

BANKING IN WINNIPEG'S ABORIGINAL AND IMPOVERISHED NEIGHBOURHOOD

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Abstract / Résumé

Fringe financial services, a term that qualifies non-mainstream financial institutions such as pawnshops are becoming more and more visible in lower socio-economic urban areas. Drawn from a study conducted in the North End of Winnipeg, an economically disadvantaged district home of a large Aboriginal community, this paper discusses clients' experiences with using fringe banking services. Most of our findings confirm what previous surveys conducted in large North American cities have already identified as main factors in the use of these services. However, our findings indicated that "discrimination" and "forced marginalization" played a more central role than we had hypothesized.

Les « services financiers marginaux », une expression qui qualifie les entreprises offrant des prêts à taux usurier (prêteurs sur gages et autres) se multiplient dans les quartiers socioéconomiquement défavorisés. Tiré d'une étude menée auprès de la population du quartier North End de Winnipeg – foyer d'une importante communauté autochtone –, cet article présente les expériences des utilisateurs de ces commerces. Nos résultats indiquent que les raisons qui poussent les résidents de ce quartier à utiliser ces services sont similaires à celles identifiées par les autres recherches. Cependant, il apparaît que la discrimination et la marginalisation forcée jouent un rôle plus important qu'anticipé.

Introduction

In neighbourhoods experiencing deprivation, the closure of many mainstream banks and credit unions¹ has added to the difficulty for many residents to access mainstream banking services. In particular, the physical inaccessibility of bank locations compounds the difficulty that low income and loss of income creates for obtaining a bank account. A study undertaken in Canada in 2000 documents that between 650,000 and 900,000 adults do not have a bank account, and that 8% of households with incomes less than \$25,000 do not have a bank account (Ramsay 2000: 2). In lieu of mainstream banking facilities, there has been an emergence within impoverished neighbourhoods of an alternative banking system referred to as “fringe banking.” Encompassed by this system are businesses that offer high interest financial services such as cheque-cashing, loans, money orders, and rent-to-own agreements usually at a much higher cost than mainstream banks (Caskey 1994: 68-73). Few studies have been undertaken in Canada on the rise of fringe financial services, and even fewer focus on the experiences of the fringe banking users. To our knowledge, their perceptions of these services have not been previously studied on a systematic basis. It is the goal of this article to shed light on the fringe banking clients.

In terms of explaining the growth of fringe banking, various factors have been identified in US and Canadian studies, including the changing financial sector that is itself related to broad processes such as financial sector liberalization and technological change (Caskey 1994 and Dymski 2003). Also, the desire of major banks to secure their leading position has pushed the banks to look for more and more groundbreaking profits. Chartered banks, to achieve these enormous operating profits that they strive for have developed several strategies allowing them to cut expenses. One of them is to leave lower-income markets. In the meantime, stagnant incomes at low-income levels, growing debt ratios, declining state interventions, and feminization of poverty have increased the number of potential consumers that live on the fringe of the mainstream economy unable to maintain a bank account, or to cover monthly expenses without resorting to extreme measures such as food banks or high cost loans. These consumers constitute a market that is now captured by the fringe banking industry. It is then arguable that the rise of fringe banks is part of a broader economic process responsible of the recent widening of the economic gap between the poorest members of society and the other socio-economic groups. This social segmentation is associated with segmentation in the financial services sector (Dymski 2003).

In Winnipeg, a noticeable decrease in mainstream banks and an in-

crease in fringe banking facilities in a central impoverished neighbourhood: the *Winnipeg's North End* was a motivating factor behind developing our research. The Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation funded this research, conducted from September 2002 through August 2003, with support from a grant through the Winnipeg Inner-City Research Alliance (WIRA). Overall, this research had three main objectives:

1. to understand the motives and experiences of fringe bank clients;
2. to determine if fringe bankers overcharge their clients; and
3. to develop a model, and complete a pre-feasibility assessment of a consumer financial services outlet that could offer an alternative to existing fringe banks.

A research report resulting from this survey is available online (Buckland, Martin *et al.* 2003). This report presents the raw results of the research and offers a pre-feasibility assessment of a consumer financial services outlet that could contribute to fill the gap created by the departure of mainstream banking institutions. Two articles, offering more substantial discussion, were drawn from this report. First, this article, which discusses the motives and experiences of fringe bank users, and a second article (Buckland and Martin 2005) that focuses on the cost (for customers) of fringe banking and economic processes at the origin of the growth of the fringe bank industry. Although the two articles have a lot in common, each of them focuses on one specific aspect.

Fringe Banking in Perspective

It is estimated that in 1988, US pawnshop credit reached \$689 million, less than one percent of total US consumer credit, but since that time the number of pawnshops has doubled (Caskey 1991: 85). The number of cheque-cashing outlets in the US grew from approximately 2,000 in 1986 to 5,500 in 1997 reaching 11,000 in 2002 (Squires and O'Connor 2001: 142). The number of payday loan firms in the US in 2001 was estimated at 8,000-10,000 (Lott and Grant 2002: 12). In his examination of fringe banking in the US, Caskey (1994: 84) argues that a chief reason for their rise is the increase in the number of households without a bank account, rising from 9.5% of the population in 1977 to 13.5% in 1989. Caskey argues that this is especially due to changing bank regulations that have led to the introduction of bank fees and the closure of bank branches in low-income neighbourhoods. As a result, small income clients have faced pressures that make holding a bank account less possible. Caskey points out that several factors, including the stagnant or declining real incomes of low-income people and the increase in the number of people falling below the poverty line, are phenomena that

correlate when the increase in the number of people without a bank account. In contrast, studies confirm that fringe financial services are relatively expensive. Annualized interest rates of 100-500% are common while one estimate found that payday loans' annualized interest rates amounted to 3,000% (Lewison 1999: 3).

Research in Canada has demonstrated similar patterns. A survey undertaken by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) in 2002 estimated that almost 200,000 Canadians had used a pawnshop service, and between 1 and 1.4 million Canadians used some type of fringe banking services in the last three years. The PIAC study estimated that approximately 550,000 Canadians had used a cheque-cashing or payday loan services in the last three years. Ramsay (2000), found that 8 percent of the Canadian population (approximately 2.4 million) had used, during the year 1998, a cheque-cashing firm's service. Ramsay identifies similar factors for the rise of fringe banking that has been documented in the US.

In Winnipeg, fringe financial services have been increasing in number generally, and in the North End of Winnipeg, particularly. The number of licensed pawnshops in Winnipeg has been steady over the past 15 years at around thirty. It has held at approximately that level from 1989 until 2002. Today there are thirty-two pawnshops licensed by the city, primarily scattered throughout Winnipeg's inner-city. However, the number of pawnshops in the North End grew from five in 1987 to nine at the time of the study. Annualized interest rates charged by the various fringe banking institutions we have surveyed vary from 300 percent to 1,000 percent (see for more details Buckland and Martin *et al.* 2003 and forthcoming). Needless to say these businesses breach section 347 of the Canadian Criminal Code, which specifies that interest rates in excess of 60 percent per annum are illegal. We will see later the sociological signification of that situation.

Winnipeg's North End: A Marginalized Neighbourhood Called Home by an Aboriginal Community

Our research was conducted in the Southern part of the North End² of Winnipeg. This neighbourhood is located in the northern part of Winnipeg's inner city; it represents a statistically disadvantaged segment of Winnipeg's population. Indicators ranging from low-income and under-employment to dependence on social assistance indicate that North End residents have a lower socio-economic status in comparison to the rest of Winnipeg. This low socio-economic status is in part correlated with the income disparity that exists between the North End and the rest of Winnipeg: the North End has a considerably lower average income

than Winnipeg as a whole. Average household income in the North End is of \$22,320 opposed to \$44,937 for Winnipeg. In Lord Selkirk Park, one of the census tracts of the North End, the average household income is as low as \$16,513. The North End has also a higher level of unemployment (23 percent, in comparison Winnipeg has a 8.2 percent unemployment rate) (Lord Selkirk Park has an unemployment rate of 33.3 percent). Higher level of government transfer payments is also prevalent (43.1 percent of North End population receives government transfer payment).³

The impoverishment of the neighbourhood is correlated with declining population, high percentage of children and seniors, prevalence of single income families, high number of children per family, and minimum levels of formal education. The heightened usage of public transportation in the North End is reflective of the lower socio-economic status of the area. As a result, potential declining state services and transfer payment as well as market deregulation are likely contributing factors, or factors favouring the social breakdown of this fragile neighbourhood.

Winnipeg's North End has traditionally attracted new immigrants especially Polish and Ukrainian who developed, there, several community-based institutions and businesses. During the major part of the last century these two groups constituted, in terms of numbers, the two largest communities of the neighbourhood. Like in many other Canadian cities the number of Aboriginal residents in Winnipeg was very low until the mid 1970s. In 1951, only 210 Aboriginal peoples were living in Winnipeg and they were still no more that 1082 ten years later in 1961 (Peters and Starchenko 2005). According to Newhouse and Peters (2003: 6) "...there are numerous example to suggest the general absence of Aboriginal in cities before the mid-1900s resulted at least in part from policies that actively displaced them from urban areas." When Aboriginal peoples began to migrate, in the late 1970s, towards urban centres the ethnic composition of Winnipeg's North End changed rapidly. A recent survey (Carter *et al.* 2003) indicates that the inner city is becoming the Aboriginal quarter of Winnipeg. Estimation from the city of Winnipeg indicates that 2,000 Aboriginal peoples move every year to the provincial capital. Based on that steady flow of Aboriginal peoples coupled with a high rate of birth, the City of Winnipeg estimates that by 2020 the Aboriginal population of the city is likely to reach 100,000 (City of Winnipeg 2003).

According to Distasio *et al.* 2004, 85% of Aboriginal peoples who move in Winnipeg will settle in the Inner city, especially in the Winnipeg's North End as they find there the lowest rent, as well as because they tend to first establish with a relative. As a result, Métis and First

Nations, constitute the largest ethnic group of Winnipeg's North End. They represented 31.1 % of the total population of that neighbourhood in 1996 and 34 % in 2001. They even constitute (in 2001) 54.9% of the total population in one of the census tract of the inner city (Lord Selkirk Park). Hence Aboriginal people of that tract represents only 2% of the total population of Aboriginal peoples living in Winnipeg but the urban segregation of Aboriginal peoples in Winnipeg is high enough—in ten census tracts Aboriginal peoples made up to 30 percent or more of the total population and 17 percent of the total Aboriginal population of Winnipeg lived in census tracts where they made up 30 percent or more of the tract population (Peters and Starchenko 2005)—for Carter to wonder if that group is not in the process of ghettoizing (Carter *et al.* 2003). Nevertheless, according to their conclusion Winnipeg's inner city does not constitute an Aboriginal ghetto because to be defined as a ghetto a district has to meet two characteristics. Its population must be drawn, in majority, from one ethnic group, and most members of that ethnic group must be living in that district (Peach 1996). This second characteristic is important since the process of ghettoizing refers to the exclusion (voluntary or forced) of one ethnic group. Winnipeg's North End is lacking this second characteristic since several hundreds of Aboriginal peoples, especially those belonging to the new Aboriginal middle class as defined by Wotherspoon (2003), do not live in that neighbourhood but elsewhere within the city limits.

Urban segregation of Aboriginals is not very much studied but those who looked at it, like Maxim, Keane and White (2003) noted that some structural conditions favour urban segregation while others contribute to the dispersion of Aboriginal peoples within cities. In general, most of the witnesses of Aboriginal urban migration, including politicians and scholars, do not fear that similarly to the urbanization of African Americans in the US, Aboriginal migration will lead to the emerging of urban ghettos. Their main argument is that levels of urban concentration of Aboriginal peoples cannot compare to the ones of African American peoples in the US. There is no room, here, to discuss that position but it reminds us the argument made in France about les "cités" (the impoverished suburbs where a large population of Arabs and Muslims live) In fact, when, in the early 1990s, Alain Touraine contended—both in the media and in his work—that the *cités* were indeed ghettos, similar by the way peoples living there felt excluded from mainstream society to the US ghettos (Touraine 1991:12), many sociologists disagree with him arguing *cités* could not be qualified of ghettos as their level of ethnic segregation did not compare to the US ghettos (see on that issue Rinaudo 1999). Although, main stream sociology made its point and it is now

agreed that *cités* are not ghettos (see Wacquant 2004), we still can argue that both in the case of Arabs and Aboriginals quantitative data could hide the qualitative experiences of the members of these minorities. However and whatever how one qualifies this urban concentration of Aboriginal peoples it is still significant as Aboriginal peoples constitute 34% of the total population of the Winnipeg's North End, which is the most impoverished neighbourhood of Manitoba's capital. Moreover this percentage is not decreasing but at the contrary has increased in 10 years. As a result Winnipeg has the highest degree of segregation of Aboriginal peoples of all Canadian cities (Maxim and Keane 2003).

To sum up, the Winnipeg's North End is since the beginning of the 20th century one of the favourite destination for the migrants, while in the early and mid 20th century these migrants were Eastern Europeans, nowadays the immigrants from South Asia (especially from Philippines) contribute to the important percentage of visible minority in the neighbourhood (16.5% in 1996 and 17.3% in 2001). However that percentage of visible minorities is only slightly superior to the rest of the city of Winnipeg where visible minorities represented 13.4% in both 1996 and 2001 of the total population. In fact, what distinguishes that neighbourhood is its Aboriginal population. The large number of Aboriginal peoples create a special result, indeed if we add to the number of the number of visible minorities we have a large contingent of non-Caucasians in the neighbourhood (51.3% in 2001), if we add to that the fact that Ukrainian and Polish communities are still very strong (13.6% of people speaks Ukrainian or Polish in 2001), we ought to conclude that this section of Winnipeg is a true mosaic where Anglo-Caucasians are under represented and Aboriginal over represented.

Table 1
Aboriginal Peoples and Visible Minorities in Winnipeg's North End

North End's Census Tract	Aboriginal Population (2001)	% of Census Tract's Population	Visible Minorities (2001)	% of Census Tract's Population
Burrows Central	885	18.7	975	20.6
St. John's Park	40	7.2	30	5.4
North Point Douglas	900	39.8	315	13.9
William Whyte	2325	40.5	1095	19.1
Lord Selkirk Park	735	54.9	125	9.3
Dufferin	690	39.3	290	16.5
Total	5575	34%	2830	17.3%

Table 2
Number of Ukrainian and Polish Speakers

North End's Census Tract	Ukrainian Speakers (2001)	% of census Tract's Population	Polish Speakers (2001)	% of Census Tract's Population
Burrows Central	585	12.4	290	6.1
St.John's Park	105	18.9	20	3.6
North Point Douglas	170	7.5	115	5.1
William Whyte	305	5.3	210	3.7
Lord Selkirk Park	140	10.5	95	7.1
Dufferin	155	8.8	30	1.7
Total	1460	8.9%	760	4.6%

Methodology

The goal of this research was to provide information to discuss the relationship between the rise of the fringe services and the impoverishment of socio-economic and ethnic groups, especially Aboriginal peoples. To explore the interaction between social processes and the fringe financial services sector an interview guide was designed to survey users of fringe bank services. Three students helped by two community research assistants, and supervised by two faculty members, interviewed 41 North End adult clients of fringe financial services in the fall of 2002.

Initial respondents were recruited through personal contacts or by talking with clients outside of fringe financial firm's outlets. These respondents were interviewed and asked to refer other clients for the interview, and so on. Flyers were also posted in strategic locations to attract additional responses (although we did not count on it very much, to our surprise the flyers allowed to recruit several respondents eager to provide testimonies that proved very rich). Arrangements were made to interview the majority of the clients over a four-week period at two different locations: the *North End Community Renewal Corporation* and the *North End Community Ministry*. Although the total number of respondents was not high for the time dedicated to the interview process, it has to be understood that recruiting people using fringe services and willing to discuss in depth their experiences and divulge their economic situation, was not easy. In fact, the number of respondents initially targeted was much higher. However, we did not stop recruiting new interviewees because it was too difficult, but rather when we reached a satu-

ration stage, that is to say when answers and testimonies became redundant. We then came to the conclusion that the effort to recruit more respondents would be too great in comparison to the likelihood that more interviews would bring new information.

Several inquiries were made with numerous community-based organizations in order to meet clients of fringe banks belonging to different ethnic groups. However, the sample did not intend to be statistically representative of the ethnic diversity of the Winnipeg's North End but rather to gather information from as many as possible perspectives. Thus no generalization can be drawn from the sample regarding the ethnic breakdown of the fringe bank users. Though, we can say like in the case of the Filipinos, that some ethnic groups were not represented in the sample because the number of the members of their group using these services was minimum. Indeed interviews with community leaders and fringe bankers indicate later that Filipinos do not use these services as when they are in need of money they can rely upon a strong community informal network of solidarity. On the other hand Aboriginal respondents constitute the majority of the interviewees (26 out of 41 of the respondents identified themselves as Aboriginal peoples), which is quite in agreement with the ethnic breakdown of the neighbourhood. Thus, although not selected to be statistically representative we are nevertheless quite confident in the value of our sample. We base that confidence on the fact it was constituted with the help of several community partners well aware of the network of clients and having gain their trust through many years of community action. The locations and the institutions choose to conduct the survey were also a way to bring confidence.

The nine males and thirty-two females respondents range in age from 18 to 59 years with 34.8 being the average age. Three quarters of the sample (26 out of 41) describe themselves as either "Aboriginal" or "Métis." The other interviewees were either from East or South European background or visible minorities, several having a multiple background.⁴ Although more than half of the individuals in the sample are single, more than 2/3 of the respondents have children and a third of these have three or more. Twice as many women have children compared to the men in the study, and were also more likely to be single parents than the men. Overall, the education level of the participant was fairly low, with only 1/3 having completed high school. Of this 1/3, only half received some post secondary education and very few have completed a degree or received a diploma at a university or college.

Each interview was conducted in the same manner using the same interview guide. Our survey was comprised of five sections with a total of 64 questions, most of them open-ended. The first section was con-

cerned with the respondents' age, education, residence, occupation, and financial situation. The second section aimed to record details of the respondents' participation in Mainstream Institutional Financial Services (banks, credit unions and credit cards). Questions of the third section, entitled Family/Friend and Moneylender Financial Services prompted respondents to discuss their participation in informal financial networks. The fourth section was about the usage of the high-interest banking in the North End such as at local stores and/or bars, rent-to-owns, and cheque-cashing businesses. The final section focused on what the respondents would like to see in the future in terms of financial service firms in the North End.

Although interviews constitute the core of the materials discussed in that paper we have also gathered information through two other channels. First we interviewed twenty-seven key informants: community economic development actors involved in financial services, fringe bank brokers, as well as justice and law enforcement officers. The goal of those interviews was to better understand the socio-economic constraints and trends at stake in Winnipeg's North End. We also held two focus groups. One focus group involved fringe bank clients and further explored their experiences with fringe banks and their ideas about alternatives to fringe banks. The second focus group involved community organisation key informants who helped to develop a model that formed the basis of the feasibility assessment.

Results

The following sections summarize the main reasons respondents have identified, or that we have drawn from their experiences, to explain the use of fringe services.

Low Income: The Common Denominator

The use of fringe financial institutions stemmed from a situation of economic need, either in terms of acquiring a loan or expediency in cashing a cheque. It was of no surprise that among the respondents low-income was a common characteristic. Within this low-income category, a variety of sources of income were cited, although receiving EIA (Employment and Income Assistance; commonly known as social assistance⁵) was a substantial contributor to this income bracket. Of the respondents who were employed, part-time or casual employment was more frequently cited than stable full-time employment. The primary income level cited by those receiving EIA was under \$10,000 per year, while for those who were employed, this increased to \$10-20,000 per year. Some respondents had obtained a post-secondary education, which

translated into slightly higher income. However, the repayment of student loans for these individuals was identified as contributing to their financial restrictions at the time of the survey.

The main cause cited for using a fringe bank was the inability to maintain a bank account. Respondents consistently acknowledged the link between being impoverished and being unable to maintain a bank account, as this comment illustrates:

I had an account at [X Bank] but I closed it because I didn't have any money at the time. I was being charged \$9 per month even when there was no money in the account.

This respondent closed his bank account due to the service fees on the account. The second reason mentioned to explain use of fringe banks was a restricted access to overdraft services, credit cards and loans through mainstream banks. Indeed, usually banks refused to provide these services to low incomes customers because they are seen as a financial liability. Respondents who have claimed bankruptcy in the past were also denied overdraft, credit card and loan privileges. As a result several respondents mentioned using pawnshops loans to cover unforeseen or exceptional expenses (school supplies for children, birthdays or Christmas gifts, trips to visit relatives who were ill) or when they were facing emergencies such as the need for medication, as this illustrates:

I am borderline diabetic and sometimes need money for fresh fruit. I have also pawned things for emergencies. In 1993 I needed money for a funeral. When you are stranded and you only have one option, you take it. It was my last resort. I lost some things that time, there were too many items to redeem.

Demonstrating the effect that income has on the use of fringe banks is also the fact that respondents who experienced a change in employment status resulting in a higher income also experienced a reduced need for fringe financial institutions, as this quotation indicates:

I don't use pawnshops anymore because now I'm employed. My \$20,000 annual income has reduced my need for money at the end of the week.

In this case, the increase in income allowed for a surplus of money to be saved for emergency expenses. This resulted in a decreased need for small loans previously obtained through pawning personal items.

It should be noted that single parent status was common for the users of the fringe banks in particular for female respondents. Contributing to the level of poverty experienced by many individuals that we surveyed, single-parenthood added extra barriers to mainstream bank-

ing (difficulty to travel to a bank outlet with the children especially in winter, the difficulty to save money, especially for women receiving EIA). The higher incidence of single low-income mothers than single low-income fathers contributes to the disadvantage of women when it comes to equal access to banking services.

Availability of Mainstream Financial Services

Although low-income was the common denominator behind fringe bank use, location of banks was a commonly expressed concern for respondents. Several respondents who had been using banks in the past were now unable to do so due to the incidence of banks moving out of the North End. This out-flux of banks from their neighbourhood was a major concern for the residents interviewed. For example, a respondent mentioned that her branch had moved twice and that it now takes her 45 minutes on the bus each way to access her account in person. Respondents commonly experienced difficulty in getting to a bank that was not within walking distance as these comments illustrate:

It is nearly impossible to bundle up my four small children in order to walk five or six blocks to the bank to cash a cheque, let alone traveling out of the North End altogether.

I find it very difficult without an account. I can't find a friend to cash my cheque or to give me a ride. I had a bank five minutes away from my house but it closed. With kids, and no vehicle, I can't get to their branch downtown.

Those without a bank account often admitted that they would only consider opening one if the bank was within a few blocks of their home. This reflects the infrequency of the respondents in our sample being able to afford the transportation needed to reach branch locations. In addition, it should be noted that being without a vehicle also decreases the potential of receiving loans from mainstream banks due to the lack of available collateral.

In terms of desirable financial services, cheque-cashing was cited as a priority. When asked if they were satisfied with the cheque-cashing service provided in the neighbourhood, one respondent answered:

Well, sometimes I am dissatisfied because Cheque-Cashing Firm charges too much, especially when it is a smaller cheque. \$167 goes down to \$157. That \$10 is a lot. I guess I am only satisfied that there is a service available for me to use. I am not really satisfied with fringe banking.

However, regardless of the savings associated with cashing cheques at banks, respondents still used cheque-cashing outlets fairly regularly. The primary reason for this was the convenience of hours, location and

the expediency in receiving the cash. The operating hours of cheque-cashing outlets were a significant draw to their business. Banks are typically closed during evenings and weekends, so for respondents who needed money quickly after normal banking hours, fringe banking was the only option. Employed respondents commonly indicated the location and hours of banks as problematic, as they worked during bank hours. Bank hours were also of concern for respondents who were part-time or casually employed as this type of employment could lend themselves to a less regular and, therefore, more hectic lifestyle in which organisational functions are hard to manage. This, combined with the low wages received by respondents, resulted in a tight stretch of time and funds that made waiting for an opportunity to access a bank impractical, leaving cheque-cashing institutions, with their long hours and numerous locations, the best option, in respondents perspective, as shown by this comment.

When I cashed my damage deposit cheque it cost me \$7.50 to cash a \$135 cheque. I could have taken it to my branch the next day but I couldn't wait- I needed the money to move.

The five-day hold banks can place on a cheque before cashing is also impractical for respondents who need the money quickly. As a result of living in poverty, individuals often have no choice but to pay more to cash their cheque in order to receive the money when they need it.

As a result, although most respondents understood that fringe financial services were more expensive than mainstream banks; a surprising aspect of our findings was that many respondents expressed gratitude that fringe banks exist in the North End to provide a service otherwise unavailable to them:

I go to these places and they treat me well. I am pleased they exist, otherwise we would really be left behind.

Indeed, cheque-cashing firms and pawnshops provide clients with quick access to cash when other sources (e.g., bank, family or friends) are not available or provide them with less freedom. As well as, rent-to-own provide newcomers to Winnipeg (immigrants, Aboriginal peoples) or people in dire economic situation with consumerism goods that help them to feel part of society. Hence, several of the fringe banking clients who were interviewed recognised that access to these services has a price as this comment shows:

Poverty is a booming business! Someone is making a lot of money off people who don't have much to begin with. In fact, while in many cases clients did not know exactly how the fringe bank fees compare to mainstream bank services, they did understand

that the accessibility of fringe financial services was at a higher cost. Moreover, several of the fringe banking customers recognised that the services were, in some cases, deepening their debt load but still they accepted them as the only way or the less problematic solution to participate in society.

Control, Anonymity and Desire to be Part of the Modern Society

Compared to the impersonal and undemanding transactions at the fringe banks that require minimum identification, personal information and commitment, banks are seen by respondents as ‘big brother’ institutions. As such, banks were sometimes viewed by respondents through a suspicious and distrustful lens:

I used to have an account with [X Bank] but they started taking money from my account. Once I found \$200 missing from my account, another time \$60 was missing. I don't think they were service fees.

It is possible that some of the reasons for this perception of distrust towards mainstream banks were rooted directly in the bureaucratic operations that required particular identification, a mandatory holding period for cheques, and a mandatory minimum account balance. Nevertheless, it appears that the request for personal information when opening a bank account deterred some respondents as they felt the banks had no right asking them questions about what they qualified their private life. “No questions asked” was also a common reason for pawning rather than borrowing from a bank or from family. In this regard, bank policies can provoke a feeling of intrusion in the privacy regardless of the particular actions of the teller. Indeed, typically, the respondents’ concerns revolved around the desire to retain a sense of autonomy and control over personal information that banks could not offer. Although alternative services tended to be more expensive, they allowed the patrons to feel more in control during the transaction. Indeed, most fringe banks we have visited do not demand that patrons disclose personal information to do a transaction at their establishment. There is an element of freedom involved in fringe banking that is absent through the bureaucracy of mainstream banking policies. That freedom has a price that many respondents were ready to pay. They pay it because they want to be treated like regular citizens; a wish that reflects their desire to be fully part of society and treated like such.

It is also important to mention that several respondents said they preferred to pawn rather than to borrow money from friends and family. To best understand this situation it is essential to consider the background of our sample, many respondents were immigrants or Aboriginal

peoples settling in Winnipeg with the desire to embrace the ideal of modernity. As a result, some of them are dreaming to become self-supporting individuals and would rather not depend on an ethnic or family network of solidarity. This situation is exemplified in the following statements:

It is easier to pawn something than asking a friend to borrow money. It's embarrassing having to ask people for money. I'm ashamed to ask them. At the pawnshops they don't ask you any questions.

I do not want to borrow from family.... At [X Cheque-Cashing Firm] they treat you well. They are always polite. No hassle, no question asked. You do your transaction and that's it.

The desire to be emancipated from family network can for the middle class citizen be easily satisfied by having access to modern institutions of banking. However, for poor people who cannot have access to banks, the only way to obtain that freedom is to access the fringe banking services. As a matter of fact these businesses tend to answer the demand of these people by offering them a type of service that gives them the feeling of being autonomous and treated as regular citizen.

Actually, one of the most surprising finding of that survey was that the respondents when asked what would be the best solution to resolve the problem associated with fringe banking in their neighbourhood, they said it would be to "bring back banks." When we discussed alternative solutions such as community pawnshop, micro-credit union, several of them said they did not want a tier two banking system but rather "real banks," with regular services. This indicates that for many of the respondents banks and banking activities are part of a desirable way of life. Actually, some of them saw the departure of banks as an indication of their marginalizing from the mainstream society.

Discrimination and Differential Treatments

Our survey shows that in general respondents demonstrated certain common characteristics explaining their use of fringe banking services that were largely anticipated based on previous researches in this field. However, patrons of fringe institutions especially Aboriginal ones seem to experience, from mainstream financial institutions and from society at large, a level of discrimination not anticipated. It also appears that discrimination contributes, along with other factors, to their use of fringe institutions. Although the issue of discrimination was not a question asked to respondents, it was a subject that was brought to our attention in a number of ways by the interviewees themselves. This sec-

tion presents findings in this field.

The opinions express by the respondents indicate that they feel discriminated in two ways. First directly, through personal interaction and indirectly through structural obstacles they encounter due to their ethnicity or/and social position, which make their access to bank services unsatisfactory.

Lack of Respect and of Courtesy

Aboriginal respondents discussed a lot the issue of respect and courtesy while using mainstream banks. Although we did not have specific questions about this topic, respondents raised several concerns regarding feeling unsafe emotionally with the service offered through banks. There was an underlying feeling of alienation and discrimination; respondents often expressed feeling mistreated and disregarded by the bank tellers because they received social assistance or because they were Aboriginal. Respondents noted with distaste that they stopped using their bank because tellers would insist on personal identification even though they had a debit card. There were various reports of dissatisfaction by respondents saying they were treated rudely and with disrespect.

I tried to open a bank account but I got attitude – they wouldn't open an account for me. I had to go to [X Cheque-Cashing Firm] to cash my cheque. I tried at [X Bank] also, but they said they would do a credit check and then I was refused.

Although Aboriginal respondents reported most testimonies of mistreatment, a few number of non-Aboriginal respondents also commented about the lack of respect they would experience from tellers when the later would realize their main source of revenue was the EIA.

It is important to note that in some cases the convenience of a bank's location was not enough to ensure patronage, respondents also wanted to be treated kindly and with respect, as express by this respondent:

I tried to open an account at the nearby [X mainstream financial institution]. I left without opening an account because the teller was rude. Distance is not the only factor. Being treated with respect is the most important thing.

Actually, respect was for almost all respondents a criterion to include in a new potential financial institution that could be establish in the neighbourhood. On the contrary, no respondent complained of discrimination at fringe banking facilities. In fact, they consistently indicated being well treated in these places.

Lack of Proper Identification and Lack of Proper Identity

Associated with the limitation poverty placed on mainstream banking is the fact that a lack of personal identification prohibited a number of respondents from opening a bank account. Due to lost, stolen, or unavailable identification (a common situation facing people living in low-income neighbourhoods), respondents would neither be able to open a bank account nor cash a cheque. The following respondent explain how lack of identification prevented him from accessing bank:

I have a bank account but I cannot use it anymore since my branch was relocated. Now I cannot use my account because I don't have any valid ID.

The most recognised and widely accepted form of identification is a driver license, which can be costly to obtain. Impermanent residence and/or lack of a telephone and cost to replace identification were reasons communicated as the primary obstacle for not being able to comply with bank request. Whatever the reason, respondents felt discriminated against by their inability to prove their identity, according to bank standards.

However, several respondents also experienced another form of discrimination regarding identification, as this respondent explains:

I tried to use my photo Métis card. [X Bank] told me they don't consider it a valid ID. I was upset, this is who I am, how can they tell me it's not acceptable.

As exemplified in the quote above, respondents often perceived the rejection of the improper ID they submit as a rejection of their ethnic identity, and not actually about identification requirements. Considering a Métis card as a non-valid proof of identity was deemed by several respondents to be a form of discrimination. In the latter quotation the respondent perception was that the teller was not doing simply his job. He was rejecting his application not because of a lack of identity but because he was a Métis. This was for him especially unfair, since—as he commented—the statute of Métis is entrenched in the Constitutional Act and because Manitoba Métis leaders played an important role in the construction of Western Canada. Besides, processes and genealogical evidences to obtain a Métis card are strictly established; a Métis card was for the respondents no less a proof of identity than an Indian card that is regularly accepted all over Winnipeg as an official proof of identity. Refusing to accept it is an evidence of the resistance that the Manitoba population still exhibits toward Métis claims and attempts to be fully recognized as Aboriginal peoples (Martin and Patzer 2004).

Insecurity and Improper Law Enforcement

Respondents routinely echoed concerns for their personal physical safety while using bank machines. It also appears that the fear of crime was also apparent in respondents' understanding of the reasons why mainstream banking facilities were scarce in the North End. A common assumption, though not confirmed by any evidence, was that banks had left the North End because of the threat of robbery, as illustrated by the following:

I want banks back. The area used to be beautiful. We need patrols here now; it is not safe to walk at night. If we had safety the banks might come back.

As a result, respondents commonly expressed the desire for more protection, for more police supervision. Related to that issue of police involvement in the neighbourhood is the question of Winnipeg's "pawnshops police patrol." This patrol is in charge of visiting Winnipeg's pawnshops to ensure they do not sell or hold stolen-goods. During their inspection of the pawnshops the team of police officers verify that the pawnshop owner has recorded evidence proving the items on guaranty are legitimate possessions of the patrons. However, during their visit they do not make any attempt to check if pawnbroker is respecting the Canadian Criminal Code, which specifies that interest rates in excess of 60 per cent per annum are illegal.

When we made inquiries with Winnipeg Police services about that issue we were told that it was not the mandate of the "pawnshops patrol" to enforce that section of the criminal code and that a fringe bank will only be prosecuted if a patron files a complain against it. At that point the Court examine the case and if the fringe banker is found guilty he will have to repay to the customer all the fees he has charged in excess of the maximum authorized. However, the burden of making the proof of the criminal deed is the responsibility of the consumer with all the consequences it represents for him such as losing the ability to have access to a fringe bank or the time consumed in assembling the evidence, etc.

Discussion

From the previous results we can say that there are different factors contributing to the use of fringe bank by the people we have met. First, there exists a relationship between the socio-economic conditions of the respondents and their use of these services. The use of fringe banking is also exacerbated through the use of these services themselves. Indeed, the convenience and availability of fringe banks could quickly

encourage a dependency on these services. The following excerpt from a testimony summarizes what most respondents said:

At the time when I needed money, it was good that there was a way to get it. But I look at it now and they (fringe banks) charge way too much. It is ridiculous to pay \$24.00 out of a cheque. You never get out of the hole, especially if you are on social assistance, you just can't get out of the hole.

By catering to customers within a low-income bracket, the high-interest demands of fringe banking created a cycle of debt that ensured the continued use of pawnshops for small loans, or the use of cheque-cashing outlets for immediate cash, and rent-to-own services for purchases of consumerism goods. In fact, respondents viewed fringe-banking facilities as providing services that no one else was ready to offer, and the attraction and necessity of fringe services manifested itself as a downward spiral. For individuals who had become caught in this system and had low-paying employment or received EIA, it became very difficult to accumulate surplus cash or even a sufficient monthly income to pay off the interest on previously pawned items, pay for cheque-cashing and bill payment fees, and other high interest services, while still being able to cover the everyday costs of living. Yet the further into this spiral they were, the harder it was to get out of debt, save money, become eligible for legitimate loans, or take measures that may have helped encourage upward mobility such as training and education.

This spiral, though, cannot be credited entirely to the fringe banking institutions as they fill a void previously established through mainstream banking practices. Moreover, and this is the second sociological factor that influence the use of fringe bank: the desire for anonymity, freedom as well as the longing for being part of the modern world pushed several people that cannot access to it through regular canal (banks) to use fringe banking facilities that provide them with services that mimic the ones members of the middle class enjoy through the mainstream businesses.

The third contributing factor for the use of these services is discrimination and differential treatment that several of the North End's residents have encountered, experienced or think they are experiencing. There are two forms of discrimination recognized in Canadian law, as expressed by the Human Rights legislation. The first is direct discrimination, which refers to a situation where two individuals are treated unequally based on a characteristic such as race or ethnicity. Some respondents express clearly that tellers mistreated them because of their Aboriginal background and most of them experienced what is qualified

by the Human Rights legislation as indirect discrimination which is a situation where an institution uses neutral criteria that have an adverse impact on members of minority groups (Fleras and Elliott 2000: 75). The rejection of certain forms of identification, especially Métis ID-cards, should be recognized as a policy designed to accommodate certain clients, and to exclude others and as a result falls into that category of indirect discrimination.

Moreover, the issue may be raised that a set of discriminatory stereotypes has been in effect through the decision of several banks to leave the North End. Given that poverty intersects with a large Aboriginal population in the North End, the possibility of stereotypes affecting the policies of banks is two-fold. Hence, spokespersons for financial institutions maintain that the regulations pertaining to opening accounts and receiving credit is based on objective market criteria, and that it would be contrary to the interests of their business to turn away credit worthy consumers (Ramsay 2000: 35). Yet in our study we found evidence that suggests it is not as straightforward as this. Indeed, several respondents, regardless of their ability to maintain a bank account or being worthy of credit, experienced rude treatments, faced overly strict identification requirements, and refusal of services that seem to be based on visual cues such as race, dress, or the fact that respondents were beneficiary of EIA. This was especially true for respondents who tried to maintain an account with their bank after the closing of their branch in the North End. Although respondents files were transferred and their affiliation had no reason to be questioned or reviewed, most of the respondents in that situation felt discouraged to maintain business in the new branch where the regular clientele was better off financially than in the branch they used to do business with.

Perhaps even more significant are the comments and the position defended by one bank representative during a workshop organized during the course of this research. During this meeting we discussed possible solutions to providing mainstream financial services in the North End. Researchers made the case that, although alternative solutions such as community based pawnshop or micro-banks operated through local businesses would be attractive to policy makers because of their low cost and communal ideology, it was important not to forget the desires of the population for “real banks.” Indeed our survey revealed that the majority of the respondents wanted the banks to be back in their neighbourhood. Many did not want a second-class form of financial institution but rather requested to have access to what other citizens have. That is to say, they expressed their desire to be part of the mainstream economy, which is symbolized by, and made accessible through, the

banks. Following this remark a bank representative contended that our results were biased and that our methodology was certainly wrong. He then argued that, since most of the North End is inhabited by Aboriginal peoples who come from Northern and rural areas where there are only few financial institutions they have no bank experience and as such no interest in banking. He went on to say that Aboriginal peoples would be better off with a system mimicking the informal network of borrowing and lending existing in traditional communities. We commented that most Aboriginal peoples settling in the city were leaving reserves in part because they saw the city as a place of opportunity, as already documented by the Royal Commission of Aboriginal peoples (Canada 1996 see also Newhouse and Peters 2003). As such they wished to access the tools needed to become active members of a modern city. Although we ascertained that formal credit is one of those tools and that depriving Aboriginal peoples of it, on the basis of cultural differences, would be a form of discrimination, the bank representative was unable to revisit his position. This attitude reveals the perceptions that inhabit some members of the upper management of the bank industry. This attitude is rooted in a general prejudice, well explained by Peters (2000) who shows that urbanization and Aboriginal peoples is seen as a mismatch and that, as a result, urban Aboriginals are seen as a source of problem.

Still in respect of that question of discrimination we should come back to the question of the Winnipeg's "pawnshops police patrol." As said the officers do not make inquiries to verify that pawnshops do not breach the law regarding usurious fees. One simple reason for that is that it would involve a lot of time and effort. However, by ensuring that the law pertaining to usurious fees is being respected the police would be protecting the most impoverished citizens; by making sure pawnshops do not sell stolen-goods they instead protect middle class and upper-middle class citizens. Indeed, by cutting down the market for stolen-goods (especially electronics and jewellery) they contribute to discouraging burglars from breaking into suburban middle class properties. This is an illustration of a well-known situation: the police and the justice system are more concerned with protecting the interest of the majority rather than the ones of the minority (Reiman 2001: 110).

Although most of the respondents are not aware of the provision of the Criminal Code that should protect them they nevertheless think that the police are not in the neighbourhood to protect them but rather to protect the society at large. Indeed, several interviewees mentioned being aware of some illegal transactions taking place in the pawnshops. After commenting on that an informant conclude:

Doing business in a pawnshop is not safe but I have no

other option. The police is too busy to deal with our problems.

To sum up, there is, especially among Aboriginal residents, in the North End a strong feeling that the police are not interested in protecting the local population. They have at the contrary a strong feeling of being over policed and do not see the police activity in the pawnshop at being directed toward their protection but rather to watch on them.

Another evidence of differential treatment can be found in the move the City of Winnipeg is making to computerize the surveillance of pawnshops' potential illegal activities. It is planned to implement in every pawnshop a system recording electronically the references of every item pawned. Information collected locally will be centralized and be available on immediately to the police. This system will, according to the city of Winnipeg, contribute to greatly improve the control on retailing stolen-goods, and as a result is likely to increase the security of private properties. However, this system has a cost. It would seem logical that people who benefit from it should cover it, that is to say the whole population of Winnipeg. Indeed, since that new system will be likely contributing to decrease the number of property attacks city-wide the money necessary to pay for it should be drawn from the general municipal budget. Nevertheless, the City has chosen to pass on the fees to the pawnshops users who will have to pay an extra one-dollar fee (or so) for each item they will pawn. Prejudice regarding the poor seems to prevent the recognition that they are victimized and not necessarily accomplices of crimes. Otherwise, how can we explain that the City of Winnipeg plans to pass on to them the cost associated in controlling the market of stolen-goods if it is not because they are assumed to be part of the condition allowing that market to exist. The result is, for a sociologist, amazing, while not of great surprise. Indeed, pawnshop users that are victimized by the usurious fees applied to them by fringe financial businesses do not receive police protection but are rather forced to pay for the cost associated with protecting the private properties of the rest of the population. A protection that is rendered necessary by the very existence of the same business that already victimizes them. In sum, they are simultaneously victims and punished for being part of the system that victimizes them.

Conclusion

In this article we have identified the major factors that contribute to the use by the residents of the Winnipeg's North End of fringe banking institutions. Although we had anticipated that socio-economic conditions would be one key factor contributing to that use our survey allowed us to realize that two other factors play also an important role.

First, several of the fringes banking users are motivated by their desire to be part of the modern society and refuse to be left over from the consumer society because there are poor. Most of them are either immigrants or Aboriginal peoples recently settled in Winnipeg; they are using credit both to participate in society and to get emancipated from their family network. The fringe banking outlets offer to them services that fulfill their demand for anonymity, freedom, and respect; as many qualities that are associated, by many, with urban life. The growing number of fringe business in the North End indicated that the fringe banking industry has quite well understood what these customers look for.

The third factor affecting the use of fringe bank is differential treatment. Discrimination that faces several of the people we met is first the deed of isolated individuals (bank tellers). Myths about the poor or those on public assistance—such as that they are irresponsible in managing their money—affect indeed attitudes of some bank tellers. These attitudes deter in return several of the North End residents, especially Aboriginal peoples, to do business with the banks. Moreover, the apparently neutral and objective criterion used by the bank to justify discretionary decision-making processes regarding credit allocation might be based in fact on stereotypes as an other survey as already discussed (Ramsay 2000: 35) and as the treatment received by some respondents that tried to maintain a bank account after their bank has moved away indicates. However we also uncovered that prejudices against ethnicity, in the case of Aboriginal peoples, contribute to reinforce discrimination. In fact, it is unclear whether poverty or ethnicity is the master status causing discrimination experienced by several of the interviewees since the two seem to work together. This finding is in agreement with the literature that has established that primary racial segregation and discrimination is reinforced and then carried further by other socio-economic factors. In his book, *Declining Significance of Race*, Wilson (1978), has demonstrated that even if American black-ghettos are not anymore produced directly by discrimination, poverty that was a result of discrimination is becoming now the cause of discrimination, which, in turn, perpetuates and reinforces poverty and marginalizing together (Wieviorka 1995: 58). Similarly we can argue that Aboriginal peoples from Winnipeg's North End are experiencing the same type of marginalizing.

Moreover, and that was not anticipated, it appears that the differential treatment experienced by the residents of the Winnipeg's North End is also perpetuated by several institutions. First the police prefers to supervise the stolen goods rather than enforcing section 347 of the Canadian Criminal Code pertaining to usurious fees. That choice tends to reinforce the inequality that poor people are already experiencing.

Second, it appears that decision makers at the financial institutions seem to have a negative perception of the residents of that neighbourhood and believe that Aboriginal residents are, for cultural reason, less interested in bank than other Canadians. That appreciation might have contributed, along with economic criteria, to the decision made by some of the banks to leave the North End; that latter decision being at the origin of a void that allowed the fringe banking industry to develop their businesses.

To conclude, in our liberal economy it would be unrealistic to expect a legislation that would force the banks to maintain branches in deprived neighbourhoods. Although some tax credit could be offered to encourage the remaining banks to maintain minimum services in these neighbourhoods. But such measure is unlikely to be implemented, for in our increasing neo-liberal economy the state is more interested to provide bandage to compensate for the side effects of economic growth rather than implementing legislation that would limit the strive for growth of private corporations in order to prevent the side effects to happen first. In that situation we can offer three relatively realistic measures that could be easily implemented as they are in agreement with the actual ideology and legislation. First, we suggest that the police officers from the so-called Winnipeg's pawnshop patrol be asked to ensure that business owners post their fees. That simple fact would at least allow the customers to realize the extent of the cost of the loan they are contracting or of the transaction they are doing. Add to the fees could also be posted the maximum interest rate as defined by section 347 of the Canadian Criminal Code.

The second proposition is drawn from the observation that many individuals receiving EIA, especially single mothers, go into the trap spiral of the fringe banking because they have no savings. Although, according to the regulation of the Manitoba Employment and Income Assistance program, people receiving income assistance can save money up to a certain amount, they however must have exhausted all their savings before being eligible. As a result people once receiving EIA are left without any savings. That is why we think the Employment and Income Assistance regulation should be amended to allow people, especially single parents, to become eligible to receiving income assistance before they exhaust all their savings.

Negative effect of discrimination is not easy to counterbalance with a simple policy. However we suggest, and the Canadian Human Rights Commission itself has already risen that possibility, that 'social position' (and as a result poverty) be added to the enumerated grounds in the Federal Human Rights code (Ramsay 2000: 35). Since we have seen that

poverty and ethnicity are two factors that work together to put the subjects into a situation where they might be discriminated against, this addition to the Human Rights code would allow to recognize the cumulative effect of the two masters statutes contributing to the differential treatment the Winnipeg's North End residents are experiencing. In this respect one could follow Evelyn Peters (2000) lead and work to deconstruct the generalized prejudice that makes Aboriginal peoples unfit for urban life.

Notes

1. During the course of our survey we asked questions to see if the residents of the Winnipeg North End saw a difference between the two categories of institutions. It appears that regarding the topic discussed in our survey, banks and credit unions were seen similar by the respondents. That is why to facilitate the reading of this paper "bank" will be used as a metaphor to qualify all mainstream financial institutions.
2. The section of the North End where we conducted our survey includes the following census tracts: Burrows Central, Dufferin, Dufferin Industrial, Lord Selkirk Park, North Point Douglas, St. John's Park, and William Whyte. All statistics we discuss in this paper are based on the population of these census tracts. According to the City of Winnipeg the Winnipeg North End is composed by eleven census tracts, but we have limited our survey to the seven most central census tracts of the North End as they constitute the geographical and historical core of that neighbourhood.
3. Source City of Winnipeg's web site "Community Profile." The specific data are from 1996. For more information see Buckland and Martin 2003, tables can be retrieved from the WIRA web site www.uwinnipeg.ca.
4. We chose not to be more specific regarding the ethnic breakdown of the participants as it is not a representative sample. It is important that the reader does not infer any conclusion about the ethnic participation into the fringe industry from our sample. The information provided in that section only aims to describe qualitatively the participants and not quantitatively.
5. For detail regarding that program from Manitoba Family Services and Housing, see the web page: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/assistance/eia.html>

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