IMAGINATIONS
REVUE D'ETUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE • JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES

IMAGINATIONS:
JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES |
REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE
L'IMAGE

Publication details, including open access policy and instructions for contributors:
https://imaginationsjournal.ca

**Contemporary Critical Theory and Decolonial Visual Praxis: Exploring resistance narratives and colonial hegemonies in the pandemic**
**Guest Editor: Nanditha Narayanamoorthy**
**2023-03-31**

To cite this article:
Haque, Abu."Reimagining the Margin: Space of Difference through a Visual Narrative." *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2023, pp. 37-61, doi: 10.17742/IMAGE29664.

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE29664

The copyright for each article belongs to the author and has been published in this journal under a Creative Commons 4.0 International Attribution NonCommercial NoDerivatives license that allows others to share for non-commercial purposes the work with an acknowledgement of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal. The content of this article represents the author's original work and any third-party content, either image or text, has been included under the Fair Dealing exception in the Canadian Copyright Act, or the author has provided the required publication permissions. Certain works referenced herein may be separately licensed, or the author has exercised their right to fair dealing under the Canadian Copyright Act.

# REIMAGINING THE MARGIN: SPACE OF DIFFERENCE THROUGH A VISUAL NARRATIVE

ABU HAQUE

Representations of space do not fittingly reflect the lived experiences of the margin. Representational spaces, on the other hand, are linked to underground social life and art (Lefebvre 39), which are expressed through complex signs and symbols, sometimes coded and sometimes not. Revisiting these spaces provides an understanding of the spatial practices of the marginalized bodies within the existing social relations. This paper interrogates the discursive practices of those mediated bodies through a visual narrative. The paper also challenges the center-periphery rhetoric, revealing an ambiguous and ambivalent marginality that is not fixed. The images are used as a methodological tool to elaborate the actions of the bodies in space. A series of exclusions intertwined within the spatial practices not only confirms the ambiguity of the margin but also reveals that it is a process of becoming.

Les représentations de l'espace ne reflètent pas convenablement les expériences vécues des marges. Les espaces de représentation, en revanche, sont liés à la vie sociale souterraine et à l'art (Lefebvre 39), qui s'expriment à travers des signes et des symboles complexes, parfois codés, parfois non-codés. Revisiter ces espaces permet de comprendre les pratiques spatiales des corps marginalisés au sein des relations sociales existantes. Cet article interroge les pratiques discursives de ces corps médiatisés à travers un récit visuel. Il remet également en question la rhétorique centre-périphérie, révélant une marginalité ambiguë et ambivalente qui n'est pas figée. Les images sont utilisées comme un outil méthodologique pour élaborer les actions des corps dans l'espace. Une série d'exclusions entrelacées dans les pratiques spatiales confirme non seulement l'ambiguïté des marges mais révèle également qu'elle est un processus en devenir.

## PRELUDE

Representations of the margin do not fittingly reflect the lived experiences of those bodies. On the other hand, representational spaces imagined by the margin are linked to the underground side of social life and art, which are expressed through complex signs and symbols that are often coded and often not (Lefebvre 39).[1] Revisiting these spaces reveals the discursive practices of the margin within the nuances of existing social relations.

The schema of the margin is flexible and ambiguous, as it stretches and includes identities that are always in a process of "becoming" such as the subalterns (Gramsci 20), new immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, LGBTQ2 communities, hyphenated identities, and women (of colour) but are always in relation to a dominant group. A well-rounded understanding of marginality would guide us to addressing the discursive practices of those spatiotemporal realities. The spaces of the margin, as it appears, reside in multiple spatiotemporalities composed of various identifying markers occupied by the subalterns and hyphenated identities, including but not limited to, new immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and others. Hyphenated identities refer to identities that are perceived as a tag of at least two different cultural and/or geopolitical identities, such as Bangladeshi-Canadian, Chinese-Canadian, or African-Canadian. Subalterns, on the other hand, are social groups that include what Antonio Gramsci identified as "slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, different races, and the proletariat" (qtd. in Green 2). Gayatri Spivak further expanded the idea, proposing that everything with very limited to no access to cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference (qtd. in de Kock 45). Synthesizing Gramsci and Spivak, I argue that the aboriginal peoples, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, LGBTQ2 communities, women (of colour), and people with disabilities, among others, also belong to this space (and time) of difference.

Hence, the subject of the study is always a work in progress, which is credited to belong to an ambivalent and ambiguous third space unrepresentable in itself (Bhabha 55). Here, marginality is viewed as a condition of being without a prefixed notion of spatiotemporal exi-

gency, the markers of which include but are not limited to race, class, religion, gender, culture, age, or language. Not only is the margin ambiguous without a fixed or obvious meaning attached to it, but also represents different cultural groups, both socially constructed and a process of becoming. Marginal identities are consigned to accepting precarious jobs, especially in the informal sectors also known as the gig economy. This paper interrogates the discursive practices of the mediated bodies in those (representational) spaces through a visual narrative that contradicts the popular representations of those bodies. Thereby, this paper deviates from the dominant discursive practices of knowledge creation by reproducing the spatiotemporal[2] representations of the margin—a perceived reality of the bodies frozen in time and space inside the frames and subsequent analysis of those.

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to analyze and interrogate the lived reality of the margin that the representations of space exclude, and to which the representational spaces allude, thereby expanding the reach of our understanding of marginality—both in spatial and temporal terms.

## THE RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Media play a crucial role in the construction of Canadian identity, which considerably affects how marginal identities are formed. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, is a political ideology that reinforces the status quo and differentiates people based on the colour of skin. The concept of diversity with all possible variants—visible minorities, religious minorities, ethnic minorities, women of colour, and so on—is judged against a Canadian "we," which essentially resides within ideology in the European/North American physique "in the body and the color of skin" (Bannerji 551) and not on the aspect of language, religion, or culture. Here the marginal identities, already alienated by the politics of differentiation and exclusion, are seen as unusual and irregular, and also discriminated against. This paper reveals the underlying conditions and

discursive practices of the marginal bodies through a visual narrative and subsequent analysis of those. The paper is a conceptual opening to a larger project exploring spatiotemporality of the margin beholding visible minorities, racialized and gendered bodies, and also the subalterns.

## VISUAL NARRATIVE IN THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING

The use of photography has been a well-established research method in disciplines like anthropology and sociology, but increasingly it has also been used in areas like humanities and communication studies. Historically, photographs have been viewed from two different perspectives: one as a form of art and the other as a precise record of a subject or scene (Schwartz 120). This paper aligns more with the latter, that is, in the potential of photographs' ability to precisely record and symbolize the representational spaces of the margin, rather than in its aesthetics. It does not ignore the artistic inclination of the creative process nonetheless, as the process could potentially reveal interesting nuances about the representational spaces. Viewed as records, photographs reproduce reality and are thought to yield an "unmediated and unbiased visual report" (120). For example, a study on the American middle class shows that participants were inclined to respond to pictorial elements that were personally significant and/or were related to their everyday life, rather than responding to the encoded messages and making meaning out of them (122). This attachment toward the pictorial elements aligning with personal significance is the reason why interpretation of an image differs.

Moreover, widely shared ideological beliefs of one group are often represented as the attitude of the entire population (Van Dijk 117). As is evident, studies of children in poverty often portray a white, middle-class childhood due to the easy access to this group, and they are not studied through their lived experiences (Stanczak 169-70). Meanwhile, the use of photographs in this study has reduced the unequal power relations between the researcher and the participants, as it relies primarily on non-linguistic visual cues in the revelation of the

lived spaces occupied by the margin. Media representations of the margin, on the contrary, normalize a complex system of social and cultural hierarchy that reinscribes the dominant narrative, where the marginalized bodies are treated as strange and seen as the Other. They are usually incorporated in stereotypical representations, viewed from a hegemonic universal human being—white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied cis-men, where interest in the Otherness is a continual revival of interest in the primitive and the savage:

> "Certainly from the standpoint of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the hope is that desires for the 'primitive' or fantasies about the 'Other' can be continually exploited, and that such exploitation will occur in a manner that reinscribes and maintains the status quo." (hooks 22)

Photographs have been used both as a methodological tool and a means of inquiry; however, using visual images as a research tool requires an understanding of the process of the production of meaning. Meaning is produced within the shared knowledge of language and discourse, and not outside of it. It is a process of identification within a hierarchy of classifications that excludes some and privileges others—constructed through, not outside, difference—pointing toward not so much what something is, but rather, what it is not (Hall 4). Hegemonic power structure and discourse are mediated through various repressive and ideological state apparatuses that maintain the hierarchies within the limits of different markers, making the marginal space a space of difference and struggle, fundamentally different from the dominant one. The demarcation works in two different ways: one is discursive and operates under erasure, while the other draws meaning in relations to the vicious hierarchy between two resultant poles such as white/black or man/woman in which white is synonymous to "human being" (5)—normalized and incorporated as such within the structure of power. Identities are affected by the way they are catalogued within this process of identification.

An analysis of the marginal spaces reveals the discursive practices of the marginal bodies. The visual cues reveal fascinating practices of the representational spaces of the margin, which do not always

represent physical bodies but incorporate ideas, too. Sometimes they expose contradictions—fear/acceptance or denial/conformity—however, they capture more complex details about those spaces than the process of identification does, which tends to produce binary oppositions.

> "Must we always polarize in order to polemicize? Are we trapped in a politics of struggle where the representation of social antagonisms and historical contradictions can take no other form than a binarism of theory vs. politics? Can the aim of freedom or knowledge be the simple inversion of the relation of oppressor and oppressed, margin and periphery, negative image and positive image?" (Bhabha 28)

These ambiguous spaces outside of the bipolar opposites (marginal/dominant) have no fixity but depend on how they are being interpreted and read, as the marginal and dominant positions can swap in a matter of a moment. For example, the driver of a motorized vehicle can quickly become marginal if s/he switches the position to a bicycle—starts riding within the marked lines of difference on the same road, but now riding on the edges—on the margin. Therefore, even though margin is a space of struggle, it is context-specific. The production of these spaces pushes the margin to the boundaries of society, to the edges, or traps them in between, which is almost always an ambivalent process of becoming. Kathleen Stewart adds a variant to the understanding of the spatiotemporality through "weak theory," which is not only complex but also aptly articulates the boundaries of the third space. Stewart suggests a space of potentials that is of primary interest to me: she conceptualizes cultural poesies that give birth to a weak theory when assemblage of discontinuous, yet mapped elements—disjointed and disparate things—throws itself together in a singularity to make up a scene—something that comes into existence that did not exist before (75). The word "margin," as it implies, is an extra, something more or less, but always in relation to a centre. It could be trivial but is impossible to think without. I will provide a real-life example to illustrate the weak theory.

## THE WEAK THEORY IN THE PROCESS OF BECOMING

This is in reference to two different food delivery services: SkipTheDishes and UberEats. Both apps provide options for tipping the delivery drivers. In the SkipTheDishes app, customers are forced to put the tip amount upfront without ever knowing the identity of the driver beforehand, which means the tip is independent of the actions of the driver. For the driver, this could be the stimulus, as s/he can decide whether to accept the order or decline it depending on the total amount already promised (including the tip); however, there is no potential of any future gains except on very rare occasions where the customer might tip in cash.

On the other hand, the UberEats app is built on the notion of possibility, as the tip amount can be added not only at the time of the order but also later, at which point the customer can edit the amount if s/he wishes to. The actions of the driver can influence the size of the tip received, both negatively and/or positively. Therefore, tipping in the UberEats app is not wholly independent of the actions of the drivers. A kind and smiling face, a quick service, or a smooth handover could result in a potential gain; likewise, rude or sluggish service could result in a potential loss. The question is not about which app is better (or worse for that matter), but it is a matter of choice between two different approaches that behold two different philosophies or moral codes. One promises a guaranteed amount irrespective of the actions on the part of the driver, while the other promotes the idea of service excellence where the tip amount, at least partially, depends on the action of the courier and may yield higher reward, but only potentially. Some may like the potential of extracting a greater value; some might be satisfied with the prefixed notion of the value being guaranteed. This "potential of becoming" is what Stewart defines as weak theory—depending on the bits and pieces of a faint smile, a warm greeting, a kind text message, or a gentle handover of the food, and in the nuances of the anticipation of good work in the future. Similarly, the margin beholds the potential of becoming something meaningful in the changing multicultural space-time curvature.

## THE METHODOLOGICAL PREMISE

The western mind has internalized the logic of binary antagonism through language and other discursive practices. On the contrary, photographs do not depend on spoken (or written) language for their meaning; rather, these are discernible through vision. However, like any other communications medium, photography reflects the perspective of the photographer where technological mediation reproduces a reality through alienation. This isolation from reality occurs through multiple intermediaries (technological) between the image and the viewer, such as camera, lens, screen, lab, paper, chemicals, and so on reproducing a version of the real where the subjectivity of both the photographer and the viewer plays a crucial role in the production of meaning. Hence, meaning partly depends on the intellectual and linguistic faculty for its interpretation—though only secondarily. However, the visual goes beyond language and discourse, at least at the beginning, and works in the abstract form as ideas, but the interpretation of the image again relies on language and discourse. Nonetheless, the photographic images reveal details about spaces otherwise imperceptible, reproducing an alternative position outside the dominant discourse through observable and objective narrative inferring generalization, as to generalize one requires "observable, more or less 'objective' evidence" (Bell 10). The space that the process reveals belongs to what Michel Foucault identifies as "other spaces" between utopias and heterotopias (Foucault and Miskowiec 24). These spaces complicate and transform the marginal spaces inside the ubiquitous view of globalization, especially within the purview of the world system theory (Wallerstein 15; Jameson 9), which seriously punctures through the nationalist and regionalist ideologies and becomes something post-national. It has, along with the effect of digital technologies, collapsed the world into an unequal global village.

Therefore, representation is the point of departure for this research, but it goes beyond representation and includes the discursive practices hidden in plain sight: signs and symbols of spatial and temporal references conceived within various social relations (Lefebvre 3-6;

Massey 2). Reconstructing the time and space of the margin through images and subsequent analysis provides an understanding of the marginal reality, and tests the limits and opportunities rendered through the creative process of photography. This is within the scope of abduction methodology, which avoids polarization between induction and deduction methods and derives from both (Alvesson and Skoldberg 10). For example, the premise that being a member of visible minority reproduces the conditions for marginalization could be confirmed by observation; however, the empirical data could be then analyzed and interpreted further to develop and elaborate on the theoretical assumptions. This methodology explores spaces beyond their bipolar oppositions and explores hybrid and in-between spaces.

The process is complex, as it begins with hypothesis-laden theory and tests that with empirical data. However, it does not conclude there but goes on to improve the theory with interpretation, and is open to more observations for confirmation, and finally expands on the theory. This methodology grants access to the lived experience of the margin, welcoming inclusion of the margin in perceiving their spatial reality, which means an interpretative process during which the researcher "…eats into the empirical matter with the help of theoretical preconceptions, and also keeps developing and elaborating the theory" (Alvesson and Skoldberg 5-6). And that is exactly how the researcher theorized and then analyzed the images; for instance, the way the marginal identities often explain certain terms that are otherwise obvious (see the discussion of Figure 4 and subsequent explanation), just to be in cohort with the dominant narrative.

The use of photography as a methodological tool produces an alternative meaning of the marginal bodies where the focus is now reversed—a switch in the focus from the representations of space to the representational spaces. On one hand, methods such as photography capture subjective data and thus are destined to be a part of indigenous research methodology within qualitative research approaches, since they reflect the photographer's perspective (camera position, camera angle, distance, focal length, framing, etc.) without quantifying. The method brings in the stories and perspectives of both the researcher (absorbed in the research process through qualitative re-

flection and analysis) and the research participants (through their actions) in the knowledge creation that are the traits of indigenous methodology (Kovach 28). Indigenous methodology, within the qualitative research tradition, is interpretive and searches for contextualized realities and acknowledges many truths, as opposed to the traditional positivist quantitative research approaches that seek a singular static truth from an objective distance (26). Besides, qualitative research considers reflexivity to reference the relational and "the reflexivity is the researcher's own self-reflection in the meaning-making process" (32). At the same time, indigenous methodology does not consider different parts of the research process such as method, methodology, and epistemology independent of each other; rather, it views research as a whole, where these parts are interdependent and relational (122).

Moreover, research is considered a lifelike work in progress in indigenous methodology: alive and messy, flexible and soft, and often fuzzy, which is about social relations (Kovach 30). Also, space must be considered along with time, and "not as some absolute independent dimension, but as constructed out of social relations: that what is at issue is not social phenomena in space but both social phenomena and space as constituted out of social relations, that the spatial is social relations 'stretched out'." (Massey 2).

Consequently, social relations in production of space are crucial, where interrogating the intricate social practices of the margin through a visual analysis allows us to explore these spaces through observations. Marginalization is generally constituted in relation to a white body, which, within the concept of diversity, consists of various nuances and is in itself problematic. The meaning starts to weaken with every deviation from the standard markers and has a narrow range of inclusivity as to who can pass and who cannot. It begins to wither away the further the body deviates from the standard Judeo-Christian English speaking subject of a white body. If replaced by a female or queer identity, the body loses its privilege; if replaced by a Muslim or Sikh identity, or by a person of colour, it loses even more, and so on and so forth. The counterargument to the logic that bodies and faith have been conflated here would be that even though these

are two distinctly separate categories, bodies are always wrapped up in clothes and symbolic ornamentations reflecting different faiths. Often, faith-based identities express themselves in hijab, niqab, turban, kurta, or in other religious symbols like a piece of jewelry, a cross, or an om et cetera, which adds another layer to the already marginalized bodies based on colour, creed, et cetera. Christianity is the default faith in North America; anything else is a deviation, a margin. The further the body moves away from those markers toward the periphery, the more it keeps losing privileges until ultimately it is left with nothing normative.

## THE RATIONALE OF THE METHOD USED

Photography embodies a way of seeing, as an image is not merely a mechanical record but an act of choice on the part of the photographer (Berger 8). Each photograph is a conscious selection by the photographer from infinite other possibilities; therefore, it reflects their way of seeing through the choice of subject (10). However, besides the mechanical and material records, photography has magical components to it:

> "Photography is a form of magic—or to put it another way, the photographic provides cerebral experiences for the viewer that are equivalent to magic. Just as sleight of hand facilitates, but does not fully materialize, the magical experience that resides in the dynamic of our own imaginations, so too photography—when liberated from a pedestrian definition as the sum of its mechanics and materials, its chemistry and software—can spark the occurrence of magic in our minds." (Cotton 3)

This magical experience depends on the viewers' imagination and can be fully materialized only if viewed independently of the materials or processes of the medium. However, Charlotte Cotton's argument emphasizes that this magical experience is an interpretative process on the part of the viewer. Analyzing John Berger and Cotton, it becomes evident that the photographic experience relies not only on the photographer but also on the viewer for its meaning. This is true about any texts where the claim of originality has now been

made void and very well depends on who is reading, or in our case, whoever is interpreting the image, as "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author" (Barthes and Heath 148). There are also components of both art and science amalgamated in photography, which is revealed in Eadweard Muybridge's work *The Horse in Motion*, where he stopped time in revealing the aspects of motion that ultimately resulted in the radical concept of time as a spatial image (Premeaux 387; Muybridge).

There are places of interactions within social spaces known as "contact zones" where uneven relationships of power dynamics—that of domination and subordination—reproduce the conditions similar to "colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (Pratt 4). Mary Louise Pratt also unpacks the meaning blended and obscured in everyday chores, hidden beneath the

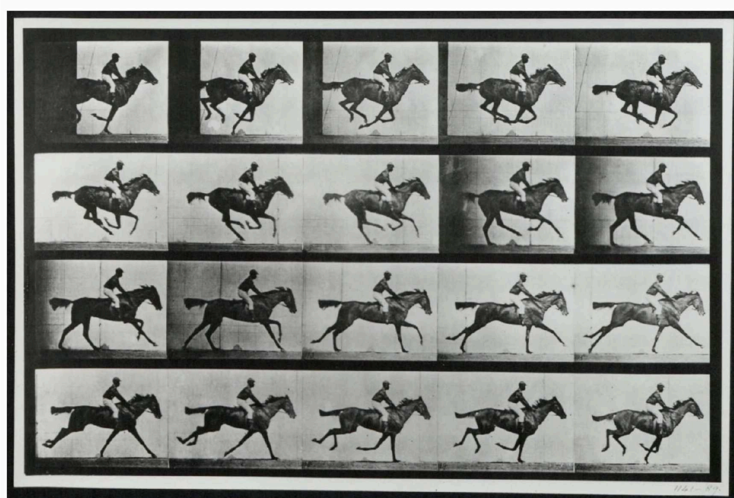

Figure 1: The Horse in Motion, Muybridge. The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum. EXEBD 61975. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Victorian Popular Culture.

lines and structures of Eurocentric travel and exploration writings, and elsewhere within language where knowledge is produced as a discursive practice of writing (Foucault 56-58). All of these point toward the disparate location of the marginal voices that I have explored in this paper, a shrinking space also known as the public sphere (Habermas 75-79), of which Nancy Fraser was critical. She argues that the institutional arena of public sphere constitutes several significant exclusions—the key one being the *gender*—and she argues for a multiplicity of "subaltern counterpublics" instead of a single public (Fraser 67). Public spheres are usually seen as spatial, but I argue that these must be considered in temporal terms as well. The public uses these spaces for political reasons; however, they do so in their free time, which makes these public spaces a representation of temporality (Sharma 12). At the same time, power exercises control over its citizens through resource allocation (by its authority to decide what time and which space to allocate for the margin to congregate). Thus, space and time collapse in a dimension of power and struggle where the bodies "are orchestrated in space in order to delve further into distinctive temporal forms of power" (11). Moreover, the spaces of the modern nation-states such as Canada are increasingly becoming cultural hybrids where there is no specificity or centralized unity (Bhabha 200), yet the thrust from the dominant discourse looms over the language, representations, and cultural expressions. Marginality operates within a complex system, which is not just about representation but also about hierarchies of orders, where a holistic and representative vision of society could be materialized only if a discourse that "at the same time are obsessively fixed upon, and uncertain of, the boundaries of society, and the margins of the text" (207).

## VISUAL ANALYSIS

Historically, marginal identities were consigned to the least desirable jobs such as cleaners, gas station attendants, food servers, delivery drivers, garbage collectors, maids, nannies, hairstylists, and barbers, and other informal and precarious jobs because of the systemic discrimination and exclusion from professional

Figure 2: Images are arranged from left to right, and taken by the author in different locations.

sectors. Therefore, their survival was “premised on their acceptance of inferior working conditions” (Bernhardt 5). The images below show empirical evidence of this claim, which demonstrate an over-representation of marginal identities in jobs such as at the gas stations, food services, restaurant workers, delivery jobs, et cetera.

The first image in Figure 2 shows a marginal body, represented through skin colour as non-white, working at a gas station, while the second one confirms a Black body working as a garbage collector. The third image shows a trolley attendant, who is marginalized as being non-white (even though it cannot be seen from the back), while the last image shows a restaurant worker, marginalized as being non-white and a woman, preparing the order for the delivery drivers. On the other hand, the set of four images in Figure 3 below depicts the bodies of delivery drivers and restaurant workers frozen in motion.

The first image in the series shows the subject, a marginal identity represented in skin color as non-white, reaching out for his car door,

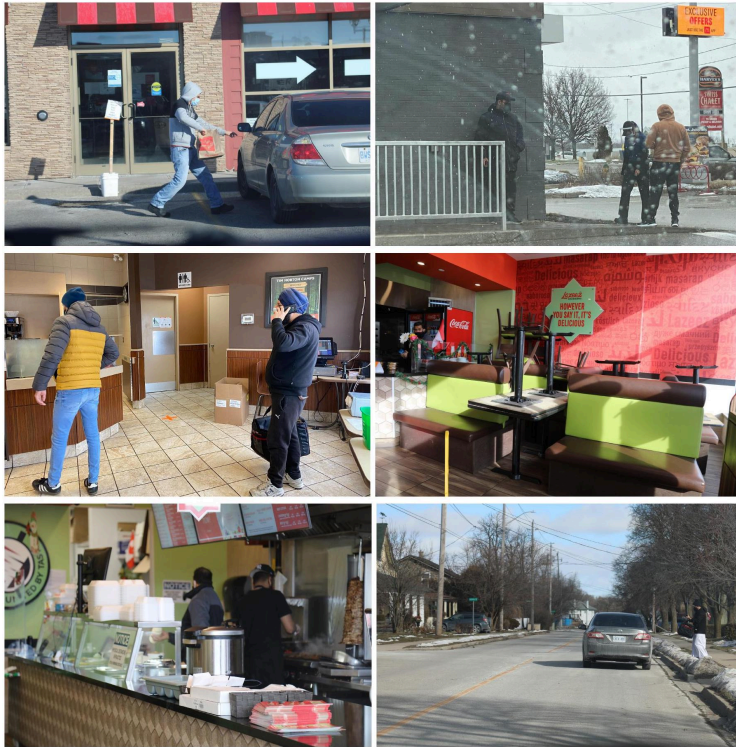


Figure 3: From left to right: Images of delivery drivers & food industry workers, by the author.

while the second image shows drivers waiting outside in the snow, also represented in their skin color as non-whites. The third image shows the drivers waiting inside the restaurant for delivery, which is not something every restaurant is offering during the pandemic. The drivers here has triple jeopardy due to their skin color (non-white), an expressive religious symbol (a turban associated with Sikhism), and language marginalization, as one of them was speaking a language other than English (or French). The next image shows the inside of a restaurant where the workers are waiting for the drivers to come in and pick up an order; the identities represented are marginal

by skin colour (non-white), and spoken language other than English (or French). The subsequent images explore the time and space of these essential workers, which reveal an overrepresentation of marginal bodies in the food delivery service. The last image shows both an ethnic and religious minority, traits that are considered marginalization through exclusions, going back to his car after completing a delivery. The observation reiterates the findings that immigrants, especially recent immigrants, work in the gig economy at a disproportionately higher rate than Canadian-born workers. Over one-third of all male gig workers are immigrants, (Jeon et al.) even though immigrants only make up about 24% of the Canadian labor force as a whole. Also, the income of a food delivery driver is far below the national average of $49,500 (Mojtehedzadeh ), which means they are subject to income discrimination.

The analysis of the two images below in Figure 4, a seemingly ordinary discursive act, reveals another aspect of the marginal identities. The reading of the two images (the second one is zoomed from the first image) reveals the prevalent anxiety and unease in the margin that Wendy Chun calls a "normal paranoid response to and of power" (3), which often drives the margin to do things differently and forces them to provide explanations for things otherwise obvious, as a testament to their acknowledgement and conformity to the dominant discourse.

The images show that the Cambridge Muslim Society was praising the front-line heroes by rendering prayer for their safety and well-

Figure 4: Images of a banner of Cambridge Muslim Society, by the author.

being; however, the group finds it necessary to provide an explanation for the word Allah in the bracket (God), which is not only redundant but also obviously never thought of reciprocally (who provides an explanation for God in the bracket!). The violence brought about through the process of identification and exclusion renders the marginal body an extension to a dominant body, which also compels the margin to endorse such pronouncements. The need for this sort of conformity comes from the fear of backlash against marginal identities, which continuously puts the burden of proof on them; therefore, they learn to endorse cultural differences that are not too different or expressive. The fear of backlash comes as a reminder for the marginal groups every once in a while; for instance, when Alexandre Bissonnette went on a shooting spree killing six innocent people at the Quebec Islamic Cultural Centre on January 29, 2017 (Page), or the most recent terrorist attack, by the 20-year-old white male suspect Nathaniel Veltman perpetrated on a Muslim family due to their faith that took four innocent lives on June 6, 2021 (Bell et al.; Coletta).

By the same token, the need for the margin to accept the essentialized, stereotypical representation that the process of identification renders possible often leads them to endorse that identity. Because the marginal groups, knowingly and/or unknowingly, far too often conform to these stereotypes for their survival that the dominant narrative enforces through the process of Othering. The ways the marginal bodies themselves become wary of these discursive texts are visible in their desire to conform, in an attempt to become what the dominant narrative suggests (and wants) them to become: the exoticized, commodified, sexualized, eroticized "other" ready for consumption, ready to feed the normative body's primal desire to assert power and privilege (hooks 36).

So they conform to the discourse of being exotic, conform through discursive practices such as the one that reveals itself on the advertisement board of the plaza above (Figure 5). A visual analysis of the content shows that the plaza Heritage Square accommodates several businesses including a dental office, convenience store, physiotherapy office, laundromat, cremation service, salon, pizza shop, et cetera, most of which announce something they do: the nature of the busi-

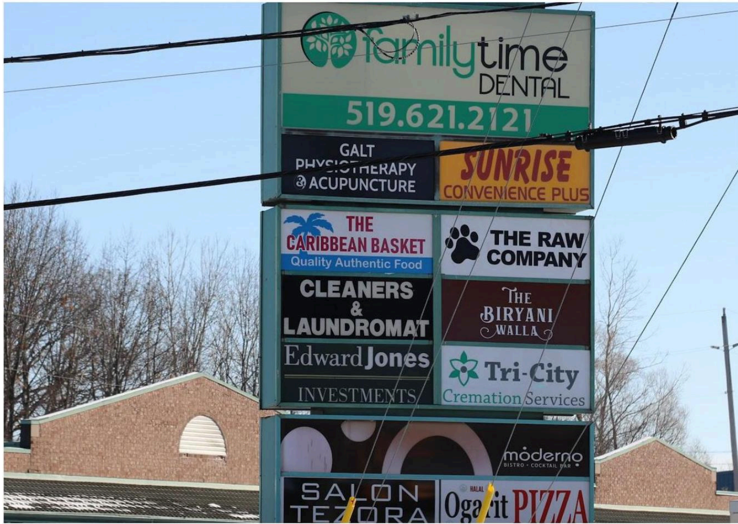


Figure 5: Image of an advertising board photographed by the author.

ness, or the product. The only exception to this is The Caribbean Basket that has offered something extra through the catchy tagline that reads "Quality Authentic Food," thus exoticizing the food, flavour, and identity therein. But what does authentic food really mean? Is the chef Caribbean, or is it the ingredients that are claimed to be authentic? Is it something brought from the Caribbean, or is it the process of making the food that makes it authentic? It becomes complicated following this line of argument, and this is not the proper place for that debate either; however, the pronouncement of such authenticity makes the Basket a desirable commodity/place for consumption. The question of authenticity mentioned here is in reference to how the margin is forced to conform, so as not to be perceived too differently. It is another way of endorsing the exotic (in a discourse of authenticity) for the purpose of consumption (eating the other) by the dominant culture, even though within the political discourse Canada is projected as a mosaic, where it is depicted as diverse and multicultural. Also, the issue of authenticity is crucial, as the margin, even a second or third generation of Canadian born

to immigrant parents and raised here since birth, often has to respond to their *authenticity* against a forced marginalization through the type of question: “but where are you really from?” The proposition which the margin often exploits in its favour. They are always the first to be blamed and avoided during the onslaught of global happenings like the COVID-19 pandemic and related health crises, as throughout history, people of Asian descent; marginalized groups including religious, ethnic, and racial minorities; and immigrants have been stigmatized and targeted through the process of othering, systematic racism, and xenophobia (Gover et al. 648-653, Dionne & Turkmen E213). Also, marginalized identities, immigrants, and low-income residents have been at a higher risk of contracting and dying from the disease: “Similar to the U.S. and U.K., urban regions in Canada with higher shares of Black residents have been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19” (Choi et al. 159), which reiterates the existing racial discrimination against marginal groups. However, these positions can flip, and a dominant position can become a subordinate one in a moment. For example, a restaurant, formerly a dominant space, has now become marginal because of the pandemic. A once-vibrant place, such as the mall, has now turned peripheral; a once-bustling place has now become vacant, extra, as the following images reveal.

Through a similar token, a truck driver occupying the road in a dominant position can become marginal once s/he changes position and becomes a biker. In the literal sense of the meaning, cycling on the edges inside the demarcated white line drawn by the power (authority), as seen in the image below where other mechanical vehicles now dominate the road.

## CONCLUSION

The space of the margin is ambiguous and contains cultural hybrids where identities can often change their relative positions. However, marginal identities, in all the nuances of the term, get excluded from the professional sectors due to systemic discrimination and consigned to occupy precarious jobs, as well as to

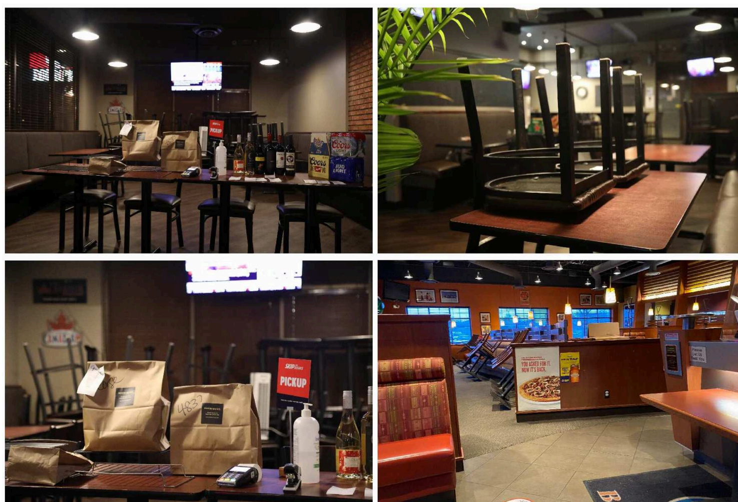


Figure 6: A once-vibrant and dominant place turns marginal during COVID.

Figure 7: Images of flipped positions, from a dominant to a marginal. Photos by the author.

informal sectors referred to as the gig economy—a position that can be confirmed through observation. Spaces of the margin are also prone to backlash, especially in vulnerable times where the burden lies with the margin to prove their innocence against any such misrepresentations, which ultimately pushes them toward conformity or assimilation. Therefore, the idea of Canadian society being a mosaic of different cultures is rendered problematic and dubious, as a dom-

inant discourse looms out of the spatial practices that unsettles that claim. This suspicion, occupying a spatiotemporal condition of always being reminded of the vulnerability of that claim, of living at the edges, often wary of being judged and gazed at from a position of hierarchy produces anxiety, and in worst case paranoia. These exclusions, the traits such as the pronouncement of the language, colour of skin, expressions of religious symbols, et cetera, all melt down to a body politic: a process of becoming. Thus, marginalization becomes a process of becoming that the grand narrative suggests, spatiotemporal isolation that appropriates and tolerates the margin within the schema only as long as it is within the cultural limits that are considered acceptable and does not challenge the discursive practices—anything beyond that is abnormal, considered too exotic for consumption.

## WORKS CITED

Alvesson, Mats, and Kaj Skoldberg. *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research.* 2nd ed., SAGE Publications, 2009.

Bannerji, Himani. "The Paradox of Diversity: The Construction of a Multicultural Canada and 'Women of Color.'" *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 23, no. 5, 2000, pp. 537-560.

Barthes, Roland, and Stephen Heath. *Image, Music, Text.* Hill and Wang, 1977.

Bell, Phillip. "Content Analysis of Visual Images." *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, SAGE Publications, 2004, pp. 10-34.

Bell, Stewart, et al. "London Attack Was Latest of Canada's 'Most Deadly' Form of Extremism, National Security Adviser Says." *Global News*, 8 June 2021, https://globalnews.ca/news/7931790/london-attack-canadas-most-deadly-extremism/.

Bernhardt, Nicole S. "Racialized Precarious Employment and the Inadequacies of the Canadian Welfare State." *SAGE Open*, vol. 5, no. 2, Apr. 2015, doi: 10.1177/2158244015575639.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture.* Routledge, 1994.

Choi, Kate H., et al. "Studying the Social Determinants of COVID-19 in a Data Vacuum." *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2021, pp. 146-64, doi: 10.1111/cars.12336.

Coletta, Amanda. "Four Muslim Family Members in Canada Killed in 'Targeted' Attack, Police Say." *Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/06/07/canada-london-vehicle-attack-hate-veltman/. Accessed 10 June 2021.

Cotton, Charlotte. *Photography Is Magic.* 1st ed., Aperture, 2015.

de Kock, Leon. "Interview With Gayatri Spivak: New Nation Conference in South Africa." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 23, no. 3, July 1992.

Dionne, Kim Yi, and Fulya Felicity Turkmen. "The Politics of Pandemic Othering: Putting COVID-19 in Global and Historical Context." *International Organization*, vol. 74, no. S1, Dec. 2020, pp. E213-30, doi: 10.1017/S0020818320000405.

Foucault, Michel. "The Order of Discourse." *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, edited by Robert Young, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, pp. 48-78.

Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowiec. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, pp. 22-27.

Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text*, vol. 25/26, 1990, pp. 56-80, doi: org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.2307/466240.

Gover, Angela R., et al. "Anti-Asian Hate Crime During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality." *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 45, no. 4, Aug. 2020, pp. 647-67, doi: 10.1007/s12103-020-09545-1.

Green, Marcus. "Gramsci Cannot Speak: Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci's Concept of the Subaltern." *Rethinking Marxism*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2002, pp. 1-24.

Habermas, Jurgen. "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopaedia Article." *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, John Wiley & Sons, 1989, pp. 75-79.

Hall, Stuart. "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, Sage, 1996, pp. 1-17.

hooks, bell. "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance." *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, South End Press, 1992, pp. 21-39.

Jameson, Frederic. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Indiana UP, 1995.

Jeon, Sung-Hee, et al. "Measuring the Gig Economy in Canada Using Administrative Data." *Statistics Canada*, 16 Dec. 2019, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2019025-eng.htm.

Kovach, Margaret. *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts*. University of Toronto Press, 2009.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, 1991.

Massey, Doreen. *Space, Place, and Gender*. University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

Mojtehedzadeh, Sara. "Their Work Is Keeping Canada Safe. But They Earn a Fraction of the National Average." *Toronto Star*, 31 March 2020, https://www.thestar.com/business/2020/03/31/these-workers-are-keeping-canada-safe-but-they-earn-a-fraction-of-the-national-average.html.

Muybridge, Eadweard. *Image Viewer - Victorian Popular Culture - Adam Matthew Digital*. n.d., https://www-victorianpopularculture-amdigital-co-uk.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/Documents/Images/EXEBD_61975/0. The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum.

Page, Julia. "Quebec City Mosque Shooter Sentenced to at Least 40 Years in Prison." *CBC News*, 8 Feb. 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/alexandre-bissonnette-sentence-quebec-city-mosque-shooting-1.4973655.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturization*. Routledge, 1992.

Premeaux, Sonya. "The Flying Horse: Eadweard Muybridge's Contribution to Motion Study." *Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2003, pp. 36-51, http://ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/scholarly-journals/flying-horse-eadweard-muybridges-contribution/docview/203930493/se-2?accountid=15182.

Schwartz, Dona. "Visual Ethnography: Using Photography in Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Sociology*, vol. 12, no. 2, Summer 1989, pp. 119-54, doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00988995.

Sharma, Sarah. *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*. Duke University Press, 2014.

Stanczak, Gregory C. "Inner-City Children in Sharper Focus: Sociology of Childhood and Photo Elicitation Interviews." *Visual Research Methods*, edited by Gregory C Stanczak, SAGE Publications, 2007, pp. 167-196, http://www.doi.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.4135/9781412986502.

Stewart, Kathleen. "Weak Theory in an Unfinished World." *Journal of Folklore Research*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2008, pp. 71-82.

Van Dijk, Teun A. "Ideology and Discourse Analysis." *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2006, pp. 115-40, doi: 10.1080/13569310600687908.

Wallerstein, Immanuel Maurice. *The Modern World-System, Vol. 1. E-Book*. University of California Press, 2011, https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/2027/heb.31242.

## IMAGE NOTES:

Figure 1: *The Horse in Motion,* Muybridge. The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum. EXEBD 61975. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Victorian Popular Culture.

Figure 2: All images taken by the author at different locations.

Figure 3: Images of the delivery drivers (faces unrecognizable) taken by the author at different locations.

Figure 4: Images taken by the author of a mosque and banner of Cambridge Muslim Society.

Figure 5: Image of an advertising board photographed by the author.

Figure 6: Images of a restaurant during the pandemic—a vibrant and dominant place now becomes marginal. Photos by the author.

Figure 7: Images of flipped positions, from a dominant to a marginal. Photos by the author.

## NOTES

1. Lefebvre identified representational spaces as the ones that embody complex symbolisms, either coded or not, but linked to the underground side of social life, and art. The representations of space have to be lived first in order for someone to perceive the representational spaces, which are spaces imagined by writers, philosophers, and artists.↩

2. It might be necessary here to explain what the term "spatiotemporal" means; for example, Canada came into being in the year 1867, was not in existence before, and may not exist forever. The geographical boundaries of nation-states are also something not fixed; therefore, any mention of space is always in relation to time. For example, it would be impossible for two people to meet if only a temporal reference is provided (If one says, "I will meet you tomorrow at 11am," then the question would be, "but where?"). Similarly, if only spatial reference is given ("I will meet you at Eaton Centre," then the obvious question would be, "but when?"). Thus, it is always spatiotemporal, and therefore, the condition of the margin discussed in this paper is in relation to the discursive practices of the contemporary Canadian society, which is historically grounded in a colonial settler society.↩