Unravelling Discourses on COVID-19, South Asians and Punjabi Canadians

TANIA DAS GUPTA
York University, Canada

SUGANDHA NAGPAL
O. P. Jindal Global University, India

ABSTRACT *This article uses critical discourse analysis to examine how the higher COVID-19 infection rates among South Asians in general, and Punjabis more specifically, have been represented by conservative politicians and their representatives as a consequence of cultural and religious practices. Two counter-narratives are discussed. The first substitutes the negative image of the Sikh Punjabi Canadian community with a celebratory and positive view of Sikh humanitarianism and community service. The second attributes the high numbers to class attributes such as precarious jobs, poverty-level wages, employment insecurity, lack of sick days, over-crowded housing, racism and lack of access to healthcare. We argue that the conservative explanation as well as the first counter-narrative reveal continuities in culturalist understandings of South Asian immigrants, albeit in slightly different ways. The second counter-narrative represents a discursive resistance by advancing a structural analysis of health and disease in immigrant communities.*

KEYWORDS race; media; COVID-19; Canada; South Asian

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified deeply entrenched racial, class and gendered inequalities in Canada and beyond (Block & Dhunna, 2020; Wu et al., 2021). Anti-Asian hate crimes and discrimination related to COVID-19 in North America have risen exponentially (Neustaeter, 2021). Mental health and domestic violence have risen (Miller, 2021; Statistics Canada, 2021) as a result of lockdowns, quarantines and social distancing (Women's Shelters Canada, 2020). South Asians in Canada have been hard hit by COVID-19 and are highly vulnerable in terms of unemployment, poverty and number of infections (CASSA et al., 2020; Colour of Poverty, 2020). Unemployment in

this community surged to 17.8% in the 15-69 age group, the highest among all ethnic groups, between July 2019 and July 2020 when the national rate was 11.3% (Subramaniam, 2020). In January 2021, South Asians and Indo-Caribbean people had the highest proportion of COVID-19 cases in Toronto at 27%, while comprising only 13% of the population falling to 23% by March 2021 (City of Toronto, 2021).[1] In addition, South Asians have come under the scanner for not following COVID-19 protocol.

In this paper we draw on media narratives about Sikh Punjabis during the pandemic in the "hot spots" of Calgary, Alberta and Brampton, Ontario to illustrate the discourses around South Asians, Punjabi Sikhs and COVID-19. We argue that these discourses reveal the continuities in culturalist understandings of South Asian immigrants and the counter-hegemonic value of a structural analysis of health and disease in immigrant communities. While there are many subgroups among South Asians that have been subjected to discrimination and racialization during the pandemic, we are attending to Sikh Punjabis due to their visibility, size,[2] and the extensive media reports about Brampton,[3] as well as North East Calgary, which house large Punjabi populations.

Media coverage will be interrogated to delineate three strands of discourses. The first strand, which reflects continuity with racialized discourses about the cultural other, explains the higher infection rates in the South Asian community as a cultural and religious issue related to traditional practices. This is reminiscent of Orientalist tropes of immigrant cultural susceptibility to disease in the late 19th century. These tropes were an important tool of nation building, as it allowed officials to banish those deemed racially undesirable (Mawani, 2003). This discourse of health threat will be explored as an indication of new racism, also referred to as neo-racism (Barker, 2002).

There are two counter-narratives in media accounts of Sikhs and South Asians. The first one relies on a celebration of Sikhism, particularly its concept of *seva*, and the Sikh community's resilience, humanitarianism and sacrifice. This narrative has been articulated by both liberal and conservative national and provincial newspapers, and city-based dailies. We assert that while this is a counter-narrative to the racialization of South Asians as culturally predisposed to COVID-19, it also relies on a culturalist paradigm. The second counter-narrative asserted by members of working class South Asians and their advocates has attributed the high levels of COVID-19 to

---

[1] East Asians, who also comprised 13% of the population, had the lowest proportion at seven percent of COVID-19 cases. Blacks who made up nine percent of the population had 13% of COVID-19 cases. Whites, on the other hand, who made up 48% of the population comprised 26% of COVID-19 cases (City of Toronto, 2021).
[2] Comprising 1.6% of the population of Canada.
[3] Brampton reported 29,500 as being Punjabi and 110,655 speaking Punjabi as their mother tongue, the leading non-official mother tongue in Brampton with 54.36% of residents among non-official mother tongue speakers of Punjabi, Urdu or Gujarati (Statistics Canada, 2016b).

their disproportionate concentration in precarious jobs, poverty-level wages, employment insecurity, lack of sick days, racism and inaccessible healthcare. This argument has been amplified by non-South Asian members of the more liberal political establishment and the media. We argue from a Gramscian perspective that this counter-narrative based on class precarity serves as a form of discursive resistance. The next section will provide a context for our discussion.

South Asians, Punjabi Canadians and Sikh Politics

The category of South Asian references immigrants who trace their origins to the South Asian region, but scholars have pointed out its social constructed-ness and exclusions (Ameeriar, 2017; Ashutosh, 2008; Bannerji, 2000). While the Canadian state uses the term in a reductive way homogenizing South Asians, there is greater heterogeneity in how members of the community identify themselves.

We find that media narratives about COVID-19 in the South Asian community do not always explicitly name them. They refer instead to coded geographical areas like Brampton in Ontario and Surrey in B.C., which have a higher concentration of Punjabis. Other times they talk more specifically about Sikhs or describe cultural practices such as "large family gatherings," which when mentioned along with the geographic area can be ascribed to South Asians and Punjabis. In this paper we also fluctuate in our use of the terms South Asian, Punjabi,[4] and Sikh, depending on how the material we are analysing has described the community and relatedly, the community's self-identification. In order to understand the discursive resistance to cultural racism or to neo-racist ideas of certain conservative politicians, it is important to link the counter-narratives utilized by the Sikh community during the pandemic to the long history of Sikh and South Asian resistance to racism and colonialism.

Migration from Indian Punjab to Canada dates back to 1903, when Punjabi Sikh workers arrived as immigrants to British Columbia. While there were a handful of non-Sikhs from South Asia, Sikh Punjabis came in larger numbers from more prosperous rural families and later on engaged extensively in family reunification forming close-knit communities in Canada. They remain physically and numerically more visible not only due to their religious practices, but also their increasing political importance (Johnston, 1989, 2005; Nihjawan, 2014; Tatla, 1999). Sikh strongholds like Malton and

---

[4] The term Punjabi can be exclusionary as it is often used to reference Sikh Punjabis, thereby excluding Hindu and Muslim Punjabis. Walton-Roberts (2011) points to the reification of a singular Sikh identity, as a militia race tied to five symbols (uncut hair, kirpan, comb, underwear, bracelet) which was actively cultivated by the British (Fox, 1985).

Brampton, which used to be split between Liberals and Conservatives, have seen a landslide towards the New Democratic Party (NDP) currently led by Jagmeet Singh, a second generation Sikh Punjabi. In addition, there are 18 Sikh MPs in the House of Commons. The increasing political and numerical visibility of the Sikh Punjabi Canadian community has meant that Canadian politics has come to reflect the concerns of this sizeable constituency (Nijhawan, 2014; Shukla, 2019).[5]

Moreover, Sikhs in Canada have had a long history of resistance and protest movements. This resistance dates back to Gurdit Singh organizing the ship Komagata Maru to challenge the racist Canadian requirement of continuous journey to Canada.[6] Thereafter, the Sikh Canadian community has organized multiple times against social injustices and to demand equality before the law, for example for asylum seekers in the late 1980s. Baltej Singh Dhillon successfully contested the RCMP's prohibition of the turban and beard in 1989, later upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada and the Canadian Human Rights Commission. In 1993, when four Sikh veterans were denied entrance to the Remembrance Day parade in Surrey due to their turbans, they refused to comply and contested their exclusion by circulating reports of other Legions accepting turbaned Sikh members (Bains, 2019; Jakobsh & Walton-Roberts, 2016; Johnston, 2005; Nijhawan, 2014; Nijhawan & Arora, 2013; Tatla, 1999; Walton-Roberts, 2011).

Despite staging sustained protests against exclusions, the inclusion of turbaned and "racialized kirpan-carrying Sikhs" within Canada is continually contested (Dhamoon, 2013 p. 15; Puar & Rai, 2004), most recently in Quebec under Bill 21 which prohibits some public officials from wearing religious symbols. Along with their Muslim counterparts, Sikhs in North America were racially profiled following 9/11 and seen as political threats. Mosques and *gurudwaras* (Sikh temples) were vandalized (Dhamoon, 2013; Nijhawan, 2016; Puar, 2008; Puar & Rai, 2004; Sian, 2017; Thobani, 2012).

Sikhs have responded to this situation through political engagement and activism (Ahluwalia, 2019; Jakobsh, 2017; Luthra, 2018, 2021; Nijhawan, 2014, 2016; Singh 2008). A common method has been to conduct outreach and education about Sikh history and culture with the general public, government, law enforcement and media (Murphy 2004, pp. 358-360). This has given rise to a new image of the Sikh community associated with humanitarian work, social justice and the ethic of *seva* or selfless service.

Various organizations like the Sikh Activist Network, the Sikh Coalition for the Media and United Sikhs, among others, have emerged to fight for the rights of Sikhs but also other marginalized communities (Jakobsh & Walton-Roberts, 2016; Nijhawan & Arora, 2013). This remaking of the Sikh

---

[5] Their numbers increased by 36.5% between 2006 and 2016.
[6] In order to deter migrants from India, Canada passed an Order-in-Council in 1908 which required migrants to land in Canada through an unbroken journey, a stipulation that was impossible for Indians to fulfill. The ship was turned back.

community draws on the precepts of Sikhism and integrates it with secular ideas of social justice (Luthra, 2021; Nihjawan, 2014). Thus, media reports that reflect resistance to neo-racist ideas of certain conservative politicians has to be seen in relation to the history of Sikh resistance to racism in Canada.

Culturalist Discourses on Immigrant Health and Neo-Racism

There is a long history of the racialization of immigrant bodies and their health (Mawani, 2003; Reitmanova et al., 2015; Ward, 2002). Immigrants have historically been represented as inherently uncivilized and diseased, posing a threat to white settlers (Ward, 2002). In the context of COVID-19, many of Asian origin in North America have been subjected to hate activity (Li & Nicholson, 2021). During a public health threat, white settler-citizens often scapegoat racial minorities deemed "other" (Eichelberger, 2007; Li & Nicholson, 2021). Othering entails blaming the immoral behaviour and cultural norms of the out-group for the origins and spread of disease (Briggs & Mantini-Briggs, 2003; Nelkin & Gilman, 1988). During the Ebola crisis, Africans and African cultures were blamed (Kapiriri & Ross, 2020). Such culturalist discourses about immigrant health leave unexamined structural factors such as post-migration unemployment, poverty, lack of access to health and social services that compromise the health of immigrants (Beiser, 2005; Reitmanova & Gustafson 2012; Reitmanova et al., 2015). We rely on this literature about the pathologization of immigrants to understand the discourse around COVID-19 and South Asians as part of the narrative of stigma attached to immigrant bodies.

In unravelling issues of race and media in the Canadian context, we are critical of the official multiculturalism framework, which is the state sanctioned approach to managing racial difference in Canada (Bannerji, 2000; Haque, 2012). This official policy of multiculturalism denies or underplays settler colonialism and upholds culture rather than race, class and gender inequality. In this paradigm, racism is construed as isolated acts rather than as foundational to nation-building. While state multiculturalism celebrates diverse cultures, there is a tendency to essentialize and ossify them while exalting English and French cultures as "official." Thus, cultural diversity is "tolerated" and even celebrated in normal times under multiculturalism, but it can easily deteriorate into neo-racism under a national crisis such as a pandemic.

In neo-racism (Balibar, 2007; Bannerji, 2000; Barker, 2002), the racial discourse does not necessarily utilize a discourse of biological inferiority of the migrant non-national other, but rather, their incommensurability with dominant national culture. Indeed, this culturalist racism is based on a notion

of "national separatism [as] natural and inevitable" (Barker, 2002, p. 82). Neo-racism or culturalist racism is not new to the South Asian community in Canada. Dua (2000) shows that while white immigrant women were admitted to Canada in the beginning of the 20th century as "mothers of the nation," South Asian women were depicted as a danger because of their fertility, non-traditional marriages and family formations. Although such blatant expressions of neo-racism would be unacceptable today, the suggestions of cultural essentialism and inassimilability of South Asian families, cultures and practices remain. In this paper we will use critical discourse analysis to examine neo-racist representations and resistances to such representations in media reports about South Asians and Sikh Punjabis during COVID-19.

Media Representations and Resistance: Critical Discourse Analysis

Canadian media representations of minority communities have been critiqued for reinforcing their racialization by selectively highlighting the negative traits of minority communities and constructing them as threatening, deviant and irrelevant to nation-building (Bannerji, 1987; Jiwani, 1993, 2010). These representations not only exclude minority communities from the mainstream but also affect how white Canadians understand and interact with them. In the context of multiculturalism in Canada, there is often a concurrence of more subtle forms of stereotyping and prejudice alongside more explicit forms of discrimination (Mahtani, 2001). Contemporary representations of minority groups have also evolved in keeping with ideas of new racism, which allows for racist statements to be formulated without bringing into awareness the racist assumptions on which these statements are grounded (Jiwani, 2009).

   In order to unravel the underlying racist assumptions of minority community representations, it is crucial to make visible the relations of power so that one can, "disrupt, dislodge, and recast the colonial narrative(s)" (Jiwani, 2011 p. 334). In making explicit the power relations that underlie racialized representations, marginalized groups often engage in "making do" where they use the tools they have access to in order to launch their resistance. This can take the form of contesting claims of truth-telling, subversions of dominant narratives, articulations of counter-narratives, reframing and creating new or alternative meanings (Jiwani, 2011).

   Hall (1997) points out three ways in which a dominant regime of representations gets challenged. He draws on the movies *Shaft* and *Superfly* to illustrate the strategy of reversing stereotypes by bringing black actors to the centre of the mainstream. The second strategy entails replacing negative images of racialized populations with positive images. The third strategy is locating oneself within the representation and trying to contest it from within.

   In addition, as demonstrated by Jakubowski (1997) and others (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1987), critical discourse analysis is particularly useful in revealing racist assumptions that underlie media representations. Critical

discourse analysis lays bare how strategies of talking and communicating about race, immigration, crime, poverty and other social issues frame reality, thereby reproducing racism. This cognitive and ideological control at micro-levels allow racist actions, structures and institutional processes at the macro-level to be continued. In fact, based on her critical discourse analysis of Canadian migration policy text and talk Jakubowski (1997) identifies "ideologically deracialized" discourse which has been sanitized of a language of race or racism, but which nonetheless perpetuates racist tropes and has exclusionary effects on people of colour. Various rhetorical strategies are utilized in furthering a deracialized discourse around immigration, such as sanitary coding, equivocation and *pro bono* arguments. Sanitary coding happens when privately racist ideas are expressed, although the public message is de-racialized. An example is using the phrase "immigration control" instead of "stopping immigration" (Jakubowski, 1997, p. 44). This example can also characterize equivocation when the public message is vague and ambiguous so that it can be interpreted in a variety of ways, including a racist one. The *pro bono* argumentation appeals to benefitting people (i.e., we should control immigration in order to benefit Canadians and lessen racism). These rhetorical strategies are evident in Premier Kenney's radio interview which we discuss in the next section.

In this paper, we focus on media texts where discourses of difference and danger *vis-à-vis* South Asians became evident during the pandemic. We begin with a South Asian radio talk show in which Premier Jason Kenney of Alberta was interviewed in November 2020. In addition, we examine stories that were reported in national, provincial and local media accessible online between April 2020 and January 2021, such as *Global & Mail, National Post, Toronto Star, Calgary Herald, The Leader Post (Regina), Vancouver Sun, Brampton Guardian, South Asian Daily, THE VOICE* and *Weekly Voice*. In deconstructing the words of Premier Kenney and the counter-narratives to the racialization of immigrant health, we engage in a critical discourse analysis.

Jason Kenney's "Wake up Call" on Radio Talk Show

United Conservative Party (UCP) member and Premier of Alberta, Jason Kenney, appeared in November 2020 on a South Asian radio station RED 106.7 FM hosted by Rishi Nagar (REDFM, 2020). The interview was streamed live on Facebook and generated numerous tweets on social media. In response to Rishi's question about whether restricting activity while limiting the disruption to people's lives will work to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the premier said:

> Well, only if people comply with the rules and do the right thing… Let me be absolutely blunt. The largest spread in the province is in North-East Calgary and

we see a very high level of spread of COVID-19 in the South Asian community. I don't say that to blame or target anyone. The fact of the matter is this, one of the beautiful, wonderful things about my friends in the South Asian community is a strong, strong sense of family and hospitality. And, people have very often in the community have, you know, large families, multi-generational families and I have great respect, great respect for how so many South Asian families care for their seniors, their grandma and grandpa at home, and sometimes 3-4 generations and we know that it's a tradition to have big family gatherings at home… I'm calling your program with a wake-up call. We must, must have people understand the new law is, no social functions at home. No indoor social functions. No family or friends visiting at home, who are not part of your immediate household who don't sleep there at night… and we have given the police the power to enforce this with a $1000 fine. (REDFM, 2020)

In the course of the interview, Premier Kenney connected rising COVID-19 numbers in Calgary's North-East region to "big family gatherings" and "social functions" (Mason, 2020). When the host, Rishi, pointed out that there are people who cannot stay at home due to the nature of their jobs, Premier Kenney responded by emphasizing that it was not the workplace that was the source of spread but rather "private social functions and at home gatherings" (REDFM, 2020). He also reiterated the challenge of compliance posed by areas that are associated with a larger South Asian population namely, *"Peele region in Ontario around Brampton and Surrey and Fraser Valley in B.C."* (REDFM, 2020).

In the context of Calgary, Premier Kenney mainly referred to North East Calgary where the largest minority group is Punjabi-speaking (15%) and there are smaller segments of Urdu-speaking (5%) and Cantonese-speaking people (2%) (City-Data.com, 2012). Through Premier Kenney's characterization of North-East Calgary as being predominantly South Asian, having disproportionately high numbers of COVID-19 infections and having large family gatherings, the area was constructed as a bounded community with essentialist features (Bannerji, 2000; Walton-Roberts, 1998). In constructing the South Asian community, Kenny relies on the idea of tradition as attached to multi-generational family life, associated with pre-modern gendered patriarchal relations, in contrast to modern nuclear families of white mainstream Canada where gender relations are assumed to be more egalitarian (Bannerji, 2000). Kenney insists that his remarks are meant to benefit all Calgarians with his "wake-up call" laced with the coercive power of law when he remarks that it is "not a suggestion, it is not a recommendation, it is the law" (REDFM, 2020). It was, after all, presented as "a public health necessity" (REDFM, 2020). There was an immediate outcry to Premier Kenny's racialization on social media, by South Asian community members from across the country. Kenney's message of large family gatherings as being the chief cause of rising COVID-19 numbers ignored other socio-economic reasons, including the community's concentration in precarious employment, such as truck driving, warehouse, janitorial and

cleaning work, which lack paid sick days, job security and living wages. In these occupations, workers do not have the luxury of operating from their homes, observing social distance and staying home when they are starting to feel ill. A day away from work often translates to lost wages and causes them to lose their jobs or legal status in Canada. However, when the host of the program challenged the Premier, the latter dismissed the challenge by saying, "generally speaking, workplaces are pretty safe. If it was just a question of workplace transmission, we would not be in this crisis right now" (REDFM, 2020). By saying this, he excuses employers of any culpability in the spread of the virus and also relieves them of responsibility for its control. He also appeals to the authority of scientific evidence by saying "based on eight months of contact tracing and data, we have identified that about 40% of the spread of COVID-19 in Alberta goes back to private social functions, gatherings at homes" (REDFM, 2020).

When Premier Kenney said, "we see a very high level of spread of COVID-19 in the South Asian community, and I don't say that to blame or target anyone" (REDFM, 2020), it is a pre-emptive denial of an anticipated accusation of racism (van Dijk, 1992). He is levelling an accusation at South Asian families and their purported lifestyles while denying that he is doing so. He displays ambivalence about cultural diversity when he says he has friends in the South Asian community with a "strong, strong sense of family and hospitality" and defines them as "beautiful" (REDFM, 2020), but asks that provincial restrictions be respected (Amato, 2020). This also enables a discourse of denial.

What is interesting is that some journalists made the Facebook interview of Kenney accessible to the public by embedding it in their online articles (Press Progress, 2020; Mason, 2020) and highlighting counter-arguments. Following the outcry from the community, Kenney's office issued a statement reinforcing what he had said before: "the Premier went on Red FM specifically to increase awareness among affected communities that may not consume traditional media" (Villani, 2020), ironically referring this time to mainstream media as "traditional." This statement reiterates his commitment to public service and concern for the rights of all people to be informed.

Matt Wolf, the Premier's Issues Manager, took to Twitter selectively pointing to news stories from Ontario to reinforce the Premier's emphasis on family gatherings as the chief cause of the spike in COVID-19 spread in North-East Calgary. He first referred to an opinion piece written in the *Toronto Star* (Chagla et al., 2020) on the eve of *Diwali* by three South Asian physicians: Dr. Zain Chagla, Dr. Sumon Chakrabarti and Dr. Tajinder Kaura. In this piece they acknowledge that South Asians are being infected and dying at higher numbers than other groups for a variety of reasons, including social gatherings, multi-generational households, higher rates of underlying health conditions, precarious occupations, financial instability, stigmatization

and language barriers. They urge the development of culturally and linguistically sensitive public health education, creating virtual support networks and temporarily stopping indoor gatherings. Matt Wolf also tweeted a link to a CBC (2020) program "Canada's South Asian community facing a higher risk of COVID-19," which showed how South Asians were modifying their *Diwali* festivity by using online technology and restricting their functions. In addition, Wolf tweeted a Statistics Canada report (Subedi et al., 2020) to establish that South Asian families were comparatively larger than other groups.

But, Wolf failed to include the more balanced and nuanced reporting of both Chagla et al. (2020) and the CBC (2020) program, instead zeroing in on the parts which supported the Premier's message. Kenney's comments on the South Asian community, when juxtaposed with his silence on predominantly white anti-maskers' rallies in the same city, showed a discourse which had been deracialized and sanitized of racial coding and stripped of using an overt language of race, but nonetheless created differential representations of the South Asian other.

Counter-Narratives: Celebrating Sikhism and *Seva*

During this same period, stories about the positive contributions of the Sikh community during the pandemic also emerged. These are seen as counter-narratives that discursively replaced the negative stereotypes about the community. In national newspapers across the political spectrum, there have been news pieces that have celebrated the kindness, generosity and sacrifice of Sikhs in Canada. On 6 May, 2020, the *National Post* (Bill, 2020) ran a story about the "existential crisis" faced by a Sikh doctor, Singh-Saluja who had to decide between the precepts of his faith and commitment to his profession, as well as the principle of *seva*. He eventually decided to shave his beard so that he was able to wear the N95 mask and serve his patients. Singh-Saluja articulated his dilemma in the following words:

> It was an extremely difficult decision for us, but one we felt was absolutely necessary in this time of need… it has left me with much sadness. This was something that had been so much part of my identity. (Bill, 2020)

The tone and content of the article convey the immense sacrifice the physician was willing to undertake as a doctor, something that inspired his team members to also shave their beards in solidarity (Bill, 2020).

A number of articles point to how the Sikh tradition of *seva,* which entails the provision of *langar* or community kitchens in *gurudwaras*, has been adapted to provide food aid during the pandemic. Due to the Covid related restrictions around religious gatherings, various Sikh community centres across North America have mobilized their resources for *langars*. These

newspaper articles represented *langar* services as a successful demonstration of community support and solidarity (Melnychuk, 2020; Salmaan, 2021). On January 21, 2021, the *Globe and Mail* ran a story about Sikhs expanding their community kitchens in response to COVID-19 hardships. The article cites that the Dashmesh Culture Centre in Calgary began offering delivery and takeout during the pandemic. Volunteers delivered up to 50 meals a day to people in isolation, some as far as an hour's drive away (Salmaan, 2021).

These articles, published across varied platforms and written by differently positioned people, presented a positive image of Sikh Canadians. This projection of Sikh Canadian community as linked to the idea of *seva* and humanitarian work is aligned with the diasporic community's own project of re-making its identity in the aftermath of 9/11. The concept of *seva* discussed in many of these articles speaks to an ethical framework that is central to Sikhism (Hirvi, 2014; Murphy, 2004). *Seva* entails selfless acts for fellow human beings that allow an individual to overcome the egoistic self and transcend individuality (Singh 2011). In the context of the current movement among diasporic Sikhs, *seva* is seen as a political act that allows young Sikhs to connect with secular ideas of humanitarian work and is tied to serving the interests of the larger community, including non-Sikhs, thereby subverting boundaries of caste, class, ethnicity and religion (Murphy, 2004; Nippoldt 2018). This entails a form of humanitarianism, activism and resistance to the subjugation of subaltern groups, for instance by expressing solidarity with the Black Lives Matter protestors through delivering food for them.

While diasporic Sikhs make an important link between *seva* and resistance, the reviewed articles use the discourse of *seva* to make Sikh practices legible to white audiences. This can be linked to the community's concern with refashioning their image in the aftermath of 9/11. In most of the articles reviewed above, *seva* appears as a way of projecting the "goodness" and "model minority" attributes of the diasporic Sikh Punjabi community. In an April 5, 2020 article in the *Leader Post* (Melnychuk, 2020) about community kitchens being run in Regina, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau lauds the efforts of the Sikh community. He says,

> Every day Sikh Canadians make our cities and our neighbourhoods stronger. And right now, when people need help most, you're stepping up once again. In Regina you're delivering supplies to your neighbours, while in Mississauga, you're donating to the Seva Food Bank. It just goes to show that we are all stronger together, supporting each other. (Melnychuk, 2020)

This discourse about *seva*, while it can be linked to forms of community-based resistance, also feeds into positive media representations and makes the community amenable to the mainstream white community.

Specifically, the newspaper reports point to the accessibility and mainstreaming of the community kitchens run by diasporic Sikhs, through

discussions about the type of food available which includes "canned food, almond milk, fruit, chips and rice" (Melnychuk, 2020). These foods are dissociated from South Asian cultures and more closely tied to mainstream white culture, and thereby rendered neutral. In addition, the articles mention obstacles to the uptake of *langar*, indicated by low demand from hospitals, shelters and other charitable organizations due to concerns about the hygiene of the cooked food (Melnychuk, 2020; Salmaan, 2021), alongside the fact that many of the beneficiaries of *langar* had never heard of Sikhism and "for many, daal, roti and vegetarian curries have never before been part of their diet" (Salmaan 2021). In each of the articles, there is an explicit effort to respond to these concerns and persuade the mainstream community to engage in the *langar* service. For instance, almost all of the articles cite the compliance with health and safety protocols, like the volunteers wearing masks, using gloves and sanitizing their hands (Melnychuk, 2020; Salmaan, 2021).

Salmaan (2021) talks about a method of food distribution that is more culturally aligned with white mainstream ideas about food and safety protocol. He says:

> Volunteers handed out plastic bags, which were then filled in a trick-or-treat-like fashion with items like bananas, dried chick peas, lentils and potatoes. Orange circles and arrows were spray painted on the pavement to indicate direction and help maintain proper physical distancing. Hot pasta and soup were also being handed out as recipients quietly, but graciously made their way past the food-filled tables. A bread delivery came around 2:30 p.m. after the line had died down to a slow trickle.

In this description, the mention of bags filled in trick-or-treat fashion is a cultural marker that is familiar to a white mainstream audience. Moreover, the reference to non-Punjabi foods and maintenance of social distancing appear targeted at assuaging the concerns of the white mainstream community.

These media reports communicate that the diasporic Sikh community is adapting its food and its distribution to suit the needs and concerns of the white mainstream community. These efforts position the Sikh Canadian community in direct contrast to Kenney's claims of the South Asian community as defying COVID-19 protocol and placing their culture above the requirements of the mainstream community. Instead, these discourses show how the Sikh Canadian community is able to leverage their cultural capital to serve the needs of the larger mainstream community, while ensuring compliance with COVID-19 protocols. It is not clear if the celebratory narratives reflected in media reports are also echoed by Punjabi Sikh and South Asian community members. But a number of articles cite the views of prominent South Asian community members and the participation of Sikh community members in the food distribution.

This media messaging uses culture in a productive way and challenges Kenney's arguments, but it remains at odds with the idea of resistance because it is attempting to appeal to mainstream consumers rather than launching a form of protest. While this does not discount the potential for *seva* to be a form of resistance, in the media discourses discussed *seva* appears as a projection device targeted at the mainstream white community and contributes to the image of the Punjabi Sikh community as commensurable with the dominant white mainstream culture.

Hall (1997) points out that adding positive representations does not necessarily do away with negative stereotypes; it only adds to the diversity of representations. These positive representations of Sikh Canadians coexist alongside the negatives ones that reiterate the violence, backwardness and threat represented by South Asian and Sikh Punjabi cultures. In remaining within the culturalist paradigm, these alternative media images also reinforce the logic of neo-racism and are able to perpetuate a reductive view of Punjabi Sikhs, as defined primarily through their culture and religion. It prevents an engagement with the other social, economic and political relations in which Sikh Punjabis are embedded.

Counter-Narratives: Structural Effects of Class among South Asian and Punjabi Communities

Another counter-discourse is similar to what was heard when Premier Kenney racialized the rise of COVID-19 infections in North-East Calgary. This alternative message emphasizes the working-class character of the Sikh Punjabi Canadian community, and how many of its members are putting themselves at risk to make sure that essential services remain available to the general population. On 20 November, 2020, *Toronto Star* ran an opinion piece by Jaskaran Sandhu, a senior consultant with Crestview Strategy, previously the executive director for the World Sikh Organization of Canada and a senior adviser to Brampton's Office of the Mayor. In this piece, she says,

> Brampton is proud and we are tired of people pointing and laughing while we hustle and die doing the essential jobs that no one else wants to perform. We are tired of people blaming us for allegedly not taking COVID-19 seriously and proclaiming 'It's always Brampton' without ever taking a minute to think about what is actually happening here. (Sandhu, 2020)

The tone and content of this article serve as a backlash to the culturalist rhetoric and present a counter narrative.

In her article, "Covidiots come in all colours. Using race-based data to demonize South Asians is a cruel twisting of the evidence," Paradkar (2020)

points out that it is, "easier to berate people for parties and 'multi-day weddings' than to examine if there are adequate testing sites, if they are easily accessible by public transit and if there are adequate supports for those who do test positive." This article points out the misplaced effects of blaming people and communities of Brampton in Ontario for their irresponsible socializing practices, rather than considering the precarity of their employment, the multi-generational residential units due to high costs of housing, crowding in public transit and lack of adequate testing sites, which are contributing to the disproportionately higher infection rates among South Asian populations.

Similarly, the article by DiManno (2020) asserts that while it may not have been the intention of Peel Public Health to stereotype any community, they have inadvertently attributed COVID-19 spread to cultural factors. According to the Peel Report on *Social Determinants of Health: Race and Occupation* (Region of Peel, 2020),[7] "the coronavirus was being spread, to some extent, by people living in multigenerational households and individuals who'd travelled to severely struck countries such as India" (DiManno, 2020). In pointing out some of the structural factors at play, DiManno cites Dosani, a palliative care physician and health justice activist who mentions that people residing in such communities are using public transport, living in multi-generational homes as a way to cope with their finances, and take care of their relatives. DiManno (2020) points out that the Peel Report shows that visible minorities make up 63% of Peel's population and 77% of the region's COVID-19 cases, but she asserts that one needs to delve deeper to understand the complex factors contributing to these numbers. The most frequently reported occupations among positive cases were healthcare, trade, transport and equipment operators and manufacturing and utilities, all defined as "essential." She concedes that there are cultural factors involved such as large gatherings or weddings, but these must be balanced with the impact of race, language, health, literacy, income, housing and eldercare. She calls for a public health response that understands that health care should vary across communities (DiManno, 2020).

In one of the sharpest critiques of the culturalist discourse, Sabina Vohra-Miller (Vohra-Miller Foundation and global health activist), Dr. Amanpreet Brar (a surgery resident doctor) and Dr. Ananya Tina Banerjee (Assistant Professor in Dalla Lana School of Public Health at University of Toronto) point out in a *Toronto Star* article on November 19, 2020, that it is not *Diwali*, but "racial segregation and over-representation in precarious employment" which is raising the level of infections in Ontario's Peel region (Vohra-Miller, et al., 2020). Brar, a general surgery resident doctor at University of Toronto and former warehouse worker in Brampton, points out

---

[7] Peel Public Health, which is a part of the municipal government of Peel Region, has been collecting socio-demographic data since April 2020 in response to community demands. As a data gathering unit, its capacity to provide critical analysis is limited.

that lack of sick days makes workers vulnerable to being fired for calling in sick. The authors quote a Statistics Canada report (Vohra-Miller et al., 2020) that says 18% of Canada's roughly 181,000 truck drivers are South Asian immigrants (Vohra-Miller et al., 2020) who regularly drive in and out of COVID-19 hotspots, thus exposing them to infections. Mayor Patrick Brown was quoted as saying that Brampton receives less healthcare funding per capita than other regions in the province (Vohra-Miller et al., 2020). In addition, multi-generational and over-crowded housing is often a result of poverty as opposed to familial affinity as it is portrayed to be.

Thus, each of these articles point to the need for class and institutional analysis to inform sensitized public health responses. Inequities of public health information, education, contact tracing and vaccinations on the basis of class, race, immigration status and living arrangements have been pointed out by activists. Community organizations and spokespersons have consistently advocated for six paid sick days per year for all workers,[8] for the prevention of cuts to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) payments, and for pre-empting the announced cuts by the Federal Government to the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB), measures that precarious workers have relied on during the pandemic.

While public health officials at the municipal level have responded to these advocates by calling for paid sick leave for all workers, monitoring of workplace breakouts of COVID-19 infections, orders to shut down such workplaces, and the prioritization of vaccinations for essential workers in hot spots (like Brampton), conservative governments in both Alberta and Ontario have been intransigent, resorting instead to neo-conservative strategies of individual responsibility, restricted household gatherings, enhanced policing powers, fines and the like.

In capturing a structural competency perspective (Metzl, 2012 p. 216), which recognizes disease and health as inherently shaped by social and economic forces, the counter-narrative emanating from frontline practitioners, physicians and activists in the South Asian and Punjabi Sikh community emphasizes the need to probe the underlying class factors that make South Asians more vulnerable to COVID-19. In creating this alternative framework, it is also laying bare the limitations of the culturalist narratives.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion highlights a discursive battleground to explain the high numbers of COVID-19 numbers among working class South Asian

[8] Workers' Action Centre (WAC) and Justice For Workers are two examples of such community groups.

Canadians, many of whom are Sikh Punjabis. From the United Conservative Party, Alberta Premier Kenney's remarks invoked neo-racist assumptions about why South Asian family gatherings, religious practices and lifestyles were posing a special danger to public health.

Some journalists from national and provincial papers presented a counter-narrative emphasizing the selfless service, sacrifice and humanitarian values of the Sikh community. This was later amplified by the Prime Minster and Liberal Party representatives who acknowledged that diverse cultures were the strength of the nation-state. Although this view is a counter-discourse to the neo-racist one expressed by Premier Kenney, the positive media representation of Sikh culture and *seva* is nonetheless a continuation of the trope of the tradition-bound South Asian. This image also reinforces a colonially constructed image of a "true Sikh male" who is loyal to the powerholders but who presents a potential threat to colonial dominance (Walton-Roberts, 2011). In this media discourse, the core of multiculturalism, in particular the more conciliatory aspects of culture, were reinforced rather than the ones that can be mobilized to fight colonial oppression, gender and class injustices.

It is from advocates of local South Asian communities, including physicians, academics, health activists and some journalists, that we saw the most critical counter-narratives emerging. They pointed out the classed and racialized reasons, as well as structural disparities, leading to the rising numbers of infections. Local politicians sometimes reflected these same critical perspectives. This discursive resistance points to the crucial role of South Asian community members in articulating critical counter-narratives. This can be further explored in relation to the increasing demographic, political and economic clout of South Asians in Canada. Moreover, when viewed in the longue duree of Sikh resistance against social injustices, this form of discursive resistance points to new directions for understanding and broadening our conception of diasporic resistance. Given the increasing political importance of the Sikh community in Canada, it is particularly useful to move beyond the usual focus on explicit forms of resistance, such as legal activism, to also attend to more discursive forms of resistance and subversion.

Acknowledgements

References

Ahluwalia, P. (2019). Precarious and model minorities: Sikh identities in the 'new' global politics of religion. *Sikh Formations*, *15*, 332-342.

Amato, S. (2020). *Kenney quiet on protesters after issuing COVID-19 'wake up call' to South Asian community*. CTV News. https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/kenney-quiet-on-protesters-after-issuing-covid-19-wake-up-call-to-south-asian-community-1.5209763

Ameeriar, L. (2017). *Downwardly global: Women, work and citizenship in the Pakistani diaspora.* Duke University Press.

Ashutosh, I. (2008). From the census to the city: Representing South Asians in Canada and Toronto. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, *17*(2), 130-148.

Bains, S. K. (2019). The resistance of Indian migrants: Facing lies, deception and racism. In R. Dhamoon, D. Bhandar, R. Mawani, & S. K. Bains (Eds.), *Unmooring the Komagata Maru: Charting colonial trajectories* (pp. 76-94). University of British Columbia Press.

Balibar, E. (2007). Is there a neo-racism? In T. Das Gupta, C. E. James, R. C .A. Maaka, G. -E. Galabuzi, & C. Andersen (Eds.), *Race and racialization: Essential readings* (pp. 83-88). Canadian Scholars' Press.

Bannerji, H. (1987). Introducing racism: Notes towards an anti-racist feminism. *Resources for Feminist Research,16*(1), 10-12

Bannerji, H. (2000). *The dark side of the nation: Essays on multiculturalism, nationalism and gender.* Canadian Scholars' Press.

Barker, M. (2002). The problems with racism. In P. Essed & D. Goldberg (Eds.), *Race critical theories* (pp. 80-89). Blackwell.

Beiser, M. (2005). The health of immigrants and refugees in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, *96*(Suppl. 2), S30-S44.

Bill, B. (2020, May 6). A doctor's dilemma 'in this time of need': Doing good. *National Post*. http://ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/doctors-dilemma-this-time-need-doing-good/docview/2399036608/se-2?accountid=15182

Block, S., & Dhunna, S. (2020, April 6). *Face to face With Covid-19: How do we care for workers.* The Monitor. https://behindthenumbers.ca/2020/04/06/face-to-face-with-covid-19-how-do-we-care-for-care-workers/

Briggs, C. L., & Mantini-Briggs, C. (2003). *Stories in the time of cholera: Racial profiling during a medical nightmare.* University of California Press.

CBC. (2020). *Canada's South Asian community facing a higher risk of COVID-19.* https://cbc.ca/player/play/1820137539990 #ableg

Chagla, Z., Chakrabarti, S., & Kaura, T. (2020, November 15). South Asians play a part in Covid-19 transmission and we need to acknowledge it. *Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/11/15/south-asians-play-a-part-in-covid-19-transmission-and-we-need-to-acknowledge-it.html

City-Data.com (2012). *Calgary Northeast, Alberta, Canada.* Retrieved March 12, 2021 from http://www.city-data.com/canada/Calgary-Northeast.html

City of Toronto. (2021). *Covid-19: Ethno-Racial Identity and Income.* Retrieved June 19, 2021 from https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-latest-city-of-toronto-news/covid-19-pandemic-data/covid-19-ethno-racial-group-income-infection-data/

Colour of Poverty. (2020, September 8). *Canada's COVID-19 reconstruction plan must address systemic racial inequalities* [media release]. https://ocasi.org/covid-19-reconstruction-plan-must-address-systemic-racial-inequalities

Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA), South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO), South Asian Women's Rights Organization (SAWRO). (2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on South Asians in Canada.* http://cassa.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-impact-of-covid-19-on-south-asians-in-canada.pdf

Dhamoon, R. (2013). Exclusion and regulated inclusion. The case of the Sikh Kirpan in Canada. *Sikh Formations, 9*(1),7-28.

DiManno, R. (2020, September 16). Spike in Peel COVID-19 cases shows the need to dig deep for an effective public health response. *Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/2020/09/15/spike-in-peel-covid-19-cases-shows-the-need-to-dig-deep-for-an-effective-public-health-response.html

Dua, E. (2000). 'The Hindu women's question': Canadian nation building and the social construction of gender for South Asian-Canadian women. In A. Calliste & G. J. Sefa Dei (Eds.), *Anti-racist feminism: Critical race and gender studies (*pp.55-72). Fernwood Publishing.

Eichelberger, L. (2007). SARS and New York's Chinatown: The politics of risk and blame during an epidemic of fear. *Social Science & Medicine*, *65*(6), 1284-1295.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Polity Press.

Fox, R. G. (1985). *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the making*. University of California Press.

Hall, S. (1997). *The spectacle of the 'Other'*. Sage.

Haque, E. (2012). *Multiculturalism within a bilingual framework: Language, race and belonging in Canada.* University of Toronto.

Hirvi, L. (2014). Civic engagement and *Seva*: An ethnographic case study of a Sikh Gurdwara in Yuba City, California. *Journal of Punjab Studies*, *21*(1), 55-68.

Jakobsh, D. (2017). Tragic violence, hate crimes and grieving within sacred geographies of faith: Sikhs and the Oak Creek Gurdwara shootings, 2012. *Journal of Religion and Culture*, *27*, 103-131.

Jakobsh, D., & Walton-Roberts, M. (2016). A century of miri piri: securing Sikh belonging in Canada. *South Asian Diaspora*, *8*(2), 167-183.

Jakubowski, L. M. (1997). *Immigration and the legalization of racism.* Fernwood.

Jiwani, Y. (1993). *By omission and commission: 'Race' and representation in Canadian news* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Simon Fraser University.

Jiwani, Y. (2009). Report race and the media: A retrospective and prospective gaze. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 34*, 735-740.

Jiwani, Y. (2010). Doubling discourses and the veiled Other: Mediations of race and gender in Canadian media. In S. Razack, M. Smith, & S. Thobani (Eds.), *States of race: Critical race feminism for the 21ˢᵗ century* (pp. 59-86). Between the Lines.

Jiwani, Y. (2011) Pedagogies of hope: Counter narratives and anti- disciplinary tactics. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, *33*(4), 333-353.

Johnston, J. H. (1989). *The voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh challenge to Canada's*

Johnston, J. H. (2005). Group identity in an emigrant corker Community: The example of Sikhs in early Twentieth-Century British Columbia. *The British Columbian Quarterly*, *148*, 3-23

Kapiriri, L., & Ross, A. (2020). The politics of disease epidemics: A comparative analysis of the SARS, Zika, and Ebola outbreaks. *Global Social Welfare*, *7*(1), 33-45.

Li, Y., & Nicholson, L. H. (2021). When "model minorities" become "yellow peril" – Othering and the racialization of Asian Americans in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Sociology Compass*, 15(2), e12849. DOI: 10.1111/soc4.12849

Luthra, K. S. (2018). Sikh American millennials at work: Institution building, activism, and a renaissance of cultural expression. *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*, *14*, 280-299.

Luthra, K. S.(2021). Remembering Guru Nanak: Articulations of faith and ethics by Sikh activists in post 9/11 America. *Religions*, *12*(2), 113. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020113

Mahtani, M. (2001). Representing minorities: Canadian media and minority identities. *Canadian Ethnic Studies, 33*(3), 93-133.

Mason, G. (2020, December 3). Scapegoating South Asian Canadians for high COVID-19 numbers is just wrong. *The Globe and Mail*. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-scapegoating-south-asian-canadians-for-high-covid-19-numbers-is-just/

Mawani, R. (2003). The 'Island of the Unclean': Race, colonialism and 'Chinese leprosy' in British Columbia, 1891-1924. *Law, Social Justice & Global Development Journal*. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/elj/lgd/2003_1/mawani/

Melnychuk, M. (2020, April 5). The Helpers: Regina Sikh community distributes free groceries during pandemic. *Leader Post*. https://leaderpost.com/news/local-news/the-helpers-regina-sikh-community-distributes-free-groceries-during-pandemic

Metzl, M. J. (2012). Structural competency. *American Quarterly, 64*(2), 213-218.

Miller, J. (2021). Peel Police are joining forces with social services agencies in a 'radical' experiment to curb intimate partner violence. *Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2021/03/16/peel-police-are-joining-forces-with-social-services-agencies-in-a-radical-experiment-to-curb-intimate-partner-violence.html

Murphy, A. (2004). Mobilising seva ("Service"): Modes of Sikh diasporic action. In K. A. Jacobsen & P. Kumar (Eds.), *South Asians in the diaspora* (pp. 337-372). Brill.

Nelkin, D., & Gilman, S. L. (1988). Placing blame for devastating disease. *Social Research*, *55*(3), 361-378.

Neustaeter, B. (2021, January 27). *'Raise your voice': Campaign targets anti-Asian racism heightened amid Covid-19 in Canada*. CTV News. https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/raise-your-voice-campaign-targets-anti-asian-racism-heightened-amid-covid-19-in-canada-1.5283974

Nijhawan, M. (2014). 1984 and the diasporic politics of aesthetics: Reconfigurations and new constellations among Toronto's Sikh youth. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, *17*(2), 196-219.

Nijhawan, M. (2016). *The precarious diasporas of Sikh and Ahmadiyya generations*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Nijhawan, M. & Arora, K. (2013). 'Lullabies for broken children': Diasporic citizenship and the dissenting voices of young Sikhs in Canada. *Sikh Formations, 9*(3), 299-321.

Nippoldt, L. (2018, February 17). *Transformed through Seva: Personal and community experiences of Sikh service* [conference presentaton]. Sikholars Conference, Stanford, CA, USA.

Paradkar, S. (2020, November 18). Covidiots come in all colours. Using race-based data to demonize South Asians is a cruel twisting of the evidence. *Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/2020/11/18/covidiots-come-in-all-colours-using-race-based-data-to-demonize-south-asians-is-a-cruel-twisting-of-the-evidence.html

Press Progress. (2020, November 30) *Jason Kenney under fire over radio interview linking spread of Covid-19 with South Asian 'traditions'*. https://pressprogress.ca/jason-kenney-under-fire-over-radio-interview-linking-spread-of-covid-19-to-south-asian-traditions/

Puar, J. (2008). The turban is not a hat: Queer diaspora and practices of profiling. *Sikh Formations, 4*(1), 47-91.

Puar, J., & Rai, A. (2004). The re-making of a model minority: Perverse projectiles under the spectre of (counter)terrorism. *Social Text*, *22*(3), 75-104.

REDFM. (2020, November 25). *Good Morning Calgary with Rishi Nagar* [Web video]. Retrieved June 12, 2021, from https://www.facebook.com/REDFM1067/videos/435088651218061/

Region of Peel. (2020). *Covid-19 and the social determinants of health: Race and occupation*. https://www.peelregion.ca/coronavirus/_media/COVID-19-race-and-occupation.pdf

Reitmanova, S., & Gustafson, D. L. (2012). Rethinking immigrant tuberculosis control in Canada: From medical surveillance to tackling social determinants of health. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health, 14*(1), 6-13.

Reitmanova, S., Gustafson, D. L., & Ahmed, R. (2015). 'Immigrants can be deadly': Critical discourse analysis of racialization of immigrant health in the Canadian press and public health policies. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, *40*, 471-487.

Salmaan, F. (2021, January 21). Sikhs expand their community kitchens in response to COVID-19 hardships. *The Globe and Mail*. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-sikhs-expand-their-community-kitchens-in-response-to-covid-19/

Sandhu, J. (2020, November 20). Brampton should be celebrated, not stigmatized. *Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/11/19/brampton-should-be-celebrated-not-stigmatized.html?rf

Shukla, S. (2019, November 1). How are Sikhs so powerful in Canada? It's not about their numbers. *The Print*. https://theprint.in/theprint-essential/sikhs-so-powerful-in-canada-its-not-about-numbers/314036/

Sian, P. K. (2017). Surveillance, Islamophobia, and Sikh bodies in the War on Terror. *Islamophobia Studies Journal, 4*(1), 37-52.

Singh, J. (2008). *Diasporic community building enterprise: Race, religion and Sikh American grassroots political prganizing before 9/11* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of California, Berkeley, USA.

Singh, N. K. (2011). *Sikhism: An introduction*. Tauris & Co.

Statistics Canada. (2016b). *Brampton: Immigration and ethnocultural diversity*. https://geohub.brampton.ca/pages/profile-diversity

Statistics Canada. (2021). *Survey on COVID-19 and mental health, September to December 2020*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210318/dq210318a-eng.htm

Subedi, R., Greenberg, L., & Turcotte, M. (2020). *Covid-19 mortality rates in Canada's ethnocultural neighbourhoods*. Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00079-eng.htm

Subramaniam, V. (2020, August 7). New race-based data shows visible minorities in Canada disproportionately affected by COVID recession. *The Chronicle Herald*. https://www.thechronicleherald.ca/business/perspectives-on-business/new-race-based-data-shows-visible-minorities-in-canada-disproportionately-impacted-by-covid-recession-482846/

Tatla, S. D. (1999). *The Sikh diaspora: The search for statehood*. UCL Press.

Thobani, S. (2012). Racial violence and the politics of national belonging. The Wisconsin shootings, Islamophobia, and the war on terrorized bodies." *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory, 8*(3), 281-286.

van Dijk, T. (1987). *Communicating racism: Ethnic prejudice in thought and talk*. Sage.

van Dijk, T. (1992). Discourse and the denial of racism. *Discourse & Society*, *3*(1), 87-118.

Villani, M. (2020). *Calgary's South Asian community demands premier apologize after 'wake up call' comments*. CTV News. https://calgary.ctvnews.ca/calgary-s-south-asian-community-demands-premier-apologize-after-wake-up-call-comments-1.5210563

Vohra-Miller, S., Brar, A., & Bannerjee, T. A. (2020, November 19). 'It's not Diwali, it's precarious employment and less healthcare resources'. South Asian medical experts on Brampton's rising Covid-19 cases. *Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/11/19/its-not-diwali-its-precarious-employment-and-less-health-care-resources-south-asian-medical-experts-on-bramptons-rising-covid-19-cases.html

Walton-Roberts, M. (1998). Three readings of the turban: Sikh identity in Greater Vancouver, *Urban Geography*, *194*, 311-331.

Walton-Roberts, M. (2011). Relocating the Sikh subject: Sikh veterans and the Royal Canadian Legion, *Sikh Formations*, *7*(2), 195-210.

Ward, P. M. (2002). *White Canada forever: Popular attitudes and public policy toward Orientals in British Columbia* (3rd ed.*)*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Women's Shelters Canada. (2020, November). *The impact of Covid-19 on VAW shelters and transition houses*. Retrieved June 5, 2021 from http://endvaw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Shelter-Voices-2020-2.pdf

Wu, C., Qian, Y., & Wilkes, R. (2021) Anti-Asian discrimination and the Asian-white mental health gap during COVID-19. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *44*(5), 819-835.