the data collection process would result in me yielding similar themes and findings (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). It was my experience that a majority of my participants – all of them regarding certain topics – mentioned the same points in regard to factors that were negatively impacting the community's sense of neighbourhood belonging, and after the twelfth interview I felt confident that I had acquired enough information to conclude the data collection process. It should be made clear that I do not believe the twelve participants I interviewed represented all of Dixon, as interviewing more residents (from a wider set of demographic variety) would yield perspectives I had not received from the participants I interviewed, however for the sake of the themes I was interested in representing within this study, as well as the limitations I faced regarding time and willingness of resident participation, the data became similar amongst each participant.

All of the interviews were conducted over the phone on an individual basis throughout June 2021 to mid-September 2021. The interviews ranged from 20 minutes to two hours with the average at approximately 50 minutes. The interviews that went over an hour were with initial contacts with whom personal conversation were also initiated during the interview process. All interviews were recorded on a separate iPhone with verbal consent from each individual participant. The interview consisted of five pre-written questions, each touching on various aspects of Dixon and the neighbourhood's perception outside and inside of the neighbourhood such as representation in media, development within Dixon, public perception of Dixon, etc. Each pre-written question was followed up by three to four follow-up questions as a guide to keep the conversation flowing. These five pre-written questions were what the conversation with my participants would be based around. Due to the semi-structured nature

of my interviews, I aimed to have my interviews flow like seamless conversations so if a conversation began to deviate from the pre-written questions I would allow it, but then work those questions into the conversation, ensuring that they get answered without disrupting the flow of each individual conversation. The follow-up questions were not always asked as often times the conversation would carry in a way that the follow-up questions would be answered within the conversation prior to being mentioned. Participants were reminded prior and during the interview that they were not obligated to answer any question they felt uncomfortable answering, as well as the fact that they reserve the right to end the interview at any point should they choose to.

After conducting my interviews, I transcribed all the audio into written notes so that it would be easier for me to reference back to each individual interview rather than having to skip through recordings to find a specific quote and risk skipping over any important details. The interviews also occurred over the span of four months so the chance that I would forget what key points were discussed in each interview was relatively high, and in an effort to avoid that happening, I conducted a thematic analysis of my interview findings. After transcribing my interviews, I became more familiarized with my data, allowing me to create a list of codes – words and phrases that were important to the study as they came up in several instances (Gamage, 2019) – and sorted under the five pre-written questions I had selected prior to conducting the interviews. Each question centered around an individual theme (i.e. Dixon in the media, growing up in Dixon, development in Dixon, etc.) so the codes under each question helped create a mind-map for certain shared meanings and experiences (Braun, Clarke, & Hayfield, 2022). I employed a thematic analysis for my qualitative research as the process

granted me the opportunity to link re-occurring points to broader theoretical and conceptual issues, allowing me as the researcher to then see how different factors may influence one another (Braun et al., 2022). The list of codes under each question (see appendix) showcases the prevalent themes and phrases mentioned by my participants during our individual interviews. The codes I gathered contributed towards a better understanding of the social, political, and economic issues prevalent within Dixon, allowing me to expand on these themes and phrases are throughout the paper. For example, codes under question 3 such as "misinformed", "misguided", "negative", and "racist" help shape the narrative presented to me by my participants. This understanding of the participants' interactions with public perceptions of Dixon not only allows me to expand on *how* residents feel they are perceived, but also *where* it may come from. These narratives presented to me shaped this study, which can be seen in section 4.4 and section 5.4 where I expand on why my participants believed the public's perception to be negative, rooted in racism and xenophobia, as well as where the history behind it.

### *2.4 Ethical Considerations*

#### *2.4.1 Importance of building trust between the interviewer and the interviewee*

My data collection process consisted of semi-structured interviews, a process that relies greatly on openness from the participants' part, as the more information they share about their lived experiences, the more accurate I am in portraying their neighbourhood as an outsider looking in (Scanlan, 2020). In order to gain this level of openness it was crucial for me to foster a sense of trust between myself and each individual interview participant. The semi-structured interview style allowed me to yield richly textured information through in-depth conversations

as opposed to a traditionally structured question and answer interview format (Scanlan, 2020). For me to attain this level of trust amongst my participants it was pertinent that I prove to them the information they were disclosing was to someone who had their and their community's best interest at heart. I made use of the open-ended nature of my interview style by divulging information about myself as well as what led me to pursue this research project in an effort to establish a rapport. I also allowing the participants to ask me any questions throughout the interview process should they desire to. Prior to any formal interaction, three of my participants requested me to message them on my personal Instagram account, assumably in an effort to gauge who it is they are being asked to engage with. This also allowed them to confirm whether or not I matched the description presented to them by whoever recommended them to participate. Five of the twelve participants (including the three who requested to see my Instagram account) conducted their own screening method consisting of questions regarding my background and why I was so interested in Dixon. Though this was a tedious process, primarily due to the way it kept prolonging the interview process and making me constantly have to follow up on certain individuals, I had to remind myself that the process was necessary if it meant each participant I was engaging with established a level of trust and comfortability with me, thus allowing me the opportunity to better represent them and their community through my work. Aside from the impact it would have on the quality of my data, it was important for me to establish a sense of trust because of my insider-outsider status as a researcher (Kim et al., 2022). Regardless of my project's intentions, as well as my proximity to some of my participants, I was an outsider to the community of Dixon, and it was important for me to have all my participants understand what my objective was conducting this research. I

engaged with each of my participants in a manner that allowed both parties to learn more about one another, and by connecting to them on a personal level, I conveyed to them that my goal with this project was to bring awareness to their community rather than benefit from it (Bukamal, 2022). Though I held an outsider status on most characteristics (race, economic status, privilege, etc.) my conversations with my participants allowed us to uncover characteristics we shared such as being Muslim, being raised by immigrant parents, and being members of the diaspora – features that allowed me to obtain a role as an insider to some degree, and in turn allowed my participants to be more willing to share their personal accounts with me (Bukamal, 2022).

#### *2.4.2 Limitations due to COVID-19: The challenge of phone interviews replacing in-person interviews*

Conducting my interviews in the midst of COVID-19 restrictions presented a challenge to my data collection process, as my interviews were initially intended to be in-person but due to safety concerns I thought it would be best to alter them to phone conversations. I had initially considered video conversations but quickly reconsidered on the account that potential participants would be less likely to engage in a video conversation with a stranger as opposed to a phone conversation. Altering my interviews from in-person to over-the-phone still negatively impacted my data collection process because potential participants were less likely to divulge personal accounts to a stranger over the phone as there was less opportunity to establish trust between both parties. In-person interviews would have allowed for a more comfortable experience because body language and facial expressions – both factors that play a key role in communication – could not be picked up over the phone. Visual tells such as eye

contact and how the participant reacted to certain topics and conversational points would have allowed me as the interviewer to pick up on queues that dictate whether I should dig deeper into a specific topic or avoid it due to discomfort. These little nuances would have allowed me as an interviewer to ensure that the comfort of my participants is placed above all else – a quality that would foster a sense of trust between the participant and myself as the participant would realize that they and their relationship with their neighbourhood is the focus, rather than my project and the information could yield from them for the sake of my data collection. I mitigated this obstacle by having light conversations with my participants prior to starting the interview process. These conversations allowed for both parties to get a sense of one another, allowing for the interview to flow like a conversation rather than a questionnaire. I explained to the participants that I was pursuing this study because I was interested in the notion of neighbourhood belonging – how it is or can be fostered and maintained – particularly in Dixon since it is a neighbourhood rarely discussed amongst geographers within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Most existing literature within the realm of urban planning at a neighbourhood scale – particularly lower income and minority neighbourhoods – focuses on Jane and Finch, Regent Park, or neighbourhoods within the East-end of Toronto (Ahmadi, 2018; Galanakis, 2016; Laughlin & Johnson, 2011; Sheppard et al., 2012; Sriskandarajah, 2019). A majority of current existing literature on Dixon is written by academics belonging to either the Dixon community or the Somali community, looking to bring attention to the current and historic treatment of their respected community (Danso, 2002c; Kusow, 2007; Hassan Ali Mohamed, 2001b; Hodan Ahmed Mohamed, 2016). By outlining this to my participants, I stated my intent to use my platform to bring attention to an underrepresented community within the city. I also

disclosed information about myself such as how long I have lived in the GTA, as well as my personal interactions with Dixon prior to this study. I found that the more information I shared about myself throughout an individual interview, the easier it became for my participants to share their accounts as they were able to feel less like subjects and more like they were collaborators in the study.

# 3. Literature Review: Situating Dixon within three distinct sub-disciplines of human geography

## *3.1 The Negative Impacts of Gentrification – How it Challenges Placemaking Within Toronto*

In this section I examine the importance of recognizing gentrification's role in the creation of boundaries that dictate who can and cannot access new and refurbished spaces within the city. I initiate this analysis by providing an outline of how economically geared procedures such as financialization and renovictions are forms of gentrification within the city of Toronto that allow for affluent members of the city to establish placemaking while simultaneously ostracising lower-income and minority communities from access to these spaces. I conclude this discussion by calling attention to a gap in literature regarding a fear of *imminent gentrification* – how residents of lower-income neighbourhoods fear development within their neighbourhoods because it is a sign of raised costs of living and possible housing insecurity. By establishing the presence of inequitable planning practices within Toronto, I present *some* of the conditions that challenge the ability for particular residents of the city (those not belonging to an upper-class and affluent household) to foster a sense of belonging to Toronto (Keatinge & Martin, 2016; Kitchen, Williams, & Gallina, 2015; Sriskandarajah, 2020). This chapter acts as a foundation on which later chapters (see chapter 4.2 and 4.3) can build and draw parallels from. An understanding of the existing practices that challenge the formation of a sense of belonging allows for a better understanding of my participants' perceptions regarding their representation within existing planning and policy practices.

Early in the twenty-first century, the concept of gentrification – a change in the social and physical characteristics of a low-income neighbourhood geared towards replacing low-income residents with a significantly more affluent population (Finio, 2022; James, 2010; Keatinge & Martin, 2016) – first became apparent in within North America (Atkinson & Bridge, 2004). Since then, it has gained a prominent fixture within scholarly debate and policy formation. Gentrification highlights economic and racial inequalities through the act of displacing lower-income communities – predominantly people of colour – through the means of increased rent prices and overall cost of living (Lees, 2016a). As city officials take on new forms of development or revitalization projects the cost of living in that area increases, pushing out current residents who cannot afford to match the new cost of living and replacing them with new residents who can afford it. In the case of Toronto specifically, the city has experienced a substantial increase in high-rise condominium towers due to a large reinvestment into the inner-city (Davidson, 2009).

Scholars in the field of urban studies propose that this rise of condominiums in Toronto has birthed a new form of gentrification within the city, one which Lehrer and Wieditz (2009) identify as the “condofication of Toronto”. They claim that the rise in condominiums has contributed towards Toronto being spatially divide into three distinct cites, 1. The constant city of the rich, 2. The shrinking city of middle-income households, and 3. The growing city of concentrated poverty (Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009). They identify the occupants of each separate entity as those whose income increased by 20% since 1970, those whose income stayed relatively the same, and those whose income decreased by 20%. Their division of the city is similar to the works of August and Walks (2018), Hawkins, Ahmed, Roorda, and Habib (2022),

and Rosen and Walks (2015) as they view gentrification one's economic status. Citing the three forms of a *neoliberal spatial fix* – a theory that argues in favour of neo-liberal policies due to their positive impact on urbanization in wealthy nations as per outlined by Hackworth (2008), Lehrer and Wieditz (2009) talk about how rapid suburban growth, a decline in the inner suburbs, and reinvestment in the inner city as the key features of Toronto's spatial transformation. This form of socio-spatial transformation is celebrated by scholars such as Florida (2002) who claims that the formation of contemporary metropolitan areas attracts the *creative class* – a subsect of the population comprised by young creatives in the fields of arts and sciences (Nathan, 2007). Florida positions himself as a proponent for the influx of a more affluent population (creative class tends to fall in this category) as it yields greater economic prosperity through the development of new industries, disruptive innovations, and technological progress (Florida, 2002).

These scholars' works provide an outline of gentrification through an economic lens, prioritizing focus on wealth and income as economic inequality plays a significant role in determining who benefits from the process of gentrification and who falls victim to them. Similarly, their counterparts' work applies similar focus on how demographic factors such as race (Denis, 2021; Lees, 2016b; McKittrick, 2011; Nelson, Trautman, & Nelson, 2015), gender (Bondi, 1999; Burchiellaro, 2021; Warde, 1991), and social class (Clerval, 2022; Curran, 2004; Gorczynska, 2017) determine the degree to which an individual is impacted by the effects of gentrification. Neighbourhoods with ethnic and racial minorities – particularly Black communities – have a much higher chance of being susceptible to the impacts of gentrification due to limited housing choices caused by racial exclusions (Anguelovski, Connolly, Garcia-

Lamarca, Cole, & Pearsall, 2019; R. Murdie & Teixeira, 2011; Shabazz, 2015). R. Murdie and Teixeira (2011) use Little Portugal as a case study to outline how not only do ethnic neighbourhoods experience a higher chance of undergoing gentrification, but they also have a greater chance of experiencing the negative effects associated with it such as being removed from a network of social and community structures. In a similar manner, Oswin (2016) speaks of the way queer communities often fall victim to losing a sense of place with developing urban areas. The *othering* of queerness distances it from the notion of *the urban*, and regardless of which of the three separate cities (as per outlined by Lehrer and Wieditz) someone within this community may fall under, they will experience a negative impact of gentrification – lose of place – that is separate from their economic standing. As for the benefits that come with attracting the creative class, Florida (2002) applies more focus towards the attraction of new inhabitants rather than the already existing population within an area that will get pushed out to make space for the new occupants. The population that gets pushed out occupies positions that do not fit the criteria of the creative class, and by doing so only further exacerbates the division of the city into three separate cities as outlined by Lehrer and Wieditz (2009).

According to literature specifically geared towards the City of Toronto, procedures such as financialization of housing – a process in which housing is treated as a commodity rather than a social good (Aalbers, 2020; August & Walks, 2018; Ward, 2021), renovictions – the act of evicting current tenants in an effort to renovate a property for the sole purpose of relisting it for a higher price (Aaida, 2018; Ramiller, 2022; Stenberg, 2020), and more recently touristification – the transformation of spaces into a commodity geared towards attracting tourists (Sequera & Nofre, 2018), have been key features contributing towards the socio-spatial

division of the city. If referring to the triple bottom line – a framework advocating for an equal effort to be placed on social, environmental, and economic concerns (Venkatraman & Nayak, 2015) – these procedures prioritize the economic sector over the social and environmental one as their primary goal is to increase profits for the city (Isil & Hernke, 2017).

The problem with prioritizing profits over the wellbeing of the city's occupants is that by doing so, the city begins to create boundaries dictating who can and cannot belong to a space (Benson, 2014). Occupants who can afford to reside in newly renovated (gentrified) neighbourhoods are able to adjust to the rising cost of living and by doing so they can comfortably create a space for themselves where they can establish a sense of belonging (Trudeau, 2006; Warde, 1991). The formation of belonging is significantly more accessible for them because they do not have to adopt the stresses of possible housing insecurity due to financial security. The gentrified space is curated *for* them because they are able to provide a return of investment rendering them the ability to belong, whereas the previous occupants of a gentrified space are unable to formulate a sense of belonging because they cannot afford to do so (Davidson, 2009). Furthermore, it is often the case that previous occupants of a since gentrified neighbourhood had already established place-belongingness – the feeling of familiarity, safety, and a sense of *home* tied to any particular space (Pinkster, 2016) but due to economic boundaries dictating the price of belonging, their established sense of belonging gets handed over to those who can afford it. To the point of attracting a creative class in the hope of boosting the city's economy and making space for a more affluent and youthful population (Florida, 2002), the notion establishes a boundary dictating what population the city seeks to serve. Though the boundary is not a physical one that actively forbids anyone *outside* the

creative class from residing in the city, it is enforced as an *invisible* boundary – not formally written but understood mentally. The act of enforcing boundaries (invisible or physical) is that it contributes towards issues regarding belonging – a social relationship concerning how an individual or community feels at home in a particular setting – through implicit and explicit forms of exclusion (Kuurne & Gómez, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2006). The act of revitalizing an older or lower-income neighbourhood because it allows for a higher yield of profits through raising the cost of living implies that the space is not for anyone who cannot afford it. An overwhelming number of ethnic enclaves getting gentrified implies that regardless of place formation within an entire community, the relationship amongst them and their space is not valued if it means a higher yield of profits can be made by replacing them with condominiums – initiated by investors and developers and passed by city planners. (James, 2010; Trudeau, 2006). Maantay and Maroko (2018) expand on this by outlining the cost-benefit analysis conducted by city planners when making the decision to revitalize a dilapidated space. When city planners conduct a cost-benefit analysis of a proposed development project, they prioritize development in areas that fall into the 'high profit-making category'. The cost of revitalizing a property is seen as less of a deterrent and more as a long-term investment for higher-income neighbourhoods since there is a guaranteed return of investment (Maantay & Maroko, 2018). Development in low-income neighbourhoods almost always follows with gentrification as developers have to make their money back in one way or another, and they choose to do so by raising the cost of living. This implies that access to adequate amenities and revitalized spaces only belongs to those who can afford it, or those who can be a return of investment. Not only does this approach to urban planning leave lower-income and minority communities behind as

the rest of the city gets developed and improved, but it negatively impacts their sense of belonging as they 1. Cannot form a sense of *home* within their neighbourhood and 2. Cannot form a sense of belonging to the city overall due to the stark contrast between the conditions of their spaces and the rest of the city (Mee & Wright, 2009).

In the past decade there has been an increase in literature regarding gentrification, and in even more recent years gentrification's negative impact on place-belongingness (Benson, 2014; Finio, 2022; Pinkster, 2016). Scholars in this this space apply focus on the intersectional manner through which various social factors impact one's experience with belonging. In the case of Toronto, scholars largely focus on its impacts on specific neighbourhoods via case studies, though these tend to be limited to more well-known neighbourhoods (both low-income and more affluent areas) within the city (Hackworth & Rekers, 2005; James, 2015; Keatinge & Martin, 2016; Mathews, 2008; R. Murdie & Teixeira, 2011). Not only is there is a gap in the knowledge regarding gentrification's impact on specific communities within the city, but there is also a lack of research regarding the fear of *imminent* gentrification within communities that stems from a lack of lack of development within their neighbourhoods. This is not to say that the research does not exist, but it is drastically scarce when compared to articles regarding current impacts of gentrification (Anguelovski, 2016; Berglund & Gregory, 2019; Davidson, 2009). The revitalization and new development within various parts of the city leaves neighbourhoods who did not experience any substantial forms of development at risk of the effects of gentrification, as well as any new forms of (much needed) development within their neighbourhood will place them at high risks of displacement due to raised costs of living. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, this project touches on both of these gaps by conducting

a case study within Dixon – an underrepresented and under-developed low-income neighbourhood of located within a fast-developing district of the city of Toronto.

### *3.2 Race creating space: The systemic othering of Black communities influenced by conflating a sense of belonging with a sense of ownership*

In this section I examine how race creates spaces by analysing the how the creation of space as well as the racially discriminatory systems that form within it would not exist without Black communities. I start this analysis by underlining how the concept of place is shaped by the unique experiences of Black people, rather than a fixed entity. I expand on this point by examining the creation of a racialized economy and how it normalized the presence of white supremist ideologies within urban planning, leading to the *othering* of Black communities. I conclude this section by proposing that a sense of ownership over spaces by privileged members of society (affluent, white, upper-class, or those with authoritative powers) is used to systemically and socially *other* and ultimately contain Black communities. By highlighting the relationship between race and space, this chapter underlines the historic mistreatment of Black bodies within the realm of urban geography, and by doing so provides the necessary background to examine the reasons why (Black, as a majority of Dixon occupants are Somali) residents of Dixon – as per my participants – feel that their race plays a factor in their community's ability to form a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood. Chapter 4.4, 5.4, and 5.5 all apply the relationship between race and space in relation to Dixon to examine the how the notion of race negatively impacts my participants' ability to foster place-belongingness due to public perception and treatment of their community.

Geography as a discipline is generally concerned with the ways various social and demographic factors influence individuals' interactions with the space they occupy. A subsect of geographers have paid specific attention to the relationship between race and geography – in both social and spatial contexts – and in recent years there has been a greater emergence of literature examining the complex conceptualizations of race and how it impacts the production and maintenance of space (Allen, Lawhon, & Pierce, 2019; Gilmore, 2007; Hawthorne, 2019a; McKittrick, 2006, 2011; Shabazz, 2015). Black scholars – as well as those dedicated towards highlighting and ultimately dismantling the deeply rooted systems of racial oppression – seek to narrate the lived experiences of Black individuals and communities for the means of underlining their interconnected relationships between space, place, and power (Hawthorne, 2019a). McKittrick (2006) claims that "Black matters are spatial matters", challenging the notion of *place* being seen as a fixed entity, but rather shaped by the unique experiences of Black people (Hawthorne, 2019b; Noxolo, 2022). She emphasizes on the role that the geography of domination played in the formation of space as well as predominant Eurocentric conceptions of geographic knowledge through slavery, colonization, and imperialism. Similar to McKittrick, Lipsitz (2007) refers to these processes as the "fatal links that connect race, place, and power", in which he argues that institutional structures – economic (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019; Koechlin, 2019), social (Sriskandarajah, 2020; Weber, 2020), and political (Boyle, 2008; Hall, 2020; Weber, 2020) – do not simply materialize in space, but are rather carried into effect through the undertakings of spatial development itself. These structures that both produce and reproduce racism exist through inclusion and exclusion – who is afforded the chance to partake in structures of access and opportunity (Hunter & Robinson, 2018; McKittrick, 2006, 2011;

Shabazz, 2015). Not only would the oppressive structures that prevent Black bodies from establishing place-belongingness not be carried out without the presence of Black bodies, but the actual spaces on which these practices were established on would not exist in the first place. Take for example the transatlantic slave trade; it created the foundation on which a global economy was built upon, and through which capitalistic systems rooted within notions of white supremacy were birthed (McKittrick, 2011). White supremacy's influence as one of the central principles of capitalism further exacerbated the creation of a racialized economy through which those who *belonged* were able to accumulate greater wealth and in turn more opportunity to *belong,* while those who were not (Black diaspora) were forced to undergo further dispossession and alienation (Hall, 2020; Lipsitz, 2007; McKittrick, 2011; Noxolo, 2022).

The presence of white supremist ideologies post-slavery bled into all imaginable structures within society, and of particular interest is the processes in which it permeated and was enacted within the discipline of urban planning. Planning procedures such as zoning – the division of land into individual areas each which their own set of regulations for development, and redlining – a practice in which financial services were denied to individuals based off of particular social characteristics – created a space in which only affluent white bodies were able to establish a sense of place (Gilmore, 2007; Hall, 2020; Lipsitz, 2007; Shabazz, 2015). Zoning and redlining both raised issues regarding racial injustice, housing injustice, and injustice regarding land use, as both these practices systematically denied Black communities access to specific services, land use, and in turn, equal access to opportunities (Lipsitz, 2007; Shertzer, Twinam, & Walsh, 2016; Trudeau, 2006). Exclusionary land-use polices present within urban planning contributed towards social segregation, preventing Black communities from access to

the same institutional services as white communities. Inequal access to education (Lipsitz, 2007), financial services (Shertzer et al., 2016), healthcare (Smith, 2021), and the exacerbation of food insecurity are just a few of the by-products of exclusionary policies and procedures within urban planning that have historically, as well as currently continue to complicate the formation of place within Black communities. McKittrick (2011) cites this *othering* of Black individuals and communities to be rooted in the notion that the creation of space tied with creation of difference. These (economic, political, and social) systems inherently embedded within white supremacy and Eurocentric modernity regard blackness as a hostile racial category, one that infringes upon an already established sense of whiteness (McKittrick, 2011). Whiteness in this case is portrayed as the standard – a perception that normalizes all practices associated with colonization by the justification that Blackness disturbs the stable sense of normality (whiteness). All forms of violence and exclusion associated with slavery and post-slavery hereby become irrelevant and external of the shaping of collective geographies (McKittrick, 2011).

Placing Blackness as intrusion to an established standard demands for it to be controlled, often through the use of force (Dukes & Gaither, 2017; McKittrick, 2006, 2011; Shabazz, 2015). Shabazz (2015) discusses how Blackness becomes suppressed predominantly through the acts of policing, surveillance, and the creation of unjust urban landscapes. He claims that even prior to unjust incarcerations as a mean to maintain order, Black communities are caged through an urban landscape that emulates a sense of confinement. Using the city of Toronto as an example, Black communities regularly undergo excessive policing, be it through use of force in the form of unlawful searches and arrests or comparatively less forceful actions

such as carding – a policy in which police can stop and question individuals regardless of an offence being committed (Denis, 2021; Tobias & Joseph, 2020). In both of these scenarios, the act of policing is enforced as bodies of power display their authoritative role over Black bodies in an effort to *maintain peace*. Razack (2000) applies this notion of displaying an authoritative role over Black communities through the process of *peacekeeping*, citing it an excuse used by those in power to maintain their ability to not only control spaces they occupy, but also the ones they do not. This process forms the basis through which the *othering* of Black communities is enforced as belonging becomes conflated with ownership (Mee & Wright, 2009; Schein, 2009). White supremacist notions of placemaking treat Black communities as something that belongs *to* their physical geographies rather than belonging *with*, as the latter is enacted through possessing *membership (Mee & Wright, 2009; Schein, 2009)* – a notion that is afforded strictly to those who McKittrick (2011) describes as are ones *with* (legible Eurocentric history narratives and ownership). This notion contributes towards over-policing in addition to a lack of mobility within various government policies such as housing, transportation, and employment, which by doing so enforces systematic racism to persistently contain and *other* Black communities from non-Black communities and spaces (Brand & Miller, 2020).

Gilmore (2007) reflects on systematic racism within prisons by outlining how prisons represent the phenomenon of racial barriers get enforced through physical barriers as they separate one from society and ignore the problem by locking it away rather than determining the possible causes of how it came to exist in the first place. I use her stance on prisons to mirror the notion that the policing and systemic *othering* of Black communities is linked with the creation of landscapes which emulate a sense of confinement, and this is evident in the

processes which systemically and socially *other* lower-income Black communities (Brand & Miller, 2020). This notion is relevant to my research as I use it to underline how the systemic and social *othering* of Dixon's residents creates a space in which my participants claim they are confined to the space they occupy. This study further examines my participants' experience with being given an identity by the general public that vilifies their sense of self by portraying them as perpetrators of violence and disorder, a process which is then used to justify the hyper-policing and containment of their community in an effort to maintain order (see section 5.5).

### *3.3 From there to here: The challenges of forming a sense of belonging amongst Somali refugees in Toronto*

In this section I will present the challenges faced in forming a sense of belonging amongst refugees entering Canada, within a particular focus on Somali refugees in the mid-1980's to the early-1990's. I outline the state of *in between* Somali refugee claimants were placed in due to their lack of obtaining permanent status and how it created obstacles for the community to formulate place-belonging. I conclude this section by proposing that the Somali-Canadian identity that formed Dixon continues to exist in a state of limbo, one in which they, along with future generations, are still unable to fully belong to due to similar patterns of challenges as faced by the initial settlers of Dixon.

The city of Toronto has been a primary location for immigrants and refugees seeking asylum in Canada. Since the early 1970's in has been documented that upwards of one-third of immigrants and refugees entering Canada each year settle in the Greater Toronto Area, a figure

that increased in a relatively drastic manner since the late 1980's and into the 1990's (Danso, 2002a; Kusow, 2007). Toronto experienced approximately 30,000 new persons enter the city in the mid-1980's, jumping to 70,000 persons in the early 1990's (Danso, 2002a). Aside from the large increase in the number of immigrants and refugees entering Toronto, there was also a shift in the countries of origin from which people were coming from. Up until the late 1960's it was mostly British and European migrants entering Toronto, but since then there was a shift where large amounts of immigrants began entering from countries in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean – all coming from a relatively diverse spread of economic classes ranging from refugees to white-collar workers (Danso, 2002a; Leach, 2013; Pratt & Valverde, 2002). This section will solely focus on the refugees that entered Toronto due the nature of their entry – refugees being forced to flee their home country for their own safety, whereas immigrants are able to exercise the freedom to *choose* where they migrate to. It is important to highlight this distinction because within the context of belonging and placemaking, immigrants are able to decide where they want to establish a sense of place, unlike refugees who are forcefully displaced and given no choice in the act of placemaking (Kox & van Liempt, 2022). Refugees face significantly more obstacles than their immigrant counterparts considering they are entirely uprooted from their homes without the ability to plan their move, making it more difficult to establish themselves in their new spaces (Octávio, Elizabeth, & Pedro Gabriel, 2022; Radford & Hetz, 2021).

Forced migration is a life-altering process that carries dire implications for nations and their people who are imposed to adjust to a new life within a new society, often with an entirely different set of norms. A loss of home paired with the fear of establishing oneself in the

unknown invites a spectrum of social, phycological, cultural, and economic challenges that complicate refugees' ability to integrate into their new life (Beiser & Hou, 2006). These factors along with demographic ones such as race (McKittrick, 2011; Tefera & Gamlen, 2021), gender (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Hopkins, 2010; Senthanar & MacEachen, 2019), and age (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Hassan Ali Mohamed, 2001a) dictate how well an individual and their families can fit into the new society they now occupy. The process of re-establishing oneself and their families as well as coming to terms with their newfound marginalized position within society creates conditions for alienation, estrangement, and a loss of *self (Hassan Ali Mohamed, 2001b; R. Murdie, 2010; Radford & Hetz, 2021; R. Sampson & Gifford, 2010)*. According to Beiser and Hou (2006) one of the long-term psychological challenges faced by refugees when arriving to the country where they seek refuge is the loss of self. Prior to being displaced from their home countries, refugees had established a sense of belonging to their land. The formation of place-belongingness within their country of origin allows for it to become an integral part of their identity, as the norms and day-to-day processes of their country shape how they perceive and navigate the spaces they occupy (R. Sampson & Gifford, 2010; Tefera & Gamlen, 2021). The act of having to resettle without the opportunity to appropriately honour the loss of their homes – and through this kinship with place, a loss of their identity – places them at a crossroads where they have to decide whether to hold onto the identity they embodied their entire life, or to abandon it completely in the hope of *obtaining membership* within their new society (Beiser & Hou, 2006; Tefera, 2021). For many, assimilation ensures a better chance of acceptance as they avoid enduring the process of being *othered* due to cultural differences. Ratnam (2019) describes this process as the creation of identities within "in-groups" and "out-groups", based

off one's similarities and differences from the norm. This concept is similar to what McKittrick (2011) refers to as "those with" and "those without" – those without land, home, or ownership of self. McKittrick here refers to a Black sense of place, in which Blackness and Black people are seen as *other* from their non-Black counterparts. This notion complicates placemaking for many Black refugees as they get displaced into a space where their Blackness situates them within the *out-group.* For most refugees the concept of assimilation in an attempt to gain access into the *in-group* of their new space acts as a catch-22 because assimilation requires abandoning aspects that identify and connect them with their culture of origin, and by doing so further alienates them from a sense of self (Hopkins, 2010; Isajiw, Sev'Er, & Driedger, 1993; R. A. Murdie, 2008). For Black refugees however, this same process applies with cultural practices, values, and language, but unlike non-Black refugees, regardless of the degree to which they assimilate, their Blackness places them in the *out-group*, or as *those without*. I compare a sense of self and its relationship to placemaking with McKittrick's notion of a Black sense of place because this project situates itself within a neighbourhood that is primarily shaped by Black refugees – many who to this day have a difficult time forming a sense of belonging to the space they occupy.

In the period between the mid-1980's to the mid-1990's, Somali refugees began arriving in Canada in great numbers due to the civil war within Somalia that displaced over 1.5 million people following the overthrow of dictator Siad Barre (Nyadera & Mohamed, 2020). Due to the large number of refugees entering the country, only 2% of Somalis were allowed entrance under the status of government assisted refugees (SAR), while the rest were granted high rates of acceptance as refugee claimants – those seeking protection but not appointed landed status

("Somali Refugee Resettlement in Canada," 2016). In 1993 when the influx of Somalis entering Canada was at its highest, an amendment to the Immigration Act – also known as Bill C-86 – was introduced starting that all applicants were required to possess passports or "satisfactory identity document" in order to be granted landed SAR status (Hassan Ali Mohamed, 2001a). Due to escalating political tensions and in Somalia, the lack of a central government made it so there was no eligible authority in place to issue passports or produce valid documents needed for Somali refugee claimants to obtain SAR status, rendering them in unable to access services required to situate themselves in their new lives ("Somali Refugee Resettlement in Canada," 2016). A lack of landed status prevented Somali refugees from accessing post-secondary education, provincial healthcare coverage, permanent housing, and eligibility for certain types of employment (Hassan Ali Mohamed, 2001a; "Somali Refugee Resettlement in Canada," 2016). R. A. Murdie (2008) details the hardships associated with the initial stages of settlement, in which he outlines the distinction between finding housing – a structure that provides shelter – and a home – the space that fosters one's emotional, cultural, and phycological well-being – as one of the most challenging features of the integration process. Devoid of a *home* and unable to work due to a lack of accessibility, devaluation of their professional backgrounds, and employers unwilling to hire *temporary workers,* most refugee claimants were forced to work jobs below their skill set or depend on social services (Hodan Ahmed Mohamed, 2016; Phillimore & Goodson, 2006; Senthanar & MacEachen, 2019). This process contributed towards a loss of identity, as claimant refugees got stripped of everything that once defined them and provided them with a sense of belonging. Furthermore, by being situated in a state of limbo in which they were unable to fully immerse themselves in their new country, while also being

unable to go back to their home countries, refugee claimants experienced a difficult time coming to terms with what *home* would feel like moving forward (Kox & van Liempt, 2022; Tefera, 2021). The process of becoming (Kox & van Liempt, 2022) is already challenging as it requires the need to start from scratch, building up the resources needed in order to transform the space one must now *reside* in into a place that one can comfortably *live* in, but it presented itself to be exponentially more challenging for a majority of Somali refugees as were not able to even access the resources need to simply provide for themselves and their families, let alone engage in placemaking (Danso, 2002b). I center the discussion of the challenges refugees face in establishing a sense of place around Somali refugees specifically because the neighbourhood of Dixon became the ethnic enclave known as Little Mogadishu on the account of the influx of Somali refugees situating themselves there, and by doing so, created a distinct *place* for themselves amongst their own community (Kusow, 2007; Hassan Ali Mohamed, 2001a). Somali refugees faced significantly more challenges situating themselves in Toronto, due to immigration policies placing them in a state of limbo regarding their status as permanent residents of Canada ("Somali Refugee Resettlement in Canada," 2016). This state of limbo Somali refugees were situated in is relevant to my project because within the lens of placemaking I propose that the Somali population of Dixon never shed this status as they still not only embody it but pass it down to future generations as well. As mentioned prior, Dixon is a distinct place that embodies the Somali identity, yet several of its residents lack a sense of belonging to it due to mistreatment from bodies of authority and a lack of amenities within the neighbourhood that allow for it to be experienced as a home, rather than simply a shelter to reside in (Kusow, 2007). These are the same patterns that challenged forming a sense of

belonging for a large amount of Somali refugees initially entering the country, just in a different manner (Abdela, 2015). I argue that the Somali-Canadian identity that formed Dixon existed, and for many, continues to exist within a state of limbo, preventing them to fully belong.

# 4. The negative impact social, political, economic, and physical *othering* has on fostering neighbourhood belonging in Dixon

### *4.1 Introduction*

In this chapter I analyse the how a lack of representation within social, political, and economic policies and initiatives *others* residents of Dixon by challenging their ability to form a sense of place-belongingness. By presenting lived experiences of Dixon residents, this chapter shines light on state of distrust residents have for the various actors who influence the state of Dixon. I initiate this analysis by outlining how the physical state and lack of development within the neighbourhood's urban design negatively impacts residents' sense of community and self as they identify the need for new development but fear that the process will lead to loss of housing and community. I conclude this chapter by examining how the current lack of place-belongingness amongst Dixon residents is not a recent phenomenon, but rather one that was shaped though various forms of *othering* amongst initial refugee settlers within Dixon and passed down generationally. By doing so, I examine how these processes complicate place-belonginess as many Dixon residents fear that their ability to belong is consistently under threat.

### *4.2 Fear of Imminent Gentrification Following Development in Dixon*

In this section I present my participants' fear of imminent gentrification that would occur if the city was to approve any project initiated by developers within the Dixon neighbourhood. I examine how several of my participants perceive any form of development or revitalization within their community as a sign that their community will be negatively impacted due to displacement, as well as a lack of understanding by developers regarding the needs of

the community. By doing so, this section argues that residents exist in a state of limbo– *needing* new development within their neighbourhood to facilitate place-belongingness but hesitating it due to the fear that their neighbourhood will be altered for the worse.

At its infancy, I predicted this project to be heavily rooted within conversations surrounding gentrification – particularly the ways in which gentrification has impacted Dixon. To my surprise however, the effects of gentrification in Dixon were quite minimal, but this is due to a lack of development projects being taken on within the neighbourhood. I initially speculated that gentrification would be the biggest theme I would uncover within Dixon because in the past two decades Toronto has undergone expansive development (August & Walks, 2018; James, 2010; Rosen & Walks, 2015) that has led to the gentrification of multiple neighbourhoods and ethnic enclaves within the city such as Parkdale, Little Portugal, Regent Park, and little Jamaica, to name just a few (R. Murdie & Teixeira, 2011). Policies initiated by the city of Toronto that allow for such transformations within the city to occur have placed upmost importance towards the growth of the urban core – a result of capitalist urbanization that places an emphasis on economic growth within the city (August & Walks, 2018; Hackworth & Rekers, 2005; James, 2015; Keatinge & Martin, 2016; Rosen & Walks, 2015). From January 1st 2016 to December 31st 2020, approximately 503,362 residential units had been proposed within the city of Toronto with 93,836 units built, 162,757 units actively under construction/have approved building permits, and 246, 769 units under review ("Development Pipeline 2021," 2021). Basing this project within the lens of gentrification initially seemed appropriate, as Etobicoke is currently undergoing expansive growth with multiple proposed development projects as well as several that are currently being built. Amongst these proposed

projects is a new civic center with parkland, retail spaces, office spaces, as well as community activity spaces, and a new transit hub within Kipling – a $73 million project that comes with 4,500 square metres of green roof, 1,400 parking spaces, and a 3000 square foot indoor waiting area. The civic centre is said to be a part of a larger plan in which 2,300 to 2,500 residential units along with a two-acre park will be erected ("Ontario Marks Completion of New Kipling Transit Hub," 2021). Aside from commercial development, there are currently 11 new condominium buildings in Etobicoke and 16 that are under construction (*Development Pipeline 2021*, 2021), so my assumption was that the residential and business growth within the district would lead to gentrification within Dixon.

Neighbourhoods such as Little Portugal – an ethnic enclave that once provided low-cost housing to the Portuguese population of the city and has since been gentrified – were used as a case study to shape this project, but as I started conducting my data collection process, I came to the realization that gentrification was not the issue at the forefront of my participants' list of concerns regarding Dixon – a lack of policies and development initiatives geared towards positive growth within the community was (further discussed in Chapter 5). In each individual interview, all twelve of my participants mentioned their concern with the lack of neighbourhood maintenance within Dixon. Participants spoke of the poor conditions of the Dixon apartment complex, as well as a lack of adequate public spaces and green areas. Five of my participants acknowledged that though they would like to see more for their neighbourhood, they fear that it will no longer be a space for them once developers and investors starts putting more money towards its development. Faiza mentioned that

> "There's so much space within Dixon, I feel like we don't necessarily have to go around and build new spaces, we should put more money into programs and utilize the spaces

> that we do have, but it would mean that the Dixon community would not stay the same. I mean in some ways that is the case already, like you see a lot more non-Somali, non-African people in the area now, a lot more South Asians and South Asians which I don't necessarily mind, but the people that are here already will probably not be able to stay for too long" (Faiza, 24 years old, female, lived in Dixon since she was three years old).

Faiza outlines how revitalising existing infrastructure could promote neighbourhood belonging as it leads to more spaces for residents to not only occupy but to utilize in a way that allows for the community to bond over shared interests and activities, though the caveat with such development projects is that they would lead to housing insecurity within long-term residents. Her fear of the community being altered is rooted in two main scenarios, 1. By investing funds into revitalization projects within Dixon, the City of Toronto will expect to see a return in investment by raising the cost of living within the neighbourhood, rendering residents who are unable to match the new cost of living to seek housing elsewhere (Davidson, 2009), and 2. Revitalization of existing infrastructure will attract a new clientele of potential investors and homebuyers who view development projects as long-term investments into a potential up-and-coming neighbourhood (Davidson, 2009). Faiza outlined public facilities and amenities such as the Dixon Basketball Court, Dixon Park, and Martin Grove Park as specific spaces within Dixon that are in dire need of revitalization but according to her would contribute towards a gradual rise in cost of living once revitalized. She was not alone stating this as three other participants mentioned that the Dixon Basketball Court has been in a horrible condition for nearly a decade now with no signs of revitalization initiatives.

> "I was too young to really enjoy it, or to even understand what it was at the time. I only knew it as a shithole when I stated to play ball. I wasn't really allowed to be at the courts much either because that's where you would get into trouble. All the older kids who were caught up would be around there and parents' permission aside, you didn't really want to get caught up in all that either. It looks old and abandoned. There are no nets

> on the rims, its rusty, and the actual court looks dirty. I swear I can't explain it, but the court looks like it should be scrubbed or something." (Azhar, male, 25-years old, lived in Dixon since he was four years old)

Azhar describes the basketball court as having been in a poor condition when he started utilizing it around the age of eleven, though he acknowledges that the basketball court used to be in a much better condition when it was first built. The court was constructed in 2003 and funded by the Raptors superstar Vince Carter who sought to give back to his city and provide the youth of Dixon the opportunity to focus their energy on a productive activity rather than getting into trouble by breaking the law ("2003 Vince Carter Builds $130.000 Basketball Court In Toronto ", 2013). His foundation *Embassy of Hope* donated the $130,000 court to the city, and it garnered a lot of success by attracting the community's youth together to enjoy something *new* in *their* neighbourhood *for them (Qorane, 2013).* Rob Ford even praised the court by stating that it is something good for the community that did not come out of the pocket of taxpayers (Qorane, 2013). According to Azhar, he was not able to enjoy the court in its heyday as he was too young, nor did he have any interest in basketball at the time. He was unable to understand why the addition of the court meant such a great deal to the community, and by the time he was old enough to enjoy it, the court was in dire need of revitalization, or some form of upkeeping at the very least.

To return back to Faiza's point regarding her belief that there is a lack of revitalization and re-development projects within Dixon due to fiscal reasons, it is worth highlighting the work of Maantay and Maroko (2018) in which they argue that vacant and dilapidating spaces are significantly more common in less affluent spaces because re-development and revitalization comes at a high-cost, so such projects are typically taken on within areas where

there is a strong likelihood of yielding a profit. Faiza's argument that should the City of Toronto invest in the re-development of Dixon it would inevitably alter the current demographic within the neighbourhood, highlights the notion that historically the benefits of new development are generally afforded to an affluent class, whereas the victims of it are almost exclusively low-income residents belonging to a minority group (Laughlin & Johnson, 2011).

When asked about the last major development/re-development project within Dixon, all twelve of my participants mentioned the Shoppers Drugmart on Kipling and Dixon. Prior to the Drugmart, that plaza was home to a Food Basics – a Canadian supermarket chain popular for its low prices. In 2018, the replacement of the Food Basics with a Shoppers Drugmart caused a great deal of controversy within the neighbourhood, as Food Basics provided groceries for low-income members of the community, and it was at the heart of Dixon, allowing for easy access especially for the elder residents and ones without automobiles. Shoppers Drugmart merchandise is relatively more expensive than compared to Food Basics, as well as the fact that it does not carry all the essentials that Food Basics did, meaning residents have to travel further to the nearest grocery store for certain products such as produce for example. When asked about her opinion regarding the change of stores, Lama claimed that

> "A lot of people were pretty unhappy with that. A lot of people depended on that Food Basics because it was cheap, like cheaper than Superstore and Metro. Everyone in these apartments went to the Food Basics, it was right there and now the closest and cheapest option is the No Frills. The Shoppers is cool and all but not what should be there, like the Food Basics served a lot more people. At the end of the day, I need to buy potatoes, not perfume" (Lama, 25 years-old, female, lived in Dixon since she was six-years old).

Lama's sentiment regarding the decision to replace the Food Basics with the Shoppers Drugmart is one that was expressed by nine other participants, claiming that replacing such an

essential store within the community with the Drugmart perfectly exemplified the divide between what planners and developers believe the residents of Dixon need and what the residents actually require. The replacement of a grocery store that typically serves lower-income communities with a store that holds a reputation for being overpriced when compared to its counterparts, can be marked as one the early signs of gentrification beginning to occur. This could be due to a spill-over gentrification effect from the rise in high-end residential and commercial development happening in neighbourhoods around Dixon. The overall negative reaction to what was described as the only significant form of development with Dixon that all my participants could recall is telling because it acts as an example of what could be the future of Dixon at a larger scale. It is worth acknowledging that the decision to replace the Food Basics with a Shoppers Drugmart is rarely under the jurisdiction of planners and developers, as commercial entities are often the ones in charge of such decision-making. It is highly likely that the landlord of the Westway Centre plaza simply replaced their previous tenant (Food Basics) with a new one (Shoppers Drugmart), and city planners and developers did not play a role in impacting the change on the community. That being said, the sentiments raised by my participants regarding their apprehension to the change in stores are still important to consider as they showcase a fear of negative change within their community, as well as outline multiple instances of residents feeling that they do not belong to their neighbourhood due to infrastructural changes that do not represent the community's best interests. The implication held by my participants that developers are actively seeing to displace their community through various planning initiatives displays a mistrust within the community that in turn has a negative impact on neighbourhood belonging. At the heart of their argument, my participants state that

they require the development of new and existing spaces as they can be helpful for the community – community centers, parks, athletic areas, and green spaces – but they fear it because any proposed project could 1. Displace them from their homes due to a raise in cost of living, or 2. Put them at a disadvantage as new development will not serve the needs of the community.

### *4.3 Dixon's physical state neglected by developers contributing to a low sense of community belonging*

In this section I analyse how a lack of neighbourhood maintenance, revitalization, and development of new infrastructure contributes towards low levels of social cohesion and neighbourhood belonging amongst residents of Dixon. By doing to I state that the physical state of Dixon not only challenges residents' ability to foster a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, but also negatively impacts residents' sense of self.

In the early stages of research prior to conducting my interviews, I turned to online message boards to see how residents of Dixon were describing their neighbourhood, as well as taking note of the prevalent issues that were frequently being mentioned. I noticed that in a majority of message boards or comment sections, the most reoccurring criticism I came across was regarding the physical state of the neighbourhood. A handful of comments stated that the physical condition of Dixon looks neglected, particularly in comparison to other neighbourhoods within close proximity. When referring to *Dixon* here, people were referring to the general infrastructure including plazas, the apartment complex, the basket-ball court, and Dixon Park. I found it especially interesting that the overwhelming presence of comments

regarding the physical state of Dixon spanned back to as early as 2008, meaning that residents of Dixon have been complaining about the physical state of Dixon for nearly a decade and a half now. It should be noted that of the general infrastructure stated above, different actors within the city hold responsibility to each respected one – private property owners for the plazas and apartments, and municipal government for the parks and basketball court, however I was particularly interested in applying focus on the actual grievances expressed by Dixon residents regarding the physical state of their neighbourhood. I posed the question "how has Dixon changed over the years?" with a particular focus towards physical development within the neighbourhood.

> "there's new condos and plazas being built in Etobicoke but like in Dixon specifically its nothing. They built a Shoppers and added a few dispensaries but other than that you see nothing. You can literally see what areas are rich and which ones are poor just by looking at the state of the neighbourhood and it's hard to watch because I see some areas of Etobicoke and lots of money is spent to take care of gardens and the city pays for the landscaping associated what that, but then you go to the Dixon area and there's garbage littering in every freakin' area of land, it's disgusting". (Giuliana, female, 24-year-old, lived in Dixon since she was two-years old)

Giuliana claimed that there is a clearly visible difference between the built landscape of Dixon in comparison to neighbouring areas within Etobicoke. Her annoyance with the state of Dixon expanded beyond simply comparing it to other neighbourhoods in Etobicoke, claiming that it is wrong of the city to only have these services offered within affluent neighbourhoods, especially when the occupants of these neighbourhoods are not the ones paying for these services. Giuliana's sentiments towards this situation raise an interesting point – one that will be addressed after clarifying a few important details within her statement. Though she is correct in stating that the occupants living in affluent neighbourhoods where landscaping and garbage removal services are routinely executed, it is not the city of Toronto that pays for them, but

rather the developers and investors of these properties who routinely hire these services to maintain the neighbourhood's aesthetics. Berglund and Gregory (2019) speak on this sentiment saying that newly developed areas are celebrated as *up and coming* to attract the affluent, and by doing the needs and wants of lower-income neighbourhoods and long-time residents gets neglected. The perception of prestige and opulence is used as a magnet to attract affluent homebuyers and investors in the hope of further expansive development.

> "You can definitely tell that there is a difference in financial brackets when you look at Dixon compared to everywhere else in Etobicoke. Like there is new development everywhere but Dixon just stays the same or gets worse because it isn't a priority…the physical state [of Dixon] definitely doesn't help its cause because it looks like a place you wouldn't want to be in or around…and then they wonder why crime rates are higher in Dixon. It's obviously because everyone from here is constantly in a suffocating environment". (Lama, female, 25 years-old, lived in Dixon since she was six-years old)

Both Giuliana and Lama raise points that echo sentiments of broken windows theory – a criminological proposition claiming that visible signs of criminal activity or civil disobedience within any given space act as an invitation for further disobedience and crime (Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006). This theory initially aimed to highlight the importance of neighbourhood aesthetics as a key function of healthy and lawful communities. The thinking that if the outward appearance of a neighbourhood is *put together*, the neighbourhood in turn will be more respected by residents and non-residents alike. Though this project centers itself around the neighbourhood perception of Dixon residents, I should make it clear that I hold a significantly critical stance towards broken theory on the grounds that it criminalizes poverty and contributes towards the mass incarceration of people of colour. Researchers have countlessly disproven the theory stating that there is no viable link between physical disorder and serious crimes (Alves Diniz & Stafford, 2021; Michener, 2013; R. J. Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004).

Though I do not agree with Giuliana and Lama's sentiment that crime rates are higher in Dixon due to the physical state of the neighbourhood, I do think that neighbourhood aesthetics play a significant role in influencing a sense of belonging within occupants of a community (Wood, Hooper, Foster, & Bull, 2017). The frustration Giuliana voiced with the services offered in newer and more affluent areas of Etobicoke stemmed from how they contrast with the physical state of Dixon. Similarly, Lama claiming that Dixon is a suffocating environment is based off the lack of development within the neighbourhood throughout her time living there.

> "It feels like it's almost intentional. The people here never had access to proper government services and the place has looked more or less the same since I was a kid. We get subjected to shitty conditions and then people start thinking that's all they can have. You become a product of your environment and when you start acting out, they use it as an excuse to say this is why we can't have shit. We never had shit". (Azhar, male, 25-years old, lived in Dixon since he was four years old)

Much like Giuliana and Lama, Azhar voices his anger at how difficult it is to form place-belongingness within a space that looks dilapidated and battered. He speaks on how one's sense of self is tied with the space they occupy, claiming that this applies not just to how one perceives themselves, but also how they are perceived by others. It is difficult for the community to treat Dixon as their home when they do not feel like they belong there. Or alternatively, one could start to experience a diminishing sense of self by believing that their space defines who they are within the rest of society (Mee & Wright, 2009). Azhar voices his concerns with the lack of new public spaces or even redevelopment of older run-down spaces, claiming that they it almost feels intentional. The implication here is that many residents of Dixon feel *othered* by the city due to a lack of initiative shown towards improving the community. My participants are exposed to the expansive development happening around

Etobicoke and they feel like outsiders – those unable to enjoy the privileges of clean and inviting social spaces due to their social standing. Research suggests that improving social attributes of neighbourhoods have been cited to have positive impacts on stress and well-being, especially in urban settings. (Henderson, Child, Moore, Moore, & Kaczynski, 2016). In Dixon, physical attributes such as the inclusion of green spaces, the revitalization of the Dixon basketball court, and waste removal around public spaces could help with positively impacting residents' mental health and sense of neighbourhood belonging by providing them the opportunity to occupy clean and safe spaces within their neighbourhood (Barton & Rogerson, 2017). The issue presents itself when these spaces are only accessible to those who can afford them, or those residing in areas where developers and investors propose to initiate new development projects (Cole, Garcia Lamarca, Connolly, & Anguelovski, 2017; Maantay & Maroko, 2018).

These sentiments shared by my participants not only highlight the role neighbourhood aesthetics play for the importance of belonging and social cohesion, but they also bring attention to the fact that access to new and revamped spaces is limited to those who can afford it, rather than a right that is allocated to all residents of the city. Ultimately, this section brings attention the state of limbo residents of Dixon find themselves in regarding development within their neighbourhood. My participants identified the needs of their community regarding its physical state by outlined the importance of new public spaces and refurbished amenities, as well as the positive impact they would have on their sense of belonging. While doing so they also realize how the implementation of these spaces would ultimately lead to their neighbourhood getting gentrified because the developers who propose these projects to the

city would want a return on their investment, which would come in the form of raised costs of living and loss of community through the attraction of affluent homebuyers looking to obtain property in an up-and-coming neighbourhood (Keatinge & Martin, 2016). The lack of mobility prevents the neighbourhood of Dixon from developing, by doing so it places residents of Dixon in a state of limbo, one in which they can identify the needs of their community but cannot achieve them due to the damaging effects towards their neighbourhood. Not only does this impede on the formation of a sense of belonging for residents, but also becomes a defining part of their neighbourhood identity. The frustration voiced by my participants speaks on not only how they see their neighbourhood, but also how they see themselves and how they experience others to perceive themselves as. These intersecting notions make it difficult to form a sense of belonging with their neighbourhood, while also contributing towards a loss of self.

### *4.4 Dixon residents' negative experiences with xenophobia, Islamophobia, and racism shaped their perception of what it means to belong to Canada*

In this section I examine the weak sense of belonging that Dixon residents formed with Canada, a phenomenon that they believe was shaped through a lack of government assistance within housing and immigration policies as Somali refugees entered the country, as well as negative public and media perceptions which contributed towards xenophobic, Islamophobic, and racist narratives to not only form but to continue to negatively impact the community. By doing so, this section examines how a lack of belonging within Dixon residents has a deep-rooted history, one that extends past the scale of neighbourhood and city, and into belonging to Canada as a whole.

As mentioned prior, Dixon is an ethnic enclave that is occupied by a majority of Somali residents, so much so that it is often also referred to as Little Mogadishu (Henry, 2007). Dixon gained this reputation in the 90's when a large influx of Somali refugees entered Canada and formed a community within Etobicoke. Though having a network of people speaking the same language and hailing from the same culture helped with the process of settling into a new country with a new set of roles and responsibilities, people that shaped Dixon into what it is today faced a slew of oppressive barriers that made the transition from their old life into their new one extremely difficult. One of the initial forms of oppressive barriers that many newcomers of Dixon faced was rooted within government policy – Bill C-86. Former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney passed the bill in 1993, in which it was stated that refugees who did not possess *satisfactory identity documents* were unable to be afforded the granting of permanent resident status (Hodan Ahmed Mohamed, 2016). Bill C-86 was controversial as it lacked guidelines and specifications as to what *satisfactory identity documents* entailed specifically, leaving hundreds of refugees in a state of limbo regarding their residential status within the country. Mulroney's government defended the bill by justifying its validity claiming that in was passed as a protective measure to avoid Somali warlords from gaining entry access into Canada (Hodan Ahmed Mohamed, 2016). This sentiment fueled racist and xenophobic rhetoric that placed Somali newcomers under a microscope and provided immigration officers with unprecedented power over who is allowed into the country regardless of validity.

> "They told us their stories of like coming here and all that they had to endure like all immigrant parents do. As a kid you don't really deep it because you don't know what struggle is but the older that I get and the more shit I have to deal with myself, I realize how hard they had it, especially back then. The racism was different back then, a lot more in your face without as much of the repercussions. My father would tell me he got treated like a second-class citizen all the time. He would get side-eyed like he did

> something wrong. They don't understand that he had to leave his entire life behind because of a war and start over in the only place where he knew his family would be safe…even with work like he's an engineer and no place would take his education seriously, so he did what almost every other person in Dixon does, drive a cab and work at Pearson". (Taha, male, 25 years old, lived in Dixon his whole life)

The accounts shared by Taha express layers of barriers that his family had to deal with on a day-to-day basis – xenophobia and racism shaped the perception of not only his family, but his community as a whole, making it unreasonably more difficult to establish themselves within the country. He talks about how these struggles were not something he understood or internalized until he got older and began to experience them first-hand. The aforementioned state of limbo regarding refugees' status within the country persisted even upon entry as newcomers were not afforded the ability to obtain employment, access to education, or access to provincial healthcare coverage without refugee status – a process that for many took up to three years to obtain (Ilmi, 2009). Due to a lack of official status, many families were unable to access Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), rendering them only able to rent in the private market without government assistance (Hodan Ahmed Mohamed, 2016). Refugees were let into the country as refugee claimants, rendering a majority unable to obtain permanent status (Immigration, 1996) – and then left to fend for themselves, in many cases without government assistance geared towards smoother integration into the Canadian system. During this time the public perception of the newly entered residents of Dixon was relatively negative, as Somali refugees were labeled "queue hoppers" because a large sum of Somali refugees were granted entry seemingly over other groups (Ilmi, 2009). The white Canadian population remained reserved when it came to welcoming Somali refugees because they did not match the existing notion of what it meant to be a *Canadian* – a criteria that was

rooted in the exclusion of minority groups, particularity Muslims and people of colour (Danso, 2002b).

Regardless of educational background, my participants claimed that they have a difficult time finding employment opportunities – three of them speculating that this phenomenon is linked to their proximity to Dixon.

> "There is an idea of what teenagers and young adults in Dixon are like, and regardless of what the truth might be, that association makes employers less likely to want to take a chance on someone from [Dixon]". (Hana, female, 26 years old, lived in Dixon since she was four years old).

Hana states that the pre-conceived notion of Dixon deters employers from hiring Dixon residents, highlighting how this form of exclusion is rooted in xenophobic and racist stereotypes that were initially created through a pattern of exclusionary behaviour in which Somali refugees were legally not allowed to work unless they were granted the status to do so (Jiwani & Al-Rawi, 2021). It should be made clear that I am not insinuating employers actively refuse to hire residents of Dixon, instead I am highlighting the ways in which existing narratives formed by a history of systemic oppression have created a space in which my participants believe that their association to Dixon deters them from equal opportunities in several different avenues – including employment. Hana positions her experience to represent the cyclical nature of oppressive behaviour as exiting narrative get re-enforced and by doing so, continue to make it difficult for residents of Dixon to feel as if they belong to the city at large. It is important to bring attention to the ongoing history of oppressive behaviour that exists within Dixon as it provides a clearer understanding of why the polarity between bodies of power and residents of Dixon is at the state it is currently in (Lingen, 2013). In the mid-90's to early 2000's, Dixon was depicted in the media as an area that sticks out from the rest of the Canadian population.

Articles published by notable media outlets would portray Dixon residents as a threat to the existing Canadian zeitgeist, without realizing that the community was not presented with a fair opportunity to integrate themselves within it (Jiwani & Al-Rawi, 2021; Hodan Ahmed Mohamed, 2016; Razack, 2000). In the following decade this narrative did not disappear, if anything it became more overt in portraying Dixon residents as violent and disobedient bodies who need to be policed in order for justice to prevail (Pagliaro, 2013). This section provides a glimpse into the myriad of ways in which belonging was never afforded to a majority of Dixon residents. Various governmental polices and public attitudes that were shaped by the media's depiction of Dixon created an environment in which residents of Dixon were unable to incorporate themselves into the narrative of what it meant to be Canadian, and as a result, they were unable to form an adequate sense of belonging with their neighbourhood, a feature that is being passed down each generation of Dixon's community (Hodan Ahmed Mohamed, 2016).

# 5. Manuscript for the Canadian Geographer: "Belonging in Toronto – A Case Study of Dixon"

**Key Messages**

- ◊ A strong sense of neighbourhood belonging is important for community growth and well-being
- ◊ A lack of neighbourhood belonging negatively impacts a sense of self
- ◊ A lack of representation within social, political, economic, and physical policies and initiatives contributes towards the *othering* of low-income and minority communities by dictating who can and cannot form place-belongingness

**Abstract**

Using the neighbourhood of Dixon as a case study, this paper centers itself around the notion of belonging by examining the role various political, social, economic, and physical policies play towards impacting the formation of a sense of neighbourhood belonging amongst residents of Dixon. Interviews conducted with Dixon residents outline how hyper-policing initiatives within the neighbourhood contributed towards negative public perceptions of the Dixon community, which were exacerbated by the way media outlets covered Dixon. Both of these factors negatively impact residents' quality of life by influencing their relationship with their space, their community, and themselves. This study uses the perceptions of Dixon residents to highlight the importance of including the notion of belonging within planning and development procedures and initiatives.

**Keywords:** belonging, placemaking, public-perceptions

### *5.1 Introduction*

Dixon is an ethnic enclave located in central Etobicoke—a municipality in the west end of Toronto. The neighbourhood was initially home to South Asian and Caribbean immigrants, but since the early-1990's it has been occupied by a predominantly Somali population (earning it the nickname of Little Mogadishu) that initially settled into the space as refugees fleeing Somalia due to the civil war in 1991 (Denis, 2021; Kusow, 2007). Using the neighbourhood of Dixon as case study, this paper examines how a lack of representation within various economic, social, and political initiatives contributed towards the *othering* of Dixon residents through the

process of drawing boundaries dictating who can and cannot gain access to particular services and amenities (Mee & Wright, 2009). The act of boundary-making ultimately dictates who does and not belong to spaces within the city, and this paper outlines how this process is acted out through policies and procedures and as a result, leads to social *othering* by other occupants of the city (Antonsich, 2010). Centering around the notion of belonging within Dixon, this paper examines the importance of including the formation of a sense of belonging into urban planning and design, as well as policy and procedural planning within the city.

### *5.2 The multifaceted nature of belonging – How a sense of belonging is experienced through inclusion and exclusion*

One of the foremost important concepts in human geography is understanding of the connection between people and the built and natural environments they occupy (Pinkster, 2016). Human geographers pay close attention to various cultural, economic, and political factors, particularly their influence on the relationship between individuals, societies, and physical space. This connection between space and humans is measured at different scales from a country, a city, all the way down to a particular neighbourhood (Pinkster, 2016; Trudeau, 2006) , and the relationship is often understood through a variety of conceptual lenses such as a sense of belonging, feeling *at home*, and a place attachment—a sense of place differing from *space* in the sense that a *place* is anywhere with ascribed value (Sack, 1993). These different concepts all allude to a similar idea—an emotional feeling attached by an individual to a particular place, producing place attachment (Lin & Lockwood, 2014). To belong is to hold attachment to a particular place because it transforms into *home territory*, a space which

garners a feeling of relative freedom of ones behaviour, which in turn allows inhabitants a degree of control over the space (Kuurne & Gómez, 2019). *Control* in this instance should not be understood as the ability to manipulate space one occupies according to their liking, but rather as the ability to move freely within it. The ability for one to form day-to-day routines within the existing rules of conduct of any given space is to have control over how they can *choose* their interactions. According to Sack (1993) the concept of place has the ability to either help liberate someone or to supress them greatly, and in the case of someone with the ability to hold control over their space, they are more inclined to feel the former. In this instance belonging is not limited to being spatial, but also social, in which belonging is understood as an attachment to a particular social group (Holton & Riley, 2016). Attachment towards a social group is one of the determinants of neighbourhood belonging, as the relationship is formed through shared sentiments and practices all contributing towards the formation of identity—as well as how one chooses to interact with it. A greater sense of social belonging affords occupants not only the ability to deepen their sense of belonging amongst one another, but also the physical space they occupy. In either case, for geographers the notion of how belonging is defined, maintained, and enforced varies depending on the scale and lens it is viewed through (Mee & Wright, 2009). Most geographers agree that belonging to a place is rooted within a sentimental attachment to a space (Antonsich, 2010; Benson, 2014; Fenster, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Yuval-Davis, Anthias, & Kofman, 2005) but several expand on how it is not bound to this understanding alone, since forming a sense of belonging is not experienced in the same manner for everyone occupying a particular space.

Fenster (2005) creates a clear distinction between one's personal place attachment and formal structures that clearly outline who does and does not belong. In a similar manner, Antonsich (2010) branches out on his notion of place-belongingness to highlight the politics of belonging in which *to belong* means resisting or re-enforcing socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion. In both of these examples, the notion of belonging is executed through boundary making as the public and various bodies of power allow the dictation who does and does not belong, or who can and cannot belonging. The concept of belonging encompasses a wide variety of features including but not limited to race (McKittrick, 2011; Ruddick, 1996; Sriskandarajah, 2020), citizenship (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005), gender (Fenster, 2005; Lewicka, 2010; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005), ethnicity (McKittrick, 2011), and nationhood (Pinkster, 2016; Radford & Hetz, 2021; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005)—all modes of belonging in which one can capture and categorize these different forms of attachments (Antonsich, 2010). These features create hierarchies dictating who has the ability to form a greater sense of attachment to a space over others as outlined by Rowe (2005). They define the ways in which these different and often overlapping notions are performed as *differential belonging*. Differential belonging is defined as the way a sense of belonging differs between various social groups, and by doing so extends place-belongingness from a personal matter to a social matter as members of society belonging to particular social groups are subject to being rejected or unaccepted by others occupying the same space (Antonsich, 2010). Affluent people belonging to a higher social class tend to have a significantly more positive experience with the formation of a sense of belonging when compared to lower income people belonging to a lower social class. This relates back to the notion outlined by (Sack, 1993) where they state that place has the ability to either liberate

or supress an individual or community. Affluent people and those belonging to higher social classes are afforded the privilege to be liberated by the spaces they occupy since they have a greater chance of forming place-belongingness. The ability to have a significant capacity to occupy and navigate social spaces—largely because most spaces are either made by or catered to those with such privileges—allows for the chance to have more control over spaces. Unlike the prior example in which a control over space was discussed, control in this instance *can* and often *does* relate to the ability to manipulate space one occupies according to their liking through the production of patterns that re-enforce inclusion (of those with similar privileges) and exclusion (of those without). Bodies of power such as and policy planners, developers, and investors tend to re-enforce this by implementing procedures that favour affluent upper-class members of society, whilst actively *othering* lower income individuals and communities (Finio, 2022; Hackworth & Rekers, 2005; R. Murdie & Teixeira, 2011). This is important to consider for all actors involved in urban planning and policy making because it contributes towards a growing divide between who is and who is not represented within initiated policies, as a growing number of the population is becoming misrepresented and because of this they are unable to form a sense of home within their living spaces. In the case of Dixon, my participants state that they feel supressed rather than liberated in their own neighbourhood because they cannot access spaces within their neighbourhood that would make them feel at *home*.

Yuval-Davis et al. (2005) cites this as a mismatch between the 'sociology of emotions' and the 'sociology of power', in which one can *feel* as if they belong to a place but the individuals within that space who have either 1. maintained a sense of belonging for a longer period of time or 2. hold the power to dictate the boundaries of who *can* belong, exercise the

ability to *other* members that they do not fit the established mode of what it means to belong. Geographers claim that belonging is something that is performed, displayed, and enacted through individual and collective practices (Antonsich, 2010; Fenster, 2005; Mee & Wright, 2009) , a notion that is evident in both placemaking and boundary making. Collective practices contribute towards the cultivation of collective memory—a pool of knowledge, stories, ideas, and information shared by individuals occupying or identifying by a social group – and by doing so foster a sense of belonging, as individuals within the community *use space* by engaging in activities that sustain a personal identity tied to place (Gotham & Brumley, 2002; Pinkster, 2016). In the same vein however, this same practice creates boundaries as anyone unable to partake in established collective practices is unable to form place-belongingness. This notion is important to consider in relation to Dixon because it brings attention the lack of control many residents of Dixon have over the space they occupy. Unable to *use space* in a similar manner that affluent communities can, my participants state they are rendered with a lack of ability to belong. They occupy a social space with its own collective identity, but that identity is rooted within exclusion and placelessness.

### *5.3 Methods*

In this section I will outline the research methods I adopted for data collection portion of this study. I conducted semi-structured interviews for the data collection for my study. Semi-structured interviews were the primary mode of data collection because this project is interested in understanding the lived experiences of Dixon residents through the lens of neighbourhood belonging, a subject that requires open-ended conversation as opposed to the traditional structured interview format. In order to gain a better understanding of how the City

of Toronto has contributed towards the fostering of neighbourhood belonging in Dixon, I thought it would be appropriate to engage in conversation that allows for me as the interviewer to become a knowledge-producing participant, and learn from the accounts of my participants rather than walking in and guiding the interview towards what I believe will be said (Leavy, 2020).

All participants were required to be self-identifying members of the Dixon community and over the age of eighteen. I placed an emphasis on *self-identifying* because as it currently stands there are no pre-determined borders dictating what does and does not qualify as Dixon, so I did not want to implement one myself and possibly limit my findings. Furthermore, by doing so I am potentially disregarding the experience of certain members of the community, which is counterproductive to my project.

All participants were recruited through the use of snowball sampling. Initial participants were reached out via email in which they received a letter of information regarding the details of the study alongside a separate letter that was meant to be forwarded to any of their contacts they thought would be appropriate for the study. This method was advantageous as I came to find out that there were several instances in which potential participants were hesitant to participate in the interview process until an initial contact vouched for me and the validity of my project.

Prior to conducting my interviews, I was aiming to interview closer to 25 participants for my study, but as started going through the interview process I began to experience data saturation. At first, I thought it could be because there was a possible bias I was unaware of, but it became clear that this was not the case once I looked at the demographical data.

Regardless of demographical differences such as race, gender, or socioeconomic status, all my participants shared similar accounts and sentiments in regard to the police presence within the community, their interaction with the physical state of their neighbourhood, as well as how they are perceived as residents of Dixon.

The interview consisted of 12 over the phone interviews throughout June 2021 to mid-September 2021. The interviews ranged from 20 minutes to two hours, averaging just under an hour all together. All interviews were recorded on a separate iPhone with verbal consent from each participant. The interview itself consisted of five pre-written questions and three to four follow-up questions under each question in an effort to guide the conversation should it be necessary. Participants were also reminded at prior as well as during the interview process that they were not obligated to answer any question(s) they felt uncomfortable with. They were also reminded that they were free to end the interview at any point should they choose to.

I sorted my findings by conducting a thematic analysis of my findings. All 12 interviews were transcribed from audio to writing in an effort to make it easier to sift through conversational points. The transcription process also allowed for me to become familiarized with the data, making it easier to mentally take notes of what re-occurring themes and points are present, as well as how they complement or contrast one another (Gamage, 2019). A list of *codes* was created—codes being words and phrases that are deemed important towards the study (Gamage, 2019) – and sorted under the pre-written questions I had for the interview. Important quotes were also written out and placed within the appropriate code(s). This process allowed me to compile my data more efficiently as well as outline the themes that I would ultimately use within my project.

### *5.4 Popular perceptions of Dixon damage community belonging*

Prior to taking on this project, I would often see of Dixon on the news, and it would always be something negative (Jiwani & Al-Rawi, 2021). Shootings, stabbings, drugs, and gangs would be the keywords present in almost every news covering that had to do with the neighbourhood, and because of this it began to form an association between Dixon and danger. As I got older and gained more knowledge about Dixon, it became clear that my understanding of the neighbourhood was fairly misguided. Even as I initiated this project, I had a handful of my peers express their concerns regarding my safety due to the time I was going to be spending there. Interestingly enough many of them did not have much knowledge about the neighbourhood other than the reputation it held for being dangerous, and when asked more details about what shaped their perception, most of them referred to the news coverage surrounding Dixon, particularly the Project Traveller raids from 2013. It was at this point that I realized the negative connotations that I and the people around me had formed surrounding Dixon were almost exclusively due to the way it was presented on the news (Pagliaro, 2013; Sriskandarajah, 2020). A majority of the time the intersection of Kipling and Dixon was on the news it was because a violent incident was reported but very rarely would I see a follow-up or even coverage explaining the prevalence of such concentrated incidents (Lindgren, 2009).

This influenced my project as it led me to wonder how the residents of Dixon react to these incidents, as well as how they navigate residing in a neighbourhood that holds such a negative reputation amongst the general public. It was important to gain an understanding of residents' experiences with the perception of their neighbourhood because I wanted to understand if others' perception of their space impacted how they interact with it, whether

residents of Dixon internalize present narratives about them and their community, and lastly whether public perceptions have at any point influenced policies and procedures initiated within Dixon.

In order to gain a better understanding of these concepts, I initially asked my interview participants what their opinion is of the public's perception of Dixon, followed by secondary questions asking them about whether or not they personally agree with the narratives being presented of their neighbourhood within media outlets. Out of the twelve participants interviewed, all twelve of them claimed that they found the general public's perception of Dixon to be negative. In their own words, every participant claimed that the public has had an adverse reaction towards Dixon, one that is based on high rates of crime and a lack of safety within the neighbourhood. In my interview with Rose, she stated that

> "it's always the negative things that get covered, which I guess there isn't anything good being developed for them to talk about. It's very quick like okay here's a shooting okay here's another number, never like why something like this is happening.…there is a lot more that could be talked about than what is currently said but also that's news, I guess. Like there's people that live here and there are homes here but it's never a story about their day-to-day…like it's not what it's made out to be". (Rose, female, 25-years old, lived in Dixon her whole life)

Rose raised an important point about there being a lack of coverage explaining some of the possible causes behind the concentrated acts of violence within Dixon. She adds to her point by stating that the media applies more focus on incidents in which a resident of Dixon is the perpetrator of violence as opposed to instances in which they are the victim. This pattern in which racial minorities tend to be overrepresented as perpetrators of violence over their white counterparts has been countlessly evident in research, and Dukes and Gaither (2017), expand on it by stating that this disproportional depiction of racial minorities feeds into the promotion

of public hostility towards minority communities—particularly the Black community. This hostility contributes towards a delegitimization of racial minorities as victims and normalization of white bodies as an archetypal victim. Another one of my participants shared remarks similar to Rose, stating that the public's perception of Dixon is

> "Horrible. The general public I guess all they know is the whole Rob Ford situation, but aside from that like people would always give me a side eye when they found out where I was from. It was a stigma; all people knew was violence from that area so that's all they associate with kinda thing. Everyone got categorized into what they though they thought they knew about it." (Faiza, 24 years old, lived in Dixon since she was four years old)

Similar to Rose, Faiza claims that in the case of Dixon, a similar pattern is evident as residents are rarely depicted as the victims, even when violence is being perpetrated towards them. The portrayal of Black people as the instigators of violence has been brought to question more frequently in recent years, a notable example is during the summer of 2020, when the Canadian news channel CP24 faced criticism for perpetuating media biases by using a mugshot to report the passing of Mohamed Sow, a young Black man who was victim to a drive-by shooting in a Toronto plaza's parking lot (Westoll, 2020). A handful of viewers commented on how CP24 has showcased a pattern of using photos of white criminals surrounded by loved ones with smiles on their faces – essentially humanizing the perpetrators—all while using a mugshot to showcase a Black victim. The case of Mohammed is one of the many examples in which media biases shape the public's perception of particular identities—by associating violence, crime, and disorder with low-income neighbourhoods and minority communities, the public is influenced to adopt a mindset that ostracizes Blackness and poverty (Dukes & Gaither, 2017).

Lindgren (2009) addresses the ways in which newspaper coverage has an implication on negative stereotyping and its contribution towards the shaping of internal and external

opinions of disadvantaged neighbourhoods by outlining the ways in which media tends to overplay images and information ostracizing residents of urban places, particularly through highlighting a sense of difference, especially for people who are unable to experience these places first-hand—a phenomena that shapes the perceived identity of a space, often in a way that sensationalizes all the ways it is different. The issue with these narratives entering the mainstream, let alone being formed, is that they contribute towards the *othering* of disadvantaged neighbourhoods by portraying them as rambunctious and violent (Abdela, 2015). This form of *othering* diminishes the fact that members of these communities belonging to an at-risk portion of the population residing in areas with "rising poverty levels, high social needs and inadequate social services and infrastructure" (Lindgren, 2009). Henri Lefebvre (1991) breaks down the production of space into three categories: 1. Conceived space, 2. Perceived space, and 3. Lived space; conceived space being the representations of space through politicians, city planners, public perception, and of course, media (Sriskandarajah, 2020). According to his framework, media becomes a key medium in the creation of the social imaginary—leading to the production of identity and spaces (Sriskandarajah, 2020). In the case of Dixon, the constant coverage of violent acts conducted within the neighbourhood portrays its residents as innately violent, and as a result, paints Dixon out to be a space that should be avoided.

In an effort to understand analzing what implications the existing public perception carries on the residents of disadvantaged areas, I asked my participants if "the public's perception of Dixon shapes how the residents of Dixon view themselves?", to which 9 of the 12

participants claimed that it did in fact hold a negative impact on how they interacted with one another, as well as the space they occupied. Omar spoke on his experience saying that

> "I didn't realize what people who looked like me were seen as because obviously I was a kid and all, but it was fucked up not gonna lie…kids would make jokes, and at first you play around because it's all jokes, but then it gets to a point where they're laughing at you not with you. It made me start looking down at my people like man is this us? Like I would start hating the fact that I was from here because it's like *this* is me, *this* is my people you know? I don't blame them because man we were kids you know, but it's fucked because they're most likely picking this up from their parents and it's not like they're out here like that so obviously the parents form their opinions from what they're told". (Omar, male, 24-years old, lived between Dixon and Mississauga his whole life)

Omar moved back and forth between his parents' homes in Dixon and Mississauga, and the kids he spoke of were his family friends in Mississauga. His experience highlights the way the creation of harmful narratives not only impacts the current generation, but also the future ones as rhetoric regarding Dixon's reputation gets passed down and influences impressionable minds. This process exacerbates the *othering* of Dixon's community as children perpetuate certain narratives without fully comprehending the harmful nature of what they are saying. This creates a cyclical pattern in which Dixon residents are constantly labeled as perpetuators of violence. Susan Ruddick (1996) argues that media must be examined if one wishes to understand the general public's perception of particular spaces and the people that occupy or are associated within them. Through their own experiences and perspectives, my participants underline how the stigmatization they experience can lead to a sense of *othering* from the rest of the general public.

### *5.5 The negative relationship between the police and residents of Dixon post Project Traveller contributing to a sense of mistrust and a lack of belonging*

In this section I discuss how the mistrust between residents of Dixon and the police post Project Traveller has led to hyper-policing of the Dixon community. Through interviews regarding the police presence in Dixon, I examine how the fear of being wrongfully persecuted through processes of racial profiling and overt use of force has contributed towards a weak sense of belonging and *othering* of residents from not only their neighbourhood, but their community as a whole.

My first memorable account of Dixon was in 2013 when the neighbourhood was extensively covered in the news due to Project Traveller—a raid performed by Toronto police as a response to gun violence, stabbings, and a repeated pattern of smuggling drugs and illegal arms into Canada from the United States—all said to be carried out by a gang known as the Dixon City Bloods (DCB) (Alcoba, 2015). Project Traveller raids were responsible for 44 total arrests between Toronto and Winsor, as well as "the seizure of more than 175,000 grams of drugs, $570,000 in cash, 42 firearms, a Taser and more than 100 rounds of ammunition" (Johnson, 2013). DCB were unheard of amongst the general public until the infamous scandal in which photos of late Mayor Rob Ford smoking crack cocaine were leaked to the public (Kassam, 2016). These photos were taken in a home across the Dixon apartment complex, and alleged members of DCB attempted to sell a video showing the mayor smoke crack cocaine as evidence (Seglins, 2016). Though the police was silently building a case against the suspects, it was the Rob Ford scandal that became the tipping point that lead to the unfolding of Project Traveller (Hodan Ahmed Mohamed, 2016).

Project Traveller was a significantly monumental moment in Dixon's history as many claim it to have been a turning point, one in which the quality of life for the residents of Dixon drastically took a turn for the worse (D'Aliesio, 2014). According to Denis (2021), the relationship between Dixon' community and the police was always at an arm's length, but the events of Project Traveller exacerbated this greatly. Dixon post Project Traveller was left in panic, and the heightened police presence within the community only added to the lack of security felt by the community. The disconnect between a heightened presence of policing bodies and lower sense of security amongst residents prompted me to gain a better understanding of how members of the community currently feel about the state of policing within Dixon. I initiated this discussion by asking my participants whether they noticed a change in police presence throughout their time in Dixon, and if so, when did it first become noticeable, to which all twelve of my participants claimed that their presence in Dixon grew drastically after the Project Traveler raids. Four of my participants claimed that though police presence had slowly been growing within the neighbourhood, the entire social landscape of Dixon got altered after Project Traveller, and the heightened police presence following it continued to elevate collective anxieties.

> "Growing up in Dixon that was something you were just used to, but after 2013 it was like if you were from or even associated with Dixon, it was like you were under a microscope and being watched all the time. Especially if you were Black like that's always been a thing and honestly still is. Somali kids are told not to hang out around the neighbourhood just because parents don't want to take the chance of having police thinking they are up to something, even if it's just kids playing. It's trauma, a hundred percent trauma that will continue to get passed down generations". (Faiza, female, 24 years old, lived in Dixon since she was four years old)

Faiza spoke of life post Project Traveller, and how it altered residents' ability to formulate a sense of place within Dixon due to the fear of being under constant surveillance. Spaces within the neighbourhood became inaccessible to residents—predominantly the youth—because of the fear that the police would wrongfully accuse a resident of a crime they did not commit. This fear comes from numerous accounts of the police conducting *street checks* which have contributed to false arrests of countless Black community members, particularly in lower-income neighbourhoods (Peirone, Maticka-Tyndale, Gbadebo, & Kerr, 2017). Furthermore, the community was traumatized by having to witness police exercise extreme force during the raids, and parents did not wish for their children to have to witness another event of such magnitude, so in an effort to avoid that exposure they encouraged their children to avoid excessive presence in public spaces (Daniel, 2015). Daniel (2015) outlines the ways in which excessive police presence began to play a role within the educational institutions, leading to a partnership between the Toronto police and the Toronto District School Board, one which invited more police intervention against racialized students. This process played a role in heightened cases of racial profiling and targeting of lower-income racialized communities. Leanne Weber (2020) speaks on the concept of policing creating and enforcing borders, both in a psychical and social manner. Citing Geddes (2009), Weber defines social borders as organizational and conceptual—as their enforcement is enacted through bureaucratic means, restricting or denying access to services and opportunities, or determining who does and does not belong to particular places and communities. The act of hyper-policing in Dixon contributes towards the creation of conceptual boundaries through containment (Abdela, 2015; Denis, 2021). Through the process of carding and profiling, Black lower-income members of the

community become vilified and deemed necessary to be policed or reprehended (Collet, 2007; Jiwani & Al-Rawi, 2019; Lingen, 2013). This process places an all-seeing eye on everyone falling within these demographic categories, and in turn contains them in an area where their ability to exercise freedom is *socially criminalized*.

The *othering* of Dixon residents also plays a significant role in the creation of boundaries dictating placemaking and belonging in two ways 1. Excessive policing due to the implication that residents are instigators of violence, and 2. Not providing the same level of assistance to residents (compared to occupants of another area, one that is more affluent and occupies non-Black people) when they police assistance.

> "I had to call the police because he was blackmailing me and was saying he was going to share my nudes if I didn't have sex with him, so I called the police and the cop blamed me…he was like maybe you shouldn't be sending pictures like that"

A participant who requested anonymity for this story recalled an interaction she had with a police officer where she was seeking his assistance, only to be victim blamed as cited as the initiator of the transgression. She laughed the situation off situating it as a relatively small incident compared to the ones that occur daily in Dixon where victims end up falsely getting arrested when they are the ones who initially seek assistance. Six other participants claimed that they would never call the police for assistance regarding a matter because they do not trust the police to assist them. The work of police officers is supposed to be synonymous with justice as they are responsible for creating a sense of balance amongst the community, and if Dixon residents are steadily treated as victims they are placed on the opposite side of justice. They are *othered* and become the perpetrators regardless of the situation. Tobias and Joseph (2020) refer to this as psychological gaslighting carried out by a form of systemic racism in

which the constant portrayal of lower-income racial minority communities leads them to start internalizing the narratives placed against them. My participants state that residents are portrayed to be unlike other populations within the city—they have to be policed because otherwise they or someone within their community will engage in behaviour that is unwelcomed by the rest of the population, and by doing so it impacts their relationship with one another as begin to see their own community as the reason they are seen as the inciter of disorder.

My interviews with residents of Dixon allow me to understand that the various ways in which hyper-policing is enforced within Dixon challenges their notion of belonging, as all the conceptual boundaries present make it difficult for them to move freely without fear of repercussion. According to my participants, policing within Dixon has made it difficult for residents to trust one another, let alone any external forces, making it increasingly difficult to implement positive challenges due to a conditioned fear of what is to come. Several accounts of unjust treatment carried out during the Project Traveller raids followed by years of similar behaviour at various scales has torn into the social fibre within Dixon leading to the adoption of an 'us versus them' mentality within the community, and even worse, a 'me versus everyone else' mentality within many occupants of Dixon.

### *5.6 Conclusion*

Through semi-structured interviews with twelve Dixon residents, this research examines the low sense of belonging amongst the community of Dixon. Interview findings outlined that the misrepresentation of Dixon in the media—portraying the neighborhood as an epi-center of

gang-violence and trafficking—led to negative perceptions of Dixon residents being formed by the public. These negative perceptions of Dixon became the prevalent conception of Dixon amongst the rest of the city's population, contributing towards a loss of community and sense of self amongst residents of Dixon as they became portrayed as perpetrators of violence, even in instances where they were the victims. This process not only weakened the social fibre of the community, but also contributed towards hyper-policing of Dixon residents through heightened police presence, racial profiling, and use of force to establish a sense of *order*. Dixon residents identified the police presence within their community as one of the biggest challenges towards establishing a sense of belonging due to a lack of safety and feeling as they are under constant surveillance, making it difficult to occupy public spaces and conduct day-to-day activities within the neighbourhood.

This study was conducted to gain first-hand accounts of Dixon residents' relationship with the space they occupy and the factors that influence it. By examining the lack of neighbourhood belonging amongst residents of Dixon, this paper urges for geographers in the field of urban and policy planning, as well as stakeholders and bodies of power within the city to consider the importance of the notion of belonging when reviewing or implementing policies and initiatives within the city. A focus on belonging should particularly be applied to all initiatives within lower income and minority neighbourhoods as it is often the case that these communities feel that they are not being represented within social, political, and economic procedures, and as a result they feel *othered* by the rest of the population.

# *6. What can be done? Instilling community-based policies to foster a higher sense of neighbourhood belonging*

## *6.1 introduction*

In this chapter I examine the most prevalent answer presented to me by my participants regarding solutions that would help improve Dixon. Out of my twelve participants, eleven of them suggested that a community-based approach to policy planning – particularly within policing – in Dixon would help with filling the gap between the Dixon community and the various stakeholders such as police officers, policy planners, and lawmakers who have influence on the shaping of the physical and social space of the Dixon neighbourhood. Participants discussed a variety of issues within Dixon that required attention, but for the sake of urgency (amongst my participants), as well as feasibility, it was evident that a change in policing policies would be the most appropriate first step towards implementing the community's desired changes within their neighbourhood, hence why this chapter focuses solely on policing reform. In this chapter I analyse the suggestions provided by my participants and advocate for the implementation of community-policing within Dixon as it allows for collaborative problem solving that in turn assists in build trust amongst residents and police.

## *6.2 Challenging the proactive policing model: The implementation of community-based policing strategies within Toronto*

As discussed in section 5.5, residents of Dixon have formed a sense of fear and mistrust with the police. Amongst the twelve of my participants, seven of them detailed an instance in which their interaction with a police officer in Dixon caused them to feel unsafe – even when

they were not guilty of any wrongdoing. Over the past decade, the number of accounts in which Dixon residents reported an unjust interaction with the police grew exponentially, largely due to a drastic shift in police presence following the Project Traveller raids in 2013.

> It sounds like excuses to people who don't have to experience it, but it's the sad reality for most Black people. Blackness the first thing that most people see, and the automatic assumption is crime. Violence. I'm not saying that there wasn't shit going down here, yeah even now there are people involved in some serious activity, but the way the police acts is that they assume everyone is that way. They see Black, Somali, boom, suspect. [Rob] Ford was the one smoking crack. People laughed at it and the next day its over. For us that shit defined us. We can't shake it off. Its not like it happened overnight either man, this always been that. We've all been suspects all the time. (Navid, male, 27 years old, lived in Dixon since he was six years old)

Navid details his experience in Dixon after the Project Traveller raids, expressing his frustrations with how police officers treat people within his community. He states that though the state of policing was drastically exacerbated following Project Traveller, the unjust treatment of the Somali population within Dixon was always prevalent. According to Navid's experience, demographic factors such as race and socio-economic status are seen to be linked to criminal activity, so any Black individual occupying a low-income neighbourhood could be seen as a potential suspect. Policing in Dixon currently operates under a mode of proactive policing – an approach to policing in which officers actively seek out and deter crime prior to it being committed (Jonathan-Zamir & Perry, 2021; Saberi, 2017). This particular approach also features an active police presence, as well as an overt show of force (Reisig, 2010). Residents of Dixon have cited both of these functions to be heavily prevalent with their neighbourhood – the former alluding to constant presence of police patrolling public spaces, as well as multiple officers reporting to minor incidents, and the latter referring to officers using their position of power to intimidate who they deem to be potential suspects. Carding – a process in which

officers carry out 'stop and frisks', questioning, and documenting of civilians regardless of any offence being committed – is a controversial yet prominent feature of proactive policing, largely because tends to target minorities – particularly Black people belonging to low-income communities (Saberi, 2017; Tobias & Joseph, 2020). Proactive policing tends to operate under the assumption that one is *possibly* guilty, an approach that challenges one of the most fundamental principles of justice that states everyone is to be considered innocent under *proven* guilty. In the case of Toronto such policing strategies are largely enacted within what Saberi (2017) refers to as 'immigrant neighbourhoods' – areas occupied by a majority of non-white working-class populations, regardless of their official status within the country. The Toronto Police justifies their approach to policing within these communities by citing high concentrations of crime prevalent within them but fail to acknowledge the systemic racism that create these concentrations in the first place (Murphy, 1988). By invalidating as well as completely *erasing* the various policies and procedures that play a key role in creating 'non-white poverty', officers exert their power to alienate members of these communities from the rest of the population (Saberi, 2017). Proactive policing can often create a divide between officers fostering belonging within a community and fostering a safe environment within a community – two factors that do not have to be mutually exclusive (Stein & Griffith, 2017).

> "It sounds stupid to say almost but honestly fam the system needs to change and that's the only way Dixon can be improved. I don't even know what that looks like but that's what needs to happen for real. Dixon is a regular ass neighbourhood with regular ass people except with many more needs than say maybe where you're from, but that also because people here have to go through problems that people in your neighbourhood necessarily don't. (Azhar, male, 25-years old, lived in Dixon since he was four years old)

I propose that this can be achieved through *reforming* the current mode of policing and adopting philosophies rooted within community policing. I want to make it clear that rather than entirely replacing the current mode of policing, I am advocating for a modification in the current approach in a way that ensures order to be maintained within Dixon, though in a way that positively serves the residents of Dixon. Community policing should be understood as an umbrella term geared towards addressing neighbourhood conditions, applying a focus on community safety concerns, and fostering a close-knit bond between the community and the police (Reisig, 2010). By doing so, community policing allows for residents of Dixon to play a more active role in improving their neighbourhood's conditions as opposed to a passive one (Reisig, 2010).

> If the police were to work with the community, exercising patience and actually treating them like humans who have basic wants and needs. The police, the government, the city should be more empathetic and actually get to the root of the problems instead of trying to ignore it, or even worse try to be more forceful with it because I swear that just makes it worse. (Giuliana, female, 24-year-old, lived in Dixon since she was two-years old)

Giuliana states that instead of asserting force as the primary method for policing, Toronto police should take a gentler approach in which they situate themselves as part of the community they are responsible to maintain order within. This approach humanizes residents of Dixon which in turn allows them the opportunity to foster a sense of self – one that is not associated with being seen as potential perpetrators of violence (Dukes & Gaither, 2017). As mentioned prior, community policing is a multidimensional concept that encompasses a wide variety of approaches, depending on which function is necessary for a given area or community, allowing both parties – the residents and the police – to be able to work together towards implementing a system that ultimately builds towards reparations and mending years of fear

fostered within Dixon. By re-orienting a focus on community problems, the public is able to reside within a neighbourhood they feel safe in, ultimately lowering prevalent crime within their community, and allowing for both the community and the officers within it to play an active role in ensuring community needs are understood and responded towards.

### *6.3 A brief history of community policing policies initiated within Toronto*

A call for community-based policing programs and initiatives is not a radical proposal, nor is it one that drastically alters policing affairs within the city considering Toronto's history with prior proposed as well as currently existing community-based policing initiatives. The TPS – known then as the Metropolitan Toronto Police – began experimenting with community policing within targeted localities in 1982, creating space for the introduction of area-specific policing within the early 1990's (Saberi, 2017). Introduced in 1993, Project35 was an area-based policing initiative that targeted low-income public housing neighbourhoods within the downtown core (Saberi, 2017). The two-month long project was carried out through heightened police presence, in an effort to mitigate high crime rates related mainly to drugs and prostitution. Similarly, in 1999 the initiation of Community Action Policing (CAP) required officers to target specific areas within the city where crime was more prevalent. North York, Regent Park, and Parkdale were a few of the neighbourhoods included on the list of high-crime areas where officers would station themselves to *proactively* prevent *uncommitted crimes (Lastman, 2000)*. *Prevention measures* within targeted communities became a prevalent focus amongst policing procedures throughout the 2000's, starting with the introduction of the Community Safety Plan (CSP) in 2004, aimed to tackle the spike in gun violence within the youth

of the city occupying at-risk (low-income) neighbourhoods (Miller, 2004). From 2006 to 2012 the Priority Neighbourhoods Strategy was implemented within the city where 13 *priority areas* (again, low-income neighbourhoods) were highlighted to receive special attention in the form of area-based policing and funding towards the development of programs and infrastructure for the community ("Toronto's 13 Priority Areas," 2006). At the same time the introduction of the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS) was implemented from 2006 to 2016, introducing a larger police presence in *high-risk* locations ("Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (Synopsis)," 2013). Officers applied focus on a lack of social cohesion within the highlighted neighbourhoods through community engagement and improving the urban design of these communities by planting flowers and cleaning up parks (Saberi, 2017). The main focus of TAVIS was to combat gun violence within the city and in an effort to prevent the rising rate of violent crimes, officers conducted raids within these communities, starting with Jamestown – one of the listed *priority neighbourhoods (Saberi, 2017; "Toronto police execute series of pre-dawn raids," 2012)*. TAVIS performed a major raid of specific communities at least once every year (between 2006 to 2016) and the introduction of Provincial Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (PAVIS) in 2007 intensified the military-styled raids described by residents as similar to war-zones (Horak, 2010; Saberi, 2017).

By outlining the years of community-policing policies and procedures implemented within Toronto, I examine how a proposal by Dixon residents for community-policing within their neighbourhood is not an unexplored option that has yet to be initiated within the city, however, according to residents of these *priority areas,* the initiatives implemented within the city thus far have not served the communities they aim to protect as they were rooted within a

proactive policing based model in which officers were policing at-risk communities in a manner that portrayed residents of these neighbourhoods as potential perpetrators of violence (Clarke, 2006; Dukes & Gaither, 2017). The act of preventing *uncommitted* crimes with initiatives such as Community Action Policing and TAVIS was predominantly done so through carding – a process which perpetuated racial profiling and criminalized the notion of 'non-white poverty' (Saberi, 2017; Tobias & Joseph, 2020). The militarization of community policing through neighbourhood raids conducted by Rapid Response Teams centered around the notion of policing through force as well as enacting power over low-income communities as opposed to performing actions that help the community. As mentioned prior, part of TAVIS's action plan was to foster community wellbeing through community engagement and improving the urban design of the community, but these actions got overshadowed by the series of raids conducted, leading to further alienation of low-income communities (Horak, 2010). This process resulted in a greater sense of mistrust amongst residents and the police.

As of 2020 policing reform continues to be an active process within Toronto. For starters, stemming from the Priority Neighbourhoods Strategy – a policy implemented from 2006 to 2012 as a by-product of the CSP – Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy (TSNS) was introduced in 2020 for the purpose of building partnerships amongst various stakeholders in the city geared towards implementing a variety of services, programs, and facilities within the outlined list of Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIA) (Saberi, 2017; "Toronto Strong Neigbourhoods Strategy 2020," 2020). TSNS sets goals to "activate" *people, resources*, and *neighbourhood policies* by understanding a neighbourhood's past history a long with present needs in an effort to implement policies that advocate for long-term transformations within

each respected neighbourhood ("TSNS 2020," 2020). TSNS calls for implementing system-wide changes specific to each individual neighbourhood through the use of what they call a *neighbourhood lens,* and by doing so allows for neighbourhoods to be regularly assessed so that harmful effects on each locality are appropriately minimized. The five domains TSNS focus on are physical surroundings, economic opportunities, healthy lives, social development, and public participation in civic decision-making ("TSNS 2020," 2020)

. By encouraging neighbourhood residents to participate in decision making processes TSNS seeks to better understand issues prevalent within a community, as well as the appropriate actions to implement. In conjunction with the implementation of the TSNS, the June 2020 City Council meeting spotlighted a call for policing reform, leading the city to execute changes to policing, stating that the goal is to implement alternative models of community safety ("Policing Reform," 2020). City Council assumed 36 decisions contributing towards police reform, adding to the 81 approved decisions from the 2020 meeting of the Toronto Police Services Board. One of the decisions that particularly stood out from the rest was the creation of a “non-police led response to calls involving individuals in crisis” – a feature which could be particularly useful in Dixon due the mistrust the community holds against police ("Policing Reform," 2020). This service is said to launch in two phases, one in March 2022 within the northeast and downtown east, and the second in June 2022 within the northwest and downtown west (Yousif, 2022). This initiative is said to be a response to the public’s long-awaited need for non-police respondents – ones with adequate knowledge and experience in providing mental health services to those in need ("Policing Reform," 2020; Yousif, 2022). This response by the TPS shows efforts made towards the implementation of procedures geared towards addressing neighbourhood

conditions and fostering a sense of community within the city. Both of the two proposed initiatives pull the positive aspects from previous policies and by doing so apply a greater focus on the community characteristic of community policing. My participants call for similar policies to be implemented within their community, ones that invest into the community and foster a space where residents can not only rebuild their trust with the police, but also foster a sense of belonging with their neighbourhoods.

# 7. Conclusion

### *7.1 What this project set out to find*

This project situates itself within the notion of neighbourhood belonging, and by doing so set out to answer the question, *what are the factors that influence Dixon resident's sense of belonging to their neighbourhood?* In order to gain a well-rounded answer to this question it was necessary to gain a better understanding of the prevailing factors that have the most impact on Dixon through an economic, social, and political lens. By outlining the key issues present within Dixon, it became easier to understand how these issues play a role in influencing a sense of belonging amongst residents of Dixon. Furthermore, by gaining a better understanding of prevalent issues in the community through the perspective of Dixon residents, I was able to identify the gaps between the public's perception of Dixon in comparison to the lived experiences of the neighbourhood's occupants. After outlining the prevalent issues within Dixon, it became necessary to then outline who the stakeholders are that influence the relationship residents have with the space they occupy, as well as the exact role they play in impacting a sense of belonging amongst the neighbourhood of Dixon. By clearly outlining the actors involved, as well as *how* they influence place-belongingness within Dixon, it became clear to me how each identified actor's interactions with the neighbourhood and its residents can be modified to have positive impact towards fostering a sense of belonging within Dixon. Lastly, it was important to understand how the residents' sense of belonging to their neighbourhood affect their sense of self, because it this dictates the degree of damage experienced by Dixon's community. By outlining how residents process and internalize the lack of belonging and frequent *othering* of their community I gained a better understanding of the

necessary services needed by the city and the stakeholders of Dixon in order to appropriately promote neighbourhood belonging, as well as repair the existing damage within the community.

### *7.2* Key findings

This study is based on the perspectives of Dixon residents with the goal being to examine their lived experiences as well as the factors that impact their ability to form a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, and in order to obtain this information I conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve residents of Dixon. According to my interviews the three prevalent issues within Dixon that negatively impacted their sense of belonging were 1. the public's negative perception of Dixon residents, 2. excessive police presence and policing of the neighbourhood's residents, and 3. the lack of new or revitalized infrastructure within the neighbourhood. My participants cited the media outlets as the primary perpetrator towards the negative perception of their community, stating that the news primarily focuses on covering crime within Dixon in which a resident is the offender, and rarely when they are a victim. This creates and perpetuates the narrative that residents of Dixon are prone to violence and as a result require to be policed and *othered* from the rest of the population. The hyper-policing of Dixon residents contributes towards low levels of belonging as participants claim that residents avoid being in public spaces due to a fear of being under constant surveillance. An excessive presence of police officers challenges placemaking as residents feel they have to be on high alert in order to avoid any situation that complicates their well-being. Lastly, the lack of development and revitalization of Dixon's urban design presents itself as a prominent issue

amongst residents as all twelve participants complained about how the space they occupy does not feel welcoming, nor does it provide a sense of home. Speaking in reference to the Dixon basketball courts, the parks, and nature trails around the neighbourhood, residents complained that there is no incentive to occupy the public spaces due to a lack of adequate infrastructure for residents to engage with. Residents alluded towards a clear link between the physical attributes of their neighbourhood and their ability to form a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood. Participants also brought attention to the impact a lack of adequate social spaces have on their ability to bond with their community – the rest of the residents occupying Dixon – as they have less of an incentive to be out of their homes and occupying public spaces amongst one another.

In order to understand how a sense of belonging can be promoted within Dixon it was important to understand which actors within the city have the ability to impact residents' sense of belonging to their neighbourhood. Interestingly enough, amongst the twelve participants eight of them cited *the city* as the main actor that impacted their neighbourhood. When speaking of the prominent issues within their neighbourhood, eight of my twelve participants cited it to be *the city's* job to revitalize spaces, build new infrastructure, and create community resources. Several participants also claimed that the city purposefully avoids funding the development of Dixon so that the population remains *othered* by the rest of the community. A majority of participants were unable to identify policy planners, developers, investors, and police officers to be the most notable actors that impact Dixon – the physical space and the residents within it. For residents these actors all fall under *the city*, and upon gaining clarity of how developers are the ones who propose (and initiate) development plans to the city, policy

planners are the ones who present proposed procedures and initiatives to City Council in order for them to be enacted, and investors are the ones who fund development projects, most participants became less hopeful and more fearful as they realized that in order for them to see the development they desire of their community, these processes would contribute towards gentrification of their community. It is important to highlight this disconnect between city processes and resident perceptions because there were a few instances where resident perceptions were misaligned with neighbourhood processes. For example, my participants stated that they did not have any knowledge of existing services within Dixon that are catered towards its residents, but I was able to identity a few examples of services such as senior's programs, senior's transportation, and parents' programs that are geared towards aiding the occupants of Dixon ("toronto central healthline," 2022). This disconnect between residents' experiences and existing services does not invalidate their claims, but rather spotlights how residents are detached from their neighbourhood in a way where they are unaware of the changes being implemented within their neighbourhood – changes that fall in line with the ones they stated they wish wish to see within Dixon. It is also worth considering that the implementation of TSNS is still in its early stages, so the positive impacts they have on neighbourhoods and their communities may take a few years to be noticeable amongst the public. Lastly, in my methods section (see section 2.3) I mentioned how snowball sampling as data collection process acted as a double-edged sword, as it allowed me to obtain high quality data, though this data collected may be contained to a very specific portion of Dixon. I mention this because a majority of my participants were in the age group of 23-27, so they would be less

likely to have knowledge of public services – especially since most of these are geared towards senior and middle-aged populations.

In several instances participants outlined how a low sense of belonging to their neighbourhood plays a negative role towards their sense of self due to a feeling of hopelessness and alienation. The participants stated that having to occupy spaces that often times mirrors prison makes them feel caged away from the rest of the city. In some of my conversations my participants (three to be precise) made the connection that constantly having police patrol public areas within their neighbourhood reminded them of prison guards ensuring that the prisoners are keeping out to trouble. Furthermore, the Dixon raids further contributed to this analogy as police offers violated the notion of private space by enforcing their power to enter people's homes and in several cases harm occupants who were simply existing in their home (Pagliaro, 2013). Participants claimed that the combination of the public perception of Dixon along with the hyper-policing with the neighbourhood results in a loss of community as residents begin to internalize and perpetuate popular narratives amongst their own community. Furthermore, seeing development in other parts of the city, as well as the social stigma against their community alienates their community, making them feel that they do not have the right to belong. Participants also highlighted the way the initial settlers of Dixon (Somali refugee and refugee claimants) were forced to undergo various forms of political, social, economic, and physical *othering* that created a precedent regarding the treatment of Somali occupants within Dixon, and as a result contributing towards a low sense of self.

By outlining 1. the prevailing economic, social, political, and physical issues that have had the most impact on residents of Dixon, 2. the role individual stakeholders play towards

influencing a sense of neighbourhood belonging amongst the neighbourhood of Dixon, and 3. how the residents' sense of belonging to their neighbourhood impacts their sense of self, through my interviews with residents, I was able to pose the question, *how can neighbourhood belonging be promoted amongst residents within the neighbourhood of Dixon?* Residents claimed that a community-based approach to policy planning – especially in regard to policing – would be a beneficial first step for the community to establish trust amongst the various actors that represent the city. By taking the time to listen to the needs of the community, all stakeholders – including the residents – are able to play an active role in diagnosing community issues and creating a course of action geared towards resolving the problems outlined. This initiative allows residents to bring their point of view into consideration towards the implementation of new policies and initiatives, allowing the greatest number of members within the community to be represented within decisions that involve their neighbourhood and community. This process of providing residents the ability to voice their opinions and concerns creates a sense of ownership and responsibility amongst all stakeholders involved, which in turn contributes towards fostering a higher sense of neighbourhood belonging amongst residents as they get to play an active role within a process that better reflects the needs of their community. By focusing on the lived experiences and perceptions of Dixon residents I was able to showcase the unique perspectives of twelve residents of Dixon. This process allowed me to examine what aspects of Dixon impact residents' ability to foster a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood through firsthand experiences rather than speculations. By collecting individual accounts of residents' experiences and perceptions this study was able to identify overlapping factors between each participants' shared experiences, in turn creating more

urgency for taking the steps to implement the appropriate changes. Detailed individual perspectives provide more insight when compared to statistics and numeric figures, and this project was initiated with the intent of bringing awareness to Dixon and its residents.

### *7.3* Concluding statement

Denis (2021) outlines the usage of the term *bucktee* – derived from the Somali word *bakhti,* meaning corpse, or dead thing – and how it was taken from the Somali lexicon and entered what he calls *Multicultural Toronto English (MTE)* – a multiethnolect adopted by the younger generation within the Toronto Greater Area (GTA). In recent years the use of MTE has grown in popularity throughout the GTA, influencing the creation of the *Toronto manz* identity – stemming from the adoption of various linguistic and aesthetic aspects of Somali and Jamaican culture. The popularization of the *Toronto manz* has influenced a shift in the public's image of what a stereotypical Torontonian looks like – no longer some *big-money city slicker*, but rather someone in a Canada Goose jacket saying" wallahi fam". The creation of the current identity of what it means to be from Toronto (at least in the eyes of the younger generations within the city) was influenced heavily by the Somali identity, meaning that they shaped what it means to *belong* from Toronto, yet the Somali community in Toronto, particularly Dixon, consistently feels a low sense of belongin*g* in the spaces they occupy within the city. This project was initiated with the intent of shedding a light on the underrepresented community of Dixon through analyzing the role various social, physical, political, and economic procedures play in influencing a sense of belonging amongst Dixon residents. Dixon and its residents are not only underrepresented within policies and procedures initiated by various stakeholders in

the city, but there is also an underrepresentation of Dixon within geographic literature regarding urban planning and policy making. Dixon remains regularly mentioned within media in regard to prevalent crime, yet currently there only exists a handful of literature addressing the lack of representation of Dixon amongst development initiatives and procedures, as well as literature that addresses the low levels of belonging experienced by residents of Dixon (Danso, 2002a; Denis, 2021; Jiwani & Al-Rawi, 2021; Kusow, 2007). In fact, the notion of belonging should be included more amongst geographers interested in urban planning and policy making because it acts as the core of why people form a sense of kinship with the spaces they occupy, as well as why they might be unable to form that kinship with the spaces they occupy. The notion of belonging is vast, stemming into various geographical disciplines at various scales – be it small like a neighbourhood or large like a nation, which is why I underline its importance to be considered with greater detail amongst geographers in their respected fields.

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# Appendix

| **Initial Questions** | Can you tell me about your history in Dixon? | How has Dixon changed over the years? | In your opinion, what it the public's perception of Dixon? | Do you think the city of Toronto does a good job promoting a sense of belonging in Dixon? | In your opinion, what are some ways Dixon can be improved? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Codes** | • Initial perceptions<br>• Community<br>• Sheltered – not exposed to much<br>• Dangerous<br>• Diaspora<br>• Link to home | • No development<br>• More tension<br>• More police<br>• Violence<br>• Alienation<br>• Distrust<br>• Dirtier<br>• Aged<br>• Shoppers Drugmart<br>• Food Basics<br>• Same community<br>• Impatience | • Negative<br>• Violent<br>• Media and News<br>• Racist<br>• Xenophobic<br>• Misinformed<br>• Judgemental<br>• Islamophobic<br>• Misguided<br>• Accurate to some degree<br>• Clout and profit driven | • Lack of outlets<br>• Lack of community initiatives<br>• Lack of support for residents<br>• Poor conditions<br>• Prejudice prevents it<br>• Do not care for Dixon | • Less police<br>• Better police<br>• More community initiatives<br>• More opportunities<br>• Youth centers<br>• More amenities<br>• More development<br>• More funding |

**Listed below are the three lenses in which my codes fell under and how they helped shape my understanding of my participants' perception of their neighbourhood in relation to forming a sense of belonging and the ways it is influenced.**

## Three lenses the codes influenced

### 1. Economic

- **No development** – Lack of development projects
- **More police** – Government funding allocated towards higher police presence
- **Alienation** – Lack of spaces where a sense of community is fostered
- **Dirtier** – Lack of clean spaces (compared to affluent neighbourhoods)
- **Aged** – Lack of revitalization
- **Shoppers Drugmart + Food Basics** – Negative impact on lower income residents
- **Clout and profit driven** – profit incentivized over community wellness

- **Lack of community initiatives** – Lack of government funded initiatives
- **Lack of support for residents** – Participants felt underrepresented
- **Poor conditions** – Physical, neighbourhood aesthetics
- **More amenities** – Participants feel are necessary
- **More development** – Participants feel is necessary
- **More funding** – participants feel is necessary

## 2. Political

- **Negative** (perception) – History of narratives shaped by bodies in power
- **Violent** – Crime always reported when residents are perpetrators
- **Media and News** – Large hand in shaping public perceptions
- **Misinformed** – Residents depicted as "savages"
- **Lack of support for residents** – In regard to policies
- **Do not care for Dixon** – Lack of representation of Dixon in policies and procedures
- **Less police + Better police** – To improve Dixon
- **More community initiatives** – Funded by the city of Toronto
- **More opportunities + development + funding** – Reflected in policies and procedures by the city
-

## 3. Social

- S**heltered, not exposed to much** – Some participants
- **Dangerous** – Exposure to dangerous situations
- **Diaspora** – Children of immigrants
- **Link to home** – Felling at home because of community but also not because of the treatment
- **Alienation** – Sense of community diminishing
- **Distrust** – Towards bodies of power
- **Racist + Xenophobic + Islamophobic** – Participants' experience and perceptions of bodies in power
- **Misinformed** + Misguided – General public regarding Dixon
- **Accurate to some degree** – Some participants agreeing with the high rates of violence
- **Clout and profit driven** – Lack of focus on social development
- **Lack of community initiatives + support for residents + Poor conditions** – Prevents the development of social structures and relationships amongst one another
- **Prejudice** – Bodies of power foster it