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Dignité, convivialité et contestations morales d'appartenance

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Résumé de l'article

Dans la ville multiculturelle et multiraciale de Toronto (Ontario), l'espace de l'église est un lieu où les femmes presbytériennes blanches et racialisées négocient l'hospitalité conviviale, la dignité et les notions de la bonne vie. J'utilise le concept d'hospitalité conviviale pour montrer comment la convivialité s'aligne sur l'hospitalité chrétienne lorsqu'elle est centrée sur la volonté de bien-être spirituel et physique des personnes à travers leurs relations et leurs interactions avec les autres. Cet article se concentre sur le travail affectif impliqué dans la préparation des dîners communautaires de l'église, qui ont été développés et organisés par des femmes presbytériennes âgées et racialisées. La préparation des repas est un moment où l'hospitalité conviviale émerge parmi les femmes racialisées qui passent le temps en partageant leur nourriture, leurs souvenirs et leurs histoires de vie, affirmant ainsi un sentiment de dignité et d'appartenance. La convivialité, cependant, devient inhospitalière lorsque les femmes racisées sont soumises à une socialité indigne. Lors de l'exploration des moments où les femmes blanches presbytériennes aidaient aux repas communautaires, la manière dont elles aidaient cooptait et privait les femmes racisées de leur service à l'église et à Dieu. Il en ressort une inhospitalité conviviale, car les fidèles racisés sont soumis à des interactions hiérarchiques qui leur donnent l'impression d'être des étrangers au sein de leur propre église. Pourtant, en se souciant du bien-être des fidèles blancs pour maintenir l'harmonie sociale et l'unité de la congrégation, les fidèles racisés tolèrent le *statu quo* qu'ils considèrent comme une hospitalité conviviale chrétienne.

Nourishing the Body, Disenfranchising the Spirit

Convivial Hospitality, Dignity, and Commensality in a Presbyterian Church in Toronto

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Abstract: Within the multicultural and multiracial city of Toronto Ontario, the space of the church is a place for racialized and white Presbyterian women to negotiate convivial hospitality, dignity, and notions of the good life. I use the concept of convivial hospitality to show how conviviality aligns with Christian hospitality when it centres on people's will for spiritual and physical wellbeing through their relationships and interactions with others. This article focuses on the affective labour involved in the preparation of church community dinners, which were developed and organized by older, racialized Presbyterian women. Meal-time preparations are moments when convivial hospitality emerges among racialized women who pass the time by sharing their food, memories, and life stories, thus affirming a sense of dignity and belonging. Conviviality, however, takes an inhospitable turn when racialized women are subjected to undignified sociality. In exploring times when white Presbyterian women assisted with the community meals, the manner of their help coopted and disenfranchised racialized women from their service to the church and to God. What emerges is convivial inhospitality as racialized churchgoers are subjected to hierarchal interactions, making them feel like outsiders within their own church; yet, in caring for the wellbeing of white congregants to maintain social harmony and congregational unity, they tolerate the status quo which they see as Christian convivial hospitality.

Keywords: Hospitality; conviviality; commensality; racialization; gender; Christianity; Canada

Résumé : Dans la ville multiculturelle et multiraciale de Toronto (Ontario), l'espace de l'église est un lieu où les femmes presbytériennes blanches et racialisées négocient l'hospitalité conviviale, la dignité et les notions de la bonne vie. J'utilise le concept d'hospitalité conviviale pour montrer comment la convivialité s'aligne sur l'hospitalité chrétienne lorsqu'elle est centrée sur la volonté de bien-être spirituel et physique des personnes à travers leurs relations et leurs interactions avec les autres. Cet article se concentre sur le travail affectif impliqué dans la préparation des dîners communautaires de l'église, qui ont été développés et organisés par des femmes presbytériennes âgées et racialisées. La préparation des repas est un moment où l'hospitalité conviviale émerge parmi les femmes racialisées qui passent le temps en partageant leur nourriture, leurs souvenirs et leurs histoires de vie, affirmant ainsi un sentiment de dignité et d'appartenance. La convivialité, cependant, devient inhospitalière lorsque les femmes racisées sont soumises à une socialité indigne. Lors de l'exploration des moments où les femmes blanches presbytériennes aidaient aux repas communautaires, la manière dont elles aidaient cooptait et privait les femmes racisées de leur service à l'église et à Dieu. Il en ressort une inhospitalité conviviale, car les fidèles racisés sont soumis à des interactions hiérarchiques qui leur donnent l'impression d'être des étrangers au sein de leur propre église. Pourtant, en se souciant du bien-être des fidèles blancs pour maintenir l'harmonie sociale et l'unité de la congrégation, les fidèles racisés tolèrent le *statu quo* qu'ils considèrent comme une hospitalité conviviale chrétienne.

Mots-clés : hospitalité ; convivialité ; commensalité ; racialisation ; genre ; Christianité ; Canada

Introduction

The crescendo of the music within the congregation was flowing with exuberance today as churchgoers sang these phrases repeatedly to the rhythm of a beating drum: "God is good!" and "You are welcome in this place!" The white woman standing in the pulpit with long brown hair, wearing a white tunic and a flowing cinnamon-hued ankle-length skirt, introduced herself as a friend of the Filipino church pastor. She is a student in Divinity Studies at the University of Toronto and was invited to share in Toronto East Community Presbyterian Church's (TECPC)[1] 136th anniversary celebration sermon. She tells the congregation that she chose that song because "it reflects this [church] place, an open community that welcomes the stranger in our midst." She steps down and walks among the congregants and asks churchgoers to repeat the song again, this time for us to sing to our neighbours: the person sitting beside us,

behind us, and in front of us. She asks us to change the lyrics from "you are welcome in this place" to "you are welcomed in this place to invite the Holy Spirit to come and be with us this morning." Congregants went beyond her call to sing to neighbours: they sang and walked around the sanctuary, hugging, and clasping the hand of churchgoers. Black, Asian, white, middle-aged, elderly, impoverished, and middle-class congregants were linked in song and touch for that moment. The woman tells the congregation that songs are one way for people from around the world to find unity and solidarity in the belief that God is good. Her congregational message is for churchgoers to find a way for opening their hearts, for becoming vulnerable to each other and to God. "Unity," she exhorts, "is to respect diversity and this is a beautifully diverse congregation, something to celebrate."

After the sermon, congregants make their way to the banquet room, located at the rear of the church, to socialize and converse with one another while consuming cookies, tea, and coffee. In the banquet room, tables are placed to form two long rows and as congregants trickle in, they begin to self-organize: in one row, white congregants sit together while in the other row, racialized congregants converge. On this Sunday morning, as with other Sunday mornings, there is very little intermixing between the two tables. Janet, an elderly Guyanese woman and a church elder[2] who has been a member of the church since the mid-1980s, confided that many racialized women in the congregation do not feel welcome within the inner circles of white congregants. Rarely are their advice or perspectives sought by white church elders during congregational meetings, despite being long-term members of the church. They feel marginalized from participating more fully in the church because their proposals and suggestions for growing the church community are commonly rejected by dominant white voices with their claims to church tradition and statements of "this is not the way it is done."

This article centres on the conviviality and hospitality among racialized Christian women to maintain congregational unity in a multiracial and multicultural Presbyterian church in Toronto, Canada. I understand conviviality as the moments where social harmony and comfort are fostered through intimate moments of contact (Radice 2016), of relational openness that encourages a sense of compassion, wellbeing, and dignity. The focus of this article is on church community dinners, which were the sole church activity that was developed and organized by Presbyterian women from Guyana and Korea. More precisely, I attend to women's social and affective labour of

cooking together for the church community meal, which are the micro-events and ephemeral moments of conviviality between racialized women through the sharing of food and stories, highlighting their love of God. I use the term convivial hospitality to show how conviviality aligns with Christian hospitality when it centers on people's will for spiritual and physical wellbeing through one's relationships and interactions with others. However, how do racialized women respond when faced with unsociability and micro-aggressions by fellow church members? To elucidate how conviviality takes an inhospitable turn to undignified sociality, I focus on the instances when white women helped with the labour of community dinners; yet the manner of their help coopted and disenfranchised racialized women from their service to the church and to God. As such, in this circumstance, convivial inhospitality maintains a false sense of social harmony and perpetuates undignified hierarchal sociality as racialized churchgoers do not want to "make trouble," thus affirming white benevolence and tolerating white privilege as congregational unity.

Making the church a welcoming place is an ongoing ambition for many Canadian Presbyterian congregations,[3] especially those located in multicultural and multiracial urban cities, such as Toronto. Since the 1960s and 1970s, Canadian mainline denominations[4] have become racially and culturally diverse, thus destabilizing the Anglo-centric foundations of these denominations. Bramadat and Seljak (2008) describe the formation of interracial and interethnic congregations as the "de-Europeanization" of Canadian churches. The influx of racialized immigrants into Euro-Canadian congregations was created by changes made to Canadian immigration policies in the 1960s and 1970s. Prior to World War II, Canada had a "Keep Canada White" policy through exclusionary immigration policies in which preferred countries included the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, and the United States. Racialized British subjects from South Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean were less desirable and were typically denied migration into Canada (Haque 2012; Kelley and Trebilcock 2010; Thobani 2007). In the 1960s however, the Canadian government was motivated to liberalize state borders because of three interrelated factors: firstly, the flow of British immigrants dropped significantly; secondly, Canada's economy was flourishing in multiple sectors and required a labour force to meet growing demands, and thirdly, Canada was experiencing international pressures to retain its reputation as a tolerant, generous, and humane nation-state (Haque 2012; Thobani 2007). Due to immigration changes, the racialized and class-based demographics of Canadian Presbyterian congregations are

steadily changing as newly arrived immigrants seek out support, advice, and belonging through church networks (Bramadat and Seljak 2008; Meintel and Mossière 2013).

Churches have long been a centre for neighbourhood activities vis-à-vis community dinners, outdoor food markets, bake sales, yard sales, and English language socials for newcomers hoping to learn Canadian culture and language (Bramadat and Seljak 2008). For a period of two years in the mid-2010s, I carried out research at three multicultural and multiracial presbyterian churches on the east side of Toronto, attending and participating in these kinds of church activities in addition to English bible study sessions and church meetings on issues of governance and operations. Rather than overtly proselytizing to non-church members in the neighbourhood, church leaders see congregationally led activities as a key strategy in opening the church to people who are interested in faith and religious community, but have little regard for worship services (Clarke and Macdonald 2017). Church activities are sites of conviviality where strangers may engage with each other, as well as regular churchgoers, discussing personal hardships, health concerns, and other more intimate matters. In her study of Montreal neighbourhoods, Radice (2016) draws attention to the microplaces of conviviality, such as park benches and sidewalks, where different degrees of conviviality may occur between strangers. She distinguishes between layers of conviviality, noting the differences between simple momentary exchanges that are courteous and welcoming with a conviviality that is sustained through more interactions, which may involve discussions of personal and contemplative topics such as familial and health concerns (Radice 2016, 434). The latter exchanges, where people share pertinent and more personal concerns, have the potential of fostering social comfort. They are a layer of conviviality that Radice labels "inconsequential intimacy" (Radice 2016, 435) because these types of social engagements allow for brief moments of social wellbeing, connection, and belonging. Similarly, church encounters are characterized by a positive feel-good quality of conviviality as the aspiration is to make the church community less strange to neighbours, the idea being that congregants are open to interacting with people who come from different racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds. The hope is that strangers and neighbours will feel welcomed and return to the church. In their study of the inclusion of racialized minorities in religious spaces in Montreal, Meintel and Mossière (2013) similarly show that there is an openness to cultural and religious differences within religious spaces, which helps inculcate feelings of neighbourliness and goodwill.

Among the racialized Christian women who allowed me into their personal and Christian lives, they see church activities that are devoid of proselytization, such as the monthly community dinners, as a technique in recentring the humanity of church members and creating a welcoming space and time for mundane conversation and intimate forms of relationality.

Toronto East Community Presbyterian Church (TECPC)

TECPC is one of the oldest Presbyterian churches in Toronto and is located in a rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood that was historically an Anglo working-class enclave. Churchgoers are a diverse mix of racialized and elderly people, many of whom migrated to Canada in the 1980s from Guyana, Trinidad, Swaziland, Rwanda, the Philippines, Korea, China, Australia, and Scotland, while other congregants identify as white Canadian from Anglo or Francophone backgrounds. Most congregants are over the age of sixty and children are an uncommon sight, attending sporadically when in the care of church-going grandparents. I am a racialized researcher and I was welcomed by both white and racialized congregants with my consistent and ongoing participation in congregational activities. At TECPC, I had ongoing interviews with 15 congregants, both women and men. Many congregants believed that my academic research was a spiritual journey and I was guided to them by the Holy Spirit.

Many congregants are socio-economically underprivileged and reside in government-subsidized housing, while a small handful is affluent and economically privileged, working as professionals and entrepreneurs. Sunday service at TECPC does not follow a rigidly structured liturgical style; rather, it is informal and congregationally driven, based on crises, concerns, and inspirations relevant to churchgoers. Sermons are delivered in many languages during a single worship service and the Hispanic-Filipino pastor welcomed congregants to read biblical passages in their natal language.

A major problem for TECPC as with many mainline protestant denominations in Canada is the crisis of declining church membership (Bramadat and Seljak 2008; Clarke and MacDonald 2017; Meintel and Mossière 2013). The sanctuary at TECPC has the capacity to seat 250 to 300 people and church bulletins dating back to the first half of the twentieth century state that there was an overflow of churchgoers. Currently, the pews are sparsely populated with a scattering of 30 to 35 congregants attending worship services even though the church has approximately 150 registered church members.

I was invited to a church meeting where members of Session[5] discussed the need to develop future activities for congregational growth in terms of people and revenue. A church elder shared that TECPC is running an annual deficit of $60,000. I later learned in a subsequent church meeting that the subsistence of the congregation is heavily reliant on the rental income from organizations unaffiliated with the presbyterian congregation, such as a music school, yoga classes, and baby and toddler programs. The concern of church elders is that with dwindling congregational numbers and increasing financial insecurity, the crisis of decline will draw the attention of upper levels of church governance, potentially motivating conversations for permanent church closure. A shortage of churchgoers and the inability to raise sufficient funds to sustain the operational costs of the church mobilizes a view of spiritual waning within the church community; specifically, that the church is no longer relevant to the neighbourhood.

Revitalizing Church Life: Community Dinners

To make the church a more welcoming place, a small group of elderly Guyanese and Korean women who joined the church forty years ago developed a plan to revitalize church life. Their idea was to hold monthly community dinners that would be free of charge to all and offer slow-cooked meals made with fresh produce. Janet told me that she presented the idea to the remaining church elders, who were at first reticent to the plan, citing the operational costs of the dinners. However, she was able to mobilize a small number of congregants, women from Korea and Guyana, to donate supplies and funds and volunteer their time, which assuaged the budgetary concerns of white church elders. Volunteers told me that they did not dwell on the economic barriers but pressed that it was God's will for them to come out and socialize with each other and non-church members to make congregational life beyond Sunday sermons. Patty, a woman from Guyana, told me she welcomed time away from her government-subsidized housing, especially from her unruly neighbours and the stench of mould and garbage that permeated her housing hallways.

The community dinners began in May of 2013 and were held on the last Wednesday of each month and open to the public. When I spoke to Janet after one of the Sunday sermons to inquire whether I could volunteer with the community dinners, I asked her what kind of meals she served. She clasped her hands together and told me that they wanted to cook "Canadian comfort food." The problem, she told me, was that none of the volunteers

knew how to cook Canadian food, which she identified as spaghetti, chicken noodle soup, meatloaf, and chili. I asked Janet why she was considering these particular dishes for the community meal, and she stated that these dishes would make for "good" meals for church guests. She explained that guests were predominantly white, middle-aged and elderly women and men, most depending on government subsidies and living on the streets or in subsidized housing. These foods, she said, would warm their spirits.

For the first year and half, volunteers and I arrived around noon to prep fresh vegetables, herbs, and meat for a dinner start time of six pm. As we chopped fresh vegetables and herbs, Janet explained to us that fresh food and the pleasure of cooking are God's gifts and as such, are a spark for something greater: It was hope that good food and conversation would bring people together and make the church community visible and strong. She and other community dinner volunteers aspired that their show of participation and involvement would inspire other churchgoers to join in, share ideas, and further support a range of church-based gatherings, such as dance socials, exercise get-togethers, and cooking classes. The hope of the volunteers is best conceptualized as a moral ambition, which Elisha (2011) defines as the "individual aspirations that involve persuading and recruiting others to do likewise" (2011, 19). Their hope was for their moral ambitions to gain motivational traction and resonate with other church participants who would then develop more activities within the church.

Although the community dinners at TECPC may appear mundane, they are innovative when compared to those held by neighbouring and more affluent Presbyterian churches. Nearby churches frequently served packaged, processed, or frozen foods, such as hamburgers, hotdogs, and lasagnas to their dinner guests, who are predominantly racialized immigrants, attending church dinners for the opportunity to improve their English conversational skills. Food choices in neighbouring churches are based on an economic logic: they are easy to prepare, cheap, quick, and require little labour from volunteers, who are predominantly white. Most dinner guests at TECPC are socio-economically disadvantaged white Canadians and a 99-cent bottle of spaghetti that is warmed up and served over a 99-cent package of pasta is unimpressive. The slow and laborious transformation of food, in the purview of volunteers, demonstrates their compassion and respect for dinner guests. The community dinner was meant to stand out from daily life and to make dinner guests feel welcomed within the church community.

Convivial Hospitality and Commensality: Fresh Food and God's Love

Commensality, the practice of sharing food and drink with other people (Cowan 1990, 64; Fischler 2011) coalesces with the practice of convivial hospitality as it is a time for intersociality and sharing. While the apogee of the feast is normally the focus of hospitality, the microprocesses of preparing a meal for dinner guests allow for the space and time to establish, experience, and consolidate convivial relations (Cowan 1990, 65). Gathered in the church kitchen, church volunteers who are washing, dicing, and chopping fresh vegetables and herbs pass the time by sharing ordinary stories of their daily activities that highlight moments of dignity and exaltation. For example, Janet would share a story of her travels from local produce markets to the church. In her 10-kilometre journey by streetcar, Janet reminisces with church volunteers on the goodness of the transit conductor who, without being asked, helped her step down the steep steps of the streetcar, or of the kind person who carried her grocery cart from the streetcar to the sidewalk. She tells us how she met "a nice gentleman who helped" her or "a young person who was so kind" to her. Jennifer, an elderly woman from Guyana, would share stories of a young person, a stranger, who helped her carry fresh bread to the church and Mina, a young Korean woman, would share stories of meals from her childhood in Korea, which would then entice the Guyanese elders to share their recollections and hopes of life in Guyana. These were small acts of conviviality that may appear unexceptional and perhaps even trivial; however, for these women, their stories exemplified God's grace—moments where they are being caressed and embraced by the Holy Spirit through their interactions with strangers (Strhan 2015). While church volunteers shared their personal stories, Janet reminded volunteers that God is present in the world through the dignity and care they experienced through the social good of strangers, and that the actions of strangers were the worldly presence of "God's strong loving hands." These stories were followed by proclamations by volunteers that "God is good" as a reminder that such ordinary events are moments of exaltation and of God's love and presence.

Feeling grace is a sensuous and emotional experience where conversations involve reflection, awareness, and appreciation of the social interaction with strangers and of dignity of the self and others that lasted well beyond the interaction. A sense of goodness is an enduring emotional quality and requires faith in strangers and the unknown. To welcome the stranger is to willfully welcome and be open to the possibility of the exceptional in ordinary interactions (Strhan 2015). In his study of the virtue and aspiration of conviviality

in Catalonia, Erickson (2011) uses the term "sensory politics" to draw attention to the role of the senses and emotion that give meaning to social practice.

Sharing, Smelling, Tasting, Friendship

Janet surprises us one afternoon by bringing us a small treat from home. She unrolls a brown lunch bag, unfolds the corners of an item wrapped in aluminum foil, and reveals a thin, round flat bread. "In Guyana, we eat this with curry, do you like curry?" she asks as she reaches into her cart and pulls out a small plastic container holding a thick yellow sauce, "this is curry with chickpeas." Mina exclaims that she loves roti and reaches over to pull off a small morsel of roti and dips it in the curry. Another volunteer from Guyana inquires, "Janet did you make this roti? I don't like making roti, it takes so much time!." She too reaches over for some roti and curry, savouring the flavours with closed eyes and a small sigh.

Mary Douglas sees the sharing of warm meals as a symbolic structure containing close friendships and relations; it is a boundary, marking "the line between intimacy and distance" (1972, 66). Although commensality here was not voluminous, it included elements which Douglas uses to define a meal. "A meal" she writes, "incorporates a number of contrasts, hot and cold, bland and spiced, liquid and semi-liquid, and various textures. It also incorporates cereals, vegetables and animal proteins" (Douglas 1972, 66). Crossing the threshold from one domain of food categories, from cold substances to a warm meal, entails the restructuring of relations (Douglas 1972, 66). These small acts of food sharing contributed to the formation of a more intimate sociality. Each month, Janet brought different dishes to share; we would each have a cup of tea and would gather around the kitchen island as she handed us a small plate with a sample of unique culinary indulgences that she prepared at home tea. One month, she brought us a large container that emanated a robust cinnamon-like fragrance. Filled inside were darkened pieces of chicken with a baked marinade that tickled my nose: jerk chicken. Natalie's eyes widened as she bit into the juicy meat and exclaimed, "How do you have the time to make this! This is very good!" With this lead-in, Janet recounted how she could not sleep at night because she was distressed over her financial difficulties. She confessed that after her husband passed away, she discovered that their joint bank account was missing over $25,000 dollars. She confided that she believes he sent money to a child he conceived in an affair. She explained that she had no evidence; it was a

feeling that continuously haunted her. The doubt and growing anxiety over the missing money made her feel like she was drowning, "I could not breathe, I felt like I was choking." To ease her mind at three am, she decided that she would make jerk chicken for us. According to Tye (2010, 192), preparing a meal can be reminder to nurture self-identity, especially when a sense of self is fractured. Preparation and consumption of certain foods can help repair the continuity between the past and the present through labour-intensive structures. Tye (2010, 199) writes that after the passing of her mother, her father took on the jam-making that her mother habitually carried out; this brought a sense of structure back into his life, reconnecting him to the past and his late wife through food production. In this way, food production is a form of spiritual and mindful healing that is heightened and made meaningful when food is shared in a manner where dignity and mutuality frame the interaction.

In these moments of convivial hospitality, Janet experienced a small temporally marked shift in status, from a congregant on the margins and a church guest who is welcomed to a congregant who is valued and a church host who welcomes. Over time, she shared various other dishes from Guyana, such as fried chickpeas, fried rice, and chow mein. Mina asked Janet on several occasions why we did not serve some of these dishes for the community dinner guests, to which Janet responded dismissively that there were not enough funds to support a Guyanese meal. The meals were supported by monetary and food donations from church members and the few dollars that guests made to the donation basket. Community dinners usually had a budget of $35: $10 to 15 dollars would be spent on meat and the rest would be allocated for the purchase of produce, grains, herbs, and fresh bread from the bakery. On another occasion, I asked Janet why she felt compelled to prepare Canadian meals that she is uncomfortable with and unaccustomed to making, suggesting even that she prepare meals that were familiar to her. She let out a soft exasperated exhale, "They would not like Guyanese food, Lisa. It has spice and white people do not like spice." Hearing this, Natalie joined in with a big broad smile and laughing eyes, "Yeah! White people don't like flavour in their food!" It was evident that this was an ongoing joke about the culinary tastes of white church members. Despite claims of insufficient funds to host a Guyanese dinner, it is likely that the risks inherent to producing a sensuous ethnocultural meal were not worth the possibility of offending the senses of white Presbyterians. Odours, both bodily and culinary, are notorious markers of otherness that are difficult to

contain and neutralize (Ameeriar 2017, 97); they are subjectively experienced as either welcoming or repulsive and one's reaction to a smell is not taken lightly.

Disenfranchising Spiritual Growth

Two years after the start of the community dinner program, members of the Women's Association at TECPC began to volunteer and participate. Their involvement, however, was oriented towards an economic logic in operationalizing the community meals, which eventually disenfranchised racialized volunteers. The Women's Association involves a small group of white women who are naturalized citizens and British immigrants. Under the direction of Nancy, a member of TECPC for over sixty years, the Women's Association organizes fundraising activities, such as yard sales and bake sales, that provide necessary financial support to maintain church operations. The association also mobilizes church community members to participate in church social functions, such as annual cleanups, silent auctions, and luncheons, which I attended. Community dinner volunteers are not members of the Women's Association; they do, however, regularly participate in the social events organized by the association. The implicit tensions between the two groups are highlighted in the post-sermon tea, as members of the Women's Association sat together while racialized women and their families convened separately.

Throughout the first year of the community dinners, members of the Women's Association were not involved in the community dinners. When I asked Nancy and another member of the association why they did not join sooner, they informed me that they thought the community dinners were successful and effective in reaching out to and drawing people into the church[6]. As such, they saw no reason to intervene or interfere with what they saw as Janet's project. This logic would change over the course of the second year when Janet made repeated requests for members of the Women's Association to participate. Janet wanted the full participation of church members and she often told community meal volunteers that "working together is coming together." Her ambition was that all people should be welcomed, even when some volunteers mentioned that there was no need for extra help. Janet's welcome without condition, however, did not signify an absence of social fissures or racial tensions.

As we chopped and prepped in the kitchen one Wednesday afternoon in August, I noticed that Janet appeared irate, lost in her own thoughts. Concerned, I asked her if all was okay, uncertain if she had had another unsettling episode

during the night or if she was experiencing some of her physical aches and pains. She sighed and responded, "It's okay, Lisa," then dropping her voice to a low whisper,

> Those ladies [nodding in the direction of the foyer where members of the Woman's Association convened] are here at noon for their meeting and they don't even come back to help after! It is just us cooking for thirty! That bunch is very closed. You know it feels like they are always observing us, like we are under their watchful eye. It has been like this ever since I started coming to church 25 years ago.

Racialized congregants never explicitly mentioned racism and marginalization in the church. Voicing such ideas infers that they are trying to create trouble by challenging congregational unity. After voicing their discontent regarding white congregants, racialized congregants would pull me aside or phone me a few days later and say, "Lisa, you have to keep this between you and me because I don't want to start any trouble." The fear of "starting" trouble underscores that a precondition of "trouble" already exists for racialized congregants. They take on the responsibility of keeping relations harmonious and dignified, thus refusing to challenge white sensibilities, perpetuating a pretence of conviviality.

Drawing on a study of Guyanese Presbyterians in Canada, MacDonald (2008, 187) remarks that Guyanese "come from a culture where whites had historically dominated" and upon integrating into Canadian churches, they have an "understanding that whites should be in charge." This framing, however, does not question the role and privilege of white Presbyterians in their presumption that they are welcome to take charge, which only consolidates their status and value as "hosts" within the church. We must also question why there is an assumption that racialized churchgoers are passive in their willingness for white Presbyterians to take charge. There is a disconnect in communication as racialized and white churchgoers are overly concerned with maintaining a status quo of convivial tolerance, continuing a register of convivial relations that does "not make trouble," all in the name of unity.

From my own conversations with Guyanese Presbyterians, they did not want white members to take charge, they only desired their participation in church activities. For racialized congregants to take on and/or retain an authoritative role as "host" within the church is no easy task when they perceive attitudes and behaviours from white members that infer their subjection. Maintaining a convivial register for the purpose of congregational unity perpetuates hierarchal

and racialized relations and limits the full inclusion, value, and dignity of racialized women in growing the congregation.

Janet's critique regarding the initial lack of support by the Women's Association is a result of her conviction that all members should participate. It is a feeling of doing the right thing that is, she says, including all members of the church community and being open to their involvement despite their differences. Her fear is that the community dinner project will end with her because of her age and her debilitating health and the community dinners must become larger than herself. Welcoming and being open to the participation of white women is a difficult yet virtuous calling. Janet knew that she and other racialized women would fall under the gaze of whiteness, of having the community dinner project come under scrutiny. While welcoming is an act of convivial hospitality, it also exemplifies Derridean inhospitality by which members of the Women's Association, who see the church as their place of belonging, are made into guests through the act of being offered an invitation to volunteer in their own place of worship (Derrida 2000). This did not mean, however, that white Presbyterian women would remain as guests, as they would soon reaffirm their position as hosts.

White Help and the Disenfranchisement of Racialized Volunteers

With the additional help, there was talk of making the monthly community meals bimonthly. Many congregants, both white and racialized, were favourable to the idea, stating that the social interactions emerging from the dinners outweighed the economic costs of the community dinners. Nancy, the organizer of the Women's Association and a church elder, provides a broader perspective on the cost of the meal. In her assessment, running the community dinner more than monthly is unsustainable. She acknowledges that the groceries for the community dinners are quite cheap. Her concern is the expenditures related to heating the church during the winter, running the air conditioner during the summer, the cost of electricity such as lights and stove, and the cost of replenishing pots, pans and other cooking utensils, of which many are over 40 years old. She is also concerned that the church will eventually need extra funds to make the church building wheelchair accessible, and potentially, additional funds for a dishwasher if Presbytery, a higher governing body in the Presbyterian Church denomination, deemed it necessary due to food safety concerns.

Church activities are not based on profit, yet will incur expenses that are not covered by donations. I asked Nancy about accessing funds from the governing bodies within the Presbyterian Church. She sighed and explained that the community dinners would likely not qualify. Her fear was that a request would create an opening for the Presbytery to put regulations in place to protect the church from potential lawsuits. Even if TECPC was successful in acquiring funds, financial support would only come with requirements set by Presbytery. Nancy raised an example of a nearby Presbyterian church which sought Presbytery funding for their community dinners and was required to install a dishwasher to ensure that all utensils were properly sanitized. She also noted that if this was brought forward, there was the possibility that the congregation could be told to terminate the community dinners altogether. The dilemma for Nancy is that the community dinners are a necessary measure in ensuring that TECPC, as a church, does not close. "I have been at this church since I was two years old and I am now 70," says Nancy. "There is no way that I will allow this church to be closed by the Presbytery." Through financial and organizational annual reports submitted to the Presbytery, the community dinner project demonstrates to upper echelons of church governance that TECPC is actively conducting outreach work within the neighbourhood and growing its congregation, both spiritually and in numbers.

By the second year of the community dinner program, members of the Women's Association began to volunteer their time. Janet was ecstatic that she had four additional women working in the kitchen. To help, Nancy bought a case of spaghetti sauce jars that were a "good deal" at the grocery store. Carrying in the case and placing it down on the kitchen table, she announced that this was more cost-effective and would save time by reducing the labour required to manually chop up the vegetables and other food preparation activities. Over the following months, volunteers arrived at the church about half an hour prior to the opening for community dinner guests. The only necessary work was to warm up frozen goods or items that Nancy found on sale at local grocery chains, bought in bulk and transported to the church, and to set it on the table buffet style. Dinners were no longer fresh and homemade, but now consisted of frozen lasagnas, pizzas and burgers, and canned spaghetti. Nancy expressed her belief that she had "done good", saying that dinner guests should be happy and are lucky to be served such foods because "It is more than they could afford." In terms of time-savings and cost-effectiveness strategies, these meals were

"successful" as they were quick and easy and did not require the involvement of more volunteers.

With less time devoted to food preparation, conversations between the women became expedient. They shifted to less intimate and depersonalized conversations about the weather, grocery sales at local markets, upcoming congregational events, and church maintenance projects. Time-saving foods did not allow for time to engage relationally. Talk of home in Guyana and Korea ended and stories of family ceased; new volunteers did not have time to share their own stories. The habitual sharing of foods also came to an end. For two months, Janet continued to bring in food to share with others; however, volunteers from the Women's Association politely declined to sample the home-cooked food, citing problems with digestion. Although members of the Women's Association did not show any malicious intent in refusing the food, Janet read their rejection as courteous revulsion. She did not insist that they try her food, she would take a step back and with a slight hunch in her shoulders, murmur, "Oh I understand," or "That's okay, maybe next time." The white women did not seem to notice how their response affected Janet and more so, they were unaware of how racialized women interpreted their response as inhospitable actions. Refusing the commensality of ethnic food was interpreted as a sensorial and gustatory distantiation of Janet's ethnoracial identity and made it seem that they were closed off from mutual sociality. In her study of Pakistani women in Toronto, Ameeriar (2017, 77) shows that food is one of many components of a "sensorial regime" of racial knowledge "to produce selective forms of racialized, sensorial alterity, disciplining Other subjects into a minoritized space". Refusing the taste and smell of Janet's ethnoracial identity is an exclusionary practice that socially distinguishes her apart from a tolerable, pleasurable aesthetic and "sensuous experience of difference" (Ameeriar 2017, 97).

By the end of my fieldwork, racialized volunteers rarely helped with the community dinners; new volunteers recruited by the Women's Association showed up thirty minutes prior to the dinner commencement to hastily lay out the stagecraft of hospitality: lining the table with tablecloths; putting out bowls of chips as centre pieces on each table, and laying out drinks and desserts. To help expedite post-dinner clean-up, the Women's Association bought paper dinner plates and disposable cutlery. Dinner guests did not voice their displeasure with the changes. Instead, they made eye contact with a slight frown as the disposable plates were flimsy, awkwardly spreading food to ensure that

their plate was better balanced. Other guests would take two to three disposable plates, stacked one on top of the other to create a stronger structural support system for the food. Some guests seemed annoyed as plastic forks would warp with the heat of their food, requiring two to three trips to the buffet table to get replacement forks and to dispose of the ineffective fork.

Unintentionally, white help quickly disintegrated the camaraderie racialized women had established through their labour as partners, transforming ordinary relationships into friendships. Feminist theologian Letty Russell (2009, 80) calls this a "deformation" in hospitality "when it [hospitality] is practiced as a way of caring for so-called [sic]'inferior people' by those who are more advantaged and able to prove their superiority by being 'generous,' rather than using a model of partnership". The help provided by the Women's Association undermined the formation of partnerships as racialized volunteers were repositioned as "objects of charity" as the call for more bodies was interpreted as incompetence in management and skill, that the dinners had grown too successful for racialized volunteers to cope. Nancy soon began making decisions on behalf of Janet, in the name of "doing good." By implementing a strategy based on saving time and money, TECPC was no longer exceptional in offering homecooked meals made with fresh produce and became indistinguishable from neighbouring Presbyterian churches' dinners.

Deformations in Convivial Hospitality: Convivial Inhospitality

Although conviviality is defined as living together, this does not mean that it is a celebratory formulation of togetherness and tolerance (Gilroy 2005). Wise and Noble (2016, 424) point out that conviviality underscores the "potential ambivalence at the heart of the everydayness of living together." In other words, conviviality is intertwined with tensions and conflict. For white Presbyterians, an ongoing concern in doing convivial hospitality is how to integrate racialized congregants into the dominant church culture. In many instances, integration takes the form of assimilation because the Presbyterian church, a white-dominant and settler church institution, is perplexed by the uncertainties that racialized churchgoers bring, such as their experiences, values, ideas, beliefs and languages into the habits and rituals of the Presbyterian church (Macdonald 2008). The fear is that full integration will eventually change the Presbyterian Anglo traditions that have shaped contemporary Canadian identity.

Derrida's writings on hospitality discuss the hostilities and pitfalls of relational breakdowns, particularly when a host is made to feel strange within their own domain when expectations of generosity and welcome are experienced as a burden (Ahmed 2012; Derrida 2000). Congregants, especially white Anglo congregants, may speak of the need for change in the way new and racialized churchgoers are welcomed and they see the benefits of change that make the church relevant today, yet there is little will to actuate institutionalize transformation (see Ahmed 2012). White Canadian Presbyterians may be comfortable with the visibility of non-white culture such as people, food, language, music, and art, but if such items remain spatially immediate and linger for too long, they are no longer welcomed because such artifacts challenge congregants' sense of self vis-a-vis Anglo-Canadian Presbyterian identity (c.f. Thobani 2007). Openness can be deeply unsettling and uncomfortable, but it is in that discomfort where mutuality has the potential in being generative, in making social relations more open and ultimately and hopefully, a congregation that is more welcoming, which is demonstrated by the interactions between racialized elderly Presbyterian women. While Derridean hospitality centres on the desires and experiences of hosts, convivial hospitality brings into focus the humanity of recognizing guests with agency, dignity, and mutuality.

Conclusion: Convivial Hospitality

Christian convivial hospitality is encapsulated by the ubiquitous phrase, "welcoming the stranger," a performative utterance that describes how one is to give hospitality to others in relation to degrees of relational intimacy: people one meets only in passing, people who attend church activities, and people one considers neighbours and friends. Racialized congregants compared their convivial experiences of carrying out, receiving, and witnessing good deeds from unknown individuals with biblical scriptures and narratives, such as the story of the Good Samaritan, to better understand the shared humanity and dignity between strangers. Congregants interpreted such social interaction as exemplary of God's presence and grace in a contemporary post-Christian society. Compassion, dignity, and love are Christian values that are conceptualized and idealized as qualities of a "good life," especially in today's society which congregants characterize as "Godless" (Bialecki and Bielo 2016). Toronto East Presbyterians experience Toronto as a secular city that only tolerates Christian values. One white congregant, for example, saw herself and other Christians as a minority sect whose Christian identity and values are socially denied and excluded due to cosmopolitan political correctness for religious diversity.

Convivial hospitality and congregational unity is hard work and difficult to achieve as the tension of maintaining the optics of a harmonious conviviality is a burden and indignity carried more often by racialized Presbyterian women who are congregational members of predominantly white churches. Among racialized women at TECPC, meals offer the materiality of convivial hospitality and create a space for the sharing of personal stories that emerge from the sensorial experience of "homecooked" meals (Cowan 1990; Ochs and Shohet 2006). The materiality of food thus links with a spatial and temporal awareness of dignity, sociality, and the sacred. The sensorial and social experiences acquired through the time and labour of procuring fresh produce and transforming it into a warm meal were experienced as God's gifts of love and life.

White women situate and value themselves as hosts to racialized women, taking over and disenfranchising them from their love of God and growing the church. This act of subversion was unintentional yet consequential in relegating racialized volunteers to feel and experience second-class Christian belonging. As noted by Pitt-Rivers (1963) and Ahmed (2012), hospitality is based on hierarchal structures of sociality that cannot be resolved because doing so would necessitate further conflict.

This paper dwells in these moments of tension of convivial hospitality and inhospitality, capturing how long-term guests mediate their desire and struggle to become valued and to belong within the congregation. The racialized women whom I interviewed have had much practice navigating systemic inequalities and conditioning themselves to function within oppressive relations and "to not make trouble'" for white congregants at the centre of church life. To name or voice their disenfranchisement creates more work for racialized women: there would be an assumption that they are not "friends" with white Christian fellows or that they do not value the support of white volunteers. Worse, there is the potential that they would be ostracized from the church community for the purposes of retaining congregational unity.

Belonging is experienced quite differently, as women of colour work harder at producing a superficial yet desired sense of unity, and white women were often oblivious to these relational inequities. In this sense, racialized and aging Presbyterian women are maintaining the barriers that sustain their marginalization because they do not want to make trouble for those at the centre. They see this as an act of convivial hospitality as they are consciously and carefully keeping God's house running smoothly, despite their resentment and

indignity. Resentment here did not unfold into hostile relations but signified convivial inhospitality and a failure of willful openness and welcome.

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Notes

1 All names of churches and congregants are pseudonyms.

2 The Presbyterian Church of Canada is founded on a system of courts consisting of: Session, Presbytery, Synod, and the General Assembly. Each governing body is composed of elders and ministers (known as teaching elders); elders are elected by the congregation. Elders are long-term members of the denomination, who are nominated to the eldership and voted into the role by members of the congregation.

3 Presbyterian churches are not alone in making church spaces welcoming places; other mainline Protestant churches such as the United Church, Methodist Church, and Anglican Church have similarly faced church closures due to dwindling church participation (Bramadat and Seljak 2008).

4 Mainline denominations are protestant Anglo-European churches that travelled from Britain to Canada in support of the settler and colonial endeavor. Mainline church denominations include the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, the Anglican Church, and the United Church.

5 Session is the court at the level of the congregation. At TECPC, a small church by denominational standards, Session involved the teaching minister and six elected elders. The main duties of Session are to approve and supervise the programs, budgets, and operations of congregational associations.

6 Attendance of the monthly community dinners averaged over 35 people per month, surpassing the targeted number of 25.

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