



# METROPOLIS BRITISH COLUMBIA

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### **Immigrant Residential Geographies and the “Spatial Assimilation” Debate in Canada, 1997 – 2006**

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# **Metropolis British Columbia**

## ***Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Diversity***

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### **IMMIGRANT RESIDENTIAL GEOGRAPHIES AND THE “SPATIAL ASSIMILATION” DEBATE IN CANADA, 1997 – 2006<sup>1</sup>**

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper discusses research published between 1997 and 2006 on the residential separateness of immigrants and ethnic and visible minority groups in Canadian metropolitan centres. Specifically, it reviews findings and conclusions that relate to the ongoing debate over the validity of the assimilationist perspective assumptions regarding the typical social and spatial trajectory of newcomers. A Canadian immigrant underclass thesis is generally rejected, but some evidence emerges to suggest a potential bifurcation of the assumed pattern of socio-spatial mobility. The traditional assumptions would hold for most groups, yet significant exceptions would justify an alteration of the model, essentially de-linking social from spatial mobility in the case of certain groups. Methodological considerations underlying this proposition are discussed.

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<sup>1</sup> A revised version of this working paper has been submitted for publication to the Journal of International Migration and Integration.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the next few months, data from the 2006 census will start to make its way into the statistical analysis laboratories of Canadian universities. The dynamism that has come to characterise Canadian metropolitan housing markets over the past five years suggests that significant changes in neighbourhood composition have taken place since the collection of the 2001 census, especially in the nation's largest urban centres. Due to their importance as locations of settlement for the vast majority of immigrants, such cities--and their dramatic transformation--are evidently of great interest to migration scholars. It is very likely that with access to these new data, researchers will turn their attention once again to location quotients and indices of dissimilarity, in the hopes of shedding new light on the ongoing trajectories of immigrant socio-spatial distribution and mobility. It seems therefore that we have reached an appropriate time to review the state of the "spatial assimilation" debate in its Canadian modality, particularly as it has evolved over the past ten years.

Both inside and outside academia, the social and spatial mobility of North America's highly diverse and rapidly growing immigrant population has been the source of considerable debate. An increasingly contested but still widely held assumption--which some even view as an expectation--is that over time the attitudes and practices of immigrants, including their residential location behaviour, become similar to those of the typical member of the receiving society. This "assimilationist perspective" has a long history in the social sciences. In the 1920s and 1930s, following a massive wave of immigration to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, scholars associated with the Chicago School of Urban Sociology pioneered research on the socio-spatial

patterns of immigrant assimilation (Park et al. 1967). Their innovative work sought to document the widespread incidence of residential congregation by newcomers--predominantly of European origins, most of them impoverished--in inner city neighbourhoods and the consistent pattern of relocation to the relatively affluent suburbs of long-established residents, which they famously attributed to a process of integration into mainstream US culture.

The Chicago School studies were premised on the notion that a strong association exists between the social and physical distances separating new and established groups in American cities. This view continues to be tremendously influential, but it is no longer held as universally true, and both the assimilation thesis and the theoretical relationship that underwrites it have for quite some time been contested in the US literature on residential segregation (Gordon 1964, cited in Hiebert and Ley 2003; see also Logan et al. 2002, Massey and Denton 1993, Wilson 1987). The resulting debate, fuelled empirically by growing inequality in American urban centres, continues to generate a considerable amount of research.

As one would expect, Canada's immigration phenomenon has not failed to generate its own substantive body of research on the evolving situation of newcomers and their impact on the societies that preceded their arrival. Over the past ten years alone, geographers, sociologists, demographers and economists have produced more than 30 monographs, journal articles, books and book chapters addressing recent patterns of residential distribution among immigrants and visible minority groups in Canadian metropolitan centres. These researchers do not necessarily situate their work explicitly within the assimilation thesis debate; in fact, their studies vary significantly in terms of stated motivations, and are designed to address a wide array of theoretical and empirical questions. For this reason, findings are diverse and at times

inconsistent between studies, making it difficult to provide a comprehensive synthesis of such a broad body of work.

Nonetheless, a defining feature of this recent literature is the predilection for research methods and assumptions typically associated with assimilationist perspective scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the assimilation debate looms large over both the integrationist and the cultural pluralistic interpretations of Canadian multiculturalism. Consequently, a theme that unifies many of the literature's findings and conclusions is an evaluation of how well the spatial assimilation thesis describes the residential patterns of immigrants and visible minority groups in Canada. In this paper, I approach the multiple and complex views on this question as the basis for a report on the progress of Canadian research on this topic, based on scholarship published between 1997 and 2006.

Previous reviews of the Canadian literature (Beavis 1995, Drieger 1999, Fong and Shibuya 2005, Smith 1998) have grouped together studies set in Canada and the US--and in some cases even Europe and Australia. But there are several reasons for limiting this paper to research on the Canadian metropolitan context. A first consideration is the vast amount of English language material that has been published on this topic since the early 1990s, and the need to limit what can be productively reviewed given journal space limitations. A second consideration refers to the already mentioned fact that starting in the mid-1990s, Canadian research on the topic displayed a remarkable surge in interest, and this has generated an adequate amount of material to warrant such a nationally bounded effort.<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, an additional incentive to restrict the number of studies to review comes from recognition of the particularities of national contexts and the heterogeneity of locally specific findings.

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1 The term "integration" is preferred in Canada over "assimilation" within both policy and academic circles, with the exception of economists who freely make use of the latter term when measuring the proximity of immigrant earnings to the Canadian norm.

2 See Hiebert (1999) for analysis of the reasons behind the renewed academic attraction to this topic.

Yet a final and very important consideration in defining the scope of this paper is my interest in disentangling the factual socio-spatial situation of immigrants in Canadian cities from the pervasive and influential imagery of the US ghetto. As I show in the following pages, the testing of a homegrown “underclass” thesis, modelled on the vast American literature documenting the plight of impoverished African Americans and Hispanics in large US cities (e.g., Auletta 1982, Massey and Denton 1993, Myrdal 1963, Wilson 1987), has proved to be a recurring theme for many Canadian researchers. While I recognise the importance of comparative work and the potential value of testing theories developed in different national contexts, I also sympathise with Michael Goldberg and John Mercer’s “distress” arising from “the indiscriminate application of American-based ideas about cities and urban policy to a Canadian setting....” (1983: xv). If it is true that geographical proximity and a growing degree of transnational interaction with the US produce social and cultural similarities between the two countries, there are also important distinctions and particularities that result from historical differences in value systems and institutional structures. By focusing exclusively on Canadian research, I seek to emphasise the distinctiveness of Canadian cities as settings of immigrant settlement.

My attention to difference and particularity echoes a defining feature of much of the literature that I review in this paper. As David Ley and Heather Smith (2000: 59) show, “There is no such person as the average immigrant [in Canada]”, and many of the studies I discuss take care of disaggregating the immigrant and visible minority categories into population group subcategories, immigration admission classes, entry cohorts, and so on. The

result is a high level of heterogeneity in terms of group characteristics and settlement outcomes, but also in terms of research methods and findings.<sup>3</sup> In order to give some coherence to what could easily turn into a chaotic mass of disjointed information, the first two sections of this review adopt a chronological approach to presenting results and conclusions that speak to the assimilation thesis debate. More specifically, I structure the first section around a collection of studies that rely on cross-sectional data up to the 1991 census, while the second section focuses on studies conducted with data from the 1996 and 2001 censuses results. As I will argue, results from the 1996 and 2001 censuses have ushered in the possibility of an empirically supported re-framing of the socio-spatial assimilation thesis. Because of this empirical focus, a final section will address the role that methodological issues play in shaping this fascinating and rapidly evolving debate.

#### THE 1991 CENSUS AND THE CONTINUING VALIDITY OF THE "UP AND OUT" MODEL

The expectation that newcomer groups will shed their traditions and cultural attachments in exchange for those of the host society has in recent years lost favour in Canada. In turn, the language of "assimilation" that used to accompany such views has given way to the twin notions of "integration" and "cultural pluralism" (Hiebert and Ley 2003). The notion of integration is meant to represent a two-way adjustment process between immigrant groups and long-established residents, culminating in the creation of a new multicultural society, while cultural pluralism refers to the cohabitation of multiple autonomous groups without coalescing into one single, normative

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Fong (1997) shows that ethnocultural groups display different propensities to cluster. In turn, Lo and Wang (1997) found that the well-documented residential concentration of Chinese households implies a level of geographical convergence that actually overshadows the high degree of separateness between some Chinese subgroups, a phenomenon that can only be measured if the 'Chinese' category is disaggregated by country of origin. The authors also found that this uneven residential distribution appeared to vary according to socio-economic and length of stay differences between subgroups.

cultural environment.

There is a certain amount of disagreement over which of these notions provides a better description of the contemporary socio-spatial trajectories of immigrant and visible minority groups in urban Canada. In many ways, this debate resembles its American assimilation counterpart. A central question raised by the Canadian integrationist and the US assimilationist perspectives alike has been whether immigrants and members of visible minority groups experiencing same-group residential concentration tend to disperse as their socio-economic condition begins to resemble that of the host society. In other words, the debate centres on whether upward mobility is accompanied by an outward move away from same-group neighbourhoods--a contemporary variation of the so-called *up and out* model of assimilation (see for example Clark 1998).

For observers who sympathise with the notion of cultural pluralism, moving out of neighbourhoods characterised by significant concentrations of same-group residents should not necessarily be regarded as a goal. As Ceri Peach (1996: 143) observes, voluntary ethnocultural co-location can be a beneficial practice, as it "maintains cultural values, it strengthens social networks, and it allows the passing of critical thresholds for the support of institutions and shops."<sup>4</sup> From this perspective, any observed persistence in the residential concentration of Canada's immigrant groups may reflect not only "repressive" but also "expressive" modalities of uneven population distribution (Qadeer 2005), and a distinction between these two forms is generally recognised by proponents of both the integration and the cultural pluralism models.

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<sup>4</sup> Many authors associate "segregated" ethnic neighbourhoods with involuntary residential concentration, and ethnic "enclave" neighbourhoods with the voluntary choices of an institutionally complete ethnic group. But perhaps in recognition of the potentially blurry boundary between voluntary and involuntary practices, this typology has not been universally adopted, and some authors use the terms "enclave" and "segregated neighbourhood" interchangeably.

Those who favour the assimilationist perspective, however, fear that voluntary segregation can lead to social conflict and perpetual poverty, and consequently to rising government expenditures related to social programs and crime reduction (Stoffman 2002, Collacott 2002, both cited in Hiebert 2003). Representing an extreme position within this camp, immigration critic Diane Francis asserts against all evidence that "Most [immigrants] live in economic-ethnic ghettos for generations and remain members of their underclass" (2002: 101, cited in Hiebert 2003), a statement that draws unjustified parallels with the American "culture of poverty" literature.

#### *The underclass thesis in Canada*

The underclass notion is not a traditional assumption of the assimilationist perspective, but as I mentioned earlier, it has gained substantial ground in the US literature, especially with regards to African American and Latino inner city neighbourhoods where assimilation is seen as an answer to the spatial concentration of racialised/ethnicised poverty. In Canada, it has been adopted not only by media commentators like Francis, but by segments of the broader public as well. This has motivated researchers in recent years to investigate the growing coincidence of neighbourhood deprivation and longer lasting immigrant residential separateness in Canadian cities (e.g., Hiebert 2005, Ley 1999, Smith 2004). While the causes, contours and consequences of this phenomenon are complex and likely to be in constant evolution, some researchers in the late 1990s readily interpreted its development as the formation of an American-style "underclass." In a survey of 16 of Canada's largest Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) conducted using 1991 census data, A. Kazemipur and S. Halli (1997) found a significant correlation between the proportion of a census tract's population living below what they call "the poverty rate" and the proportion

that belongs to 12 ethnic groups (out of 36 included in the study). The authors concluded that for immigrants belonging to these groups, "poverty is very likely to become persistent, extending over generations," and added that their "extreme isolation ... poses further impediments to their integration in Canadian society."<sup>5</sup> Unlike the seminal research on the American underclass literature (e.g. Wilson 1987), however, their study does not examine the incidence of any other markers of deprivation besides income. In addition, the authors do not control for immigrants' length of stay in Canada, a variable that differentiates the socio-spatial achievements of each immigrant cohort (Lo and Wang 1997, Ley and Smith 1997). As I will discuss later, methodological issues are not irrelevant to the socio-spatial assimilation debate.

In a study designed specifically to test whether the condition of immigrants in Canada might be converging with that of an African-American urban "underclass," David Ley and Heather Smith (1997) also found an association between the incidence of poverty and the degree of residential concentration of immigrants in Canada's three largest CMAs. These findings complement Fong and Gulia's (2000) assessment of the differences in neighbourhood quality between groups, a study in which the authors conclude that non-European groups tend to live in lower quality neighbourhoods than European-origin ones, while Blacks tend to live in neighbourhoods embedded in broader clusters of disadvantage. Ley and Smith, however, do not take these findings as evidence of an underclass emerging. Comparing their 1991 results to 1971 data, they show that the number of census tracts registering extreme poverty (i.e., tracts where more than 40 percent of the population lived below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut Off measure) had in fact decreased. The authors also used linear regression analysis to examine whether period of arrival, language used

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<sup>5</sup> See also Kazemipur and Halli (2000).

at home, and country of origin played a role on the observed co-location of poverty and immigrant settlement. They found that the first two variables were generally more important than the last one, suggesting that in general, immigrants continued to follow an “up” (socio-economically) and “out” (of poverty tracts) trajectory over time, as predicted by the assimilation thesis.<sup>6</sup>

*Testing the validity of the “up and out” model using the 1991 census*

In a second study, Ley and Smith (2000) expanded their analysis to include multiple indicators of deprivation besides income, citing in particular the US underclass literature that defines ghettos in terms of a persisting manifestation of multiple dimensions of deprivation (Hughes 1990 and Ricketts and Sawhill 1988, cited in Ley and Smith 2000; see also Wilson 1987). Ley and Smith found that in 1991, only two tracts in all of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver were affected by the presence of all indicators, and only a moderate-to-low positive relationship existed between multiple deprivation factors and non-European immigrant location. Once again, their findings did not support a Canadian underclass thesis. The authors also found that between 1971 and 1991, the dominant immigrant experience was one of socio-spatial mobility rather than entrapment, although exceptions did exist. Recognising that the causes behind these exceptions are complex, the authors concluded that such cases are most likely linked to adverse socio-economic factors rather than to visible minority status, and in any case confirm the widely recognised heterogeneity of immigrant populations.

In a separate effort to assess the relationship between social isolation

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<sup>6</sup> This conclusion does not imply an assimilationist position on the part of the authors. As Hiebert and Ley explain elsewhere, the measurement of socio-spatial distance among groups is not necessarily conducted “out of an expectation that assimilation is inevitable, nor perhaps even desirable, but to investigate the relationship between social isolation and socio-economic exclusion. If Canadian society embraces multiculturalism but economic penalties exist for minority groups that maintain a social distance from the mainstream, then there is an unfortunate gap between rhetoric and reality.” (2003: 19)

and socio-economic exclusion among immigrants, Daniel Hiebert and David Ley (2003) combined the measurement of immigrant residential separateness with various socio-economic modalities of difference such as income, labour market segmentation, educational attainment, degree of ethnic group in-marriage, and language attributes. Their analysis was based on custom tabulations of 1991 census data for Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. The authors argued that the outcomes of immigrants of non-European origin and ethnicity reached levels similar to the receiving society much slower than European immigrants, who remained significantly separate past the first generation--an outcome more reflective of the expectations of cultural pluralism. Nonetheless, the authors argued that the validity of the traditional model was confirmed by the important role played by length of residence, as the relationship between the variables was found to grow over time.

Hiebert and Ley (2003) also found that while economic marginality and socio-spatial concentration are correlated for both immigrant types in the first decade after arrival, non-European groups display lower individual incomes than their European counterparts. However, the authors show that non-European immigrant groups soon outperform European groups in terms of household income, likely a result of income pooling strategies among groups characterised by large household size.<sup>7</sup> Hiebert and Ley found no evidence of an immigrant underclass, and concluded that the assimilation model generally provides a better description of immigrants' trajectories than the cultural pluralism thesis.

These three rejections of the notion of an emerging Canadian immigrant underclass also found support in a study conducted by T. Balakrishnan and Feng Hou (1999a). Comparing census data from 1981 and 1991 for Canada's

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<sup>7</sup> See also Ley (1999).

seven largest CMAs, the authors examine the relationship between spatial distribution and occupational attainment among European and non-European ethnic origin groups. Their analysis shows that in 1991, the latter groups displayed higher levels of congregation than 20 years earlier, and continued to be under-represented in higher status occupations; occupational separateness, however, had decreased. This gulf between labour market outcomes and geographic residential distribution is inconsistent with the underclass thesis, and provides additional evidence against it.

But if Balakrishnan and Hou (1999a) helped settle the debate over claims that an immigrant underclass was emerging between 1981 and 1991, their study also seemed to challenge the validity of the “up and out” model by suggesting that immigrants were failing to convert their socio-economic achievements into a dispersed spatial position. In other words, their study suggested that the assumed relationship between socio-economic achievement and residential mobility (not necessarily movement out of poverty tracts but out of same-group neighbourhoods) was weakening by 1991. Using different study designs applied to 1991 census data, Eric Fong and his colleagues reached similar conclusions with respect to the situation of specific visible minority groups (Fong and Shibuya 2000, Fong and Wilkes 1999, 2003). For example, Fong and Wilkes (2003) found that within-group separateness was generally low for European-origin groups (regardless of immigrants or non-immigrant status), but moderately high between European and non-European ones. In the first case, city demographic factors (namely the proportions of visible minority groups in the total population of each city) were found to have primacy, while city structural factors (specifically city unemployment rates, the proportion of new housing built, and city functional specialisation) were more important in the case of non-European groups. Given that city

structural factors are “larger social forces that will not be easily altered in the near future” (599), the authors concluded, segregation between European and non-European groups was unlikely to improve in the short term. In this respect, their study cast a second shadow of doubt over the validity of the “up and out” model. It is clear that there can be movement “out,” but this does not necessarily translate into a reduction in residential concentration regardless of whether members of specific groups generally make socio-economic gains at the individual level, as in the case of Chinese groups in Richmond (a suburb of the Vancouver CMA), or if they are mostly unable to do so, as in the example of South Asian groups in Surrey (another Vancouver CMA suburb). These examples illustrate the fact that suburbanization is no longer automatically equivalent to dispersal, which is in fact a new development that seems to have been completely unanticipated by the assimilation model.

The fact that neither Balakrishnan and Hou (1999a) nor Fong and Wilkes (2003) controlled for cohort effects in their analyses might help explain why their conclusions regarding the validity of the assimilation thesis departed from those reached by Ley and Smith (1997, 2000) and Hiebert and Ley (2003). But in an earlier study based also on 1991 census results, Fong and Wilkes (1999) take cohort effects into account and reach the same conclusion, refuting the relationship between socio-economic attainment and urban dispersal in the case of non-European origin immigrant groups. Through regression analysis, they find that neighbourhood attainment (expressed in terms of average house price, crowding levels, percentage of residents with university education, and percentage of unemployed residents) relates to socio-economic attainment (measured by household income levels) but only in the case of European-origin groups. The relationship was also found to break down in the case of Asian groups and Blacks, “even when immigration periods are controlled.” (603) The

authors conclude that the larger *ethnocultural* contexts of immigrant groups need to be taken into account when applying the spatial assimilation model—a theme I will revisit later in this paper.

#### THE CENSUS IN 1996 AND 2001: AN EMPIRICAL BASIS FOR AN ADJUSTED MODEL?

Annual immigration levels of over 200,000 entrants in most years between 1991 and 2001 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2003) have introduced important changes in the Canadian urban landscape. With the help of census results from 1996 and 2001, researchers continue to assess the multiplicity of impacts that these cumulatively high levels of immigration have had on a variety of registers. In this section of the paper, I continue the examination of the spatial assimilation debate in the residential separateness literature, by focusing on studies that make specific reference to the 1990s. Two different types of studies once again engage the validity of the “up and out” model of immigrant integration. As I will show later, the second type of study distinguishes itself from what follows by the use of sophisticated multivariate analysis and the intimation of a new approach to understanding the socio-spatial trajectory of different immigrant groups.

Like Lo and Wang (1997), T. Balakrishnan (2001) focused on the geographic distribution of the total population of specific ethnic groups within a city, instead of examining the population composition of given geographical areas. More specifically, he used 1996 census data to analyse the levels of separateness in the residential distribution of South Asian and Chinese populations (immigrants and non-immigrants alike) in 14 of Canada’s largest metropolitan centres. Developing an original GINI index to measure each group’s geographic pattern relative to its own total population, Balakrishnan found that both groups displayed high levels of separateness. In comparison,

the population of the “dominant British group” recorded much lower levels using this measure. Furthermore, Balakrishnan reports that in almost all the 14 CMAs he examined, Chinese residents (as well as South Asians, though to a lesser extent) were more likely to live in areas “with higher-than-average socio-economic status.” While the author does not indicate how that was measured, he interprets the reported findings as proof that socio-economic achievement has a minuscule impact on the residential distribution of ethnic groups. He then concludes that the assimilation model has been replaced by a successful multicultural model, in which enclave formation does not prevent socio-economic integration.<sup>8</sup> In a similar study, Balakrishnan and Stephen Gyimah (2003) reach the same conclusion, but in this case they speculate that the levels of segregation that they report are likely to subside with length of stay in Canada. However, neither of the two studies incorporates this factor as a variable of analysis. The authors are therefore unable to statistically verify this possibility and determine how cohort effects would modify their conclusions.

In contrast, two other studies that directly consider length of stay in Canada found evidence supporting the continuing validity of the “up and out” model throughout the 1990s. Ley (1999) sets out to demonstrate that the urban underclass thesis in Canada continued to be only a myth, using census data from 1991 and 1996 for Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Ley’s study confirmed Hiebert’s (1999) findings regarding growing tendencies to concentrate reported for non-European-origin groups in Vancouver, particularly for group members who are immigrants. Ley found that labour market segmentation, earnings, and residential separateness levels were

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<sup>8</sup> See also Balakrishnan and Hou (1999a). In addition, we can think of the earlier patterns established by Jewish communities, where upward socio-economic mobility was accompanied by outward spatial mobility yet residential concentration levels remained high.

highly correlated. More disturbingly perhaps, he found that within same-time-of-arrival immigrant groups, separateness was more likely to be accompanied by severe income difficulties. However, this pattern shifted substantially when household (instead of individual) income was taken into account.<sup>9</sup> Non-European immigrant groups were found to quickly reach household income levels that were higher than those reported by their European counterparts. It should be pointed out, however, that these results to some extent reflect the peculiarities of Vancouver as an immigrant destination, given its low levels of refugees (typically poor) and high levels of (wealthier) business migrants.

The second relevant study here is Smith's (2004) update of her analysis (with Ley, 1997) of the geographic intersection of immigrant residential separateness and incidence of neighbourhood poverty and deprivation. Using 2001 census data, she finds that in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, co-location of these two phenomena was on the rise, but it was more often found in isolated suburban areas or embedded in broader clusters, especially in the case of recently arrived immigrants. Smith concludes that the "up and out" model continues to most accurately describe the trajectory of immigrant settlement over time. However, her findings also suggest that "Canada's immigrants are increasingly carving out new patterns and practices of settlement and adjustment" (3) which depart from those posited by the traditional assimilation model.

Incidentally, Smith's (2004) study is one of only a few in which residential redistribution patterns out of the inner city are explicitly discussed. Indeed, Smith reports that recent immigrants in Montreal tend to disperse individually into the surrounding suburbs without relocating into new pockets of same-group concentration (see also Rose et al. 1999, Marois 1998, cited in

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<sup>9</sup> See also Ley and Smith (2000).

Hiebert 2000). Likewise, Hiebert (1999) discovered that similar patterns have developed in Vancouver, particularly in the case of smaller visible minority groups. Like many other authors, however (e.g., Bauder and Sharpe 2002, Ley 1999, Ley and Smith 1997, 2000), both Smith (2004) and Hiebert (1999) also describe a different dispersal pattern--perhaps more appropriately termed *decentralisation*--in which recent immigrants move out of inner city same-group clusters only to re-concentrate in the suburbs, or else move into suburban same-group neighbourhoods directly upon arrival. In these cases, immigrant suburbanization is not necessarily inconsistent with the assimilation thesis.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Towards a bifurcated model of socio-spatial mobility*

In the first part of this review, I showed how most studies that rejected the assimilation model using 1991 and earlier census data were affected by common methodological limitations. This implies that the authors could have obtained different results using an alternative research design, and potentially reached diametrically different conclusions as well. But Smith's (2004) mixed findings regarding the patterns of immigrant geographical settlement and social adjustment seem to reflect more than a methodological conundrum. Rather, they may be the result of deep social and spatial transformations in the Canadian urban structure associated with size effects, which recent sophisticated multivariate studies of census results for 1996 and 2001 have started to reveal. Two statistics for the metropolitan trio of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver emblemise such changes: between 1981 and 1996, the

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<sup>10</sup> One of the assumptions of the "up and out" thesis as proposed by the Chicago School was that, in accordance with the concentric model of urban growth, the most affordable housing was to be found in the inner city. But since the 1970s the inner suburbs have increasingly become sources of economically accessible housing (Murdie 1998), attracting growing numbers of immigrants (newly arrived and longer settled alike). From an assimilationist perspective, it is argued that under these conditions, suburbanisation simply shifts the geographic starting point of immigrant outward trajectories.

number of census tracts in which at least 30 percent of the population belonged to one of these cities' top three visible minority groups jumped from six to 142 (Hou and Picot 2003).<sup>11</sup> By 2001, that number had reached 254 tracts (Hou 2004).

In one of three tract-level studies of transitions in neighbourhood composition (Fong and Gulia 2000, Hou and Milan 2003), Hou (2004) examines the three largest visible minority groups in each of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver (West Asian/Arab, Blacks, South Asians, Chinese, and Filipinos) using census data from 1981, 1991, and 2001, and finds that visible minority immigrants in recent cohorts were more likely to find themselves in same-group neighbourhoods upon arrival, compared to the experience of older cohorts. More importantly, visible minority immigrants were more likely in 2001 to live in same-group neighbourhoods after longer periods living in the country. One interpretation of this finding is that the "up and out" model continues to describe the experience of most immigrants in Canada, but for many of them, the predicted time frame of this trajectory unfavourably departs from the patterns observed in the past.

Hou also shows that in most cases, the emergence of individual visible minority census tracts was attributed to a "partial replacement" of non-visible minority residents by visible minority ones. However, this exchange was found to occur only in the initial stages of minority neighbourhood formation.<sup>12</sup> According to Hou's multivariate analyses, the residential concentration of visible minorities in a census tract stabilises at or below 60 percent of the

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11 In this same study, Hou and Picot (2003) update previous research refuting the Canadian underclass thesis by showing that in 1996, the residential concentration of visible minority immigrant groups had little or no relationship with labour market segmentation and its disadvantages.

12 This phenomenon may in part be attributed to residential relocation of "empty nest" households at or near retirement age, or motivated by homeowners' desire to cash in on the equity accumulated in their property in light of rising real estate prices. See Ley (Forthcoming) for a metropolitan-level analysis of these behaviours.

total tract population for almost all visible minorities and all cohorts after 20 years. While a stabilisation of concentration levels runs contrary to the spatial assimilation thesis, Hou indicates that the phenomenon is consistent with the historical experience of some “traditional” (i.e. pre-1967) immigrant groups, in particular Italians, for whom high levels of residential concentration only tapered after their immigration to Canada had almost come to a stop.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, Hou observes that the 60 percent threshold “may not hold if visible minority populations continue to increase rapidly in the major metropolitan areas.” (23) Considering Canada’s projected immigration levels, this is not a superfluous caveat: Hou’s study also shows that in general, the rapid expansion of visible minority neighbourhoods was primarily associated with large increases in visible minorities’ share of a city’s population due to immigration, rather than with any tendency to congregate.

Other researchers have conversely argued that a tendency to live in same-group neighbourhoods is more important for some groups than others. In a study I discussed earlier, Fong and Wilkes (2003) speculated that persistently high levels of separateness between Chinese and European-origin groups were partly associated with the voluntary formation of Chinese enclaves composed of well-to-do and more disadvantaged group members.<sup>14</sup> Given that Chinese are among the top largest visible minority groups in Canada’s three largest cities, some researchers have turned their attention to examining the formation of such voluntary enclaves and determining whether (for some groups at least) this is no longer an exception but the norm.

Analysing microdata from the 20-percent sample of the 2001 census, Myles and Hou (2003) examine the neighbourhood experience of Toronto’s

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13 In other words, with continuing high levels of immigration we can expect to find continuing high levels of spatial unevenness in the residential distribution of the population. See also Balakrishnan and Hou (1999b).

14 See also Ray et al. (1997) regarding the socio-economically mixed distribution of this population group.

three largest visible minorities. Echoing Smith's (2004) mixed results, their findings both converge and depart from the expectations of the assimilation model. On the one hand, South Asians and Blacks emerge as groups for which "the immigrant [neighbourhood] is a place to be left behind as economic circumstances allow" (16), although the mix of explanatory factors (language spoken at home, period of immigration, income and education levels) varies between the two groups. On the other hand, the Chinese exhibit a pattern of home purchasing shortly after arrival, with a tendency to locate in same-group enclaves--what Logan et al. (2002) call "ethnic communities"--as long as language assimilation (defined on the basis of language spoken at home) does not occur. The authors conclude that the expectations of the "up and out" model match the residential settlement patterns of South Asians and Blacks, but not those of the Chinese.

Haan (2005) takes a different approach to testing the "ethnic community" hypothesis of residential congregation persisting beyond what the assimilation model would predict. His study of Toronto sets out to determine the factors that explain the occurrence of self-segregation in neighbourhoods where relative affluence and ethnicity intersect. Using census data from 1996 and 2001, Haan finds that same-group concentration affected the new home ownership rates of three of the city's 12 largest immigrant ethnic groups (Jamaicans, Chinese and Italians). Haan found that the direction of the impact varied according to whether the group displayed income or university education levels above or below the Toronto average. Of these three immigrant groups, only Jamaicans ranked below the city's average. Their rate of new home ownership was likely to be on average higher for group members who did not live in a same-group neighbourhood, while for Chinese and Italian immigrants the home ownership rate was likely to be higher for enclave residents. Other groups also displayed

a differential in their new home owners' residential location, but it was found not to be statistically significant--suggesting that for most groups (nine of the 12 examined), ethnic neighbourhood composition is not likely to affect the home purchase decision. However, Haan's findings would also suggest that the spatial assimilation model continues to be valid for groups with income or university education levels below the city's average. In contrast, above average attainment is associated by Haan with what he terms a "new" assimilationist perspective--one in which, under certain conditions, socio-economic assimilation is not accompanied by the traditional model's expected outward movement.

#### A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

To a large extent, Haan's conclusions relate to the specifications of his analytical model and the restricted interpretations of statistical findings they allow. As can be expected from any statistically based body of research, the choice of categorial variables--and the interpretation of what these represent--has a decisive impact on the findings and conclusions of the literature I have reviewed. In the case of the underclass thesis debate, for instance, I have argued that conclusions regarding its validity depend on the inclusion or omission of period-of-immigration variables. A few other examples of this type of methodological effect were detected throughout. One of these is the role that ethnocultural factors play in the socio-spatial trajectory of immigrant settlement. As mentioned earlier, Fong and Wilkes (1999) found an association between neighbourhood and socio-economic attainment for European-origin groups only, not for Asian or Black immigrants. These results would seem to imply that ethnocultural factors could help explain such variations in spatial outcomes.

Ethnocultural factors figure more explicitly in Haan's (2005) study. For him, the determinants of the set of assimilation expectations that apply to a particular group--those of the "traditional" or of the "new" assimilationist perspective--are simultaneously socio-economic and ethnocultural, in that the socio-economic attainment of a group depends in part on its ethnocultural background.<sup>15</sup> The key assumption here is that a particular ethnocultural background can be readily assigned to a group as a whole. To this effect, Haan uses income and university education variables as proxies for the notion of "ethnic capital," leading to the conclusion that spatial assimilation continues to be valid for groups that display low ethnic capital status (i.e., Jamaicans), while high ethnic capital groups (Chinese, Italians) are instead associated with a "new assimilation perspective." But contrast Haan's (2005) conclusions with Myles and Hou's (2003) suggestion that a variation on the assimilation model may be required to account for the case of Chinese immigrants. The authors caution that "Skin colour alone does not produce shared identities," and that "The 'average' experience of Chinese, South Asian and black families potentially conceals important differences among immigrant populations that are internally divided by national origin, religion, and other characteristics" (2003: 28). This qualification suggests that the concept of "ethnic capital" not only poses measurement challenges, but also minimises the significance of observed between-group differences based on current group definitions. Haan (2005) and Myles and Hou (2003) are not the only researchers to suggest in recent years that other factors beyond socio-economic considerations may need to be considered in the future (Fong and Wilkes 2003, Smith 2004). Yet,

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15 Haan cites the American economist Borjas (1998), who uses the term "ethnic capital" to describe the average human capital (namely the educational attainment) of an ethnic group in the parent's generation. Borjas' strategy assumes that composite measures of a group's generational socio-economic attainment are a priori markers of ethnic belonging, obscuring the fact that such measures are simply a posteriori statistical aggregations.

perhaps more than any other classificatory variable, ethnocultural identity or affiliation is a statistical artifact requiring careful interpretation and substantial empirically based theorisation and testing.

One final observation here concerns the measurement of geographic distribution as a marker of the socio-spatial residential patterns of immigrant groups. The vast majority of empirical studies rely on variations of the dissimilarity index, a measure of *evenness* in the spatial distribution of populations. As Massey and Denton (1988) have shown, this is only one of several dimensions of residential segregation.<sup>16</sup> Surprisingly, only four recent Canadian studies employed so-called exposure measures (namely Isolation and Interaction indices) as alternatives to evenness or its facsimiles (Bauder and Sharpe 2002, Hou 2004, Myles and Hou 2003, Ray 1999). A fifth study (White et al. 2005) shifts away from pair-wise measures and employs instead sophisticated multidimensional scaling (MDS) methods first developed in the 1970s. These five studies are able to present a more nuanced analysis of the socio-spatial trajectories of specific groups than those in which only distributional evenness is approached.

Admittedly, this review suffers from its own kind of uni-dimensionality, as it focuses only on one aspect--engagement with the assimilation debate--of the recent Canadian literature on residential separateness. Many findings and conclusions that did not relate directly to the assimilation debate were omitted from my discussion. Put differently, the assimilationist perspective structures its own debate by folding time into space, in the sense that it treats the question of ethnocultural residential concentration as a matter of the speed or differential rate of immigrant access to mainstream society and to its economic

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<sup>16</sup> Massey and Denton (1988) identified five separate dimensions of spatial segregation: evenness, exposure, concentration, centralisation, and clustering. Their categorisation has been widely adopted in the literature.

and spatial resources. As a result, this discussion only explored what could be called a “geography of time.” A much different set of themes and findings could be highlighted by focusing on a “geography of place” (as redundant as this descriptor sounds). For instance, what is the significance of the growing suburbanization of initial settlement choice? Or what does this literature say about the role of historical institutional practices—such as “exclusionary zoning policies” (Duncan and Duncan 2004) or municipal amalgamation decisions—in either facilitating or discouraging the residential segregation of various population groups?<sup>17</sup> More generally, what do these studies teach us about the social relations that are produced within and around the bounded space of residential separateness, or about the relations that produce such spaces in the first place?

## CONCLUSION

A positive or negative association between residential congregation and the socio-economic attainment of immigrant and visible minority groups may be interpreted as evidence of Canada’s failure to live up to its multicultural ideals. For that reason, this review of the recent literature on immigrant residential separateness focused on the debates surrounding the presence and direction of this relationship. The three main themes were discussed: the debate over a Canadian immigrant underclass, the debate over the validity of the mobility assumptions posited by the “up and out” model, and the introduction of a “new assimilation” thesis.

With regards to the first of these themes, it appears that a consensus

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<sup>17</sup> For example, historian Jordan Stanger-Ross (2005) argues that the substantial differences in the development of Little Italy neighbourhoods in Toronto and Philadelphia were at least partly the result of these cities’ divergent policies regarding the amalgamation of suburban municipalities. Drieger (1999) in turn develops a triple typology of metropolitan “ethno-racial residential segregation” based on patterns he outlines for Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. See also Murdie (1998) regarding the relationship to residential high-rise zoning and the location of government-assisted housing in Toronto.

has developed around the inappropriateness of the American underclass thesis for describing the socio-spatial situation of immigrants in Canadian metropolitan areas. Whereas some researchers suggested that the 1991 census provided evidence of an incipient immigrant underclass, their findings did not stand more rigorous testing that took into account the effects of period of immigration. Research using both 1991 and more recent data showed that multiple indicators of deprivation were anything but common in Canadian urban neighbourhoods; when present, multiple deprivation affected mainly the Canadian-born. In addition, researchers found that the tendency is for immigrants in general to make residential location gains over time.

These findings constitute the foundation of a second theme in the literature. For most groups, the assumptions of the "up and out" model of immigrant integration have continued to hold, albeit with increasing amounts of time reported before the expected socio-spatial outcomes are attained. While differences were found to be decisive between groups, none seemed to be more important than those related to the outcomes of the Chinese immigrant population. A recent study based on analysis of the 2001 census revealed that the Chinese are now the only visible minority group in Canada's three largest metropolitan centres for which it can be said that the average member lives in a same-group neighbourhood.<sup>18</sup> However, only about half of the Chinese population resided in such census tracts, confirming that this "exception" is still far from being a group norm.

Nonetheless, some evidence suggests that the socio-spatial model of immigrant integration could be splitting into a traditional and a "new" version, each applying to different groups. For example, the Chinese were found to be peculiar in that they deviate from the expectations of the traditional

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<sup>18</sup> In the study where these findings were reported, this designation referred to census tracts where at least 30 percent of the population belongs to that ethno-cultural group (Hou 2004).

assimilation model by not transforming their pre- or post-arrival socio-economic attainment into an ethnoculturally dispersed residential location. Instead, members of this group showed a tendency to purchase homes in same-group ethnic communities, though education and income levels were found to affect this outcome. It is important to remember, however, that “Chinese” is a heterogeneous category composed of multiple sub-ethnic and country of origin groups (Lo and Wang 1997). Moreover, these findings may be overly dependent on the methodological specifications that gave rise to them, including insufficient attention to the significance of newcomer suburbanization. Therefore, it is not yet clear whether the magnitude of this exception to the “up and out” thesis is robust enough to confirm that an empirically consistent bifurcated model of socio-spatial assimilation has emerged.

In closing, it is worth reflecting on how various important transformations in the Canadian urban structure, originating in the 1970s and 1980s, became increasingly noticeable during the 1990s. In what is arguably a related development, the socio-economic and ethnocultural composition of Canada’s immigrant population has also undergone dramatic change over that same 30-year period. Hou’s (2004) findings regarding the composition of visible minority neighbourhoods suggest that it may not be long before we reach the stage where the practice of leaving older immigrant cohorts out of the benchmark group against which integration is measured will simply cease to make sense. Supported by results from an innovative study that seeks to go beyond analyses based on a single reference group, White et al. (2005: 193) argue that: “Integration should be more precisely conceptualized as integration with particular groups, recognizing that in a diverse society, individuals can be integrated with any number of ethnic groups or with none at all.”

The introduction in the past few years of a diversity of increasingly

sophisticated research methods is an important development that was only hinted at in this review. Yet the wide range of this literature's findings and conclusions seems to reflect not only differences in research design, but also the growing complexity of these evolving social geographies. The narrative that gives structure to this review may give the appearance that a clear set of patterns has been identified; yet almost all of these studies take care to insist on the differences in reported outcomes within and between groups, municipalities, and cities. Much work still remains to be done before we are able to tell which (if any) of these factors contribute to such dimensions of variability, and what these mean for the continuing validity of the traditional assimilation model and its assumptions. And who knows what the soon-to-be-released 2006 census is about to reveal.

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