

***Vertical Neighbourhoods as
Spaces of Hope and Despair: A Case
Study of Bangladeshi neighbourhoods
in Toronto***

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Outline

- Neighbourhoods
- “Vertical Neighbourhoods”
- Bangladeshis in Toronto
- The Production of Bangladeshi Neighbourhoods
- Conclusions

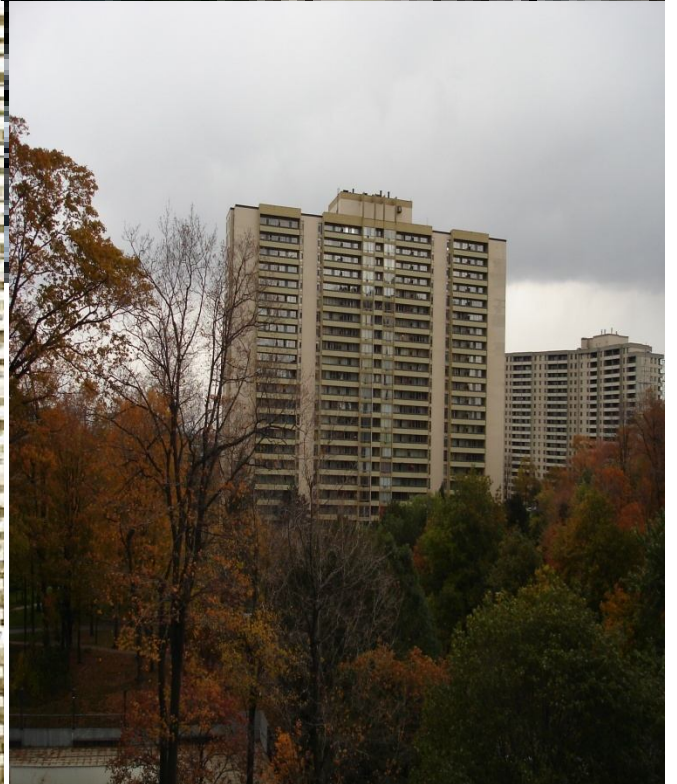
“Traditional” Concept of Neighbourhoods

Horizontal Spaces

- Low Density
- Low Rise
- Backyards and Front Porches



Vertical Neighbourhoods?

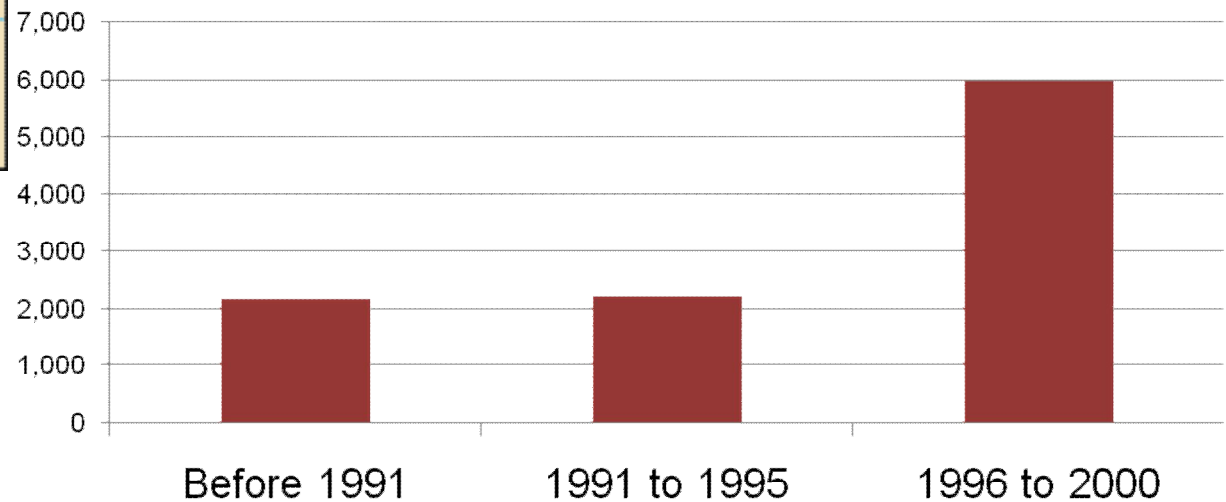


The Case Study: Bangladeshis in Toronto

Bangladesh



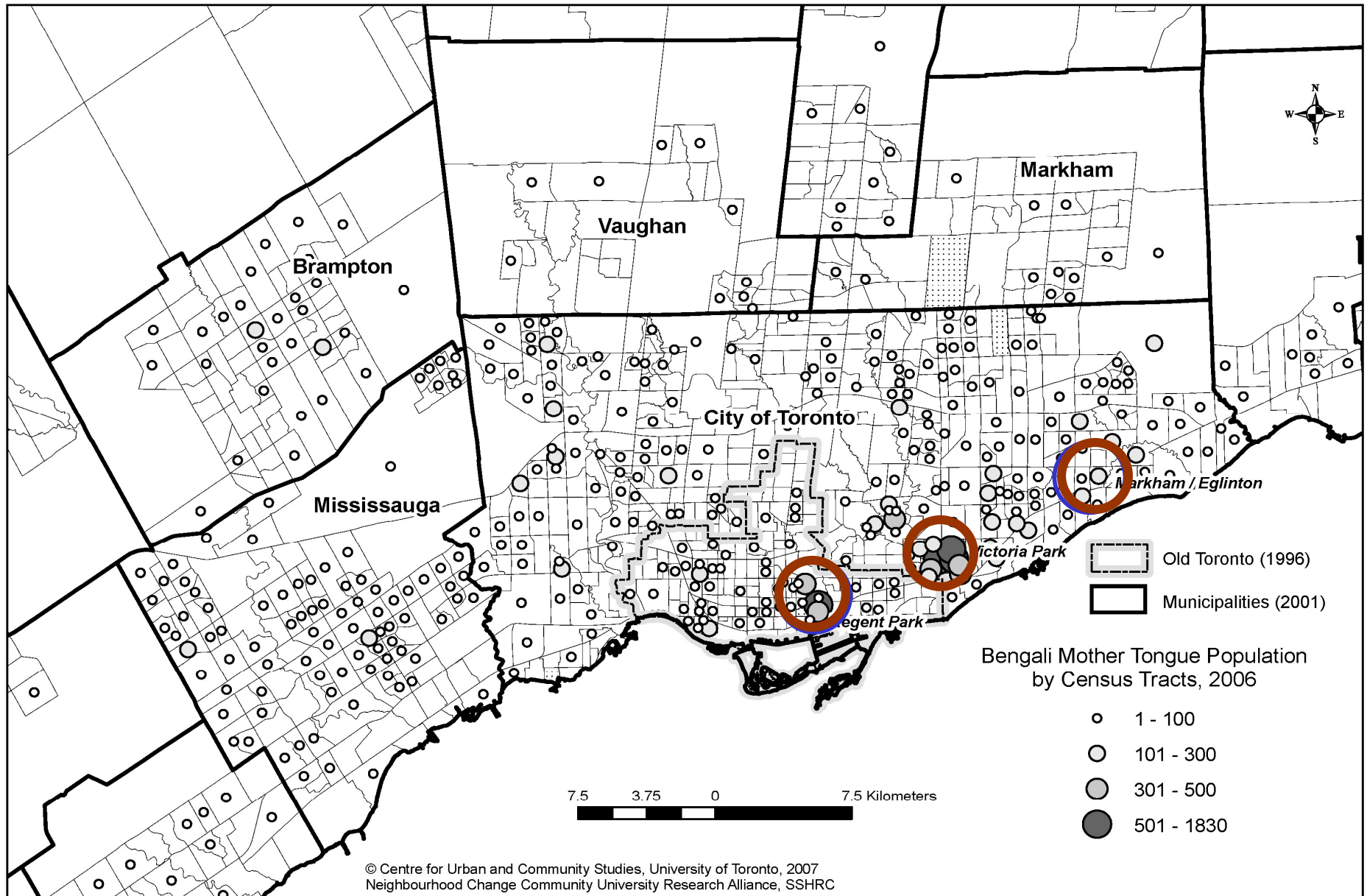
Bangladeshi Immigration to Toronto



Identifying “Bangladeshi” Neighbourhoods

- **Concentration of Population**
 - Census Data
 - 16 DAs at least 100 Bangladeshi Households
 - 25% of all Bangladeshis
- **Degrees of Institutional Completeness**
 - Key Informant Interviews
 - Business Directories
 - Field Observation
- **Self Identification**
 - Semi-Structured Interviews
 - 15 Key Informants
 - 30 Respondent Households

Bengali Mother Tongue Population, Toronto CMA, 2006



Victoria Park

- East Don Valley Parklands Area
- Built in the 1970s
- 97% High Rise
- Primarily Rental (Private and Public)
- Ownership Condos – many units are rented
- 22% Need Minor Repairs
- 12% Need Major Repairs
- 50% of Renters Spend More than 30% of Income on Rent
- Invasion Succession
 - Late 1990s Bangladeshis
 - Now Largest Recently Immigrated Group



Institutional Completeness : Victoria Park

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প্রিয়া

Regent Park

- 1940s and 1950s
- Social Housing
- 66% High Rise
- 37% Need Minor Repairs
- 19% Need Major Repairs
- Most Bangladeshis arrived in the mid 1990s
- Most Bangladeshis are from Sylhet District, who came to Toronto from Montreal



Institutional Completeness: Regent Park



Eglinton Avenue and Markham Road

- Built in 1970s
- 75% High Rise
- 81% Rental
- 31% Need Minor Repairs
- 20% Need Major Repairs
- Primarily “South Asians”,
Bangladeshis, Afghanis, Sri
Lankans and Pakistanis and
some Caribbean
- 54% of Renters Spend
More than 30% of Income
on Rent



Institutional Completeness: Eglinton Avenue and Markham Road



Bangladeshis in Toronto, 2001

	Toronto	Bangladeshis in Toronto
Population Born Outside Canada (%)	45.2	86.8
Population Immigrated 1991-2001 (%)	17.0	75.6
University Degree	24.9	51.4
Managerial, Professional, Other Skilled	57.1	42.9
Unskilled Sales, Service, Manual	11.3	21.0
Unemployment Rate (%)	5.9	14.4
Low Income Families (%)	14.4	59.6
Average Household Income (CAD)	76,454	33,925
Married Couples (%)	16.4	95
Persons per Household	2.8	3.8
Renters (%)	37	81%
Dwellings Needing Major/Minor Repair (%)	31.8	39.8
Households (%) Spending:		
30% or more of Income on Shelter	28.9	50.7
50% or more of Income on Shelter	12.2	29.6

Respondents at the Time of Interview

Characteristics	N=30
Length of Stay in Toronto	Majority between 3 and 5 years, some 10 years
Income	Low income, many on social assistance
Labour Market Participation	Most looking for jobs in their field of specialisation Many unemployed in the formal sector 54% men and 40% women working full-time outside of home
Occupation	Very few in managerial or professional positions Many women are stay-at-home mothers
Incidence of Retraining	Some were retraining: women ESL classes, men apprenticeship or obtaining another undergraduate degree or diploma
Language	Men are well versed, Women are relatively less comfortable in spoken English

Respondents at the Time of Interview

Characteristics		N=30
Average Household Size		4
Household Structure	Couples with a Child / Children	27
Length of Stay in Toronto	Less than 5 years	20
	Between 5 and 10 Years	7
	More than 10 years	3
Gross Household Income before Taxes	Less than \$20,000	15
	\$20,001 to \$50,000	11
	\$50,001 to \$75,000	3
	\$75,001 to \$100,000	1
	\$100,001 and above	--

Respondents at the Time of Interview

Characteristics		Men	Women	
Labour Force Participation Rate (Full and Part-time)		54%	40%	
Respondent's Source of Income	Professional / Managerial Occupations	4	2	
	Manufacturing Occupations	1	2	
	Services	Catering /Hospitality	6	--
		Technical Support	--	--
		Retail	--	4
	Self Employed**		5	4
	Social Assistance		14	
	Other	Stay at home Mothers and/or Homemakers	--	16
Ability to Speak in English	Fluent	22	10	
	Not Fluent	8	20	

From a High Rise to a Neighbourhood

- Transformation of Space: From Functional to Economic, Social and Political
- Spaces of Hope: Neighbourliness – Mutual Trust and Dependence
- Spaces of Despair: Exploitation and Alienation
- Perception of Space: Bidesh and Desh

From Functional Space To Lived Space

“Bengali” Services available within a Building

- Grocery Store
- Mosque and Quoran Classes
- Informal Daycare facilities
- At-Home Beauty Parlours
- Academic Tutors
- Bengali Language Classes
- Informal Catering Services



From Functional Space to Social Space (Gendered Space)

We have a mosque on the 7th floor, yes it is rented [the apartment] but we all pay you know. It is so cold here in the winter months and I cannot drive... this is a good place for us [women in the building] to go and pray, I can take the children as well. Their father goes to the Baitur mosque (Mrs. N. S.: 2003)

...for my wife it is important that we live here [meaning the apartment building] she can function on her own.... (Mr. M.K.: 2003)

I have many friends here. Sometimes we co-ordinate our laundry times so that we can chat...(Mrs. M. K. : 2003)

I know they have all these signs don't loiter, oh, but we do anyways...you can't go out sometimes and we really don't have so much time to go to the park (Mrs. S. B.: 2003)

Neighbourliness: Sense of Family

Oh, I keep the door opened, otherwise, I will have to open it every minute... they [her own children and those of the neighbours] are always coming and going... this house, this fridge is theirs and theirs' is mine... who will rob us... if I closed the apartment door, the neighbours will feel hurt (Mrs. R. Ch.: 2003)

We don't have to make appointments to meet like them [laughs]... we drop by [each other's place], if I open my door and she her door... we can also speak in the corridor (Mrs. S. B.: 2003)

Spaces of Hope

When we decided to come to Canada, of course we had connections...well, we knew people who had friends and family in Toronto...look even if we did not really know someone, I am sure we would not be left on the street, my children will go hungry and other Bengalis will just look, that will never happen (Mr. M. Q.: 2003)

I just had K [daughter]...when I went to work, I could leave her with Bhabi [sister in law-no blood relation] next-door. Here it is not like that, it can be my house but it is not the same. These people [meaning non-Bangladeshi neighbours] do not understand me and I do not understand them... (Mrs. M. H.: 2003)

Spaces of Hope

When her [meaning wife's] father passed away, she left everything, me the children and went back home. Our friends here told me, let "A" go, we will take care...where else can I get this in Toronto? (Mr. A. Ch.: 2003)

*If we went away from here I would not get small jobs here and there. When I first came, I used to cook for **** restaurant....I don't have to ask my husband all the time for little things. I also worked in **** store, the man...used to treat me like a servant (Mrs. R.C.: 2003)*

Spaces of Despair

See the apartment yourself... we pay \$850 for a one bedroom and see how it is... there are cockroaches and insects everywhere ... they [the maintenance personnel] will come and promise they will do something but eventually nothing will happen. The roof of our bathroom is leaking, one day my son was playing in this area when a huge chunk of building material fell... it almost hit him. (Mrs. S B.: 2003)

proper security system... they just say, nothing is done (Mr. A. Q.: 2003)

When I buy my own house I will make sure that there are some Muslims in the area... people are killed just because they are wearing a cap (P.A.: 2003)

Spaces of Contestations

The supervisor will not give me the place. ..she was sitting with her feet on the table, when she saw me she didn't even put her feet down, how disrespectful these people can be... I was stunned that they think we are like beggars here...she looked right in my eyes and said nothing was vacant. (Mr. K. B.: 2003)

I am always afraid when my children are out late. Everyday there is something or the other going on here...no work just smoke, having babies. I feel frustrated, don't know why they [building supervisors] can't install a security system

Spatial Imaginations

Toronto = Bidesh (Migrant City)

I don't think that I am Torontonion. Why, because I am a Bengali. Why should I think I am Torontonion? Do you think you are Torontonion...it is like they keep a distance and we keep a distance. (Mr. M.. A: 2003)

For me, Toronto is like a place you go to, you work and then come back home. Nowhere in Toronto, do I feel the way I feel when I come here. It is just different. (Mrs. S A: 2003)

Spatial Imaginations

Neighbourhood = Desh (Homeland)

Well, I have some Pakistani friends at work, but [we] will not choose a house knowing that is in a Pakistani area, Indian Bengalis, ok, but not my first choice (Mr. J. H. : 2003)

*Yes this is a Bengali area but it is not like Victoria Park ...there are too many criminals here and there is a lot of drug abuse, that is why many Bengalis feel that the government should not allow **** and **** to live here...many of us not just Bengalis don't feel safe and so we need to make this area more like ours (Mr. O. I.: 2003)*

A Bengali area like this one [Victoria Park] , that's all...you are away but you are still at home...jumma namaz [Friday prayers]...functions all the time...Sundays, while doing grocery...you don't feel the emptiness (Mr. N. S.:2003)

Conclusions

- Immigrant groups variously transform cities (conceived space) and societies into lived spaces (representational space) through symbols, sights, sounds and smells
- Ethnic enclaves are not always places of “choice”, nor are they places of “constraint”, but of “constrained choice”
- Immigrant neighbourhoods are not always “happy” spaces ---- these can be ambivalent spaces of hope and despair, contestations and imaginations
- It is important to examine the everyday practices of “immigrant groups” in order to understand their types and levels of integration in the Canadian society
- The traditional concept of neighbourhoods needs to be revisited—neighbourhoods can also be vertical spaces
- Qualitative research complementing quantitative analysis is needed
- Longitudinal studies are necessary to track the processes of change within ethnic enclaves, at the inter and intra city scales