IMMIGRANTS AND RACIALIZATION IN CANADA

Geographies of Exclusion?

ABSTRACT

This research draws on information from Statistics Canada provided to York University through the Data Liberation Initiative and to the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement, CERIS – Toronto.

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Approximately 18% of Canada's permanent residents are foreign-born and their share of the population increases annually as approximately 200,000 immigrants land in Canada. Recent immigrants are coming from new sources, changing the complexion of Canada. The majority of immigrants now arrive from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Central America and South America. In 2001, more than 80% of the Canadian population born abroad was visible minorities, people who identify themselves as not being of European background, Caucasian race or white colour (Statistics Canada 2003). Living in a racialized society dominated by people from European backgrounds, recent immigrants face challenges to successful integration rooted in their experiences as newcomers and as people of colour.

Visible minority immigrants' experiences are shaped by conditions in Canada's major metropolitan areas where they are concentrated. Three quarters live in Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver (Statistics Canada, 2003). In 2001, 45% of all visible minority immigrants in Canada resided in Toronto, 19% in Vancouver, and 11% in Montréal. Every visible minority immigrant group, except for the Montréal Arab population and Vancouver Japanese population, had its largest numbers in Toronto (Statistics Canada, 2003).

Much of our understanding of the experiences of racialized people in Canada is based on data collected by Statistics Canada. Four social characteristics may be used to classify an individual's ethno-cultural background: place of birth, mother tongue, ethnic origin, and visible minority group (Boyd, Goldmann and White, 2000). Few studies consider how these social characteristics intersect.[2] Yet, the success of visible minority immigrants in Canadian society reflects their experiences as visible minorities and as newcomers. Since immigrants now account for more than 70% of all people from visible minority groups in Canada (Hou and Picot, 2004, Statistics Canada, 2003),[3] understanding the ways they resist and respond to the effects of being newcomers and people of colour is crucial for curbing their social exclusion in Canadian society.

Shaped by the country's economic, social, and political circumstances, immigration policy has always influenced the composition of the Canadian population. Starting with the early 'need' for settlers and labourers, migrants to Canada have been judged on their ability to contribute to, and their ability to 'fit in' in Canada (Stasiulis and Jhappan, 1995). Historically, evaluation of these two factors and the question of whether a migrant was settler *or* labourer had racialized dimensions (Razak, 2002). Settlers from the colonial headquarters of France, and then Britain, were courted. As Canada grew, labourers for resource-based industries were drawn from countries such as Japan, India, China, and Italy.

Immigration policies often entrenched racism. The *Chinese Immigration Act* and *Chinese Exclusion Acts* imposed large taxes on immigrants from China; the *Continuous Journey Stipulation of 1908* limited immigration from India; and the 1910 *Immigration Act* gave governmental consent to institutionalized racism (Abu-Laban, 1998). Beginning in 1962, overtly discriminatory practices and policies were removed gradually. The introduction of a 'points system,' whereby an applicant for admission to Canada was assessed on the basis of skills, age, education and employment prospects instead of nationality, ethnic origin, race, religion, and colour was a major step forward increasing the 'objectivity' with which would-be immigrants were evaluated (Li, 2003).

At the same time as immigration policies were evolving, multiculturalism was becoming part of Canadian discourse and law. The policy, introduced in 1971, promised that ethnic groups could retain their cultural heritage while participating fully in Canadian society (Hansard, 1971). Incorporated into the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982, multiculturalism policy was revised to

refer explicitly to racial diversity in the *Multiculturalism Act, 1985* that was ratified in 1988 (Leman, 1999). Current legislation and programs promise full participation in Canadian society to immigrants from all sources and ethno-racial backgrounds.

Challenges for Canadian Society

Despite the promises of multiculturalism, visible minority immigrants are experiencing exclusion and marginalization in Canada. One measure of their difficulties is the rising percentage of immigrant families that reported incomes below the low-income cut off, a frequent measure of poverty.[4] Between 1991 and 2001, the percentage of families with incomes below the low-income cut off increased for families in which the principal wage earner was an immigrant and declined for families in which the principal wage earner was Canadian-born. Even as the economy grew, poverty rates for immigrant families increased. The divergent trends underscore the persistent economic challenges facing recent arrivals, the majority of whom are visible minorities.

The resulting poverty rates are unacceptably high for visible minority immigrants. In 1996, almost four in ten visible minority immigrant households in the Toronto metropolitan area were living in poverty. Among households with a Canadian-born principal respondent of European background, the percentage with incomes below the low-income cut off was 16.3% (Preston, Lo and Wang, 2003). As recent immigrants, visible minority immigrants are also experiencing different processes of labour market integration than their earlier counterparts from European sources (Aydemir and Skuterud, 2005). On average, their earnings are not catching up with those of the Canadian-born within a decade as was true for immigrants arriving prior to 1986. As a result, recent visible minority immigrants are much more likely to be living in poverty than earlier arrivals who were visible minorities. In 1996, the percentages of visible minority immigrant households in Toronto with incomes below the low-income cut off were 19.0% for those who had arrived before 1986 and 48.5% for those who arrived after 1985 (Preston, Lo and Wang, 2003).

The deteriorating economic performance of visible minority immigrants is not well understood. Researchers have proposed many explanations. Employers are placing less value on foreign work experience than on domestic experience (Ayedemir and Skuterud, 2005), immigrants are facing increased competition from highly educated Canadian-born workers (Reitz, 2001, Li, 2003), and accreditation issues reduce immigrants' access to regulated professions (Brouwer, 1999). Fluency in Canada's official languages also influences immigrants' economic performance. As employers require more literacy from all employees, immigrants who are not fluent in French or English or speak with an accent have more difficulties obtaining employment commensurate with their qualifications and experience (Boyd and Thomas, 2002). Racism may also affect the economic prospects of all immigrants, particularly visible minority immigrants.

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The Question of Segregation

Recently, attention has turned to the impact of residential segregation on the inclusion of visible minority immigrants in Canadian society. Newspapers report growing concern that immigrants are being placed at a disadvantage by living in residential areas where they are the majority of the population (Carey, 2001). In public discourse, there is a growing and troubling association between residential concentrations of visible minorities and poverty. It is useful to analyze the supposed relationship between residential segregation and the economic difficulties facing visible minority immigrants as an avenue for examining how racism and discrimination influence the inclusion of visible minority immigrants.

Although overall levels of segregation in Canadian cities are lower than in American cities, visible minorities are often more segregated from the dominant British and French populations than ethnic groups from European backgrounds (Balakrishnan and Gyimah, 2003; Bauder and Sharpe, 2002; Ray, 1998). In the three large metropolitan areas, visible minority residents experience moderate levels of segregation while residents from southern, central and eastern European backgrounds are segregated slightly. The exception to these trends is the Jewish population that is still highly segregated (Balakrishnan and Gyimah, 2003; Myles and Hou, 2004).

The causes of segregation in Canadian cities are disputed. The gradual decline in segregation for most ethnic groups from southern, central and eastern Europe is often cited as evidence that segregation is largely voluntary, an attempt to maintain cultural identities and heritage by concentrating in residential neighbourhoods (Murdie and Teixeira, 2003). However, there is recent evidence that some visible minority groups are experiencing difficulties in the housing market that may contribute to segregation (Myles and Hou, 2004). Blacks have lower rates of home-ownership than expected on the basis of their incomes, occupation, and education suggesting that discriminatory processes may be operating (Myles and Hou, 2004). Immigrants and refugees who are visible minorities also report discriminatory experiences in the housing market (Owusu, 1998; Novac et al., 2002).

The consequences of segregation for visible minority immigrants in Canadian cities are also not well understood.

Some research suggests that the incomes of visible minorities who live in neighbourhoods dominated by a visible minority group are lower than those of visible minorities who live in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods (Kazemipur and Halli, 2000; Lee, 2000). Critics question these findings on several grounds. They note that the low-income cut off, the most common measure of poverty, is only one measure of deprivation which is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon (Germain and Gagnon, 1999; Ley and Smith, 2000). Others have found little relationship between the percentage of people in a neighbourhood who are living in poverty and the percentage who are immigrants (Ley and Smith, 2000). Still others note that the various mechanisms by which neighbourhood circumstances limit the life chances of immigrants are not spelled out (Germain and Gagnon 1999). They question the extent to which research that links the residential segregation of African-American populations at the centres of American cities to high and sustained rates of impoverishment (Wilson, 1996) is applicable to the experiences of visible minority immigrants in Canadian cities.

American research is difficult to translate into the Canadian context for three reasons. Patterns of segregation in Canadian cities differ from those in American cities. Levels of segregation in Canadian cities are lower than those in American cities and the effects of racialization are more complex. There is no Canadian equivalent of a ghetto in which a visible minority group dominates the neighbourhood population and high proportions of the group's total population live in neighbourhoods where the group is a sizable majority (Peach, 1996). Even for Chinese and South Asian immigrants, the most segregated visible minority immigrant groups, there is little relationship between neighbourhood location and income (Hou and Picot, 2004; Myles and Hou, 2004). Unlike African-Americans the group that is most often studied with respect to segregation in American cities, many visible minority immigrants are more educated than the average Canadian-born adult. Their educational attainments should ensure that visible minority immigrants enjoy economic success in Canada.

The suburbanization of minorities is also taking different directions in Canada than in the United States, further differentiating segregation patterns in the two countries. In Canadian metropolitan areas, suburbs are home to large and diverse populations of visible minority immigrants who move to the suburbs for many different reasons. For some, the suburbs offer inexpensive social and private rental housing[5] (Owusu, 1998) while others seek homeownership in a suburban setting (Ray, Halseth and Johnson, 1997). The social diversity of the visible minority immigrant population in the suburbs of Canadian metropolitan areas is not matched in American cities where suburbanization is the purview of affluent minority households (Alba, Logan and Stults, 2000).

Finally, recent research in the United Kingdom and Western Europe raises questions about the nature and significance of segregation. Spatial patterns of segregation in Canada are similar in many ways to those in the United Kingdom that are influenced significantly by housing and welfare policies. In this context, a recent analysis of several European cities (Murie and Musterd, 2004) concluded that the characteristics of the neighbourhood affect the options for social mobility once a household experiences poverty and other forms of social exclusion. In the European context where the welfare state actively redistributes income and sets a floor under household income, neighbourhood characteristics do not determine which households experience poverty. Contrary to the American view of segregation, the European experience suggests that segregation may affect visible minority immigrants' future prospects more than they explain their current economic difficulties.

Recent visible minority immigrants are much more likely to be living in poverty than earlier arrivals who were visible minorities. In 1996, the percentages of visible minority immigrant households in Toronto with incomes below the low-income cut off were 19.0% for those who had arrived before 1986 and 48.5% for those who arrived after 1985.

Looking Ahead

As yet, we have a limited understanding of the social processes that lead to the exclusion of visible minority immigrants. There is tremendous scope for future research. For example, current analyses of the causes of visible minority immigrants' economic difficulties are often contradictory. To explain immigrants' low employment rates, Aydemir and Skuterud (2005) emphasize that employers do not value foreign work experience, while Hum and Simpson (2003) highlight the importance of time of arrival. One way to reconcile these divergent findings is research that takes account of how visible minority status interacts with the effects of gender, period of arrival, and other social characteristics and the ways that these links change over time. Research must also take seriously the possibility that visible minority immigrants are experiencing discrimination in the labour and housing markets. It is insufficient to attribute unexplained differences in housing and employment outcomes to discrimination (e.g., Pendakur, 2000). Audits in which paired applicants who differ only in terms of their skin colour apply for the same jobs or housing vacancies are one of the few means of establishing definitively the extent and nature of discriminatory practices.

Comparative research that documents the changing benefits and disadvantages of segregation would also be useful. Upon arrival in Canada, women from Hong Kong and China benefited from living near other members of their communities, although, later, surrounded by people speaking Cantonese and Mandarin, they felt at risk of losing their fluency in English (Preston and Man, 1999). Research also needs to examine the impacts of living in a low-income neighbourhood on visible minority immigrants' economic prospects. The statistical associations calculated between the proportions of visible minority immigrants in a census tract

and the proportions of the population with incomes below the low-income cut off do not reveal the mechanisms by which residential location affects economic integration. Statistical associations also mask the highly variable nature of neighbourhood effects and their impacts (Hou and Picot, 2004). The multi-ethnic nature of Canadian neighbourhoods also warrants investigation. Given the relatively low levels of segregation in Canadian cities, visible minority immigrants are settling in neighbourhoods with diverse populations. By drawing mainly on American studies of segregation (Borjas, 2000), we overlook the potential role of multi-ethnic neighbourhoods as sites of inclusion in Canadian metropolitan areas.

Given the unique demographic and political characteristics of Canadian cities, we cannot simply transfer ideas from other countries and cities. We need to develop a sophisticated understanding of the factors contributing to exclusion in a Canadian context that has been shaped by immigration and multiculturalism policies implemented more than thirty years ago. The research is essential to combat the exclusion of visible minority immigrants and to achieve the promise expressed in contemporary multiculturalism policies.

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Notes

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2 For an important exception, see (Hou and Picot, 2004; Hou, 2004).

3 In the interest of clarity, the terms in this article are congruent with those used by Statistics Canada in the 2001 Census of Population and do not reflect the political views of the authors.

4 The low-income cutoff is the minimum income for a household to meet its basic needs. The value of the low-income cutoff is adjusted for household size and the population size of the household's place of residence.

5 Social housing includes housing units that are owned and managed by the government and cooperative housing that offers subsidized housing to low-income tenants.

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