
Integrated or segregated in Ontario:

Exploring 'South Asians' settlers' heterogeneity in the context of specific immigrant urban spatialities

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Introduction

Studies on 'settlement' experiences in Ontario have concluded that 'South Asians' are a spatially segregated and economically struggling immigrant group (Ghosh 2013). However, the differences in socio-economic performances within the national and linguistic groups in the umbrella of 'South Asian' is often overlooked and could result in inefficient "settlement" experiences and ultimately poor 'integration' into the 'host' society (Agarwal 2013; Ashutosh 2012; Ray 1999). In this paper, I attempt to explore and understand academic discourses on socio-economic diversity around 'South Asians'. Specifically, I aim to explore differences in spatial experiences of neighbourhood, 'settlement', housing, employment and health encountered by these groups. Using an intersectional lens (Mollet and Faria 2018; Crenshaw 1991) to understand the heterogeneity in these diasporas, I explore feminist understandings of the global urban south by exploring 'South Asian' diasporas with Ontario as my urban research context. This heterogeneity can be based on genders, sexualities, ethnicities, religion, nationalities, class, and caste, for example. This can lead to particular experiences of privilege or marginality or simultaneous existence of both, that make each of the immigrant experiences different. Focusing on spatial experiences of neighborhood, 'settlement', housing,

employment and health help me address the course goals of GEOG 5330 (York University) Feminist Geographies of Space and Place: Urbanization, Gender and the Global South, for which this paper has been developed. The objective of this paper is not to provide a laundry list of intersectional debates surrounding diverse immigrant identities within 'South Asian' diasporas but rather to draw attention to academic work that moves away from 'South Asia' as a catch-all term and highlight immigrant women's intersectional experiences of marginality or privilege, with respect to specific urban spatialities of neighbourhood, housing, 'settlement', employment and health.

Positionality

As a feminist researcher and an immigrant Indian woman, I find myself in a dilemma when I am addressed as a 'South Asian'. I am aware of my privilege as a 'designer' migrant: young, highly educated and skilled (Ghosh 2007). I am a permanent resident in Canada, an upper caste hindu, brahmin woman with a middle-class identity. This identity includes a white-collar job, career progression, recognition within the Canadian job market, English language education, a graduate degree and homeownership. These markers helped me in negotiating my initial 'settlement' and employment experiences. My struggles are very different as compared to immigrants of other 'South Asian' groups who have arrived here as refugees, or as economic immigrants who work in blue-collar jobs. Secondly, my overrepresented immigrant status as a model minority, makes me an enabler and a participant of the ongoing white settler nationalist project (Dhamoon 2015, Lawrence and Dua 2005). The essay 'Decolonizing Antiracism' by Lawrence and Dua critically examines "the Indigenous question", particularly the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit exclusion and invisibility in decolonizing and anti-racist academic politics. The examination helped me move beyond my academic identity to a privileged diasporic group member not just a racialized, victimized immigrant. I recognized my complicity with the Canadian nationalist agenda of ongoing land theft and colonial domination of Indigenous population as described by the authors (Lawrence and Dua 2005, p.132). My exclusion and marginalization as a woman has received considerable academic attention without much attention to my caste privilege, brahmin, and Indian identity. My status as a model minority receives more examination than Indigenous struggles within anti-racist scholarship and activism (Lawrence and Dua 2005, p.134). I recognize my complicity as a settler and I offer solidarity to the ongoing land struggles and fight against Indigenous dispossession and genocide.

My racialized experiences as a settler could arise out of my skin colour, the stereotype of originating from a country where English is the second language and finally the fact that I am an immigrant woman from the global south. For instance, one of the challenges associated with this course has been the feedback on language and communication like leading seminar discussions, academic writing,

grammar and construction. The feedback need not have stemmed from a normalized notion that newcomer immigrants with English as second language have issues with communication (Mohamoud in Graham et al. 2007), but had the effect of making me hold back on my specific politics and cultural expression during written assignments, discussions and seminar presentations, leading to an experience of isolation. In Mohamoud's words, "any expectation that immigrants ought to "sound," "express themselves" and "behave" as the local population might is not only misplaced, but also violates the legally sanctioned right of foreign-born Canadian residents to cultural distinctiveness" (Mohamoud in Graham et al. 2007, p.34). I compulsively revisited and edited my written work before submission which led to inefficient time management, and I lacked confidence to turn in my paper on time. To cope with the completion of this paper, I made sure to request my personal mentors to review my work before I submitted it for grading. My academic politics thus are an outgrowth of my myriad experiences of benefits and disadvantages as an immigrant woman from the global south.

Method

I investigated journal publications and relevant organizational reports over a time period of the last twenty years. As briefly mentioned before, 'The Metropolis Project' especially the compendium on *Our Diverse Cities*, particularly the section on Ontario, was most relevant for my urban research context. The work of 'settlement' organizations, academic conversations around 'integration' of immigrants are discussed in this compendium. Another compelling special journal issue on 'South Asian' Diasporas in Canada helped me understand the nuances of diversity amongst 'South Asians' and problematic construction, of the categorization 'South Asian' in Canada. Introductory readers on urban studies like *Canadian Cities in Transition: New Directions in the Twenty-First Century* (2010) edited by Trudi Bunting, Pierre Filion and Ryan Walker and Roger Keil's work on *Suburban Planet: Making the World Urban from the Outside In* (2019) helped me situate my research objectives of understanding 'South Asian' heterogeneity through concepts of ethnic concentrations and racial segregation in the suburban neighbourhood context. These readings helped me formulate a conceptual framework and define the spaces of difference that the peoples from the urban global south face within the GTA context. In the language of immigrant research on "settlement's' and 'integration', the term 'South Asian' is used by Statistics Canada to include other countries beyond India, like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan for example. Despite this attempt at granularity and detail, for example elite class, caste privileged, hindu immigrants though different from many marginalized 'other' immigrants end up getting an undifferentiated status and dominance in research. I have explained about this further in the other sections that follow my theoretical understanding.

Feminist geographers on intersectionality

Originating from Black feminist activism and thought (Crenshaw 1991), feminist geographers have engaged with intersectionality as a spatialized concept and called to attention its critical application in immigrant spaces and transnational scholarship (Mollett and Faria 2018). Hierarchical structures and power dynamics of class, gender, race and more, travel in a spatial and temporal manner according to the spaces of scholarship that intersects feminist geography and immigration (Mahtani 2006, Mahler et al 2015, Ruddick 1996). For example, intersectionality informs production of space through multiple power formations like whiteness and academic scholarship in geography (Kobayashi and Peake 2002), caste privilege versus marginality within India (Mohanty 2003) and implicit racism and anti-racism (explicit avoidance of racial references) debates in the welcoming, 'multicultural' fabric of English-speaking Canada (Ku et al. 2018; Bhuyan et al. 2017).

Thus, I draw upon Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (1991) to understand the impacts of heterogeneity within 'South Asians'. This focus calls for an acknowledgement of intra-group differences within groups of people with a common identity, whether it be gender, social class, sexuality, religion, race, or one of the many other defining aspects of identity politics for women of colour as argued by Crenshaw (1991), "(t)he problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite-that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences" (Crenshaw 1991, p.1242). Differences in age, gender, sexuality, nationality, ability, politics and religion have led to inter and intra group tensions especially within and between nations like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (Ghosh, 2013). These differences could also be an individual's markers of privilege or precarity as a part of diasporic communities (Mahler et al. 2015). Shambuka (2021) argues how caste conversations by organizations like Equality Labs, Hindus for Human Rights in the diaspora are trivialized by privileged organizations like Hindu American Foundation even as they support anti-racism events like Black Lives Matter. I aim to use this paper to remind me how offering solidarity to anti-racist conversations and movements should also make me accountable towards my own privilege as a brahmin and highlight my caste privilege. Diasporic researchers from various disciplines problematize definitions of mapping the globe as an unchanging set of cultural regions, homelands in a world of transnationalism and mass movements of populations (Ang 2001; Ghosh 2007; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Lawrence and Dua 2005). The authors conceptualize diasporas as hybrid spatial assumptions (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, p.20) as against viewing a diaspora to have originated from a common axis (Ghosh 2013). Assuming a national identity and culture which result in broad policy frameworks, subsumes inherent differences within intra and inter-group identities that go beyond 'Indian', 'South Asian' or 'Asian'. Moreover, they sideline issues related to marginalized diasporic communities (Ang 2001, p.25), could juxtapose issues of immigrant

settlers against native Indigenous communities (Lawrence and Dua 2005) thereby reducing possibilities of solidarity for shared struggles. With the above understanding in place, I aim to provide instances of diasporic heterogeneity with respect to immigrant urban spatialities.

Rationale for focus on specific immigrant urban spatialities

For the purpose of this paper, I have borrowed the concept of space and spatiality as highlighted by Merriman et al. (2012) - "...abstract and concrete, produced and producing, imagined and materialized, structured and lived, relational, relative and absolute – which lends the concept a powerful functionality that appeals to many geographers and thinkers in the social sciences and humanities" (4). This explanation relates well to my spatialities of focus as each of them have both physical (concrete, material, absolute) and non-physical (abstract, imagined and lived) elements that directly affect successful 'acculturation and integration' of immigrants in Canada. The specific urban spatialities related to immigrants that I would focus on is: 1. Housing, neighbourhood and 'settlement'; 2. Employment; and 3. Health, mental health and well-being.

These clusters have been identified as key focus areas to promote economic and social 'integration' of immigrants by CERIS – The Ontario Metropolis Centre (Anisef et al. in Graham et al. 2007, 8). The above immigrant urban spatialities also find special mention among top eleven challenges facing Canadian cities in the 21st Century (Bunting, Filion & Walker 2010, p.434). The next two sections of my essay delve deeper into each of these spatial elements. I do not look at each spatial element in exclusivity but in relation to each other and how they contribute to more complexities in policy and academic discourses.

Heterogeneity in housing and 'settlement' – Are ethnic enclaves beneficial to all members within the community?

Academic literature on social geography makes compelling arguments on racial concentration of immigrants in particular neighbourhoods of Greater Toronto Area. Many authors have argued that racial concentration is not always and necessarily associated with greater neighbourhood poverty (Bourne and Walks 2006; Walks in Bunting et al. 2010; Hoernig and Zhuang in Bunting et al. 2010). Cities often display a dichotomous behaviour when it comes to immigrant concentrations. On one end of this dichotomy is the high incidence of apartment housing with respect to immigrant people of colour and high racial diversity that highlight neighbourhood patterning of low income. There are increasing odds of poor immigrant people of colour living in the lowest-cost and least-desirable neighborhoods including social housing in the inner suburbs. On the other end, wealthier members of similar immigrant groups are able to live in higher-status ethnic communities called 'ethnic enclaves'

or 'ethnoburbs' (Hoernig and Zhuang 2010 in Bunting et al. 2010). 'settlement' practices like above underscore a more nuanced interpretation of segregation, ghettoization and neighbourhood dynamics (Anisef et al in Graham et al. 2007), applicable to 'South Asians' immigrants in the GTA. Walton-Roberts (2013) highlighted diversification of 'South Asian' diasporas in Canada over the last fifty years. However, the dominance of Indian nationals in the 'South Asian' diasporas in Canada leads to overrepresentation in academic research projects and consequently, this overrepresentation, spills onto policy decisions.

To explore divergent outcomes of an ethnoburb and compare it with social polarization, I would like to take the example of *Sikh / Punjabi* community that is nestled in the GTA cities of Mississauga and Brampton in particular. Bagga's (Graham et al. 2007) research occasioned the importance of immigrant political 'integration' while addressing the general under-representation trend of marginalized groups in elected Canadian political institutions. The author has demonstrated that a collective sense of belonging in the ethnic enclaves created by this community has led to many Canadian-Sikh candidates being elected provincially and federally through electoral ridings in Mississauga and Brampton since 2001. This political gain since the past two decades is counter to research argument that states, "*social class and financial instability are considerable barriers to minority political participation*" (Bagga in Graham et al 2007, p.162) which resonates with the current economic profile of the Punjabi community. Bagga elaborates how despite social class and financial instability, there is significance of family class immigration in the formation of the Punjabi community in Canada and the existence of cohesive group collectivity, against a sense of individuality, in the community. Given its immigration history of isolation and exclusion, the larger Sikh community considers everyone within as an extended family member (Bagga in Graham et al. 2007, p.163). In spite of these challenges, certain members in the community, including women, have been able to leverage social and cultural capital (religious centers, sports clubs, media outlets, seniors' associations to name a few) to improve their status economically and fight the barrier to political participation. Three out of five current Members of Parliament representing Brampton are professional women of Canadian Punjabi/Sikh origin (Kamal Khera – a registered nurse, Ruby Sahota – a lawyer and Sonia Sidhu – healthcare professional) who have achieved better economic, social and political standing while living in these very ethnic enclaves (Liberal Party of Canada 2020).

Despite the thriving nature of these ethnoburbs, they have been reported to conjure negative images of a ghetto (Ghosh 2013, p.47) by the very same members of the community. Interestingly, as informants voice out with Ghosh (2013), spaces of ethnoburbs like, "'Little India' (Brampton, Albion-Islington in North York) 'Little Pakistan' (Thornccliffe Park, East York) or 'Little Bangladesh' (Crescent

Town, East York)” (Ghosh 2013, p.47) vaguely conjure country-based (despite the possibility of communities from neighbouring countries may stay in same areas) affiliations rather than homogenized ‘South Asian’ spaces.

Intersectional understanding of these ethnic enclaves can generate new academic insights with potential for positive policy implications. Aggarwal and Das Gupta’s empirical work (2013) highlights less researched areas of invisible care work of Sikh Punjabi grandmothers that arrive in these ethnic enclaves as temporary residents or sponsored family members to Canada. The authors use the method of life story interviews to argue how that grand-mothering work ends up being invisible, unacknowledged, and unrecognized as other kinds of women’s reproductive work (Aggarwal and Das Gupta 2013, p.88). In Canada, these women have particular spatial limitations. Firstly, their immigrant status (temporary residents or sponsored family members status) keeps them from achieving higher socio-economic independence brought about by better housing, healthcare, access to social networks and ultimately better human rights, left behind in their ‘home’ country. Despite being a nurturer to children and grandchildren, they lose their decision-making power in the patriarchal family relations as a mother or a mother-in-law and become dependent on their children’s income. As a minority group within their own ethnoburb, they face spatial isolation leading to interlinked forces of constricting opportunities, residential segregation, and an abstract sense of poverty (Massey and Denton 1988). This heterogeneity of experiences within a spatial context of home and neighbourhood is an important aspect to be considered in the ever-changing transitions as described by Bourne (2004) that are “... creating new sources of difference - new divides - among and within the country’s urban centers, augmenting or replacing the traditional divides based on city-size, location in the heartland or periphery, and local economic base.”

Intersecting conjectures on precarious employment and health

In Toronto, immigrant women’s voices from Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan (Premji et al. 2014) generated new and complex conversations around precarious employment (on call, temporary, shift-based, contract work and casual work with little or no job security and no employment benefits). The authors related physical and mental health issues to complex connections with racialized social locations, particularly with regards to their religion, household and caregiving responsibilities (Premji et al. 2014, p.122). The study brings to light the voices of women not only as ‘South Asians’ but as university educated women with distinct nationalities (Premji et al. 2014, p.123). This approach established common elements and distinct experiences as a result of job precarity while pushing past the umbrella term of ‘South Asian’, underscoring distinct ways in which participants were often pushed

into long term trajectories of gendered, low paid precarious employment that did not reflect their education and experience (Premji et al. 2014, p.128).

Such a nuanced focus on immigrant diversity helps in directing specific services offered by immigrant serving organizations beyond a broad approach towards 'South Asia' where, for instance, the debates are about self-reliant 'South Asians' versus those that need 'settlement' services (Agrawal et al. in Graham 2007, p.110) or assuming mutual exclusivity (seniors or youth or LGBTQIA+) amongst groups regarding health issues of people from 'South Asia' (Our South Asian health & wellness strategy for Ontario 2018).

Karumanchery (2006) provides a detailed ethnic profiling of Indian women participants in their study that attempts to address "racial trauma" (psychological trauma caused by racism) in everyday socio-political spaces like corporations, school, communities (Karumanchery 2006, p.192). The study argues for diagnosis of trauma that attends to realities of racialized existence (Karumanchery 2006, p.189) by highlighting specific experiences as lived realities arising in contrast to the Canadian social spaces imagined as inclusive, equitable, and safe (Karumanchery 2006, p.190).

Considerable attention has been provided to research on newcomer 'integration' into the social, economic and cultural fabric of Ontario and continuing immigrant employment issues by 'CERIS-The Metropolis Project' (Anisef et al. in Graham et al. 2007). I was advised by the course director to go through, 'Our Diverse Cities' (2007) even if it was a dated collection of over twenty years as the compendium covers a range of topics like individual and structural barriers to decent employment (employment of choice, with security and benefits), transportation networks and commuter issues, workplaces and immigrant acculturation to name a few (Graham et al. 2007, p.4). The project raised pertinent questions that needed governments "to develop a better understanding of the policy implications of having broadly defined populations ("Black," "Asian," "Aboriginal") that may themselves be very diverse linguistically, culturally and in terms of religion" (Graham et al. 2007, p.6). Such intersectional approaches have brought to light multiple connections relating to long term precarious work conditions of women immigrants, negatively affecting their care work for family, hazardous work environment, mental health implications, social deprivation and commuter issues to list a few (Premji 2017).

Hybrid identities and future trajectories for diasporic research

For immigrants, hybrid identities could entail ending of rigid cultural boundaries between by intermingling within the Canadian multicultural context , which results in the dissolution of unique

identities (Anthropology 2018). Canadian Geographers are interested to study diasporas, their hybrid identities related to Asia or the Pacific as they contribute to over fifty percent of Canada's immigration and influence Canada's largest urban centers (Walton- Roberts 2003). This interest could enable academic debates by the way of moving beyond the stereotypical image of 'South Asian' women as victims of patriarchy and as individuals with agency and negotiation in patriarchal cultural practices (Samuel 2013). Samuel's empirical study on immigrant women as nursing professionals from the Orthodox Syrian Christian community of India moves away from the dominant Hindu narratives of popular academic scholarship on Indian immigrants. A key learning from the women's voices in the study highlighted complex experiences of racial exclusion in "settlement" in the 'host' country leading to greater dependence on 'home' country's cultural practices ultimately affecting immigrant 'integration' into the 'host' society (Samuel 2013, p.103).

This review has ultimately helped me understand the importance of intersectionality in studying urban spatialities. Delving deeper into each urban spatiality with this intersectional lens has the potential to unearth nuanced experiences of marginality among different groups of racialized and/or migrant women and evolve specific strategies to address them.

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