Vancouver Centre of Excellence

Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis

Working Paper Series

RIIM

Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis

The 'Flexible' Immigrant:
Household Strategies and the Labour Market

by

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December 2006

Abstract: As the Canadian immigration system has increasingly sought ways to select immigrants based on their human capital, it has correspondingly problematized immigrant families. Most analyses of economic integration have, at best, treated the family members of the primary applicant or main wage-earner in a household as shadowy figures. In drawing on interviews, conducted over a five-year period with recent migrant families in two different neighbourhoods in the Greater Vancouver area, we followed the paths of individual household members, as well as the fortunes of the household as a unit. The longitudinal study allowed us to observe the strategies of households and their members over time as they negotiated multiple barriers in the labour market and represented their hopes, desires and meanings of family. This analysis opens up a view of the 'flexible household' in the context of a discourse of those immigrants mostly likely to achieve 'successful integration' and contribute to Canada's economic goals. We argue that households not only provide fundamental support in the migration process, but also enable immigrants to adopt flexible and changing strategies to deal with precarious circumstances and thereby begin the process of integration. Rather than a being a 'problem', immigrant households may be the lynchpin to successful integration.

Introduction: Placing Households

Social and economic integration are key concerns in considering the impact of large-scale immigration on the countries of the developed world. While goods, capital and informational flows are 'neutral' features of globalisation with increasingly few barriers to their movement, international migration of people is far more problematic, with the richest democracies of the world putting into place various barriers to free movement (*The Economist*, April 1-7, 2006). Some people in the world are much more mobile than others (Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006), and are inserted in the 'power-geometry' of place quite differently (Massey 1993). That is, individuals and groups enjoy varying access to the material and social resources that foster or support ways of 'belonging' in an adopted country; similarly their ability to create resources will differ. As nation states debate the contributions to or possible 'drain' on society of immigrants and refugees, particularly in relation to the economy, these 'others' in the nation are represented through a number of discourses. A human capital discourse, for example, privileges the well-educated, highly qualified, relatively young 'flexible' immigrant. Those entering Canada as dependants, especially through the family reunification category of immigration policy, or as refugees, fare less well (McLaren and Black 2005); their recognised contributions tend to be confined to the cultural sphere and at that, in the context of a carefully scripted 'celebration of diversity', which is a cornerstone of Canada's multicultural ethic and polity. Indeed some commentators are hostile to family reunification immigration on the basis that family class immigrants are unlikely to be successful in the labour market (Grubel 2005). The business class immigrant bringing financial investment and potential job creation is counterpoised against other less visible contributors to the economy, such as caregivers entering through the Live-in Caregiver programme who support – as an example – the dual career wage earners whose economic contribution to the economy is more tangible at first sight (Arat-Koc 1995).

The broad specifications of Canadian immigration policy, thereby, recognise immigrants and refugees to be diverse. But where the family fits into a picture of economic integration is unclear – the family members of the primary applicant or main wage-earner in a household are shadowy figures in most analyses of economic integration. This lack, we suggest, fails to adequately recognise the complex but undeniable links between economic and social life that carve out conditions under which immigrants and refugees come to participate in the labour force, make friends, raise children and ultimately become 'Canadian' in quite specific ways. At the heart of this life is the household – not an unvariegated, single decision-making unit, but a set of fluid kinship and/or other relations with particular sociocultural dynamics and intra-household inequalities. Feminist scholars in unpacking the relations of power at the household level, for example, show the deep connections between gender

identities and the structuring of men's and women's employment; as Buzar, Ogden and Hall (2005:424) comment, a "growing body of evidence suggests that the negotiation of gender roles in the household can affect the flexibilization of family and employment patterns in the macroeconomy." Further, a 'second demographic transition' has resulted in a wide variation of household forms and "turned the traditional conceptualization of the family on its head" (ibid:420). They argue that urban processes in the developed world need to be understood in parallel with the contemporary plurality and fluidity of household arrangements emerging from three decades of demographic change. They claim "deep connections between household demography, on the one hand, and the social, spatial and cultural aspects of everyday life, on the other" (ibid:422).

Our focus on the household in this paper is consistent with this understanding of the recursive links between households and spatial and social processes, and similarly endorses feminist work that has been central in demonstrating the significance of gender and the domestic realm to economic production and migration more generally (Strategic Workshop on Immigrant Women Making Place in Canadian Cities, 2002). This signalling of the significant theoretical potential of the household in unravelling relations of power that connect the social, cultural and economic dimensions of migrant 'integration' is matched methodologically with our empirical focus on the household in our study. An earlier paper points to the gender and generational variation in immigration experiences of various immigrant households in different neighbourhoods in Vancouver (Creese, Dyck and McLaren 1999). Here we build on this analysis, aiming to explore the links between households (and their intra-household relations) and the economic participation of household members. In this longitudinal study we capture something of the processual nature of the households, which are embedded in sets of local and non-local relations that take on greater or less significance over the five-year period of the study as members of the household in question work to create a socially, economically and culturally satisfying life in Canada. Our particular focus is on household members' participation in the labour force and its relationship with the domestic sphere of the home – which in some cases is stretched over space as household strategies accommodate a variety of material, social and cultural resource issues.

The research adopted qualitative strategies in exploring intra-household relations and dynamics, keeping in mind that subaltern accounts are important in revealing the effects and negotiation of social relations of power (Dossa 2004; Lawson 2000). The in-depth semi-structured interviews with household members provided such situatedness of personal stories – of both individual and shared family experience – within an interweaving of intra-household, local and non-local relations (see also Dyck and McLaren 2004). By interviewing over a five-year period, we were

able to follow the paths of individual household members, as well as the fortunes of the household as a unit. This longitudinal aspect of the study thereby allowed us to observe the household as process (c.f. Hardill 2002), linked in complex ways with various material conditions and social relations of power. Observation of the strategies of households and their members over time, and how these are represented by them in terms of hopes, desires and meanings of family, opens up a view of the 'flexible household' (or its converse) in the context of a discourse of those immigrants mostly likely to achieve 'successful integration' and contribute to Canada's economic goals.

Research Practice and Process

This paper is based on interviews with recent migrant families in two different neighbourhoods in the greater Vancouver area. Vancouver is second only to Toronto as a prime Canadian destination for new immigrants. According to the Census, immigrants made up 37.5% of the total population of the Vancouver area in 2001 (Statistics Canada 2003a: 35). We compare families' experiences in an inner city neighbourhood that constitutes a traditional reception area for new immigrants – East Vancouver – with experiences in a suburban neighbourhood – the Tri Cities[1] – with a relatively new but growing immigrant population. The research team recruited households through immigrant settlement agencies and placed ads in local ethnic media in the two study areas. In East Vancouver we recruited 14 households from Bolivia, El Salvador, Hong Kong, India, Peru, Philippines, Somalia, Uganda and Vietnam. In the Tri-Cities we recruited 11 households from Brazil, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Korea, Japan, Poland, and the former Yugoslavia.

Most families were interviewed multiple times over a five-year period (1997-2002).[2] Our intent was to interview all household members from the age of 15 and up, but in practice not all household members were willing or able to take part. The dynamics of interviews varied widely, as in some cases individual household members wished to be interviewed with others. The stories therefore varied, with some representing experiences from an individual's viewpoint and others a shared,

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[1] The Tri-Cities is composed of 3 adjacent municipalities: Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody

[2] In the cases of the households in East Vancouver, the sequence of interviews were conducted by the one author, Creese, and a colleague, Dan Hiebert, in the first 2 years and the final year; in between research assistants helped with some of the interviews. The first year of interviewing of the households in the Tri Cities was carried out by the authors Dyck and McLaren, with subsequent interviews conducted by graduate students or community based research assistants, with careful consultation and debriefing. Ethical guidelines of the two universities involved were followed, and the study approved by the respective ethical review boards. Not all families participated for the full 5 years; some could not be located at a later date, and others declined to continue to be involved in the project. Of the 14 families recruited in East Vancouver, 4 families were interviewed once; 4 were interviewed twice; and 6 were interviewed 4 times over 5 years. Of the 11 families recruited in the Tri Cities, 1 family was interviewed twice; 6 were interviewed 3 times; 3 were interviewed 4 times; and 1 was interviewed 5 times over 5 years.

composite story. All accounts are necessarily a view from 'somewhere' (Haraway 1988); here we are primarily concerned with identifying the particular narrative of employment, as viewed from within the intra-household relations that frame the understanding and practices of economic production.

Because our research design is complex – comparing households in two different neighbourhoods and examining them longitudinally – and because our aim is to provide in-depth analysis, we selected four households to examine in this paper. We selected the four households (two in each neighbourhood) to highlight specific features of household composition and employment-related activities. The four household families were all recent immigrants to Canada and the principal applicant had come to Canada in the independent, skilled worker stream. We interviewed at least two members of each household and continued to interview one or more household members 4-5 times over a five-year period (1997-2002). Here we provide a general profile of the four households to highlight some of their key features. During the five-year period the composition of the four households and members' activities shifted considerably (which we discuss below in more detail). Table 1 provides an overview of the 4 households.

Table 1 : Profile of the four households

	Marcos Household (EV)	Khalili Household (TC)	Naidu Household (EV)	Lau Household (TC)
Country of origin	Philippines	Iran	India	Hong Kong
Arrival in Canada	1997	1997	1996 onward	1996
Highest educational level in household	Engineer	Engineer Bachelor degree	Masters degree	Bachelor degree
Level of English spoken	Fluent	Fluent	Fluent	Some difficulties in everyday speech
Household type	Nuclear family	Nuclear family	Extended family	Extended family
Number of household members during research period	4	4	2-7	7-8
Pseudonym (first name) of interview participants	Husband: José Wife: Margarete	Wife: Mania Husband: Majid Daughter: Mehri Son : Amin	Older sister: Leena Younger sister: Chandra	Eldest son: Terence Daugher-in-law: Iris Daughter: Holly Son-in-law: Ron
Accommodation	Rented apartment	Rented apartment By year 5: had bought apartment in same neighbourhood	Rented basement suite	Home owned by parents By year 5: Terence and Iris had bought house in another neighbourhood

EV=East Vancouver; TC=Tri-Cities

Two of the households consisted of nuclear families – the Marcos family in East Vancouver and the Khalili family in the Tri-Cities. Each of these households consisted of a husband and wife and two children. The research team interviewed the wife and husband in the East Vancouver household (the children were too young to interview) and interviewed the husband (one year only), wife, daughter and son (who were teenagers) in the Tri-Cities household. The husbands in these two families were professional engineers. As they sought employment that was compatible with their training, they were involved in the Canadian labour market in occupations that were at lower skill levels. The woman of the East Vancouver household had come to Canada with less education than her husband and moved in and out of the labour market providing an economic buffer for the family. The woman in the Tri-Cities household had a university degree and had been a high school teacher before coming to Canada. She had intermittent, casual employment. took primary responsibility for household labour and was an important informational and emotional source for other family members. In both families, the adults came to Canada with fairly strong English-speaking skills and both families were living in rental accommodations at the time of the first interview. The Marcos family in East Vancouver came from the Philippines, and the Khalili family in the Tri-Cities came from Iran; both had been in Canada just under a year at the time of the first interview.

In the other two households, the families were extended.[3] The Lau extended household in the Tri-Cities consisted of elderly, retired parents, a son and his wife, daughter and her husband, and a younger son (who later married), all of whom had emigrated from Hong Kong to Canada. The research team interviewed four of the adults (son and his wife; daughter and her husband). They were in their 30s and 40s and had obtained Bachelor degrees before coming to Canada. The husbands entered as independent, skilled workers; one wife accompanied her husband; and the other came to Canada as a visitor and then married. One couple had been in Canada for a year and a half before the first interview, and the other couple for a year. The four people did not speak English easily and usually spoke Cantonese in the household. They lived in a large home, which the elderly parents, who were retired, owned.

The Naidu extended household in East Vancouver began with two sisters in their mid-20s emigrating from India to Canada as independent immigrants. They had been in Canada for two years at the time of the first interview. The research team interviewed the two sisters who spoke English well. The older sister had a masters degree before coming to Canada and was in and out of the job market until she obtained a more secure job toward the end of the research period. The younger sister

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[3] Thirteen percent of recent immigrants in the lower mainland live in multiple-family households, compared to just over 1% of Canadian-born households in Vancouver (Hiebert, Mendez & Wyly 2006).

had a Bachelors degree and also was in and out of work over the course of the research. Both sisters attained further education within Canada. During the five years of the study, the eldest sister married and had a child. As well, the sisters sponsored other family members to join them, including their mother, brother, older sister's husband, husband's brother, and brother's wife. The family lived in a rented suite. Before examining the employment narratives from these households, we briefly consider the contours of the labour market with which the immigrants negotiated.

Placing household members in the local labour market

Immigrants arriving in Canada in the late 1990s entered an increasingly polarized labour market. Economic restructuring, which saw the thinning of management ranks and the loss of many manufacturing jobs, cut-backs and privatization in the pubic sector, and a neo-liberal emphasis on labour market 'flexibility' that produced more precarious 'non-standard' jobs (that are part-time, temporary, contracted-out, multiple-job holding, and self-employed) combined to undermine job security, career prospects, and decent wages for many Canadians. These economic changes disproportionately affected those already most marginal in the labour market. Women have long constituted the bulk of 'flexible' labour and the gendered division of labour shows no sign of disappearing. Women continue to be concentrated in 'traditional female' jobs – with a majority in clerical, sales and service occupations[4] – and on average earn only 70% of men's earnings.[5] But the Canadian labour market is also clearly racialized; White native-born workers fare better than equivalently skilled and educated immigrants, workers of colour, and Aboriginal workers within the broader context of a gendered labour market (Creese 2006; Galabuzi 2006). Seventy-three percent of all immigrants who arrived during the 1990s were people of colour (Statistics Canada 2003a: 6 and 10);[6] as a result, gendered and racialized processes intersect with immigrant status to shape experiences in the local labour market. As Galabuzi notes, economic restructuring in Canada has deepened gendered and racialized inequalities such that "racialized groups, immigrants, refugees, and women have borne the brunt of economic restructuring and austerity" (2006:10).

Immigrants constitute one-fifth of all Canadian workers and during the 1990s accounted for 70% of all growth in the labour market (Statistics Canada 2003b:12). A growing body of research documents the large and growing wage gap between immigrant and non-immigrant workers as well

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[4] In 2004, 53.5% of all women worked in these occupations (Statistics Canada 2006:128).

[5] In 2003, women employed full-time all year earned 70.5% of men's earnings; all employed women (including part-time and part-year) earned only 63.6% of similarly placed men (ibid:152).

[6] Visible Minority is the term used in government statistics to refer to those who are non-Aboriginal in origin and "non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Statistics Canada 2003a:10). The more common term used by academics – drawn from Canadian feminist and anti-racist movements - is people of colour.

as the particular disadvantages experienced by new immigrants (Aydemir & Skuterud 2004; Badets & Howatson-Leo 1999; Chui & Zietsma 2003; Frenette & Morissette 2003; Hiebert & Pendakur 2003; Li 2000, 2003; Picot & Hou 2003; Picot & Sweetman 2005).[7] Moreover, the wage gap has grown at the expense of immigrants at the same time that the educational advantage of immigrants has widened (Frenette & Moreissette 2003; Reitz 2003). What seems clear, moreover, is that the evaluation of human capital is neither gender nor race blind and in most cases educational credentials and work experience attained abroad are de-valued (in many cases completely un-valued) by Canadian employers (Li 2000, 2003). Immigrant women of colour with foreign degrees experience the greatest labour market penalties, but a significant employment gap continues to exist for immigrants who earned their educational credentials within Canada (Li 2003:120-121). The combined 'discounting' of non-Canadian work experience and credentials – both of which occurs "almost exclusively in non-traditional source countries" (Aydemir & Skuterud 2004:3; Reitz 2003) – produces high levels of deskilling, precarious employment, downward social mobility, and poverty[8] among highly skilled immigrants.

The twin processes of economic restructuring and local employers' failure to recognize qualifications and work experience attained abroad were experienced by all the adult participants in our community study, including members of the four households discussed in this paper. Although most of the adult members of three of the four households were highly educated and fluent in English before migrating to Canada, employment in precarious, short-term, low-wage, low skilled jobs was a persistent pattern. As we discuss below, household members pursued a variety of goals and adopted a variety of strategies – in relation to individual and collective employment options and family responsibilities - to attain a more secure and satisfying foothold in the labour market, with various degrees of more or less 'successful' long-term integration.

We discuss these strategies through three themes that emerged in the interviews: 1) barriers to skill recognition and re-skilling, 2) the significance of familial and other social networks, and 3) the intertwining of desires for children's futures and work decisions. Through these themes we can see how the different households, positioned in a similar way to other migrants entering Canada through the economic-immigrant category, are simultaneously located within effects and practices emanating from labour market processes, geopolitics and the contingencies of place. Economic immigrants may be inherently 'flexible' as individuals with a set of skills, but these household

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[7] Another body of research documents the persistent wage gap between Canadian-born women and men of colour and White workers, even when controlling for differences in education, occupation and other human capital. See Pendakur & Pendakur 1998, 2004; Tran 2004.

members' accounts suggest that such flexibility is severely constrained by local conditions and it is the flexibility of the household as a unit of family relationships and practices that underpins the economic and social possibilities for family members as individuals, as well as the household as a collective. Furthermore, the distribution over space and time of wider kin members and ethnic networks intervenes in shaping economic strategies.

Barriers to Skill Recognition and Re-skilling

The inability to get prior educational qualifications and work experience recognized is a common experience for immigrants in Canada, so it is little surprise that this constituted a central barrier to the labour market for the households in our study. All but one adult (Margarete Marcos) in the four families profiled here had a university degree prior to migrating to Canada. Both José Marcos and Majid Khalili had degrees in Engineering; Mania Khalili had a B.A. in English; members of the Lau household (Iris, Terence, Holly and Ron) all had Bachelor degrees in Business Administration; and the Naidu sisters both had degrees (Leena a Masters and Chandra a Bachelors) in Commerce. Although these qualifications were instrumental in each family qualifying for immigration through the points system, none found local Canadian employers willing to acknowledge the value of their degrees. This was so even for Majid, although his Engineering degree was attained in the United States. In addition, the years of experience each had in their respective fields in their countries of origin – and in the case of Majid also in Europe - was no help in finding work in Vancouver.

Household members followed multiple strategies, often simultaneously, to get qualifications and experience recognized and, when that failed, to re-skill in the local context. Some individuals had their credentials evaluated by ICES (the International Credential Evaluation Service established by the provincial government and run by the Open Learning Agency) in the hope that local validation of their credentials would be recognized by employers. None who tried attaching a photocopy of the ICES evaluation to their job resumes got any response from potential employers. What ICES evaluations did make clear, however, was how much additional training would be required to gain the same certification in the Canadian education system. For example, José Marcos learned that his Engineering degree from the Philippines was considered equivalent to 2 years of undergraduate civil engineering; similarly, Chandra Naidu was credited with 2 years toward a local Bachelor of Commerce degree. Thus ICES evaluation might be useful for those who wished to continue their studies at a Canadian university, but it had little material consequence in the labour market.

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[8] "In Canada's major cities virtually all of the increase in the city low-income rates during the 1990s was concentrated among the immigrant populations" (Picot & Sweetman 2005:4).

Although all working-age adults in the four households pursued further education within Canada as a strategy to negotiate the labour market, none re-skilled to the levels attained before migration. The cost of local university education, the length of time required, and the immediate demands of putting food on the table made local university education prohibitive, and led to strategies in which work and further education could be more readily and affordably combined. Moreover, the precise timing of when further education could be pursued was worked out as a household strategy in relation to the job situation of other members, collective financial security, childcare needs, and short and long-term career goals.

Household members pursued three different types of education in their quest to find a job and/or to get access to better jobs in the future; and most pursued more than one of these avenues at different points in time:

1) job clubs, orientation courses, and bridging courses for immigrants that introduce newcomers to local expectations and practices in the labour market, including how to write a resume, how to do a job search, and how to gain 'Canadian experience';

2) English-as-second-language (ESL) courses for those who need to raise their comprehension and communication skills in English in order to gain access to the broader labour market;

3) Occupationally specific courses and diploma programs designed for the broader Canadian market, and offered by publicly funded colleges[9] and/or private for-profit educational institutions.

Almost everyone in this study made use of courses of the first type to familiarize themselves with the local labour market and learn local conventions for appropriate resumes and job seeking strategies. A critical component of immigrant access to local jobs is to somehow breach the barrier posed by requirements for 'Canadian experience' demanded by most employers. Some courses offered by immigrant settlement organizations included an unpaid work practicum to provide some 'Canadian experience', and others encouraged participants to do unpaid volunteer work to overcome the 'Canadian experience' catch-22. These and other strategies were useful but, although these courses provided critical information about local employment expectations and practices and did help newcomers gain a foothold in the labour market, they tended to steer immigrants into low-wage

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[9] British Columbia has a system of publicly funded colleges and universities. Tuition fees at colleges are much lower than at the universities. Along with providing university-level transfer courses, colleges offer many shorter (usually 1 or 2 year) occupationally specific diploma programs. In addition, many private for-profit educational institutions exist that also offer work-related training.

'survival' jobs rather than providing effective tools to access jobs related to one's professional training (Geddie 2002).

Members of the Marcos, Khalili and Naidu households were all fluent in English prior to migration and had no need to avail themselves of courses of the second kind – ESL courses. In contrast, members of the Lau household found English-language fluency to be a critical barrier to accessing jobs outside of the Cantonese-speaking ethnic economy – jobs that were not low-wage and would provide the opportunity to improve one's English – so Iris, Terence, Holly and Ron all took full-time ESL training in order to improve their longer-term job prospects. For Ron and Holly, in particular, English fluency remained an ongoing impediment to reaching their goal of attaining jobs outside the Chinese ethnic economy in Vancouver.

Research participants availed themselves of a wide range of courses of the third kind, occupationally specific courses designed for the broader labour market. In most cases household members, as individuals and as family units, alternated work and continuing education. Some family members were gainfully employed while others pursued further education. For example, Chandra Naidu remained in a low-wage entry-level job for three years and deferred further education until her sister had more secure employment; Mania Khalili attained part-time work and put her own aspirations for re-skilling on hold while her husband upgraded his qualifications; and Margarete Marcos worked a series of temporary data entry jobs while her husband pursued further education. To make ends meet while studying, individuals often combined part-time work with full-time programs, or full-time work with evening courses, and, in at least one case, pursued full-time studies while receiving Employment Insurance benefits. The continued financial viability of the household was always a prerequisite for any individual household member to pursue further education. Thus individual strategies of re-skilling were always intertwined with broader household goals.

Individuals and collective households identified long-term career goals as they took specific courses to upgrade their skills or pursued new occupationally specific programs. Both José Marcos and Majid Khalili, for example, sought to upgrade their engineering skills by taking Autocad; José also took a BCIT diploma program to become a civil engineer technologist. Leena Naidu took night courses over several years to become a Chartered General Account; and Chandra completed a BCIT program in computer science. Iris and Terence in the Lau household both completed a two-year accounting management program at a local college; their co-op placements with Revenue Canada were a result of this program, and provided an entrée to the public sector jobs they so desired.

Of all the strategies adopted to negotiate a better place in the local labour market, taking occupationally specific courses and programs designed for the broader public (and not just for

immigrants) proved the most useful route to improving one's position in the labour market. However, such strategies were not without difficulties. Mania Khalili was unable to follow-up her goal to re-train as a teacher, or, as she later wished, to pursue a new career as a social worker, because she could not produce her high school transcript (even though she had documentation pertaining to her B.A.) and was thus unable to gain admission to a local educational institution due to bureaucratic barriers. Moreover, those who completed Canadian qualifications did not necessarily find jobs in their field or greater job security. Chandra Naidu attained a computer science diploma just as the IT sector crashed, and was never able to find work in that field; instead, she returned to low-level clerical work while taking university courses through distance education to upgrade to a Canadian Bachelor of Commerce degree. Iris and Terence Lau found work with Revenue Canada, but were still confined to precarious, short-term contracts and subject to persistent and intensive monitoring of job performance. After 4 years and an Autocad program, Majid Khalili finally got a job related to his field of mechanical-engineering, though at a much lower level, but only after he removed his Engineering degree from his resume to avoid further rejection as 'over qualified'. And finally, José Marcos and his family eventually left Vancouver when their newly acquired Canadian citizenship provided access to a TN 1Visa to work in the United States. In California he found work in his field of civil engineering, and attained a salary "double" what he managed to find in Vancouver.

In summary, individuals and households collectively negotiated a variety of labour market barriers including failure to recognize educational credentials, discounting prior work experience, the catch-22 of 'Canadian experience', employers' concerns about being 'over qualified', English language barriers, and the necessity of re-skilling and upgrading within the local context. While 'flexibility' – as individuals and as households – is a central theme in overcoming many of these barriers, enacting re-skilling strategies was made more difficult by the precarious nature of the employment available to immigrants. Economic security was imperilled by the short-term and unstable nature of work as much as by the generally low wages, making it more difficult to find the resources necessary for re-skilling, and limiting the ability of most to ever envision undertaking the extensive retraining needed to attain a place in the labour market equivalent to what was left behind. As we shall see below, strategies to negotiate the labour market were also intricately connected to family support and other social networks, to desires regarding their children's futures and opportunities in Canada, and to the importance of place for developing a sense of belonging.

The Significance of Familial and Other Social Networks, Gender and Place

Social networks were important to all the households in their settlement experience and work-finding strategies. These were primarily based on ethnic affiliation or were familial networks. Their significance, however, differed among the households in how they might support and buffer individuals as they re-skilled or upgraded their qualifications, sought jobs and weathered the insecurity of the labour market. There were also changes over time in how networks were of value. Familial networks were particularly important for the Naidu and Lau households. The significance of networks for all households lay not only in their instrumentality in early settlement and job-seeking strategies, but also to a growing sense of 'belonging in place'. The interviews indicated three main areas where networks were influential in shaping the paths households followed: 1) emotional, informational and material support in initial settlement and re-skilling, 2) job-finding, and 3) establishing a sense of attachment to place and 'belonging'.

Nuclear families and place-based networks

The familial and ethnically based friendship networks of both the Marcos and Khalili households were prominent in initial settlement experience and subsequent strategies for finding work. The place-embeddedness of these networks was significant to the particular shape of the households' fortunes over the five-year period. The nature of how the networks worked for the households also shifted over time. The relative 'thinness' of an Iranian social network in the Tri-Cities at the time of the first interviews contrasted with some institutional depth of a Filipino community in East Vancouver, but nevertheless was central to the Khalili family's initial settlement and subsequent work experiences.

Neither family arrived in Canada without a contact already living in the Vancouver area, who provided initial support while the families found housing, a friend in the case of the Marcos family and a distant cousin of Majid's for the Khalili family. Mania emphasized the importance of the enduring support the relative had provided for the family as they had struggled to settle in Canada and find work. They had a place to stay, were given useful information about the neighbourhood and courses, and received invaluable emotional support. They found rental accommodation in an apartment block in the same neighbourhood as Majid's relative, where other Iranians also lived. Mania described them as unemployed engineers and architects, as was Majid, and they provided a fledgling social network for the family. It provided a route to Majid's first job through word-of-mouth. In the face of continuing barriers to getting engineering work, Majid took a job as a cashier at a gas station, working with other Iranian engineers. This process was replicated later when Majid's

son, Amin, got a part-time student job at another branch of the gas station and was trained by his father.

The pre-existing clustering of immigrants from the Philippines in East Vancouver enabled the Marcos family to readily forge links that were central to initial settlement into a familiar community: As Margarete said, "The first thing we looked for when we came was a [Filipino] church, because without them, we don't have family." They made friends through the church and church members provided food at times when José was unemployed. A Filipino network, layered through institutions such as the church and local services and shops was a significant source of information and José's early jobs. He found his first job through a friend and later work through notices in Filipino stores.

While locally based networks were of initial value to the two households, familial and friendship networks that later became prominent in José's and Majid's job searches were stretched over space. Both had contacts in the US that came into play after their failure to find jobs at their professional level in the Vancouver area. For José, the lure of the US was constant, with relatives in California encouraging him to move there for more work and better pay. Two years after the last interview (May 2004) we found that he had in fact got a job in California; Margarete commented that his "salary right now has doubled from his [inner suburb] based job when he was here – exactly the same kind of job, exactly the same type of business." She and the children were leaving to join him there. As Canadian citizens they were able to move without difficulty. Majid had similarly been encouraged to look for work in the US by his two brothers and friends from his Texas degree class who were all living and working in California. Three years after arriving in Canada he pursued an engineering job in California that he was alerted to, but the outcome did not match that of José's. Majid had not yet gained Canadian citizenship and had to wait for a visa. By the time the application was approved, the potential employer in California had decided to downsize his company because of family problems, and the job fell through. Majid, throughout this time, was sending in applications for engineering jobs in the Vancouver area but either received no replies or was rejected for being 'over qualified.' His attempts to convert his cashier job into management of the gas station franchise were turned down twice as he was deemed 'too new to the country.' Local ties and local knowledge were insufficient for getting jobs other than in the low-skill, low-wage sector.

Like their husbands, Margarete and Mania had both made good use of information networks, but social networks had linked them into the community through different routes. As in Pessar's (1999) work, this gender differentiated linking into social networks had consequences for the types of opportunity structures that the women encountered and shaped. Both had made friends, and Mania had found work through participation in settlement service NGOs and other locally based institutions

(MOSAIC and her children's school for Margarete, SUCCESS and the local community centre for Mania). For Mania, the presence of other Iranian immigrants in the area and her community participation enabled her to use her English language skills to advantage – doing translation work and teaching English as a second language. However, the part-time status of the work and, in both households' cases, the greater push to pursue the career-oriented work of José and Majid meant that the two women's relationship to their communities was defined primarily in relation to their work as mothers. The development of local friendships and the 'weak ties' of community over time had become significant to the women's attachment to place (see also Rose, D, P Carrasco & J Charbonneau, 1998). Both women liked their neighbourhoods, finding them safe and convenient, and they enjoyed the presence of other people from their home countries. Both had been reluctant to go to the US when their husbands considered job opportunities there, because of this perception of congenial neighbourhoods, good for raising children and where they had developed friendships. Social networks had taken on a different meaning over the time of the interviews, now more interwoven into everyday life routines rather than focused on addressing their particular needs as they attempted to establish a stable material base in Canada.

As the women's relationship to place changed over time, so too the neighbourhoods are in an ongoing process of change. The dynamism of place is particularly evident in Mania's case. Over the period of the interviews the area had experienced a growth in the Iranian population, reflected, for example, in the establishment of a 'makeshift' mosque within one of the local schools, where classrooms were being used for Muslim religious gatherings. Mania spoke of the change in her sense of belonging in the neighbourhood and her accumulated local knowledge. She noted that rather than being recipients of support, her family are now among those who help new immigrants. She and Majid are now a link in an Iranian immigration chain; some of the recent immigrants are people she and Majid knew from Iran and even from Majid's university class in Texas. The last interview suggested the family led an enjoyable social life primarily with other Iranians in the Tri-Cities and in other neighbourhoods in the Vancouver area.

In the case of both households, the particularity of their neighbourhoods and the networks they accessed and created had provided specific pathways into work and wider concerns of successfully making a home in Canada. While Majid still had been unable to attain the level of work in his field that he first anticipated, the household has established a life and set of relationships within emerging diasporic space. The political uncertainty of Iran has foreclosed, at least in the shorter term, thoughts of returning to Iran. Majid and Mania have recently bought a flat in an apartment block close to their previous rental accommodation, and Majid continues to hope for gradual progression to a

better job. The two children have been back to Iran twice to visit relatives, and the family keep in frequent contact with family members and friends both in Iran and the US. The daughter, Mehri, although happy with her studies and life in Canada, thinks of Canada as her 'second home', and appears to retain primary allegiance with Iran and extended family there. Amin appears happily integrated into Canadian life. Before they left for the US, Margarete and José were also happy in their neighbourhood, and the potential it held for their children.

Extended households and familial networks

Turning to the Naidu and Lau families, the extended family was the primary source of support and base from which to pursue career possibilities. While the Vancouver area, and to some extent both neighbourhoods, has dense ethnic clusterings of South Asian and Asian immigrants, ethnic and friendship networks played a relatively modest part in the unfolding of these two households' work strategies. Instead, family networks provided a prominent form of support. Indeed, the Naidu and Lau households developed an explicit strategy of family network support. This support has taken the forms of knowledge to pass on and of providing a stable material base as family members re-skilled and set on career paths.

The Naidu household enjoyed considerable support from other family members, as a sequence of job training and job finding took place. An aunt of the two sisters, who had been living in Canada for more than two decades, was not able to provide up-to-date information on training and job information but provided a home base for Chandra and Leena for the crucial first year of settlement. The sisters provided mutual support as they obtained Canadian qualifications, with Chandra waiting until Leena had a secure job before leaving low paid work to take a computer science course. Arriving as independent class immigrants, they then sponsored other family members' immigration. All Leena and Chandra's immediate family had settled in Vancouver, with the latest additions being Leena's husband's brother, to be followed by their brother's wife. Before other family members immigrated, the sisters, from a position of experience and local knowledge, were able to advise them about taking specific courses that would be useful in the Canadian labour market. As these other family members arrived in Vancouver, they not only had this informational support but also became part of an extended household sharing accommodation and pooling funds. This sharing provided a level of material security and social support for the different family members as they explored their opportunities in Vancouver. They lived together in a two-bedroom basement suite, Leena and her husband later established their own household when they had a baby, moving to another suite nearby.

The well-established Sikh community in Vancouver was not significant in the sisters' settlement and job-finding strategies. Their jobs, following Canadian training, were not acquired through ethnic or friendship networks, but through the newspaper and a job agency specializing in accountancy-related jobs. Indeed, they had no clear ties to the broader South Asian community, which they saw as laden with "too much politics", conservative, and old fashioned compared to their modern, urban life in New Delhi. It should be noted, however, that they were daughters of a mixed Hindu-Sikh marriage which may have influenced their lack of strong identification with the predominantly Sikh community making up the South Asian population of the Vancouver region. Furthermore, their friendships have developed largely through work and are multiethnic in character, with most of their friends immigrants too. Chandra had developed one strong friendship with a 'Canadian' at the bakery where she worked for 3 years, but Leena talked about feeling 'out of place' when working mostly with 'Canadians' and preferred a multicultural workplace.

Over time the sisters' sense of commitment and belonging to Canada varied. They had very different orientations to Canada when they arrived: Chandra commented, "I'm Canadian from inside." She quickly felt she belonged in Canada and applied for citizenship as soon as possible. She has never considered returning to India for more than a vacation. Leena did not consider Canada as 'home' until much later, but she became a citizen just before her daughter was born. Her husband also plans to take up Canadian citizenship as soon as he is eligible. Ties to India have continued through vacations but Leena, by the fourth interview, after a trip to India with her baby, said she no longer considers India to be 'home'. She said "I could totally see myself living in Canada for my whole life … I just longed to be back in Canada." Indeed, both sisters felt integrated into the local community, with an extended family for support and friendship networks in place. They liked the multicultural neighbourhood in which they lived, considering it safe, convenient, and close to shopping, transportation and city centre services. They hoped to remain in the area, perhaps eventually buying a house. In the case of this household, ethnic networks have not played a central part in finding paid employment or initial settlement, with the family replacing the role of mixed familial/ethnic networks important to the Marcos and Khalili household strategies. Nevertheless, since the birth of her baby Leena has been attending a mother and baby programme for Punjabi speakers, suggesting a strategic move to develop the potential of a supportive ethnically based social network as she raises her child.

Like the Naidu household, the strategies of the two couples in the Lau household were also embedded in family, rather than ethnic network support. The Lau household as a whole provided flexible support for the couples' various strategies for retraining, career preparation and citizenship. Since Holly and Terence's parents owned the house, the couples were able to take up temporary jobs,

enrol in various courses, and plan around long-term goals. The two couples had calculated in advance that they might not find secure jobs in Canada for several months and were prepared to live for a year on savings. As Iris said: "Before we came in here we have a plan … we want to improve (ourselves) first. So at that time we begin to save (to) maintain our living in the period (in case) we can not find a job or we continue our study and not … find a job." One or two people in the household were usually employed and each couple shared a car – which was necessary in their suburban neighbourhood – to help run the household, transport their parents, and get to work or training classes.

Both couples tried to avoid working in the 'local Chinese community' which they saw as holding back their English language proficiency and being a potential dead-end in finding well-paid jobs. But their search for work was much more difficult and took far longer than they had anticipated. It was only through the use of friendship and family networks that Ron and Holly found their first jobs: Ron as a salesman through one of his brother-in-law's friends, and Holly as a secretary through a classmate at an NGO's job-hunting club. After several months, Ron and Holly quit their jobs, however, to take ESL at a local college, where Terence and Iris were enrolled. Support from their parents, who owned the large house in which the extended family lived, and the local college co-op program had provided Iris and Terence with the most help in finding their current employment. Holly and Ron were still struggling to find permanent, good jobs but continued to have a stable home base and familial support.

Social and material support through the home base supplied by their parents also meant that the couples had experienced a high standard of living in a potentially amenable neighbourhood, a relatively recent sub-division of spacious houses with large gardens whose location and good local schools has attracted immigrants from Hong Kong. However, its distance from Vancouver, combined with not having made significant friendships in the neighbourhood, had led Terence and Iris to choose Richmond when they set up their own household, an inner suburb of Vancouver closer to the city centre and favoured by the Chinese community for its many Chinese food outlets, amenities and shopping facilities.

Their move suggests something of a paradox in their quest to integrate economically and culturally in Canada, with ethnic services and the familiarity of Asian culture embedded in this 'new' Chinatown of Vancouver important to Terence and Iris as they became 'Canadians'. Holly and Ron intended to follow them, together with the parents, to take advantage of the better transport and friends from the local Asian community. Both couples have maintained ties with friends and family in Hong Kong, but plan to stay in Canada. They now can find everything they need, without having things sent from Hong Kong, and are becoming more familiar with Canadian culture. For members of

the Lau household, their desires and efforts to participate in the Canadian economy and culture have been supported by their extended family and later by a strategic move to a different neighbourhood with an established Asian community. This latter move was less concerned with access to labour force participation, than with the possibility of developing friendship networks with other Asians, better access to services for the senior members of the Lau household as well as themselves, including schools for their future children.

As with the Naidu household, the Lau extended family may have given them the flexibility and resilience to face ongoing economic challenges in Canada. For the Marcos and Khalili households, extended family networks were stretched over space and, while still playing a significant part in the pursuit of economic participation, were less available to provide routine support. In this absence, these nuclear households relied more on friendship and other ethnic-based networks, and the wives were more constrained in following career paths. This gender difference becomes further evident as we trace the intertwining of economic goals and desires for children's achievements in Canada.

The Intertwining of Desires for Children's Educational Achievements and Work Decisions

Immigration is largely a family affair (Rumbaut 1997; Foner 1997) and central to the migration story is the desire to improve children's future. The four households we discuss in this paper were no exception, but they covered a spectrum of experiences with regard to dependent children, which was intricately intertwined with various strategies, including work decisions. The Khalili family came with teenage children and the Marcos family with pre-school children; during the course of the study, Leena in the Naidu household gave birth to a child; in the Lau household, Iris had a miscarriage and was planning to have a child in the future as was Holly.

The Khalili and Marcos families illustrate ways in which migration can primarily be a strategy for bettering children's futures. Both families were concerned about growing political and economic insecurities in their respective countries, Iran and the Philippines, and thought that Canada could offer a better life for their children, including educational opportunities. Migration for Margarete was "for our children's future." As their experiences unfolded, it became increasingly clear that the better life both families sought in Canada would rest on the opportunities of the children rather than that of the parents. In the second year interview, Majid stated that whatever the difficulties in getting a job, they would stay in Canada, "whatever we should do for our children … we feel that if we sacrifice for the children that is worth it. Don't you think?" Yet, Majid was also struck by the contrast of his children's opportunities to the cost of his. He said, "everything happens for them but

nothing happens for me. I am just looking for a job; no job, so it's the biggest problem. That's very hard, really." With his own career on hold in Canada, he became increasingly willing to consider migration to the United States.

Due to their uphill battles in finding secure employment, the parents in both families were compelled to forgo opportunities in Canada for themselves in order to provide for their children. It was difficult, for example, for the parents to retrain or upgrade their credentials when they needed income to pay housing and living costs, with children in childcare or school. The mothers in particular bore the brunt of diminished opportunities. They were generally more responsible for raising the children, were accommodating to their husband's employment strategies (who had professional credentials). Moreover, the mothers were unable to move out of occupational 'ghettos' organized around feminized employment. Throughout the interviews with the Khalili family, Mania's career was side-lined in conversation, although it transpired when given the opportunity that she was bored and being at home was difficult after having a career in Iran. She took on almost completely the household labour and when, in the last year's interview the interviewer asked, "over your stay here, who would you say has been the biggest source of information and support to all of you?" both the children said, "My mom." In holding things together in the household, the mother seemed to be the lynch-pin of 'flexibility'.

In families with young children, organizing the daily practice of their care can be exceedingly complex and exhausting, especially when economic and other circumstances are in constant flux. In the Marcos family, the intertwining of jobs, training and children necessitated the adoption of flexible childcare arrangements. Soon after their arrival, José's low wages precipitated Margarete to find a job. They were able to obtain subsidized childcare, which made it possible for both parents to work at minimum wage jobs; as their incomes increased, however, the subsidy disappeared. Their insecure jobs led to frequent periods of unemployment, but usually only for a short time. While on Employment Insurance (EI), Margarete was able to stay at home for a year with their children and José attended school full-time for a year. When both were employed again, they used a babysitter, until José's parents came to visit; they looked after the children for a while, followed by Margarete's parents who visited, and together the grandparents covered childcare for a year. The Marcos family continued, however, to have difficulty finding childcare when their eldest daughter began half-day kindergarten.

Though Canada promises to provide a good environment for children, such circumstances presented many difficulties. Margarete and José found raising children was more frustrating and stressful in Canada than the Philippines. They were constantly juggling their changing circumstances

of being in and out of the job market or training programs, having to pay someone to provide childcare, not being able to rely on family support for child rearing; and because no one was available to look after children in the evening, not being unable to go "out dating" and having time to spend together.

Both families were, nonetheless, satisfied with their local neighbourhoods and engaged in local activities. When her children started school (kindergarten and grade 2 at last interview), for example, Margarete became involved with the Parents' Advisory Committee (PAC) at her daughter's school. Despite the allure of US jobs for their husbands, both Mania and Margarete wished to remain in Canada, which they understood as a better place for their children. Margarete believed that Canada in contrast to the US is "less crowded" and a safer place to raise children. Nonetheless, the family did move to the US. Mania worried about the crime level in the US and the cost of her daughter's education (who at the time was at Douglas College and was going to transfer to UBC). Mania and Majid were not yet, but would soon be eligible for Canadian citizenship, and feared the cost of education as a foreigner in the US would be too high. They were also concerned about their son, who had lots of friends in the Tri-Cities and was doing well.

By the final year of the study, Amin was sounding very 'integrated' in terms of speech, friends, part-time jobs and college enrolment. Mehri was at university and, in contrast to her brother, studied most of the time and rarely went out. While they were both pursuing educational opportunities, their experiences were quite different and would strongly suggest gendered differences.

Families that arrive in Canada without dependent children are likely to have different experiences from those that do. In particular the importance of finding secure employment may play out differently. Only after having been in Canada for several years, did anyone in the Naidu or Lau household consider having children. Finding secure jobs was paramount and essential before taking on the responsibility of children. Such a strategy also entailed devotion of time and resources to their own extensive re-skilling. Without dependent children, members of the household had greater flexibility and resources for pursuing training and educational options than did the Khalili and Marcos parents, who had children to support and to care for.

Since both sisters in the Naidu household were single and did not have children when they arrived, their decisions about migration were tied to their own future prospects – a better standard of living, especially the ability to continue education and career. They were able to flexibly dedicate themselves to their extensive training objectives. Leena, for example, took a CGA program at night combined with full-time employment. Chandra continued to devise new strategies of continuing education, which included the possibility of pursuing an MBA, while in her 30s. As they pursued

their education with the hope of better jobs, they supported one another as well as sponsored other family members to join them in Canada. Not until Leena had married (year 3 of the study) and found a secure job, did she become pregnant.

The prospect of having a child gave Leena other reasons to value migration to Canada and to become more oriented towards citizenship, involvement in the local community, attachment to neighbourhood and to Canada. She appreciated the independence she had here (as a woman, and as a wife, compared to India). She also appreciated the quality of education for her child, where a good education does not depend on the ability to afford private school. And she felt Canada is a safer place to raise a child, and with better medical care. By our last interview Leena had attained her CGA, had moved into a better and more secure job in the accounting field, and was on maternity leave. She and her husband had moved to another suite close to the Naidu household. Since Leena was concerned about daycare, she planned to work part-time rather than full-time after her maternity leave and hoped that her mother would help with childcare. Her mother, who had been spending six months in Canada and six months working in India each year, was soon to retire and move permanently to Canada.

Like the Naidu sisters, the two couples in the Lau household, initially did not have children when they came to Canada and, therefore, were able to devote time and resources to improving their training and education in the hope of obtaining secure employment. In contrast, however, the two couples had more security of housing and more resources to share (e.g. two cars) than the Naidu sisters. This household support allowed them to pursue their career objectives more flexibly than the two sisters. Since Holly and Terence's parents owned the house, the couples were able to move in and out of jobs, take extended courses, and to plan around long-term goals (which included eventually having children). Holly and Ron, for example, quit jobs in favour of pursuing English courses. As Holly said, "If I want … in the future … to get a better job … I have to learn English first …. that's why I quit the job and I went to school again." Only after several years in Canada, when some job security appeared to be possible did the couples contemplate having children. Because of their age, however, both Holly and Iris were worried about the delay. If they could not find stable jobs in Canada, they thought about returning to Hong Kong. As Iris said, "I don't want to start my family in my old age!"

By 2002, both Terence and Iris had "more secure" jobs at Canada Revenue Agency. Though the jobs were full-time, they were, nevertheless, still temporary and contract-based, from six to eight months, with the possibility of further renewal. Because they now were more financially stable, Iris and Terence had moved out of the household into their own house and had a mortgage. During the past year, Iris had a miscarriage, but with their current employment, they felt more able now to plan

their future, to have a baby and to stay in Canada. Though Holly and Ron had even less job security, they hoped that their opportunities would improve to allow them, as well, to plan in the near future to have a child and to make Canada their home.

In contrast to the other three families, the two couples in the Lau household were not very happy with their neighbourhood, the Tri-Cities. Terence and Iris chose to live in Richmond (rather than the Tri-Cities, or Surrey where their jobs were located) because of its amenities, well-developed Chinese community, good schools, and safe neighbourhoods. Holly and Ron were also contemplating a move to the same neighbourhood. By the end of our study, all the adults we interviewed in the four households had found neighbourhoods that they liked and they all believed that Canada is a good place to raise children. But the process of finding job security had been much harder than they had anticipated and forced the Marcos and Khalili families to be flexible about where they would settle. Ironically, these parents had migrated to Canada with their children, with the hope to improve their children's future, but had to consider leaving Canada for the US with its allure of professional engineering jobs. The Khalili teenage children also thought they might leave Canada to raise their own children in what they felt would be a more culturally appropriate way. Their circumstances may illustrate the complex issues that migrant families face when children's futures are potentially located in two or more places (Orellana et al., 2001; McLaren and Dyck, 2004). While members of the Naidu and Lau households struggled to find secure employment, their extended families may have given them the flexibility and resilience to face ongoing economic challenges in Canada. Equally important, their extended families may have given them the feeling that they would have the strong relations and support to raise children and to be 'at home' in their new country.

Conclusions

In examining the four families – from different source countries, living in two different Greater Vancouver neighbourhoods (urban and suburban) – and considering their circumstances over time, we found strong commonalities in their encounters with the Canadian labour market that has multiple barriers for immigrants. Despite the fact they were 'ideal, skilled immigrants', most of whom were fluent in English, the adults we interviewed faced a precarious economy that primarily offered only short-term and/or low-wage jobs. Their ability to survive economically and to develop workable and flexible strategies depended a great deal on their households, families and social networks, which differed considerably – configured by family forms, gender and generation, and access to resources – and which shifted over time. The two nuclear families (Khalili and Marcos) mainly came to Canada for the sake of their children's future, and the mothers, in particular, participated in the children's care

and in developing connections that oriented the family to the local neighbourhood and community. The parents' transnational family and friendship networks, nevertheless, kept open the option of moving to the US for better opportunities for the husbands who had professional engineering training and experience. The two extended households (Naidu and Lau) developed other extensive, multiple strategies that also shifted over time. Due to the flexibility of household support, members were able to pursue long-term plans that included extensive training and re-skilling; they could enter and exit workplaces and training programs with some assurance that their daily livelihood was somewhat secure. Though their economic integration was uneven, the households provided a large base of support and enabled family members to plan their future that included the possibility of having children and remaining in Canada.

The failure to understand the importance of such household strategies of migration has important implications for the way we understand immigration in Canada. As the immigration system has increasingly sought to select immigrants on the basis of their human capital 'skills' (Li 2003; McLaren and Dyck 2004), it has correspondingly problematized immigrant families (Abu-Laban 1998); for an example, see Grubel (2005). In particular, immigration discourse and practice give legitimacy to demeaning stereotypes of extended family networks associated with foreign cultures "contrary to Canadian family values" (Li, 2004: 26). The problematization of immigrant families neglects to acknowledge the fact that the 'autonomous immigrant' is a fiction (Walton-Roberts 2003), that family relations are central in decisions to immigrate and whether or not to settle permanently (Angel et al. 1999; Khoo 2003), and that families provide much of the sustenance and development of human, social and cultural capital of immigrants (Ong 1999).

As multi-variegated sites, households may provide not only fundamental support in the migration process. They may enable immigrants who are seeking to find their way in new circumstances with multiple barriers and precarious conditions to adopt flexible strategies. It is precisely the flexibility of households that may enable immigrants to survive and possibly to begin the process of integration in an ambivalent environment that both 'welcomes' immigrants and tells them to 'stay out' (Abu-Laban 1998). Rather than being a 'burden', households may be the lynchpin to successful integration. Such 'success', however, is also contingent on intra-household dynamics as well as local and global barriers and opportunities. Our longitudinal study suggests that it is important to observe the household as process in place, linked in complex ways with various material conditions and social relations of power.

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Acknowledgements

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