

The Continuous Fabric of Change, Resistance and the Right to Remain in the DTES/*Paueru gai*: A Community Research Resource

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to Remain Community Team¹

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¹ 'Revitalizing Japantown' is a SSHRC-funded partnership development community research project in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (2012-2015), and the Right to Remain Community Fair, or 'R2R' is an arts-based and peer-led 'knowledge mobilization' project undertaken by this partnership. Please see the appendix for a complete listing of research team members.

² Please see the Appendices for a fuller explanation of the history, development and aims of the project.

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Executive Summary

This resource is the result of over three years of community research participation by past and present residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), formerly known to the Japanese Canadians who were forcibly removed from the area as "Powell Street", or *Paueru gai*. The aim of our interviews with Low-Income and former Japanese Canadian inhabitants of the neighbourhood was to bring to light the parallels between past and present stories of Human Rights abuses and struggles. In all, seven research team members spoke with 51 people (n=44 English or Chinese speaking current or recent residents; n=7 Japanese Canadian Elders) and analyzed 8 oral histories provided by Japanese Canadian Elders, and it is our considered interpretation of their interviews and histories that create what is so clearly a *continuous fabric* of stories across events, time, borders and cultures.

Our reason for doing this is to dispel the prevailing narrative of *discontinuous succession* that dominates public and governmental discussions of 'what needs doing' with this neighbourhood. In this problematic narrative, the DTES is chronicled as periodically abandoned, with each emptying of the space – or abandonment of its remaining inhabitants – justifying a new wave of development and improvement. By stripping away connections between the dramatic periods of change the area has seen, this narrative permits the 'revitalization' agenda that has fuelled today's rapid regencide of the area's Low Income, marginalized and racialized residents.

Through our work with the current Low Income community and Nikkei (Japanese Canadians) who were forced to leave by the Internment of 1942, this resource provides a more truthful and corrective story of a complex, multi-generational, and crucially, *continuous community*. This community is deeply shaped – and scarred – by Canada's colonial past and present. But it is also adapting possibilities for dignified living, for flourishing, for opposition and ultimately *remaining* in the face of racism, marginalization and exploitation. We have summed up this story as the *Right to Remain*. It has four main themes: *existential, material, cultural* and *political*. Each of these themes is made up of three to four subthemes, which are described in detail in the main resource (pp. 7-30).

Theme One: the *existential* Right to Remain - loss, violence and erasure (pp.8-14)

Low Income residents' accounts indicate disproportionate levels of physical, sexual and verbal violence in their lives, as well as their frequent degrading treatment by some police, health care, service, and housing providers. For many, this environment raises the level of fear and anxiety both in their homes and in the spaces of care where most people expect to feel safe and respected. Implicit in respondents' accounts is a link between systemic violence traumatic personal loss and historical and social erasure. This link is also implicit in Japanese Canadian Elders' accounts of the time of the Internment. They recall their wartime experience of dispossession and uprooting as one of confusion and naiveté, and of pain and shame for their parents, many of whom never discussed the racist reality of their situation with their children.

Arguably, the intergenerational silencing of this historic abuse against Japanese Canadians warns of the potential for silencing and erasing the current Low Income community from public consciousness. The multigenerational ripple effect of such trauma provides a powerful signal about the potential long-term consequences of present-day disruptions in the community. Current resident 'Richard' cautioned that a lack of awareness of people's life histories and complexity

undermined the community: “You can't deny the past, right? You know, it stays with people for a long time, so don't expect them to be perfect citizens.” For Nikkei Elder Terry Miyamoto, confronting past injustices means dealing with their lifelong impact, as she recalls “I cried when I first went back to Powell St. Brought back so many memories. So sad. Left in 24 hours; to somewhere we didn't know anything about.”

What it does: The *existential* element of the *Right to Remain* exposes the double-edged assaults that are made possible when state-authorized or condoned oppression targets the bodies, cultures and spirits of socially marginalized Canadians, and these assaults persist over multiple generations.

Theme Two: the *material* Right to Remain - housing, costs and gentrification (pp. 14-19)

A central fact of the uprooting and trauma experienced by interviewees is the repeated assault on material living conditions, and the positioning of the neighbourhood as both a useful ‘dumping ground’ for the demonized, racialized and marginalized – and a source of ready opportunities for investment by outsiders. This continuing neighbourhood commoditization amounts to the destruction of what few economic rights remain to low-income DTES residents.

The intimate association between socioeconomic precarity and housing harkens to the pre-war material conditions of the Japanese Canadian community. Recollections from Nikkei respondents reflect the economic hardships that community faced, and the discomforts and sacrifices made while living in ‘boarding house’ style homes even then. Also reflected in interview responses is an understanding of the exploitative nature of the national and even international economic structures that have shaped and threaten the DTES/*Paueru gai*, including the neighbourhood’s legacy of “rooming houses” cum SRO’s for working class and Low Income people. For many current Low Income respondents, this threat comes in the form of misplaced “revitalization”, or gentrification. In ‘Aurora’s’ view, “I really have concerns about the community, like how we all come together, and care about each other, and whether or not that will last with the push of revitalization”

What it does: These *material* dimensions of the *Right to Remain* emphasize the right of inhabitants to live – in their neighbourhood - with dignity, safety, and the same expectation of care and respect as other Canadians. Ensuring the *material Right to Remain* will require a substantial public investment in social housing that truly respects residents’ autonomy, increases in service funding, social assistance and living wage levels, and an urban development process that strongly privileges meeting social needs over profit.

Theme Three: the *cultural* Right to Remain - roots, creativity, and organizing (pp. 19-24)

In many respects ‘culture’ in the DTES, as an important touchstone for people’s identities, exists in tension between a sense of nostalgia and preservation and a more political recognition of a community’s *right to remain* irrespective of state or market forces, not the least through creating, defining and using (in this case urban) spaces. This is true of both the uprooted Nikkei community

and current Low Income residents, a complex connection well-captured by Nikkei Elder Grace in her comment on the annual Powell Street Festival at Oppenheimer Park/Powell Grounds:

We don't live there anymore but we are coming to have our festival...remembering that there are now others living there... .In essence, we are inviting ourselves annually through our history to celebrate in their community.

The DTES/*Paueru gai* has always been characterized by intricate networks of mutual support, and has existed in a complex relationship with more formal, outside or 'topdown' charity and services. The experience of survival against colonial and capitalist exploitation has created a powerful cultural of belonging and community-building, which, while always fragile and contingent, are now increasingly strained by intense economic and political pressure.

Finally, creative and artistic practice has always been vital to the work of making community, finding support and sharing mutual aid, and Indigenous culture and territorial presence has been a binding current of this work for Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents alike.

What it does: the *cultural Right to Remain* declares the right to the social, cultural, and spiritual resources that enable DTES/*Paueru gai* residents to collectively create livelihoods, spaces of care and support, and opportunities for comfort and pleasure. A meaningful *cultural* element that supports the *Right to Remain* in the DTES/*Paueru gai* will draw on unassailable Indigenous territorial rights, decades-old skills in self-organizing and mutual aid, and the active "Never Again" legacy of the Japanese Canadian Redress movement.

Theme Four: the political *Right to Remain* - belonging, boundaries and change (pp. 24-31)

The *Right to Remain* is the right by which the future – any future – of the DTES hangs in the balance amidst the converging forces of private sector-led gentrification, governmental interventions, and coalescing community activism. From our interviewees, it is clear that a community with the cultural, social and economic resources to not merely exist but also to live and grow will have to do so by pressing its right to remain within a *political* sphere, not just in the context of local planning processes, but by upscaling efforts into broader national and international movements, many of which have already been formative in DTES activism and accomplishments.

The history of the DTES/*Paueru gai* reflects the changing face of economic and racial stratification and inequality in Canada, but there are constants throughout the decades. Politics in the DTES has often been 'double-sided,' and the neighbourhood characterized by many as both repulsive and attractive, a refuge and a trap, a site of containment and a site of opportunity. This distinctiveness is a strong social and political resource for many inhabitants who are excluded from other parts of the city. As Karen says, "I think I've got the right to the neighbourhood but I'm certainly aware that I don't have the right to the city as a whole". Accompanying these dualities is the sense that the DTES is a very fluid place – *Paueru gai*, East Van, East Side or Powell Street, it's an area that both creates and is created by the larger city, region and country, and, like its future, its boundaries are always under negotiation.

What it does: the *political Right to Remain* fully recognizes the ‘double edged’ yet intimate relationship between the DTES/*Paueru gai* and the rest of the city (indeed the province and country), and the rightful role of its inhabitants and allies in its own development. It is also the right to exploit, in a self-directed way, the differences which inhabitants have both created and been branded with. Working for the *Right to Remain* requires not only working against erasure, silencing and uprooting in the DTES/*Paueru gai*, but asserting a positive alternative to the increasingly divisive, inequitable and unliveable city around it.

Conclusion

This resource reveals how the life experiences of inhabitants of the DTES/*Paueru gai* are woven together in the continuous fabric of community over many decades. In place of an imposed representation that strips away inhabitants’ agency and places the fate of successive communities in the hands of inevitable historical upheavals, we see a multi-generational community that has been produced while enduring the violence, exploitation and disrespect of the dominant economic, ethnic and cultural elements of the Canadian state.

Each of the four elements of the *Right to Remain* move beyond simply listing injustices, and provide a direct language for asserting a positive vision of dignity, agency and equality for Low Income and racialized people, both in the DTES/*Paueru gai*, and in places across Canada that are under constant pressure to change in line with market and consumer demands.

In addition, after seeing the strong connections apparent across several decades of tumultuous but continuous community, it is clear that more dialogue needs to happen between past and present residents of the DTES/*Paueru gai*, particularly between the uprooted and dispersed Nikkei diaspora and currently threatened Low Income inhabitants. Based on the importance many Nikkei Elders place on the role of youth and intergenerational learning in the life of the Nikkei diaspora, it is clear we also need to speak to the dynamic group of young Nikkei who are increasingly involved in the cultural and political life of the Nikkei community, particularly in relation to developments in the Downtown Eastside.

I Introduction

Colonized, racialized, stigmatized, gentrified – residents of the Downtown Eastside (DTES)/*Paueru gai*, both past and present, have continuously resisted Human Rights violations by rallying for social justice. These violations and struggles are not as well known as they should be, nor are the linked causes that connect them properly understood. We feel this knowledge and way of understanding can remind those who seek to revitalize the neighbourhood that the DTES is not just a space occupied by buildings, streets, and parks. The DTES is its people, and the people of the DTES do not need to be “revitalized” because they are already “vital.”

But what can be done to ensure that this knowledge and understanding of the DTES can continue to teach Canadians about our Human Rights legacy and present-day challenges, including Human Rights issues taking place around housing, health, food, and the right to the city? What can be done to ensure that the “regenocide” facing the neighbourhoods’ present inhabitants is not presented as a regrettable but exceptional incident, but instead is seen for what it is – a continuation of the threat to the continuous community of racialized, marginalized, working class people who have lived there for decades? How can we ensure that the original colonization of *K’emk’emeláy* (“place where maples grow”), as the area was known to its original Squamish inhabitants, is considered in today’s profit-driven development of what is now some of the most valuable real estate in North America?

“Revitalizing Japantown?” is a research project being undertaken by community organizations, artists and researchers between 2012 and 2015 who are working to reclaim and re-enliven the Human Rights history of the DTES to ensure that the rights of present-day inhabitants are prioritized amidst rapid social and environmental change.²

The overall aim of our interviews with Low-Income and former Japanese Canadian inhabitants of the present-day Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood, also referred to in this resource as *Paueru Gai*, was to bring to light the parallels between past and present stories of human rights abuses and struggles in the area of Vancouver. Our reason for doing this is to dispel the prevailing narrative of *discontinuous succession* that dominates public and governmental discussions of ‘what needs doing’ with this neighbourhood. In this problematic narrative, the DTES is chronicled as periodically abandoned, with each emptying of the space – or abandonment of its remaining inhabitants – justifying a new wave of development and improvement. By stripping away connections between the dramatic periods of change the area has seen, this narrative permits the ‘revitalization’ agenda that has fuelled today’s rapid regenocide of the area’s Low Income, marginalized and racialized residents.

Through our work with the current Low Income community and Nikkei (Japanese Canadians) who were forced to leave by the Internment of 1942, this resource provides a more truthful and corrective story of a complex, multi-generational, and crucially, *continuous community*. This evolving community is perhaps, painfully, necessary for the capitalist economy and is deeply shaped – and scarred – by Canada’s colonial past and present. But it is also evolving through that

² Please see the Appendices for a fuller explanation of the history, development and aims of the project.

necessity and adapting relational possibilities for dignified living, for flourishing, for opposition and ultimately *remaining* in the face of racism, marginalization and exploitation. Our definition of community in this resource borrows from the idea that community the 'continually reproduced desire to overcome the adversity of social life' (Brent 2004: 221).³

The best way to see this corrective story is to not set past and present experiences side by side like separate things found by us and then placed together for comparison. Rather, the story actually appears more clearly when we think of continuous threads that have never fully disappeared. These threads of people, places and events reveal a pattern when they are folded together. Lived experiences separated by years, language, and the silence imposed by collective and individual trauma become a stronger, more useful fabric when they touch across the folds. The pattern we see is one of colonial and capitalist exploitation, and of community resistance.

To stretch the material fabric metaphor further, the loom for this story is the physical, economic, social, and for many people spiritual, *place* of the Downtown Eastside. This means not only a unique built environment of housing, shops, libraries, employment services, and other staple neighbourhood amenities built by and for a longstanding working class enclave, particularly resource industry labourers, but also the streets, sidewalks, pavements and small but precious green spaces that are the public plaza for many DTES residents past and present, from window boxes to Crab and Oppenheimer Parks.

The folds of the continuous story of exploitation and resistance that has been woven into the DTES ultimately gives shape to a *Right to Remain* that is the hallmark of the neighbourhood. This is a right not merely to survive, but to live, create and ultimately positively influence the conditions of change that have shaped this tenuous but continuous community. We believe, and this resource reflects, that this Right to Remain needs to be pursued not just locally, but nationally and globally. For too long, the DTES/*Paueru gai* has been characterized by mainstream media, political, and research outlets as a "Our nation's slum" and "Vancouver's Gulag."⁴ By tying this place's long history of resilience and activism toward a Right to Remain denied and a Right to Remain achieved (time and again) into a singular concept and popular slogan, we seek to challenge and dismantle this reputation by representing its past and present inhabitants not on the basis of their vulnerability but as astute and determined political leaders who have created a national legacy of human rights achievement.

³ Brent, J. (2004) 'The desire for community: Illusion, confusion, paradox', *Community Development Journal* 39(3):213-23.

⁴ Globe and Mail. (2009). "Our nation's slum: time to fix it". Globe and Mail. February 14, 2009; Hopper, T. (2014) "Vancouver's 'gulag': Canada's poorest neighbourhood refuses to get better despite \$1M a day in social spending". National Post. November 14, 2014

II What is the *Right to Remain*?

This resource digs deep into participants' experiences to reveal the particular elements of the *Right to Remain*, and sheds light on how this right has been denied, fought for, and how it might be reclaimed in the face of the current program of dispossession and uprooting being imposed on its current inhabitants. Inspired by the area's long history of anti-colonial, labour and housing struggles (among others), as well as its instrumental role in prompting the wider Japanese-Canadian achievement in compelling the Federal Government to commit to "Never Again" permit the racist abuses that led to their forced removal and internment in 1942 and the subsequent dispossession of their properties and belongings, we knew Human Rights would be a powerful starting point that held meaning for multiple constituents within the community, and in many ways, figuratively constructing the community itself through ongoing relations built upon common understandings of rights.

But we also knew that Human Rights would just be another high-minded abstraction unless our work was completely rooted in people's lived experience, as shared in their own way. With this in mind, at the heart of our findings from our interviews with current Low Income and former Nikkei residents are *the four elements of the Right to Remain*, explored at length here. They are:

- i) The *Existential* Right to Remain, focusing on loss, violence and erasure
- ii) The *Material* Right to Remain, constituted by housing, food and services
- iii) The *Cultural* Right to Remain, defined by roots, organizing and belonging
- iv) The *Political* Right to Remain, enabled by space, difference and change

Each of the four elements is built from three to four subthemes that emerged from our participants' experiences, ideas, and visions for the DTES/*Paueru gai*.⁵ Each element begins with a summary and then details the subthemes before concluding with a declaration of how the element practically supports ongoing Human Rights struggles in the DTES/*Paueru gai* and other communities.

⁵ see the Appendix for more information on the research process.

Theme One

The *existential* Right to Remain: loss, violence and erasure

Low Income residents' accounts⁶ indicate disproportionate levels of physical, sexual and verbal violence in their lives, as well as their frequent degrading treatment by some police, health care, service, and housing providers. For many, this environment raises the level of fear and anxiety both in their homes and in the spaces of care where most people expect to feel safe and respected. Implicit in such narratives is a link between systemic violence and an intent to cause traumatic personal loss and historical and social erasure.

At the time of the Internment the Nikkei elders we interviewed were children, and recall their wartime experience of dispossession and uprooting as one of confusion and naiveté, and of pain and shame for their parents, many of whom never discussed the racist reality of their situation with their children. Arguably, the intergenerational silencing of this historic abuse against Japanese Canadians – in spite of the Redress movement and the many efforts in the Japanese Canadian community to engage with their history, warns of the potential for silencing and erasing the current Low Income community from public consciousness. In reading across participants' accounts it is not an overstatement to suggest that such conditions resonate with deeply traumatic memories of Japanese Canadian families both pre- and post-war. The multigenerational ripple effect of such trauma provides a powerful signal about the potential long-term consequences of present-day disruptions in the community.

Respondent's experiences were gathered into four subthemes that weave a pattern of collective trauma and an assault on life and integrity: *Powerlessness and Loss, Violence and Intimidation*, and *Erasure and Silence*, and finally, *Inequity and Rights*

1 a) Powerlessness and loss

Low Income residents in the DTES who live with few resources and options while dealing with bureaucracy and oppressive structures expressed feeling, as 'Audra' describes, "trapped in a corner like a rat".⁷ A long time DTES resident, 'Audra' links her own levels of anxiety and that of her friends with the present state of precarious housing, the threat of homelessness, and poor health:

"I don't wanna see my friends, I don't wanna see them laying on the street, in doorways, I don't wanna see them begging for change, I don't wanna see them freezing in the winter. Say oh guess what, so-and-so froze to death. I can't see that. I'm sorry, it hurts."

⁶ Everyone's words deserve to be heard and read as coming from unique individuals, with unique experiences. At times though it is important in this analysis to indicate a bit of context, and situate the speaker in a certain time and community. At these times we will often identify the speaker as Nikkei or Low Income, recognizing that these labels don't solely define that person's life.

⁷ Quotes have been edited for clarity. During the interviews, some people requested we use their real names, but many people chose to remain anonymous. These participants are identified by pseudonyms, which are indicated by 'single quote marks'.

Contrary to the common perception of a formerly prosperous *Paueru gai*, severe economic pressures also often impacted the well-being of the area's former Nikkei residents. As Kyoshi Shimizu recalls in her Oral History "My mother was a very frugal woman...She'd find ways and means of surviving...but in the process developed a lot of neuroses." Equally stressful and disempowering, many respondents reported being made to wait longer than other people, long waiting lists (particularly for BC Housing), and being ignored and disrespected by health and service providers. Marty's views sum up the experiences of many people in the DTES:

"Constantly, everything is hurry up and wait. Wait. Our time matters, yours doesn't. It doesn't matter where you go. If you go to a social service office, health office, anything, wait. Sit and wait. If you don't like it, tough." (Marty)

The impacts of intense loss and trauma as a result of violence, abuse, family difficulties, addiction and recovery were also seen to impact a lack of empathy toward the community. 'Richard' cautioned that a lack of awareness of people's life histories and complexity undermined the community: "You can't deny the past, right? You know, it stays with people for a long time, so don't expect them to be perfect citizens."

His comments reflect unrealistic expectations that are often placed on individuals within externally imposed measures to improve the neighbourhood, for example, by activating low-income residents through self-help, volunteer, and employment interventions.

For those with mental illness the consequences are further amplified when precarious housing and the imposed difficulties of everyday life exacerbate social isolation. Participants like Karen and Tom, who have benefited from stable social housing, expressed great fear and distress at the prospect of being forced to move from their current homes. In Tom's words "If my building went on the market and I had to leave, and I got gentrified out, you know, god forbid I had to end up in one of the really bad SRO's, either that or a shelter".

Nikkei respondents' recalled their childhood experiences in *Paueru gai*, regarded by many as a "ghetto", and provide an unsettling view of the effects of first ghettoization and then uprooting across generations. Internment as a life experience for many was recalled by Nikkei Elder Ichio Miki as painful for their parents, who rarely discussed the reality of their circumstances and feelings with their children:

"But to me, being quite young, I really didn't know the significance of all this commotion...but I knew the adults were feeling sort of a pain with this thing happening so quickly."

The inherent violence of rapid and unexpected dispossession has been experienced decades apart by members of both the Nikkei and the Low Income community. Here, Karen recalls the eviction experience of a friend and neighbour "who never knew what hit him":

[His] partner had suddenly died and he wasn't on the lease...he had no personal resources. So within 3 months...he was living in an SRO on Hastings and it was like he didn't know what hit him. You know, 'cause he's grieving, and he's getting kicked out of his home at the same time.

While understanding the differing circumstances, we find the visceral parallels with the experience of sudden uprooting described to us by Nikkei Elder Terry Miyamoto here:

So when the war came, it was 24 hours we had to leave. The junk man came around; gave us \$25 for the whole house. My mother almost died; sat there and cried. We only had to take one suitcase; my father had a stroke, had to carry him; kind of a caboose train; we didn't know where we were going.

A strong impression across respondents' experiences is that lives and possessions are considered disposable for those who come under the sanctioned hostility of authority. In her Oral History, Mitsuu Fugata recalls how, while her family was interned "our stored things were stolen. We asked for the stuff [but] we didn't get anything. Mr. X...was the supervisor...I think Mr. X kept it." Almost 70 years later, the dispossessions and stripping away of dignity of residents that occur in daily life in the DTES are just as traumatic for low-income inhabitants, in part because they occur so often and in an environment of chronically precarious housing. In the experience of "Stephen", illegally evicted from his SRO with only two days' notice:

I've got a lot of stuff, like my clothes...and I also got some eagle feathers and a knitted drumstick...and some other medicines that were given to me from my mother, and that was given to her from my grandmother, and then because they gave me the eviction notice so soon without the proper way of getting it, and they gave me like two days to get out of there, I had no other place to put my stuff. I had nowhere to go...so I just...said well, you [the landlords] should hold it for me, and they said okay...apparently they just throw it out, put it all in the garbage.

While the actions of the Canadian Government towards the dispossession of Japanese Canadians have since been agreed to be unjust, parallel illegal evictions in the contemporary DTES/*Paueru gai* continue to evade justice despite their clear violation of individuals' rights.

1 b) Violence and Intimidation

For low-income interviewees, violence and the threat of violence in many forms (physical, sexual, verbal, emotional) are commonplace in the DTES. Police violence was observed by many, and personally experienced by some respondents. According to Glenn, some police intentionally targeted vulnerable people: "Drunks. Drug addicts. Yeah. Elderly. Handicapped, if you got a cast on or a crutch. You're vulnerable. These guys are really [laugh]. It's like Gestapo, right". A more common observation was the subjection of Low-Income people in public spaces to harassment, questioning and ticketing for small offences. For example in Tom's experience "police...detain you on the street and search you for, actually even no reason at all. They take up your time and ask your name just because you say "I'd like to exercise my right to remain silent".

Violence and intimidation were also seen to be endemic to many people's housing experiences, not just from fellow tenants but also from the arbitrary nature of landlord's powers. Chanel stated, "They can do as they damned well please without consequence and I think that's a travesty".

Violence and intimidation by landlords can also be overt, as conveyed by Glenn, who was told by a landlord "You don't do as I say, you're either going out the door or out the window" – Glenn added "Two people went out the window in my place, into the alley". Violence is also covert, as described by 'James' and 'Iris', two Chinese seniors living in a basement on the edge of Chinatown who described threats they perceived by their landlord:

The landlord will just come down. Just takes whatever excuses to come down so there's not a lot of freedom. The lock is on the landlord's side. Most Chinese landlords, the basements are locked on the other side for the landlord, so the landlord can just come down whenever they want. So there's no regulation, so there's no human rights...often the landlord is just standing outside the door waiting for us. So it's kind of as if we're in prison.

Women experienced physical and sexual violence in many contexts, particularly in relation to sex work and when homeless. Women suffering this violence reported being ignored or brushed off by police and private security. As 'Audra' told us, "I've had women tell me that they've been in the alley, they've been raped and the police just drive by."

Violence against rights, freedom, dignity and property are well documented in daily life of the pre-war JC community as early as the infamous 1907 race riots. But more covert forms of violence were also evident in Internment, where some documentation cites direct bodily violence committed by police and camp guards. Koijiro Ebisuzaki recalls being shot at by guards at the prison camp at Angler, Ontario: "They start shooting at the people that's out of the house and...inside the house. I was going...into the kitchen. Bang bang!" hit the frying pan hanging on the wall, I was stunned "bang, bang!" When the men then refused to attend roll call the next day in protest, they were threatened with death; according to Koijiro "two days later they're gonna shoot to kill us, every one of us, so we [did] the roll call."

In a seemingly vicious circle, marginalized and racialized inhabitants of the DTES/*Paueru gai* made vulnerable by their lack of agency and frequent traumatization then become easy targets for overt violence and intimidation. In this cycle "victim blaming" becomes easy, and perpetrators of violence are frequently not held to account.

1 c) Erasure and silence

In a broad sense, a narrative of not only *uprooting and dispossession* but *erasure and silence* becomes apparent through the interviews. Both Nikkei and current Low-Income respondents spoke in terms of the DTES/*Paueru gai* area being dispersed and residents displaced:

"And then when the war broke out everybody was dispersed..." ('Sandra', Nikkei Elder)

"[the City's] intention is to dismantle our community and have people move elsewhere. Within the city or out in New West or Burnaby. Wherever, right?" ('Garret', current Low Income resident)

Reading across what our respondents had to say, physical *uprooting* is also accompanied by a deep and damaging sense of social and historical *erasure*. It is well understood by many respondents that the two processes are linked, and that with the move to disperse residents and services out of the DTES and into outlying areas, both the visibility and memory of a distinct community will be erased. In Tom's words

"That's what I feel the main consensus is with...helpers, the city, the government, and the police department. Take the low income and sweep 'em under the carpet."

'Wendel', an Elder and member of the Chinese-speaking community, also spoke to the erasure from public (and political) view that results from uprooting and dispersal, stating "the problems are gone, but not solved."

For many Nikkei respondents, the rupture of the Internment, or the near erasure from the *Paueru gai*/DTES space, was permanent. For Nikkei elder 'Bill' "the community never came back after the war. At least in my mind." For many Nikkei families, including those of Frank and 'Louise', this erasure was most evidently manifest in a profound silence toward wartime experiences. When asked about memories of discussing leaving Powell Street with his parents, Frank replied, "I don't think we really talked to our parents about things like that." This intergenerational silencing is a testament to the ways formal state repression can instill 'self-colonization', self-censorship and, at times acquiescence to injustice over long periods of time.

Indeed, the consequences have rippled for decades. Respondents like Nikkei elder Terry Miyamoto continued to deeply feel the impact of loss throughout their lives. As she recalls: "I cried when I first went back to Powell St. Brought back so many memories. So sad. Left in 24 hours; to somewhere we didn't know anything about."

A disproportionate level of visibility has always been accorded people in the DTES/*Paueru gai*, with an undue level of media attention throughout the 20th century marking the entire community for prejudicial treatment by fellow citizens, institutions, government and health systems because of their income, ethnicity, or simply their residential association with DTES.

However, in the experience of our interviewees, such discrimination can be a product of both their *invisibility* as Low Income, and *visibility* as racialized minorities. Racial discrimination can be hierarchical, with one Nikkei Elder, 'Bill' noting how, in the lead-up to the Internment, other racialized Asians took pains to dissociate themselves from the Japanese Canadian community.

The marking of DTES bodies by racial or other prejudicial attitudes has the paradoxical impact of rendering them "erasable." According to Marty, low-income DTES inhabitants are invisible to higher income newcomers to the area:

I've met some very nice people in those high-rises down here but I've also seen them come in mobs, all walking with their cellphones, they walk right through you, bump right into you.

These encounters are corroborated by 'Stephen', who recalls his recent experiences in the public space around the SRO he calls home:

"They first...bought the building downstairs below the hotel, and they...leased out the place to somebody who turned it into a five star restaurant now... And they don't wanna see people like us out there, or anywhere near that place."

1 d) *Inequity and Rights*

The experience of violence, invisibility or discrimination is both complex and viscerally felt, and those past and current residents of the DTES/*Paueru gai* at the receiving end don't often discuss those experiences in terms of 'rights'. When respondents do speak directly of their rights, it is often about their absence – an absence of rights relative to other Canadians. In addition to experiencing deprivation, insecurity, violence and emotional and psychological trauma, many respondents felt they had no rights: according to Glenn "you come into a community like this

where nobody gives a damn about you. You don't have any rights here". 'Audra' felt this was particularly the case for women: "No rights at all down here. Women have no rights at all".

It was felt by some that for both the early Japanese Canadian community and the most vulnerable current residents, rights were viewed as a sort of luxury, considering their incredibly difficult circumstances. According to Japanese Canadian Elder Grace:

I don't think the early emigrants thought about human rights, or their rights, as immigrants. They were mostly into survival. Most of the early emigrants were very poor, you know, in Japan, which was experiencing great poverty.

Similarly, Suzanne told us:

But I don't know what my rights are, what I'd like them to be, I don't know [what my rights as a tenant are], because I haven't moved in such a long time. I am trying to get a new job and work my way back into, you know, society, from addiction, alcoholism, and prostitution.

In a slightly different vein, some current Low Income residents like Suzanne and Tom felt that given the seemingly arbitrary and heavy-handed behaviour of the local police, whatever rights they have in theory are useless in reality. In Suzanne's view "...I think that if the police are allowed to do that there is no use even having rights", and in Tom's experience "our rights are abused and mine on a daily basis being harassed by police with false reasons to even detain you on the street and search you for...no reason at all." Further, many Low Income residents attributed their lack of rights directly to their relative poverty, and saw this inequity as systematic. In 'John's' experience of trying to maintain stable housing in the DTES/*Paueru gai*, he feels that "your rights are what you carry in your hip pocket. It's so true, and it's so prevalent." In 'Wendel's' analysis, basic rights are inseparable from your ability to pay in a consumer society:

Like a right to food, yes you do have the right, but in reality food is always associated with money. I don't know, if I don't have the money, how can I have my right for food?

Some respondents who may have been more active in formal campaigning spoke of formal political rights such as the right to free speech, assembly and protest. There was ambivalence about this: while many felt as a nation Canadians enjoyed among the most secure rights in the world ("Human Rights is the highest in Canada" [Chinese elder 'Margaret']), many current Low Income residents such as Glenn feel these rights as citizens are often not extended in reality to Low Income and racialized DTES residents. In Glenn's words "[I have a right] to be a citizen, not a lower class piece of trash. To be a citizen."

Rights clearly operate 'in space' as well as through notions of citizenship and belonging. Among the Low Income community the right to public space was often expressed in terms of the right to livelihood activities that many felt were unfairly oversurveilled and punished. Vending was cited by Tom as an activity where resident's rights were unjustly denied: "so what's the sense of having an actual constitutional right when the city can still put up an unconstitutional bylaw that keeps us from vending?"

In summary, the *existential* base of the *Right to Remain* brings to light the double-edged assaults that are made possible when state-authorized or condoned oppression targets the bodies, cultures and spirits of socially marginalized Canadians, and these assaults persist over multiple

generations. As an element of the *Right to Remain*, simple existence in the DTES would begin with the basic right to bodily and spiritual integrity. This right includes protection against both overt and covert forms of physical, emotional, and symbolic violence committed by state actors directly or enabled by legal and policy conditions such as social housing precariousness or misdirected laws around sex work.

Theme Two

The *material* Right to Remain: housing, costs and gentrification

A central fact of the uprooting and trauma experienced by interviewees is the repeated assault on material living conditions, and the continued and conscious positioning of the neighbourhood as alternatively a useful 'depository' for the demonized, racialized and marginalized and a source of ready capital and opportunities for investment when required.

Evident in the experiences and ideas shared by Low Income participants are the combined impacts of rising costs, the squeeze of fewer, smaller and more expensive housing options, deep cuts to services, and the social and economic displacing effects of rapid gentrification. Together, these forces of continuing neighbourhood commoditization amount to the destruction of what few economic rights remain to low-income DTES residents.

The intimate association between socioeconomic precarity and housing harkens to the pre-war material conditions of the JC community. Recollections below from Nikkei respondents reflect both the economic hardships that community faced, as well as the discomforts and sacrifices made while living in 'boarding house' style homes even then. Also reflected in interview responses is an understanding of the exploitative nature of the national and even international economic structures that have shaped and threaten the DTES/*Paueru gai*, and as well as an understanding of the neighbourhood's legacy of "rooming houses" cum SRO's for working class and Low Income people.

Participants' understandings of exploitative housing and economic experiences in the context of the DTES/*Paueru gai* were situated in both national and international historical events. Three subthemes reflect the local consequences of broader political economic dynamics: *housing stability and conditions*, *rising costs and shrinking choices*, and *experiences and understandings of gentrification*.

2 a) Housing stability and conditions:

A lack of sufficiently spacious, clean, secure and properly equipped housing is an omnipresent reality in the DTES, and interviewees spoke at length of the unhealthiness, mental stress and indignity of housing conditions in the DTES. Elder Jean Kajiwara recalls the rather cramped and uncomfortable conditions for some Nikkei families in these buildings:

"We were at the front. Our apartment...when you went in, it was very dark, I think it was a kitchen with a stove...we slept all girls together in one bedroom...didn't have an oven, just a gas stovetop"

Interviewees drew a direct connection between the present-day housing conditions and the multi-generational dynamics of the pre-ward community who originally built most of the SROs to accommodate a growing working class population. In Nikkei elder 'Sandra's words, "I think that the rooming houses were taken over by other people, they were still kept as rooming houses, SROs". Nikkei Elder Bob Nimi described the shift in the trajectory of the housing stock in the neighbourhood that resulted from the uprooting. Where boarding houses were beginning to be converted into family homes leading up to the war, they were quickly repurposed as SROs for a rentier economy:

"There's a hallway in the middle and bedrooms on both sides. I think because they were used as rooming houses before we came, there were two toilets upstairs. In front was one room with stairs which we never used."

This reversal in the housing stock meant a return to the "boarding house" conditions that now predominate in SRO life in the DTES. Of primary importance is access to appropriate and private bathroom and kitchen facilities, particularly but not exclusively for women. Chanel's experience of extremely cramped living conditions reveals they very real limits this housing stock places on inhabitants' lives:

But ... I love cooking. And I hate the fact that I...have no place to cook. They have community kitchens but ... you know, it's just, you can't turn your back on your food. And ... it's not home.

Cooking for many is a source of pleasure, a way of keeping costs down, and also maintaining personal health due to dietary requirements: Due to health problems with his digestive system, Chinese elder 'Wendel' emphasized "I have to prep my own food".

The lack of private washrooms is a second legacy of the area's housing reversal, cited as a frequent source of distress in terms of hygiene, safety and privacy. According to 'Roger', a Chinese elder who has lived in and near Chinatown for forty years, and is in the DTES daily, "those places just have common washrooms. And personal hygiene issues. There's a lot of pests and stuff that come out. And so it's not very hygienic." Glenn, a long time DTES resident, describes his SRO room as having "a floor and a sink. Yeah, there was nothing supplied. A floor and a sink... the [shared] shower, no door on the shower, no door on the bathroom."

Where the Japanese Canadian community had to some extent "built up" the housing quality of the neighbourhood, contemporary landlords have sought to maximize profits by keeping rooms in older buildings as small and partitioned as possible. "Inhumanely" small rooms, "no bigger than a shoebox", have direct health consequences. For Chanel, it means feeling depressed ("I'm so depressed when I walk into my room"), disposable, and discriminated against. Similarly, 'Audra' asks "Why do we deserve that? Why? That's inhumane to do that to anybody. To make them live in a one-room shoebox". The cramped conditions also bring physical health risks in the form of pests, particularly bedbugs but also cockroaches, mice and rats and even black widow spiders. For Marty:

"...the depression is brutal, it's terrible. You can't comfortably go to bed knowing you're going to be eaten alive by bed bugs. You walk in and despite how clean you keep your room there's cockroaches everywhere. It's demeaning. It's dehumanizing."

Residents' health in the DTES can also be affected by damp and mouldy housing. 'Iris' and 'James', an elderly Chinese couple who share a basement suite, say their concerns are routinely ignored by their landlord:

[we] live in a basement...a lot of mould inside the house...everywhere, in the washroom, living room, bedroom. There's black mould everywhere...she [the landlord] just wants us to paint it, that's it. She doesn't want to repair it.

The relationship to housing and health also works in the other direction. Interviewees like 'Wendel' who have received liveable, stable and secure housing see their housing as "the base of life", without which, according to Marty "you can't even get on your feet, to kind of get a plan." "Richard", a current DTES resident, succinctly names the three core material requirements for decent housing as "an actual bed, a shower of your own and a place where you can cook food because if you don't have a lot, you can't afford to go out and eat in expensive restaurants." Beyond the necessity of certain basic physical amenities, Karen, an eight-year DTES resident who identifies as having mental health issues, also speaks to the social, emotional and psychological benefits of secure housing:

I've actually lived in the neighbourhood for about 8 or 9 years. And I spent about half of that time being very much [a] kind of isolated, psychiatrically induced isolated person, but since I've moved into social housing, I've been very very active in artwork and art organization and neighbourhood politics and activism more directly linked with the community and outreach.

For residents like Karen, stable, secure housing was also an important element in participants' ability to participate in this research project. While extensive efforts were made to engage DTES/*Paueru gai* inhabitants experiencing a variety of housing conditions, including shelters and homelessness, there is no doubt that having a stable home made it much easier for current Low Income inhabitants to interact with us.

2 b) Rising costs and shrinking choices

Rising costs and funding cuts are not unique to the DTES, but have combined to place particularly extreme pressure on many current DTES and near by residents who are already vulnerable to such changes. Food, rent, and medication were increasingly priced out of reach, as reflected in these respective observations by 'Audra' and 'Garrett', two current or recent DTES residents on low incomes, and 'Anne', a Chinese Elder also on a low income.

'Audra' on Food: "Milk is sky-high. I mean, I coulda used that money for milk. And now, I, you know, it's just, food's not going down it's going up. My God, I remember buying a gallon of milk when I came here it was like ... almost \$3. Now it's almost 6 bucks ... in the store."

'Garrett' on Housing: "Oh, it's changing so rapidly. I mean, the rent down here is outrageous. Most people down here when they've paid their rent they've only got 10, 20 dollars left to their name."

'Anne' on Medication: "But it's the medication that's expensive. For teeth. So if you're low income then medication, those expenses are quite a lot."

This concern over prices extends to local businesses that have traditionally served the Low Income community and are now being priced out of the area. Here, current Low Income resident Chanel relates such an incident:

“A storekeeper that I was friends with, he was paying a little bit over \$2000 a month for his little corner store and suddenly he gets a notice and in three months his rent is going to \$5500. And he had to close his store, he couldn’t afford it.”

Material poverty also results in time poverty for some low income residents, even those who participate in the wage economy as they scramble to meet rising costs. ‘Florence’, a Chinese resident who has been in the DTES area for eight years, describes her experience this way:

[people say] ‘Oh, you don’t have job, you’re free. You have a lot of time’. This is wrong idea. In Chinese we have word, it’s *qiongmang*. *Qiongmang* means that you are poor that’s why you’re busy. Finally [they say] why you are poor, you are busy? [I say] you do this, do this, you do that, only \$10, \$8, \$9. If you do *one* thing you don’t feel tired, [if] each hour is \$12 to \$14. So you are not busy. You regular. But for us we will do everything to support our lives, especially when I’m getting old.

Many interviewees are keenly aware of the broader economic structures that have shaped and threaten the DTES/*Paueru gai*, and attribute these conditions to aggressive capitalism and financialization of the economy. For long-time Strathcona resident ‘Kazuo’, a Japanese Canadian Elder who moved to Vancouver from Japan in the late 1960’s, “commercialism and capitalism...are really the core of politics or social involvement today”. ‘Wendel’, an Elder living in Chinatown, felt that “everything [is] driven by capital force, so when the prices are going up and you have no choice”. Finally Chanel, a current DTES resident, Indigenous woman and worker at PACE, reflected that “there just seems to be a deep sense of community down here that’s being torn apart by high finance”.

The cost of living meant that many current residents we interviewed depended on food charity in the form of community kitchens and donated food. These residents expressed concerns about the quality and safety of charity-sourced food, as well as concern over the rapidly increasing cutbacks to food charity services and services in the DTES generally. In ‘Audra’s’ experience, “it’s just been, it’s just one thing after another that’s just closing up. Cuts to programs and services have a real and life-changing impact on DTES residents. Suzanne, a former Aboriginal DTES/*Paueru gai* resident on a low income, testified to the potential negative impacts of cuts to services for Aboriginal people, stating “I believe that if the programs don’t keep getting their funding cut, other brothers and sisters down here are going to find hope and help like I did.”

2 c) Experiences and understandings of gentrification

While linked in many respects to other subthemes, including discrimination and reduced housing options, the specific dynamics of *gentrification* are a particular touchstone for the abuse of residents’ *Right to Remain* in the DTES. In contrast to the often-stated official aims of urban renewal policies, gentrification is widely understood by Low Income residents as a destructive process. Gentrification bears its own attention because of the way it links residents’ often very

personal and humiliating encounters with new, more affluent residents and investors and their critical understandings of the broader economic forces that have led to this influx.

Gentrification is understood by many current residents in structural, 'macro' terms as, in current resident Marty's words, "a kind of oppression...where I see rights being stepped on as well". For 'Aurora' and 'Audra', both recent former residents who still goes to the DTES daily, this is a consequence of unchecked profit-driven property development abetted by the City government: "some people are really dissatisfied with what the city has done and how it kowtows to developers" ('Aurora'); "if you looked at the city map and saw the proposals that they have done, you would not believe what they're gonna do. And it's very scary" ('Audra'). Like 'Audra', many residents have an intimate knowledge of the buildings and spaces of the DTES, and are highly aware of what changes are happening. Long time DTES resident and activist Diane relates the encroachment of new, more expensive housing almost in terms of block-by-block urban warfare:

Woodwards [contentious 'mixed' housing building] - you know where Campbell [Street] is? Where the bridge is? That's already turning into another Woodward. It's going to be exactly like here, they've already started the construction. So like that's both ends. Squeeze in the middle. Now if they get that blue one [empty pit that was the Pantages Theatre building], they're coming this way, you know, we've lost.

Certain aspects of rapid private property development are particularly emblematic for residents, particularly condominiums, high rises and, in the experience of current residents Marty and Tracey, overpriced 'status' food items like "a \$38 box of donuts" and "five dollar pickles". This gentrification of the local food economy and eating places has led to intense feelings of disrespect and social isolation, inflicted, in Suzanne's view, by the anonymous intrusion of wealthy investors and consumers into the DTES landscape:

"It is packed in there [Pidgin restaurant], but the people, I think that the people that go there are pricks though, because why are they going to come there, they know they are going to come to the neighbourhood, they know what it's going to be like, but they don't gotta be mean, some of those people cannot help where they're at, maybe they'll never ever be helped."

Gentrification has also put very specific pressure on not for profit, collective, commonly held or 'free' space, especially, in local resident and artist Karen's view, for women, who reflected:

I wish there were more social spaces... I suppose that's kind of impossible now with the way that real estate and speculation and gentrification are going, but it would be cool to have...something that was run by women in the DTES. But not to my knowledge, is anything — well I guess maybe I shouldn't say that... but it's very institutional, right? Atira's a business, not a peer run agency or a peer run society...that being said...WISH is explicitly a women's organization. But it's for sex workers and it's not explicitly an 'anybody's' kind of space.

Overall, among current residents, while gentrification is understood as a mobile, opportunistic process (e.g., Expo 86 and the 2010 Olympics), it is also felt that the DTES is currently under *particularly intense gentrification* that will ultimately result in the disappearance of the neighbourhood as a multi-cultural, low-income and diverse enclave in central Vancouver. In the words of 'Aurora' and 'Stephen' respectively: "I really have concerns about the community, like

how we all come together, and care about each other, and whether or not that will last with the push of revitalization”, and “I don't see [the DTES] the way it is now, that uniqueness of it is gone.”

In summary, *the material Right to Remain* draws our attention to the built, social and economic infrastructure that has been afforded or denied to inhabitants of the DTES/*Paueru gai*. These material dimensions of the *Right to Remain* emphasize the right of inhabitants to not only exist in the neighbourhood, but to live their with dignity, in safety, and with the same expectation of care and respect as other Canadians. Ensuring the *material Right to Remain* will require a rapid and substantial public investment in independent and assisted social housing that truly respects residents' autonomy, increases in service funding, social assistance and living wage levels, and an urban development process that strongly privileges meeting social needs over profit. These practical changes must take place in a context where moralistic and individualized assertions of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' are challenged.

Theme Three

The *cultural* Right to Remain: roots, creativity, and organizing

In many respects 'culture' in the DTES, as an important touchstone for people's identities, exists in tension between a sense of nostalgia and preservation and a more political recognition of a community's right to remain within a given urban space, irrespective of state or market forces, not the least through creating, defining and using (in this case urban) spaces.

The DTES/*Paueru gai* has always been characterized by intricate networks of mutual support, and has existed in a complex relationship with more formal, outside or 'topdown' charity and services. Likewise the experience of survival against colonial and capitalist exploitation has created a powerful cultural of belonging and community-building, which, while always fragile and contingent, are now increasingly strained by intense economic and political pressure.

This theme connects experiences of making community, finding support and mutual aid, and creative practice. The linked subthemes spanning respondents' experiences in this regard are *roots and 'culture'*, *creative and sacred space*, and *support and grassroots organizing*

3 a) Roots and 'culture'

Many interviewees emphasized the importance of “roots” in their lives and community involvement. For Japanese Canadians, the Centennial marking the arrival of the first Japanese immigrant in 1877 and creation of the Powell Street Festival (PSF) were seminal events. 'Kazuo', a Nikkei Elder, emphasized the physical, experiential aspect of 'roots', citing the Sakura trees as living emblems of the historical rights exerted by the Japanese Canadian community within the neighbourhood:

“In Issei heart, mind to still there in the ground, that's a symbol as long as Sakura exist. Temple is still there, language school is still there. But they are not as visible in terms of connecting to our roots, but Sakura actually the flowers have always been in our minds as fond memories of Issei and then Powell Street Festival still happens there. So, those the trees that I like to see maintain or survive.” ('Kazuo')

Low Income residents also cited the importance of this physical connection to places of profound cultural and historical meaning to the DTES/*Paueru gai*. 'Aurora' felt recognition of this history was important, as was physically connecting to it: "But it takes a whole different meaning when I see the place where the whole [On to Ottawa]⁸ rally started... and it was like 'Oh, the people actually gathered here in Oppenheimer Park'." For 'Aurora', DTES 'roots' are inherently linked to traditions of activism and social justice:

"But they commemorate the social justice here, and that's one of the things I love about the downtown Eastside, that people stand up for the people, and stand up for issues...people have lived in this community for a long time, and they have a good memory of what's been going on."

For Chanel, the DTES is a 'special place' and beloved by many, a place where she loves "sitting at Oppenheimer Park in the afternoon, you know on a hot day, fly my kite on a windy days or whatever." Oppenheimer Park/Powell Grounds is a particularly hybrid site of cultural expression with deep roots 'in place'.

From the interviews, it is clear that a mutual understanding has existed between Japanese Canadian and Indigenous activists for decades. Early organizers of the Powell Street Festival (PSF) speak of the sense of sharing the park with the Indigenous people who frequent it, as Sandra recalls: "I think we were always respectful of them and that they were letting us use their park for two days out of the year". In speaking of the PSF presence, former DTES/*Paueru gai* resident and Nikkei Elder Grace captures nicely the complexity of who is doing the 'hosting' and who is doing the 'inviting' in Oppenheimer Park/Powell Grounds during the Festival:

"We don't live there anymore but we are coming to have our festival, to commemorate our parents and grandparents who once lived here, at the same time remembering that there are now others living there and that they must be invited to come into our community's history. In essence, we are inviting ourselves annually through our history to celebrate in their community."

Working against these community relations are cultural markers of the dispersed Nikkei community found in the DTES/*Paueru gai*'s distinct built heritage. For some current Low Income residents of the area, the "Japantown" designation and heritage generally has been a somewhat facile tool for developers, belying inattention to the living conditions of inhabitants of former Japanese Canadian buildings. Speaking of her experience living in a poorly maintained 'heritage' building, Karen commented:

I think that this idea of the Heritage building was kind of this thing that the landlord was, you know, trying to get—I mean basically they want to increase the value of the space, right? And that was their only hook, really. [laughing].

Current DTES/*Paueru gai* inhabitant 'Richard' expressed a concern that a heritage driven approach undermined not only Japanese Canadian history but also the historical rights of other DTES dwellers. He cautioned that:

⁸ The "On to Ottawa" trek emerged from street actions by the striking Relief Camp Workers Union in Vancouver in 1935. They were joined by thousands of others in a trek to Ottawa that ended in a brutal attack on the Trekkers by the RCMP in Regina. Oppenheimer Park/Powell Grounds was a major meeting place for the Trekkers in Vancouver.

The city's gotta be careful...it is such a mixed community, the Downtown Eastside is fantastic for that, you know, people come from all kinds of backgrounds, and to me that is the essence of the community, so if you want to, you know, sterilize it and say this is just gonna be Japantown, no, you know, you can't bring the past back to the present.

For many participants, whether current or former residents or their relatives, the DTES/*Paueru gai* is textured by its cultural, economic and political in inseparable ways. Attempts to memorialize (without context) or commodify places, buildings and organizations of importance in the DTES ignore their full value to residents and impinge on the cultural Right to Remain.

3 b) Creative and sacred spaces

Beyond a sense of utility or service provision, many places in the DTES are treasured as places of joy, creativity, comfort, eclecticism and solidarity. These could be current offices and social centres (e.g., PACE, Insite, Mission Possible) or outdoor spaces or zones (Oppenheimer Park, Chinatown). Japanese Canadians similarly hold several historic institutions in high regard, including the Vancouver Japanese Language School and, until 2000, the original Tonari Gumi (Nikkei seniors social and support centre) on first East Hastings and then Powell Street, a site still fondly remembered by Nikkei Elder 'Kazuo', who told us "That was when I...as a person responsible for the daily operation became so serious about moving out. Otherwise, [laughter] my heart was there, it's still there today."

Many of these spaces, for example PACE, a resource and education centre for sex workers on East Cordova Street, are valued as more than practical resources, they are cherished as spaces of care and respect. In Chanel's experience

"You know, people that have only been there once or twice come out of PACE and say, 'Wow', they've never been in a place that's so nonjudgmental and so easy...it's an amazing space and it's an important space."

For 'Florence', a DTES resident originally from China, social spaces and support centres in the DTES combine creative, educational and even political dimensions, as she shares:

And I think why...I love this here because here I join a lot of activities. We have a yearly festival and I dance, I was singer, and every year I join the Heart of City festival. And ... this is one thing. And we have [a] women's...social issues discussion group at the women's centre.

As pointed out earlier by Karen (see Theme Two), these spaces are both under threat and in demand. According to Lorna, a current resident and long time community advocate (particularly in the area of harm reduction),

we need more places to volunteer people so that once a person starts volunteering they start feeling good about themselves, you know, and this is what I can see for the EIDGE [Eastside Illicit Drinker's Group and Education], if they had a place, you know, if you give one of them work, like even at the market on Sunday there's a lot of Alcohol Drinkers, I always write "Drinker's Group Only", and then we pay for a person that stays there just to keep peace and that? And it works.

In general, DTES residents' creative talents were often strongly felt to be a valuable part of the community fabric, with First Nations art forms particularly present, according to 'Aurora', "even though we have our struggles we still have, you know, a lot of art in the neighbourhood, a lot of you know, a lot of talent, musical, artistic ... beading, drumwork, totem poles ..." For current Aboriginal resident Michael, participation in the arts also contributed to residents' social networks and sense of community. Here he highlights the relationship between Aboriginal ceremony and creative practice more generally:

I identify with mostly the Native community here. I partake in some of their Powwows, their cleansings. I'm part of that community, but also I'm part of the whole general community in the Downtown Eastside, in an art form and music form.

Karen, DTES resident and Gallery Gachet member, emphasized that creative practice does not stop at community building, but is also an important form of political action and critique in the community, or in her words, "confronting the real":

our Gallery Gachet basis of unity is that art and culture is a human right. And that in my view, everybody has a creative—not just something creative to get out of themselves, but has the right, just as I do, to engage in practices that are expressive and are, you know, a way to confront the real.

Charles, a retired logger and current DTES resident who recently discovered he has Aboriginal heritage, spoke of the new strength he has gained from participating more closely with his Aboriginal neighbours: "What I think is, you know, I heard this other side ['white' society] for a long long time, maybe I should try to go to the other [Aboriginal] – I like where I'm going to now, you know..."

For the area's many Aboriginal residents, their Aboriginal culture is simultaneously a source of deep connection to a sense of territory and self-determination, and an active way of taking (back) place in the DTES. Acts of community within the Indigenous community occur through drumming, gathering, smudging, and, in the Summer and Fall of 2014, through the erection of the longhouse and encampment during their reoccupation of Oppenheimer Park. For contemporary Low Income residents more widely, active participation in the DTES's many social and support organizations is clearly an important source of identity, fulfillment and to some degree livelihood.

3 c) Mutual aid and grassroots organizing

Residents in the DTES cherish the area's long standing vibrant legacy of organizing, from pre-war Japanese Canadian citizenship activism, to the labour movement, Japanese Canadian participation in the broader Asian rights movement, the ongoing fight for social housing, progressive inroads into supporting drug users, sex workers rights activism as well as countless efforts to protect formal and informal mutual aids, supports and resources.

For residents like 'Stephen', an Aboriginal man with addiction difficulties, it was such supports that originally drew him to the DTES, and for many people who have recently moved out of the neighbourhood it is what draws them back, often daily. As 'Nancy', a Chinese Elder says

“recently I just moved out, but I still come back here for this thing and do some studying, anything. I’m quite frequently around here”.

For Marty the network of long standing local services is “a good umbrella to get under because they have access ... they have so many programs, building, medical, dental, banks, everything, every kind of resource you can imagine.” Physical proximity to a variety of appropriate services is extremely important to many people, often due to their poor health and reduced mobility, and the feelings of security, safety and support that such proximity and accessibility provides more generally.

Chanel provides an eloquent testimony to this need:

I’m getting older, I’ve been HIV positive for over 20 years. And I have emphysema ... It’s not getting any easier for me to, you know, to ... bounce around the city...I need to be close to my resources and that was really my only option...my job, where I go to eat, to entertain, to visit.

Support was described in informal ways as well. For some it meant a sense of shared experience that meant people felt able to discuss problems and support one another more freely than in other neighbourhoods: According to ‘Aurora’, “it’s a way of surviving here and looking after each other. Because, I mean, strangers will come up to me and tell me what’s upsetting them, and then I can do the same thing”. Respondents like Suzanne, a recently former resident and sex worker, felt a sense of responsibility and leadership to their neighbours: “I realized some people don’t have anybody at all, so I had to be that somebody for them”. Peer support in terms of sobriety, stability and general well-being was seen as an important shared resource. As Michael says, “I more or less wanna help the community, you know, to stay clean, to make it a better place to live”.

This tradition of providing mutual aid amidst an outwardly hostile neighbourhood dynamic resonated with Japanese Canadian experiences. Nikkei Elder interviews and Oral Histories confirm a variety of forms of mutual aid, support and grassroots political organizing among the Nikkei community of *Paueru gai*. Elder Kyoshi Shimizu discussed how her parents were deeply committed to political ‘reform’:

there wasn't that...talk about what their life was like in Japan, it was always like, "These are the things that we need to change in our society," and they were interested in being part of a reform group in the community and so they were a part of the group that was interested in seeing the Labour Paper, The Minshu, the Daily Worker, or Daily People, that was started in the mid 20's...then they became affiliated with a reform group in the community and actually joined the Communist Party.

Such informal and formal institutions, concentrated as they are within this historically persecuted community, challenge the negative characterization of the “service dependent ghetto” often referred to in the literature and by urban policymakers. Rather, they are reflective of a normative institutionalization of community support that rises from within the community in the face of a lack of external support and investment.

For example, many people spoke to the important contributions of community advocacy and activist groups in their own lives and in the development and culture of the neighbourhood. For many current residents, organizations such as VANDU (notably the speed-limit reduction campaign), Pivot (providing legal support, and campaigning against street vending tickets),

Carnegie Community Action Project (wide-ranging advocacy, particularly in housing) and PACE (resources and advocacy for sex workers) have played important roles, and many respondents have indeed played a role (often as volunteers receiving small stipends) in these organizations.

In summary, *The Cultural Right to Remain* is the right to the social, cultural, and spiritual resources that enable DTES/*Paueru gai* residents to collectively create livelihoods, spaces of care and support, and opportunities for comfort and pleasure in the face of trauma, uprooting and marginalization. Protecting and promoting this right requires the creation and maintenance of spaces for collective and individual experiment, failure, recovery and forgiveness on the terms of inhabitants and their allies. A meaningful *cultural* element that supports the *Right to Remain* in the DTES/*Paueru gai* will draw on unassailable Indigenous territorial rights, decades-old skills in self-organizing and mutual aid, and the active “Never Again” legacy of the Japanese Canadian Redress movement.

Theme Four

The *political* Right to Remain: belonging, boundaries and change

The *Right to Remain* is the right by which the future – any future – of the DTES hangs in the balance amidst the converging forces of private sector-led gentrification, governmental interventions, and coalescing community activism. From our interviewees, it is clear that a community with the cultural, social and economic resources to not merely exist but also to live and grow will have to do so by pressing its right to remain within a *political* sphere, not just in the context of local planning processes (see Theme Two), but by upscaling efforts into broader national and international movements, many of which have already been formative in DTES activism and accomplishments (see Theme Three).

The history of the DTES/*Paueru gai* reflects the changing face of economic and racially-induced ethno-cultural stratification and inequality in Canada, but there are constants throughout the decades. Politics in the DTES has often been ‘double-sided,’ and the neighbourhood characterized by many as both repulsive and attractive, a refuge and a trap, a site of containment and a site of opportunity.

Accompanying these dualities is the sense that the DTES is itself a very fluid place – *Paueru gai*, East Van, East Side or Powell Street, is an area that both creates and is created by the larger city, region and country, and, like its future, its boundaries are always under negotiation. Several complex subthemes make up this element, including *acceptance and belonging, resilience and independence, perceptions of change, and boundaries and motion*.

4 a) *Acceptance and belonging*

Many interviewees expressed deep emotional and social attachments to the DTES. While reasons are as complex as individuals’ lives, several common threads of attachment are apparent. These include a sense of community, often grounded in a sense of shared resilience and solidarity in the face of the forces which have long both shaped and threatened the neighbourhood; a sense of non-judgemental acceptance of social marginalization, poverty, mental health issues or sexual difference; and an appreciation for the high levels of interaction and socializing available to some people.

The emblematic sense of a strong community was seen by many to be the result of collectively experienced adversity. According to Nikkei Elder Frank, “the Japanese Canadian community sort of did stick together in the earlier days. I guess we felt more comfortable that way.” ‘Garrett’, an Indigenous and current Low-Income DTES resident, reflects that, the DTES “is a real community. People know each other, I mean, we celebrate all the holidays together. You know, even though there’s so much chaos everybody knows everybody right?”

Although such adversity and chaos is acknowledged, such a sense extended to feelings of pride and personal investment in the area that appears to have persisted despite the repeated efforts to dismantle the community. Glenn told us “I love the [Carrall Street] market,⁹ I really do. This is *my* community”, and ‘Sandra’ recalls that for Japanese Canadian activists gathering in Powell Grounds in the 1970’s “It was a time to recognize that ‘yes, we as a community exist’, and let us to start working to define ourselves.”

In addition, as ‘Garrett’ again stresses here when referring to the Tent City in Oppenheimer Park in the summer of 2014, community is more about people than spaces and amenities. He cautions that the current approach is backwards, as is evident in the efforts to dismantle the tents in order to safeguard the park:

The city, it’s intention is to dismantle our community and have people move elsewhere...and if we continue to ignore it we’ll have no community and what’s the use of having a park when there’s no more community?

Many current Low Income interviewees experience the DTES as a place of acceptance and non-judgement. Marty suggests that, “no matter where you came from or what you’re like, you fit down here. Which is important.” Diane, a long time DTES resident and activist describes her experience of the openness, acceptance, civility and friendliness in contrast to other parts of Vancouver:

...my friend, he’s lived in the same apartment block in the West End, for thirty years. He knows maybe four people in his apartment block...People just don’t say hi, nothing, you know—in thirty years, he’s never met people...down here, everybody says “Hi”. And bus drivers even say, in other parts of [town], like Shaunessey [passengers] give them shit if the bus does something wrong. Down here, everybody says “thank you”...Asking for a ride but...saying “thank you”..

Similarly, several respondents indicated they often felt ‘out of place’ elsewhere: in ‘Stephen’s’ experience, “...I go down to Granville and I look around and I totally feel out of place there”. Feeling ‘out of place’ was also expressed by Nikkei Elders, albeit in varying contexts: a) in the context of being in Japan or around Japanese nationals (“I feel like a foreigner when I go there” (‘Bill’)), or even by a Japanese immigrant to Canada who had felt ‘out of place’ politically in his home country and sought new experiences in Vancouver in the 1970’s (‘Kazuo’). In all these instances, feeling ‘out of place’ might be a spatialized expression of the many reasons people are drawn, or at times pushed, to the DTES/*Paueru gai* community.

Such neighbourhood contrasts clearly influence the daily lives of many residents. But Karen describes how the negative social features of other parts of the city are encroaching on the DTES through gentrification:

⁹ This is a licensed street market initiated in 2010 by advocates in the DTES, including VANDU and others, where recycled goods are sold under the watchful eye of local market staff and volunteers.

It's very noticeable to me if I go from here and I'm meeting somebody on Main and Broadway, it's like the climate changes...you go from this engaged, one-on-one kind of existence—and it's funny because it's happening now in gentrification, right? I'm walking down the street making eye contact with...all these people, and when I'm encountering someone from the gentrified area...they're looking down at their friggin iPhone...they're not engaged with where they are.

In the simplest terms, a few long time DTES residents also expressed a general love of the neighbourhood. For Tom, "It's my 'hood, and I love it. One of the most beautiful places probably in the world." But such affection appears to be tempered by very real changes taking place in front of these residents' eyes, which is making the future very uncertain for all.

4 b) Resilience and independence

In contrast to how DTES residents see themselves, several interviewees felt that people from outside the DTES voyeuristically see the area as a freakshow or novelty; in Michael's words "they treat it as part of the tourist attraction." Residents were also keenly aware of the increasing attractiveness of the neighbourhood to others, but understood this as a threat to the community as an inclusive and tolerant space. Local resident and sex worker support person Chanel imagines newcomers' thinking "Oh, such a diverse, interesting neighbourhood, you've got it all down here'. But then as soon as they move in, they change".

Throughout the 20th century, even before WWII, residents have had to negotiate this "double edge", defending themselves against accusations of immoral or illegal 'lifestyles' while also fully exploiting dominant society's moral fears and tastes as a resource. Here, Nikkei elder Kyoshi Shimizu reflects on the alcohol and prostitution in *Paueru gai*:

... some of the drunks and prostitutes on Powell St. and there was a lot of...not hostility, but disparaging remarks about the Indian women, and occasionally you'd see some painted Japanese ladies and there might be some whispers about what she was doing with her life. It wasn't that I wasn't aware of some of the seamier side... and we heard of [the] gambling that went on there and the Judo crowd, what despicable people they were, but none of it in terms of "You have to watch out".

A contemporary reflection of this matter-of-fact approach to doing what you have to do to get by can be read across many contemporary residents' experiences with sex work, alcohol, and drugs, particularly with regards to the right to one's body and to public space. As a former sex worker and person with an alcohol dependency, Suzanne reflects on the connection: "people ask me [about] rights...and I just think, I'm not sure – if you're telling me I can't do this and it's on your property then I won't do it, but if I'm over here on public property not hurting anybody but myself, bugged off". Specifically discussing sex work, she goes on to add, "if we are going to make the decision to sell our bodies, we are making a decision."

While careful not to gloss over the very trying conditions many people have faced in the area for decades (as Chanel says, "I'm not saying it's a paradise down here because it's far from it"), many current residents like 'Stephen' expressed feelings of dignity and perseverance in the face of pain and adversity, and exercised agency over their ethical decisions and daily lives:

“I can be better if I wanted to be, but I prefer to be who I am right now, and if they don't see it that way, then you know, that's fine with me, you know, but just don't treat me any different than anybody else.”

Set against the multiple abuses, dispossessions, and indignities described by interviewees, both recent and life long residents expressed a positive vision of a preference, a *right to remain*, in the neighbourhood. In his experience, ‘Wendel’, a Chinese Elder who has only lived in the area for five years, feels “that people who stay here who would like to continue to stay here, they can find a way to still keep the connection in this neighbourhood.” Meanwhile Tom, who has lived in the East End all his life, thinks

“...it should be mine and everybody’s right to be able to remain in their place of origin. I was born and raised here and there’s no way I should be gentrified out of the community that I was born and raised in.”

When speaking of “places of origin”, it was frequently noted by Indigenous and non-Indigenous interviewees alike that the DTES is “unceded Salish land”, “Musqueam territory”, and “still Native land”. Michael, a Métis and Low Income respondent living in the neighbourhood, felt that this widespread understanding of Aboriginal sovereignty in the DTES resulted in a more open and perhaps productive defence of Aboriginal rights in the area:

“the Natives here are more or less not treated like they are in Quebec, Montreal or Toronto, or um, Winnipeg, we know. We know these things, these things aren't hidden from us. We know our rights are being trounced on.”

4 c) *Perceptions of change, decay and improvement*

Current and past residents had complex general perceptions of the changes the DTES/*Paueru gai* has undergone in recent decades. Many Nikkei elders understandably viewed the changes in the period shortly after WWII and the experience of racism driving their uprooting as a loss from which the Nikkei community would never recover. This loss is at times accompanied by sentiments that the area had “gone downhill”. In the words of Nikkei Elder ‘Louise’, “But Powell Street just seemed to go downhill. Like it wasn’t a place to go to”.

However, the generalized perception that the area was once prosperous and thriving and then rapidly became ‘derelict’ hides a more complex reality. Elder Kyoshi Shimizu’s recollections of pre-war *Paueru gai* point to an acceptance of alternative behaviour that has always characterized the community:

We lived in a part of town that wasn't all that great you know? It wasn't quite as ‘slummy’ as Powell St. later became, but it wasn't the nicest part of town and we walked through Alexander or Powell St. for Japanese school five times a week, so you know you'd see drunks weaving around, or you know, you'd see some of what it was like around that area. It never scared us.

,According to several current and recent residents like ‘Audra’, the neighbourhood is indeed “changing for the worse”, but in a very different manner. Current residents measure change in terms of rapidly shrinking affordable housing, increases in violence and dangerous hard drug use, deep cuts to services and charities and increasing public demonization and social isolation. The

perception of many Low Income people is not of a neighbourhood that has fallen from an imagined grace, but one that is becoming literally unliveable due to very real external pressures.

As 'Audra', a Low Income former resident who still comes to the DTES daily for services and friendship states: "when I go home, when I do this ride I just like, wow. I used to live down here. And it's just, I see things just falling apart". 'John', a current Low Income Aboriginal resident facing 'renoviction' at the time of his interview, expressed a similar reaction to the rapid changes going on in the DTES, telling us "I like the place, I like the neighbourhood, I'm certainly not liking things that are going on in the neighbourhood."

For Suzanne, true neighbourliness in the DTES is absent from what she sees as largely tokenistic efforts to include the community in the changes she sees taking place around her. She imagines telling newcomers, "Hey, welcome to the neighbourhood, but save some space for us too." Many Low Income residents like 'Richard' are keen to organize for positive and inclusive change in place of the profit driven and top-down development currently predominating in the DTES/*Paueru gai*. In his words, "the only thing that's constant is change, right? Things are always changing, but allow us to help ourselves change and build a community up".

While many (but not all) Nikkei respondents spoke in terms of the 'decay' of the DTES/*Paueru gai* neighbourhood, Elders did not have illusions of restoration. In Nikkei Elder Frank's words:

...the marginalized people... you know, you can't kick them out, you gotta sort of integrate with them. As far as the Japantown legacy or image, I don't know if we can do anything to revive that. You're not gonna get the stores back there. You can preserve some of the historical things, maintain some of the buildings and whatever, but eventually it's just gonna be torn down, I would think.

The perspectives of interviewees on political processes over history proves that change is inevitable. But there is also a shared hope that not all change needs to be destructive, which speaks to the catalyzing potential of the *political Right to Remain* to support community efforts to protect and preserve the neighbourhood for low-income people.

4 d) Fluid boundaries, identities and motion in the DTES

The DTES/*Paueru gai* has always been a dynamic neighbourhood in both literal and figurative senses. Yet, while the status and movement of racialized people have changed (i.e., both Japanese and Indigenous people) in line with Canada's shifting political economy and legal and constitutional development, the basic motivations that compel particular classes of workers to the neighbourhood have largely remained consistent over generations and across cultures. These include escape from destitution or trauma, seeking out and maximizing resources, pursuing employment in an often precarious and/or seasonal economy, and maintaining relationships with family, friends and loved ones.

The community of the DTES is clearly a key resource for many people, particularly those on Low Incomes, the elderly. 'Wendel', a Chinese Elder in the neighbourhood, describes the staying power of such attachments, even while personal geographies change:

Interviewer: People rely on the neighbourhood even if they live in other places?

Yeah, I have seen quite a few people, for example, one moved out and got a house in the West End, and the other one has a house in Vancouver west, but they still take a 30 minute bus back to the Carnegie.

Several others, including 'Audra', 'Aurora' and Suzanne, and Chinese Elders 'Nancy', 'Anne' and 'Margaret' have all recently moved out of the immediate DTES area, but make the trip there and back every day in order to access services, meet friends, go to work and feel immersed in an accepting, supportive and creative community.

For a variety of circumstances, for many Japanese Canadians the DTES/*Paueru gai* has been an important but often temporary place of residence. In Nikkei Elder Frank's judgement,

I think it was sort of like a stepping stone when they came back from all over, they came back to Powell Street because they remember that as being Japantown and then they stayed there for two, three years and then they bought houses in the other areas. That's what we did as well.

The labour history of the DTES was instrumental in supporting the growing community. Nikkei Elder Terry Miyamoto recalled in her Oral History how workers continued this practice of labour migration, in this case, participating in the whaling industry in order to support their families at home:

My brother went whale hunting when he was young. He didn't go to school. He went whale hunting in the Queen Charlotte Islands/Haida Gwaii. Rose Harbour. He had to support us, so that's what he was doing. So Tad was helping Dad, as the breadwinner.

This legacy of supporting resource workers has continued until the present-day and in fact has been made possible by the housing infrastructure first built by the Japanese Canadian community.. In current resident Michael's experience, "I've always used Vancouver as a crossroad for me to go to the interior, for me to go up North, for me, Vancouver has always been a stop." In our conversations with them, retired trucker 'Ron' and former logger Charles also spoke at length of how they have always come and gone to and from the DTES, before finally settling there.

For many Nikkei Elders, efforts to "contain" people or problems within prescribed boundaries of what was Powell Street/*Paueru gai* have been an imposed product of racism and marginalization throughout the area's history. When pressed, they strongly refused to romanticize the bonds of community and the marking of a 'Japanese' area as anything more than a survival tactic in response to their exclusion by 'white' society. In Bob Nimi's view, the very existence of Powell Street is owed to the exclusionary prejudices of wider Vancouver:

Powell Street happened because we had no choice. If you lived outside Powell Street, it was pretty hard to get accepted. I know some people moved to the Commercial Drive area, but they were the exception, and a few in the Marpole area. Once they were comfortable with the center, you wouldn't go out of the area because of the discrimination."

The impact this enforced concentration had on the 'health' of the community was also questioned by 'Sandra', asking "The Japanese community...[and] the Chinese community, people were forced to live there because they couldn't live anywhere else, um, is that, is that healthy? I don't know." This reading – emerging from direct lived Nikkei experience – of the spatial boundaries of Powell Street as an enforced ghettoization was further projected by some Nikkei to hold true for the

current Low Income residents of the DTES. When asked directly about the parallels, Nikkei Elder and long time rights advocate Grace had this to say:

Interviewer: A lot of people would describe the Downtown Eastside now as kind of a ghetto...Do you agree with that?

Yes, I do because the people here are imprisoned because they are not allowed to live full lives.

While it's suggested residents are "not allowed to live full lives", other interviewees added their perspective on "not allowed by whom?" Experiences such as 'Florence's' confirm other residents' experiences of being discriminated against by non-residents:

If you look for job, when people ask where do you live you will tell them Dunlevy and then you see no reply, no any reply in the future, even if you have good education, you are good people, you are new immigrant.

In spite of this history of racial ghettoization and economic stigmatization, many residents embraced the neighbourhood's identity as a "poor area" without embarrassment and even with pleasure. 'Florence' contrasted her indictment of employers with a more positive sentiment of the DTES as a home, "I feel comfortable with poor people...here, people respect me and...treat me nice...this feels like home". Some residents further asserted the *right* to be poor – and remain human, a 'citizen' and an equal. Chanel likewise depicted the DTES as "home," in ways that linked directly with her political rights:

...in a big cold world of finance, you know, where there's haves and there's the have-nots, if there's a place where the have-nots can... feel a modicum of that home... then that's important, you know. We're citizens, we have human rights. At least I thought we did.

Long time resident Tom, speaking of the area just east of the DTES, reflects on an era when social housing successes had been leveraged by the community, stating, "this was *our* area...you know, there was lots of social housing in the projects in those days". Like Chanel, he insists on using the language of rights to explain the dire situation of low-income housing, stating, "it should be our right to remain, I mean it was always a poor person's neighbourhood". This deep-seated sense of belonging, ownership and being respected in the DTES/*Paueru gai* is also clearly articulated by Karen as being more readily realized at the local level than in the wider city, "I think I've got the right to the neighbourhood but I'm certainly aware that I don't have the right to the city as a whole".

Finally, many people acknowledged that the DTES exists on unceded Coast Salish land, and highlighted how the use and valuing of special spaces in the DTES, generally thought of as particular buildings, services or demarcated zones such as Chinatown, could extend to all space and the land itself. In local resident Glenn's experience, the relationship between First Peoples and the land the DTES/*Paueru gai* occupies extends far before and beyond current settlement, but also informs current politics and the right to space in the neighbourhood. Here he describes these connections succinctly, bound together in a single event:

“There’s also a women’s march every year that happens on the 14th, Valentines Day. They block off the centre [of the intersection] and the Aboriginals do their chanting and they bless the land. ‘Cause this is Musqueam territory, right.”

He also recalled a protest he attended at a DTES building site, with a fellow DTES resident who is Ojibwe, fighting for the right to memory, culture and integrity in the face of rapid development:

[Aboriginals] want to be recognized. Do you remember a protest...when they were building and they were digging up... a burial site?...We were down there for that, from day one. They actually won, I was so happy...they got their right...the burial grounds weren’t just dug up and put in a dump trunk.

Activism for the political right to remain for Indigenous inhabitants reached heightened levels during a tent city ‘occupation’ of Oppenheimer Park/Powell Grounds in the summer of 2014. Tent city organizer ‘Garrett’ recounted to us that, “I told the rangers that this is still native land, that it’s still under treaty negotiation and until that’s settled these campers can stay as long as they wished.” Michael, a Métis DTES resident, felt that the high visibility of Aboriginal claims to territory and cultural practice in the DTES contributed to a stronger “state of his rights” than he’d experienced elsewhere in Canada as an Indigenous person: “The state of my rights? A lot better than they were back home. This is unceded Coastal Salish land.”

In summary, the *political Right to Remain* fully recognizes the ‘double edged’ yet intimate relationship between the DTES/*Paueru gai* and the rest of the city (indeed the province and country), and the rightful role of its inhabitants and allies in its own development. This *political* element is ‘radical’ in that it is the right to disobey, even offend, and at the very least reveal the hypocrisies in the way the city has developed. It is also the right to exploit, in a self-directed way, the positive and imposed differences which inhabitants have both created and been branded with. Engaging in the political work of the *Right to Remain* carries with it a responsibility to not only work against erasure, silencing and uprooting in the DTES/*Paueru gai*, but to assert a positive alternative to the increasingly divisive, inequitable and unliveable city around it.

IV Conclusion

The Right to Remain

This resource reveals how the life experiences of inhabitants of the DTES/*Paueru gai* are woven together in the continuous fabric of community. In place of a an imposed representation that strips away inhabitants’ agency and places the fate of successive communities in the hands of inevitable historical upheavals, we see a multi-generational community that has been produced while enduring the violence, exploitation and disrespect of the dominant economic, ethnic and cultural elements of the Canadian state.

Each of the four elements of the *Right to Remain* move beyond cataloguing atomized injustices by providing a direct language for asserting a positive vision of dignity, agency and equality for Low Income and racialized people, both in the DTES/*Paueru gai*, and in places across Canada that are under constant pressure to change in line with market and consumer demands. Making direct, if somewhat interpretive, links between the experiences of uprooting and dispossession faced by Aboriginal, Nikkei and other racialized Low Income people in the

neighbourhood can move us beyond moralistic debates about ‘deserving’, or decidedly flawed assumptions about the benefits of markets and economic progress.

To summarize the interconnected elements of the *Right to Remain*:

- The *existential* base of the *Right to Remain* brings to light the double-edged assaults that are made possible when state-authorized or condoned oppression targets the bodies, cultures and spirits of socially marginalized Canadians, and these assaults persist over multiple generations. As an element of the *Right to Remain*, simple existence in the DTES would begin with the basic right to bodily and spiritual integrity. This right includes protection against both overt and covert forms of physical, emotional, and symbolic violence committed by state actors directly or enabled by legal and policy conditions such as social housing precariousness or misdirected laws around sex work.
- The *material Right to Remain* draws our attention to the built, social and economic infrastructure that has been afforded or denied to inhabitants of the DTES/*Paueru gai*. These material dimensions of the *Right to Remain* emphasize the right of inhabitants to not only exist in the neighbourhood, but to live their with dignity, in safety, and with the same expectation of care and respect as other Canadians. Ensuring the *material Right to Remain* will require a rapid and substantial public investment in independent and assisted social housing that truly respects residents’ autonomy, increases in service funding, social assistance and living wage levels, and an urban development process that strongly privileges meeting social needs over profit. These practical changes must take place in a context where moralistic and individualized assertions of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ are challenged.
- The *cultural Right to Remain* is the right to the social, cultural, and spiritual resources that enable DTES/*Paueru gai* residents to collectively create livelihoods, spaces of care and support, and opportunities for comfort and pleasure in the face of trauma, uprooting and marginalization. Protecting and promoting this right requires the creation and maintenance of spaces for collective and individual experiment, failure, recovery and forgiveness on the terms of inhabitants and their allies. A meaningful *cultural* element that supports the *Right to Remain* in the DTES/*Paueru gai* will draw on unassailable Indigenous territorial rights, decades-old skills in self-organizing and mutual aid, and the active “Never Again” legacy of the Japanese Canadian Redress movement.
- The *political Right to Remain* fully recognizes the ‘double edged’ yet intimate relationship between the DTES/*Paueru gai* and the rest of the city (indeed the province and country), and the rightful role of its inhabitants and allies in its own development. This *political* element is ‘radical’ in that it is the right to disobey, even offend, and at the very least reveal the hypocrisies in the way the city has developed. It is also the right to exploit, in a self-directed way, the positive and imposed differences which inhabitants have both created and been branded with. Engaging in the political work of the *Right to Remain* carries with it a responsibility to not only work against erasure, silencing and uprooting in the

DTES/*Paueru gai*, but to assert a positive alternative to the increasingly divisive, inequitable and unliveable city around it.

Continuous community, different voices

Through hearing people's experiences of life in *Paueru gai* and other Lower Mainland communities important to Nikkei (e.g., Steveston, B.C.) before and after the Second World War, we have been able to see clear parallels between the ways both Nikkei and contemporary DTES residents have been racialized and exploited in violation of their *Right to Remain* in their communities. We have intentionally not separated our interviews with current (largely Low Income, often Aboriginal) residents, Chinese and Nikkei Elders, but analyzed them using the same methods and criteria.

But while they both clearly are part of the continuous fabric of community and human rights struggles in the DTES/*Paueru gai*, the distinct stories of the Nikkei and contemporary DTES communities cannot be assembled in the same way. Firstly, the Nikkei elders we interviewed in 2013 were recalling events from the 1940's and 50's, when many of them were as young as five years old. Rather than recalling the violence and fear suffered by the Nikkei community at the hands of the Internment and other racist measures, these participants mainly recalled the attempts of their parents to protect them from the worst impacts. In the words of Jim and 'Louise', two Nikkei elders interviewed in conversation with their peers,

Jim: I don't think they ever mentioned that they had to move out of Vancouver because of the war. I don't know why, you know dad and them lost their house and car and everything ... I thought we were just moving off of the interior.

Interviewer: They tried to keep the facts from you?

'Louise': They just never talked about it and nobody asked.

These silences, while in some ways an emotional protection against violence, are an effect of dispossession and uprooting. The loss or trauma recalled as a distant, blurry sort of pain from decades ago may be part of ongoing events of dispossession and uprooting that perpetuate violence and palpable suffering in the here and now. And what was a rather ambiguous experience for many Nikkei children was felt directly and painfully by their parents' generation, people who are now no longer with us, as recalled in the this Oral History with a Nikkei Elder: "But to me, being quite young, I really didn't know the significance of all this commotion...but I knew the adults were feeling sort of a pain with this thing happening so quickly". And as you will have seen in the four elements of the *Right to Remain*, Nikkei respondents highlighted many ways in which the dispossession and displacement of their community has created long-term social, emotional and economic losses, which were only beginning to be recognized within the community decades after the last restrictions were lifted from Nikkei.

In reviewing our work with Nikkei elders and seeing the strong connections apparent across several decades of tumultuous but continuous community, it is clear that more frank dialogue needs to happen between past and present residents of the DTES/*Paueru gai*, particularly between the uprooted and dispersed Nikkei diaspora and the current threatened Low Income community. Based on the importance many Nikkei Elders place on the role of youth and intergenerational learning in the life of the Nikkei diaspora, it is clear we also need to speak to the

dynamic group of young Nikkei who are increasingly involved in the cultural and political life of the Nikkei community, particularly in relation to developments in the Downtown Eastside. In addition, we look forward to increasing our collaborative efforts with the NNM-CC and others as we look to archival materials to augment these interview findings.

V Appendices

i) “Revitalizing Japantown?” background and research team

Background

“Revitalizing Japantown?: a unifying exploration of Human Rights, Branding and Place in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside” is a research project conducted by community organizations, artists and researchers between 2012 and 2015, all working to reclaim and re-enliven the Human Rights history of the DTES to ensure that the rights of present-day inhabitants are prioritized amidst rapid social and environmental change. The idea for this project stemmed from a previous study that was headed by Jeff Masuda in 2007 and involved a number of DTES residents. The Strengthening Urban Community Capacity to promote Environmental health Equity through Dialogue-centered research (SUCCEED) project worked with DTES residents to see what their views were on the urban environmental justice and health of their neighbourhood.¹⁰ Community members and academics worked together to see how social determinants of health – conditions that people are born or grow into that are often shaped by the distribution of power, wealth and resources – were played out in different community environments. Community researchers took part in dialogues that looked at these inequities and the way they appear within their community. People who are planning these neighbourhoods rarely inquire about what inner city residents see as suitable solutions to address social inequities.

Residents who were researchers in the project recognized how people from outside of the neighbourhood tended to see the city through privileged eyes resulting in neighbourhoods being built around a culture of individual consumerism. DTES residents who took part in the SUCCEED program felt that this culture of individualism was not consistent with the priorities of the people who actually lived in the DTES.

Over the four years that the SUCCEED project took place, the sentiments of an old Japantown were being increasingly used to celebrate the neighbourhood’s history. Japantown, or Nihonmachi, was the term used to describe the neighbourhood before the Japanese Canadians were forcibly removed from the neighbourhood (and the whole west coast) during World War II. While this history, including that of the internment, has been acknowledged in present-day accounts of Japantown, this history seemed to be “stuck” in the past, with very little regard for its relevance to present-day issues. Following conversations with residents, planners and community organizations, parallels between the way that the Japanese Canadian community was treated, and the way the neighbourhood’s residents are being treated were drawn. The same sorts of Human Rights violations from the past – stemming from racism, ignorance and profit motivations – created a neighbourhood that was transient, tenuous, and ghettoized. The removal of the Japanese Canadians paved the way for the creation of a neighbourhood. How this was done, and the violations of human rights involved in the process, is being repeated but under a different name.

Led by Jeff Masuda and fellow project investigators Audrey Kobayashi, Sonia Bookman, Joyce Rock and Beth Carter (see below), a successful SSHRC Partnership Development Grant brought together six advocacy and cultural organization partners from the Downtown Eastside and the local Japanese Canadian community. The ranks have since swelled to eight partner organizations. The project has been divided into three phases. The first phase focused on

¹⁰ To read more about SUCCEED, go to <http://www.cehe.ca/sites/default/files/SUCCEED%20FINAL%20REPORT.10Mar2011.pdf>

deepening partnership relationships while conducting archival work on Human Rights in The DTES; the second was a phase of extensive interviews with past and present residents of the DTES/*Paueru gai*, which the *Continuous Fabric* resource draws on; finally, the *Right to Remain Community Fair*, or 'R2R', is a year long series of arts-based participatory workshops and other activities that featured project exhibits on the theme of Human Rights and the Right to Remain in the DTES/*Paueru gai* at Gallery Gachet (March-April 2015) and the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre (October 2015 – January 2016).

Research team

Jeffrey Masuda, PhD (principal investigator), is Associate Professor in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies and Department of Geography at Queen's University, and the founding Director of the **Centre for Environmental Health Equity** (CEHE). Jeff is a human geographer trained in the sub-discipline of health geography and his research and teaching foci encompass environmental justice, urban health equity, community-based participatory research, human rights, knowledge translation, homelessness and housing, and Indigenous environmental health.

Sonia Bookman, PhD (Co-principal investigator), is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. Her research interests include urban space, culture, and sociality; branding and social life; media; consumer culture.

Audrey Kobayashi, PhD (Co-principal investigator), is Professor of Geography in the Department of Geography at Queen's University. Her research interests revolve around the question of how processes of human differentiation - race, class, gender, ability, national identity - emerge in a range of landscapes that include homes, streets and workplaces.

Joyce Rock (Co-principal investigator) is currently Executive Director of Stella, a resource and support centre for sex workers in Montréal. Previously she was Executive Director of the Vancouver Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House and a twelve-year resident of the neighbourhood.

Beth Carter (Co-principal investigator) was Director and Curator at the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre (NNM-CC) from 2009 to 2015. She is currently Curator at the Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art in Vancouver.

Aaron Franks, PhD (Project Coordinator and Data Analyst), is a postdoctoral research fellow at Queen's University. His research interests encompass social-ecological relationships, performance and art and considerations of human and more-than-human justice. He is currently in Cultural Studies at Queen's and is an associate member of CEHE.

Trevor Wideman, MA Candidate (Research Associate, CEHE), is a Master's student at Queen's University who has lived and worked in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside since 2013. His research interests include the politics of place-naming and the right to the city. He will be beginning his PhD at Simon Fraser University in Fall 2015.

Greg Masuda (independent documentary filmmaker) has been filming and advocating in the DTES since 2007. As a tandem project with "Revitalizing Japantown?" and the R2R arts-phase, he

is filming *The Right to Remain*, a cinema verité view of the ties between the DTES Low Income Community, their activist advocates, the Japanese Canadian community and the history, economics, and planning politics of the City of Vancouver. It is scheduled for release in Autumn 2015.

Jenna Drabble, MA (Research Associate, CEHE), has done research and written about the right to food in the city, most notably the Downtown Eastside, where she lived and worked from 2013-2014. She is currently works as Community Connector and Neighbourhood Resource Centre Manager for the West End Commons in Winnipeg.

Scott McCulloch, MA, worked with the “Revitalizing Japantown?” project as a graduate student under the supervision of Dr. Sonia Bookman. In his fieldwork he looked at how cultural events like the Powell Street Festival contribute to the identity and rebranding of neighbourhoods and urban environments.

ii) Interview and Analysis Process

a) Participants

Since June 2013 we have had **51** people generously speak with us in ‘semi-structured’ interviews (see Table 1).¹¹ These interviews took place right up until August 2014. Most have been one on one conversations, though there have been a few interviews with small groups. ‘Semi-structured’ means that the interviewer starts with a loose set of questions intended to guide the conversation, but inside that rough guide the interviews happen quite freely.

We connected with our participants through a variety of ways. Our Partners introduced us to their members and people they work with in the community, as well as Greg Masuda, who has developed relationships with people and organizations in the DTES through his advocacy and filming the documentary “The Right to Remain”. Word of mouth is always important, as is the incredible network of ‘non-partner’ DTES organizations we are increasingly working with, including WAHRS, VANDU, Pivot, Aboriginal Front Door, AHA Media and Mission Possible among others.

We began by asking the interview participant to tell us about themselves, however they wanted to do that (“What do you think is important for us to know about you, in your own words...”). We’d then talk about people’s lives in the neighbourhood, and gradually connect their life experience to their experience of their human rights in the DTES – the right to safety, food, housing, respect, public space, movement and gathering, their rights to health and equal treatment and freedom from violence and racism, sexism, homophobia and discrimination based on age and ability.

Low-Income community participants

Of these 51 interview participants, **34** were current or very recent residents of the DTES, people on low incomes. In addition, with the help of advocates and an interpreter in the Chinese DTES community, we were able to speak to **10** low-income Chinese Elders who spoke little English. Because the interviews were semi-structured and did not directly ask people for specific details, we did not collect the same demographic (i.e., age, ethnic background, gender, orientation, income, etc.) information for all of our participants.

¹¹ While 51 participants were interviewed, only 48 participants appear in Table 1. This is because one interviewee did not provide full and informed consent, and two other persons’ interviews unfortunately suffered from very poor audio quality.

Name	Age Bracket	Tenure in DTES in years	Livelihood	Indigenous	Nikkei	Chinese/Chinese Canadian
Suzanne	40-45	17	volunteer	y		
Karen	35-40	9	artist			
Grace	70+	childhood	retired		y	
Charles	65-70	7	retired logger	y		
Lorna	55-60	25	volunteer	y		
Carol	35-40	7	volunteer	y		
Tom	55-60	50	volunteer, recycler			
Tracey	40-45	15	volunteer, vendor	y		
"Ron"	65-70	21	retired trucker			
Diane	60-65	45	community advocate			
Dave	45-50	28	community advocate			
"Sandra"	55-60				y	
"Vanessa"	60-65	25				
"Lana"	30-35	10				
"Dan"	unknown	Non-resident	Social housing			
Glenn	60-65	24	volunteer			
"Foster"	40-45	7				
Marty	40-45	5				
Michael	55-60	35	artist	y		
"Audra"	60-65	12	volunteer	y		
"John"	55-60		theatre	y		
"Kazuo"	70+	n/a	retired musician		y	
"James"		15				y
"Iris"		15				y
"Nancy"	60-65	10				y
"Wendel"	40-45	4				y
"Margaret"						y
"Elizabeth"						y
"Anne"						y
"Roger"						y
"Rose"						y

"Jeanne"	70+	40				y
"Jay"	50-55			y		y
Dean	55-60					
"Richard"	60-65	13	artist			
"Florence"	45-50	9	cleaner, volunteer			y
Eric		10		y		
Chanel	45-50	10	support worker	y		
"Bill"	70+	childhood	retired		y	
Jim	70+	childhood	retired		y	
"Louise"	70+	childhood	retired		y	
Frank	70+	childhood	retired		y	
"Janelle"	45-50	6				
"Jessica"		15				
"Stephen"	35-40	15		y		
"Garrett"	50-55	23	activist	y		
"Aurora"	35-40	10				
"Gordon"	65-70	10	retired			

Table 1. Demographic Overview of Interviewees: DTES/*Paueru gai* current and past residents and people connected to the neighbourhood¹²

Because not everyone describes his or her ethnicity, gender, etc., in the same way, we cannot use this information in a demographic way. However, in addition to the information in Table 1, as an overview we can also say that:

- almost all people self-reported difficulties with their health - physical, mental and emotional and often all three
- many people self-reported past and/or present struggles with alcohol and other drugs
- the average age of our participants in the Low-Income community (not including Chinese Elders) was about 48-55 years
- while two or three people said they had lived in the area all of their lives, most people have left and come back to the area at least a couple of times, sometimes over many years.

Nikkei (Japanese Canadians) with attachments to Powell Street (*Paueru gai*)

A vital element of our story of Human Rights, identity and the neighbourhood is the experience of the area's former Nikkei residents and their families. In the decades before the racist displacement and dispossession of their community by their Internment in 1942, the area around Powell Street

¹² The information in this table is not exact. It is not suitable for statistical purposes, but can give the reader a general overview of the age, gender, and 'ethnic' mix of our interview participants. While people of many 'ethnic' and cultural backgrounds participated, we have drawn attention to three of what are often considered the DTES/*Paueru gai*'s Five Founding Communities, the Indigenous, Nikkei, Chinese, African-Canadian, and Low Income Communities.

was known as ‘Japantown’, *Nihonmachi*, or *Paueru gai* to the more than 8000 former Nikkei residents of the area.

First, we’ve spoken to 7 Nikkei Elders, who have lived in or have been connected to *Paueru gai*. Like our interview participants from the current Low-Income DTES community, the Nikkei we interviewed ranged from well-known organizers and activists to ‘ordinary’ residents with equally important stories to tell. We then included the Oral Life Histories of 8 Nikkei Elders, which were recorded by staff at the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre (NNM-CC) several years ago and recently transcribed by our research team. These interviews focused not on Human Rights per se, but on participants’ general biographies, including their lives in *Paueru gai*, Internment and after the war.

b) Coding

Interviewing, transcribing and then using the information for research is a long and complex process. Before the information on people’s experiences of rights and the Right to Remain in the DTES/*Paureu gai* can be used, people’s identities have to be removed from the material. Then it can be analyzed as a collection of information that can reveal patterns, trends or interesting differences in experiences and ideas. This process, in this case aided with a computer program, is called *coding*. When coding we closely read through the interviews without specific themes in mind, and then built the themes as we sensed them appear consistently through the material.

Coding the words of 51 participants (including interviews and oral histories) resulted in over 1200 Free Codes. From there, these short phrases or statements were gathered together through several stages, each stage synthesizing information into a tighter focus on Human Rights, identity and place in the DTES/*Paueru gai*, until we arrived at the four elements of the *Right to Remain*. Arriving at a manageable number of themes is a difficult task, given the variety of sources and the richness of material people shared with us. There are many borderline judgment calls as to what gets tethered with what, and these thematic groupings should be read as interpretive guidance rather than categorical truths. What you have read here is just such an interpretation, of the scores of stories that together reach back generations through the spaces of the DTES/*Paueru gai*, and are as yet unfinished.