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**Crafting ‘enterprising’ workers through career training programs among Canada’s South Asian professional immigrants**

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# **Crafting ‘enterprising’ workers through career training programs among Canada’s South Asian professional immigrants**

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## **Abstract**

In the current post-Fordist, neoliberal Canadian state, the concept of the ‘enterprising self’ has come to define worker-subjectivity and ability to access the labour market. The discourse of entrepreneurialism promotes individual initiatives and resources as the most useful qualities necessary to be successful in the neoliberal labour market. This paper, based on two qualitative research projects examines the mechanism through which enterprising conduct is instilled within immigrants in Canada. In particular, the focus is on South Asian immigrants to take up questions of how racialised immigrants fit into the enterprise culture. This is an area that has remained understudied despite the fact that immigrants of colour in Canada are consistently pushed towards re-training and re-skilling because of their higher rates of un/under employment in Canada. Informed by the theories of governmentality, the paper highlights two findings; first, it demonstrates how work-related training programs offered by the settlement agencies in Canada advocate the importance of being ‘enterprising’ by harping on discourses of self-sufficiency and personal endeavour to become productive workers; second, the programs implicitly correct or redress immigrants of colour to conform to the hegemonic Eurocentric codes underlying normative citizenship. In foregrounding the experiences of South Asian immigrants, this paper thus explores how the process of neoliberal subject making, particularly in the first world countries, has a racial and cultural undertone. Racism continues to circulate powerfully in the neoliberal era, reordering existing modes of inclusion and exclusion which, having been relegated to the realm of private choice becomes difficult to pinpoint.

**Keywords:** enterprising self, neoliberalism, racism, whitening, immigrants, training

## **Introduction**

In the current post-Fordist, neoliberal Canadian state, the concept of the ‘enterprising self’ has not only gained momentum, but has also come to define worker-subjectivity and ability to access the labour market. Based on a theme of ‘responsibilising of the self’ (Peters, 2001, p.61) the discourse of entrepreneurialism promotes individual initiatives and resources as the most useful qualities needed to enter the labour market in the current free market economy when there is an increasing reluctance of the state agencies to provide any kind of social safety-net to its citizens (Aguiar, 2006; Church et al., 2000). Citizens are encouraged to engage in personal self-care and self-management so that they are more active, responsible, and self-governing

individuals capable of ensuring their own success (du Gay, 1996; Lemke, 2001). The entrepreneurial ideology, supported by the neoliberal state, thus perpetuates the discourse of civic responsibility, arguing that instead of mourning the loss of welfare securities, citizens should start taking responsibility for their own achievements and engage in continual investment in their own human capital to maximise their potential in the labour market (Adkins, 2012). Crucially, then such subjects must be ‘equipped with a psychology aspiring to self-fulfilment and actually or potentially running their lives as a kind of enterprise of themselves’ (Rose, 1996, p. 139) in order to succeed in the everyday venture of life. So, the same logics of risk and growth that drive the market must become the cornerstone of everyday life itself for the individuals to self-develop.

The neoliberal discourse of the ‘enterprising self’ has important ramifications for those who qualify to immigrate to Canada for being the ‘best’ and the ‘brightest’. Over the years, the Canadian state has been particularly keen in attracting immigrants with high human capital and entrepreneurial skills (Duncan, 2012; OECD, 2008) so that after immigration they can find decent work on their own and become ‘productive’ members of the Canadian labour market. Highly educated, skilled immigrants are deemed to be ‘labour market/economy ready’-‘ideal’ newcomers who can take responsibility for optimising their employment opportunities in the new country without the Canadian state having to heavily invest in their settlement (Root et al., 2014; Shields, Drolet & Valenzuela, 2016).

Individual self-maximisation as the basis of enterprising conduct, is not however a ‘natural universal condition’ (Gooptu, 2013, p. 8) and may require a reengineering of the human subjectivity and the social and cultural values on which it rests (Gooptu, 2013). For example, in Canada, there exists trainers and counsellors within the immigrant settlement sector who provide career training related to forms of social interaction, dress code, bodily deportments,

personality traits, speech/accent, voice in order to prepare newcomers for the local labour market (Shields, Drolet & Valenzuela, 2016). These trainers and their programs are specifically geared towards ‘helping’ those immigrants who are unable to use their human capital to gain employment and lack entrepreneurial abilities to turn their lives into a ‘success’ (Shields, Drolet & Valenzuela, 2016).

In this paper, based on an analysis of employment-related training programs offered by government funded settlement agencies, I examine the mechanism through which enterprising conduct is instilled within immigrants. In particular, I focus on South Asian immigrants to take up questions of how racialised immigrants fit into the enterprise culture. This is an area that has remained understudied (for exception see Maitra, 2015; Maitra & Maitra, 2015; Shan, 2015) despite the fact that immigrants of colour in Canada are consistently pushed towards re-training and re-skilling because of their higher rates of un/under employment in Canada (George & Chaze, 2014; Guo, 2013; Shan, 2009). I make two arguments in this context. First, I employ Foucault’s notion of governmentality to locate career training programs offered by settlement trainers and counsellors as one of the powerful sites where immigrants are regulated in order to become ‘self-responsible, self-enterprising, and self-governing subjects’ (Ong & Zhang, 2008, p. 3). After Foucault (1988), governmentality in this paper is defined as a set of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour that includes certain modes of training and modification of individuals, ‘not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes in living out life’ (p. 18). Second, drawing on Ong (1996, 2003) I argue that inherent within this enterprising subject-making is a process of ‘whitening’ imposed upon immigrants, especially immigrants of colour based on their assumed ‘difference’ from the normative white ‘ideal’ citizen-subject. The training, by asking immigrants of colour to work on their self so that they can conform to the hegemonic

Eurocentric codes underlying normative citizenship, links self-management with the discourse of the enterprising self (Hancock and Tyler, 2008) while glossing over issues of race and racism that continue to affect the employment experiences of immigrants of colour living in Canada.

### **Governmentality and the enterprising self**

A number of scholars in trying to map the processes through which individuals learn to become enterprising worker subjects have found Foucault's conceptualisation of 'governmentality' as particularly useful in delineating the regulatory practices embedded within the learning process (e.g. Fenwick 2001; Garrick and Usher 2000; Ong 1996, 2003; Pun 2005; Rose 1992). In a series of lectures, Foucault developed the notion around what he described as the 'art of governing'. In explaining the process of its development from the sixteenth century to the present neo-liberal era, Foucault highlighted how the notion of governing has shifted from the specific control over territory or property to a more pervasive attempt at governing individuals, their relations, customs, habits and even the way they act and think (Foucault, 1991). The essential logic behind the deployment of this notion of governing is not coercion or utilisation of force, but the 'management of population in its depths and its details' (Foucault, 1991, p. 102). Accordingly, individuals are governed through certain non-coercive techniques that

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

Foucault defines these techniques as 'technologies of the self' (1988, p. 18) and underscores that the process entails citizens modifying their individual skills, capacities, and attitudes to fit into the neoliberal labour market.

Rose (1992), drawing on Foucault's work on 'governmentality' presents a nuanced analysis of how this particular neo-liberal enterprising subjectivity is being nurtured within a space of what he describes as 'regulated freedom' (p. 160). According to Rose, the ideology of the enterprising self is all about individual actions, how individuals would act on themselves out of their own choice, regulating and disciplining their selves to develop into competitive, efficient and prosperous citizens. However, such qualities are inculcated within individuals through certain regulatory procedures and strategies provided by a range of experts such as social workers, counsellors, advisors, or psychologists. These experts, through different training and programs encourage individuals to govern and control their own selves in such a way that they are able to become 'that which it wishes to be', so that 'fulfilment of any final *telos* [emphasis original] of self-development lies entirely within the domain of one's own action' (Rose, 1992, p. 146). On a similar note, other scholars such as Gershon (2011) elaborate on the role of the expert in inculcating self-management strategies within workers while Fogde (2010) highlights how expert employment training 'shape desirable subjects and subjectivities...in culturally prescribed ways' (p.15). Orchestrating the various activities of the self, the training provided by expert career counsellors thus 'shape, channel, organise and direct the personal capacities and selves of individuals' (Rose, 1992, p. 147) to be in control of their careers and turn themselves into high achievers. So, with citizens who are unemployed or underemployed, this expertise promises to break the blockages and passivity that trap individuals into 'undemanding jobs and underachievement' (Rose, 1992, p. 151). Yet, at the same time, these regulatory practices are not for creating compliant individuals absolutely dependent on these services, but only to equip them with certain tools so that they are able to manage their affairs, take control of their goals, and make plans for achievement (Rose, 1992).

### ***Racing Enterprising self***

Further critiquing the discourse of ‘entrepreneurialism’, several scholars point out how the process of neoliberal subject making, particularly in the first world countries also has a racial and cultural undertone so that the process of making an enterprising self becomes coterminous with the process of ‘whitening’ (Ong 2003, 739). This process of whitening is justified based on the discourse of ‘deficiency’ or ‘lack’ assumed to be existing within the immigrants especially immigrants of colour.

Clarifying this process of whitening, Ong (2003) points out that in countries like the USA, where ‘human capital, self-discipline and consumer powers are associated with whiteness’ (p. 739), these become important attributes for judging others, especially when it comes to non-white immigrants. When compared to such normative, white attributes, the qualities of the non-white groups are perceived as deficient in various aspects such as language, education, or culture. They are then maneuvered towards a variety of training and educational services that have been put in place to inculcate in them qualities of ‘whiteness’. Therefore, what really happens in the name of making enterprising citizens is an imposition of dominant values based on an Eurocentric hegemony. Through various techniques, non-white immigrants are trained to smoothen their transition into the white society, techniques that aim to improve their language, accent, social education, skills and bodily departments – all in the name of acculturation and for becoming the subject most malleable to the authority of the state. It is through these techniques that the immigrants are taught ‘self-discipline and entrepreneurship of American success’ (Ong, 1996, p. 747). They also presumably guarantee immigrant’s integration into the white society and adherence to ‘white authority’ (Ong, 1996, p. 746), socially, culturally, morally and economically. Following Foucault, she describes these practices of whitening as ‘technologies of government’ (2003, p. 6) and identifies several domains such as the refugee camp, welfare state, labour market, school, where such regulatory



procedures are carried out on immigrants and/or refugees to transform them into ‘enterprising’ citizens of the West.

What is however distinctively unique about the neoliberal discourse of the ‘enterprising self’ is the way it reshapes the very process of racialisation by giving it a ‘market orientation’ (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010, p. 253). Since in the discourse of the enterprising self, it is the individual abilities and initiatives that are considered instrumental for the success of individuals, the fact that un/under employment of racialised immigrants is often exacerbated by racism and systemic discrimination are not taken into consideration or rendered non-existent. As Roberts and Mahtani (2010) contend, what the neoliberal discourse of entrepreneurialism does is to ‘effectively mask racism through its value-laden moral project: camouflaging practices anchored in an apparent meritocracy making possible a utopic vision of society that is non-racialized’ (p. 253).

Arguing along similar lines, Goldberg (2009) too critiques the ‘raceless’ quality of the neoliberal era, in which race is considered non-existent, and yet functions as the foundation upon which neoliberalism operates. Although neoliberal ideas stress race-neutral individual qualities, merits and abilities, Goldberg (2009) observes that racism persists, but has merely been relegated to the sphere of private expression and choice. Due to its legal mandate of equality with respect to its citizens, the modern state can no longer practice racial discrimination openly. Discriminatory practices would compromise the very legitimacy of the state and place its role as the ‘defender of both freedom and equality’ in question (Goldberg, 2009, p. 335). However, this does not mean that the state ‘purges racism from its domain. Rather, the state is restructured to support the privatising of race and the protection of racially driven exclusions in the private sphere where they are set off-limits to state intervention’ (Goldberg, 2009, p. 337). It is perhaps no wonder that ‘the more robustly neoliberal the state, accordingly, the more likely race would be rendered largely immune from state intervention so

long as having no government force behind it' (Goldberg, 2009, p.334). Racism therefore, continues to circulate powerfully in the neoliberal era, reordering existing modes of inclusion and exclusion which, having been relegated to the realm of private choice becomes difficult to pinpoint. In the following sections I will present the method used to collect the data, analysis of the data that emerged from the interviews about the skill training programs and the women's experiences of those programs.

## **Method**

The discussions in this paper are based on two qualitative studies aimed at understanding the settlement, employment, and training experiences of immigrant women of colour living in Toronto. The first study was conducted as part of my doctoral research, where based on a feminist interpretive inquiry, I examined how highly educated South Asian immigrant women, unable to find any job in their own field, were forced to run small informal home-based businesses for survival. A few women were also working part-time in low paying, low-end jobs as supermarket cashier or babysitter. Out of the 25 women interviewed for the project, 7 women were from Bangladesh, 7 from Sri Lanka, 6 from India, and 5 from Pakistan. They had all migrated after marriage and 11 of them had children as well. Before coming to Canada, these women were all professionals with degrees in Arts, Commerce or Science. Their premigration work experiences were in such areas as office administration, teaching, Information Technology (IT), telecom and sales. At the time of the interview, majority of these women were enrolled in various employment related training programs (ETPs) offered by government funded agencies in Canada with the hope that these programs will enable them to find decent employment in their areas of expertise.

Following my doctoral research, I undertook a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded post-doctoral research that further examined the experiences of South Asian immigrant women enrolled in bridge training programs in Toronto. Bridge training programs help qualified internationally trained individuals move quickly into the labour market. Bridge training programs are offered in both regulated and non-regulated professions. The women were undertaking programs offered in non-regulated professions that is where recognition of qualifications and credentials are normally at the discretion of the employer (CICIC.ca). I specifically focused on women workers in non-regulated professions (such as information technology, banking, management, business administration) as scholars argue that lack of formal, uniform criteria for non-regulated professions, pose complicated but often subtle challenges for immigrants making a transition from their previous jobs and designation to those available in the destination country (McCoy & Masuch, 2007).

As part of this study, qualitative face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 key informants such as coordinators, employment counsellors and program instructors in various government-funded settlement organisations in Toronto that provided bridge training to immigrants. I also interviewed 25 South Asian women out of which 15 were from India, 6 were from Bangladesh, 3 women were from Sri Lanka and 1 from Pakistan. Except for 2 women, all were married and had immigrated with their spouses. Similar to the first study, in the second study as well all the women interviewees were highly educated with University degrees primarily in Science and Commerce. At the time of the interview, 12 women were working part-time in low-end jobs, 3 women were working in various community organisations, 2 women had full time job as office assistant and the rest were unemployed. In both studies I focused on South Asian women because it has constituted one of the largest visible minority immigrant groups in Canada for subsequently two census periods (Statistics Canada, 2011). The community, especially the women, has been highly educated yet primarily un/underemployed after immigration (George

& Chaze, 2014). As well, the focus on women also enabled me to ‘recognize and understand the lived experiences of these women as racialized immigrants and how they interpreted the training experiences from their own perspectives’ (Maitra, 2015, p. 69). Feminists, too, have embraced the prominence of lived experiences to include women’s own stories and understanding of their experiences (Jansen & Davis, 1998) into the research process (Maitra, 2015).

Semi-structured interview was utilised in both studies as it is known to provide the ‘principal means by which . . . to achieve the active involvement of . . . [the] respondents in the construction of data about their lives’ (Graham, 1984, p. 112). The interviews with immigrant women focused on four broad areas. The first area related to their previous work experiences and education, their process of immigration and arrival in Canada. The second set of questions probed their career paths upon arrival. Interviewees were asked to describe in detail their job searching processes, including application and interviews as well as training and workshops that they might have attended in Canada to facilitate their entry into the labour market. Relatedly, women were also asked to reflect on the kind of barriers they experienced in the Canadian labour market vis-à-vis their own racial and gendered positions in the country. The third area broadly related to their home-based businesses, with in-depth probing of how women themselves made sense of their work and what value they placed on this particular form of work. The fourth area related to their experiences in bridge training programs, their training and learning in those programs as well as what critique they had of those training modules. In the second study, the interviews with counsellors and instructors focused on the training structure, the curriculum, the selection procedure for training needs, impacts of training and evaluation strategies.

As part of the data analysis, both studies employed thematic analysis. First, after transcribing the interviews, I read the transcripts in order to understand the conversations and the analysis

that the women and the key informants had presented with regard to life, work, and training in Canada. While reading the transcripts I looked for prominent themes and patterns that emerged from the conversations (Braun and Clarke 2006), themes like motivation for immigration, training/learning, job searching experiences, career related suggestions or entrepreneurial skills. The themes were then pieced together to prepare a comprehensive picture of the collective experiences of the interviewees (Aronson 1994). In order to maintain privacy and confidentiality, all the names mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms.

### *Training sessions*

In Canada, several services are provided to newcomers by the provincial government to support the successful settlement and integration of newcomers to Canada. In Ontario, for example, the program is delivered by a province-wide network of community-based not-for-profit agencies that assist newcomers in settling and integrating to communities across Ontario (Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, 2017). Employment related settlement programs have always been a priority for the provincial government in order to tap into the international skills and experience of Ontario's skilled immigrants. Thus, it has been proposed that up to \$91 million will be invested in Ontario over the next three years for training programs designed to help newcomers meet local employment requirements (Regan, 2017). Apart from the above programs, 'Bridge Training Program' is another joint effort by the province and the federal government that aims to help internationally-trained workers find work in their profession in Ontario (Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, 2017). In 2015, there were 70 active Ontario bridge training projects across the province that directly addressed the Immigration Strategy's objective to grow a globally-connected economy by increasing the employment rate of highly skilled immigrants within their fields (Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, 2017). In 2016, the province allocated another 3.35 million over two years to support 11 new bridge training projects that are expected to improve

immigrants' access to career assistance services, career mentoring, employment events, language skills-training and a micro-loan program (Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, 2017).

The women interviewees came to know about these various career-related programs from their community networks and settlement agencies that they visited when unable to find jobs on their own. Consequently, they enrolled in these career development programs that offered a variety of courses such as mock interview session, mentoring, resume clinics, communication and workplace culture workshops. Most of these training programs were geared at implanting within workers various soft skills such as communicational abilities, gesture correction, accent reduction and/or adaptability to prepare them for the Canadian labour market. To be eligible for these programs, individuals had to be immigrant (preferably arrived in the last 3-5 years with some prior work experience) and actively looking for jobs. Once registered, the women were assessed by counsellors and advised to undertake several short programs (each of 4-6 weeks duration) before they were recommended to a job developer who was responsible for connecting them to paid or voluntary opportunities. As part of the bridge training programs (1-2 year duration), participants also received career coaching and opportunities to connect with employers through mentoring, networking, and internships. Although it is not mandatory for all immigrants to go through these settlement programs once they arrive in Canada, yet government agencies and settlement workers promote these programs in a way as if these constitute the 'passport' that immigrants need to transition from dependency and un/underemployment to active citizenship and decent employment.

## **Data Analysis**

## **The moulding of South Asian immigrant women into enterprising white subject**

During the interviews, South Asian immigrant women from both studies shared their experiences about the various employment related training programs that they went through in order to optimise their career aspirations. While some of these training, especially in the bridging programs, specifically related to technical skills, the rest was primarily focused on moulding immigrants' ideals, values, and behaviour in a way so that they can be more self-reliant and productive. An analysis of women's experiences revealed two interrelated processes through which entrepreneurialism was fostered amongst the immigrants. First, women reported that within the agencies a common rhetoric was about the need to be sincere, hard working and responsible. Second, through the workshops and training sessions, counsellors and trainers encouraged immigrants to correct or redress their habits, attitudes, customs so that they can be suitable for the Canadian workplace. In the following sections, I will discuss these processes in detail.

### ***Discursive perpetuation of optimism and self-sufficiency***

As the first point of contact, women interviewees visited several settlement organisations in Toronto to find out information about work opportunities and support leading to jobs. As women shared their experiences, it started to become evident how some of the entrepreneurial ideologies were discursively perpetuated within the organisations. For example, many women pointed out how during workshops counsellors would often begin their presentations by pointing out how the immigrants were 'lucky' to be in a country like Canada which represents a land of equal opportunities for everyone. Such discourses by service providers, however, were consistent with some of the policy documents that describe Canada as a place of 'exciting opportunity' for immigrants and newcomers (Citizenship and Immigration Canada<sup>1</sup> [CIC] 2013, para. 1 cited in El-Lahib, 2016, p. 759). One of my interviewees from the first study, Rumona drew my attention to this. At the time of the interview she was looking for secretarial

positions in offices and banks. She knew typing, had a good knowledge of computer and was fluent in English. After coming to Toronto she attended at least ten different workshops trying to pick up tips and advice on how to market her resumé successfully. One such workshop had invited guest speakers to come and talk about Canadian work ethics. These speakers, themselves immigrants, while sharing their life stories underscored how Canada was a land of opportunities for everyone. According to Rumona,

Those speakers were really good. I was new then and they shared their life stories that were similar to mine. [When asked what did those speakers say about Canada] they said how there are many opportunities in Canada, everyone can work here or study and get a good life. There is no discrimination here; one just has to be sincere and hard working to be successful.

Saadiya's introduction to such optimistic messages about Canada was through an agency that she went to for information regarding applications for a Social Insurance Number. It was there that one of the agency members, while welcoming her to Canada, told her not to worry about her career as in Canada everyone gets a fair chance to work if one has good qualifications and a drive to be successful. Another experience was shared by Ghazala. While attending a session on job search and interview skills, Ghazala mentioned, how the counsellor conducting the sessions made it clear at the very beginning that there were ample opportunities available for all in Canada and that immigrants should keep a positive mind-set when looking for jobs. Ghazala described what the counsellor had told them that day,

He kept telling us to have a positive attitude. He said unless you do that it will reflect in your interview. He then assured us that many jobs are available for the newly arrived and that we should just learn the means of accessing them. The workshop was supposed to teach us that.



Along with such motivational discourses about Canada where apparently anyone can be successful with sincerity, hard work, and the drive to perform, women were also subtly induced to act on themselves to develop into competitive and prosperous citizens (Rose, 1992). Malathi, a science graduate from Sri Lanka with experience in office administration further mentioned how almost every settlement trainer that she visited would tell her,

I need to prepare myself for the labour market, show positive energy, work on my resume, build relationship and display confidence. Presumably that's how one gets a good job in Canada.

What the above quotations reveal is how trainers and counsellors were trying to discursively regulate immigrants in a way so that the responsibility to remain employed and market-knowledgeable would be on the women themselves (Phillips and Iltan 2004). Interestingly, my interviews with the trainers and counsellors corroborated some of the findings women shared with me. Many of the trainers, for instance reiterated the need for immigrants to be 'entrepreneurial'. Melanie a career counsellor in a reputed organisation in Toronto while explaining what barriers immigrants face in finding jobs mentioned that,

When my clients come to me and complain that they are not getting jobs, I ask them have you been sincere enough? How many resumes have you sent in? How much time are you spending in looking for jobs? They try for quick solutions. I always advise them to work hard. If they are sitting home in despair, thinking why am I not getting a job, nobody is to be blamed. They need to go out, meet people, be proactive.

The importance of the reiterative force behind such messages as shared by the interviewees reveals some of the governing practices adopted by agencies to instill within immigrants the importance of being self-sufficient and self-responsible without depending on the state for sustenance (Rose, 1991). In such a scenario, the *good state* is assumed to have already

performed its duties by being the repository of the immigrant's faith and by providing a prefabricated conception of Canada as a land where, for enterprising citizen-subjects, sincere work and equal opportunity are rewarded. These discourses then play a vital role in inducing immigrants to 'pursue a range of self-managing goals' in their daily lives to optimise their chances of becoming an enterprising self (Ong and Zhang 2008, p.7). Such self-managing goals are manifested through regulatory discourses of remaining sincere, hard-working or keeping an optimistic attitude that also serve the purpose of shifting people away from any reliance on state welfare to reliance on the self. However, when trainers like Melanie suggest that immigrants need to spend more time on job search, they tend to undervalue the fact that often women's efforts towards their career goals are incumbent upon their fine balancing between child care, domestic responsibilities, and the need to earn a living (Maitra, 2015). On the contrary, immigrant women are expected to 'exercise diligence ... talents, and social skills to navigate' the Canadian labour market for their own 'personal advantage' (Ong & Zhang 2008, p. 8). Statements around hard work, diligence, positive mindsets thus not only project for immigrant women ideals they can aspire to, but also provide significant templates to imbibe values (like self-reliance, independence, and economic enterprise) that are considered worthy of emulation.

The emphasis on entrepreneurial discourses within the agencies however, seemed to have a complex impact on women. Quite a few women from both studies mentioned how they relentlessly worked on their resumes and networking skills to gain a footstep into the labour market. Rania, a former bank employee from India showed me a logbook that had a list of at least 50-60 job applications along with employer contacts and cold call logs. The logbook was prepared by Rania for her counsellor from the bridging program. Rania felt that her task would facilitate her counsellor to provide more concrete suggestions about what she can further do to get a job in her own area of expertise. Neeta was enrolled in an IT bridging program and quite

hopeful about her future. When asked about what responsibility women should have in finding employment for themselves, she felt that South Asian women were often to be 'blamed' for being 'culturally shy' and not 'proactive'. She stated that, 'you know job counsellors can only do so much. We have to act as well'.

Yet there were others like Rumona who mentioned, how when she looked back at what some of the trainers had to say about Canada, 'it all seems like a big lie'. She mentioned how despite sending several applications over the years, she has never got any call for interview. Every day she would diligently work on her resume, go meet the recruiters and apply to new positions. Despite all her efforts, she was clearly frustrated about the fact that nobody ever called her for a single interview,

I think that I had too many expectations... I thought Canada is a land of opportunities and that it welcomes everybody... But when I came here my background that kind of disappeared. I feel that my former years of work are a waste. I had to start from scratch.

I am unable to utilise my experience and that frustrates me. It hurts.

Thus, the acceptance of the entrepreneurial discourse by the women were fraught with contradictions. While some felt that it was their responsibility to be adaptable and continue learning throughout their lives to gain employment in Canada, others felt disillusioned and lost. They realised that access to employment was not just about sincerity and hard work. They were critical about who can access these employment opportunities and at what costs?

### ***Acculturation into Canadian norms and values***

Concomitant to the regulation of South Asian immigrant women through a discursive perpetuation of optimism and self-sufficiency, a simultaneous process of acculturation into Canadian norms and values through training was also evident during our conversation.

Interviewees provided several examples of socialization into Euro-Canadian workplace culture- a process described as ‘whitening’ in this paper.

Shashi (a junior level school teacher from India), Shaoli (a science graduate from Bangladesh) and Smita (an accountant from Sri Lanka) had similar stories to share. Unable to find decent jobs for themselves, these women approached various community organisations in order to seek advice and get assistance with their job search skills. When they attended the training and information sessions, often service providers focused on a ‘uncritical and generalised sense of Canadianness’ that the women were encouraged to emulate (Maitra & Maitra, 2015, p. 323). As part of this Canadianness, most agencies emphasised bodily deportments and presentability as the key to preparing oneself for the job market. Seema had interesting experiences to share,

We had several workshops as part of our bridge training course. Some of them were useful... in one we had to do a mock interview. But most just came down to telling us how to present ourselves and look smart in front of the employer. We were told to watch Canadian news, follow Canadian magazines to see how we can dress professionally and even given scripts of small talk that we can initiate with potential employers. [When asked for an example, Seema mentioned] ... it’s really nice outside... there was so much traffic today...

In another interview Shyama mentioned that,

We had a session on soft skills and communication. The Canadian woman who was taking the session made it very clear that presentation is key to employment... if we have a heavy accent or speak unclear sentences nobody would hire us. She also showed us how to walk into the interview room with straight shoulders and look straight in to the eye of the interviewer. She made it clear that no matter how good we are in our subject if we are shy, nervous, shabby nobody will hire us.

Some of the counsellors also pointed out the need for socialization. Patel, himself an immigrant from South Africa and working as a job developer in one of the agencies was quite critical about the way many immigrants, especially those from Asian and African countries, presented themselves in front of the employers. He pointed out that despite the fact that many of his clients were well educated, they were still not hired because of the way they dressed or talked. Many go to interviews wearing 'odd coat', 'sneakers', or simply lack confidence. Women too, in his opinion, often do not wear proper clothing to the interviews. On a similar note, another case manager concluded that, 'when you are new in the country you have to learn the Canadian way'.

In the above quotations, an assumption of the inferiority of 'other' cultures, their way of speaking or presenting themselves becomes evident as service providers continue to tutor professional, educated immigrants the basics of 'carrying oneself' in the Canadian society, without taking into consideration the fact that most of these immigrants are highly educated and have worked for many years before coming to Canada. Furthermore, when immigrants of colour are taught to absorb the ideals of a 'Canadian' culture, the notion of 'Canadian represents people who have white skin and European background (Maitra, 2015, p.69). In opposition to this authentic Canadian subject imagined as white, South Asian immigrant women are perceived as 'different' and 'deficient'. Hence, through the training programs, women are governed to abandon all 'cultural distinctiveness' of their South Asian identities (Maitra, 2015). Their thoughts and attitudes are regulated in a way so that they themselves would taking initiatives to mould and whiten themselves in accordance with Canadian norms of speech, bodily dispositions, social interactions and so on (Maitra, 2015).

Moreover, in situations where immigrants were asked to 'speak up' without an accent, the presence of systemic racism becomes apparent. According to Guo (2009), colonial practice informs such attitude where non-native accent is seen as 'deficient' and marker of

incompetency. White, Canadian accent is therefore taken to be the standardised norm, marker of confidence and capacity, and it is implied through training that if immigrants of colour are to express the same kind of confidence, they have to follow the Canadian accent and way of speaking.

Some women further pointed out how they were specifically told to wear western clothes such as suit or pants to the interview, not to wear too much jewellery, and also to speak up as clearly as possible during the interview. For instance, Shazia an IT graduate from Pakistan mentioned,

I attended a presentation by an employment counsellor who kept harping on the need to wear dress pants or skirts to interview, proper shoes and minimal jewellery. She also mentioned how women from many cultures are soft-spoken and that these women need to promote themselves more aggressively. I just thought at that point that these must be targeted towards us... non-white women.

While apparently these practices appear to be neutral and aimed merely at enhancing immigrants' soft skills necessary for the Canadian labour market, in reality they are geared towards the re-making of immigrant women of colour. Crucial to this re-making is the way in which the apparent lack of these women – for instance, their assumed inferior notion of hygiene, inadequate professional etiquette, deportment -- are made hyper-visible to the women themselves during the training. This identification of lack is a vital node in the entire process of assimilation whereby the immigrant subjects can be worked on, their 'shortcomings' exteriorised and demonstrated in order to be rectified, and then finally a proper set of qualities adhering to the normative principles of Canadianness prescribed for adoption. For example, the emphasis on western clothes or language abilities aptly demonstrates how western norms and language are given a dominant place, rather than the immigrant's own culture, language or experience. While prescribing the normative rules for getting in the Canadian labour market, soft skill training hardly seems to consider that for many women, looking directly into the eye,

wearing suits, or shaking hands might be practices that they can be reluctant to pursue. Additionally, when insisting women to wear suits or look into the eyes of the interviewer, trainers also seemed to be oblivious of the fact that often within organisations, ‘style of dress, use of language, and expression of emotions ... perpetuate the gendered nature of social practices ... [and] include expectations to perform both masculine and feminine qualities’ (Lester, 2008, p.281).

These practices that are apparently aimed towards improving the ‘self image’ and self-esteem provide an insight into the ‘tutelary power’ of organisations in transforming the individual subject into the normative Canadian citizen-subject through social acculturation. What is emphasised as the ideal of a professional Canadian worker self is in the last instance often a reproduction of certain normative ideals of whitened Canadian citizen-subjects. Thus, despite the repeated enunciations about Canada’s multiculturalism, when it comes to the formal processes of acculturation, the state can devise no other form of ideal than that of a pre-existing racial and gendered white citizen-subjectivity for its immigrants of colour. No doubt done in the interests of the women to enhance their repertoire of professional skills, the language employed is still one of lack, where it is no longer just the lack of educational accreditations, but also of bodily signs, practices and habits that can potentially inhibit their participation in the national imaginary.

Professionalisation learned in the workshops then tells a related story of devaluation, where women of colour need to upgrade themselves not only in specific academic or technical skills but also achieve a more overarching impact where the quotidian life must be altered in order to find access to the labour market. Governing becomes evident here in the way these women are regulated to think and act like Canadians and made to believe in the superiority of the Canadian way of doing things.

Indeed, many interviewees expressed how, motivated by the trainers, they were trying to incorporate the suggestions in their own lives to self-fashion their personas. To a great extent, such compliance seemed to be induced by the way counsellors ‘manipulated the desires, attachments, and anxieties within workers thereby governing them to internalize the practices deemed necessary to be a productive worker in the neoliberal labour market’ (Maitra & Maitra, 2015, p.326). As Fazia stated,

I think it’s important to listen to what these agencies have to say. They are at the forefront and know what the market wants. They always say that they are working closely with employers. So I am sure they will be able to give us the best suggestions for the job market’.

Consequently, Fazia and others mentioned listening to English talk shows, radio programs, reading newspapers and rectifying their accent and bodily comportments. Many had bought suits, trousers, and high heels to prepare themselves for the labour market. They would attend the training sessions regularly, prepare for mock interview sessions and attended communication classes to ‘improve their conversation’.

Yet, at the same time, many women ‘remained critical about the larger objectives of training and how much such remaking of their personhood could actually help them find a bearing in the labour market. They often consciously rejected certain aspects of the training that they found persistently devalued their own understanding of their self-worth and educational attainments’ (Maitra, 2015, p. 75). They felt most sessions had nothing new to teach them as they were already experienced professionals from their home country who knew quite well how to ‘perform’ in an interview. They were vocal about how the trainers never recognised any of the domestic skills or took account of how much adjustment an immigrant woman had to go through in the host country in order to balance her household and professional life



(Maitra, 2015). Finally, many women actively organized familial and kin network and crafted what can be defined as an alternate model of enterprise based on qualities of collaboration and relationships (Fenwick, 2002). They would purposely dress up in South Asian clothes, cook together or purposely speak vernacular in public. Women's 'insistence to hold onto some of these cultural practices not only overtly created a sense of community, but also demonstrated their active negotiation with the mainstream training sessions that, while trying to conform them into Western comportments, also aimed at eradicating some of those very departments or values that women actually practised within homes' (Maitra 2015, p.74-75).

## **Conclusion**

In this article I argued how career training programs offered by government-funded settlement agencies and bridging programs in Canada shape immigrants, particularly immigrants of colour as 'economically responsible and entrepreneurial' (Patrick 2013, p.3). Underpinned by neoliberal rationalities, these programs tend to act upon individuals to develop within them an attitude of self-help (Ong 1996) so that they can embark on a process of self-management to fit the enterprising culture of the labour market, its uncertainties and its opportunities. Yet, the idea of an empowered and responsible self that runs through the discourse of the enterprising self actually rests on modes of subtle domination and discrimination inducing individuals into internalizing certain discourses of success and economic productivity irrespective of the actual structures of domination. What is most problematic in all this is that the subject who fails to prosper in such a scenario, is made to feel guilty by her/his own sense of shortcoming, rather than being able to question the structural causes of failure.

Furthermore, I also demonstrate in this paper, how the training programs pathologise certain subjects/communities such as immigrants of colour as inherently 'deficient' and therefore in

need of constant self-modification in order to comply with the ideals of a ‘white Canadian self’. This particular ‘Canadian self’, imbuing with the right qualities of entrepreneurship, individual agency, and flexibility, becomes normalised in a deeply competitive labour market. All other bodies, especially immigrants of colour, are encouraged and actively trained to emulate the cultural traits, bodily dispositions, mental attitudes, hygiene standards and social skills of this idealised self in the name of economic survival. Hereby, the contingencies of survival in a deeply precarious neo-liberal market get annexed to the individuated body of the subject. Certain bodies are touted as inherently better equipped to survive the strains of economic and market fluctuations while others are not. The only hope for the ‘deficient’ bodies is to undergo a constant regime of self-promotion – a watchful, anxious and future-oriented care of the self – that someday may invest them with the right dispositions to stay out of harm under the onslaught of free-market economics. Structural questions of racialisation, gender or class thereby get erased from the functioning of the labour market where the failure of coloured bodies in such a market is persistently read as due to individual (and not structural) reasons. More intensive training thus remains as the only remedial measure in this viewpoint ensuring ‘perpetual market availability or perpetual job readiness’ of immigrants ‘even if employment never arrives’ (Adkins, 2012, p.635).

From a policy perspective, my findings point to the way that mere imposition of certain normative abilities in the name of soft skill training is clearly not a solution to immigrants’ labour market integration in the host country. Training policies, especially in OECD countries like Canada where underutilisation of skills and experience brought in by immigrants of colour is still a stark reality (Reitz et al. 2014), need to be more responsive to the realities of racial and cultural discrimination rather than just incessantly pushing immigrants towards investment in their own human capital. As front-line service providers, settlement organisations are often the first point of immigrants’ source of information in the host country. They are also the ones

primarily responsible for developing and gearing immigrants towards training modules useful for the labour market. Service providers in these organisations therefore need to be attuned and oriented towards understanding immigrants' existing experiences and overcome a pervasive 'deficiency' based outlook, especially when it comes to immigrants of colour. Rather than just advocating an one-size-fits-all training program, service providers and adult practitioners need to be more adept at skill recognition and subsequent training facilities. Furthermore, training curriculum needs to be able to develop those skills that can positively link immigrants to the labour market. Given that the current neoliberal labour market in OECD areas has a dearth of 'decent' jobs, an issue that was pointed out by some of the counsellors as well, labour market related training should not just aim at imparting certain generic skills but also offer other support (such as networking) especially to immigrants of colour. Finally, employers need to be part of the training mechanism. It is imperative to encourage prospective employers to be more accepting of a diverse work-force and the skill-sets immigrants bring to Canada where racial biases continue to underlie employer's attitudes in hiring immigrants of colour (Banerjee & Reitz, 2017). Training policies based on coordinated efforts of government, settlement workers and employers would be thus potentially useful for integrating skilled immigrants of colour into professional employment in the host country.

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