

Diasporic Civic Organizations (DCOs), Cyberspace, and Superdiverse Places: Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN GEOGRAPHY
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

May 2026

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how diasporic civic organizations (DCOs) navigate the intersecting dynamics of superdiversity, digitization, and urban inequality through a case study of Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto. Drawing on mixed methods, including census analysis, institutional ethnography, and cyberethnography, the research investigates how DCOs respond to economic marginalization, intergenerational tensions, and shifting forms of civic engagement across both neighbourhood spaces and cyberspace.

Grounded in critical human geography, this research examines superdiversity by foregrounding structural inequalities and civic invisibility within highly diverse urban settings. It situates DCOs within the third sector and interprets their practices through Polanyian concepts of reciprocity and the double movement, alongside Gibson-Graham's framework of diverse and solidarity economies. The findings show that DCOs play a vital role in fostering social support, economic resilience, and cultural belonging, while simultaneously contending with resource constraints, labour precarity, and the uneven demands of digital transformation.

The dissertation demonstrates that digitization has both expanded and complicated diasporic civic engagement, reshaping organizational forms, outreach strategies, and transnational networks. However, these transformations are deeply conditioned by existing social and spatial inequalities. By linking place-based experiences with digital practices, this research offers a multi-scalar understanding of how DCOs operate as critical forms of collective support and resistance. Ultimately, it contributes to scholarship on migration, diaspora, and urban studies by highlighting the adaptive capacities and limitations of grassroots organizations in building more inclusive and equitable futures in superdiverse places.

Acknowledgements

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

This dissertation is the culmination of a long-winded journey that precedes my post-secondary studies. I want to thank my mother and father, who were my first teachers and instilled the importance of learning and education from a young age. I am also lucky to have an older sister who has been like a parent in her support, and a younger sister who has always kept me up to date on trends in the world and in tune with the next generation.

I am fortunate to have a remarkably talented and supportive committee. I am indebted to Professor Emerita Valerie Preston, who has been there during my master's and PhD - a significant mentor and counsel for many years - always pushing me to do better. She has spent countless hours reading and providing feedback on this dissertation and on my other works. I am grateful to Professor Philip Kelly and Professor Michael Nijahwan for their valuable feedback and guidance along the way. I have benefited further from the company of my colleagues at York University and in the Department of Geography. And the numerous colleagues in the third sector who work hard everyday to improve our society. I also appreciate the York RDC and its staff for critical access to Statistics Canada data.

The unwavering love and support of my wife have made this journey easier, as well as the joy and antics of our baby daughter. Also, thank you to all my close friends, who have been there for me (special shoutout to Sumo for sharing her expertise on data mapping approaches).

If you are reading this, I sincerely hope that this labour of love will be of benefit to you.

All praise is due to Allah.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Overview

Human geographers have long posited that advances in contemporary transportation and communication technologies are accelerating global flows of people and goods, but these developments have also deepened spatial disparities and created unequal access to mobility, resources, and connectivity (Barnes & Christophers, 2018; Dodgshon, 1999; Massey, 1999). The trends of globalization and digitization reshape our world in ways that increase the significance of spatial analysis (Barnes & Christophers, 2018). Rather than flattening time and space, the growing entanglements between different scales spurred by advances in communication and transportation technologies - and the social, cultural, and economic relations embedded within - requires more nuanced spatial analysis than ever before (Ash et al., 2018; Barnes & Christophers, 2018). Hence, across cultural (Mitchell et al., 2019), economic (Barnes & Christophers, 2018), and digital (Ash et al., 2018) domains of human geographic research, the quest continues for novel conceptual and empirical insights into the deep-seated structural inequalities and variegated positionalities that have been produced by accelerating globalization and digitization.

In the context of international migration, transnational diasporas and urban settlement, variegated spatial and social experiences are especially relevant. A member of a diaspora lives and works in a localized environment while maintaining some social, cultural, and economic ties to distant places of origin courtesy of technological advancements. For the Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto and the diasporic civic organizations (DCOs) studied here, the multiscalar nature of civic engagement is a defining characteristic. The DCOs originate and operate within localized urban

spaces, such as neighbourhood community centres, while also representing and embodying the rich tapestry of intersectional identities and transnational networks of their stakeholders. As proposed by Crenshaw (1989,1991), intersectionality describes co-constituted identities. A person has multiple social identities, e.g., race, gender, and class. These identities do not simply stack one on top of each other, rather, they interact to create unique and compounding forms of discrimination. A Black woman, for example, does not have separate experiences of racism and sexism; she experiences both simultaneously in ways that neither framework alone can fully capture (see Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). The integration challenges facing diasporic women from racialized backgrounds in urban centres where colonial legacies are entrenched are often investigated using an intersectional lens (see Brah, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2019).

Transnationalism, as used here, refers to the cross-border processes that link a place of origin with a place of reception for migrants as they form transnational social networks (see Schiller et al., 1992). Studies of transnational diasporas emphasize that advancements in telecommunication, travel and related infrastructures have heightened the importance of spatial analysis and opened novel avenues of geographic research (Mitchell et al., 2019; Tololyan, 2010). Moreover, acknowledging the intersectionality of identities within diasporic groups can help avoid essentialization by considering multiple dimensions of identity. The latter approach builds on nuanced understandings of developmental, psychological, and biological factors for a fuller understanding of social experiences (see Antonsich, 2018).

For understanding urban diasporic life, Glick-Schiller and Çağlar (2008) posits that cities should be studied as layered assemblages of place-making projects, rather than simple containers of diversity. In other words, what matters is not only where people are located but how they relate to and transform those places through their social, cultural, and economic practices (see Mitchell et

al., 2019). Place-based and spatialized thinking can help researchers deconstruct the variegated social, cultural, and economic experiences of different groups within the same urban setting. The acknowledgement and analysis of spatial variegation is crucial for making sense of social and economic inequalities within contemporary urban regions where migrants settle. Across social science disciplines from regional studies to critical human geography, there is growing interest in how places are produced through social, economic, cultural, and spatial processes, and how uneven development manifests in the everyday geographies of residents (see Clarke, 2013; Hall, 2017; Phillimore, 2023).

Diasporas do not merely move from one location to another; their journeys are characterized by transnational practices that involve ongoing connections with their places of origin and reception (Ehrkamp, 2020; Kok & Rogers, 2017). Thus, it is not enough to study migration as a linear process, since people often engage in multiple migrations over their lifetimes, influenced by factors such as economic opportunities, familial ties, and social networks (Bernard & Perales, 2021; Conway & Potter, 2007; Hagan & Thomas Wassink, 2020). In this research, the terms migrant and immigrant refer to the first generation, people who leave their places of origin to settle in new places. The first-generation are individuals born in the nation-state of Bangladesh, as identified in Canadian national census data. Migration is a fundamental prerequisite for the formation of diaspora, a process where migrants maintain connections with their place of origin and other transnational networks over time, despite physical dispersion (Kok & Rogers, 2017; Tololyan, 2010). Diaspora involves the maintenance of transnational networks and cultural heritage across generations, regardless of geography. Beyond the first-generation, the terms generation 1.5 and second generation refer to children of migrants, whose settlement and integration experiences are often different from those of the first-generation. Generation 1.5 individuals are born abroad and

immigrate (often with family) to a new place at a young age and simultaneously navigate their parents' heritage and that of the place of reception (see Rumbaut, 2012). Second-generation or generation 2 individuals are born in the place of reception to first-generation parents, which should foster greater integration while also allowing meaningful engagement with their parents' cultural roots and heritage (Kasinitz et al., 2004; Portes & Zhou, 1993).

There is little agreement about the ages of first, 1.5 and second generations. The concept of generation 1.5, those who migrate as children and are shaped by both their origin and destination cultures lacks a single, agreed-upon age boundary. Rumbaut (2012), who helped popularize the term, identified children who migrate between ages 6 and 12 as the clearest example of this in-between generation, old enough to carry memories of their places of origin but young enough to be deeply formed by the new one¹. The second generation, Bangladeshi-Canadians who are born in Canada, have no experience living in Bangladesh, unlike many of their first-generation parents who were born and grew up in Bangladesh before emigrating.

The ages of immigrant generations differ with the first generation older than either the 1.5 or second generations. The 1.5 generation also tends to be older on average than the second generation. Within each generation, age-group definitions also vary because each group follows a distinct developmental and integration timeline, shaped by age at arrival and context of incorporation (Rumbaut, 2012). Because the pace of integration and the transition to adulthood differ across the generations, a single fixed age range risks obscuring generation-specific experiences, and researchers often adjust their age boundaries accordingly. For example, consider the definition of youth as a stage in the life course. In Canada, youth are defined officially by

¹ The generation 1.5 age of migration is important because it represents a phase of life before the child grows up and enters secondary school in the place of reception. In the case of Rumbaut, his studies focused on children of migrants in the United States.

Statistics Canada as people between 15 and 24, though reports examining labour markets and housing often extend that range to ages 29 or even 34, reflecting the reality that young adults are taking longer to reach economic independence (Statistics Canada, 2018, 2023). This study follows that convention, using "youth" to refer to people up to age 29 given that it discusses views about social and economic outcomes among young people which may be taking longer to attain today (see Statistics Canada, 2018, 2023). These conventions illustrate how age is less a rigid dividing line than a flexible lens that researchers calibrate to the life transitions and social conditions they are trying to understand. This study focuses on the civic engagement of the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora in Toronto across different generations and age groups.

In this research, civic engagement refers to activities such as working, volunteering, donating, and joining third sector organizations to address local (urban) issues by pooling expertise and resources (see Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). Civic engagement involves voluntary activities beyond the domestic (household) and market spheres (Bloemraad et al., 2022). The geographic scope of civic engagement is debated, with some scholars emphasizing local belonging to cities or neighborhoods (Antonsich, 2018), while others view the civic sphere as encompassing issues from state citizenship to neighborhood belonging (Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). These types of debates occur often in geographic research where key concepts such as civic engagement must be defined within the context of their usage. For example, location and place are foundational concepts in human geography, offering distinct but complementary insights into our interactions with the surrounding environment. Location generally refers to a fixed point in space, identified by coordinates or physical attributes. Location is a social construct influenced greatly by historical, political, and cultural processes that becomes meaningful through the activities, representations, and power relations that unfold within it (Agnew, 2011). Whereas place is a space imbued with

social experience, memory, practice, and symbolic value (Cresswell, 2004, 2015). Place shapes behaviours, attachment, collaboration, and conflict. Whether understood as neighbourhood, housing complexes, or informal gathering sites, places are always relational and embedded in broader power structures. These fundamental differences are important to understand when speaking about variegated spatial experiences and diasporic groups who navigate multiple scales simultaneously.

The growing entanglement between diasporic life and digitization further complicates how diasporic civic engagement unfolds. Digitization involves shifts in communication technologies and the relational, affective dimensions of transnational engagement. Madianou and Miller's (2013) concept of polymedia highlights how migrants choose between digital platforms not only for their technical function but also based on emotional and social considerations. Digital connectivity is shaped by unequal power relations, personal histories, and the affective labour of maintaining connections, mediating, but not dissolving, spatial differences in the lives of migrants (Moran, 2023).

The current widespread usage of digital technologies, e.g., laptops and smartphones, to connect and communicate across distances (Ash et al., 2018; Zook et al., 2004), have made them a staple of daily life in Global North cities where internet connectivity and computer accessibility are commonplace (Brinkerhoff, 2009). For diasporas, multiple forms of connectivity, from viewing ethnic news channels on satellite television (Karim, 2003) to online forums to discuss social, cultural and economic issues about their places of origin and reception (Axel, 2005; NurMuhammad et al., 2016), play vital roles in maintaining economic, social and cultural ties across borders. With digitization of ties and links between diasporic members living in distant places, the term digital diaspora has emerged. Digital diaspora describes how groups use digital

tools to maintain social, economic, and political ties across borders (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Ponzanesi, 2020; Vekemans, 2019). Digital telecommunication platforms intensify transnational networks, enabling interactions across borders as members navigate different spatial, social, cultural, and economic contexts (Kok & Rogers, 2017; Ponzanesi, 2020). Digital diasporas also leverage online platforms to maintain connections, coordinate actions, and amplify their voices through civic engagement (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Sahoo & Shome, 2024).

Cyberspace arises from the complicated entanglement of human actors and digital technologies that include but are not limited to computers, servers, the internet, codes, coders and technology users (Ash et al., 2018; Garcia et al., 2009). This research extensively grapples with cyberspace and how it significantly shapes diasporic civic engagement and continuously blurs the boundaries between different geographic scales (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Mitchell, 2019). Diasporas often navigate a web of connections that span multiple places, facilitated by digital technologies and influenced by diverse social, economic, cultural and political dynamics. In practical terms, digital platforms enable migrants to maintain communication with family and friends in distant places, share experiences, and access resources (Vochin, 2023). The emergence of digital transnational spaces allows for the continuous exchange of cultural, social, and economic ideas and resources through cyberspace, which lead to the emergence and growth of contemporary digital diasporas (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Nur-Muhammad et al., 2016). However, this research goes beyond the personal aspirations and experiences of diasporic individuals and their digital engagements via cyberspace, to expand the scope of investigation to their collective communication and collaboration when they come together to mobilize through DCOs.

The intersection between diaspora, civic engagement, and digitization

Diasporic organizations facilitate social bonds and the development of built spaces where religious, cultural and national identities are interpreted, (re)defined and internalized (Kastoryano, 1999) through different programs and services within built and digital spaces of diasporic solidarity (Brinkerhoff, 2009). Diasporic members build organizations that focus on civic engagement through mobilizing social and cultural solidarities which are adapted based on local interpretations of diasporic experiences (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Kastoryano, 1999). While civic engagement is often locally rooted (Antonsich, 2018), diasporic experiences are often rooted in transnational networks and intersectional identities, leading to their civic engagements meshing multiple scales of activity (Kok and Rogers, 2017). As Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad (2008) posits, civic engagement in contemporary urban regions encompasses issues ranging from national citizenship to individual belonging to places of settlement. However, various conceptions of place, be it a neighbourhood, a city or a region (Glick-Schiller & Caglar., 2008). shape and frame understanding of civic engagement. For example, Antonsich (2018) argues that civic engagement rooted in local belonging to a city or neighbourhood is a mechanism to cope with a lack of attachment to the nation-state. When a group of diasporic individuals come together to address some shared interests and concerns, we often see the formation of DCOs. These DCOs are complex entities, existing within the fold of the third sector, which are shaped by the confluence of transnational networks and intersectional identities among their stakeholders.

The third sector includes many different organizations such as cooperatives, mutual societies, voluntary organizations, foundations, and social enterprises, which generally prioritize social objectives (equality and solidarity) over business (market-exchanges and profit-seeking) goals (Gibson-Graham, 2008). The third sector often emphasizes its commitment to the values of

mutualism, altruism, and community (DeVerteuil, 2015). DCOs are a unique actor within the third sector that enable diaspora members to connect, commemorate their cultural heritage, and advocate for their social and economic needs through providing critical services such as language classes, cultural festivals, recreational gatherings, assistance accessing housing, and employment (see Bhuyan et al. 2021; Rouf, 2025). DCO programs and services are often shaped by what Brinkerhoff (2009) describes as the condition of the diaspora in a locality, making local neighbourhoods a useful analytical unit of research (see Stringer, 2014). DCOs, like other third sector actors, tend to focus on the civic interests of their stakeholders within locales where they have settled in notable numbers despite the prevalence of cyberspace and transnationalism linkages (see Kok and Rogers, 2017). Regardless of scale and scope, DCO programs and services are inspired by shared social and cultural consciousness rooted in the diaspora's collective imagination and perceived memory of geographic and historical experiences (see Brah, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2019).

Digital platforms play a critical role in how contemporary DCOs operate, providing novel spaces for diasporic civic engagement, a significant reconfiguring of how we think about possible scope, and site of action (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). Digital diasporas, and their organizations, can have a wide transnational reach, using online resources to challenge dominant narratives and advocate for social justice, especially during times of conflict or crisis when there is a need to aid relief efforts, mobilize protests, or influence politics, and policy outcomes from a distance (Bernal, 2006; Hess & Korf, 2014).

This research centres on a local diaspora, Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto, who take part in civic engagement within local neighbourhoods of settlement as well as across digital platforms. This work engages with key debates on the spatially distributed and multidimensional nature of diasporic

identities and practices (Blunt, 2007; Brettell, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2019). Through their DCOs, diaspora members collectively navigate and cultivate their transnational networks and intersectional identities, which go on shape and be shaped by their organizations. By examining diasporic civic engagement across built and cyber spaces, this research contributes to contemporary human geographic scholarship within migration, diaspora, and digitization studies.

1.2 Reassessing Superdiversity Through a Place-Based Case Study

This research responds to Vertovec's (2019) call for a reassessment of the concept of superdiversity. Such a reassessment involves both reaffirming the concept's interdisciplinary relevance - from sociolinguistics to policy studies - and critically rethinking its implications within migration, diaspora, and digitization research. As urban neighbourhoods grow increasingly superdiverse, traditional integration models that assume a dominant 'majority' culture are proving inadequate (Crul, 2016). The following paragraphs investigate how superdiversity can offer better insights into shifting urban demographics and highlight conceptual challenges to binary frameworks of state citizenship and narrowly defined local integration (see Crul, 2016; Fincher et al., 2019).

International migration has reshaped urban centres globally, piquing the interest of contemporary human geographers and other social scientists. Stuart Hall remarked that the defining question of the 21st century will be how to live with diversity, while Doreen Massey reflects on the consequent tribulations of living in harmony in places of 'throwntogetherness' (Valentine, 2008). The practical challenges of living together amicably and the opportunities for meaningful civic engagement within superdiverse places are enough to keep researchers, civic leaders and policy makers busy for some time to come (see Antonsich, 2018; Peterson, 2017; Sealy, 2018). The research presented

here, responds to an important call within academic and policy circles to examine superdiverse urban centres, particularly those receiving large numbers of international migrants and face profound levels of social and economic inequalities (Hall, 2017, Phillimore, 2023).

Superdiversity has emerged as an important concept within contemporary migration and diaspora research (Aptekar et al., 2020; Berg et al., 2019; Crul, 2016; Hall, 2017; Meissner et al., 2023). that can help advance nuanced understandings of contemporary diversity within urban regions where increasing numbers of international migrants settle. This research presents a grounded case study using the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), referred primarily to as Toronto hereafter, unless noted otherwise. Toronto is a compelling site for superdiversity study given widespread demographic shifts catalyzed by waves of international migration post-World War II (Anisef and Lanphier, 2003; Boyd & Vickers, 2000). Although Toronto spans a large geographic area, it is subdivided into smaller statistical areas called census tracts (CTs)². Superdiverse places in Toronto where many diaspora members live are expected to exhibit two characteristics: there is no ethnic majority, and the number and size of different ethnic groups are 'substantial' (Crul, 2016). Moreover, within superdiverse places, intersectional identities will shape diasporic experiences and create social, cultural, and economic challenges for racialized diasporas (see Brah, 1996; Hall, 2017; Kok and Rogers, 2017; Phillimore, 2023).

In the Canadian context, Toronto stands as the country's most populous and geographically expansive migrant-receiving urban centre. It functions both as a key national and regional

² Statistics Canada frame census tracts (CTs) as small, relatively stable geographic areas with a population between 2,500 and 8,000 persons. Whereas the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), the largest urban region in Canada, consists of 16 cities, townships and hamlets, with over 6 million residents and 5,000 square kilometers of land. The namesake City of Toronto is the most well recognized and populous segment of the CMA. CTs offer a more granular level of analysis, enabling researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the distinct social and spatial characteristics of different parts of the metropolitan area.

economic hub that attracts individuals from around the world in search of better opportunities (Brunelle et al., 2021) and as a city where policymakers and administrators often emphasize cultural diversity as one of its core strengths (Anisef & Lanphier, 2003). Toronto is comparable to other major gateway cities such as Los Angeles and London which are also characterized by high levels of migration and layers of diversity (de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2022; Fincher et al., 2019). The story of Toronto has been shaped by decades of federal multiculturalism policies and sustained waves of international migration (Al-Solaylee, 2016; Anisef & Lanphier, 2003). Despite its significance as a global migration hub, Toronto is often overshadowed by research about popular global cities like London and New York (see Albeda, 2020; Crul, 2016). The choice of Toronto as the site of study underscores its role as a leading migrant-receiving urban centre with substantial economic activity alongside deeply entrenched urban inequalities, exemplified by persistent poverty rates among newcomers and racialized groups (see City of Toronto, 2024; Hulchanski, 2010). This research begins from the premise that Toronto deserves greater attention in academic discussions of superdiversity, given that it provides fertile grounds for the examination of how different diasporic groups respond to systemic challenges through collective civic engagement.

This research adopts a critical superdiversity lens, asserting that the concept must engage with the structural inequalities evident in superdiverse urban settings, along with the forms of marginalization faced by some urban residents (Aptekar, 2020; Bauder, 2016; Berg et al., 2019; Hall, 2017; Phillimore, 2023). Within Toronto, DCOs play a vital role, not only by providing programs and services, but also cultivating a rich sense of social, cultural, and economic belonging as well as partaking in local advocacy to dismantle systemic barriers around them (see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Bhuiyan., 2019; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012; Shuva, 2020). This research advances superdiversity studies by investigating the pivotal role that DCOs can play in helping immigrants

navigate social and economic inequalities within contemporary urban centres. Through their efforts to address different forms of social and economic marginalization within the populations that they serve, DCOs can become critical agents of civic engagement and changemaking. In this respect, the investigation of Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto presents a unique and underexamined empirical case that not only enriches our understanding of superdiversity but also prompts a reassessment of the concept by highlighting how grassroots civic actors shape and sustain inclusive urban futures.

For over two decades, Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs have leveraged their rootedness in Toronto's east end to promote diasporic solidarity and deliver programs and services to several racialized and low-income neighbourhoods (see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2020, 2025). Toronto's relatively welcoming immigration policies coexist with deep social and economic disparities. Within urban centres like Toronto, racialized and low-income groups are left behind in fierce competition for control of material resources and opportunities in environments shaped by systemic inequalities rooted in histories and geographies of power and privilege within a settler-colonial society (see Fincher et al., 2019; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013). These contradictions, the coexistence of superdiversity and urban inequality, fuel the emergence of civic movements and organizations led by marginalized groups within the city (Anisef & Lanphier, 2003; Bhuyan et al., 2021). In recent years, Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs have proliferated, stepping in to fill critical service gaps and provide social, cultural, and economic support to racialized and marginalized segments of the local diasporic population (see Ahsan, 2015; see Halder, 2012; Ghosh, 2014a).

1.3 Centering Alternative Economic Thinking and Practices

This research examines the third sector through the broad lens of alternative economic thought and practices. This research draws on two historical and contemporary conceptual frameworks

underpinning alternative economic thinking and practices. The first is Polanyian substantivism and the interrelated concepts of reciprocity and the double movement which highlights the cultural and social ways that humans ensure material well-being. The second is solidarity economies popularized by Gibson-Graham (2006, 2008) which highlights the significant contributions of non-capitalist actors and practices within economic systems. By bringing Polanyi's historical insights into dialogue with Gibson-Graham's thoughts, this research aims to enrich empirical and theoretical understanding of the third sector.

The enduring importance of reciprocity and the double movement offers a relevant lens through which to analyze how third sector organizations contest and navigate the forces of neoliberal capitalism today. Polanyi (2001, p. 143) explains the historical proliferation of market exchange as "...the control of the economic system by the market is of overwhelming consequence to the whole organization of society: it means no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market. Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system." In Polanyi's view, a resistive double movement - a dialectical struggle between economic liberalization and social protections – would repeatedly recur throughout history (2001, p. 170), "Indeed, human society would have been annihilated but for protective countermoves which blunted the action of this self-destructive mechanism." Polanyi's (1944) stern warnings about the dangers of market society and widespread commodification of labour, land, and currency, resulting in the much-needed counter forces of the double movement resonate in contemporary landscapes of neoliberal capitalism (see Castles et al., 2011; Svitych, 2021). Moreover, with the passage of time, the double movement appears to be taking on different forms with recent technological innovations, such as the emergence of large-scale digital commons e.g.,

Wikipedia, seeking to protect society from the proliferation of market-exchange and commodification (see Wright, 2010).

Polanyian concepts of alternative economic thinking and practices can play an important role within contemporary human geographic analysis of economic processes and their variegated spatial impacts (see Peck, 2020). Polanyi's substantivist approach to economics remains an unfinished project - one that some contemporary economic geographers have begun to revisit and expand upon (Peck, 2020). The double movement is a response to the widespread commodification of money, labour, and land that Polanyi considered socially destructive and debilitating during the early stages of the industrial revolution in Western Europe. At that time, forced land enclosures and the expansion of poorhouses and factory labour across Western Europe caused immense human suffering. Numerous counter-movements, focused on providing social and economic supports to marginalized segments of the population such as poor factory workers, emerged to counter the harms inflicted by the abandonment of traditional social and cultural systems based on reciprocity rather than market exchanges for meeting material needs.

In addition to Polanyi, this research is greatly inspired by the voluminous works of feminist economic geographers Gibson-Graham, who advocate for a shift away from focusing on capital-centric perspectives towards non-capitalist economic activities. Gibson-Graham (2008) posits that many non-capitalistic economic practices go unnoticed and underappreciated within society. Gibson-Graham, through their extensive research and activism, calls for greater recognition of the value of unpaid labour and voluntary goodwill within existing economic systems, even capitalist systems. Gibson-Graham (2006, p. 60) strives, in their own words, towards the "...widening the identity of the economy to include all of those practices excluded or marginalized by a strong theory of capitalism." Through their works, Gibson-Graham cast a wide conceptual net to describe

economic activities that do not neatly fit under capitalism. Their research extensively uses ethnographies and participatory field work with different third sector organizations and stakeholders to enhance our understanding of "anticapitalocentric readings" (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 72). This use of ethnographic and participatory approaches to understand the third sector greatly influenced my own research methodology presented in chapter three.

The third sector is not merely a collection of organizations and their stakeholders operating between the state and markets but as sites where non-capitalist and alternative economic thinking and practices can thrive. Drawing on Gibson-Graham's (2006, 2008) solidarity economies framework, the third sector is approached in this research as potential sites for non-capitalist and alternative economic thinking and practices. Rather than viewing the economy as synonymous with capitalism and filled with solely capitalist activities related to profit-motives and market-exchanges, both Polanyi and Gibson-Graham have inspired generations of researchers to unearth the variegated forms of labour, exchange, and value that exist through unpaid care work, mutual aid, and reciprocal exchanges.

Central to solidarity economies are the critique of dominant capitalist logics and the recognition of diverse economic practices consistently emerging from within and across different sections of society (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008; Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2016). Contemporary third sector actors play a fundamental role in shaping solidarity economies across local and global contexts, beyond being seen as purely social or charitable entities without tangible material and economic impacts (Defourny & Develtere, 2009; Laville, 2010). The hybrid position of the third sector, situated between market and state, allows them to mediate between the thinking and practices that are popular within the private and public sectors and advocate strongly for the redistribution of resources as well as representation for marginalized groups within society

(Brandsen & Karré, 2011). Researchers have documented how the third sector frequently fills critical care gaps left by the state, functioning as critical social service providers (Milligan & Conradson, 2006). However, operating between the public and private sectors presents challenges with third sector actors often facing a double bind: they are increasingly embedded in governance networks and subject to audit regimes from public funders, while simultaneously facing creeping pressures from private-sector management models (see Martin, 2011, 2012; Preston et al., 2024). However, third sector actors also retain the capacity for resistance, particularly through collective action and ethical labour practices in the face of pressures from the public and private sectors (see Martin, 2011, 2012; Richmond & Shields, 2024).

This research draws on a growing body of geographic literature about the third sector's role in responding to social and economic marginalization and exclusion under austerity (see DeVerteuil et al., 2020; Milligan & Conradson, 2006; Mohan & Mohan, 2002). The erosion of public goods and services along with the dismantlement and offloading of state responsibilities, has left third sector organizations facing expanding mandates and shrinking resources (Amin, 2005; Berg et al., 2019; Kissane, 2010). While periods of social and economic upheaval, catalyzed by policies of austerity, creates opportunities for innovative and effective grassroots interventions, there are additional pressures on under-resourced third sector actors who serve marginalized groups, such as racialized and low-income individuals, within superdiverse urban environments (see Aptekar, 2020; Berg et al., 2019).

The third sector's entanglement with neoliberal urban governance and policies, where the outsourcing of state responsibilities to the sector risks transforming them into shadow agents of the state (see DeVerteuil et al., 2020; Martin, 2011, 2012; Preston et al., 2024; Richmond & Shields, 2024; Wolch, 1990). These precarious dynamics raise crucial questions about the

autonomy of third sector actors and whether they reinforce or resist the entrenchment of neoliberal capitalism. Furthermore, labour within the third sector is increasingly co-opted by state and market actors, weakening democratic decision-making and diminishing spaces for genuine economic empowerment within these institutions (Martin, 2011, 2012; Richmond & Shields, 2024; Wright, 2010). However, even within places where capital-centric thinking and practices dictate economic systems, there remains ample room to cultivate alternative practices of solidarity, reciprocity, and collective well-being (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

With all the opportunities and challenges facing the solidarity economies movement and third sector actors, this research presents a critical but cautiously optimistic view based on empirical evidence and conceptual insights. This research examines how the third sector can be more than victims of neoliberal austerity or shadow vessels of state and market interests and assesses where the third sector can create contested spaces that disrupt neoliberal capitalistic logic and its reproduction. The strategies that DCOs use to negotiate harmful policies and practices of austerity and labour precarity under neoliberal capitalism such as reciprocity, voluntarism, and goodwill are investigated. Better understanding how DCOs resist pressures to adopt capital-centric economic thinking and practices provides useful insights to assess their transformative potential in broader struggles for equality and justice within superdiverse urban settings.

DCOs, through the thinking and practices of their stakeholders, exemplify many of the core principles laid out by Polanyian substantivism and Gibson-Graham's solidarity economies. Through their practices of reciprocity, voluntarism, and mutual aid, DCOs can function as counter-movements to the encroachment of commodification and market logic into domains of care, belonging, and civic engagement (see Martin, 2011, 2012; Sheringham, 2025). Echoing Polanyi's notion of the double movement, these organizations arise not only in response to structural

dislocations such as austerity, precarious labour, or racialized exclusions, but also to reclaim civic life as a space rooted in relationality and social embeddedness (Castles et al., 2011; Polanyi, 2001; Svitych, 2021). In doing so, they assert a form of grounded resistance, demonstrating how social and cultural norms of reciprocity, transnational networks and localized solidarity endure even amidst neoliberal governance regimes.

Digitization and the rise of digital collectives have the potential to expand the terrain in which DCOs operate and resist (see Bernal, 2006; Brinkerhoff, 2009; Wright, 2010). While digital technologies risk intensifying surveillance, labour precarity, and resource disparities (Graham, 2011; Graham & Zook, 2013), they also present new arenas for collective coordination, cultural expression, and civic visibility (Greenberg & McAulay, 2009; Kok & Rogers, 2017). The emergent digital commons, exemplified by collectively managed websites, online campaigns, and virtual organizing platforms, reflect an evolving double movement in the digital age (see McMichael, 2023; Pfeiffer, 2021; Wright, 2010). Moreover, through their hybrid presence across built and cyber spaces, DCOs serve as vivid examples of what Gibson-Graham describe as the non-capitalist and alternative capitalist - spaces where unpaid labour, affective bonds, and collective governance challenge dominant economic paradigms (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008; Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2016). Similarly, DCOs not only meet the immediate needs of their stakeholders but also gesture toward broader imaginaries of alternative economic thinking and practices grounded in justice, care, and economic plurality.

1.4 Research Questions

This research investigates the impact of superdiversity and digitization on DCOs through three research questions. Each research question addresses distinct yet interconnected challenges that contemporary DCOs face given rapid social, economic, cultural, and technological changes.

1. How do DCOs address economic/occupational and multi-generational sociocultural challenges in a superdiverse context?
2. How has digitization impacted the organizational form and function of DCOs?
3. How do DCOs engage with the labour and technical processes required to go digital?

The first research question investigates how DCOs address intersecting economic, occupational, and multigenerational socio-cultural challenges within superdiverse urban settings. This inquiry foregrounds the critical support roles that DCOs can play in mitigating experiences of downward social mobility, economic exclusion and intergenerational tensions – key issues that negatively impact the experiences of racialized and low-income diaspora members within superdiverse urban settings.

The second research question investigates how digitization is reshaping civic engagement, namely core functions of the DCO such as volunteering, membership, outreach, and fundraising. The fieldwork for this research was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic - a period that triggered a rapid, real-time shift toward widespread digitization, fundamentally transforming many organizational functions. These disruptions have lasting implications for how DCOs operate and engage with their stakeholders. Some of the processes of digitization among DCOs may have already been underway before the pandemic and its associated shutdowns; the crisis primarily accelerated and deepened these ongoing transformations and their impacts on core functions such as funding, volunteering, staffing, program, and service delivery.

The final research question investigates how DCOs navigate the labour and technical demands associated with digitization. This involves a detailed investigation of the technical skills, technological platforms and human talents required to support program and service delivery via

cyberspace. It is vital to investigate the energy, time and other resources required for digitization within third sector organizations that rely heavily on goodwill and voluntarism - operating under significant monetary resource constraints - especially considering the preceding research question focused on different forms of economic challenges.

Together, these three research questions examine how DCOs navigate and reconfigure civic engagement within superdiverse urban neighbourhoods and cyberspace. The conceptual and empirical insights generated by this inquiry contribute to a growing interdisciplinary literature on diaspora, superdiversity, and digitization by offering new perspectives on how DCOs serve their diverse stakeholders across different sites. This work contributes to human geography research by foregrounding how DCOs actively reshape urban and digital landscapes under conditions of superdiversity and technological transformation. By linking neighbourhood-level urban practices to broader structural forces such as digitization, labour precarity, and neoliberal governance, this research offers a multi-scalar analysis of civic engagement. This research highlights the spatial dynamics of diasporic organizing across urban neighbourhoods and cyberspace, providing new insights into how place-based and digital forms of civic infrastructure mediate belonging, economic resilience, and civic visibility in superdiverse places.

How do DCOs Address Economic/Occupational and Multi-Generational Socio-Cultural Challenges in a Superdiverse Context?

This research presents a case study of DCOs serving Toronto's Bangladeshi Canadian population. The empirical discussion begins by analyzing the social and economic characteristics of census tracts with notable Bangladeshi Canadian populations, comparing them with different areas of Toronto as well as the non-Bangladeshi Canadian population within these areas. By examining these spatial and social patterns, the study reveals how intersectional identities are shaped by, and

embedded within, the broader dynamics of urban inequality in superdiverse settings. Rather than interpreting DCO strategies as reactive to the digitization surge during COVID-19, census data allows us to understand these responses as rooted in long-standing social, economic, and cultural disparities across urban neighbourhoods, caused by differences in race, migration status, gender, occupation, class, and other intersectional identities. In doing so, this research situates DCO civic interventions within the broader history and contemporary context of social, cultural, and economic exclusion in Canadian urban centres.

Among DCOs, occupation-focused organizations play a crucial role in addressing some of the challenges faced by highly skilled migrants (see Bhuiyan, 2019; Ye, 2023). Among first-generation Bangladeshi Canadians, many professionals, from doctors to accountants, experience loss of occupational status post-migration (see Bhuiyan, 2019; Halder, 2012). In response, Bangladeshi Canadians often establish occupation-focused DCOs to cope with deprofessionalization and the loss of social and economic status post-migration (Ahsan, 2015; Bhuiyan, 2019; Halder, 2012). However, there is limited inquiry and research about the inner workings of these DCOs, and the strategies used to mitigate the adverse effects of deprofessionalization and the loss of social and economic status among Bangladeshi Canadians (see Bhuiyan, 2019; Bhuyan et al., 2021; Halder, 2012). Further empirical inquiry can help us better understand how DCOs, rooted in the social and economic struggles of Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto, turn to civic engagement within superdiverse urban neighbourhoods and cyberspace to effectively address economic challenges such as occupational-status loss and deprofessionalization.

Furthermore, to better understand occupational and multi-generational sociocultural challenges within Toronto's superdiverse urban landscape, this research integrates a spatial analysis of census

data with ethnographic findings from the fieldwork. This mixed method analysis offers empirical insight into the superdiverse neighbourhoods where DCOs originate and operate, describing the social, cultural, and economic indicators such as income, education, housing, employment, and ethnocultural diversity of the populations living in superdiverse neighbourhoods. By mapping the social and spatial characteristics of the areas where Bangladeshi Canadians are most concentrated in Toronto, and where the studied DCOs originate, the census data helps illuminate the structural conditions to which these third sector actors respond through their programs and services. In addition, by drawing on a modified Shannon-Weiner index, this research evaluates superdiversity across Toronto's census tracts to capture the complex superdiverse environments in which DCOs operate. The quantitative analysis, based on census data, complements the research's focus on a place-based case study into DCO strategies to address economic/occupational and multi-generational socio-cultural challenges as outlined in the first research question.

Acknowledging the intersectional identities of diasporic members within superdiverse places, this research investigates multiple generations to investigate their involvement in DCOs (see Antonisch, 2018; Rouf, 2025; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). Generation 1.5 and the second generation, while more familiar with Canadian institutions than the first-generation, continue to face systemic barriers in education, employment, and social mobility (see Abada & Tenkorang, 2009; Kelly, 2014, 2015; Zaami, 2015) due to the enduring legacies of colonization and racism within Canadian cities (Liodakis & Satzewich, 2013). Residents from low-income neighbourhoods in Toronto (see Galabuzi, 2006; Hulchanski, 2010), including some of the next-generation adult children of racialized immigrants encounter barriers to securing stable, well-paying employment due to discriminatory hiring practices and limited access to professional networks and meaningful employment opportunities (Rouf, 2020; Zaami, 2015). Some next-generation adult children of

immigrants experience limited education and employment trajectories, especially racialized males, although in general exposure to Canadian institutions is helping many of them attain higher outcomes than their parents (see Abada & Tenkorang, 2009; Kaufmann, 2021; Kelly, 2014, 2015; Pendakur, 2021). Moreover, members of the 1.5 and second generations often serve as social, cultural, and linguistic intermediaries for first-generation family members, while simultaneously navigating exclusionary educational and employment systems that frequently undervalue their own diverse backgrounds and experiences (Kaufmann, 2021; Shields & Lujan, 2018; Taylor & Krahn, 2013). In response, many members of the 1.5 and second generation face complex identity negotiation processes as they navigate Canadian society while maintaining meaningful connections to their parent's cultural roots and practices (Kelly, 2014; Noh & Kaspar, 2003; Zaami, 2015). The social and cultural expectations that the adult children of immigrants navigate often result in intergenerational tensions within families, as parents' values and experiences may not always align with their children's (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Islam et al., 2021; Zaami, 2015).

In this research, it was important to present some of the serious social, cultural, and economic challenges facing young Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto and to consider the potential role of DCOs in helping the 1.5 and second-generation address these challenges. Many 1.5 and second-generation adults have come of age during a series of destabilizing global events, including 9/11, the Great Recession, and the COVID-19 pandemic, that have profoundly affected them and their families. These cumulative pressures have contributed to mental health struggles, deepening feelings of social isolation, and intensifying intergenerational tensions among the local diaspora in recent years (Islam et al., 2021). Some of these young Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto are now starting their own DCOs to address challenges facing diasporic youth in the neighbourhoods where they grew up as well as via cyberspace as documented in the empirical findings of this research.

How Has Digitization Impacted the Organizational Form and Function of DCOs?

This research analyzes DCO's use of digital tools and their impacts on membership, funding, employment, volunteering, and outreach activities. Since 2020, a destructive global pandemic has created a real-time experiment in digitization, on short notice, for individuals and organizations. Many activities had to go digital to comply with physical distancing requirements to reduce risk of viral disease transmission. Consequently, DCOs were forced to operate in cyberspace instead of the neighbourhood centres and local offices with which they were familiar. The disruption of core DCO functions such as membership, fundraising, employment, volunteering, and outreach, inevitably raises questions about the reshaping and reconfiguration of the economic, social, and cultural factors that shape diasporic aspirations and experiences (see Brah, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2019; Tololyan, 2010, 2018).

As digitization accelerates, researchers must adopt innovative methodologies to examine how built and cyber spaces intersect with civic engagement. The built urban spaces, such as neighbourhoods community centres and libraries (Berg et al., 2019) that have traditionally been seen as fertile grounds for civic engagement, have come under increasing empirical scrutiny for their effectiveness in fostering meaningful social networks and cross-cultural collaboration among diverse urban populations (Hall, 2017; Peterson, 2017; Valentine, 2008). Similarly, cyber spaces that are often celebrated for their accessibility and civic potential are not exempt from comparable challenges, with research showing that digitization can reinforce narrow, place-based affiliations within digital diaspora rather than fostering greater inclusion and solidarity across members (see Axel, 2005; Brinkerhoff, 2009; Sahoo & Shome, 2024).

With these tensions in sight about both built and cyber spaces and their potential to facilitate diasporic civic engagement, this research contributes to key emerging debates within migration,

diaspora, and digitization studies through a thorough investigation of how DCOs navigate 'roots, routes, and routers' (see Lim, 2018; Vekemans, 2019). Rather than focusing solely on the individual use of cyberspace for communication among digital diasporas, this research centres on how DCOs use websites, social media pages, and digital telecommunication tools to connect with stakeholders in order to foster shared social and cultural identities as well as coordinate different forms of civic engagement (see Brinkerhoff, 2009; Kok & Rogers, 2017; Ponzanesi, 2020). In doing so, this research demonstrates the transformative possibilities of cyberspace for enabling novel forms of civic engagement among diasporas as well as the serious challenges of collaboration and coordination across multiple geographies.

To fully understand how digitization reshapes the form and function of DCOs, it is crucial to situate these organizations within the complex social, cultural, and economic fabric of Toronto. Statistics Canada's census data serves as a vital tool for grounding this analysis, revealing how different migrant and diasporic groups often share the same urban spaces but experience vastly different outcomes in employment, education, income, and housing. These inequalities extend beyond the social and spatial realms; they are also digital. Digitization does not affect all groups or organizations equally (see Graham, 2011; Warschauer, 2004). This research investigates whether DCOs originating from superdiverse neighbourhoods with notable concentrations of low-income and racialized immigrant populations encounter additional barriers to accessing the digital infrastructure, technical training, and funding needed to scale up digital activities. This research closely investigates the concerns of DCOs about how resource inequalities shape organizational transitions from neighbourhood community centres to cyberspace, influencing their outreach capacity, staff workloads, and member engagement.

How do DCOs Engage with the Labour and Technical Processes Required to go Digital?

Digitization presents novel ways to communicate and collaborate with distant diasporic members who share social, cultural and economic interests (see Axel, 2005; Kok & Rogers, 2017; NurMuhammad et al., 2016). It also allows DCOs to communicate and collaborate with members of other diasporas and with non-diasporic third sector actors such as professional training organizations that share similar goals and mandates (see Shuva, 2020). Studying the impacts of digitization on DCOs involves understanding how these organizations navigate the complex labour and technical demands underpinning operations in cyberspace. This research not only highlights the adaptive capacities of DCOs but also interrogates whether digitization can meaningfully address some of the structural inequalities faced by diasporic groups in urban settings (see Brinkerhoff, 2009; Ponzanesi, 2020). By focusing on the behind-the-scenes work required to implement digital systems, from acquiring technical expertise to reallocating volunteer and staff time and energy, this research connects digital transformations to broader questions of equality, access, and sustainability facing DCOs within superdiverse urban places and cyberspace.

As noted earlier, census data is a critical tool for contextualizing the social and economic challenges faced by DCO stakeholders across Toronto. These data points underscore the tenuous conditions in which DCOs may operate, potentially limiting organizational funding and encouraging the precarious labour conditions present within some third sector organizations and urban neighbourhoods. How social and economic exclusion and inequality then impacts DCOs' access to the human talent and technical resources required for digitization among DCOs who originate from these neighbourhoods where racialized immigrants and low-income groups are overrepresented raises serious empirical concern which requires further investigation. By identifying the geographic areas where such constraints are spatially concentrated within Toronto,

census data enables a focused understanding of labour precarity and social exclusion, which, in turn, helps explain why some DCOs face significant barriers to digitization and organizational capacity building. The research examines how the social and economic conditions of the neighbourhoods in which the studied DCOs and their stakeholders are embedded play a fundamental role in shaping their mandates and activities, including their experiences with digitization. Mapping the intersectional identities that co-exist and tangle within superdiverse urban neighbourhoods can help reveal the systemic inequalities that undermine the effectiveness of third sector organizations under neoliberalism capitalism and policies of austerity which hamper access to much needed technical and human resources. This research emphasizes that digital transformations should be understood as more than a purely technical solution, but as a source of profoundly social, economic, and spatial struggles exemplified by the case studies of the Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto presented here.

DCO stakeholders, particularly board members, staff and volunteers, require technical resources (hardware and software) to carry out organizational tasks effectively. Digital labour is highly demanding and requires learning new technical skills (Yeritsian, 2018). The access to software and hardware can be costly and often requires technical training as well. The high price, time, and energy investments required raises questions about how third sector organizations with limited funding and resources cope with the challenges of digitization. Moreover, monetary compensations within the sector does not reflect the high skill levels required, as most DCOs are primarily volunteers or part time staff (Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2025). The heavy reliance on voluntarism and the goodwill of stakeholders, especially when those stakeholders are already a part of marginalized social and economic groups within a society, raises critical questions about burn out and labour exploitation within the third sector (see Collins et al., 2009; Martin, 2011,

2012; Richmond & Shields, 2024). The studied DCOs involve large collectives of marginalized urban residents, from racialized immigrant and low-income backgrounds who enthusiastically volunteer their time and energy to serve other marginalized urban residents as well as stakeholders in cyberspace. Therefore, this research rigorously examines the ways that DCOs contend with the labour and technical resources that digitization necessitates within broader systems of social, spatial, and economic exclusion.

1.5 Conclusion

This introductory chapter sets the stage for an in-depth investigation into Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto and how they navigate the complex realities of superdiverse urban environments and cyberspace. Beginning with some foundational concepts in human geography, this chapter discussed how globalization and digitization are reconfiguring experiences of time and space, as well as amplifying social and spatial inequalities. The chapter also made a case for ethnographic spatial analysis of DCOs and their operations across superdiverse urban neighbourhoods and cyberspace, given that the formation of transnational digital diasporas are not linear processes but rather the outcome of multiscalar and transnational phenomenon rooted in the histories and geographies of different places and peoples. Historically, third sector actors such as DCOs have played notable roles in shaping civic engagement within superdiverse urban neighbourhoods (see Brah, 1996; Kastoryano, 1996) and across diasporic digital spaces (see Brinkerhoff, 2009; Ponzanesi, 2020). Hence, this chapter introduced some underlying concepts such as civic engagement, transnationalism, and digitization before proceeding to the research questions and rationalizations for an empirical investigation into how superdiversity and digitization shapes, and is shaped by, Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto.

In chapter two, there is a detailed discussion on relevant conceptual frameworks and related academic literature. By highlighting the significance of reassessing the concept of superdiversity (see Crul, 2016; Hall, 2017; Phillimore, 2023; Vertovec, 2009, 2017) chapter two illustrates that Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs are not merely ethnic and cultural institutions but third sector actors whose mandates often address social and economic inequalities impacting marginalized urban residents (see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Bhuiyan, 2019; Halder, 2012). The Toronto CMA, with its stratified social and spatial patterns of settlement (Hulchanski, 2010; Toronto Foundation, 2020) as well as many diasporic hubs and diverse neighbourhoods developed over the last several decades is fertile grounds for empirical investigations into DCOs (see Anisef & Lanphier, 2003; Siemiatycki & Isin, 1997). Diasporic hubs are neighbourhoods where migrants and their families (multiple generations) concentrate densely enough to sustain their own institutional infrastructure through ethnocultural businesses and socio-cultural organizations (see Belchem, 2010; Grelle et al., 2026).

This research grounds superdiversity in critical human geographic thought, aligning with scholarship that calls for increased attention to the urban inequality, labour precarity, and civic invisibility faced by marginalized residents and their organizations amidst the advances of neoliberal capitalistic policies. Chapter two also features an extended discussion of DCOs as sites of alternative economic thinking and practices, drawing on the Polanyian concepts of reciprocity and the double movement, as well as Gibson-Graham's solidarity economies. These concepts underpin the empirical investigations into DCOs. Highlighting how DCOs engage in non-capitalist and reciprocal practices, even while entangled within precarious third sector funding and management regimes, helps move towards a balanced and objective analysis of their potential and shortcomings. Furthermore, rather than romanticizing grassroots solidarity, reciprocity, and

resilience, this research aims to examine the material limitations of voluntarism and unpaid labour within DCOs, as well as the potential for more sustainable support through capacity development and wide scale institutional recognition, which will be discussed further in the later empirical chapters.

In chapter three, the research methodologies pursued in the empirical inquiry are explained in depth. Three guiding research questions are revisited along with the relevant research methods used to address them: (1) how DCOs respond to economic, occupational, and multigenerational sociocultural challenges in superdiverse contexts; (2) how digitization has altered DCO organizational forms and functions; and (3) how DCOs manage the labour and technical demands of going digital. The practical use of census microdata and spatial analysis to uncover spatial patterns of social and economic inequalities across Toronto and how those inequalities shape DCO programs and services, are explained in greater detail. In addition, profiles of the three DCOs studied in this research are provided as well as the rationale for their inclusion. Specifically, the decision to study the 1.5 and second-generation, women-led, and occupation-focused DCOs and how they shed light on intersectional identities among the diaspora are explained.

In chapters four, five and six, the empirical findings from extensive ethnographic case studies of three DCOs are discussed. Chapter four focuses on the social, economic, and spatial characteristics of the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora across Toronto. By delving into the income, housing, occupation, and educational characteristics of the local diaspora, some insights are shared into the challenges facing DCOs and their stakeholders as they serve local needs. Chapter five expands the empirical discussion of the role of superdiversity in shaping and being shaped by DCOs. This research delves into the intersectional identities that shape DCOs that originate within superdiverse neighbourhoods in Toronto. The intersectional identities of different DCO stakeholders, despite

belonging to the same diaspora, shape distinct forms of civic engagement, focused on generational, gendered, and occupational experiences and aspirations. In chapter six, the empirical discussion shifts to digitization and investigates civic engagement among DCOs and the challenges they face navigating cyberspace. The investigation in chapter six examines the role of transnational networks, facilitated via cyberspace, in transforming the form and function of the studied DCOs. The empirical findings shed light on the advantages and disadvantages of digitization for civic engagement and core DCO functions such as funding, volunteering, staffing, and outreach. Afterwards, chapter seven concludes with final reflections and forward-looking thoughts about future interventions and some potential best practices for DCO programs and services.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Frameworks and Literature Review

2.1 The Economic Geography of the Third Sector

This research draws inspiration from the rich tradition of economic geography that promotes intellectual diversity and spatialized understandings of economic activities. Economic geographers have long examined alternative economic models, challenging the orthodoxy of capitalist markets (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008; Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2016; Healy & Gibson-Graham, 2019; Peck, 2012). Many economic models promote an aura of universality and monolithic thought (Hirsch et al. 1987; Peck, 2012, 2023). As economic systems become increasingly complex in a globalized world, spatial analysis and intellectual pluralism, both key contributions of economic geography become even more relevant (Barnes & Christophers, 2018). Unlike abstract economic models that ignore the social and spatial unevenness underpinning economic systems, economic geography grounds its analyses in spatialized differences and linkages, uncovering the embedded nature of markets and society (Amin & Howell, 2016; Barnes & Christopher, 2018; Peck, 2023). Moreover, economic geographers aim to uncover the social, cultural and political impacts of different economic phenomenon, ranging from the development of industrial zones to the global journey of financial capital (Barnes & Christophers, 2018). Spatialized analyses are vital for properly understanding how globalization is reshaping contemporary economies and why place-based variegations should underpin economic thinking and practices (Amin & Thrift, 2000; Barnes & Christopher, 2018; Peck, 2023).

Economic geographers engage with a broad spectrum of ideas, allowing for experimentation and innovation within the discipline. This openness is crucial for investigating alternatives to existing economic models. In the context of this research, the analytical unit is the DCO, a part of the third

sector that is distinct from the public and private sectors. In theory, third sector actors prioritize democratic decision-making, open access, and shared ownership, hence challenging the monopolistic tendencies of capitalist market actors (Defourny & Develtere, 2009; Richmond & Shields, 2024; Wright, 2010). However, we must also accept the possibility that "...economic diversity, alternatives and otherness cut both ways. They do not necessarily lead in progressive directions" (Lee, 2013, p. 73). Empirical research can help uncover whether third sector actors who seek to differentiate themselves from capitalist private and public sector actors through local, collective, and reciprocal alternative economic practices, stay true to these ideals (see Defourny & Develtere, 2009; Garkisch et al., 2017). Consequently, this research aims to build on contemporary economic and social geography inquiries which prioritize an openness towards alternative economic thinking and practices by bringing together social, economic, and spatial perspectives to develop a nuanced understanding of DCO mandates and activities.

Economic geographers have long critiqued capitalistic thinking and practices that prioritize market efficiency and profit over collective social welfare (Hart, 2002; Peck & Theodore, 2007; Peck & Tickell, 2017; Peck, 2023; Scott, 2006; Springer, 2010). Moreover, the spread of neoliberal capitalism, especially the proliferation of austerity policies and neoliberal management principles, has placed increasing strain on third sector actors globally (Baines, 2010; Jones et al., 2016; Mercer, 2002; Wright, 2010). As austerity and neoliberal management principles reshape social and economic governance, third sector organizations find themselves ever more tightly embedded in, and constrained by, the sometimes-conflicting priorities of public and private sector actors (DeVerteuil, 2015; Evans & Shields, 2000; Mercer, 2002; Richmond & Shields, 2024 Wright, 2010). Third sector actors often serve marginalized urban residents such as those from low income and racialized backgrounds who are concentrated in neighbourhoods which have been neglected by

the provision of public services and goods (see Berg et al., 2019; DeVerteuil, 2015; Kissane, 2010; Power, 2021). The economic geography literature about the third sector (sometime called voluntary or non-profit sector) writes about confronting urban poverty and racial disparities within contemporary urban regions. For example, Power et al. (2021) examine how third sector organizations navigate entrenched social and spatial dynamics that shape their capacity to challenge poverty. In a related vein, Kissane (2010) investigates how service providers and their stakeholders employ creative strategies to adapt to challenges serving marginalized neighbourhoods, where the service need is greatest, yet the resources and infrastructure needed are limited. When monetary resources are concentrated in wealthy and privileged neighbourhoods in urban centres, limited funding opportunities reach the third sector organizations operating in distant marginalized neighbourhoods, which in turn inhibits these organizations from expanding their programs and services (Kissane, 2010). DeVerteuil et al. (2020) posits that uneven geographies of support and funding increase social, economic and spatial disparities within urban settings, ultimately limiting the effectiveness of local third sector actors to address poverty and social exclusion (see Amin, 2002; Clayton et al., 2016; Power et al., 2022; Wolch, 1981, 2014). Moreover, building on historical works of Polanyian substantivism and the question of labour, Martin (2011, 2012) highlights how precarious labour conditions within some segments of the third sector mirror the profit-driven private sector and put already marginalized workers in a difficult situation. Recent studies show how the challenges facing the third sector from austerity to labour precarity continue to intensify given the entrenchment of capitalist neoliberal thinking and practices. For instance, Fanelli et al. (2017) document how employment services organizations in Canada face unstable funding contracts, intensified performance-based outcomes, and top-down managerial controls that erode worker security and well-being. Likewise, Mikołajczak (2024) finds

that NGOs across Europe experience significant levels of temporary, part-time, or project-based labour, confirming that precarity is embedded in organizational structures rather than an anomaly.

Reciprocity, redistribution, and the double movement

Polanyi (2001) posits that economic activity is always embedded within social and cultural relations. This central premise of embeddedness, expressed in different language and conceptual formulations, has inspired much contemporary research on alternative economic arrangements which emphasize collective wellbeing, rather than market efficiency and for-profit exchanges (Peck, 2020). Central to Polanyi's seminal work, *The Great Transformation*, is also the conceptual framework of the double movement, which he envisioned as a continual push-and-pull between the expansion of market forces and the protective social responses that arise to counter the harms of commodification. As labour, land, and money became increasingly treated as commodities during the 18th and 19th centuries in the rapidly industrializing parts of Western Europe, the resulting dislocation and human suffering provoked strong societal responses, including trade unions, cooperative movements, and grassroots mutual aid networks, that sought to restore social, cultural and political protections (Polanyi, 2001). Polanyi's historical account underscores how these counter-movements, the double movement, are underpinned by long standing social and cultural practices of reciprocity and solidarity to meet material needs and consequently helped protect marginalized segments of society from the destructive ills of widespread commodification and prevailing market society at the time. The different forms of communal support that were offered by institutions which form the double movement were not peripheral practices but rather deeply rooted social, cultural and political organizations which sought to preserve dignity, security, and cohesion for everyone.

Polanyi's account of economic history and anthropology directly challenges economic narratives about the markets being abstract, rational and detached from social relations (see Hirsch et al., 1987). Polanyi (2001) emphasizes different nodes of integrated local economies and their sustenance through reciprocal non-market exchanges forged by social and cultural practices. He develops arguments about the centrality of social networks, communal support, and reciprocal exchanges. In his own words, "Economic liberalism misread the history of the Industrial Revolution because it insisted on judging social events from the economic viewpoint." (Polanyi, 2001, p. 112). Markets, more specifically market exchanges, became central to social life rather abruptly and forcefully during the first Industrial Revolution in Western Europe (Polanyi, 2001). There was nothing natural nor predestined about the formation of market society; instead, it was a series of manufactured changes to pre-existing social, cultural, political and economic arrangements. The great irony is that market exchanges and market-based economy exist within a market society, and markets themselves are social institutions (Polanyi, 2001, p. 143).

Polanyi's concept of the double movement provides a robust foundation for understanding how contemporary third sector organizations navigate and respond to economic pressures arising from the spread of neoliberal capitalism. His historical analysis of the rise of market society demonstrates that markets did not naturally evolve into autonomous institutions; instead, they became disembedded from social relations through deliberate political and economic interventions (Polanyi, 1944, 2001). This disruption, through the proliferation of market exchanges and the consequent formation of market society during the first Industrial Revolution in Western Europe, profoundly disrupted existing social and cultural systems of reciprocity and redistribution (Carrier, 2022; Polanyi, 1944, 2001). Symmetrical exchanges between symmetrical groupings, such as mutual aid and gift-giving between kin groups, characterize reciprocity – facilitating exchanges

without profit-seeking and rooting these practices in personal and social ties instead (Carrier, 2022). Redistribution involves the movement of resources toward a central point (such as a chief or the state) and then back out to the rest of society, based on principles of politics, custom, or administration. The welfare state is the modern embodiment of this form of integration (Castles et al., 2011).

The capitalist project sought to replace both social forms with universal market exchange, bilateral movements mediated by price-making markets (Gemici, 2008). By treating land, labour, and money as fictitious commodities, this process generated profound social instability and destruction, which Polanyi (1944, 2001) describes as market peril. Contemporary third sector organizations can be understood through this Polanyian lens as key actors in the modern protective countermovement, or in other words the double movement. These organizations often operate by actively prioritizing and institutionalizing principles of reciprocity (through mutual aid networks, social capital, and peer-to-peer support) and redistribution (by pooling resources, delivering essential social services, and advocating for public support). The existence and growth of the third sector organizations represent a sustained effort to re-embed economic and social activity into protective communal relationships, thereby resisting the continued dominance of purely disembedded (from social and cultural practices) and profit-driven market exchanges (DeVerteuil, 2015).

While the pressures imposed by neoliberal restructuring on the contemporary third sector may differ from the industrial upheavals of the 19th century (see Richmond & Shields, 2024), the underlying dynamic Polanyi described persists: as markets intensify inequalities and erode social protections, organizations work to reassert social values, revive practices of reciprocity, and mitigate the harm inflicted by prioritizing market exchanges and commodification. Building on

Polanyi's ideas, this research investigates how contemporary DCOs are a manifestation of the double movement against contemporary forms of commodification and market-exchange and built on principles of reciprocity and redistribution highlighted by high levels of voluntarism, in kind supports, local participation, and advocacy. Hence, in this research, the role of reciprocal exchanges and redistributive practices, such as volunteer labour, mutual aid, public advocacy, and peer-to-peer support groups formed by DCOs are empirically investigated. In the face of neoliberal efforts to commodify necessities such as housing (Milligan et al., 2012; Wainright & Manville, 2017; Yung & Chan, 2020), healthcare (Crampton et al., 2001; Dickinson et al., 2012; Sheaff et al., 2024; Windrum, 2014), and labour (Baines et al., 2014; Collins et al., 2009; Garkisch et al., 2017; Martin, 2011, 2012; Richmond & Shields, 2024), DCOs have a key role to play in addressing the adverse fallout from commodification and market failures.

Polanyian conceptual frameworks such as reciprocity, redistribution, and the double movement provides the critical historical scaffolding for understanding how contemporary scholarship can conceptualize the restructuring of public goods and services as well as the emergence of non-capitalist and alternative economic thinking and practices. Polanyi's work not only described the social and cultural dislocation produced by commodification and market society but also the rise of state- and civic interventions to counterbalance market dominance. The following subchapters discuss some of the developments since then, such as the tensions highlighted in Wolch's (1990) conceptualization of the shadow state, in which governments offload social welfare functions to third sector organizations, effectively embedding themselves and allied institutions within market-driven governance regimes (see Mercer, 2002; Wallace, 2009). Moreover, this research draws inspiration from Gibson-Graham (2006, 2008) who put forth their own ideas of alternative economic arrangements by spotlighting solidarity economies, a diverse range of locally rooted

non-capitalist economic practices that resist commodification and reclaim social provisioning through solidarity, cooperation, and mutual aid. Wolch and Gibson-Graham can be seen as contemporary and timely expansions of Polanyi's historical critiques of commodification and market exchanges: with the former highlighting how, civil society becomes a functional extension of the state under neoliberal capitalism, and the latter emphasizing grassroots organizations that strive to reconstruct economic life around collective, ethical, and place-based values. Taken together, these works illustrate how Polanyi's historical insights into market society continue to animate critical scholarship on the contemporary third sector.

Agents of Neoliberal Capitalism? The Shadow State and the Third Sector

The shadow state refers to the increasing reliance on the third sector to fulfill roles traditionally perceived to be the responsibility of the public sector (Wolch, 1990). The shadow state has significant implications, as neoliberal capitalistic thinking and practices inspire governments to cut back on social services as well as outsource any remaining welfare responsibilities to the third sector (Lowe et al., 2017; Preston et al., 2024; Richmond and Shields 2024). The growing interdependence, or rather reliance, between the state and the third sector, means that the latter becomes an extension and direct subject of state policies rather than as autonomous civic institutions. Canadian research by Richmond & Shields (2024) illustrates how third sector organizations become dependent on state funding and legitimacy. This dependency can arise from governments offloading service delivery to third sector actors and then claiming that they are critical partners while providing unstable, project-based contracts that undermine organizational autonomy (see Lowe et al., 2017; Richmond & Shields, 2024). Consequently, third sector actors are caught in a precarious situation, constantly competing for finite monetary resources, adapting to meet funder expectation, and struggling to retain capacity to fulfil their mandates (Joassart-

Marcelli, 2013; Macaraig, 2011; Van Slyke, 2003). Within the context of neoliberal capitalism, important questions arise about the ability of the third sector to effectively deliver programs and services without being co-opted by the agendas of public and private sector actors (see Defourny & Develtere, 2009; DeVerteuil, 2015; Mercer, 2002).

Moreover, third sector engagement with public-sector actors, such as local bureaucrats (de Graauw, 2015; de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2022), and the notable challenges of navigating burdensome funding requirements and regulatory frameworks, warrants critical examination considering the pervasive influence of neoliberal governance (DeVerteuil et al., 2020). The implications of the shadow state extend beyond the delivery of public services and goods, to critical concerns around equitable governance, accountability, transparency, and the broader promise of social empowerment that third sector actors profess (Defourny & Develtere, 2009; Wright, 2010). In some cases, the third sector becomes complicit in the very systems of inequality and injustices they seek to confront. As Wolch (1990) noted, the shadow state can lead to a manufactured civil society, where the priorities of the state shape the missions of civic organizations, potentially undermining their ability to serve the needs of the people they represent (see Baines et al., 2011; Power et al., 2021). Hence, there are important ethical questions, which can only truly be uncovered through ethnographic empirical inquiries about the role of third sector actors in perpetuating existing power dynamics versus their responsibility and capability to advocate for progressive change.

In the context of public services and goods, the shadow state has profound implications for the delivery of collective welfare. As public funding declines, third sector organizations are increasingly tasked with stepping in to serve marginalized populations, often under conditions that prioritize efficiency and cost-effectiveness over comprehensive and effective care, which results

in the dilution of service quality and a destructive focus on short-term solutions rather than long-term systemic changes (Benson, 2022; Van Slyke, 2003). The reliance on the third sector to address collective social welfare can obscure the responsibility of the state to provide public services and goods for its residents in a just and equitable manner. Moreover, the blurred lines between state and third sector functions can complicate efforts to hold different players accountable for their respective actions and decisions (Baines et al., 2011; Whiteford, 2010). The blurring of accountability is particularly concerning in contexts where government contracts largely fund third sector actors, as they may be incentivized to align their priorities with those of the state rather than their own stakeholders. As third sector actors become more entrenched in the delivery of social services, the voices of the people they serve may be marginalized in favour of bureaucratic processes and state-driven agendas (Amin, 2005; de Graauw, 2015; de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2022). The disconnect between the needs of residents and the services provided to them, ultimately undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of third sector interventions in addressing key social and economic issues (DeVerteuil et al., 2020; Joassart-Marcelli, 2013). Hence, for some contemporary third sector actors continuously navigate pressures from public and private sector funders and donors. The latter reality can make it difficult to remain true to their organizational mandates, which often profess visions of social and economic empowerment and equality for all.

In the Canadian context, much of the third sector's responsibility for supporting migrants has fallen to the immigrant-serving sector, also known as the settlement sector (Lowe et al., 2017; Richmond & Shields, 2024). The sector consists of organizations, often larger and more formalized than grassroots DCOs, that deliver federally and provincially funded settlement services, including language training, employment assistance, and orientation programs. The settlement sector has become deeply institutionalized within Canada's migration management apparatus, operating as a

professionalized, policy-driven system closely aligned with government objectives for immigrant integration and labour market inclusion (Lowe et al., 2017; Richmond & Shields, 2024). While this sector plays a vital role in supporting newcomers' transitions, it is also heavily shaped by top-down priorities such as economic integration and short-term outcomes, which can limit its capacity to address structural inequalities and long-term local development, especially in the face of austerity and neoliberal policies (see Lowe et al., 2017; Richmond & Shields, 2024). DCOs, by contrast, are often more grassroots, volunteer-driven, and embedded in diasporic, transnational, and digital networks (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). Although DCOs may collaborate with and receive funding from government programs, they are not directly embedded in the formal settlement infrastructure created by the government for the core purposes of newcomer integration. Instead, DCOs often emerge from the ground up, starting at the local grassroots or neighbourhood levels and shaped by the everyday experiences and aspirations of diasporic groups in the city. Recognizing the complementary but distinct roles of these two types of organizations, the immigrant-serving organization and the DCO is essential for understanding the layered architecture of settlement and integration services across Canadian cities, as well as the need to develop policies and practices that empower civic engagement among diaspora members.

Counter Narratives of Localized, Non-Capitalist Thinking and Practices

Counter narratives proposed by economic geographers provide helpful insights into solidarity economies and non-capitalist thinking and practices. Ultimately, wage labour and market transactions constitute a relatively small fraction of people's economic lives globally and there are many hidden, non-capitalist practices such as unpaid labour, barter, and voluntarism still present today (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008). Gibson-Graham (2008) emphasizes that diverse economic

thinking and practices demand a fundamental reorientation in how we understand and address human material needs, one that extends beyond the confines of capitalist production. This research responds to their compelling call for a “weak theory” of economics, which promotes exploratory and open-ended approaches that resist reinforcing the dominance of capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 60; Hart, 2002). Capitalist production, Gibson-Graham posits, is neither inevitable nor immutable (Gibson-Graham, 2008). A wide range of third sector actors through their emphasis on volunteer labour, in-kind contributions, and reciprocal exchanges, embody the ethos of solidarity economies. By centering diverse economic thinking and practices, third sector actors actively challenge capital-centric economic narratives. Gibson-Graham’s weak theory brings much needed attention to non-capitalist and alternative capitalist arrangements that are often overlooked in existing economic discourses. By broadening what is recognized as meaningful economic activity, they urge greater acknowledgment of the many ways non-capitalist actors and actions fulfill our collective material needs. As they explain, in their own words “...widening the identity of the economy to include all of those practices excluded or marginalized by a strong theory of capitalism” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 60).

Gibson-Graham favours ethnographic empirical research rooted in the field. The solidarity economies framework highlights many examples from the field such as the Latrobe Valley in Australia, Jagna in the Philippines, and Mondragón in Spain, where third sector actors have scaled and created new avenues for social and economic development (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2016). Within the fold of solidarity economies, social development is seen as supporting economic growth as well as fostering ethical decision-making about collective resources, the dignity of labour, and distributive justice. The solidarity economies model calls for addressing both individual and collective needs, such as sustainable livelihoods and adequate

housing, through innovative non-capitalist and alternative capitalist thinking and practices. Beyond exchanges, Gibson-Graham (2006, 2008) emphasizes the need to build collective (what they refer to as community-based) assets which assist the social and economic development of third sector stakeholders as well as entire geographic regions. For example, Gibson-Graham highlights the case study of Social Enterprise Sunderland (in the United Kingdom), which emerged to address local employment and labour market needs by promoting cooperative enterprises and linking them within broader social and economic networks. This emphasis on asset-based solidarity economies redefines needs not as static but as adaptable to their social, cultural, and spatial context, promoting inclusion and resilience while expanding economic possibilities for marginalized groups and their allies.

Civic Skills, Labour Precarity, and Challenges to Organizational Efficacy

Building meaningful third sector organizations require many different social, cultural, economic skills, and competencies. In particular, the civic skills required for meaningful collective action are often underappreciated (Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008; Fincher et al., 2019). Civic skills are techniques and tactics used to effectively collaborate and engage individuals and groups to participate within the third sector. These skills include organizing, mobilizing, public speaking, navigating bureaucratic systems, and different governance structures. Civic skills also include soft skills such as communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, and the ability to work across race, class and ideological differences (see Boroş et al., 2019; Crul, 2016; Verba et al., 1995). These skills help third sector organizations thrive despite the demanding nature of labour in these organizations. Work often occurs outside fixed workplaces, at all times of the day (beyond the standard office hours and days) and is poorly compensated (see Baines et al., 2014; Richmond & Shields, 2024). While it can be difficult to retain the right people given the difficult work - with

the right mix of human talents and skill sets, third sector actors can provide effective programs and services for their stakeholders.

Antonsich (2018) highlights how migrant-led organizations reflect the shifting demographics of contemporary superdiverse places, where marginalized groups increasingly assume leadership roles through their civic engagement. In addition, there have been some novel challenges with widespread digitization and the demands for technological skills within third sector organizations, reshaping how organizational stakeholders must operate (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). Historically, many DCOs have navigated tensions between their local embeddedness, nationalist homeland-hostland narratives, and transnational linkages, giving rise to forms of diasporic civic engagement that span geographic boundaries. In recent times, transnational networks have been further enriched by the digital tools used by many diaspora members within multiple geographies of settlement and reception (Kok & Rogers, 2017; Ponzanesi, 2020; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). Moreover, the increasing internal diversity within diasporic groups (see Crul, 2016), particularly among the 1.5 and second generation (see Antonsich, 2018; Sahoo & Shome, 2024) and the rise of superdiverse urban settings challenge simplistic narratives of group assimilation into a singular dominant identity.

Third sector organizations do not operate in a vacuum; their effectiveness depends not only on the talents, skills, and sustained commitment of organizational stakeholders but also on the broader social, cultural, and economic environments in which they function. Their success can be closely tied to the effectiveness and efficacy of institutional (public and private sector) support that reflects the amenability of local networks, infrastructures, and governance systems to organizational mandates (see Amin, 2005). In environments marked by systemic neglect, austerity, or weak inter-organizational collaboration, even the most skilled and passionate individuals will struggle to

sustain meaningful civic engagement. Moreover, in places where there are glaring lack of sustained funding or the institutional backing necessary to scale and build long-term capacity success relies not only on internal organizational capacity but also on navigating existing structural inequalities. Third sector actors tend to compensate for the lack of monetary resources with informal networks, in-kind contributions, and grassroots innovation, with digitization in some cases offering assistance and relief, living up to its theoretical potential in garnering social support, civic visibility, and monetary resources (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024).

Furthermore, third sector organizations operating within superdiverse urban settings must navigate and engage the intersectional identities of their stakeholders. DCOs contend with challenging gendered dynamics and class differences which shape members' access to resources and leadership roles, impacting the organizations' overall levels of inclusivity and democratic decision making (see Halder, 2012; Bhuyan et al., 2021; Rouf, 2025). Differing interests and aspirations among stakeholders can lead to division and destabilization within organizations (Walker & Stepick, 2014). The reality is that unjust and unequal hierarchies exist within and between third sector actors based on gendered, generational, class and other categories of differences (see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Ku, 2011; Walker & Stepick, 2014). The strain of limited financial resources can exacerbate these inter-group and intra-group differences, making organizational cohesion and efficacy a serious challenge (Martin, 2011; Mercer, 2002). The labour precarity experienced by third sector stakeholders can further impede organizational longevity and effectiveness in the delivery of programs and services (Martin 2011, 2012). Moreover, labour precarity heightens the risk of burnout among organizational staff and volunteers, particularly given the imbalance between low remuneration and high service demand, which often results in unfair workloads (Collins et al., 2009). Limited compensation constrains the development of third sector

organizations, where wages and salaries are consistently lower than those in the private and public sectors across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2021, 2022a). As aforementioned, DCOs rely heavily on volunteer labour operating outside formal labour markets (Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2025). While reliance on voluntary labour challenges the conventional emphasis on wage-based work, it also raises critical concerns about exploitation, especially when core organizational functions depend on voluntarism and goodwill (Collins et al., 2009; Martin, 2011, 2012). The research presented here underscores the importance of civic and technological competencies and skills as well as monetary resources for effective civic engagement while also acknowledging the significant barriers to acquiring the needed talents, resources, and skills.

2.2 Critical Superdiversity, Civic Invisibility, and Urban Inequality

Vertovec (2019) reflects on the different applications of superdiversity across academic disciplines ranging from sociolinguistics to policy studies. He highlights three different ways to look at the concept of superdiversity today, which are particularly relevant to this research; methodological reassessment, multidimensional reconfigurations, and moving beyond a focus on ethnicities. Vertovec concludes that a reassessment of superdiversity requires careful reconsideration of intersectional identities that are shaped by migration, namely legal status, labour market participation, gender, age, and the localized responses of residents and social service providers (Vertovec, 2007, 2019). Contemporary superdiversity scholarship has increasingly moved away from traditional assimilation and integration frameworks, recognizing that the so-called ethnocultural majority into which migrants are expected to integrate - in many contemporary urban regions - are more imagined than demographic reality (Crul, 2016).

“Super-diversity is a summary term proposed also to point out that the new migration patterns not only entailed variable combinations of these traits, but that their combinations produced new

hierarchical social positions, statuses or stratifications. These, in turn, entail: new patterns of inequality and prejudice including emergent forms of racism, new patterns of segregation, new experiences of space and “contact”, new forms of cosmopolitanism and creolization (including what’s more recently discussed in terms of conviviality and multiculture), and more.” (Vertovec, 2019, p. 126)

This research expands on the need for a reassessment and more critical take on superdiversity (Hall, 2017; Phillimore, 2023; Vertovec, 2019) especially within human geographic works focused on migration and diaspora. While the original concept of superdiversity is useful for comprehending demographic configurations within contemporary urban settings, it is crucial to also address the social and economic inequalities that persist within superdiverse places. Consequently, critiques of superdiversity studies call for the anchoring of the concept within the politics of contradictions and ethos of subordination that migrants experience (Hall, 2017). Superdiverse places are often sites of glaring disparities in access to labour markets, housing, healthcare, and transportation (see Fincher et al., 2019; Hall, 2017; Phillimore, 2023). For first-generation migrants in Canadian urban centres, integration often involves navigating persistent social, cultural, and economic marginalization - realities that starkly contrast with the country’s official multicultural policies and discourse - yet remain widely accepted, reflecting Canada’s deep settler-colonial foundations (Ashutosh, 2015; Bannerji, 2000; Chatterjee, 2019; Fincher et al., 2019). In response to inequalities among urban residents in core metropolitan locations (Hiebert, 2015; Hulchanski, 2010), many newcomers gravitate toward diasporic hubs in the surrounding suburbs of city cores, where they can access some degree of culturally relevant goods, affordable housing, and reliable transit access (Ghosh, 2014a; Qadeer et al., 2010).

Urban inequalities are not just statistical differences but everyday realities that adversely impact the lives of newcomers, racialized, and low-income residents. For example, in marginalized urban neighbourhoods marked by high poverty rates, inadequate public infrastructure, and systemic underinvestment, these conditions create the need for targeted civic engagements that are culturally responsive and locally led, like the DCOs studied in this research. Their missions often centre around addressing the compounded barriers faced by their stakeholders, offering programs and services that aim to mitigate the negative effects of social and economic inequality. Within these contexts, DCOs aim to fill critical gaps in service provisions and facilitate spaces of solidarity and reciprocity, where marginalized residents can assert their rights to the city and reimagine forms of civic engagement. Consequently, this research seeks to empirically investigate the impact of inequality within superdiverse places, and the relationship of those inequalities to the emergence of DCOs and the programs and services they deliver to assist marginalized urban residents from newcomer, racialized, and low-income backgrounds.

A critical superdiversity lens (see Hall, 2017; Phillimore, 2023) is essential for understanding marginalization within urban regions because it moves beyond somewhat superficial descriptions of diversity to interrogate how power, privilege and inequality shape daily experiences (see Hall, 2017; Liodakis & Satzewich, 2013). Unlike traditional approaches that often treat diversity as a demographic fact within urban settings, a critical superdiversity framework focuses on the intersection of social, economic, cultural, and spatial inequalities that adversely impact access to resources, recognition, and representation within superdiverse places. By centring the struggles and contributions of marginalized groups within superdiverse urban settings, this research offers nuanced insights into different forms of diasporic civic engagement.

Multidimensional Reconfigurations and Moving Beyond Ethnocentricity

Multidimensional reconfiguration of superdiversity is required to move beyond ethnocentric and essentialized readings of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2019). The traditional understanding of diversity is the gamut of religious, ethnic and cultural differences (Antonisch, 2018). However, other elements of diversity such as lifestyle and attitudes have been acknowledged (Peterson, 2017). Superdiverse places and the people who inhabit these places, provide excellent case studies to advance our understanding of different layers of diversity and the nuanced role of migration in shaping multiple intersectional facets of identity such as race, gender, ethnicity, lifestyles, attitudes, religion and more (Antonsich, 2018; see Ash et al., 2019; Crul, 2016; Fincher et al., 2019; Peterson, 2017).

Ethnicity is merely one aspect of an individual's identity. The ethnic lens can be meaningful in the reassessment of superdiversity, where it often helps to highlight persistent inequalities between different ethnic and racialized groups within contested urban spaces (Aptekar, 2020; Berg et al., 2019). However, there are practical implications that stem from the definitions and data on race and ethnicity provided by government administrators. It is important to acknowledge that studies of superdiversity are impacted by the decisions of government administrators who choose the ethnic and racial categories that researchers use in their studies (see Stringer, 2014). Moreover, dogmatic ethnocentricity leading to essentialized understandings of diversity can be harmful to both social cohesion and social science research (see Bannerji, 2000; Mahtani, 2014; Vertovec, 2007). The idea of multiple reconfigurations of superdiversity pushes back against essentialized discourses about any identity category, ethnocentric or otherwise, reorienting towards intersectional understanding of identities that are impacted by migration experiences (see Vertovec, 2019).

A more fluid and intersectional understanding of identity is especially relevant when considering how DCOs are formed and shaped. Far from being limited by fixed notions of ethnicity, DCOs engage in pan-ethnic and cross-cultural collaborations as a strategic and necessary response to meeting their mandates and serving diverse stakeholders across identity and geographic lines (see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Ku, 2011; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008; Walker & Stepick, 2014). These cross-group and cross-organization alliances enable marginalized groups to amplify their voices, pool resources, and pursue shared goals in the face of the inequalities present within superdiverse urban contexts. While ethnic identity may initially play a critical role, especially among first-generation immigrants whose post-migration experiences are often embedded in co-ethnic networks and local institutions within the diasporic hub (see Kaplan, 2017; Qadeer et al., 2010), it is rarely the sole factor driving their third sector organizational development (see Ku, 2011; Walker & Stepick, 2014). The work of DCOs often reflects the complex migration experiences, shaped by intersectional identities such as gender, class, legal status, occupation and place of residence (see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). Thus, although ethnic subjectivity is an important starting point for understanding diasporic aspirations and experiences, it must be situated within a broader framework of intersectional identities and solidarities that shape diasporic civic engagement in superdiverse urban settings.

The Co-Existence of Superdiversity, Civic Invisibility, and Urban Inequality

Across Canadian urban centres, racialized newcomers and low-income migrants continue to face deep structural barriers to civic engagement (Almeida, 2022; Anisef & Lanphier, 2003; Ku, 2011; Siemiatycki, 2011). These marginalized individuals encounter what scholars have termed civic invisibility - systemic inequalities restricting their access to political representation, public funding, and institutional recognition (Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). As migrants navigate

superdiverse urban environments prone to exploitation of labour and capital accumulation (see Hall, 2017), they often do so with limited social and economic resources, which significantly constrain their ability to build organizations and secure long-term support from sustained public funding or philanthropic aid (see de Graauw et al., 2013; Goldring & Landolt, 2013; Lowe et al., 2017; Sharma, 2006). Even when migrants collectively organize to address critical issues such as labour precarity, housing insecurity, and systemic racism, their efforts are frequently marginalized by mainstream media and bureaucrats (Anisef & Lanphier, 2003; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). These issues of civic invisibility underscore the urgency of building more inclusive and sustainable avenues for civic engagement for marginalized urban residents.

Civic invisibility limits the ability of under-resourced groups and organizations to mobilize the social, cultural, political, and economic resources necessary to effect meaningful change (Bloemraad & Gleeson, 2017). Consequently, it affects racialized and low-income diasporas residing in marginalized urban neighbourhoods, excluding them from critical decision-making and public policy processes. Although marginalized urban residents and diasporic groups contribute meaningfully to civic life, they often lack the financial resources and political clout to shape policy agendas or secure public funding for their collective interests. As Bloemraad and Gleeson (2017) posit, lack of public recognition undermines the accumulation of social capital, reinforcing existing cycles of urban inequality.

The civic invisibility of migrants in superdiverse places is not a result of apathy or disengagement on the part of individuals. but rather the unequal distribution of recognition and resources among civic actors (see Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). Large and well-funded third sector organizations enjoy greater civic visibility and direct access to policymakers compared to small

migrant-led grassroots organizations that often remain on the margins (see Bloemraad & Gleeson, 2017; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). The disparities between civic actors reinforce entrenched hierarchies of power and privilege as well as deepen the exclusion of marginalized urban populations from policy conversations that shape their daily experiences (Hiebert, 2015; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013). Addressing the disparities caused by civic invisibility requires structural changes; strengthening funding mechanisms, removing legal and institutional barriers, and fostering inclusive governance models that reflect the pluralism of urban populations (see Omidvar & Richmond, 2005; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). Without institutional recognition, the specific concerns of racialized newcomers, first-generation immigrants, and low-income urban residents will continue to be neglected and underfunded (Bhuyan et al., 2021; de Graauw et al., 2013; Kissane, 2010; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). Currently, decision-making processes and resource distribution tend to reflect the interests of more privileged social, economic, and cultural groups within Canadian urban centres, reinforcing existing structural exclusion (Bannerji, 2000; Creese, 2011; Galabuzi, 2006; Good, 2009; Hulchanski, 2010; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013).

Furthermore, civic invisibility lies in the lack of political capital, the capacity to influence political outcomes and gain access to key decision-makers at various levels of government (de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2015; de Graauw et al., 2022; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). Third sector organizations representing 'invisible groups' often struggle to attract the attention of policymakers and funders, leaving their concerns peripheral to dominant policy debates and constraining their ability to mobilize resources to meet their mandates (Bloemraad & Gleeson, 2017). This invisibility reflects broader systems of inequality, particularly along axes of race, class, and immigration status. In settler-colonial societies such as Canada, racialized newcomers continue to

face the historical legacy of racism, exclusion, and marginalization (Fincher et al., 2019; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013). Entrenched systemic barriers continue to restrict racialized newcomers' presence in civic life and their access to economic resources that more established and privileged groups benefit from (Fincher et al., 2019; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013).

Since the 1970s, neoliberal urban policies have disrupted the programs and services of diasporic organizations across Toronto as in other Canadian urban centres (Anisef & Lanphier, 2003; see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Lowe et al., 2017). These challenges have been compounded in recent years by the COVID-19 pandemic, which, along with necessary public health mandates, halted in-person gatherings and forced organizations to adapt their service delivery models (see Preston et al., 2024; Rouf, 2025). The challenges facing migrants and their families have only intensified after decades of neoliberal reforms that undermined the welfare state and gutted third sector funding (Lowe et al., 2017; Preston et al., 2024). While some federal interventions, such as the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) and affordable housing funds, have helped alleviate poverty among low-income Canadian families (see Bhattacharyya et al., 2020; Esses et al., 2023; Hyndman, 2024; Liu et al., 2023), these meaningful gains are fickle and may be reversed over time with cycles of government changes and austerity policies. Meanwhile, language training, employment supports, and other settlement services remain vital but underfunded and subject to additional cuts, with many organizations struggling to meet growing demand in growing urban centres (see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Fincher et al., 2019). Post-pandemic demographic changes have added further strain, with record levels of temporary migrants, international students and foreign workers, intensifying demand for services amid constrained public resources (see Hari & Wang-Dufil, 2023; Niraula et al., 2022). Third sector organizations serving diasporas, across diverse Toronto neighbourhoods, now face escalating service demands without corresponding increases in funding and resources (Bhuyan et

al., 2021; Halder, 2012). Moreover, the pandemic exposed many structural weaknesses, revealing how immigration policies and civic infrastructure are ill-prepared for sudden shocks to existing social and economic systems (see Hari & Wang-Dufil, 2023; Niraula et al., 2022; Preston et al. 2024; Statistics Canada, 2022a, b).

Third sector organizations, like DCOs, remain essential yet under-resourced and underappreciated pillars of Canada's increasingly superdiverse urban landscape. The work of small and grassroots third sector actors are made more difficult by neoliberal funding regimes that prioritize short-term outcomes and reduce organizational autonomy (see Baines, 2010; Evans & Shields, 2000; Lowe et al., 2017; Preston et al., 2024). Third sector organizations are being forced to compete for limited funding and justify their existence through narrow performance metrics, leading organizations to sacrifice long-term structural changes and capacity building in favour of day-to-day survival and in some cases mergers with large and more well funded organizations (see Rouf, 2025). Addressing these significant systemic limitations and challenges require not only increased capacity and funding but also a fundamental rethinking of how the state and third sector actors interact to support diasporas within increasingly superdiverse urban regions.

Superdiverse Places as Sites of Inclusion and Exclusion

In urban spaces, diverse groups coexist and interact, producing simultaneous experiences of inclusion and exclusion (Bauder, 2016; Fincher et al., 2019; Valentine, 2008). Some challenges to inclusive urban spaces include the discriminatory treatment of certain social groups and the political, economic, and historical forces that shape everyday encounters between residents (Aptekar, 2020; Berg et al., 2019; Fincher et al., 2019; Valentine, 2008). Superdiversity should not be seen as inherently 'good' or 'bad'; it is an empirical condition that acknowledges the growing heterogeneity of urban populations shaped by migration (Crul, 2016). Evolving urban

demographics requires conceptual frameworks that move beyond traditional assimilation-integration models. Terms like superdiverse city or superdiverse neighbourhood are increasingly used to describe urban spaces where no single ethnic group constitutes a demographic majority and where multiple substantial ethnocultural groups reside in proximity (Crul, 2016). In superdiverse places, the idea of a singular dominant majority into which newcomers are expected to integrate becomes increasingly difficult to define or justify (Crul, 2016).

Superdiverse places often have deep-rooted inequalities shaping the experiences of the people who live there. As Hall (2017) stipulates, the inclusion or exclusion of migrant workers is often determined by structural forces of social and economic inequalities across contemporary global urban regions. For racialized migrants from the Global South, seeking better livelihoods, there are numerous barriers to securing meaningful employment in their places of settlement (Deshingkar, 2019; Ye, 2023). The latter challenges are amplified for urban diasporic residents who lack access to culturally responsive supports, a glaring gap that DCOs often attempt to address (Rouf, 2025). Moreover, migration-driven diversification brings people from a wide array of social, cultural and economic backgrounds into shared urban spaces for different purposes from reuniting with family members to seeking better livelihoods (Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Crul, 2016). As a result, third sector organizations within superdiverse urban settings expand their mandates, striving to offer integration and settlement programs that cater to multiple genders, generations, classes, and other intersectional identities among migrants and diasporic groups (Bhuyan et al., 2021; Islam et al., 2021).

In Canada, multiculturalism has long been a pillar of official government policies. However, urban spaces across Canada continue to reproduce social and economic hierarchies that disadvantage racialized and low-income migrants and their family members (Bannerji, 2000; Fincher et al.,

2019; Guo & Guo, 2011). The racialized structure of Canada's labour market profoundly, and negatively, shapes immigrants' economic experiences (Akbar, 2016, 2019; Agrawal, 2013; Galabuzi, 2006; Raza, 2023). These economic challenges are not unique to Canadian urban centres but also occur in other migrant receiving regions around the world (see Hall, 2017; Phillimore, 2023). Immigrants from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds face systemic barriers to stable and well-paying employment. They are often relegated to precarious low-wage jobs lacking benefits and long-term security (Castro, 2022). Labour precarity negatively impacts both economic security and mental health, reinforcing cycles of disadvantage (see Fanelli et al., 2017; Jaspal & Breakwell, 2022; May et al., 2022). Moreover, the spatial concentration of social exclusion and limited economic opportunities has led to the formation of marginalized urban neighbourhoods and regions, where low-income immigrants and newcomers are over-represented (Galabuzi, 2006; Hulchanski, 2010; Kaplan, 2017; Walks, 2013). These underserved areas, with limited access to quality education and employment opportunities (see Bauder, 2002), reinforce the concentration of urban poverty by restricting residents' ability to tap into the social capital and networks required for upward social mobility. The lack of social capital in these urban spaces further reinforces social and economic exclusion for local residents, (see Coleman, 1998; Kaplan, 2017; Kay, 2005; Kissane, 2010).

By situating DCOs within broader structures of systemic inequality, namely social and economic disparities as well as civic invisibility, this chapter highlights the role of the third sector in fostering inclusion, delivering essential supports, and negotiating identity, belonging, and representation for diasporas within superdiverse urban settings. Third sector organizations operating in large migrant-receiving urban centres are susceptible to changes in governments and policies, particularly austerity measures that impact their access to resources and capacity to serve

stakeholders. As de Graauw et al. (2013) posit, migrant organizations often rely on public sector funding while also needing to assert civic legitimacy, sometimes by mobilizing collective action to gain the attention of local politicians. Despite their reach and impact, migrant-led and migrant-serving organizations are frequently marginalized or overlooked by policymakers (Couton, 2014; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008), especially when their engagements centre around racialized residents, even in places where multiculturalism is officially celebrated (Ku, 2011). De Graauw (2015, 2024) demonstrates how municipal bureaucrats in gateway cities, which are home to large numbers of migrants, often lack the lived experience necessary to understand the structural barriers facing certain groups. In Canadian cities like Vancouver and Toronto, multiculturalism is often instrumentalized by bureaucrats for branding purposes, while systemic mismanagement deepens social and economic inequality (Almeida, 2022; Good, 2009). Moreover, Good (2009) emphasizes how governance structures may reinforce disparities, especially when city staff do not reflect or understand the communities they serve.

Civic organizations led by and serving migrants often walk a tightrope, balancing the culturally specific needs of their members with the bureaucratic and political demands of funders (Ku, 2011). Small third sector players, such as the DCOs studied here, frequently operate under conditions of extreme precarity. Despite their strong local roots and rapport with different stakeholders, these DCOs struggle with limited recognition and even backlash for their advocacy for marginalized residents (see Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). Even at a large scale some movements and initiatives are often overlooked, for example, Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad (2008) highlight how the media mischaracterized large-scale mobilizations against anti-immigration legislation as spontaneous events, rather than the result of years of organizing by migrant, labour, and faith-based groups.

With increasing layers of urban diversity, third sector organizations serving migrants are forming new alliances to survive neoliberal policies of austerity and service offloading (Bhuyan et al., 2021; Guo & Guo, 2011; Ku, 2011; Lowe et al., 2017; Preston et al., 2024; Walker & Stepick, 2014). In Toronto, where one in two residents are first-generation migrants from diverse regions of the world (Statistics Canada, 2022a, b), superdiverse neighbourhoods are defined by the intersections of resident's legal status, class, gender, language, religion, and generation. Hence, organizations serving these superdiverse places must develop programs and services that reflects the complex intersectional identities of their residents (see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Kaplan, 2017). Local governments and their policies often fail to meet the needs of newcomer populations that struggle with linguistic barriers, precarious employment, cultural dislocation, and legal precarity - and third sector actors often step up to address one or more of the latter key challenges (see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Creese, 2011; Galabuzi, 2006; Lowe et al., 2017). In superdiverse urban settings, these organizations can become essential intermediaries, offer targeted programs and services while also advocate for inclusive policy reforms (de Graauw, 2015, 2024; Robson, 2019). Furthermore, Ku (2011) and Guo & Guo (2011) show how third sector and migrant civic engagement not only provides vital programs and services but also strengthens belonging, integration, and participation among residents within urban contexts.

2.3 Diaspora as a Process

Diaspora as a concept remains debated and evolving (see Brah, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2019). The term diaspora emerges from ancient Greek origins to describe the process of scattering (Brah, 1996). This research draws on contemporary post-colonial understandings of diaspora as a fluid process as well as human geographic research that focuses on the role of space, place, and scale in shaping diasporic experiences and aspirations. The following paragraphs highlight the journey of

the concept of diaspora and its evolution towards a fluid concept incorporating transnational experiences of diverse historical groups and their geographies of settlement. Tracing the roots of the concept of diaspora - to review how the term has traveled and evolved over time to become what it is today - is a helpful exercise for this research, as it enables a deeper understanding of how contemporary diasporic formations, such as Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto, are situated within broader historical, political, and geographic contexts that shape their meanings, experiences, and practices.

The concept of diaspora has undergone substantial theoretical evolution. Early research often relied on fixed typologies, emphasizing key features such as dispersal from an original homeland, a collective memory or myth of return, and a shared group consciousness anchored in ancestral origins (Brubaker, 2005; Safran, 1991). These foundational definitions, while influential, were also critiqued for their essentialist tendencies, as they often framed diasporic identity as stable and bounded, primarily shaped by forced displacement or exile (see Cohen, 1995; Mitchell et al., 2019).

However, even among the early scholars, there were efforts to complicate and expand the notion of diaspora by highlighting the multi-locational nature of diasporic experiences, emphasizing how identity is shaped through movement, settlement, and affective attachments across multiple places (see Brah, 1996; Grossberg, 1996). While the idea of diasporas is connected to a place of origin, the routes taken by diasporas were seen as dynamic - crossing multiple locations and forming layered social and geographical loyalties. Diaspora is, therefore, fundamentally a geographical concept. As Brah (1996) posits, "diaspora signals these processes of multi-locationality across geographical, cultural, and psychic boundaries" (p. 191). This research strongly advocates for a

view of diasporas that is not static and fixed but rather fluid and continually reconfigured by transnational geographies of settlement and belonging.

Historical discussions of diaspora include great debates on which groups of people qualify and who makes these decisions (Blunt, 2007; Brinkerhoff, 2009; Chailand & Rageau, 1995; Mitchell et al., 2019). Unanimous definitions and typologies are lacking, given the complex processes that shape diasporas. Over time, the term has evolved to include different ethnocultural and national identities beyond earlier groups who were primarily the victims of forced exile such as African-Caribbean slaves during European colonization (Blunt, 2007) and the Jews in Babylon (Brah, 1996).

Traditionally, methods to identify diasporic groups consisted of tracing historical mass movements and the groups impacted by forced exile related to labour, trade, and imperial upheavals (Brinkerhoff, 2009, p. 34). Over time, additional groups, including those who experienced mass movement due to some elements of voluntary migration from diverse regions of the world were also included in the fold of diasporic groups (see Brinkerhoff, 2008). For example, Chailand and Rageau (1995) includes many groups who were previously unacknowledged or scantily discussed as diasporas, such as the Palestinians, Chinese, Egyptians, Gypsies, enslaved Africans, Greeks, Koreans, and Lebanese (see Brettell, 2006). Despite the lack of recognition in academic research and diaspora studies, some of the latter groups have been migrating across global regions for centuries due to colonialism, displacement, and oppression. Other diasporas have only recently emerged as part of global transnational networks. A fluid, process-oriented understanding of diaspora challenges attempts to classify entire groups based solely on a single historical event. Parochial classifications of diaspora risks oversimplifying the complex and changing experiences of groups and fail to account for continually evolving identities and experiences.

Contemporary researchers are less concerned with who is diasporic and more with the factors that create and shape transnational diasporas globally (see Mitchell et al., 2019). Even today, a key element of diaspora is shared attachments and sentimental claims tied to a place of origin (Blunt, 2007). Other key elements include a common cultural consciousness (Falzon, 2003), physical and imaginary congregation among scattered individuals (Levitt, 2001) and common allegiance between groups of people (Van Hear, 1998). Other scholars highlight the transnational social networks and linkages that distinguish diasporic experiences, with old, exiled diasporas going on to form largely transnational networks, such as the Armenians and the Jews (Tololyan, 2010).

Human geographers engaging with diaspora studies favour concepts of diaspora as flexible collectives with transnational linkages, while also recognizing the geographically and historically rooted conditions pushing them away from a place of origin (Mitchell et al., 2019). Consequently, historically popular binaries such as the home-host land and sedentary-nomadic diasporas are challenged in contemporary human geographic and social science discourses (see Blunt, 2007; Brettell, 2006; Tololyan, 2010), with newer concepts such as simultaneity within transnational networks (Levitt & Schiller, 2004) and diasporic transnationalism (Tololyan, 2010) coming to the forefront. The concept of simultaneity within transnational networks (Levitt & Schiller, 2004) refers to the ability of diasporic individuals to maintain active and meaningful social, political, economic, and emotional ties across multiple geographies. Simultaneity is a recognition that people are not simply transitioning between locations but are actively embedded in multilayered social networks and geographies that reshape diasporic identities, experiences and aspirations. Likewise, diasporic transnationalism (Tololyan, 2010, 2018) emphasizes the sustained networks and engagements that occur across national borders among members of diaspora. This concept moves beyond the idea of a unidirectional or nostalgic return to a homeland, focusing instead on

how diasporic identities, experiences and aspirations shape and are shaped by continual cross-border flows of people, ideas, capital, and culture. Diasporic transnationalism thus acknowledges the agency of diasporic actors in shaping transnational fields and institutions, as well as their roles in contesting and negotiating belonging within distant geographies of origin and reception.

Mitchell et al. (2019) posits two key avenues of contemporary ethnographies and their contributions to diaspora studies. Both conceptual and methodological approaches have greatly influenced my own research. First, they emphasize the importance of analyzing how diasporic identities, experiences and aspirations change across time and place. To adequately understand these changes involves closely examining how macroeconomic and political factors such as national borders, immigration policies, and the rise of nationalist discourses influencing who is included or excluded shape transnational diasporas. At the same time, intersectional identities like race, ethnicity, gender, and class interact with prevailing policies, public discourse, and political changes, creating layered and often unequal experiences for diasporic individuals. In other words, diaspora is not a fixed condition; it is shaped by dynamic and evolving historical, spatial, economic, and political contexts. Second, Mitchell et al. (2019) draw attention to how diasporic groups construct and negotiate collective identities. Their research critically investigates the processes through which people develop a shared sense of belonging or group consciousness, often through narratives of common origin, culture, or struggle - although such discourses of sameness can become unstable or contested over time. Internal divisions, shifting alliances, or external pressures can challenge shared identities, revealing that group cohesion is often provisional and constantly being renegotiated within diasporas (see Mitchell et al., 2019).

Moreover, the seminal work of Brah (1996) greatly appeals to many human geographers interested in diaspora studies given the key role of spatial analyses, particularly "...the concept of diaspora

space as the site of this immanence. Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes” (Brah, 1996; p. 205). Today, transnational diasporic lives tread multiple geographies across local, regional, and international scales (Blunt, 2007; Kok & Rogers, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2019). In addition, the rise of digital diasporas represents a significant new research frontier and novel element of diasporic identities, experiences and aspirations (Brinkerhoff, 2009). While Brah (1996) conceptualized diasporic space as an intersection of multiple tangible and intangible vectors and trajectories, contemporary scholars have expanded this framework to examine how digitization facilitates diasporic intersectionality, enabling transnational dialogue, cultural production, and cross-border coordination in real time (see Madianou & Miller, 2013; Ponzanesi, 2020).

The tension between places of origin and reception remains a central feature of diasporic life (Gilroy, 2000). As Brah (1996, pp. 188-89) notes, a diaspora exists within a "creative tension" between "home" and "dispersion," where the desire for connection to a homeland is coupled with a critique of fixed, essentialist origins. For diasporic individuals, home is simultaneously an imagined ancestral space as well as a set of lived experiences grounded in their place of reception. This spatial and emotional complexity reflects the concept of diasporic transnationalism, in which diasporic actors exist across multiple cross border sites (Tololyan, 2010, 2018). Modern diasporic lives, shaped by travel and technology, embody both abstract and material forms of belonging and longing (Kok & Rogers, 2017). Contemporary ethnographic scholarship continues to investigate how diasporic identities and experiences are constructed emotionally, imaginatively, and materially across multiple places of settlement and belonging (Mitchell et al., 2019). With the various directions that diaspora studies have taken in recent times, this research seeks to contribute

to evolving debates about diasporic transnationalism and digital diasporas through an ethnographic case study of Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto. This research builds on a critical, process-oriented understanding of diasporic transnationalism rooted in historical and geographic understandings. Diaspora is not treated as a static identity or predetermined label to be determined by a researcher, but rather the outcome of dynamic and evolving processes that are continuously negotiated across built and cyber spaces. Through a novel place-based case study, and building on existing research, this research delves in-depth into how intersectional identities and transnational networks continue to shape the experiences and aspirations of Bangladeshi Canadians and their DCOs in Toronto (see Ahsan, 2015; Akbar 2016, 2019; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012).

Moving Past Nationalistic Interpretations of Diaspora

Methodological nationalism refers to the dominant assumption in social science research that the nation-state is the natural and primary unit for analyzing social phenomena (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2002). This perspective equates society with national borders, leading to a narrow focus on internal processes while overlooking transnational and local scales. Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2002) stipulates that methodological nationalism has significant shortcomings, particularly its neglect of the global interconnectedness of social, economic, and cultural processes. The latter results in a limited understanding of how migration, globalization, and international institutions influence national and local contexts (see Barnes & Christopher, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2019).

To address these limitations, scholars have called for a transnational lens that captures the fluid, nature of civic engagement across national borders and more accurately reflects the influence of global forces on local realities (see Antonsich, 2018; Brinkerhoff, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2019). Critics have rightly challenged methodological nationalism for essentializing diasporas as

monolithic groups tied to fixed, homeland-based identities (Brah, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2019; Tololyan, 2010, 2018). This research strongly aligns with these critiques, emphasizing the urgent need to move beyond rigid, nationalist frameworks that have constrained the development of diaspora studies. It extends the critique to the ethnocentric tendencies within superdiversity studies, which similarly demand a critical reassessment (see Vertovec, 2019).

Nevertheless, the actions of nation-states continue to impact diasporic groups around the globe. Policy studies demonstrate that nation-states play an active role in shaping diasporic identities, experiences and aspirations through laws, narratives, and institutional frameworks (Cohen, 2017). There are ongoing debates about whether this engagement is motivated primarily by neoliberal interests, such as capital and knowledge extraction, or by genuine commitments to care and inclusion (Cohen, 2017). Similarly, Ragazzi (2014) offers a useful typology, identifying five types of state engagement with diasporic groups: symbolic, socioeconomic, cultural, citizenship-based, and bureaucratic.

State-diaspora relations are often complex, shaped by competing geopolitical interests, and mediated by a wide array of non-state actors, including private firms, and the third sector (Carroll & Sapinsky, 2017; Cohen, 2017; Deshingkar, 2019; Mercer, 2002). States often prioritize the admission of highly skilled or elite members of the diaspora, those affiliated with industry or academia, to facilitate resource and knowledge transfers that align with development goals in sending nations (see Cohen, 2017; Ragazzi, 2014). Meanwhile, non-state actors may either supplement or challenge state-led initiatives by offering alternative modes of diasporic engagement (Deshingkar, 2019). These varying state and non-state approaches to diaspora

relations and engagement are important to understanding the broader context of diasporic civic engagement and will be investigated further in the empirical chapters.

Transnational(izing) Diasporas: Further Challenging Nationalist-Homelands

As aforementioned, the concept of diaspora has evolved significantly beyond its earlier associations with homeland-based nationalism. Tololyan (2010) notes that thinking about diasporic formation has transitioned from exilic nationalism to diasporic transnationalism where transnational networks and intersectional identities are readily emphasized. The intersectional identities and transnational networks within which diasporic groups are embedded lead to novel expressions of belonging, integration, and civic engagement. For many diasporic members, the nation-state is no longer viewed as the singular or primary point of return or identity. This shift has also spurred the development of new theoretical frameworks to understand how digital media transforms diasporic experiences, giving rise to the notion of the digital diaspora (Brinkerhoff, 2007; Ponzanesi, 2020).

Tololyan (2010, p. 38) further conceptualizes the rise of "diasporic multilocality", where belonging is distributed across multiple geographic and affective sites rather than fixed in a singular homeland. Even among exiled groups that maintain transnational networks, there is now less urgency or desire to return to the homeland compared to previous generations. This evolution marks a departure from traditional nationalist ideologies and toward what Tololyan (2010, p. 39) frames as "post-sovereignty diasporic transnationalism," a mode of diasporic identity formation that is decoupled from earlier homeland-centric discourses.

Migration scholars have grappled with the intersection between transnationalism and diasporic identities, experiences, and aspirations (see Blunt, 2007; Kok and Rogers, 2017; Tololyan, 2010).

Dahlman (2004) posits that a diasporic identity and transnational social networks require a common territorial claim, and that territory will not always be a sovereign nation-state or undisputed geographic area, but diasporas will continue to be bound together around common claims and allegiances to shared places. Diasporic identities, experiences, and aspirations continue to shape and be shaped by the transnational movement of goods, peoples, and ideas across borders, hence the need to move beyond investigating the nature of the movements to examining their embeddedness within diasporic lives (see Blunt, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2019). However, mass migration, cross-border exchanges, and diaspora formation are not novel phenomena (see Barnes & Christophers, 2018). For example, in the 1700s and 1800s, mass movements to the 'new world' involving colonialists from Europe, enslaved people from Africa and indentured labourers from South Asia, reshaped patterns of cross border migration, displacement, and settlement (Karim, 1998; Khondker & Turner, 2010).

Historical and geographic perspectives are essential for understanding how diasporas are continuously shaped and reshaped across time and space. While critical scholarship challenges fixed boundaries and static identities in diaspora studies (see Tololyan, 2010), it also needs to acknowledge the enduring influence of nation-states over diasporic transnationalism through legal status, migration policies, and border enforcement (see Vertovec, 2007). These structural constraints, however, do not negate the importance of “actor-centred approaches” that highlight diasporic agency (Tololyan, 2010, p. 973). Diasporas do not simply adapt to imposed systems; they actively engage with and transform them. This research builds on scholarship emphasizing agency among diaspora members and contributing to broader discussions of diasporic transnational networks, where intersectional identities are shaped through dynamic interactions across micro-level experiences, meso-level organizational practices, and macro-level structures

across geographies and social networks (see Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Tololyan, 2010). It is important to view diasporas not only through policy or geopolitical frameworks but also as socially embedded actors shaping civic, cultural, and economic life across places of origin and settlement.

Digital Diasporas and the Next-Generation

The rise of new information and communication technologies has fundamentally reshaped transnational engagement, giving rise to the concept of the digital diaspora (Brinkerhoff, 2009). This phenomenon describes the use of cyberspace to facilitate how dispersed diasporic groups communicate and collaborate, leading to the maintenance and contestation of different notions of collective identity and diasporic cohesion (Axel, 2005; Bernal, 2006; NurMuhammad et al., 2016). For the 1.5 and second generations, who often possess high levels of digital literacy, these digital platforms are not merely tools for communication with distant members of diaspora but represent a vital new terrain for social, cultural, economic, and political collaborations (see Hess & Korf, 2014; Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Shome, 2023). The concept of digital diaspora provides the necessary framework for examining how younger cohorts engage in civic life, both online and offline.

There are mixed findings about the impact of online versus offline civic engagement among young people (see Feng et al., 2021; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). The diverse factors shaping participation among the diasporic next-generation, from level of familial support to individual digital literacy and skills, can assist or hinder collective civic engagement (see Rouf, 2025; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). Some past studies, engaging young college students, show that both online and offline social connections are important for encouraging civic participation (Feng et al., 2021). However, differences in access to digital tools and infrastructure can worsen inequalities among youth who

are often assumed to be tech-savvy (see Feng et al., 2021; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). The digital divide, even among the young, limits the ability of some to participate online. The notion that all young people are digital natives overlooks varying preferences and abilities when it comes to digital engagement. Consequently, privileges and limitations that impact levels of digital literacy and related skills have become fundamental factors in maintaining marginality in cyberspace, influencing who gets to participate and how (see Rybas & Gajjala, 2007).

The literature suggests that identity and social context often influence youth engagement in online civic activities. Some youth engage in online civic activities as forms of psychopolitical resistance, suggesting that personal and relational dynamics shape their participation (Wilf & Wray-Lake, 2024). For diasporic youth whose families and past generations have often been through war and conflict in their places of origin digital platforms can offer safe spaces for healing and resistance (Hess & Korf, 2014). Thus, cyberspace not only provides platforms for marginalized voices, but also allows diasporic individuals to digitally express their identities and advocate for transnational collaboration towards shared goals (see Axel, 2005; Kok & Rogers, 2017). Interestingly, while online engagement can complement offline activities, it does not always translate into increased civic participation. Silke et al. (2020) found that parental norms significantly influenced offline civic engagement but had little impact on online activism. Social networks remain a key factor in catalyzing civic engagement among younger individuals, with repeated emphasis on the importance of social support networks, suggesting that supportive networks can significantly influence the willingness of individuals to engage with others who are different from them (Boroş et al., 2019).

There is some existing evidence to suggest that Bangladeshi Canadian (Rouf, 2025) and other South Asian (Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Shome, 2023) diasporic youth based in North American

urban centres are using cyberspace to boost their civic visibility and engagement. These creative hybrid approaches, treading between neighbourhood community centres and social media platforms, underscore the potential of cyberspace to facilitate communication, collaboration and coordination, particularly among groups seeking to address shared challenges. In this context, DCOs serve as important intermediaries between place-based and digitally mediated forms of civic engagement who are often tasked with meeting the intergenerational needs of diasporic members, while adapting to new technologies and preferences of younger cohorts.

The Making of a Global Bangladeshi Diaspora

The global Bangladeshi diaspora has formed through diverse migration flows, urban settlement patterns, and transnational networks. To understand the present-day experiences of the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora in Toronto, it is essential to first situate their lives within the historical and geographic context from which they originate. Bangladesh's postcolonial history, marked by economic hardship, political instability, and climate vulnerability, has contributed to significant emigration since the 1970s. Over time, Bangladeshis have pursued multistep migration routes, often moving through Gulf states, Europe, or Southeast Asia before arriving in Canada (see Rai & Reeves, 2008).

The nation-state of Bangladesh spans most of the geographic landmass known as the Bengal Delta, the floodplains and basin for three large river systems in South Asia: the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, and the Meghna – with large volumes of water flowing down from the Himalayas in the north into the Bay of Bengal in the south (Akter et al., 2016). Historically, this fertile delta was settled by diverse groups of people from across the region and abroad; "...foreign and Indian merchants, traders and bankers - Europeans, Armenians, Pathans, Turanis, Marwaris, and other upcountry

Hindus." (Khondker & Turner, 2010, p. 176), Consequently, the Bengal, especially the areas surrounding the capital of Dhaka, become a booming urban settlement with diverse migrant populations; a crossroads of different religions, occupations, and cultures as early as the 18th century (Khondker & Turner, 2010). Today, Dhaka remains Bangladesh's economic and administrative capital, transforming from the commercial capital of the Mughal Empire to an administrative capital for the British Raj in East Bengal and East Pakistan.

The unique geography and history of Bangladesh influenced the migration of Bangladeshis abroad and the formation of a transnational diaspora over time. Bangladeshis, with over 7.4 million people residing abroad as of 2020, comprise one of the world's largest migrant populations (International Organization for Migration, 2021). Key destinations for Bangladeshis abroad include the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, where 73% of the migrants from Bangladesh settle, as well as Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (International Organization for Migration, 2021). By 2022, remittances from the global Bangladeshi diaspora reached \$21.76 (USD) billion annually, representing more than 6% of Bangladesh's GDP, underscoring the critical economic role of cross border financial flows (International Organization for Migration, 2021). In North America, the Bangladeshi diaspora in the United States has grown rapidly in recent decades due to chain migration, where established migrants facilitate pathways for family and friends who come after (Akhter & Yang, 2023). This pattern is echoed in other countries, including the United Kingdom and Canada, where Bangladeshis have formed robust networks that support fellow Bangladeshi newcomers settling within specific urban diasporic neighbourhoods (see McLeman et al., 2018); Rai & Reeves, 2008).

Existing research emphasizes economic motivations for migration and settlement among the Bangladeshi diaspora globally – with labour migration being a fundamental force behind the

formation of the global Bangladeshi diaspora (see Deshingkar, 2019; International Organization for Migration, 2021; Rai & Reeves, 2008). Many Bangladeshis seek opportunities abroad due to limited economic prospects in Bangladesh as well as the constant threat of natural disasters, environmental displacement, and political turmoil (McLeman et al., 2018). Emigration from Bangladesh reflects individual and familial choices as well as the economic and geopolitical trends shaping labour markets at home (Rai & Reeves, 2008). While some migrant labourers settle abroad voluntarily, others have little choice due to limited economic prospects within Bangladesh. Many such labour migrants end up as dispensable and precarious workers exploited in the pursuit of capital accumulation across global urban centres (see Deshingkar, 2019; Hall, 2017). Day labourers from Bangladesh who seek better livelihoods in the Gulf countries, and surrounding regions often fall victim to exploitation (Deshingkar, 2019). Highly educated Bangladeshis who settle abroad in countries such as Canada are also seeking better economic conditions and professional opportunities (Akbar, 2016, 2019; Halder, 2012). According to Rahman and Khan (2007), the outmigration of skilled professionals, including doctors, engineers, and IT specialists, is often linked to personal aspirations for career advancement and the demand for skilled labour in wealthier countries. The inflow of highly skilled Bangladeshi professionals is further supported by the Canadian government's immigration policies – a point-based system that prioritizes education, work experience, and language proficiency to attract the best global talent (see Turin et al., 2020).

The earliest (Anglophone) written records of transcontinental migration from Bangladesh trace back to ship workers in the 1920s attempting to settle in colonial British port cities (Halder, 2012). These early waves of migration occurred well before the 1971 War of Bangladeshi Independence, which was significant for undoing centuries-long oppression of Bengali culture and language by the West Pakistani and British colonial administrators. For the newly formed independent

Bangladeshi nation-state in the year 1971, the early decades were shaped by political power struggles, large-scale natural disasters, and economic collapse. Amidst these existential threats, some Bangladeshis sought refuge abroad, with very few coming to distant places like Canada at that time (see Halder, 2012; Rai & Reeves, 2008; Zaman & Habib, 2018). Most Bangladeshis going abroad in those earlier decades were male labourers filling dangerous and demanding jobs as gas station attendants, construction workers, and other manual labour occupations in the resource-rich Middle East and North African nations, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (USA) (see Mahmood, 1991). However, since Middle Eastern and North African (MENA), the UK, and the US did not offer clear pathways to permanent residency or citizenship (see Clarke et al., 1990), Canada emerged as an attractive alternative for Bangladeshis seeking secure legal status. A combination of economic, social, and political factors influences the aspiration of many Bangladeshis to obtain Canadian citizenship, namely Canada is perceived by the Bangladeshi diaspora as a land of opportunity, offering better job prospects, higher wages, and access to quality education and healthcare for their families (see Islam et al., 2021; Rouf, 2020). Bangladesh's history of social and economic challenges, as well as political instability, corruption, and environmental disasters (see McLeman et al., 2018) also pushes people to migrate abroad to safer and more stable places.

The global Bangladeshi diaspora is geographically concentrated in urban areas, where they have established vibrant diasporic neighbourhoods and social networks (see Alexander, 2011, 2018; Shaw, 2004). Diaspora members often build spaces that reflect their cultural identities while also engaging with social and economic life in the urban environment (see Ashutosh, 2020). Bangladeshis illustrate many facets of diasporic urbanism within their place of settlement. For example, Brick Lane in East London has become a symbol of Bangladeshis in the UK, showcasing

the diaspora's cultural heritage through food, festivals, and businesses (Alexander, 2011, 2018; Shaw, 2004). As the global Bangladeshi diaspora navigates their intersectional identities and transnational networks, they collectively challenge traditional notions of fixed territoriality and loyalties (Ahsan, 2015). Such global movements contribute to the dynamism of the diaspora, as individuals maintain ties to their roots while integrating into new places spanning multiple continents. The global Bangladeshi diaspora is the result of decades of multistep migration, with Bangladeshis moving between cities and states for new opportunities (Ghosh, 2013).

Among the global Bangladeshi diaspora, there is a clear preference to live and work in large urban regions like London, New York, Singapore and Dubai, where there are ample opportunities for employment and business (see Ghosh, 2007; Rahman, 2018; Rai & Reeves, 2008). For the Bangladeshis, urban regions of settlement often have existing diasporic hubs which can reduce some of the risks of migration and attract more members of the diaspora through chain migration, housing supports, and employment referrals from DCOs and co-diasporic members (see Ahsan, 2015; Akbar, 2016; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012; Rai & Reeves, 2008). Moreover, the existing infrastructure in these urban regions, from transportation to communication systems to labour markets and public services, makes them particularly attractive for formal and informal economic activity, such as entrepreneurship and retail and service sector employment (Zaman & Habib, 2018). Moreover, diasporic hubs offer ethnocultural familiarity, which can be especially important for first-generation members seeking to establish a foothold in an unfamiliar place (Ashutosh, 2012; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013). Urban centres also enable first-generation newcomers to participate in the transnational networks within which they are already embedded, both economically (e.g., through remittances or business investments back home) as well as socially and culturally (e.g., maintaining family ties, religious practices, and claims of ancestral heritage) (Ghosh, 2014a).

Thus, migration to large global urban regions is not simply about access to jobs but reflects broader desires for familiarity, mobility, access, and a sense of belonging.

The Journey of the Global Bangladeshi Diaspora to Toronto

Canada's shifting immigration policies over the decades created opportunities for Bangladeshis to immigrate to urban centres such as Toronto. In the post-1967 period, with the introduction of the points-based system, Canadian immigration selection no longer prioritized national origin but instead emphasized merit-based criteria like education, language skills, and work experience (Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Reitz, 2013). This policy shift opened migration channels to non-European countries, while also increasing the proportion of economic migrants, which allowed highly skilled and educated professionals from all parts of the world to have a better chance.

Alongside changes to immigration entry criteria, Canada officially adopted multiculturalism as a federal policy in the 1970s, going on to redefine national identity and support widespread recognition of cultural diversity. While, in theory, multiculturalism encourages racialized migrants to retain their ethnocultural affiliations, it also places serious responsibility for cultural retention and integration on the migrants and migrant-led institutions, often without sufficient structural supports from different levels of governments and corresponding policies (see Anisef & Lanphier, 2003; Lowe et al., 2017). Within this broader framework, Bangladeshi Canadians have formed DCOs to navigate urban inequalities and promote their collective social, cultural, and economic well-being. Therefore, understanding the evolving experiences and aspirations of Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto requires attention to the historical origins of migration as well as public discourse and policy landscapes shaping their civic engagement.

Bangladeshi Canadians, like other diasporic groups who have come to Canada in recent decades, settle mainly in the major urban regions to benefit from the concentration of economic opportunities, diasporic hubs, social networks, and institutional supports (Akbar, 2016, 2019; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012; Propa, 2007; Rouf, 2020). Toronto, an urban region composed of diverse diasporic hubs ranging from Little Italy to Bangla Town, is emblematic of the places that appeal to newcomers and immigrants from diverse corners of the world (see Ashutosh, 2012; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013). Figure 2³ below shows the spatial distribution of recent immigrants (between 2016-21) across Toronto's census tracts, with darker blue areas indicating higher concentrations (broken into quintiles) and pale-yellow areas indicating very few recent arrivals. Notably, the highest concentrations appear in the inner suburbs (particularly in the northwest and northeast), while the old downtown core tends to show lower proportions. These darker blue areas are not just diverse in a general sense - they are actively absorbing new arrivals in real time, reflecting the most current wave of immigration and the newest source countries, refugee streams, and immigration programs of the post-2016 period. For discussions of superdiversity and the third sector, this map is critical because it reveals where the most intense and contemporary migrant settlements are unfolding, rather than where diversity has simply historically accumulated. This has direct implications for service delivery, school planning, language supports, housing pressures, and community cohesion, to assist newcomers with integration.

³ Publicly made available by City of Toronto in the November 2022 Census: Citizenship, Immigration, Ethnic Origin, Visible Minority Groups (Race), Mobility, Migration, Religion: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/8ff2-2021-Census-Backgrounder-Immigration-Ethnoracial-Mobility-Migration-Religion-FINAL1.1-corrected.p>

Map 1 – City of Toronto Proportion of Population who are Recent Immigrants (Period of Immigration 2016 to 2021) by Census Tract

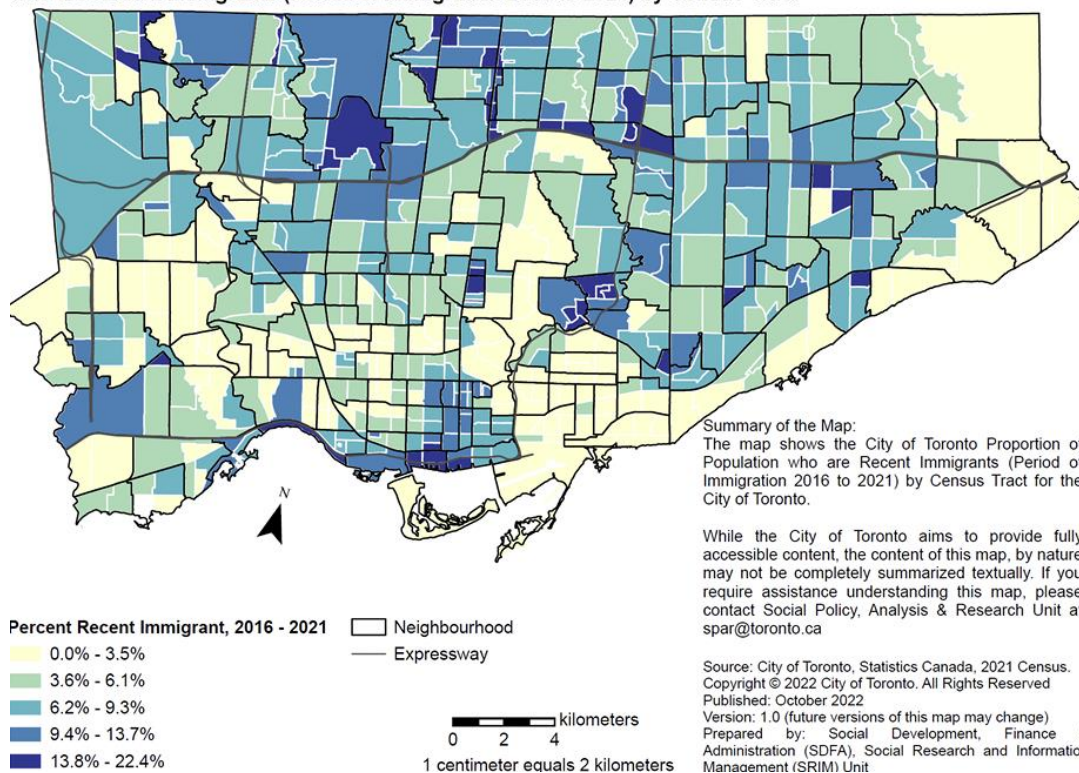


Figure 2 Map of City of Toronto Recent Immigrants (2016-2021) Concentration

With the sustained arrival of immigrants, Toronto's neighbourhoods are increasingly central to ethnographic studies on the identity and belonging of residents from diasporic backgrounds and their experiences in a diverse city (Ashutosh, 2012, 2015). The formation of Toronto's Bangla Town demonstrates how the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora reconfigures their urban surroundings to mirror familiar cultural and social spaces (Ahsan, 2015; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2020). This local placemaking parallels other Bangladeshi diasporic concentrations in cities from Singapore to the United States, where diasporic hubs are strong anchors for cultural continuity and diasporic solidarity (Rai & Reeves, 2008). The global Bangladeshi diaspora, regardless of their place of settlement, frequently refer to their surroundings as 'bidesh' (foreign land) and their homeland of Bangladesh as 'desh,' suggesting a spatially and symbolically intertwined understanding of roots and routes (see Ghosh, 2014a). These relational understandings of places

of origin and settlement are reinforced through shared language, history, and cultural practices among members of the global Bangladeshi diaspora.

Bangladeshis are part of the broader South Asian diaspora in Canada, a demographic group often categorized together in official (census) terms yet internally diverse in terms of language, religion, class, and migration history (Ghosh, 2014a). It is vital to note that South Asian diasporas in Toronto are far from monolithic and that existing research reveals that solidarity and collaboration emerge through gendered, generational, linguistic, and religious lines of differentiation within and across diasporic groups in the city (Ashutosh, 2015). There are some similarities among the local diaspora such as most Bangladeshis speaking the language of Bangla and belonging to the Muslim religion, however there are also gendered, class, occupational, and generational differences within the local diaspora (Ahsan, 2015; Halder, 2012). Intra- and inter-group engagements among diaspora members complicate essentialist notions of a collective South Asian or even Bangladeshi identity, particularly in urban centres where diverse neighbourhoods are sites of negotiation between inclusion and exclusion (see Ashutosh, 2012; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013).

This research is a place-based case study of Bangladeshi Canadian in Toronto that investigates how diasporic identities, experiences, and aspirations shape and are shaped through civic engagement. Conceptualizing diaspora as a process rather than a fixed category enables a deeper analysis of how diaspora members navigate the complexities of intersectional identities and transnational networks, which often span different generational, occupational, gendered, and spatial dynamics. In doing so, this research contributes to current and future understandings of diaspora as a socially embedded and spatially situated process best investigated through ethnographic place-based case studies.

2.4 Aspirations and Experiences of the Bangladeshi Canadian Diaspora

Challenges facing the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora can be gleaned from a comprehensive literature review. Literature about the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora began to emerge in earnest in the early 21st century, with a range of scholarly contributions covering many themes and geographic areas. The literature is reviewed chronologically to trace the evolution of key issues and highlight recurring concerns over time. This methodical approach helps identify central themes, such as integration challenges, diasporic aspirations and spatialized settlement, that continue to warrant further empirical investigation. Much of the existing literature consists of postgraduate theses and dissertations produced at large Canadian universities.

The earliest traceable literature posits a general Bangladeshi Canadian identity (Nazneen, 2000) based mainly on case studies in large urban centres where Bangladeshis were settling at the time; Montreal (Nazneen, 2005) and Ottawa (Ahmed, 2006). Early works in Toronto emerge in the mid-2000s, discussing the use of the Bengali language among the local diaspora (Subhan, 2007). Around this time, studies of economic issues such as the housing experiences facing Bangladeshi Canadians in Kitchener-Waterloo also start to emerge (Propa, 2007). Literature about Bangladeshis settling in other Canadian cities was equally diverse ranging from an assessment of the legal system in Winnipeg (Quddus, 2008) to Muslim Bangladeshi women's identities in St. John's (Akhter, 2010).

More 'Toronto-centric' literature emerged in the 2010s. The literature of the 2010s often concentrated on small geographic areas, namely Toronto's Bangla Town and nearby diasporic concentrations, highlighting the social and economic challenges in these neighbourhoods

characterized by poverty, newcomer concentrations, and high-density housing (Ghosh, 2014a). Toronto-based research included a detailed study of the neighbourhoods around Toronto's Bangla Town and how diasporic identities, experiences and aspirations were shaped by religious, gendered, and class dynamics (Halder, 2012). Gendered and class experiences within the local diaspora were also examined among Bangladeshi Canadian women entrepreneurs from Toronto's Bangla Town (Akbar, 2016, 2019). Research that evaluates generational familial ties (Hossen & Westhues, 2013) and cross-border marriages (Chowdhury, 2018) among Bangladeshi Canadians also emerged at this time. While the latter studies discussed intersectional identities and transnational networks as well as different forms of communication and collaboration (at an individual or household level) across geographies, DCOs remained largely absent from the literature.

Recent research expands on themes introduced in earlier studies. In 2020, a few studies examined the role of language in identity formation and integration (Shams, 2020) as well as the labour market challenges facing Bangladeshi Canadian women and their families (Akbar & Preston, 2020). Simultaneously, mental health supports for generation 1.5 and two Bangladeshi Canadians (Islam et al., 2021), their educational and economic aspirations (Rouf, 2020), and social media use (Shuva, 2021a) were investigated. The literature continued to find that many first-generation Bangladeshi Canadians were experiencing deprofessionalization and underemployment in Toronto despite possessing advanced educational and professional qualifications (Agrawal, 2013; Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2020). These economic challenges are exacerbated by language barriers, racism, and social, cultural, and economic exclusion (Halder, 2012; Propa, 2007). Consequently, many Bangladeshi Canadian families face economic hardships, struggling with access to secure housing, stable employment, and high rates of poverty (see Agrawal, 2013; Akbar, 2019; Debbarman, 2019;

Rouf 2020, 2024). Recent studies also identify mental health as a growing concern, particularly as Bangladeshi Canadian newcomers experience heightened stress related to settlement challenges, social isolation, and the lack of culturally appropriate mental health supports (Islam et al., 2021).

Spatial Concentrations, Economic Challenges, and Civic Interventions

The existing research literature emphasizes the success with which Bangladeshi Canadians have established a strong presence in Toronto through the formation of diasporic hubs such as Bangla Town and adjacent neighbourhoods in western Scarborough (Ahsan, 2015; Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2020). However, many members of the diaspora residing in and around Toronto's Bangla Town report persistent social and economic challenges, such as underemployment, deprofessionalization, and discrimination in the labour market (Akbar, 2016, 2019; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2020). The social and economic challenges facing the Bangladeshi Canadians are typical of the acute issues facing recent racialized groups – with existing disparities deepening over time, contributing to widening income inequality and spatial segregation across Toronto (see Hulchanski, 2010; Rosa, 2023; United Way, 2017; Walks, 2013). While some immigrant groups, such as Chinese Canadians and Indian Canadians, have achieved relatively high rates of employment, income, and home ownership (Murdie & Ghosh, 2013), Bangladeshi Canadians, with similar educational achievements have fared worse by comparison (Agrawal, 2013; Akter et al., 2014). One contributing factor may be a high concentration within low-income inner suburban neighbourhoods where other racialized newcomers reside (see Li, 1998; Qadeer et al., 2010). Toronto's Bangla Town, located within the inner suburb of Scarborough, has a high concentration of poverty, limited access to well-paying jobs, and aging high-rise apartment complexes (Akbar, 2016, 2019; Halder, 2012; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013; Rouf, 2020). The absence of well-paid and

secure economic opportunities in local neighbourhoods significantly constrains residents' pathways to upward mobility (Bauder, 2002; Galabuzi, 2006; Zaami, 2015). These structural disadvantages not only affect the first-generation but also shape the experiences of 1.5 and second-generation Bangladeshi Canadians. While the 1.5 and second-generation Bangladeshi Canadians may benefit from diasporic programs and services in and around Bangla Town, they also face the enduring challenges of growing up in marginalized neighbourhoods where economic prospects are limited (see Rouf, 2020). As Preston and Ray (2020) observe, many second-generation residents of Toronto, particularly those from Asian backgrounds, tend to stay close to and continue to grapple with some of social and economic conditions of the neighbourhoods in where they grew up.

The experiences of Bangladeshi Canadians, particularly the first-generation, reveals a troubling gap between aspirations and achievements. Despite high educational and professional qualifications, many continue to face barriers to meaningful employment and commensurate compensation (Akbar, 2016, 2019; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012; Propa, 2007). Labour force participation is average, yet Bangladeshi men are overrepresented in part-time work, and Bangladeshi women in unemployment compared to other South Asians (Debbarmann, 2019). Existing research shows that Bangladeshis and Pakistanis earn less and have lower home ownership rates than Canadian-born individuals and other racialized immigrants, despite comparable or higher education levels (Agrawal, 2013). While there are signs that Canadian-educated 1.5 and second-generation Bangladeshi Canadians may be faring better, some still report experiences of labour market discrimination and challenges towards greater social mobility (Rouf, 2020, 2025).

Conventional predictors of integration, such as arriving in Canada at a young age or obtaining a Canadian education, have not yielded the same returns for Bangladeshi Canadians as for other

comparable immigrant groups (Agrawal, 2013). Alarming, first-generation Bangladeshis with Canadian degrees report a lower probability of earning high incomes than their peers (Agrawal, 2013). These disparities align with broader patterns across Canada, where racialized immigrants with higher education earn significantly less than their non-racialized counterparts (Pendakur & Pendakur, 2015). A heavy reliance on co-diasporic employment networks and concentration in low-wage survival jobs further reinforces these disparities for some Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto (see Akbar, 2016, 2019; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013; Rouf, 2020).

Since the end of the Second World War, Toronto residents have established diverse civic organizations to address the social and economic challenges facing residents (see Anisef & Lanphier, 2003). Civic organizations established by migrants play a crucial role in supporting integration, political participation, and the formation of social capital in places of reception (Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). These migrant-serving organizations help newcomers navigate settlement challenges, promote cultural continuity, and advocate for the specific needs of their respective groups (Bhuyan et al., 2021). Moreover, migrant-serving organizations often act as intermediaries between different ethnocultural groups and the state, particularly in areas such as welfare provision, housing, health, and employment services (Richmond & Shields, 2024). This intermediary role, while vital, also positions them within a precarious funding landscape, often making their operations dependent on state-granted legitimacy and project-based funding cycles (Lowe et al., 2017).

Ethnocultural identities often play a central role in the formation and operation of migrant civic organizations. The organizations may initially emerge around shared cultural, religious, or linguistic identities, especially among first-generation immigrants seeking familiarity and solidarity (Bhuyan et al., 2021; Couton, 2014; Walker & Stepick, 2014). Over time, some

organizations evolve to incorporate intersectional identities and transnational networks which connect diasporic members with shared civic interests across geographies and generations (Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Shome, 2023).

Despite the growing recognition of the important contributions of migrant civic organizations, most existing studies of Bangladeshi Canadians focus on individuals and households rather than their organizations. Without studying the organizations that Bangladeshi Canadians establish and nurture, it is challenging to assess the impacts of solidarity and reciprocity among diasporic members seeking to address the social and economic issues facing them within superdiverse places of settlement. Moreover, cyberspace further catalyzes the emergence of novel forms of organizing and coordination, which also require careful consideration in the context of transnational diasporas and their civic engagement. While some preliminary studies of Bangladeshi Canadians have described the use of online platforms by individual professionals for employment and networking (see Shuva, 2021a), little is known about how these same tools can be used for diasporic civic engagement across social networks and multiple geographies of origin and settlement.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has situated the research within the critical traditions of economic geography, diaspora studies, and superdiversity scholarship, offering a set of robust conceptual frameworks for investigating the three research questions. Through the lenses of Polanyi's double movement and Gibson-Graham's solidarity economies, the chapter underscored the importance of reciprocity, redistribution, and non-capitalist practices in the third sector. This chapter reflected upon how DCOs are simultaneously shaped by and respond to neoliberal restructuring, navigating pressures from both state and market actors while striving to maintain autonomy in their mandates and effectively serve their stakeholders.

The literature review in this chapter highlighted the significance of superdiverse urban settings and the ways in which civic invisibility, inequality, and digital transformation shape DCOs' access to resources and capabilities. Moreover, the chapter positioned DCOs as key actors in diasporic civic engagement, especially for racialized and low-income groups navigating systemic exclusion within urban settings. Ultimately, this chapter lays the foundation for the empirical analysis by identifying the key conceptual tools, existing research literature, and lively scholarly debates that inform this research endeavour. Consequently, this research sets the stage to meaningfully contribute to human geographic inquiry by examining the intricate linkages between the ideas and practices of economic pluralism, spatial inequality, and transnational civic engagement, thereby advancing our understanding of how DCOs operate across built and digital cyber spaces under conditions of notable precarity and potential.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Overview

To investigate spatial and social dynamics shaping and being shaped by DCOs, this research employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. First, the Statistics Canada Census microdata, which provides extensive information about individuals and households, are analyzed to identify the social and economic characteristics of Toronto neighbourhoods where Bangladeshi Canadians reside and where the studied DCOs emerged. This spatialized approach to research enables identification of the settlement, housing, occupation, poverty, and education levels in superdiverse neighbourhoods as well as the levels of ethnocultural diversity within each neighbourhood. Second, complementing the analysis of social and economic conditions in Toronto neighbourhoods, semi-structured interviews with DCO stakeholders; board members, volunteers, staff, and general members are used to provide rich insights into the programs and services as well as institutional dynamics of DCOs. Third, the analysis of digital archives including social media, websites, and online campaign materials, effectively captures the use of cyberspace to achieve organizational mandates and reach stakeholders across diverse geographies. Taken together, mixed methods provide a holistic understanding of Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto.

As Crotty (1998) explains, methodology is the rationale that guides the selection of research methods and situates them within a broader field of inquiry. Researchers must ensure that methods are logically aligned with their overarching research questions and objectives, thereby strengthening the validity and coherence of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A well-articulated methodology enables researchers to interpret their findings in a manner consistent with the research questions and conceptual frameworks chosen. This research is a mixed-method, place-

based case study of three Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs across Toronto designed to address three research questions:

- (1) How do DCOs address economic/occupational and multi-generational sociocultural challenges in a superdiverse context?
- (2) How has digitization impacted the organizational form and function of DCOs?
- (3) How do DCOs engage with the labour and technical processes required to go digital?

This chapter discusses how the research questions and conceptual frameworks underpinning this research are related to the study's mixed methods. The discussion commences with a closer look at the research methods and how they were conducted before moving onto an explanation about the significance of Toronto as a research site. A detailed explanation of the ethnographic approaches employed in this research, namely institutional and cyber ethnographies, is provided. The last portion of the chapter provides a closer look at how the three DCOs under study were chosen and a profile of each one.

3.2 The Research Process

After the York University authorized human participation in the research in the fall of 2021, fieldwork involving semi-structured interviews, review of organizational archives, and the preparation of researcher field notes continued for a year until the fall of 2022. After completion of the qualitative components, I conducted an in-depth quantitative inquiry into the social and economic characteristics of Toronto neighbourhoods using Census 2016 data, which was the most updated available data set at that time. The quantitative component was completed in the fall of 2023 after fulfilling strict guidelines and data quality checks mandated by the Statistics Canada York University Research Data Centre.

Statistics Canada Census Microdata and Trend Analysis

The quantitative analysis used the 2016 Canadian Census Master File, which comprises detailed microdata collected from the long-form census questionnaire administered to approximately 25% of Canadian households. Unlike publicly available aggregate census profiles, the Master File provides individual-level, anonymized responses across a wide range of socio-demographic, economic, housing, and geographic variables. It includes data on respondents' age, sex, education, income, employment, immigration status, ethnic origin, language, and housing characteristics, enabling nuanced analysis at various spatial scales, including census tracts (CTs), dissemination areas (DAs), and forward sortation areas (FSAs). Access to the Master File is restricted and made available through Statistics Canada's Research Data Centres (RDCs), ensuring secure analysis under strict confidentiality protocols. This dataset provides the high-resolution detail needed to examine patterns of superdiversity, inequality, and social stratification in urban contexts such as Toronto.

Using the individual level data for Bangladeshi Canadians across the Toronto CMA, descriptive (mean, median, counts and percentages) calculations were conducted at the metropolitan and census tract levels for variables describing income, employment, housing, age, and education. These variables were chosen given their significance to social mobility and economic outcomes for urban residents across Toronto. I used the prevalence (percentage of the local population) of Bangladeshi Canadians within each census tract to sort them into categories of high, medium, and low diasporic concentration. A lot of the discussion earlier and later in this manuscript, as well as past research on Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto, focuses on CTs with high diasporic concentration, such as Toronto's Bangla Town. By focusing on small geographic areas, the

research provides a spatially nuanced comparative analysis of the social and economic characteristics of Bangladeshi Canadians and their non-Bangladeshi neighbours within Toronto and its neighbourhoods. This comparative spatialized approach sheds light on how Bangladeshi Canadians fare in terms of poverty, housing, education, occupation, and other measurable aspects of integration and settlement compared to their non-Bangladeshi neighbours and other metropolitan residents.

Archival Analysis of Digital Records

Digital records created by diasporas online take diverse forms, such as text, audio, images, and video (Axel, 2005; NurMuhammad et al., 2016). In this research, digital records found online on DCO websites and social media pages, provided valuable information about organizational structure, policy, and discourses. They also helped corroborate the findings from the in depth semi structured interviews with different DCO stakeholders. I diligently gathered and analyzed publicly available digital archives and documents for the three DCOs under study from the beginning of 2020 to the end of 2022. They included annual general meeting reports, program brochures, outreach materials, donation pages, and event calendars.

Digital footprints offering clues about DCO membership, funding, employment, volunteering, and outreach were compiled, sorted, and tagged with themes based on the frequency and nature of mentions. The archival analysis offered valuable information into the shifting form and function of DCOs, especially how they went partially or wholly online over the period of study. A lot of time was spent investigating archives of digitized organizational records.

Researcher's Field Notes

My research field notes added colour to the types and frequencies of digitized programs and services, complementing findings from the analysis of digital archives, which were published on organizational websites, and social media. Careful analysis of researcher's field notes from observations of synchronous digital public events held by the three studied DCOs, ranging from community town halls to cultural celebrations on Zoom and Facebook Live. The field notes include observations from publicly shared recorded online events such as a community town hall between MPP Doly Begum and local DCO leadership. The notes are based on observation and created to serve as a written reminder for issues and concepts to later triangulate with the archival analysis and semi structured interview notes.

The Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews allow respondents to express their views and insights to the researcher largely in their own words and often with opportunities for researchers to clarify and follow up on respondents' statements (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Mann, 2016). For semi-structured interviews, the aim was to speak to at least one (paid) staff member, one board member, two volunteers, and two general members within each DCO. The initial goals were surpassed, with a total of 26⁴ in-depth semi-structured interviews. Some categories of interviewees, such as paid staff, were small since DCOs primarily rely on volunteers (see Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2025). To avoid issues of privacy with small sample sizes, the identity of each interviewee is confidential and anonymized, and any facet of personal identification such as age or gender are not provided.

⁴ This includes 10 stakeholders from JOS and 8 from BIES and SAO each. The stakeholders are a mix of board members, staff (BIES only), general members, and volunteers. Further demographic information is not shared to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of each stakeholder given the relatively small pool of people in some of these categories.

The interview questions (Appendix: Interview Guide) investigated each interviewee's history of involvement with the organization, motivations for DCO involvement, and the impacts of superdiversity and digitization on the organization and their own roles within the DCO. The interview questions about digitization probed how organizational decisions about digitizing programs and services were made, who made the decisions, and who carried out required technical maintenance. The interviews offered rich insights into how some diasporic members navigate civic engagement within superdiverse urban environments and cyberspace as well.

Interviews present some practical challenges which I had to overcome in some cases, such as respondents catering answers to match the perceived expectations of the researcher, presenting limited information that respondents recall at the time, and the use of select quotes that reaffirm researcher biases in the interpretation process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith, 2005). Despite the potential shortcomings, semi structured interviews provide an effective method for researchers to speak directly and anonymously with research participants (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Mann, 2016). Good practices such as preparing open-ended and unbiased questions as well as having an additional list of useful probing questions helped reduce some of the expected challenges. Complementing interviews with other qualitative and quantitative research methods enabled a more holistic perspective on the research questions.

The success of semi-structured interviews depends on researchers being cognizant of the backgrounds and experiences of all interviewees (Campbell et al., 2010, 2019). The research interviews were recorded live so I could transcribe the conversations and listen to them later. All interviews were conducted, recorded and securely stored via Zoom. Zoom interviews offer key advantages in accessibility, cost reduction, and geographic reach, enabling researchers to include more diverse and dispersed participants while minimizing logistical constraints (Archibald et al.,

2019). However, digital telecommunication tools may limit the depth of rapport-building and the interpretation of non-verbal cues compared to in-person interviews, potentially affecting data richness (Seitz, 2016). Additionally, issues such as digital access, technological literacy, and connectivity can introduce new forms of exclusion and bias. Research notes from the digital archival analysis were compared against the interview transcriptions to ensure the accuracy of the information and highlight any contradictions that could require further examination.

The semi-structured interviews were analysed using NVivo. After saving and storing the raw data in NVivo, transcripts were coded and analyzed systematically, first using a surface-level descriptive approach and then more analytical deconstructions (see Cope & Kurtz, 2016). Coding began with developing themes related to the three research questions. The use of relevant codes ensures easy tracking and comparisons with similar data fragments. These descriptive themes were revisited multiple times during the research process. The themes were also compared with archival insights, and the researcher field notes multiple times. These processes were repeated for each research question and all transcriptions until recurring themes and notable anomalies presented a clear and nuanced understanding.

3.3 Toronto: An Unequal City of Superdiverse Neighbourhoods

A historical overview is essential for understanding how Toronto evolved into an urban region with many superdiverse neighbourhoods. Coming into the first half of the 20th century, Toronto remained predominantly British – and rather unprepared for the influx of international migrants following the Second World War (Anisef & Lanphier, 2003, p. 373). As international migration to Canadian urban centres increased, different levels of government began to take a more active role in the affairs of ethnocultural groups, promoting discourses of ethnic self-reliance and

institutional completeness (see Anisef & Lanphier, 2003). In following decades, as the country sought to attract more highly skilled and educated global talent, waves of immigration from Asia and Africa reached Canadian urban centres. Consequently, since the 1980s, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and other urban centres have become increasingly ethnoculturally diverse (Anisef & Lanphier, 2003; Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013).

A key turning point in Canada's immigration history occurred in 1967 with the introduction of the points-based immigration system. This system marked a shift away from country-of-origin preferences toward selection criteria based on education, work experience, and language skills, thereby laying the foundation for an influx of skilled economic migrants from diverse regions of the world (Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Hiebert, 2015; Reitz, 2013). Moreover, Canada was among the first nation-states to adopt an official multiculturalism policy at the federal level (Bannerji, 2000; Fincher et al., 2019; Guo & Guo, 2011). This policy, initiated in the 1970s, continues to frame different types of migration and contemporary urban diversity.

However, the arrival of diverse migrants from across the globe also produced divergent social and economic trajectories, especially in major gateway cities such as Toronto (Anisef & Lanphier, 2003; Boyd & Vicker, 2000). Immigration and settlement patterns in Toronto since the Second World War can be broadly categorized into two distinct phases, with the first wave between 1945 and 1980 characterized by large numbers of European immigrants settling in central Toronto and a second wave, beginning around the 1980s, marked by the emergence of suburban immigrant concentrations of diverse groups from different parts of Asia, Africa, and South America (Anisef & Lanphier, 2003; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013). The social and economic pathways of the migrant groups who arrived in these two distinct waves (1945-1980 and the 1980s onwards) diverged significantly, reflecting the challenges of immigration and integration policies over time, the

availability of culturally relevant civic supports, and economic opportunities in local labour markets (Anisef & Lanphier, 2003; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013). The European immigrants who arrived in the early post-war period benefited from a booming industrial economy, with strong demand for labour in manufacturing, enabling newcomers to secure stable employment that facilitated upward mobility (Hiebert, 2000; Ley, 2003). In contrast, post-1980 immigrants, primarily from the Global South, entered a labour market marked by bifurcation with employment declining in manufacturing and the rapid rise of precarious service sector employment (Murdie & Ghosh, 2013; Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2005). Consequently, the post-1980 immigrants often settled in suburban areas where housing and rental options were more affordable than the increasingly expensive city core (see Murdie & Ghosh, 2013; Qadeer et al., 2010). In recent decades, the rapid increase in Toronto's migrant population has placed additional pressure on the city's resources and infrastructure. Between 2001 and 2021, Toronto's population grew by 35%, outpacing the national growth rate of 30% (Statistics Canada, 2023).

This research builds on contemporary conceptualizations of urban regions as collectives of superdiverse neighbourhoods (see Albeda, 2020; Crul, 2016; Zhuang, 2024). Toronto exemplifies the coexistence of vibrant diasporic spaces alongside entrenched social and economic inequalities between different neighbourhoods and residents. The City of Toronto has many neighbourhoods which are home to different ethnocultural groups who have settled in the urban region. Figure 3⁵ below shows the proportion of visible minority populations across Toronto's census tracts, with darker blue areas representing neighbourhoods where visible minorities make up many residents

⁵ Publicly made available by City of Toronto in the November 2022 Census: Citizenship, Immigration, Ethnic Origin, Visible Minority Groups (Race), Mobility, Migration, Religion: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/8ff2-2021-Census-Backgrounder-Immigration-Ethnoracial-Mobility-Migration-Religion-FINAL1.1-corrected.pdf>

(up to 98.9%) and pale-yellow areas indicating neighbourhoods with relatively lower visible minority populations (as low as 1.7%). The map colours is divided into quintiles, and the spatial pattern is striking: the inner suburbs, particularly in the northwest and northeast, are almost entirely dark blue, meaning visible minorities constitute nearly the entire residential population in those areas. In contrast, much of the old downtown core and some eastern neighbourhoods appear considerably lighter.

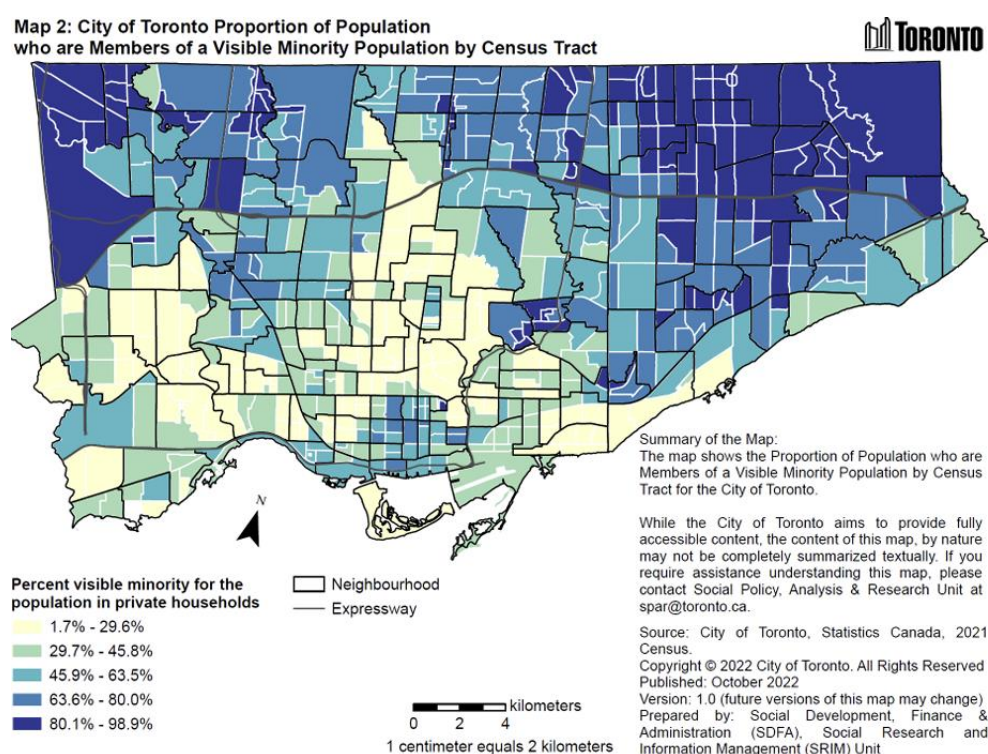


Figure 3 Map of City of Toronto Visible Minority Concentration

Despite notable social and economic challenges, diasporic groups have carved out hubs in specific urban locations, such as Bangla Town, Little Italy, and Chinatown (see Ashutosh, 2012; Ghosh, 2014a; Hackworth & Rekers, 2005; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013; Qadeer et al., 2010). The diversity is often associated with deep-rooted inequalities among residents (Fincher et al., 2019; Hall, 2017;

Phillimore, 2023; Spoonley, 2014). In Toronto, there are stark social and economic differences between residents of different neighbourhoods in the metropolitan region (Hulchanski, 2010; United Way, 2017). Many members of racialized diasporic groups are low-income and facing poverty despite high levels of education and professional skills (see Akbar, 2015, 2019; Halder, 2012).

Superdiversity characterized by the intersection of race, ethnicity, legal status, language, class, and other factors (Vertovec, 2007, 2019) can mask and intensify existing stratification, particularly for racialized diaspora members facing underemployment and deprofessionalization (see Banerjee et al., 2019; see Brah, 1996; see Creese, 2011; Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Fincher et al., 2019; Hall, 2017). For many racialized first-generation diaspora members living in a settler colonial society, the challenges are systemic and long-standing. Existing research shows Bangladeshi Canadians and other racialized residents are more likely to experience deprofessionalization, precarious low wage employment, and discrimination in the labour market than their white Canadian counterparts (see Agrawal, 2013; Akbar, 2016, 2019; Block et al., 2019; Chatterjee, 2019; Galabuzi, 2006). Social and economic barriers often relegate marginalized groups to low-income neighbourhoods with limited public resources, inadequate housing, and a lack of job opportunities (see Kaplan, 2017; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013).

In Toronto, inequality is deeply spatialized. Inner suburban neighbourhoods, where many racialized diasporas settle are marked by high poverty rates, social disinvestment, and limited access to much needed public services (Ghosh, 2014a; Hulchanski, 2010; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013; Power et al., 2022; Qadeer et al., 2010; Zhuang, 2024). Marginalized residents and neighbourhoods face barriers to adequate housing, transit, and healthcare, and well-paid jobs, reinforcing cycles of poverty and social exclusion (see Briggs et al., 2016; Walks & Maaranen, 2008). In contrast, many

outer suburbs are home to third- or later-generation diaspora members, primarily descendants of Western and Southern European settlers, who often have more stable employment, and intergenerational wealth (see Preston & Ray, 2020; Qadeer et al., 2010; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013).

3.4 Measuring Superdiversity within Toronto Neighbourhoods

Understanding the spatial and social dynamics of neighbourhoods is crucial for analyzing how DCOs emerge and operate within urban regions. Studying Toronto, a diverse city that has experienced multiple waves of international migration, this research approaches superdiversity not simply as a demographic condition, but as an analytical lens to examine how intersecting social and economic factors take shape at the neighbourhood level. By identifying areas of high ethnocultural diversity and analyzing their shared features and unique internal variations, this research investigates how local, place-based dynamics influence the form and function of DCOs. Mapping the spatial patterns of Bangladeshi Canadians across Toronto provides deep insights into diasporic civic engagement as well as everyday social and economic challenges facing diaspora members. The neighbourhoods where Bangladeshi Canadians concentrate function as more than sites of residence – these local areas and the DCOs that originate within them are dynamic sites where solidarity is cultivated, inequality is contested, and diasporic identities are continuously negotiated.

There is no single accepted measurement of superdiversity. Scholars are still seeking consensus on how superdiversity should be measured. The quantitative cut-off for determining that diversity becomes superdiversity remains highly subjective. As Stringer (2014, p. 459) ponders, "Does it need 20 different ethnic groups living within it, or 30, or 40? Does it become superdiverse when

there are 10 sub-regions of birth, or 20? The census data itself cannot answer that kind of question; it can only provide the raw data". Recognizing the shortcomings of quantitative measures of superdiversity, many researchers rely upon qualitative analysis to identify superdiverse places. Qualitative studies use field observations, such as the presence of ethnocultural stores and restaurants with signboards in non-official (state-provisioned) languages as proof of superdiversity (Kaplan, 2017; Stringer, 2014). These studies build on long-standing traditions of qualitative research on urban diasporic concentrations where businesses and civic organizations provide ethnoculturally relevant goods and services as well as foster social networks based on cultural solidarities (see Li, 2008; Wilson & Portes, 1980). While superdiverse neighbourhoods can offer localized supports and resources to residents, they can also reinforce social and economic inequalities that already exist within urban regions, as access to resources and opportunities vary between individuals and groups based on their social capital and networks (see Ahsan, 2015; Kaplan, 2017; Xie & Gough, 2011).

Researchers often use a mix of mapping, statistical analysis of census data, and ethnographic fieldwork to evaluate superdiversity (see Stringer, 2014). Some studies on superdiversity intentionally select geographies where the population is large enough for data crunching but small enough to cover the area on foot (see Stringer, 2014). By gathering empirical data on a geographic area and its population, researchers experience "...emerging themes in an iterative process of seeking similarities and differences within and between the domains of research..." (Berg et al., 2019; p. 2730).

The geographic unit of analysis used in superdiversity research varies across studies, ranging from single neighbourhoods, such as Jane and Finch in Toronto (Ahmadi, 2017), to broader scales such as the entire Toronto metropolitan area, as well as comparative urban analyses with other global

cities, such as London in the UK (see Raco & Tasan-Kok, 2020). This study employs both macro- and micro-scale geographic analyses. Superdiversity is evaluated for the large urban region encompassed by the Toronto metropolitan area as well as smaller geographic units such as census tracts, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of diasporic settlement as well as social and economic patterns across spatial scales.

In this research, an adaptation of the Simpson's index (Hiebert, 2019; Piekut et al., 2012; Simpson, 1949) is used to calculate ethnocultural diversity. Entropy indices such as Simpson's tell us the probability of randomly coming across a particular group member when groups with a different (or equal) number of members are present in an area. Here an adaptation of the general entropy formula, known as the Shannon-Weiner diversity index was used to calculate superdiversity. Entropy is measured according to the following formula (see Routledge, 1979):

$$H = -\sum [(pn) * \log (pn)]$$

where H is the Shannon diversity index,

pn is the proportion of individuals of n-th species in the total group,

$$pn = n/N,$$

n is individuals of a given group,

N is the total number of individuals,

Σ is the total sum,

Log is a natural logarithm with an arbitrary base (base ten was used).

The 'entropy score' or 'H' indicates the evenness of different ethnocultural groups in an area. Given its logarithmic nature, H can yield a result greater than one. As per Statistics Canada's

categorizations, twelve ethnocultural groups⁶ were used to measure the Shannon-Weiner index. These different groups share some historical and geographical roots, leading to them being classified and clustered as groups. Working within the limitations of the census data that specify twelve unique ethnocultural origins, the maximum value for H is a total score of 2.48. The maximum value indicates 'perfect' or 'complete' ethnocultural diversity within a specific geographic area.

As discussed earlier, this research focuses on census tracts, small geographic units with populations ranging from 2,000 to 8,000 within the Toronto metropolitan area. Using census tract data provides a more precise spatial scale for analyzing the social and economic characteristics of the geographic areas where Bangladeshi Canadians concentrate in high numbers and comparing them to areas where there are less or no Bangladeshi Canadians. Given the large land area and population of Toronto, relying solely on metropolitan-level data would not accurately reflect the social and economic experiences of the local diaspora. One of the central motivations for focusing on census tracts is a commitment to geographic research which recognizes that urban areas are not homogeneous. Instead, within urban region, there are significant social and economic differences among residents and across neighbourhoods (see Bauder, 2002; Hedman et al., 2019; Hulchanski, 2010; United Way, 2017). Adequately understanding neighbourhood effects requires a nuanced approach, one that considers both the material characteristics of a place, connections (social and spatial) between places, and the lived experiences of residents within these places (Vallée et al., 2015). A detailed spatial perspective is essential for addressing inequalities and injustices in access to urban resources and opportunities (Galabuzi, 2006; Hedman et al., 2019; Kissane, 2010). The

⁶ These are the distinct ethnocultural groups provided in the Canadian Census 2016; South Asian, Chinese, Black, non-visible minority, Latino American, Filipino, South-east Asian, Arab, West Asian, Korean, Japanese and mixed identities.

lack of social capital in some urban spaces can reinforce exclusion and marginalization, limiting individuals' ability to connect with economic opportunities and attain social mobility (see Coleman, 1988; Kaplan, 2017; Kay, 2005; Kissane, 2010).

In sum, this research takes into consideration the number of Bangladeshi Canadians who have settled in Toronto and their concentration within specific neighbourhoods approximated by census tracts that comprise the census metropolitan area. By examining where the diasporic population lived in 2016⁷, the analysis (discussed in greater detail in chapter four) provides critical information about the spatial distribution of Bangladeshi Canadians across Toronto.

3.5 Digital Diasporas and the Cyberethnography

With advances in telecommunication platforms and digital technologies, transnational diasporas are increasingly digital diasporas that maintain and develop connections through cyberspace (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Vekemans, 2019). The widespread adoption of digital tools has enabled diasporas to cultivate both virtual and in-person forms of social connectivity (Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Vekemans, 2019).

In the 21st century, cyberspace emerged as a central site for human interaction and a transformative force in how we communicate and collaborate. This transformation is particularly significant for migration and diaspora studies, where digital platforms increasingly reshape social interactions and economic opportunities. Research methods have undergone significant change to keep up with digitization. Cyberethnography, a methodological approach designed to study digital cultures, has become important for capturing the nuances of online engagement. Rybas and Gajjala (2007) were

⁷ Since then, there was a new data release with the 2021 census, released some years after the field work for this manuscript was complete, which will allow for future research endeavour and data updates.

some of the early researchers to investigate how digitization reshapes ethnographic research, positing that online and offline identities are deeply intertwined. Hence, many researchers have emphasized the need for ‘lived cyberethnography,’ where in-person interactions and interactions in cyberspace are seen as mutually constitutive (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Ponzanesi, 2020; Rybas & Gajjala, 2007). This research adopts this balanced perspective, investigating both built and cyber spaces where diasporic engagement takes place.

Moreover, digital technologies have introduced real-time communication and collaboration opportunities for organizations and their stakeholders (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009; Greenleaf, 2016). Social media and websites facilitate synchronous and interactive engagements. These platforms are now widespread and portable due to the spread of smartphones (see Brinkerhoff, 2009). For researchers, this requires an awareness of the evolving platforms that DCOs use for communication and collaboration, especially as technological trends can shift rapidly over the years (see NurMuhammad, 2016; Sahoo & Shome, 2024).

Cyberethnography has become an increasingly important method for examining how social groups such as diaspora members use digital platforms for civic engagement (Kok & Rogers, 2017; NurMuhammad, 2016; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). Garcia et al. (2009) argue that online and offline experiences are not separate realms but are instead mutually constitutive, an idea they conceptualize as augmented reality. These perspectives have broadened the scope of ethnographic research to include online sites, prompting the development of hybrid methodologies that integrate both built and digital environments (Ash et al., 2018; Wright, 2010). This research builds on that trajectory by advancing hybrid approaches to examining digital diasporas in ways that capture place-based realities of civic engagement alongside engagements in cyberspace.

A key strength of cyberethnography lies in its ability to analyze digital traces, texts, images, and user interactions left behind by individuals and organizations. These digital traces offer valuable insights into organizational discourse, stakeholder engagement, and the dynamics of power and representation. Garcia et al. (2009) emphasize that such materials, often embedded in forum discussions, websites, and social media platforms, are essential for understanding how identity is articulated and negotiated online. Drawing on these strategies from cyberethnographic research, this study uncovers how Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs shape and are shaped by diasporic identities, experiences, and aspirations across built and cyber spaces.

3.6 Blending Institutional and Cyberethnographies

Institutional and cyberethnographies provide useful frameworks to investigate critical questions about how DCOs navigate superdiversity and digitization. Developed by Dorothy E. Smith, institutional ethnography investigates institutional structures and policies within the public and third sectors. Many institutional ethnographies focus on workplaces within the public sector such as education and health care (Ezzeddine & Price, 2021; Grassley et al., 2015; McGibbon et al., 2010), while a minority consider the third sector (see Kelly, 2022; Lewis, 1999; Malachowski et al., 2017; Nichols, 2016).

Institutional ethnography is a useful tool for examining the third sector, especially in settings where there is a focus on an ethos of care coupled with demand for effective service delivery (Carey et al., 2009; Chadborn et al., 2019; Dickinson et al., 2012). Institutional ethnographies are well suited to understanding how different stakeholders; staff, volunteers, board members, and general members, shape and are shaped by organizational structure and culture. By closely investigating organizational archives and semi-structured interview transcripts, institutional ethnographies

deconstruct how institutional norms and structures facilitate or impede the efforts of organizations to meet the needs of their stakeholders. The ethnographic lens emphasizes the agency of individuals within hierarchical structures, revealing how organizations' mandates, programs, and services evolve in response to the needs of stakeholders.

The principles of institutional ethnography played a crucial role in shaping my research process. Institutional ethnography traces its founding roots to an embodied feminist approach to research, which started with the investigation of single mothers in school and healthcare settings but has expanded greatly since (Billo & Mountz, 2016). Institutional ethnography can enrich geographical research given mounting evidence that institutions act as territorial forces (Billo & Mountz, p. 2-3). By centring 'the field' when studying people and organizations, Smith (2006) challenges researchers to deconstruct their own assumptions and formative discourses by sharing experiences with study participants. She prioritizes sociological discovery, arguing that problematics are best defined in the field. As stated before, in this research, intellectual diversity and openness play a key role. Experiences from the field, based on my observations and interactions with many different DCO stakeholders were fundamental to the development of the concepts and empirical findings presented here.

Institutional ethnographies generally examine texts and discourses that inform the collaborations between employees, volunteers, and other stakeholders within an organization (see DeVault, 2006). Institutional ethnography acknowledges the role of structure but leaves ample room to discuss individual agency, hence highlighting that employees and volunteers invariably shape organizational norms and practices despite the systems and hierarchies around them (DeVault, 2006). This research directly engages with multiple stakeholders who shape DCOs: employees, volunteers, board members and general members, stressing their roles in shaping the form and

function of their organizations. Moreover, typical of an institutional ethnography, this research delves into the dynamics of organizations through detailed examination of organizational archives, such as annual reports, activity calendars, and social media posts.

Through institutional ethnography, I was able to identify how complex and overlapping identities, such as generation 1.5 and two, occupation-status, and gender influence civic engagement among DCO stakeholders. By focusing on empirical evidence gathered directly from stakeholders and organizational archives, this research offers a close look at how DCOs navigate shared challenges, foster diverse collaborations, and adapt their outreach to the specific needs of their stakeholders. This research acknowledges that different stakeholders shape organizational mandates and practices in an organic and evolving manner over time, hence institutional ethnography grounds this research in investigating the institutional experiences of those who shape and are shaped by DCOs. The goal is that empirical findings will offer a deeper understanding of the agency and influence of DCO stakeholders, while also reflecting the broader structural forces that DCOs navigate as they support and engage different stakeholders.

Cyberethnography

To examine the cyberspaces in which DCOs increasingly operate, linking local diaspora members with transnational networks, this research investigates how cyberspace facilitates civic engagement. Digital platforms, such as social media and websites, enable new forms of communication and collaboration within the diaspora. Alongside institutional ethnography, this research employs the practices of cyberethnography. In cyberethnographies, scholars expand the field of inquiry beyond traditional sites such as households or neighbourhoods to include digital environments (Hetland & Merch, 2016). These cyber spaces encompass a wide array of terrains,

including multiplayer online games, chatrooms, message boards, and social media, where people engage in different forms of socialization and participation (Hetland & Mørch, 2016). By analyzing both digital interactions and in-person dynamics, cyberethnography provides a means to observe how organizations such as DCOs not only address social and economic inequalities from the urban spaces where they originate and operate but possibly reproduce them in cyberspace. Consequently, the analysis of digital archives can reveal both the potential and limitations of digital civic participation.

To evaluate how digital environments facilitate distinct forms of civic engagement, the digital footprints of DCOs were systematically analyzed. Specifically, organizational websites, blogs, and social media platforms were visited, information about each was compiled and studied. Publicly available online archives, such as annual reports, event posters, and outreach brochures, offered valuable insight into the organizational history, structure, mandates, and digitization process. These digital artifacts, including archived images, videos, and texts, serve as vital records of how organizations represent themselves and interact with their online audiences (see Garcia et al., 2009; Hallett et al., 2014).

Importantly, this research investigates hybrid spaces and their social, cultural, and economic significance rather than solely focusing on digital sites in isolation. This is because ‘cyberculture,’ a term used to describe the culture that has emerged from the use of computer networks for communication, entertainment, and business, is not always welcoming for marginalized groups (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007). The social, cultural, and economic exclusion experienced offline can also be reproduced online (Ponzanesi, 2020). Hence, it is critical to acknowledge and uncover the reproduction of different forms of exclusion within cyberspace to provide a balanced account of diasporic civic engagement.

Moreover, cyberethnography is challenged by differential access to digital tools and resources (see Murthy, 2011; Varis, 2015). It is difficult to pinpoint which specific digital sites to analyze and which online users to approach for research engagements (see Hetland & Mørch, 2016; Ponzanesi, 2020). Then there are the challenges of simultaneously accounting for and making sense of online and offline elements that shape organizations and stakeholders. For example, contemporary DCOs often operate across multiple platforms, holding in-person neighbourhood meetings and cultural events while maintaining a digital presence through websites, WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, and Zoom-based programming (see Rouf, 2025; Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Shome, 2023). These hybrid arrangements, both online and offline, require researchers to engage with spatially and temporally fragmented data, capturing both fleeting digital interactions and enduring face-to-face relationships. Cyberspace facilitates new forms of visibility, outreach, and engagement with transnational stakeholders, while offline interactions often carry the weight of historical memory, local context, and embodied trust-building practices. Hence this research emphasizes the need to blend aspects of institutional and cyber ethnographies to learn more about membership, funding, employment, volunteering, and outreach activities among DCOs.

This research seeks to build on contemporary studies in critical digital studies, that underscore the significance of digital inequalities. Critical digital studies recognize that not all end users' access technology in the same way (see Ash et al., 2019; Garcia et al., 2009; Wright, 2010). As a starting point for cyberethnography inquiry, it is fundamental to acknowledge that online spaces can reproduce social, spatial and economic inequalities that exist offline (Garcia et al., 2009; Ponzanesi, 2020). In an early cyberethnographic research project, Gajalla (2003) speaking about digital inequalities asked a vital question which resonates even today: who the internet has empowered? Warschauer (2004) posits that the digital divide goes beyond mere access to

technological devices, encompassing differences in digital literacy and the capacity to participate in social and economic life using these technologies. This research examines digital divides from a human geographic perspective, building on earlier research that investigated how spatial, social, and economic inequalities intersect with variegated access to cyberspace (see Ash et al., 2018; Graham, 2011; Graham & Zook, 2013).

Furthermore, regarding cyberethnographic approaches, researchers have written at length about the ethical dilemmas involved in this research method - especially the ethical ramifications of 'lurking', which is the commonplace act of observing virtual sites at a distance without identifying oneself to the group (see Boellstorff et al., 2012; Hetland & Mørch, 2016). Boellstorff and colleagues posit that some level of direct involvement with online gatherings and permission from administrators makes research ethics less ambiguous. In addition, building digital relationships and rapport with research participants enriches findings and avoids studying those who do not wish to be studied (Hetland & Mørch, 2016). Accordingly, I sought consent from organizational administrators, those who participated in the semi-structured interviews and participants in synchronous online events which helped inform my research field notes, as per university regulations regarding ethics for research involving human participants.

The two research approaches, institutional and cyber ethnographies, provide complementary lenses through which we can examine diasporic civic engagement and the dual role of DCOs as neighbourhood anchors and digital actors. Cyberethnography, which examines social interactions in digital spaces (Hine, 2020), reveals how diaspora members communicate and coordinate online across transnational networks. Through the investigation of social media platforms, online forums, and messaging tools, researchers can observe how group members negotiate identity, solidarity, and belonging in hybrid spaces (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2016). Whereas institutional

ethnography focuses on how institutional texts, discourses, and social practices shape the organizational culture and mandate. It sheds light on how organizations navigate and mediate between the identities, experiences, and aspirations of their stakeholders and the expectations imposed by broader institutional structures and cultures. Together, these two ethnographic approaches enable a richer analysis of DCOs, linking everyday experiences to institutional power and digital networks, and illustrating how these third sector organizations respond to social and economic inequalities while fostering meaningful civic engagement. By combining the institutional ethnography's focus on power structures with cyberethnography's attention to digital interactions, this research offers a more comprehensive understanding of how DCOs adapt and innovate to fulfill their mandates and the needs of their stakeholders.

3.7 Profile of Studied DCOs

I followed a rigorous process to identify and select the DCOs studied here. Initially, I conducted Google and Facebook searches using keywords such as "Bangladeshi Canadian organizations" and "Bangladeshi nonprofits in Toronto." Many civic organizations maintain active pages and groups on Facebook which remains a popular social media site for third sector organizations (see Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009; Greenleaf, 2016). I used Facebook to identify related groups and organizations. Google Maps further aided in verifying the physical locations of DCOs' offices and contextualizing their built environments. Drawing on the valuable relationships that I built over a decade of employment and volunteering in the sector, I asked professionals working in the local third sector to identify relevant DCOs. Several professionals reviewed and validated the list of organizations included in the study.

Due to my status as an insider and outsider in the research processes, ethical and methodological considerations were taken seriously given past experiences of human geographers in the field (see Bannerji, 2013; Zou, 2023). Insider status presents advantages and challenges. My position as an insider grants me special access and insights that strengthened this research. I speak Bangla and identify as a generation 1.5 Bangladeshi Canadian raised in Toronto. My deep roots within local diasporic networks and spaces, shaped by my upbringing and professional involvement, predate this dissertation. However, researchers such as I need to be careful about the dynamics of how sharing ethnocultural ties with participants may influence how they perceive and engage with the researcher (see Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020). Being an insider also presents some other challenges. Insiders risk unintentionally speaking over participants rather than amplifying their voices (see Hitchings & Latham, 2020). To mitigate some of the latter challenges, I made deliberate efforts to centre the perspectives of the stakeholders who are critical to the success of the DCOs studied here. To further minimize bias, I emphasized that participation in the research was entirely voluntary and that refusal to participate would have no impact on any existing professional relationships. I hope these actions ensure that the voices, aspirations, and experiences of participants come through clearly in the findings.

The final list of organizations was refined using clear and consistent selection criteria aimed at capturing a subset of DCOs who have a sustained track record and digital presence (Appendix: DCOs List). DCOs considered for inclusion in this research were required to be socially and spatially embedded in the neighbourhoods they serve; maintain an active online presence, have formal nonprofit status (incorporation), and a sustained track record of activities. Only DCOs closely meeting the three core criteria listed below were considered:

1. The organization has operated as an unincorporated group or registered nonprofit with sustained programs and services for at least three years. The sustained nature of DCO operations is significant. Earlier studies found that many social groups and associations among the local diaspora were unincorporated and transient. They had only a fleeting existence (see Ahsan, 2015; Halder, 2012).
2. The organization has a traceable digital footprint updated on a publicly searchable online platform within the last six months. Platforms include websites, blogs, and social media.
3. The organization addresses different identities beyond the ethnocultural elements of the diaspora, such as generation 1.5 and two, occupation status, and gender-based membership.

Only a few DCOs met all three criteria. In the end, three of the qualified organizations agreed to participate in the research, creating a nice sample of DCOs who represent occupational, gendered, and generational focused mandates: Bengali Information and Employment Services (BIES), Sisters Across Oceans (SAO) and Just Our Stories (JOS).

BIES was established in response to the growing need for culturally responsive employment support around Toronto's Crescent Town neighbourhood (also known as Bangla Town). Since then, it has expanded its programs and services to support a growing number of residents across Toronto. Incorporated in 2011, BIES is committed to creating spaces where everyone lives with dignity and prosperity. Serving primarily first-generation Bangladeshis and other South Asians residing in Toronto's east end. BIES's mission is to empower individuals by connecting them to the information, resources, and advocacy they need to achieve economic stability and social well-being. The organization envisions an inclusive and equitable society where everyone, regardless of background, has access to opportunity, dignity, and full participation in civic life. Grounded in values of inclusivity, transparency, empowerment, and respect for human rights, BIES delivers a

wide range of programs and services. These include employment support services, such as resume writing, job search assistance, and guidance on credential recognition. It also runs youth mentorship and leadership programs, senior wellness groups, women's support group, and mental health workshops. Notably, BIES has contributed previously to research on issues affecting the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora in Toronto, including youth suicide and barriers to gainful employment.

BIES is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and supported by a professional team that includes an Executive Director, a program staff, and community facilitator. The DCO receives funding from a few public sources, including the Government of Canada and the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Through its holistic and multi-service approach, BIES continues to play a vital role in helping newcomers and underserved residents overcome barriers and build better futures. From BIES, eight different stakeholders participated via semi-structured interviews: two general members, two volunteers, two staff and two board members.

The second DCO, SAO, was launched in 2017 and incorporated in 2019. Its mandate is to support Bengali women's growth, well-being, and representation in the diaspora and the motherland. They primarily serve young Bangladeshi Canadian women (generations 1.5 and 2) living in Toronto. SAO also has a small but growing support base in other Canadian provinces, American states and even in Bangladesh. The organization provides discussion circles, health and wellness sessions, e-mentorship, and social media campaigns. The organization's mission is to support Bengali women globally through culturally relevant programs that centre on wellness, education, solidarity, and empowerment. SAO envisions a world where Bengali women, regardless of where they live, can access opportunities, and lead with confidence. At its core, SAO values inclusive solidarity

building, mentorship, and the celebration of cultural traditions as means towards collective healing and strength.

SAO's key initiatives reflect their mandate. Its flagship e-mentorship program connects young women in the diaspora with those in Bangladesh to exchange knowledge, skills, and support. Monthly wellness circles provide a safe space for mental health discussions, exploration of cultural issues, and group bonding. During the COVID-19 pandemic, SAO raised funds to provide essential supplies to over 300 families in Nilphamari, Bangladesh. Organizational events like '*Cha & Adda*,' a traditional tea-time gathering common among the Bangladeshi diaspora, further strengthen intergenerational ties and affirm diasporic roots.

Organizationally, SAO functions through a dedicated team based in Toronto and a network of volunteers and contributors across transnational and digital diasporic networks. This hybrid structure ensures that its programs remain grounded in both local realities and transnational networks, with diasporic women's voices at the forefront of decision-making. In just a few years, SAO has built a noteworthy model of global sisterhood, one that empowers diasporic women through connection, culture, and care. By centring wellness, education, and identity, SAO continues to uplift the next-generation of leaders across borders. Within SAO, I spoke with eight different stakeholders via semi-structured interviews: two general members, three volunteers and three board members. The organization did not have any paid staff members at the time of study. JOS was founded in 2011 as the youth wing of a larger settlement services organization and incorporated independently in 2021. This DCO has a robust digital presence and primarily serves 1.5 and second-generation South and East Asian youth in the east end of the city of Toronto. In addition, it has a small audience in the USA and Western Europe through its online platforms.

JOS's programs and services include podcasts, digital game nights, topical workshops, a blog, a YouTube channel, and social media campaigns.

The mission of JOS is to support marginalized urban and diasporic youth through accessible and inclusive programming that fosters leadership, creativity, and solidarity. Its vision is one of equal opportunities, where all young people, regardless of background, can thrive and meaningfully shape their surroundings. Guided by strong values, JOS is built on several key pillars: youth engagement and leadership, equity and inclusivity, sustainability, innovation, and strategic effectiveness. These principles are not just aspirational, they actively shape the design of programs and services, ensuring that young people are both the drivers and beneficiaries of their work. JOS reflects a deep commitment to youth-led approaches. Their creative initiatives, including a youth podcast series available on Spotify and YouTube, showcase the voices and experiences of young people from the diaspora and their allies. JOS also facilitates a digital youth hub through Discord, providing a space for over 50 young people to connect, share resources, and build solidarity online. Additionally, JOS hosts workshops, game nights, and other events that foster social connections and promote professional growth as well.

JOS is led by a team of young directors, consultants, and peer youth leaders who co-design and implement programs on a fully voluntary basis. Their horizontal structure ensures that power is shared and that youth voices are central in decision-making processes. The organization also works with a small but growing list of local third sector allies and partners to ensure sustainable operations and expand its impact. In all aspects, JOS aims to demonstrate what an inclusive, youth-powered civic and digital engagement can look like. By centring the experiences, needs, and leadership of marginalized youth, JOS is not only telling stories, but it is building futures for young people. Within JOS, I spoke with ten different stakeholders via semi-structured interviews: four

general members, three volunteers, and three board members. The organization did not have any paid staff members at the time of study.

The mission and mandates of the three DCOs in this study illustrate distinct but overlapping responses to the social, economic, and cultural challenges facing Bangladeshi Canadians in the Toronto. Their unique programs and services illustrate how contemporary DCOs adapt and innovate within superdiverse and digital environments. Each DCO emerges out of specific needs within the local diaspora: BIES was established to address the pressing needs of first-generation newcomers who face underemployment and deprofessionalization. Its early focus on employment services reflects the absence of adequate institutional support for Bangladeshi Canadians navigating the local labour market. SAO, by contrast, arose from recognition of the distinct needs of the next-generation diasporic women. Founded by and for young 1.5 and second-generation women, SAO responds to a dual imperative: fostering civic leadership among women while simultaneously strengthening transnational solidarities within the diaspora. JOS emerged with a different yet complementary mandate as a youth-led collective seeking to empower young voices and cultural expression among 1.5 and second-generation diasporic youth in the digital age. Collectively, all three organizations demonstrate the myriads of identities and experiences that exist within the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora in Toronto.

The institutional models of the three DCOs also reflect different strategic choices in response to funding environments, governance cultures, and organizational mandates. From the very beginning, BIES took a formal route by registering as a charitable organization, which allowed it to secure more public funding and develop some paid staff roles. The process of incorporation as a charitable organization under the Canada Revenue Agency enabled BIES to expand its programs and navigate funder expectations effectively. In contrast, SAO and JOS chose to remain volunteer-

led and structurally horizontal by design. Their decisions to avoid bureaucratic entanglements are both practical and political, enabling flexibility, creativity, and local programming, albeit with less monetary resources.

Another key distinction among the three DCOs lies in their approach to digital engagement. While BIES maintains a strong physical presence through its office locations and face-to-face service delivery, both SAO and JOS have embraced digital platforms as their primary mode of operation. SAO delivers its workshops, mentorship programs, and health initiatives primarily online, reaching diasporic women in many parts of the world through social media, storytelling, and online support groups. JOS takes digital engagement even further by producing podcasts, blogs, and hosting virtual game nights aimed at fostering solidarity, amplifying visibility, and nurturing youth leadership.

Despite their different modalities, all three DCOs share some common goals: reimagining the civic and digital landscapes of diasporic life. Whether it is through BIES's expansion of employment services, SAO's focus on women's wellness and advocacy, or JOS's creative digital productions, each organization plays a role in addressing social and economic inequalities by advancing diasporic civic engagement.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the mixed-methods approach used to investigate how Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs navigate superdiversity and digitization. By integrating spatial analysis of census microdata, in-depth semi-structured interviews, analysis of digital archives, and field notes, this research captures the complex, multi-scalar dynamics shaping DCOs. The use of the 2016 Canadian Census Master File enabled a fine-grained spatial comparison of neighbourhood-level social and economic inequalities, while qualitative data illuminated the lived experiences and

strategic responses of DCO stakeholders navigating labour precarity, social exclusion, and digital transformation.

The methodological blending of institutional and cyberethnography enabled a holistic understanding of how DCOs operate across physical and digital spaces and how members' intersecting identities and positionalities shape civic. By anchoring this research in both place-based and digital contexts, this study offers a rigorous and grounded exploration of the third sector's role in superdiverse places and cyberspace.

Chapter 4: Bangladeshi Canadian Diaspora in Toronto

4.1 Overview

Both geography and history are crucial to understanding diasporas. History tells us how a diaspora forms and transforms over time, in response to the macro forces, such as colonialism, war, economic conditions, and political upheavals, that spur migration. Historic accounts also help trace how diasporic groups maintain cultural ties, adapt to new places, and navigate inclusion and exclusion within these places. By examining both geographical and historical patterns of migration and settlement, we can better understand the struggles and contributions of diasporic groups in shaping and being shaped by their roots and routes.

In this chapter, the social, spatial, and economic experiences of Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora in Toronto are investigated. It must be noted that Toronto is a coveted destination for the contemporary global Bangladeshi diaspora (see Ghosh, 2014a; Rai & Reeves, 2008). In Toronto, a relatively recent site of diasporic settlement compared to London (UK) and New York (USA), the social and economic characteristics of Bangladeshi Canadians and their residential patterns shape their civic engagement. In turn civic engagement also alters Bangladeshi Canadians' characteristics and spatial distribution. Initially concentrated in neighbourhoods on the edges of downtown like Crescent Town and Cabbage town, the local diaspora has expanded into inner suburban areas such as southwestern Scarborough, where the affordability of housing and the availability of cultural and economic institutions serving the diaspora has reshaped their settlement patterns (see Ahsan, 2015; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2020).

This chapter draws on 2016 Census data to examine the housing, income, and employment characteristics of Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto. Earlier research shows that in 2006, the local diaspora was over-represented in precarious employment resulting in lower incomes and higher rates of poverty compared to other immigrants and non-immigrant groups (Agrawal, 2013; Akbar, 2015, 2019). Moreover, by building on social and economic insights from earlier research, this chapter updates past analyses by investigating recent settlement and integration trends among Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto. While prior studies have documented historical migration patterns and initial settlement geographies, this analysis reveals shifting dynamics, particularly regarding residential location, economic integration, and the role of civic institutions (see Akbar, 2015, 2019; Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2020). By integrating recent census data and past scholarship, this research offers an enriched understanding of the aspirations and experiences of Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto. The empirical findings underscore the ongoing challenges regarding economic opportunities and social inclusion that confront Bangladeshi Canadians while highlighting the diaspora's resilience and adaptability in Toronto.

4.2 Geographies of Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto

As aforementioned, Bangladeshi migration to Toronto is relatively recent, compared to the diaspora's history in cities such as New York, London and Kuala Lumpur (see Rai & Reeves, 2008). In recent years, Bangladeshi Canadians consistently represent one of the top 25 countries of origin for migrants arriving as permanent residents (Shuva, 2020). Earlier studies on Bangladeshi Canadians found that the first-generation settled in a few select neighbourhoods; namely Cabbage Town and Crescent Town, near downtown Toronto's west side and the eastern inner suburb of Scarborough (Ghosh, 2014a; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013). However, in recent decades, the local Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora has dispersed into the eastern and western inner suburbs

of Toronto and neighboring municipalities, including Mississauga, Ajax, and Vaughan, to the east and west of the City of Toronto (Rouf, 2025).

Within Canada, Toronto is an attractive destination for highly educated professionals. The Canadian Federal Skilled Workers Program (FSWP) plays a significant role attracting Bangladeshi Canadians with high education and skills, a pathway which is rather different from those of Bangladeshi labourers settling in the UK, US, and MENA in preceding decades (see Ahsan, 2015; Rai & Reeves, 2008; Zaman & Habib, 2018). Many Bangladeshi Canadians enter as economic class migrants – and the share of Bangladeshi Canadians admitted as economic migrants in the Toronto is notably higher than other major Canadian urban regions (Rouf, 2025).

According to the 2016 Canadian Census, 32,385 first-generation Bangladeshi Canadians comprise 0.55% of the total Toronto metropolitan area population. Therefore, if each Bangladesh Canadian were uniformly distributed across the region, they would represent about 0.55% of the population in every census tract. However, most Bangladeshi Canadians are found within a small number of census tracts, while there are large numbers of census tracts where no Bangladeshi Canadians reside. In stark contrast to their absence in many census tracts, Bangladeshi Canadians have become one of the largest ethnocultural groups in a few census tracts in southwestern Scarborough as observed through the census data and census tract concentrations (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2 below).

To effectively analyze diasporic concentrations for Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto, census tracts are classified into three categories: low, medium, and high concentration of Bangladeshi Canadians. The definition of the three categories is slightly arbitrary. For example, some scholars deem at least twice the regional average population percentage in each area to constitute an ethnic concentration (Edin et al., 2003). However, given the relatively small percentage of the Toronto

population who are Bangladeshi Canadian (0.55% in total), doubling, tripling or even quadrupling the regional percentage would still be a low percentage of the census tract population.

In this research, if less than 1.1% (double the Toronto census metropolitan area percentage) of the census tract population are Bangladeshi Canadian, it is a low concentration area; if 1.1% to 5.5% (two to ten times the Toronto census metropolitan area percentage) of the census tract population are Bangladeshi Canadian, it is a medium concentration area, and if more than 5.5% (ten or more times the Toronto census metropolitan area percentage) of the population are Bangladeshi Canadian, it is a high concentration area. These cutoffs were selected because the Bangladeshi Canadian population in the Toronto census metropolitan area represents 0.55% of the total population. In other words, high concentration census tracts represent 10 times or more of the census metropolitan area average, medium concentration areas between 2 to 10 times and low concentration areas below 2 times the metropolitan wide average percentage. Across the Toronto metropolitan area, there are 17 census tracts classified as high concentration, 87 census tracts that are medium concentration, 519 census tracts that are low concentration, and 528 census tracts with no Bangladeshi Canadian residents.

The majority of Bangladeshi Canadians, about 77%, still resides within the City of Toronto. In fact, as Figure 4.1 illustrates, all high concentration census tracts are clustered in the eastern inner suburb of Scarborough within the city of Toronto. This is the area of the city where Bangla Town developed in the early 21st century. Bangla Town has expanded eastward into adjacent neighbourhoods with the growth of the Bangladeshi Canadian population as evident in the 2016 census data mapped below. As characteristics of superdiversity, even within the high concentration census tracts Bangladeshi Canadians do not form the majority in any of the high concentration census tracts (>5.5% Bangladeshi Canadians).

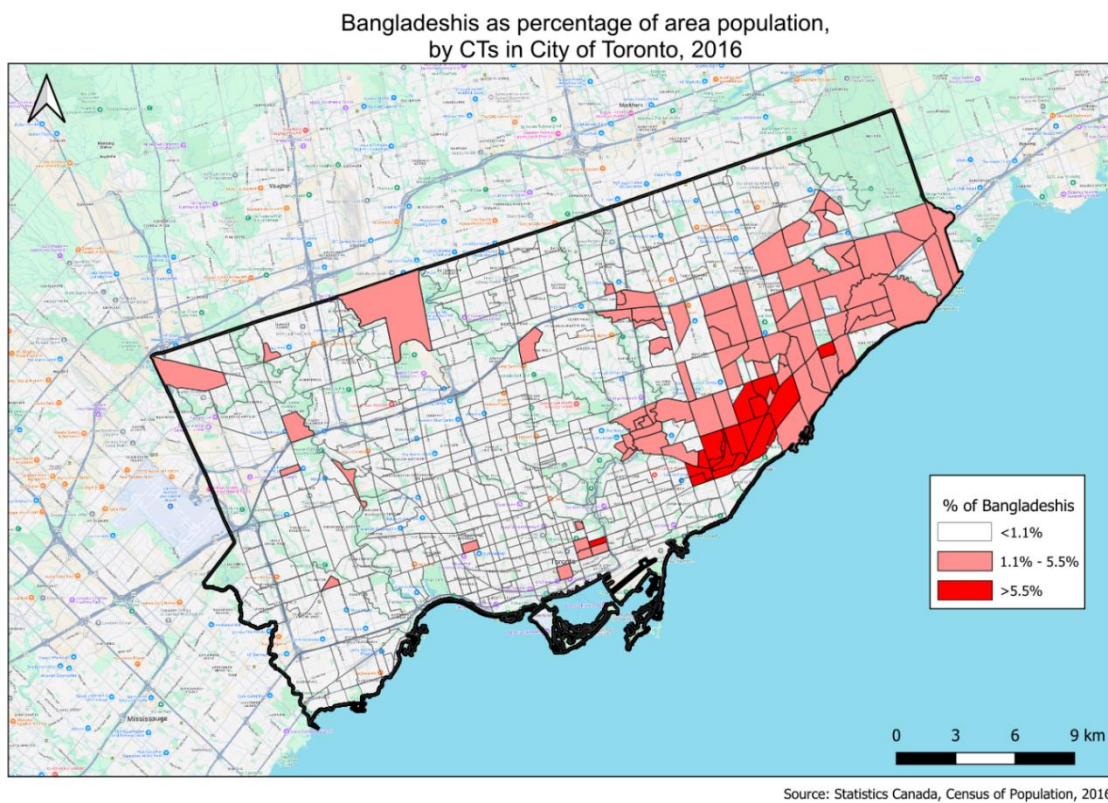


Figure 4.1 Map of Bangladeshis as percentage of area population, by CTs in City of Toronto, 2016

4.3 Toronto's Bangla Town and Moving Beyond It

Bangla Town serves as a focal point for many Bangladeshi Canadians living in Toronto. As a microcosm of diasporic life, it reflects the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of settlement and integration within Canadian urban centres (see Ahsan, 2015; Akbar, 2015; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012). Located in Toronto's east end, this half-square-kilometre area is the most recognizable concentration of Bangladeshi Canadians in Ontario, and possibly Canada (Rouf, 2020). The surrounding neighbourhoods host numerous businesses and DCOs serving the Bangladeshi Canadian population. While many residents live in nearby high-rise apartments, others visit to access culturally familiar institutions (Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2020). Residents emphasize raising the next-generation within this social and cultural environment (see Ahsan, 2015; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2020). In this way, the diaspora reimagines urban space in relation to its roots (see Ghosh, 2014a), creating a symbolic bridge between place of origin and settlement (de Graauw, 2015), and reinforcing Toronto's status as a superdiverse urban centre (Ashutosh, 2012, 2020).

Bangla Town is home to a range of diasporic businesses, civic institutions, cultural programs, and social events that celebrate Bangladeshi heritage and foster local and transnational belonging among first-generation residents and their families (Halder, 2012; Ghosh, 2014a; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013). This concentration creates a familiar environment for the first-generation while enabling generations 1.5 and two to maintain symbolic ties to their ancestral heritage (see Ahsan, 2015; McLeman et al., 2018). Beyond its geographic boundaries, Bangla Town contributes to broader narratives of multicultural coexistence in Canadian urban life (Ashutosh, 2015; Ghosh, 2014b). Its vibrant cultural and commercial landscape illustrates how diasporas shape distinct pockets of Toronto's urban terrain (Ahsan, 2015; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012).

There are complex social, cultural, and economic reasons behind the concentration of Bangladeshi Canadians around Toronto's Bangla Town. A key factor is the availability of affordable apartment rentals suitable for families, along with proximity to co-diasporic institutions that cater to the needs and preferences of first-generation residents (Ghosh, 2014a; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013). For generations 1.5 and two, Bangla Town also holds appeal due to volunteering and employment opportunities at DCOs and local businesses, as well as access to ample authentic Bangladeshi cuisine (Rouf, 2020). DCOs and social networks are integral to neighbourhood life around Bangla Town, providing both formal and informal support systems that help residents from diverse backgrounds - youth, seniors, men, women, and professionals - connect with like-minded individuals with shared experiences leading to the formation of inter-diasporic and intra-diasporic solidarities (see Ahsan, 2015; see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Halder, 2012).

The growing presence of Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto reflects trends observed in other North American cities. Across North American urban centres, organizations often emerge around shared hometowns in Bangladesh (e.g., Feni Foundation, Noakhali Society), professional backgrounds (e.g., Bangladesh Medical Association, Engineers Association), or alumni networks from educational institutions (Rai & Reeves, 2008, p. 130). In Toronto, Bangladeshi Canadians partake in civic engagement through a myriad of third sector organizations, particularly around the diasporic hub of Bangla Town (Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2020, 2025). Chain migration and a considerable reliance on co-diasporic networks and organizations further reinforce the spatial clustering, as the existing ecosystem of individuals and institutions attracts additional co-diasporic peers to Bangla Town and its surrounding neighbourhoods (Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013).

Existing research on Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto tends to focus on the high-rise residential neighbourhood of Crescent Town where Bangla Town originated (Akbar, 2015, 2019; Ghosh 2014a). However, in 2016, only 3,110 Bangladeshi Canadians, only about 10% of Bangladeshi Canadians in the Toronto census metropolitan area resided in this neighbourhood (Statistics Canada, 2016). Therefore, understanding the social and economic realities of the local diaspora requires considering areas well beyond the geographic boundaries of Toronto's Bangla Town. The 2016 census data confirm that a parochial focus on Bangla Town overlooks the experiences of growing numbers of Bangladeshi Canadians living outside this area (see Figure 4.2). Expanding the geographic scale of research inquiry is essential, as the suburbanization and dispersal of Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto is well underway with increasing settlement in new neighbourhoods across the census metropolitan area, particularly in Scarborough, Mississauga, Ajax, and Vaughan (Rouf, 2025). In past ethnographic studies, generations 1.5 and two who grew up in or were engaged in Toronto's Bangla Town enthusiastically noted the dispersal of the diaspora into other parts of Scarborough and even beyond Toronto, to areas like London, Ontario (Rouf, 2020).

In sum, Toronto's Bangla Town holds significant social, cultural, and economic importance, embodying both the strengths and ongoing struggles of the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora. It serves as a vital site for understanding how the diaspora organizes, engages, and persists amid systemic challenges. However, while Bangla Town remains a central node for analyzing these dynamics, it is essential to extend the analytical lens beyond its boundaries to grasp the lived experiences of the diaspora across the broader metropolitan region. This chapter begins by situating Bangla Town within the broader historical and spatial context of Bangladeshi settlement in Toronto. Areas such as Scarborough, Toronto's eastern inner suburbs, where many Bangladeshi

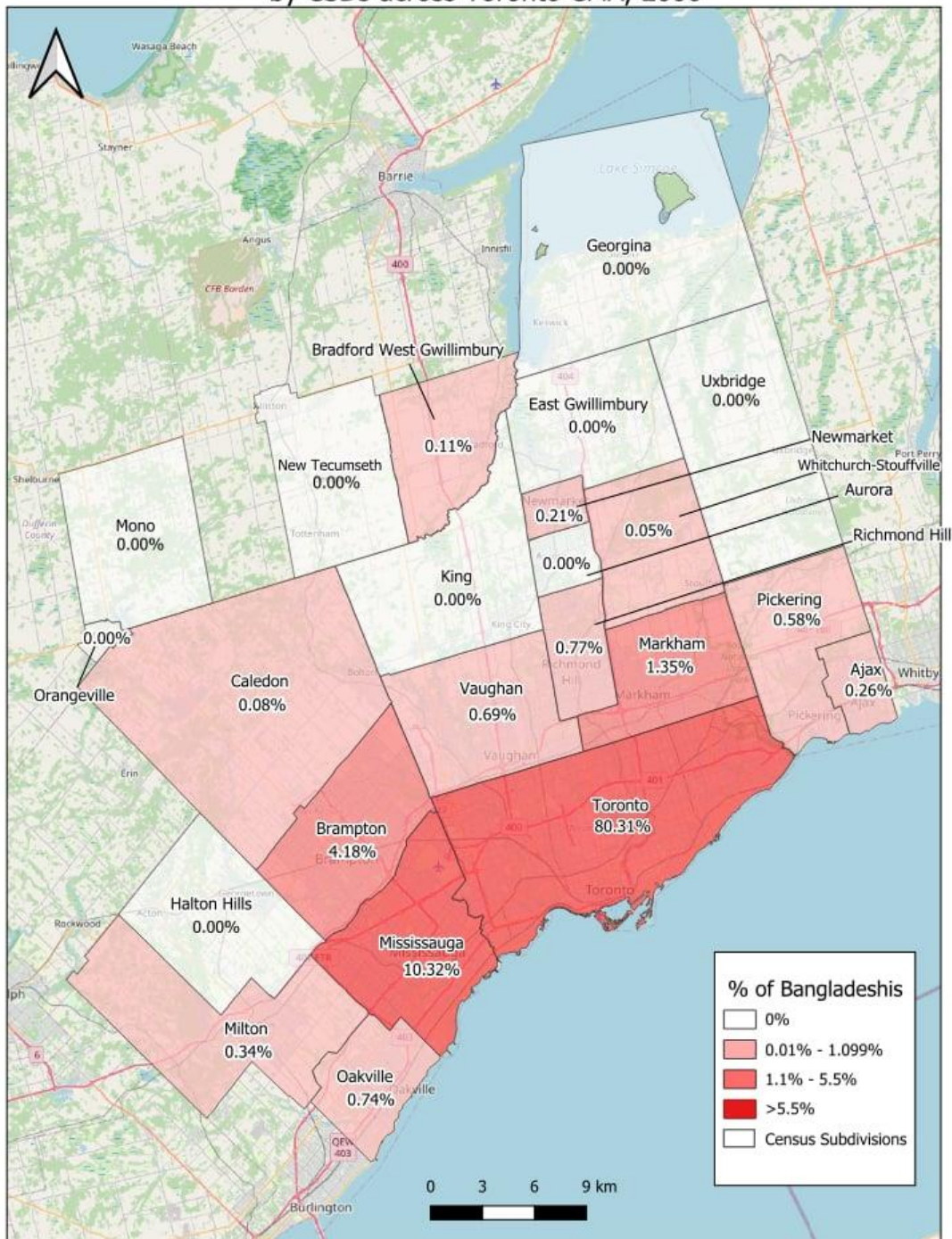
Canadians now reside, have undergone significant transformations since earlier studies of Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto. These neighbourhoods have lost many of the stable industrial jobs that once supported newcomers, while simultaneously experiencing a sharp increase in housing costs and other living expenses (Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012). The widening gap between stagnant incomes and rising living costs has exacerbated urban inequality and Toronto's shift into an increasingly polarized city marked by stark divisions between the affluent and the economically vulnerable (Hulchanski, 2010; Toronto Foundation, 2020; United Way, 2017). The census data analysis examines the implications of these trends for Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto.

4.4 Increasing Suburbanization Among the Local Diaspora

There were notable changes in Bangladeshi Canadians' settlement patterns in the decade from 2006 to 2016. Figures 4.2 and 4.3 below demonstrate that Bangladeshi Canadians have increasingly settled in suburban areas outside the City of Toronto, such as Milton, Ajax, Mississauga, and Vaughan. While most of the Bangladeshi Canadian population in the metropolitan area, 77%, still resided within the City of Toronto by 2016, this percentage declined approximately 3% between 2006 and 2016. Peel Region, located adjacent to the western boundary of the city of Toronto, has solidified its position as a key secondary hub. In Peel Region, Mississauga has the largest share of the Bangladeshi Canadian population in the metropolitan area outside the City of Toronto, 10.32%, an increase from 8.03% in 2006. In the same time frame, the Bangladeshi Canadian population grew rapidly in suburban municipalities on the edge of the metropolitan area. The numbers of Bangladeshi Canadians living in these far-flung suburbs are still small, but the populations are growing quickly. For example, in Milton in western Halton Region, the Bangladeshi Canadian population increased almost four-fold from 0.34% to 1.10%. In the east, between 2006 and 2016, the percentage of the metropolitan Bangladeshi Canadian

population living in the municipality of Ajax in Durham region increased from 0.26% to 2.04%. In the north, the share of the Bangladeshi Canadian population living in Vaughan increased between 2006 and 2016 from 0.69% to 1.19%. Although the percentages of Bangladeshi Canadians living outside the City of Toronto are still small, they indicate suburbanization is underway. These changes reflect a broader pattern of suburbanization among first-generation immigrants and their families across North American urban centres, as residents seek more affordable housing in increasingly ethnoculturally diverse suburbs outside city cores (Fong & Berry, 2017; Li, 1998; Qadeer et al., 2010; Zhuang, 2024). While the local diaspora has expanded eastward into the inner suburbs of Durham and westward into Peel and Halton, it remains largely absent from the outer suburbs of the Toronto metropolitan area – with multiple outer suburbs; Mono, Orangeville, Uxbridge, Georgina, and others, having no Bangladeshi Canadian presence as evident in Figures 4.2 and 4.3.

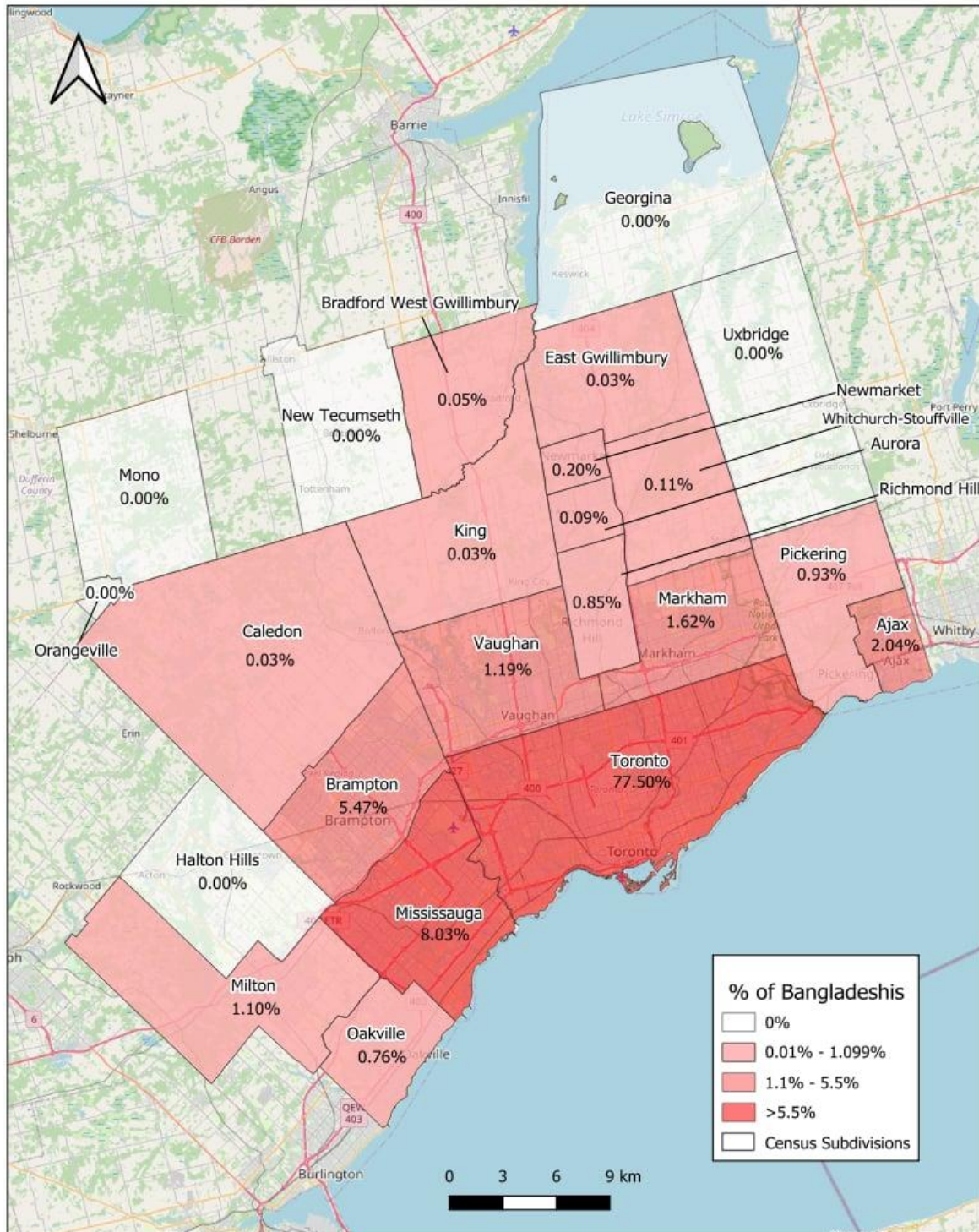
Bangladeshis as percentage of area population,
by CSDs across Toronto CMA, 2006



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006

Figure 4.2 Map of Bangladeshis as percentage of area population, by CSDs in Toronto CMA, 2006

Bangladeshis as percentage of area population,
by CSDs across Toronto CMA, 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016

Figure 4.3 Map of Bangladeshis as percentage of area population, by CSDs in Toronto CMA, 2016

As Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto disperse beyond the initial concentrations in southwestern Scarborough, access to culturally relevant programs and services, particularly those offered by DCOs is reduced by physical distance. Spatial dispersal raises critical questions about the diaspora's continued access to culturally responsive programs and services over time. A key empirical concern that this research investigates is whether Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs can effectively reach members of the local diaspora who are increasingly settling in distant suburban areas away from original geographies of settlement, namely southwestern Scarborough and Toronto's Bangla Town, through cyberspace.

4.5 Social and Economic Characteristics of Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto

Existing research underscores the serious social and economic challenges confronting Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto despite their professional experience and educational attainments (Ahsan, 2015; Akbar, 2016, 2019; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013). Since the 1980s, approximately 66% of Bangladeshi Canadians have arrived as economic class migrants, with the rest being sponsored by family, and a small portion of refugee claimants (Statistics Canada, 2016). As economic class migrants, the educational and professional qualifications of applicants are vetted before they can come to Canada. There is considerable evidence that the educational and professional qualifications that qualify Bangladeshis for admission as economic migrants do not translate into social mobility upon arrival (Agrawal, 2013; Akbar, 2015, 2019; Ghosh, 2014b, Rouf, 2020). Past studies, based primarily on 2006 census data, portray a grim picture with Bangladeshis and Pakistanis faring notably worse than their Canadian-born, Indian, Sri Lankan, Filipino, and Chinese peers in terms of income and home ownership despite having higher levels

of formal education (Agrawal, 2013). Moreover, Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto had lower household incomes and homeownership rates than other South Asian groups across Canada (Ghosh, 2014b). Bangladeshi Canadians also earned less and were more likely to be underemployed than their Tamil and Indian counterparts (Ghosh, 2014b). On average, Bangladeshi Canadian families in Toronto reported incomes that were less than half those of white immigrant families (Akbar, 2019).

Housing

The 2016 census data show the continued housing struggles facing the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora in the Toronto census metropolitan area. Living mainly in high rise apartment buildings, many still struggle with unaffordable housing and overcrowding. There are significant disparities in housing type, affordability, and suitability between Bangladeshi Canadians and their non-Bangladeshi neighbours, particularly in areas where Bangladeshi Canadians are highly concentrated (see Figures 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 below). Housing insecurity is a recurring concern for Bangladeshi Canadians, particularly those concentrated in Toronto's inner suburban neighbourhoods. Early research flagged housing challenges for Bangladeshi Canadians in Kitchener-Waterloo (Propa, 2007), and subsequent Toronto-focused work identified aging high-rise apartment complexes and limited access to affordable, adequate housing in and around Bangla Town in Scarborough as persistent structural problems (Akbar, 2016, 2019; Halder, 2012; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013). Compared to other racialized immigrant groups from Asia, such as Chinese Canadians and Indian Canadians, Bangladeshi Canadians have notably lower rates of home ownership (Agrawal, 2013; Akter et al., 2014).

HOUSING TYPE BY CENSUS TRACT (CT) CLUSTERS & POPULATION

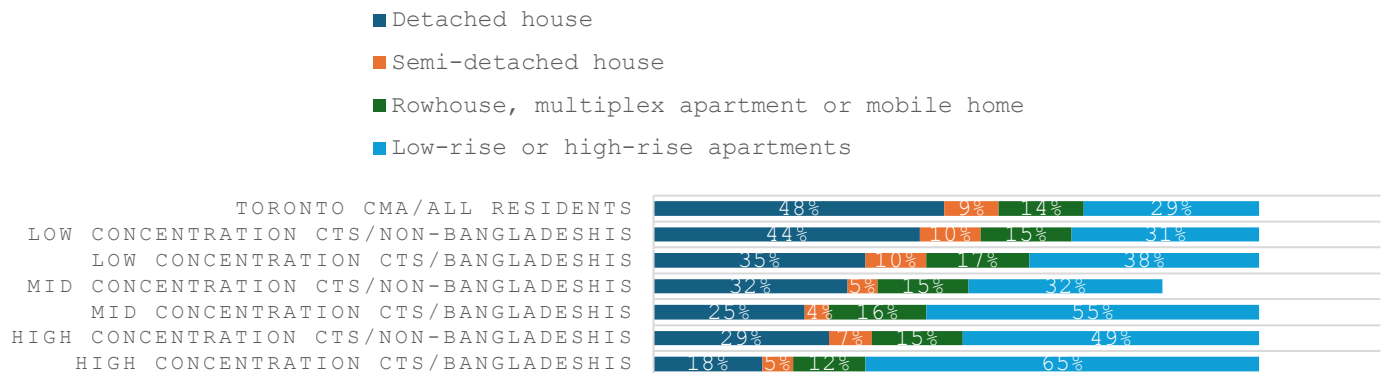


Figure 4.4 Housing type by census tract (CT) clusters and population

SHELTER-TO-INCOME-RATIO (STIR) BY CENSUS TRACT (CT) CLUSTERS & POPULATION

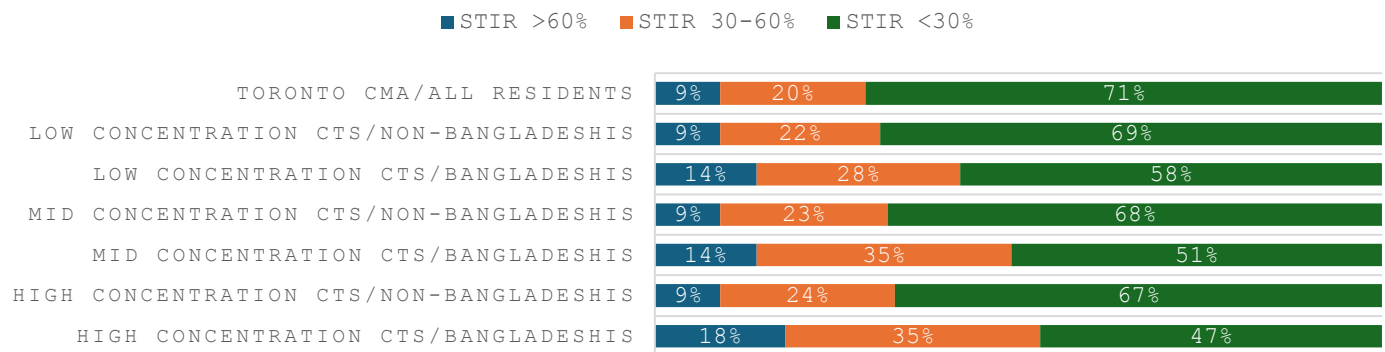


Figure 4.5 Housing suitability by census tract (CT) clusters and population

HOUSING SUITABILITY BY CENSUS TRACT (CT) CLUSTERS & POPULATION

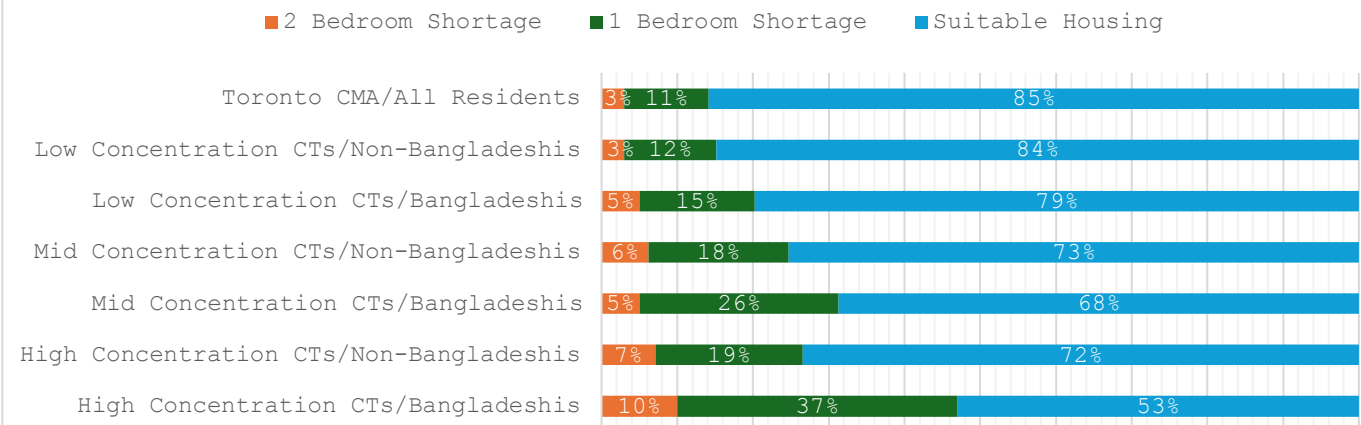


Figure 4.6 Shelter-to-income-ratio (STIR) by census tract (CT) clusters and population

Across the Toronto metropolitan area, detached houses remain the most common housing type, with 48% of residents living in them, while a much lower 29% reside in low-rise or high-rise apartments. In low concentration census tracts, the data is comparable to the census metropolitan area average, although non-Bangladeshis are more likely to be in detached house than Bangladeshi Canadians, 44% and 35% respectively. There is also a noticeable gap between non-Bangladeshis and Bangladeshi Canadian residing in apartments, 31% versus 38% in these census tracts.

Apartment living is much more common among Bangladeshi Canadians in medium and high concentration census tracts. The majority, with 55% and 65% of Bangladeshi Canadians in medium and high concentration census tracts living in apartments. The percentages are notable higher than the 32% and 49% of non-Bangladeshis in medium and high concentration census tracts who live in apartments. The differences between the housing types of Bangladeshi Canadians and the non-Bangladeshis are also notably different in medium and high concentration census tracts when we look at detached houses. Only 25% and 18% of Bangladeshi Canadians in medium and high concentration census tracts live in a detached house compared to 32% and 29% for non-Bangladeshis living in the same census tracts.

Beyond housing type, affordability remains a significant challenge for Bangladeshi Canadians across the Toronto metropolitan area, as reflected in the Shelter-to-Income Ratio (STIR)⁸. Across the metropolitan area, 71% of residents live in affordable housing, i.e., they spend less than 30% of gross income on housing, with only 9% spending an unsustainably high of over 60% of their income on housing. In all census tract clusters: high, medium, and low concentration, a higher

⁸ Statistics Canada defines the shelter-cost-to-income ratio (STIR) as the proportion of total household income spent on shelter costs. Housing is generally considered unaffordable when a household spends 30% or more of its income on shelter. While higher thresholds (e.g., above 50%) have been used in research literature to indicate more severe affordability challenges as housing prices rise across Canadian urban centres, these are not formal categories used by Statistics Canada (see Cheng & Haan, 2023; Leon & Iveniuk, 2021).

percentage of Bangladeshi Canadians than non-Bangladeshis struggle with housing affordability. In low-concentration census tracts, 58% of Bangladeshi Canadians live in affordable housing compared to 69% of non-Bangladeshis. The financial burden of housing intensifies in medium and high concentration census tracts, where only 51% and 47% of Bangladeshi Canadians live in affordable shelter compared to a much higher 68% and 67% of non-Bangladeshis living in these same areas. Meanwhile, the shares of Bangladeshi Canadians facing unsustainable levels of housing affordability (above 60% STIR) is significantly higher in medium and high concentration census tracts with 14% and 18%, compared to 9% for their non-Bangladeshi counterparts in both sets of census tracts. The 2016 census data confirm that Bangladeshi Canadians across the census metropolitan area face significant financial strain due to housing unaffordability, with those residing in medium and high concentration diasporic areas being the most adversely impacted.

Housing suitability, which refers to having adequate space within one's dwelling, is another critical issue for Bangladeshi Canadians. Across the Toronto census metropolitan area, 85% of residents live in suitable housing⁹, while 11% face a one-bedroom shortage, and another 3% face a two-bedroom shortage. However, in low concentration areas, 79% of Bangladeshi Canadians live in suitable housing, compared to 84% of non-Bangladeshis. There is also a notable gap in medium concentration census tracts, where 68% of Bangladeshi Canadians live in suitable housing compared to 73% of non-Bangladeshis. The gap widens further in high concentration census tracts where 53% of Bangladeshi Canadians live in suitable housing compared to 72% of non-Bangladeshis. Moreover, the percentages of Bangladeshi Canadians facing a one-bedroom shortage is high in medium and high concentration census tracts, rising to 26% and 37%, compared

⁹ Statistics Canada uses housing suitability to assesses the required number of bedrooms for a household based on the age, sex, and relationships among household members. An alternative variable, 'persons per room,' considers all rooms in a private dwelling and the number of household members.

to 18% and 19% for non-Bangladeshis. Furthermore, 10% of Bangladeshi Canadians in high-concentration areas experience a serious two-bedroom shortage, compared to 7% of non-Bangladeshis. There is notable overcrowding among Bangladeshi Canadians living in high and medium concentration areas.

These findings highlight the persistent housing challenges faced by Bangladeshi Canadians, in areas with high diasporic concentrations. The prevalence of apartment living among Bangladeshi Canadians, especially in medium and high concentration census tracts, reinforces past findings about low rates of homeownership and the reliance on rental units in high rise apartment buildings (see Agrawal, 2013; Akbar, 2015; Ghosh, 2014a). These serious challenges related to housing affordability are acute as the higher shelter-to-income ratios demonstrate, indicating that many Bangladeshi Canadians still spend a significant proportion of household income on shelter, leaving many financially vulnerable and susceptible to poverty. The affordability crisis is particularly pronounced in high concentration census tracts, where almost one in five Bangladeshi Canadians spend an alarming rate of over 60% of their income on shelter. In addition, the significantly higher rates of one- and two-bedroom shortages among Bangladeshi Canadians indicate a mismatch between household size and affordable housing in areas with high diasporic concentrations. Overcrowding is a significant concern which can affect quality of life and well-being for the families living in such conditions (see Ghosh 2014a; Rouf, 2020).

Poverty

Economic struggles are especially acute for Bangladeshi Canadians living in high and medium diasporic concentrations where many live in low-income households as measured by both the low-

income cut-off (LICO) and the market-based measure (MBM)¹⁰ of poverty. Poverty is a challenge facing many Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto, particularly in diasporic concentrations like Bangla Town. Past research finds high rates of economic hardship and constrained upward mobility among some residents of these neighbourhoods (Akbar, 2019; Debbarman, 2019; Rouf, 2020). These conditions reflect broader patterns of racialized income inequality and spatial segregation across Toronto (Hulchanski, 2010; Walks, 2013; United Way, 2017), where existing disparities can deepen rather than resolve over time.

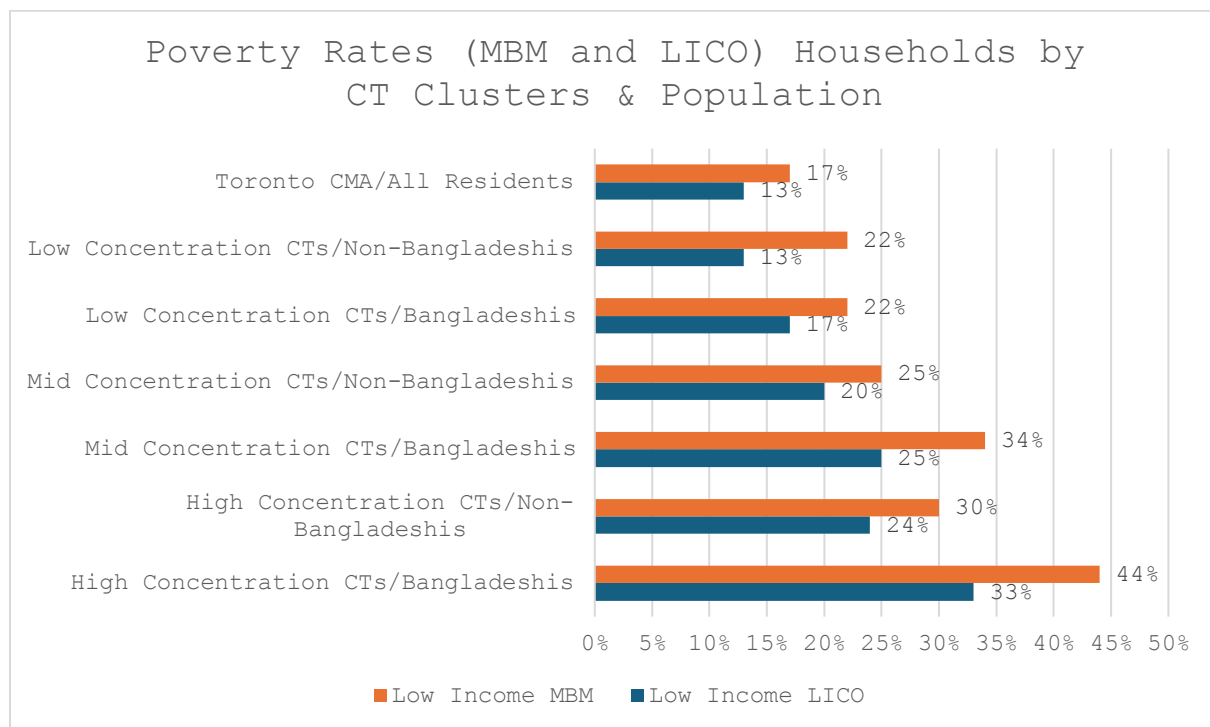


Figure 4.7 Poverty rates (MBM and LICO) households by census tract (CT) clusters and population

¹⁰ Statistics Canada devised the low income cut offs (LICO) as an income level below which a family will dedicate a large proportion (20 percentage above the ‘average’ Canadian family in that area and for that family size) of their earnings to necessities; food, clothing and shelter. Whereas the Market-Based Measure (MBM) built later upon the LICO framework seeks a comprehensive ‘basket’ of goods and services to calculate disposable family incomes more accurately.

Across the metropolitan area, 13% of households experience poverty according to LICO, while the equivalent figure is 17% per MBM. Poverty rates for Bangladeshi Canadian households in low-concentration census tracts, 17% based on LICO, are notably higher than those experienced by non-Bangladeshis at 13%. Both Bangladeshis and non-Bangladeshis in low concentration census tracts have an identical poverty rate of 22% using the MBM measure.

In medium concentration census tracts, the poverty rates for Bangladeshi Canadians start to diverge further from the metropolitan wide averages as well as non-Bangladeshis in the same area. Bangladeshi Canadians in medium concentration census tracts experience higher poverty rates at 25% (LICO) and 34% (MBM), compared to 20% (LICO) and 25% (MBM) for their non-Bangladeshi counterparts. The disparity is more pronounced in high-concentration census tracts where Bangladeshi Canadians experience poverty rates of 33% (LICO) and 44% (MBM) compared to 24% (LICO) and 30% (MBM) for non-Bangladeshis. For all residents, Bangladeshi or not, the rates of poverty in high concentration census tracts are significantly higher than the metropolitan wide averages.

The poverty data highlights the significant economic challenges faced by Bangladeshi Canadian households, particularly in census tracts where the diaspora is heavily concentrated. Although non-Bangladeshi residents in high- and medium-concentration areas also report very high poverty rates compared to the census metropolitan area rates, the increases in poverty rates are even more pronounced among Bangladeshi Canadian households. The trends in poverty rates suggest that systemic barriers - such as limited access to meaningful employment, inflated housing costs, spatial, and social marginalization - still adversely affect Bangladeshi Canadians living in high-concentration census tracts (see Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013).

Research on spatially dispersed diasporic hubs within urban regions (see Hiebert, 2015; Li, 1998) demonstrates that these areas can have advantages and disadvantages for diasporic residents (Hulchanski, 2010; Kaplan, 2017). On the one hand, such areas can offer critical social networks, culturally relevant services, and economic support that ease integration process and help newcomers navigate settlement challenges (see Hiebert, 2015; Qadeer et al., 2010). On the other hand, spatial concentration can reinforce social exclusion by restricting access to labour markets, public services, and economic opportunities (Kaplan, 2017; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013). The latter dynamics perpetuate structural disadvantages, leading to lower incomes, housing unaffordability, and poor long-term social mobility (Hulchanski, 2010; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013; Walks & Bourne, 2006).

Educational Attainment

Despite relatively high levels of educational attainment, Bangladeshi Canadians do not often earn incomes commensurate with their qualifications. Past research shows that Bangladeshis and Pakistanis earn less than both Canadian-born individuals and other racialized immigrant groups, even when holding comparable or higher levels of education (Agrawal, 2013). Most strikingly, first-generation Bangladeshis with Canadian university degrees report a lower probability of earning high incomes than their peers from other groups, a pattern that contradicts the conventional assumption that education is a reliable pathway to integration and upward mobility (Agrawal, 2013). The disparities align with wider national trends showing that racialized immigrants with higher education earn significantly less than non-racialized counterparts across Canada (Pendakur & Pendakur, 2015).

Among Toronto census metropolitan area residents, 18% hold a bachelor's degree and another 9% have a professional degree, master's, or doctorate. These proportions serve as a baseline for

comparing Bangladeshi Canadian and non-Bangladeshi Canadian populations living in census tracts categorized according to the percentage of the population who identify as Bangladeshi Canadian. Earlier studies acknowledge the high levels of education among Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto and the lack of commensurate formal employment outcomes (see Agrawal, 2013; Akbar, 2015, 2019). This research shows that the high level of educational outcomes, with many members of local diaspora holding post-graduate and professional degrees, being consistent across the high, medium, and low concentration census tracts.

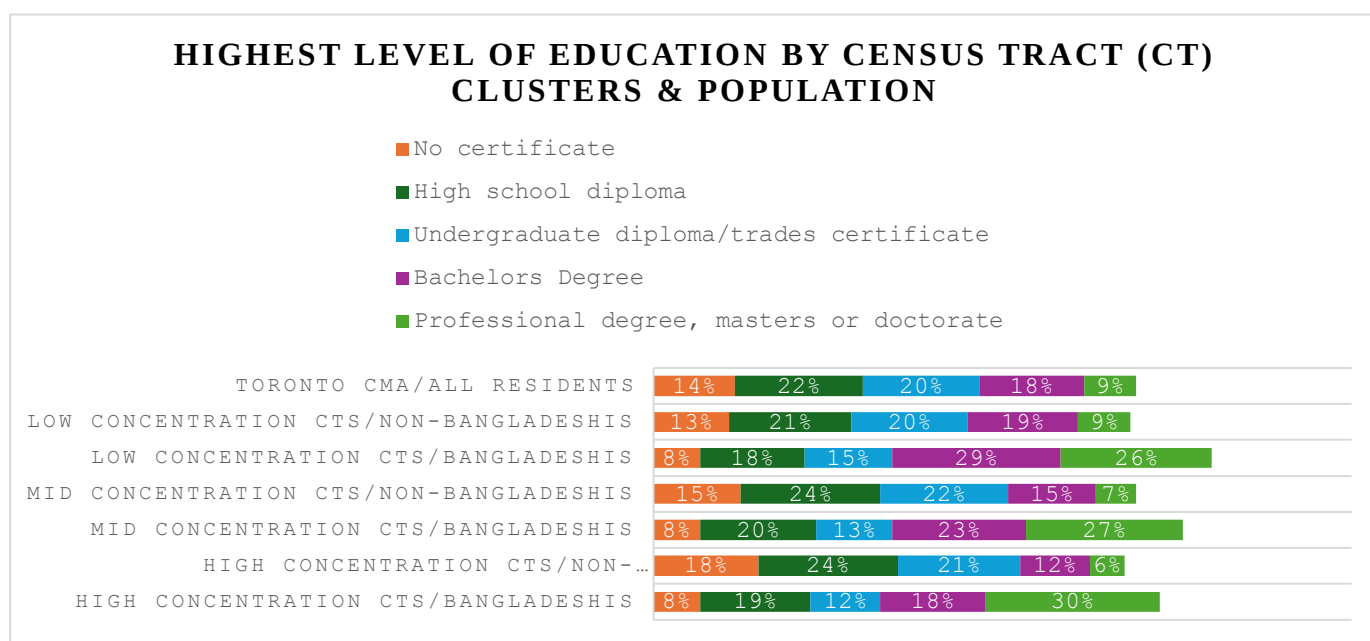


Figure 4.8 Highest level of education by census tract (CT) clusters and population

In low-concentration census tracts, the distribution of educational attainments for non-Bangladeshi Canadian residents mirrors the Toronto census metropolitan area averages with 19% holding a bachelor's degree. In comparison, a much higher percentage of Bangladeshi Canadians living in low-concentration census tracts, 29%, have a bachelor's degree. When examining advanced degrees, the educational attainments of Bangladeshi Canadian residents in these areas stand out

with 26% holding a professional degree, master's, or doctorate. The latter figure is many times higher than the 9% of non-Bangladeshi Canadians living in the low concentration census tracts who hold advanced educational qualifications. The tendency for Bangladeshi Canadians to have higher educational attainments than their non-Bangladeshi counterparts is consistently repeated across middle and high concentration census tracts. In medium concentration census tracts, the percentages of non-Bangladeshi Canadians with a bachelor's degree stands at 15% compared to 23% for Bangladeshi Canadians and only 7% of non-Bangladeshi Canadians hold a professional degree, master's, or doctorate compared to 27% for Bangladeshi Canadians. The trend of Bangladeshi Canadians being higher educated than their non-Bangladeshi counterparts continue in high concentration census tracts, where the percentage of Bangladeshi Canadians holding a professional degree, master's, or doctorate jumps to 30% compared to 6% for their non-Bangladeshi Canadian counterparts. Likewise, 18% of Bangladeshi Canadians in the high concentration areas hold a bachelor's compared to 12% for the non-Bangladeshi Canadians in the same areas.

Occupations

Occupation serves as a crucial indicator of social and economic status, shaping individuals' access to income, working conditions, and social mobility. In the context of settlement and integration, occupational outcomes often reflect structural factors such as credential recognition, labour market segmentation, and discrimination as much as human capital indicated by measures such as educational attainment. Labour market exclusion has been talked about in past research on Bangladeshi Canadian literature. Despite their professional qualifications, many first-generation Bangladeshi Canadians experience deprofessionalization and underemployment in Toronto (Agrawal, 2013; Halder, 2012). Bangladeshi men are overrepresented in part-time work, while

Bangladeshi women face disproportionately high rates of unemployment relative to other South Asian groups (Debbarman, 2019). Contributing factors include language barriers, racism, labour market discrimination, and a heavy reliance on co-diasporic employment networks that tend to channel workers into low-wage survival jobs (Akbar, 2016, 2019; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013). The experiences of Bangladeshi Canadian women entrepreneurs in Toronto indicate that class and gender intersect, often reinforcing inequitable labour market outcomes (Akbar, 2016, 2019).

This section analyzes occupational trends among Bangladeshi Canadians, as well as non-Bangladeshi Canadian residents, living across the Toronto census metropolitan area to better understand the social and spatial characteristics of the local diasporic population and urban residents. Occupational categories help understand the concentration of certain social groups, with racialized newcomers and immigrants who are female being some of the most disadvantaged (see Galabuzi, 2006; Block et al., 2019) and their variegated economic outcomes, with some occupations offering more secure, stable, and well paying opportunities (such as finance and ICT) versus the more precarious service sector (such as retail and food services) roles across Canadian urban centres (see Liodakis & Satzewich, 2013).

OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR BY CENSUS TRACT (CT) CLUSTERS & POPULATION

- Construction & Manufacturing
- Whole/Retail Sales
- Transportation/ Warehousing/ Utilities
- Finance/Real Estate/ Insurance/Business management
- ICT/Science Professionals
- Administrative/Food/Sanitary services
- Health/Art/Education/ Public Services
- Did Not Work

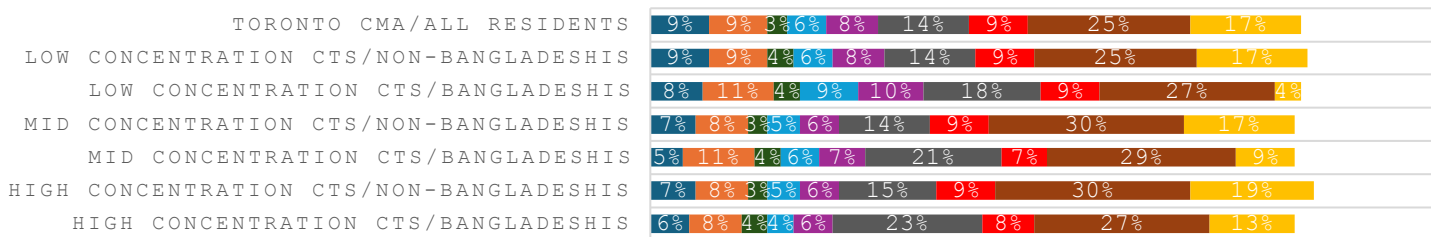


Figure 4.9 Occupational sector by census tract (CT) clusters and population

In low-concentration census tracts, 14% of non-Bangladeshi Canadians work in administrative, food and sanitary services and 9% work in wholesale or retail. In comparison, Bangladeshi Canadians living in the same areas are more likely to work in administrative, food, and sanitary services as well as wholesale and retail with 18% and 11% represented in these occupational categories. Moreover, 9% of both Bangladeshi and non-Bangladeshi Canadians within the low concentration census tracts are employed in health, art, education, and public services. Whereas Bangladeshi Canadians in the low concentration census tracts tend to have a higher representation in information, communication and technology (ICT) and science professions, with 10% compared to 8% for non-Bangladeshi Canadians. Likewise, Bangladeshi Canadians have a higher

representation in finance, real estate, insurance, and business management roles at 9% compared to 6% for non-Bangladeshi Canadians in low concentration census tracts.

The percentage of Bangladeshi Canadians in medium concentration census tracts working in administrative, food, and sanitary services is higher at 21% compared to 14% for their non-Bangladeshi Canadian counterparts. In wholesale and retail occupations where 11% of Bangladeshi Canadians work, there is a small difference in the percentage from the 8% for non-Bangladeshi Canadians living in the same area. Meanwhile, health, art, education, and public service occupations accounted for 7% of working Bangladeshi Canadians working compared to 9% among non-Bangladeshi Canadians living in medium concentration areas. There is also little difference in the percentages of Bangladeshi Canadians and non-Bangladeshis employed in ICT and science professions, 7% versus 6%. Bangladeshi Canadians and non-Bangladeshi Canadians in the medium concentration census tracts are also equally represented, at 6% each, in finance, real estate, insurance, and business management occupations

In high-concentration census tracts, non-Bangladeshi Canadian occupational patterns are like those in the low and medium concentration areas, whereas the occupational patterns of Bangladeshi Canadian residents are more concentrated in the administrative, food, and sanitary services than for Bangladeshi Canadians living in low and medium concentration areas. Among Bangladeshi Canadians in high concentration census tracts, administrative, food, and sanitary services employ 23%, compared to 15% for non-Bangladeshi Canadians. Moreover, in the latter census tracts, Bangladeshi Canadian and non-Bangladeshi residents are equally represented in wholesale and retail occupations with 8% each. Employment in health, art, education, and public service occupations are similar accounting for 8% of Bangladeshi Canadians and 9% of non-Bangladeshi Canadians living in high concentration census tracts. The percentages of Bangladeshi

Canadian and non-Bangladeshi Canadians in ICT and science professions are also similar, 8% for Bangladeshi Canadians, and 9% for their non-Bangladeshi counterparts. In high concentration census tracts Bangladeshi Canadians and non-Bangladeshi residents have limited representation in finance, real estate, insurance, and business management occupations: 5% and 4%, respectively.

Bangladeshi Canadians are overrepresented in administrative, food, and sanitary service occupations across the three types of census tracts, particularly in the medium and high concentration areas. Their participation in health, art, education, and public service occupations is also consistently higher than that of non-Bangladeshi Canadians, peaking in high-concentration census tracts. In contrast, fewer non-Bangladeshi Canadians work in administrative, food, and sanitary service occupations than their Bangladeshi Canadian counterparts across the metropolitan area. Across Canada, these frontline sales and services jobs often represent survival jobs which are generally low paying and demanding, with limited educational and technical skill requirements for entry into these roles (Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013).

Occupation and spatial patterns among the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora within Toronto show an association of concentration with poor economic outcomes. Occupation significantly shapes individual and household access to resources, social mobility, and long-term integration within urban neighbourhoods (see Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013). Canadian research underscores how racialized migrants are disproportionately represented in low-paying jobs within the service sector (see Agrawal, 2013; Banerjee et al., 2019; Block et al., 2019; Galabuzi, 2006; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013). For highly educated Bangladeshi Canadians, the high percentages working in administrative, food, and sanitary services is evidence that they continue to struggle in the job market despite their qualifications (see Akbar, 2015, 2019; Halder, 2012).

The Role of DCOs and Cyberspace in Enhancing Economic Opportunities

Beyond the examination of quantitative data from the census highlight the social and spatial characteristics of the local diasporic population, archival analysis, field notes, and semi-structured interviews help garner richer empirical insights into how some of the challenges from deprofessionalization to poverty were being addressed by DCOs. In response to different forms of social and economic marginalization, DCOs often focus on labour market and occupational issues. For the local diaspora, organizations like BIES have emerged to support members who face systemic barriers to well paid employment commensurate with their qualifications and experience. DCOs like BIES recognize that the devaluation of international credentials and immigrants limited professional networks are significant obstacles for racialized and low-income newcomers. As such, they utilize job search assistance, networking events, resume-building workshops, and support for navigating credential recognition. BIES and similar employment and occupation focused organizations aim to restore the professional identities and agency among underemployed Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto by helping them re-enter their fields or transition into alternative career paths. As the census data demonstrate, despite high levels of educational attainment, including post-graduate and professional degrees, a large percentage of Bangladesh Canadians continue to work in low-paying service occupations. These occupations often provide so-called survival jobs and pay menial wages for hard work (see Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013). Underemployment and deprofessionalization seem to remain key challenges among Bangladeshi Canadians living in high and medium concentrations. In contrast, Bangladeshi Canadians in low concentration areas are slightly over-represented in science and technology occupations and under-represented in the service sector when compared to their non-Bangladeshi Canadian counterparts and the Toronto census metropolitan averages.

For Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto, higher educational attainments do not appear to correlate with high incomes and secure, professional occupations. For DCOs, serving low income and deprofessionalized stakeholders poses unique challenges - making it difficult for organizations to attract large private donations or business sponsorships, as potential funders may prioritize more affluent areas and residents perceived to offer greater visibility and return on their investments (see de Graauw et al., 2013; Hulchanski, 2010; Kissane, 2010). These trends can contribute to chronic underfunding of third sector organizations rooted in marginalized urban neighbourhoods. Many initiatives and organizations are left dependent on inconsistent and competitive public funding (Amin, 2005; Bhuyan et al., 2021; Kissane, 2010). In addition, neighbourhood stigma can shape how policymakers and the public perceive residents and the organizations working in specific urban neighbourhoods due to social, economic, and cultural stigma (see Amin, 2005; de Graauw, 2015). The DCOs serving low income and racialized populations may be overlooked in policy consultations or left out of major funding and planning processes due to assumptions that their constituencies are too 'hard to reach' or lack political clout (see Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008).

Existing research demonstrate that Bangladeshi Canadians actively use digital tools and online resources, such as settlement organization websites, government webpages, and professional social networking platforms e.g. LinkedIn, to search for employment, upgrade their skills, and access labour market information (Shuva, 2021a). The findings highlight the role of information and communication technologies and levels of digital literacy in shaping the individual-level job-seeking behaviours among the first-generation (Shuva, 2021a). However, the small number of existing studies are primarily focused on individuals navigating cyberspace, rather than how DCOs collectively leverage technology to address social and economic challenges such as

marginalization in the labour market. This research builds on earlier empirical insights by shifting the focus from diasporic individuals to DCOs. By analyzing the role of employment and occupation focused DCOs, such as BIES, this research seeks to capture empirical insights into how collective, digitally mediated civic engagement can empower underemployed professionals by enhancing access to professional networks, resume experience development, and supportive employment pathways. Many of these employment supports are provided by diasporic professionals totally for free, volunteering their own time and energy to help others. For example, I witnessed first hand the civic engagement of BIES, JOS, and SAO with their different forms of economic interventions carried out online, from virtual career network panels to mock interviews on Zoom, reflects the evolving role of DCOs as digital intermediaries that actively mediate between highly educated and skilled diaspora members who are marginalized in the local labour market.

Labour market challenges also create opportunities for DCOs to expand their activities, especially regarding programs to assist with employment challenges among the local diaspora (see Halder, 2012; Shuva, 2021b). DCOs can benefit from the availability of highly trained and educated volunteers and staff to launch and grow their own initiatives (see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Rouf, 2025). Joining as a volunteer or staff at a local DCO may be a way for the first-generation, as well as their next-generation adult children, to build their resumes and gain some much-needed practical experience (see Rouf, 2020). The high levels of formal education and professional skills among Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto is a strength and challenge for the diaspora and their DCOs. On one hand, DCOs have access to a pool of skilled personnel capable of managing complex organizational tasks, including digital transitions, program evaluation, grant writing, and strategic planning. The studied DCOs have benefited from volunteers and staff with backgrounds in

engineering, medicine, IT, education, and business - professional fields in which many first-generation diaspora members were trained and educated pre-migration. Their valuable skills allow DCOs to build organizational capacity, implement effective outreach strategies, and support members in navigating settlement and integration challenges. For organizations such as professional alumni groups or occupation focused DCOs, access to this talent base helps facilitate mentoring programs, career networking, and workshops aimed at enhancing employment and professional growth. However, this pool of expertise also creates some tensions and challenges. Many highly educated and skilled diaspora members experience the systemic devaluation of foreign credentials, deskilling, and downward social mobility that disproportionately impact racialized and newcomer professionals in Canada (see Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Galabuzi, 2006). Their civic engagement often stems from their frustrations and unfulfilled aspirations. These social and economic challenges often create a desire among the 1.5 and second generations to act to prevent themselves from enduring the same setbacks as the first-generation (see Abada & Tenkorang, 2009; Rouf, 2020; Zaami, 2015). All DCOs studied here navigate these tensions related to social mobility by developing targeted interventions aimed at helping multiple generations of Bangladeshi Canadians bridge the gap between educational achievement and economic opportunity. JOS, SAO and BIES are directly helping many Bangladeshi Canadians as well as other diasporic residents through resume-building workshops, career networking programs, youth mentoring initiatives, and job search supports, often run by those whose own career trajectories were shaped by labour market challenges. In this way, the challenges of deprofessionalization and underemployment not only animate DCO mandates but fuel intergenerational hopes that the next-generation will achieve the professional recognition and stability denied to many of the first-generation.

Beyond education and occupation, the census data reveal material concerns that DCOs must contend with. One glaring issue is the high levels of housing precarity and unaffordability among the Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto. These material conditions have tangible implications for DCO operations given that many (see Akbar 2015, 2019; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012) operate from private households in high rise apartment buildings around Toronto's Bangla Town (see Ghosh, 2014a). The unaffordability of commercial real estate which directly impacts DCOs seeking office and activity spaces has risen along with residential units. Board members from both BIES and SAO shared with me their challenges paying the high cost of physical space and how those dollars could potentially be saved and deployed elsewhere. A Board Member at JOS shared with me regarding the cost challenges facing their organization:

An online first strategy seemed intuitive for our organization because of the exorbitant cost of office and activity space across Toronto. We [board members] are often pitching out of pocket for organizational costs and renting a permanent space would be too steep of a cost because we all have our own expenses and are mostly students or young professionals. Board Member A, JOS

The rise in housing unaffordability and overcrowding may limit the physical spaces dedicated to civic engagement, challenges in volunteer availability, and recruitment due to housing-related stress, leading to high levels of compounded marginalization among DCO stakeholders. The impact of rising housing and space costs on DCO activities and potential ways digitization can help offset higher costs and availability of spaces for activity, are investigated further in chapters five and six.

4.6 Conclusion

Chapter 4 investigates the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora in Toronto, bringing to light key insights into their social, spatial, and economic attributes. Historically and geographically rooted in migration flows that began before Bangladesh's independence, the global Bangladeshi

diaspora has developed a distinctly transnational and urban character - especially evident in Toronto's emerging diasporic hub, Bangla Town.

This research highlights the significant geographic redistribution of the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora across Toronto, from early 21st-century settlements in outer downtown neighbourhoods such as Crescent Town and Cabbage town to the growing suburbanization of southwestern Scarborough and other inner suburbs. Suburban dispersal presents numerous challenges for diaspora members and their DCOs, such as the diminished availability of social networks and culturally relevant services, which are discussed further in chapters 5 and 6. This research highlights the crucial role of DCOs in addressing social and economic challenges, preserving cultural continuity, and supporting settlement and integration throughout Toronto. However, the ongoing trend of suburban dispersal raises pressing concerns about the capacity of existing DCOs to adapt and maintain effective outreach and programs. Spatial shifts in diasporic settlement patterns may necessitate new strategies, such as expanding programs and services through cyberspace, to connect with increasingly dispersed local diaspora members. Moreover, the data shows that despite high levels of education and professional qualifications, Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto continue to face severe economic challenges. Many local diaspora members experience precarious employment, poverty, and housing instability. These challenges have produced stark inequalities in areas of concentrated diasporic settlement such as Toronto's Bangla Town.

Chapter 5: Superdiversity and the DCO

5.1 Overview

This chapter closely examines elements of superdiversity that shape Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto, with particular attention to how the organizations tailor their programs and services to address gendered, occupational, and generational differences within the diaspora. Building on past research into class, occupation, and gender dynamics among Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto (Akbar, 2016, 2019; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012; Islam et al., 2021; Murdie & Ghosh, 2013), this research broadens the empirical scope to include the intersectional identities and transnational networks of different generations, namely the 1.5 and second generations, of the local diaspora. In doing so, it reveals the nuanced ways that superdiversity influences the roles, strategies, and success of DCOs in fostering inclusion, resilience, and empowerment among diasporic members of different ages and life stages.

This chapter analyzes superdiversity as a multidimensional concept that operates both within and across diasporic groups in Toronto. Internally, the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora is far from homogenous; it comprises a wide range of experiences and aspirations shaped by intersectional identities such as gender, class, occupation, generation, migration histories, and geographies (Ahsan, 2015; Ghosh, 2007; Halder, 2012). These internal differences are reflected in the diversity of Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs, which include women-led advocacy organizations, youth-driven digital collectives, and employment-focused settlement services - each responding to distinct aspirations and experiences among diaspora members (Appendix: DCOs List).

This chapter also examines how superdiversity manifests across different diasporic groups, given that Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs operate within urban spaces shaped by interaction with other racialized and immigrant groups. Shared experiences of marginalization and racialization influence these intergroup dynamics, as well as challenges such as competition over limited resources, space, and institutional recognition (see Ashutosh, 2015; Bhuyan et al., 2021). By investigating both intra- and inter-group dynamics of diversity, this chapter provides empirical insights into how DCOs navigate the complex and layered realities of identity, experience, and aspiration in superdiverse urban contexts, and then how the latter elements shape their organizational mandates, programs, and services.

By adopting this expanded lens of diasporic difference, this research highlights the internal heterogeneity of the Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto and challenges essentialist narratives that obscure the complexities of diasporic aspiration and experiences. This latter approach, mobilized through in-depth case studies of three unique DCOs led by and serving the interests of diverse diaspora members, provides a clearer understanding of how civic engagement within superdiverse urban contexts work on the ground.

This chapter commences with an overview of the pressures facing DCOs due to civic invisibility and inequality within a superdiverse urban centre: Toronto. Then the focus shifts to how DCOs contend with superdiversity within the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora in Toronto and their diverse identities, experiences, and aspirations. Navigating diversity within the diaspora presents complex challenges for DCOs to genuinely unite members from different backgrounds that make up the diaspora and then work towards shared collective goals.

This chapter draws extensively from in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with DCO stakeholders, including general members, board members, volunteers, and employees, who offered

rich insights into how each DCO under study navigates superdiversity and the varied civic interests of diverse stakeholders. These in-depth interviews were instrumental in capturing the lived experiences, strategic decision-making, and affective investments that shape DCO responses to Toronto's shifting social, spatial, and economic landscapes. DCO stakeholders reflected on how superdiversity has impacted organizational outreach, service delivery, and transnational networks while also underscoring the persistent challenges faced in building their organizations. DCO stakeholders provided rich and insightful first-hand accounts of how gender, class, occupation, and generation influence civic engagement. By centring the voices of the people who start, grow, and sustain DCOs, this chapter brings analytical clarity to the interplay between structural conditions and everyday practices of DCOs and their diverse stakeholders.

To reiterate, the three DCO case studies at the centre of this research focus on Bengali Information and Employment Services (BIES), Sisters Across Oceans (SAO), and Just Our Stories (JOS). Each organization is a distinct embodiment and expression of the generational, occupational, and gendered differences among Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto. BIES has a strong membership base rooted in first-generation working age members of the local diaspora who are tackling the challenges of poverty, deprofessionalization, and downward social mobility. BIES has expanded its membership and services to the senior and youth populations living around Toronto's Bangla Town and in nearby Scarborough neighbourhoods. SAO mainly serves diasporic women with strong roots among the 1.5 and second-generation Bangladeshi Canadians settled in Toronto as well as few other large Canadian and American urban centres. SAO has a small but growing following in villages and towns in Bangladesh where one of the co-founders resides, demonstrating its robust transnational networks. JOS was started by and involves generation 1.5 and two Bangladeshi Canadian young adults living across Scarborough and North York. JOS also has a

notable presence on digital platforms such as Instagram, as shown in Figure 5.1 below, with its accounts attracting followers from the USA, Germany, UK, and Bangladesh.

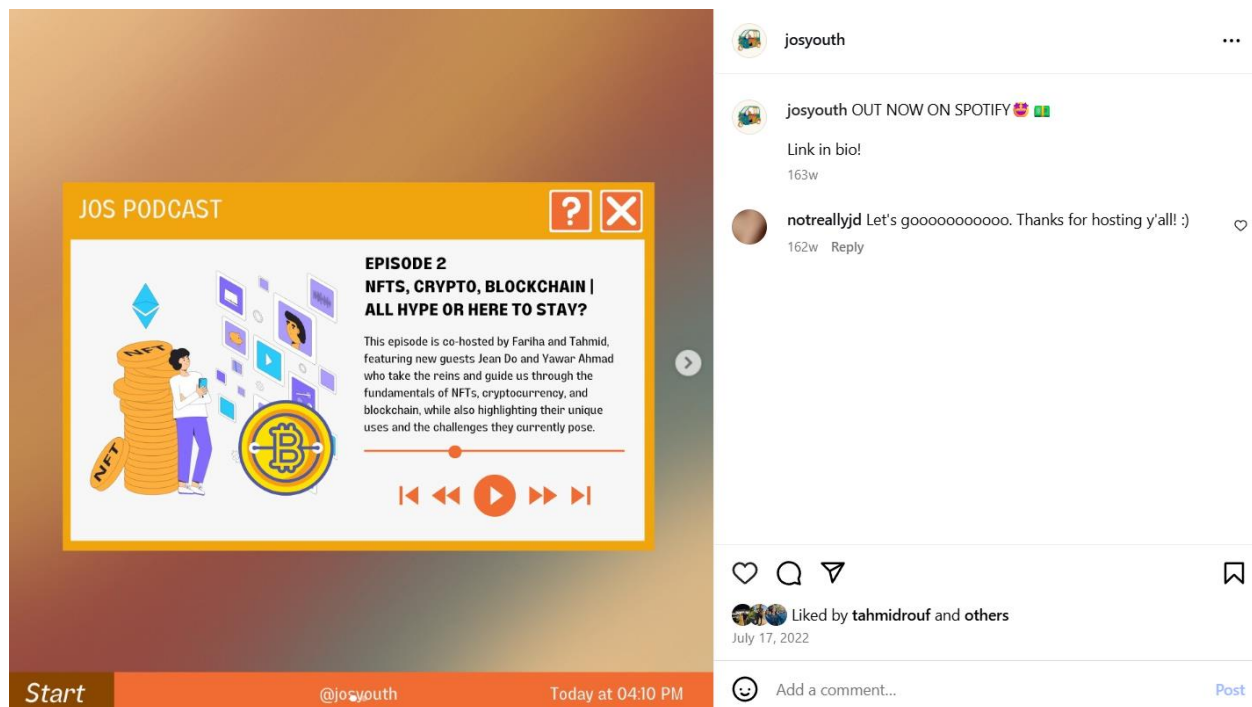


Figure 5.1 The two seasons of JOS podcasts hosted on Spotify have reached a transnational network of young people across continents.

Researchers are only beginning to uncover the links between superdiversity and third sector organizations (see Aptekar, 2020; Berg et al., 2019). As a conceptual framework, superdiversity emphasizes the increasing complexity of migration patterns and the resulting social stratification within urban neighbourhoods and regions where diaspora members settle (see Antonsich, 2018; Crul, 2016). The third sector literature has yet to fully engage with how superdiverse urban contexts influence the roles, strategies, and challenges of organizations (see Aptekar, 2020; Berg et al., 2019). Generational, occupational, and gendered interests and differences within diasporic populations, such as Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto, go on to shape the mandates of their DCOs. Moreover, these intersectional identities are often shape and are shaped by transnational

diasporic experiences and aspirations which also appear to influence DCO mandates and activities as outlined in the following chapters.

5.2 The Intersection Between Civic Invisibility and Superdiversity

Superdiverse urban regions (see Vertovec, 2007, 2019) are often marked by deeply rooted social and economic inequalities (Hall, 2017; Phillimore, 2023). These structural inequalities contribute to the civic invisibility of marginalized migrants and the organizations that represent them (Bloemraad & Gleeson, 2017; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). Civic invisibility is not merely about being unseen, but rather it involves systemic exclusion from the levers of power and decision-making (Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). This form of inequality often prevents marginalized groups and organizations from accessing the social and economic resources required to improve their situation. Addressing civic invisibility requires intentional efforts to promote inclusivity, amplify marginalized voices, and advocate for the dismantlement of systemic barriers that prevent equitable civic engagement. In the following paragraphs, the relationships between social and economic inequalities and civic invisibility facing DCOs are investigated. Simultaneously, this research acknowledges the resiliency and resistance of DCOs and their stakeholders against different forms of inequality in the superdiverse places where they reside. Everyday, through different civic interventions, third sector organizations serving marginalized residents aim to break through the veils of civic invisibility and make a meaningful impact on the lives of their stakeholders.

Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto are primarily first, 1.5, and second-generation residents who still contend with settlement and integration challenges as the analysis of census data in chapter four revealed. The social and economic challenges facing Bangladeshi Canadians and their

households have been discussed at length in the previous chapter, so the focus here will be on their impacts on DCOs. For example, in Toronto, a limited number of affluent and well-connected members of the local diaspora can donate large sums and offer executive support to compensate for shortfalls in public funding and support for Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs. Many of the 1.5- and second-generation youth and young adults who work and volunteer at DCOs are still at an early stage in their careers and post-secondary educations. These latter cohorts largely lack the financial resources to support DCOs through monetary means although they enthusiastically contribute their time and energy. Bangladeshi Canadian young adults openly shared with me the plethora of social and economic challenges facing the development of their DCOs. According to one board member at JOS, a DCO serving the 1.5 and second generations of the diaspora:

A lack of long-term sustainable funding [is the biggest challenge for us]. A lack of support and care from the policy makers. Struggling migrant groups have other concerns besides starting an effective civic organization, such as making ends meet by working at multiple precarious jobs. Good intentions are not enough to scale an organization and reach a critical mass. Board Member A, JOS

This quote offers a powerful critique of the structural constraints that hinder the sustainability and growth of DCOs serving racialized and low-income diaspora members. The speaker highlights the absence of long-term, sustainable funding as a primary obstacle, echoing broader critiques in the third sector literature about the volatility and conditional nature of financing under neoliberal governance regimes (see Lowe et al., 2017; Richmond & Shields, 2024). Without consistent investment in capacity building, DCOs are forced to rely on short-term grants and project-based funding that limits their ability to engage in long-term planning, build institutional memory, and deepening their impact.

Additionally, Board Member A at JOS identifies a "lack of support and care from the policymakers" as a key challenge, pointing to the civic invisibility experienced by their

organizations. This critique reveals how funding decisions and political priorities are often disconnected from the lived realities and needs of marginalized diasporas. The quote also highlights the labour precarity that undergirds many DCOs. Stakeholders often juggle multiple low-wage, precarious jobs to make ends meet, leaving little time, energy, and resources to invest in sustained civic engagement. This reality challenges romanticized narratives of grassroots resilience by revealing the personal sacrifices that underpin civic engagement and the structural barriers that impede it (see Amin, 2005; Lee, 2013; Martin, 2011, 2012; Richmond & Shields, 2024). The speaker's statement that "good intentions are not enough" emphasizes the importance of structural support and capacity-building, rather than relying solely on volunteerism and goodwill, to sustain collective efforts and meaningful change. Consequently, some scholarly works have cautioned against overly celebratory or utopian portrayals of solidarity economies, arguing that while such economies offer alternatives to capitalism, they often remain embedded within the same capitalist frameworks they aim to resist (see Defourny & Develtere, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Lee, 2013). DCO work underscores the importance of recognizing the contradictions and limitations of alternative economic thinking and practices, including the ways unpaid labour and affective investments in the third sector can mask more profound inequalities and reinforce dependency on precarious capitalist structures. Despite the social and economic value that DCOs provide through their work, especially in the superdiverse places where they originate, they often lack the institutional legitimacy or civic visibility to secure meaningful long-term support. In superdiverse urban contexts, where many racialized and low-income groups coexist and compete for limited attention and resources, civic visibility becomes even harder to achieve – consequently, the very complexity and fragmentation that define superdiversity can inadvertently deepen the

marginalization of groups whose voices are already less legible in dominant civic and policy arenas (see Amin, 2005; Berg et al., 2019; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008; Sheringham, 2025).

Like the experiences at JOS, stakeholders at SAO and BIES also reported challenges related to a lack of coordination between DCOs and limited funding opportunities. Limited monetary and cross-organizational collaboration (which could help pool resources) was a consistent experience across the DCOs under study and contributed to limited organizational capacity development. A staff member from BIES earnestly shared with me the many challenges of securing sustainable funding and partnerships:

The funding is also a challenge. The other challenge is coordination, because there is a lot of repetition of the programs and services. The same community, especially if we say about it in our [Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto] community. We have a lot of nonprofit organizations and sometimes we are doing the same thing. But we don't have any coordination, we don't sit together. It's not about it's not like competition, but we do the same thing. But it's a misuse of resources that we don't have many resources [to begin with], you know. Yeah, this is one of the challenges and the other challenge is that's capacity. Organization capacity is very low. The problem is, you know that funding comes from the government. They won't try, they don't, they don't like to give money funding to, to improve the capacity of the organization, you know. Staff A, BIES

A similar critical perspective was shared with me by a board member at SAO who highlighted the numerous challenges and barriers to securing funding from the municipal government:

[City of] Toronto needs to provide funding to organizations that are [small and new]. I noticed that you have to be a very particular organization, that [can] match so many requirements to get a grant. But there is a lot of barriers for organizations that are new. Because like you do not have so much to show. These are our [funding] numbers, showing a lot of numbers. It's hard to show like the kind of amount. Like at this point, I can say the e-mentorship program will be \$50,000 and it's almost like I won't get a grant if I don't have a huge number [of existing grant funding]. Board Member A, SAO

The quotes from Board Member A at SAO and Staff A at BIES connects to Polanyi's concept of redistribution by illustrating the structural failure of the current system to allocate resources based

on need, a core function of the redistributive mechanism (see Carrier, 2022). The Board Member's observation that grants favour large organizations which already have better access to resources and proven outputs which were tracked as per metrics set by funding administrators - a logic imported from the market economy - demonstrates how neoliberal management principles hinder the state's capacity for social protection for the most marginalized (see Preston et al., 2024; Richmond & Shields, 2024). The Board Member at SAO is effectively asking that the City of Toronto restore the integrity of the redistributive mechanism by funding small, grassroots organizations based on the social mandate of the protective countermovement (see Carrier, 2022; Castles et al., 2011), rather than market-driven metrics of scale and visibility (see Preston et al., 2024; Richmond & Shields, 2024).

Moreover, DCO stakeholders expressed their concern with limited advocacy and reach within policy circles where decisions impacting them were being made. The latter concern was repeatedly emphasized in an online virtual panel hosted by the first ever Bangladeshi Canadian MPP, Doly Begum representing southwest Scarborough, that included directors and staff of several DCOs in the area. The DCO directors and staff repeatedly expressed concerns with the limited civic visibility and political clout of the local diaspora and the need for greater representation in the halls of power. Without civic visibility and political clout, DCOs may continue to experience limited access to resources and opportunities for funding and capacity building.

Currently, Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs lack a strong united front which could amplify their voices and advocate more effectively for the needs of the local diaspora. A united front could also benefit the organizations themselves who would have access to pooled resources and shared expertise leading to enhanced capacity building. Consequently, some DCO leaders requested that the MPP initiate efforts to convene an umbrella initiative or organization for local DCOs, encouraging all

to act in unison rather than competing against each other for limited resources and opportunities. At the time of writing, no known umbrella organization uniting the Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs across Toronto had yet been formed.

Amidst the shortage of funding, the three DCOs under study rely heavily on the goodwill and volunteerism of dedicated stakeholders. Many founding and early members of DCOs were once struggling newcomers or the children of immigrants who experienced the challenges faced by the people they serve. This relatability to the social, cultural, and economic struggles of fellow diasporic members was a key motivator for several DCO stakeholders to contribute their time, energy, and money. These sentiments and commitments to help struggling diasporic members are then institutionalized in DCO mandates. For example, BIES indicates on their organizational website that it exists to build: “A community where everyone lives with dignity and prosperity”. Similarly, the mandates of JOS and SAO, organizations largely catering to the 1.5 and second-generation Bangladeshi Canadians, also speak to mobility, representation, and empowerment of marginalized diasporic and urban youth. This is clear from the about us blurb on the homepage of the JOS website where the organization frames itself as a “...youth-led collective that develops innovative community projects and programs on issues that impact marginalized young people.” Likewise, on the main introduction of the SAO Instagram page we see their goal clearly stated as “A global community network and platform holding space for Bangali women’s wellbeing, growth & representation.”

A staff member at BIES discussed the personal sacrifices and challenges that help inform their own commitment to the DCO’s work:

They [newcomers] suffered a lot like in getting the information about employment and how to get the job, new country, as, as being it, because if you meet a newcomer and I have gone through these challenges. Staff A, BIES

Staff member A at BIES offers valuable insights into the lived experiences of newcomers and the empathy of DCO workers, who often share similar experiences with the people they serve. The speaker reflects on how first-generation newcomers especially those living in concentrations such as Toronto's Bangla Town and surrounding neighbourhoods (where the BIES organizational office is located) suffer from a lack of information, particularly around employment pathways in Canada. Their statement, "I have gone through these challenges," foregrounds a key theme in this research: the embodied expertise of civic actors who draw upon their own personal struggles to inform and enrich their work within the third sector. Shared experiential knowledge is a powerful tool in fostering trust, cultural competence, and effective program and service delivery.

The quote also encapsulates the Polanyian concept of reciprocity and non-market exchanges conducted by DCOs such as BIES. The staff member, having "gone through these challenges," is not selling information but rather transferring knowledge based on shared experience and mutual aid, which is the definition of reciprocity (see Carrier, 2022). This exchange of vital information (such as how to navigate a new country's job system) signals an aim to protect against state and private-sector failure to support newcomers within a commodified labour market. The DCO acts as a voluntary institutional space where social connections, rather than price signals, mediate the essential economic transaction of securing a livelihood.

The quote also draws attention to a recurring issue in settlement research: the disconnect between formal state-provided information and the lived needs of newcomers (see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Halder, 2012). BIES intervenes by deploying multiple programs and services to disseminate

critical information about employment and labour markets. DCO offices, like BIES's, in and around Toronto's Bangla Town, serve as accessible points of contact for newcomers. Staff and volunteers are often bilingual and familiar with the newcomers' cultures. Familiarity with the language and culture reduces barriers to service and improves communication. For example, outreach posters in the Bengali language are shared online through different organizational platforms, with Facebook being the popular choice for BIES.



Figure 5.2 Bengali language copies of a poster advertising BIES help call line for cases of domestic violence.

Printed multilingual brochures and flyers are distributed through ethnic grocery stores, local newspapers, and cultural centres, ensuring outreach to stakeholders who are digitally disconnected. These initiatives are often paired with hybrid service delivery formats, such as online webinars and offline planning meetings, allow newcomers to participate based on their access and comfort

with technology. In addition, to serve members better, BIES has expanded its digital outreach, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. [Their website](#) features program information, event updates, and resources in plain English and Bangla. Social media platforms such as Facebook are also actively used by BIES to share job postings, event updates, and settlement information in a timely and accessible manner across geographic boundaries. The different platforms and modes of engagement reflect BIES's commitment to meeting people where they are, offline and online. Their approach underscores the necessity of creative communication strategies, blending digital platforms with local face-to-face service delivery in neighbourhoods available in languages, in this case Bangla, that are relevant to their stakeholders. In doing so, BIES actively contests the structural marginalization that many diasporic members experience when navigating formal institutional systems and sites of civic engagement.

JOS and SAO also had stakeholders in leadership positions who could personally relate to the struggles of the people they serve and unite their members in working towards collective goals:

So, it's a joy to come together, to have our meetings, to have our workshops. So, it's brought a sense of community, I enjoy working alongside and collaborating with all these members and volunteers who all contribute to SAO to reach its potential. It still has a long journey because the pandemic got in the way of a lot of what we had envisioned in terms of progress. Of course, with very limited capacity, we have tried to bring it to what it is now. Board Member A, SAO

I'm always motivated by the energy and enthusiasm of young people, and I'm also keenly aware of the unique hardships that marginalized youth face. And I believe that the work we do, even in small scale, can mitigate the difficult circumstances, and that drives me to continue the mission. Board Member B, JOS

These examples from SAO and JOS embody the local, collaborative, and non-market forms of engagement that define both Polanyi's double movement and Gibson-Graham's solidarity economies. Board Member A's description of "organically drawn" contributions and the resulting

"sense of community" illustrates Polanyian reciprocity, in which care and labour circulate through social ties rather than for profit, actively creating a social institution that buffers members against the instability of commodification (Carrier, 2022). Similarly, Board Member B's motivation to "mitigate the difficult circumstances" for marginalized youth, even through "small scale" work, reflects the fundamental resistance of the protective countermovement against the market's destructive tendency to commodify all aspects of life (Polanyi, 1944, 2001). Ultimately, by emphasizing that their collective well-being is the product of collaborative labour and reciprocal goodwill rather than funding or scale, these DCOs practice Gibson-Graham's post-capitalist imaginaries, demonstrating that non-capitalist economic practices are already embedded in the present and offer alternatives to address acute challenges facing marginalized groups (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008).

5.3 Superdiverse Places and the Origins of DCOs

Ethnocultural identities are only some components of superdiversity; however, they are important starting points for superdiversity analysis (Aptekar, 2020; Stringer, 2014). Looking at the ethnocultural diversity at a census tract level suggests that Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto usually reside in ethnoculturally diverse neighbourhoods. To reiterate, there are 17 census tracts with a high concentration of Bangladeshi Canadians, 87 census tracts with a medium concentration, 519 census tracts with a low concentration and 528 census tracts with no Bangladeshi Canadians. Also to reiterate, the census tract concentration levels (low, medium, or high concentration) are determined by the percentages of Bangladeshi Canadians in the geographic area, with high concentrations being greater than 5.5%, medium being between (inclusive) 1.1% and 5.5% and low being below 1.1%.

Table 5.3 below provides a breakdown of ethnocultural diversity scores across census tracts in the Toronto census metropolitan area using the Shannon-Weiner Index, a measure of entropy in which higher scores indicate greater diversity (with a theoretical maximum of 2.48). These numbers reveal critical spatial patterns of diversity. Compared to the census metropolitan area average of 1.13, both high- and medium-concentration census tracts show higher mean diversity scores of 1.46 and 1.47, reflecting a greater mix of ethnocultural groups in these areas. In contrast, census tracts with low concentration or no Bangladeshi Canadians, by far the most numerous (n=519 and n=528), have lower mean diversity scores of 1.29 and 1.14. Many census tracts in the Toronto census metropolitan area remain homogeneous with limited ethnocultural diversity. The outer suburbs, which are heavily populated by groups with a limited number of European origins (see Qadeer et al., 2010; Satzewich & Lioudakis, 2013) have low diversity scores. Many census tracts still have no Bangladeshi Canadians and the ethnocultural diversity of these census tracts are like the Toronto metropolitan area averages. In contrast, the census tract areas with a high or medium concentration of Bangladeshi Canadians have diversity scores well above the metropolitan averages. However, the high and medium concentration areas are a minority of all census tracts (n=17 and n=87) and most are located within the City of Toronto, predominantly in the eastern inner suburb of Scarborough.

Superdiversity matters for DCOs because these organizations emerge and operate in the high and medium diversity areas. Understanding the geography of diversity, who lives where and with whom, is critical to analyzing how and where DCOs intervene, especially in sprawling large-scale urban centres such as Toronto, where superdiversity manifests unevenly across neighbourhoods and municipalities. The entropy scores provide a valuable empirical window into this uneven urban

landscape, highlighting where targeted investments in civic infrastructure and culturally relevant services, often delivered by DCOs, may be needed most.

Table 5.3 Ethnocultural Diversity (Entropy) Scores by Census Tract (CT) Clusters

CT Types	Mean	Median	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Count
High Concentration CTs	1.46	1.48	0.36	1.29	1.65	17
Medium Concentration CTs	1.47	1.52	0.95	0.75	1.70	87
Low Concentration CTs	1.29	1.32	1.32	0.39	1.71	519
No Bangladeshi Canadians	0.98	0.96	1.75	0	1.75	528
All CTs in Toronto CMAs	1.13	1.18	1.75	0	1.75	1051

Table 5.3 exhibits the differences in entropy scores using ethnocultural groups in the census and the distribution of these scores across the different clusters of census tracts based on the concentration of Bangladeshi Canadians living in those areas. Census tracts with high or medium concentrations of Bangladeshi Canadians, are the areas where the three DCOs under study originated (see figure 5.3 below). The three DCOs continue to have a strong presence in the inner suburbs of Toronto. Ethnoculturally diverse neighbourhoods, those with high and medium concentrations of the local diaspora, are fertile grounds for DCOs and potentially provide a steady pool of the volunteers, members, and in kind supports to sustain diasporic civic engagement (see Ahsan, 2015; Bhuyan et al., 2021; Halder, 2012). There may also be positive network effects from DCOs being proximate to other diasporic institutions and co-diasporic support networks, as a detailed account from a BIES board member highlight about the effects of proximity and co-location:

And if somebody comes to our office [near Toronto's Bangla Town], they're just entered the other [another DCO] organization door. Yes, this is an example of collaboration. Yeah, anyways. So, also, the Member of Parliament and also MP [Member of Parliament] office, they have they have initiative. They have initiative to [help Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto] collaborate. The organization works in this like in their community [silos]. Yeah. And we are part of it. And we are also proud to every, every week we have a meeting. Yeah. And what we are doing, what they are doing, and what everybody's doing this [way they] share their programs and services. Yeah. And we've tried to call up [relevant DCOs in the area to join us]. Board Member B, BIES

In addition, the map below in figure 5.3 shows the founding locations of the three DCOs under study. While BIES originated near the high diasporic concentrations of Toronto's Bangla Town, SAO and JOS started farther east and north in Scarborough and North York. While the highest diasporic concentrations are around Toronto's Bangla Town, the diasporic population has dispersed further between 2006 and 2016 and can now found across the city of Toronto and in the inner suburbs of the census metropolitan area. Consequently, two of the DCOs, namely JOS and SAO, find their beginning in inner suburbs of the city of Toronto further away from Bangla Town's diasporic hub. A spatialized discussion is fundamental because diasporic concentrations and dispersion raise questions about accessible social services, culturally responsive programs, and the role of DCOs to provide much needed programs and services (see Bhuyan et al., 2021; Halder, 2012; Rouf, 2020). DCOs not only respond to ethnocultural differences but also actively work across intersections of class, occupation, gender, and generation as reflected by this case study of BIES, SAO and JOS, often in under-resourced and superdiverse urban spaces.

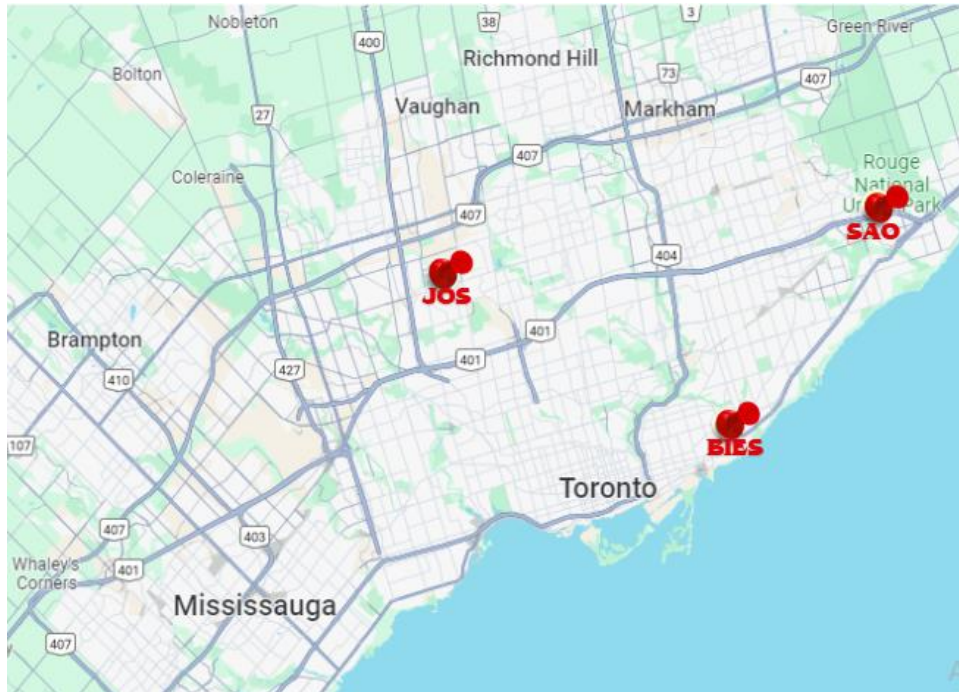


Figure 5.3 Map of DCO origin

5.4 Superdiversity within DCOs

Across Toronto, third sector organizations with diverse mandates aim to enhance equality and justice through collective practices of democratic decision making, advocating for reduced urban inequality, greater civic visibility, and meeting the material needs of marginalized urban residents (see Anisef & Lanphier, 2003; Bhuyan et al., 2021). Stakeholders from the DCOs under study readily acknowledge the diverse, sometimes conflicting, aspirations among stakeholders. Ensuring high levels of solidarity and reciprocity is a fundamental challenge for organizations seeking to infuse democratic and civic engagement within its structure.

The Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora in Toronto is a heterogenous group in which people have diverse class, gender, occupational, and generational identities (Ahsan, 2015; Halder, 2012). The diverse mandates and memberships of the three DCOs under study reflect the diversity within the diaspora. While there are different forms of identities beyond the ones emphasized here, such as

religion, this research does not emphasize religious identities because the DCOs considered here, as well as many other Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto (see Appendix: DCO List), are generally not formed around religion but rather the geographic, gendered, generational, and occupational experiences and aspirations of diaspora members.

Several different identities are present within diasporic groups such as the Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto creating intra-diasporic differences, but there is also a layer of inter-diasporic differences that must be accounted for within superdiverse places. Researchers have observed different forms of cross-diasporic solidarities as marginalized urban residents band together, across identity lines, against racism and other forms of exclusion that they face in the city (see Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). Solidarity takes advantage of the power in numbers for marginalized segments of society - within urban centres, diasporic organizations form alliances to mobilize beyond their own solidarity groups (see Ku, 2011; Walker & Stepick, 2014). Working from and within superdiverse places in Toronto provides ample opportunities for the studied DCOs to interact and collaborate with organizations who have shared interests and face similar challenges.

Superdiversity also presents unique strategic challenges for DCOs because they must navigate and respond to their stakeholders' intersectional identities. Unlike more homogenous settings, superdiverse places bring together people of many different ethnocultural, linguistic, religious, generational, and other backgrounds. For DCOs operating within these superdiverse places, this means balancing intra and inter-diasporic differences to ensure meaningful solidarity and civic engagement (see Ahsan, 2015; Halder, 2012). Differences in the identities, experiences, and aspirations of DCO stakeholders can create tensions and competing priorities when designing

programs and services. This is especially true for diasporic organizations with limited resources that are making decisions about whether to focus on certain subgroups or adopt more holistic multi-service and multi-stakeholder approaches (see Guo & Guo, 2011; Walker & Stepick, 2014). A narrow focus in programming and services risks excluding marginalized members of the diaspora, while an overly broad approach may dilute the impact of offerings.

In superdiverse places, DCOs often need to collaborate across ethnocultural lines to address systemic issues impacting their stakeholders such as housing precarity, employment barriers, and anti-racism efforts (see Anisef & Lanphier, 2003; Bhuyan et al., 2021). However, forming alliances across identity lines requires navigating historical, cultural, and ideological differences that may complicate cross-group coalition-building (see Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008; Ku, 2014). Linguistic and cultural accessibility also becomes a crucial concern, as providing services in multiple languages and culturally relevant formats requires additional resources and outreach strategies. Hence, superdiversity requires DCOs to be flexible and strategic in engaging with their stakeholders, ensuring they remain inclusive while effectively addressing different social, economic, and cultural needs of diaspora members (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024).

Multi-Service Models Serving Intersectional Identities, Diverse Experiences, and Aspirations

The DCOs studied in this research are increasingly adopting multi-service models to meet the diverse wants and needs of sub-groups within the diaspora. These models enable organizations to tailor interventions to specific generations, genders, and occupational backgrounds. For instance, BIES offers different programs for youth, working-age adults, and seniors, recognizing that each group has different goals and faces unique challenges tied to their stage of life. This quote from

Staff B at BIES offers rich insights into how DCOs dynamically evolve in response to the shifting needs of their diverse stakeholders:

We did research on what the community needs, employment was a big issue in Bengali community. When we did more research, there are lots of issues in our community. One of the major issues is mental, so then we are trying to help mental health support, another issue that we found, it is also very important, is helping seniors in our community, so now we focus on mental health, seniors and employment. Staff B, BIES

The staff member describes a process of grounded knowledge production and collective intervention, which is a fundamental tenet of solidarity economies, where organizational priorities are shaped not by top-down mandates but through direct, participatory engagement with local members (see Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008).

A recurring concern for the DCOs under study is the pursuit of gainful employment and access to economic opportunities for stakeholders. All three DCOs in this study identified labour market issues as a central focus of their work. DCO stakeholders repeatedly emphasize that stable employment and earnings are pressing concerns that influence other aspects of life. The speaker begins by identifying employment as a primary concern, echoing the everyday social and economic struggles experienced by many first-generation diaspora members. This aligns with existing literature on racialized labour market segmentation, and the barriers newcomers face in accessing secure, well-paid employment in Canada (see Akbar, 2016, 2019; Galabuzi, 2006; Ghosh, 2014a; Pendakur & Pendakur, 2015). While acknowledging the critical importance of employment, BIES uses research and consultations with local diaspora members to move beyond a one-dimensional service model. As the quote suggests, BIES researchers uncovered additional concerns among their stakeholders, namely mental health and well-being. Mental health is emphasized as an issue needing intervention. This recognition is significant because mental health

issues often remain under-discussed within South Asian and other diasporic groups due to stigma, limited culturally appropriate services, and lack of language-accessible care (Islam et al., 2021). The salience of mental health issues for Bangladeshi Canadians suggests that economic and social marginalization and exclusion may be contributing to serious psychological and emotional strains (Islam et al., 2020).

The above quote also demonstrates that DCOs actively adapt to the concerns of the diaspora. Rather than viewing employment, mental health, and senior care as isolated domains (see Sheringham, 2025), BIES is trying to address them as interconnected elements of collective diasporic well-being. This dynamic responsiveness illustrates the potential of DCOs to act as needs-sensitive and research-informed institutions that fill critical service gaps left by the public and private sectors.

The social and economic challenges facing Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto have encouraged the studied DCOs to test innovative programs and services. For example, to ease the adverse impacts of poverty, both BIES and SAO are facilitating small-scale local gardens to produce fresh, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods. These are important interventions given rising food costs that have contributed to spikes in food bank usage across Canada (Garratt & Armstrong, 2024). While food banks and soup kitchens offer temporary relief to the hungry, they may not offer culturally appropriate foods as highlighted by a staff member at BIES:

So, they [some members of the local diaspora] cannot buy what they want to what, what they used to buy. They don't get the culture of food [access to cultural food staples] like if you go for because this is very expensive in here. So, for example, the sweet water fish and vegetables. They are very expensive so they cannot afford it here [in Toronto]. [So] they just buy the cheap, cheap chickens. Right. And this is not healthy for them. So, then we what we did, we started making it. Okay guys, if you cannot afford fresh food, then grow it, especially in summer. Right, yes. If you have a house with the back[yard]. You can produce it. Or you

can rent some, some plot from the City of Toronto. And, and make it a garden.... And you can keep some in your freezer for the rest of the year. It really works. And, you know, is a huge revolution happening in our community, that difference made by food. Staff A, BIES

This quote from Staff A at BIES offers powerful insight into how DCOs address material hardships and cultural displacement through innovative interventions. It underscores how food is not only a necessity but a deeply embedded cultural and emotional anchor for diasporic identity. Even for generations 1.5 and 2, authentic Bangladeshi cuisine and food staples, plays a central role in their affective association with a Bangladeshi Canadian cultural identity (see Rahman, 2018; Zaman, 2010). As such, the rising cost and inaccessibility of cultural food staples, such as certain sweet water fish and vegetables which are central to the Bangladeshi diet, reflect more than economic strain; they signify a rupture in the cultural continuity among the local diaspora. The speaker indicates that many Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto, especially those from low-income households, are unable to maintain traditional food practices. Limited access to culturally relevant foods is not only a nutritional concern but also a form of deprivation that can exacerbate feelings of dislocation among those who rely on culinary traditions as sources of comfort, identity, and continuity (see Rahman, 2018; Zaman, 2010).

DCOs and other third sector organizations often encouraging community gardening, which is a good example of solidarity economies in practices and how collective well-being can be fostered through alternative, non-capitalist modes of provisioning material needs (see Apostolopoulou & Kotsila, 2022, Aptekar, 2015; Barron, 2017; Gibson-Graham 2006, 2008). In this case, as per the quote above from staff A at BIES, something as fundamental as access to food is being rethought. BIES's promotion of community gardening draws on local knowledge, ecological sustainability, and diasporic mutual aid, offering a form of self-reliance that simultaneously restores cultural dignity and meets material needs. In other examples at a different DCO partaking in community

gardening initiatives, as the poster (Figure 5.4 below) published by SAO on their Instagram page highlights, the emphasis is on “financial barriers” and “love for the environment”. The empowering idea that households can grow their own food, either in their own backyards or through city-supported garden plots, is a practical intervention that reclaims agency in the face of structural constraints as well make greater meaningful social, economic, and environmental impacts (Apostolopoulou & Kotsila, 2022 Aptekar, 2015; Barron, 2017). Similarly, SAO’s and BIES’s community gardening initiative caters to a sense of spatial justice as diasporic groups reappropriate private and shared urban spaces for meaningful production and nourishment. Figure 5.4 below shows the graphics and description promotion SAO’s gardening initiative on their Instagram social media profile.

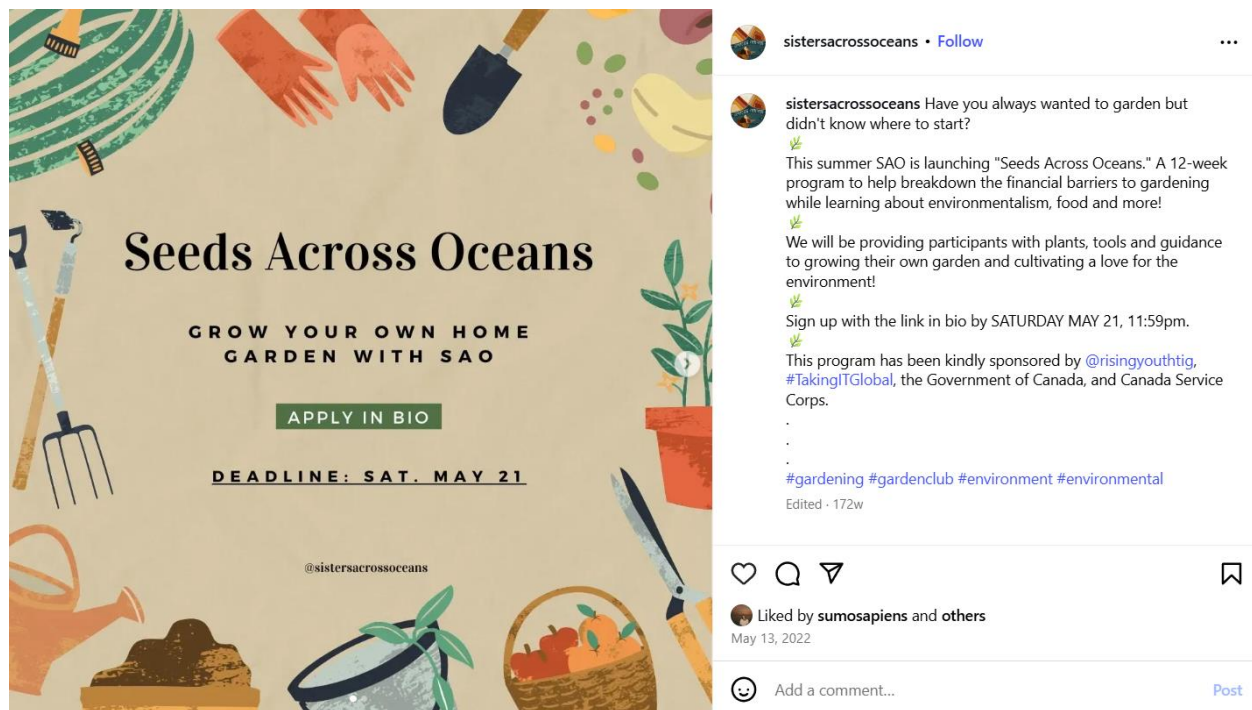


Figure 5.4 Home and community gardening is a popular activity among the local diaspora and DCOs are trying to cater to stakeholders who are interested in growing their own food.

The phrase used by a staff member at BIES "a huge revolution happening in our community" is particularly telling. It signifies that what may appear as a small, local initiative, growing vegetables, is, in fact, a transformative act of diasporic resilience. This "revolution" reclaims cultural identity through food sovereignty and challenges mainstream systems of capitalist food distribution. Consequently, community gardens such as those facilitated by SAO and BIES, serve as effective means for DCOs to aid in the bolstering food security and claims to urban green spaces among their members within contested and superdiverse urban settings (see Aptekar, 2020).

However, it is not always easy to make a large-scale impact through DCO programs and services. To envision and implement multi-service models serving multiple stakeholders are the DCOs under study are increasingly doing takes immense amounts of resources and capacity. Furthermore, economic struggles make civic engagement difficult for some Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto. Many stakeholders in the three studied DCOs reported balancing the demands of paid employment and civic engagement. With their high educational attainment and professional qualifications, many local diasporic members are former doctors, engineers, lawyers, and accountants who end up serving as volunteers, board members, and other stakeholders in DCOs for different reasons, from personal fulfillment to building their resumes for other opportunities. The diverse stakeholders running Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs exemplify how diaspora members in superdiverse settings mobilize professional and cultural identities to sustain civic engagement, even when personal resources such as time, energy, and money, are stretched thin. Some of the sacrifices and challenges facing DCO stakeholders were explained by a staff member at BIES:

I have involvement in my full-time job in another organization as a career specialist, so it is my part-time work [with BIES], but our work has been increased. Before we had lots of

volunteers coming in person, now we are struggling with volunteers remotely because sometimes they can't work, they need training over the zoom. Staff A, BIES

This quote from Staff A at BIES sheds light on the precarious labour dynamics within DCOs, particularly in the context of digital working arrangements such as the telecommunication platform of Zoom. It encapsulates the tension between increasing organizational demands and the limited capacity of overstretched staff; many of whom hold multiple jobs to make ends meet. The speaker's dual engagement as a full-time career specialist elsewhere and a part-time DCO worker illustrates a broader trend in the third sector where precarious forms of labour (part time, unstable hours, and low pay) have been increasingly normalized, particularly among racialized newcomers, low-income individuals, and women (see Baines, 2010; de Graauw, 2024; Fanelli et al., 2017; Galabuzi, 2006; Martin, 2011, 2012; Richmond & Shields, 2024). DCOs are not just service providers but are embedded within and often struggle against the very systems of social and economic marginalization they seek to address (see Martin, 2011, 2012; Richmond & Shields, 2024).

The first notable point that the speaker raises is the part-time nature of their work at BIES, juxtaposed with an increasing workload. This mismatch between job designation and actual responsibilities reflects the overload common in underfunded third sector organizations, particularly those serving groups where there is a high level of need. Third sector labour, including large numbers of volunteers, is often sustained by individuals who are personally and professionally embedded in diasporic social, economic, and cultural struggles, blurring the boundaries between paid work, goodwill, and reciprocal obligations.

This scenario underscores the social and cultural nature of engagements by DCO stakeholders, where social bonds and informal support systems are integral to the work, well beyond market-

exchanges and formal labour markets. The decline of in-person volunteering may not only reduce organizational effectiveness but also weaken the social fabric that holds DCOs together, bonds built on social and cultural relationships, trust, and mutual accountability. Finally, the quote highlights the paradox of digital participation. While digitization may be a solution to overcome barriers of space and access, it simultaneously creates new exclusions and labour burdens. The potential and pitfalls of digitization are explained in greater detail in the next (sixth) chapter of this manuscript. For organizations like BIES, navigating these tensions require constant adaptation, often without the institutional support or funding necessary to sustain the needed labour and organizational capacity which are necessary for effective multi-service and multi-stakeholder approaches.

Third sector organizations can crumble under a lack of solidarity, resources, and divergent aspirations among its stakeholders, a complexity that is emblematic of superdiverse urban settings. Consequently, the studied DCOs navigate gendered, generational, and occupational differences among their stakeholders. As several stakeholders within SAO shared with me, Bangladeshi Canadian women have found it immensely helpful to start their own organizations to provide safe spaces and supportive networks to address gendered challenges. SAO primarily serves young Bangladeshi Canadian women belonging to the 1.5 and second generation in Toronto as well as transnational diasporic networks which span large urban centres in parts of USA, Europe, and Asia:

I would basically describe as to what I said. SAO supports Bengali/Bangladeshi women's growth, wellbeing, and education. I think instead of the word education we are using mobility; I would stick to the word mobility. Those are our three pillars [growth, wellbeing and education]. Board Member A, SAO

Board Member A at SAO provides compelling insight into the gendered dimensions of diasporic civic engagement. Their articulation of SAO's mission, centred on growth, wellbeing, and education, later reframed as mobility, reveals how Bangladeshi Canadian women in Toronto are reimagining the vocabulary and aims of feminist practices. The replacement of education with mobility is not a mere semantic shift. Instead, it reflects an expansive and intersectional understanding of empowerment (see Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). While education typically refers to formal schooling or skills training, mobility encompasses a broader range of experiences, including social, economic, and spatial elements. It signals movement across physical borders, upward class trajectories, and internal transformations in confidence, self-worth and representation, which are manifested through the meditation, self-reflection, and career growth programs that SAO offers. This reframing aligns with critiques from transnational feminist scholars who argue that neoliberal, individualistic framings of education often fail to capture the collective and relational struggles of marginalized women (Alexander & Mohanty, 2013; Mohanty, 2005).

The SAO board member also draws attention to the transnational nature of SAO by highlighting "growth, wellbeing, and mobility" as SAO's three pillars reflects a broader project of place-making within the diaspora. These are not neutral or technocratic goals. Each of these terms signals an intention to create the social infrastructure for empowerment. Growth is not merely economic but personal and collective; wellbeing encompasses mental health and solidarity; mobility is about removing barriers, both visible and invisible, that restrict diasporic women's lives. With its programs to achieve these goals, SAO is not only responding to the challenges of gender and migration but also producing an alternative civic vision grounded in relational care, mentorship, and solidarity.

SAO's emergence as an organization by and for young diasporic women reflects a response to the complex needs that arise from intra-diasporic diversities. Rather than treating the Bangladeshi Canadian identity as monolithic, SAO's programming actively reflects the nuances of generational and gendered identities within the diaspora. This internal differentiation is precisely what defines superdiversity, not just diversity between groups, but within them. Furthermore, its transnational focus exemplifies how DCOs operate simultaneously across multiple geographic scales, weaving together networks of diasporic solidarity that resist simplistic narratives of assimilation and integration within places of settlement. In doing so, SAO reveals how civic engagement in superdiverse places shapes and is shaped by intersectional identities and transnational networks of diaspora members.

Similarly, the programs at JOS also highlight the different intersectional identities and transnational diasporic networks that are often embedded within superdiverse urban settings. As a board member at JOS shared with me, some of the stakeholders they served were from different social and economic backgrounds across the urban region, often differentiated by generation, geography, and income:

We are a youth-led non-profit based in Toronto. We primarily serve low income, racialized youth. Our activities and programs are diverse, but our current concerns include health promotion, financial literacy and recreation. Board Member A, JOS

The cases of BIES, SAO and JOS, as detailed above, illustrate how DCOs cater to the contemporary dynamics of urban superdiversity within which they operate. The intertwined layers of diversity in superdiverse urban settings also inspires multi-service models adopted by the DCOs under study. Toronto, as an urban region of superdiverse neighbourhoods, is marked not only by a wide array of ethnocultural origins but multiple intersecting identities among its residents with the

focus in this research on the generational, gendered, and occupation differences which inspire the mandates and programs of the three studied DCOs.

5.5 Generational Differences and the Rise of Generation 1.5 and two DCOs

For DCOs, generational differences present challenges for civic engagement and the integration of social and cultural aspirations within their programs and services. Generations 1.5 and two Bangladeshi Canadians often have social, cultural, and economic aspirations that diverge from 'traditional' parental or familial expectations, resulting in intergenerational stress and tensions (Islam et al., 2021; Rouf, 2020). For some young Bangladeshi Canadians, these divergent acculturation trajectories can lead to serious intergenerational conflicts, contributing to isolation, anxiety, and declining mental health (Islam et al., 2021). The intergenerational stress and conflict often result when the 1.5 and second generations develop aspirations that diverge from parental and familial expectations and can be traced to similar issues within other ethnocultural groups (see Kasinitz et al., 2004; Kasinitz & Waters, 2024; Portes & Zhou, 1993). This shared experience is rooted in the structural imperative that many children of immigrant's face: reconciling the cultural and social expectations of their families with the demands and the barriers to social mobility in the education systems and labour markets (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009; Kelly, 2014, 2015; Zaami, 2015). The pressure of this dual negotiation directly contributes to isolation, anxiety, and mental health issues among Bangladeshi Canadian youth (Islam et al., 2021).

In response, Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto that are led by and serve the generation 1.5 and two have actively sought to address topics that were previously considered taboo or overlooked by first-generation DCOs and traditional settlement services organizations. The issues

include mental health, youth social mobility, and the under- or misrepresentation of diasporic youth within the diaspora and broader society. Navigating generational divides and the treatment of young people by elders within the local diaspora, where experiences and aspirations vary across different life stages can present practical challenges for DCOs, which are worth investigating empirically.

The existing literature on superdiversity pays limited attention to generational dynamics, particularly their influence on civic engagement (see Antonsich, 2018). Research specifically focused on second-generation diasporic civic engagement remains underdeveloped (see Antonsich, 2018; Sahoo & Shome, 2024), pointing to the need for more empirical work examining how DCOs are evolving in response to both digitization and superdiversity in urban centres. Such an approach is especially important for understanding how generational differences shape diasporic experiences, identities, and aspirations. Younger members of the diaspora, who are often highly digitally literate and embedded in transnational urban networks, are increasingly leveraging cyberspace for innovative forms of civic engagement (Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Shome, 2023). In contrast to the first-generation, generation 1.5 and second-generation individuals tend to maintain stronger affective and symbolic ties to their families' places of origin, which, in turn, shape their modes of engagement (Hess & Korf, 2014; Kok & Rogers, 2017). However, the extent and nature of this engagement vary significantly across diasporic groups. For instance, generation 1.5 and second-generation members of Somali (Horst, 2018; Kok & Rogers, 2017) and South Asian diasporas (Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Shome, 2023) are shaped by distinct historical and geographical trajectories, which influence how they connect with transnational networks and cyberspace.

The Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs studied here illustrate shifting demographics in terms of leadership by generations 1.5 and two diasporic members. For generations 1.5 and two, joining a DCO is a way to connect with other young people with shared social, economic, and cultural experiences. Consequently, these DCOs and their young stakeholders are enthusiastic about building cross-group solidarities that expand across ethnocultural groups and organizational mandates as illustrated by the poster on JOS's Instagram on Indigenous allyship.



Figure 5.5 JOS actively seeks allyship with other youth groups beyond their co-diasporic peers

Contemporary Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto are directly addressing generational issues facing young people, an issue that organizations focusing on the first-generation may have overlooked in the past. As JOS board member B notes, a key part of their mandate was "...bridging some of the cultural and generational gaps that are unique to migrant-led diasporic organizations."

Furthermore, generation 1.5 and two young adults are building their own DCOs due to discontent with the organizations serving mainly the first-generation and a need for youth-friendly spaces and support networks. Generational differences have led members of generations 1.5 and two to break

away from existing settlement and immigrant serving organizations started by the first-generation, as was the case with JOS. One of the founding board members shared the origin story of JOS with me:

It's complicated. With the current form of the organization [non-profit incorporation], we started near the end of 2020. But before that we used to do youth work [unincorporated grassroots group] for a decade with another ethnic community organization serving Bangladeshis in the east end of Toronto [Bangla Town] since 2010. Board Member A, JOS

Consequently, generation 1.5 and two stakeholders have a lot of apprehension about groupthink and differences in social and cultural integration trajectories among the generations. As Volunteer B at JOS explains about why they chose to be involved with a youth-led next-generation organization, "I think that there are groupthink and lack of openness to other groups and ideas [among the elders and first-generation]."

Both JOS and SAO strive to create supportive and judgement-free youth spaces, without the presence of first-generation elders, to discuss topics that affect the 1.5 and second generations. Generational rifts within the local diaspora have garnered research attention recently - with notable differences in lifestyle choices and attitudes between the first and subsequent generations contributing to family breakdowns, intergenerational clashes, and mental stress (Islam et al., 2021). These intergenerational differences and tensions have yet to be adequately addressed as a member and volunteer at JOS described:

So, like sexual health is such a taboo topic in the South Asian community, and something that I would like to tackle [within our DCO], and I plan to tackle, is that taboo topic. I feel like even in high school it's not quite prevalent, we're not in discussing in more details. So that's a big thing that I would like to tackle economic issues for sure like being online makes it way more accessible for any of us. Member & Volunteer A, JOS

Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs are struggling to create spaces that can serve multiple generations simultaneously. Intergenerational differences and tensions are difficult to bridge. None of the studied DCO have maintained long-term intergenerational programs and services. Ultimately, the existence of DCOs started and run by the generation 1.5 and two Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto, testifies to the growing number of next-generation diasporic youth across the urban region who are coming of age and the failure to serve their specific needs. Bangladeshi Canadian generation 1.5 and second-generation youth coming of age in Toronto have distinct educational and employment aspirations that shape their civic engagement; however, the lasting impacts of first-generation deprofessionalization, underemployment, and poverty continue to influence next-generation DCOs, as many young Bangladeshis, particularly those in high concentration diasporic neighbourhoods, have grown up experiencing these conditions (see Rouf, 2020, 2025).

Childhood and youth poverty have long term adverse effects - around 20% to 25% of children who grow up in poverty will remain poor as adults - with approximately 144,000 children living in poverty in Toronto at the time of research, this means that an estimated 28,800 to 36,000 of them are at risk of remaining in poverty throughout their adult lives (Briggs et al., 2016). Different types of social, economic, and cultural (dis)advantages are transmitted across generations. Family members and the adults surrounding youth significantly influence their life outcomes far into their own adulthoods (Putnam, 2000). Moreover, one of the most significant impacts of social capital is its contribution to developing human capital (skills, knowledge and experiences) in the next-generation (Coleman, 1988). The intergenerational transmission of social capital plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational and occupational outcomes of second-generation youth in major migrant receiving cities in North America (Kasinitz et al., 2009).

In response to the social and economic challenges facing Bangladeshi Canadian households, the DCOs led by generations 1.5 and two, such as JOS and SAO, have launched digital mentorship and professional networking mixers to connect young adults with co-diasporic professionals from different industries. These sustained efforts that are focused on career development not only tackle structural barriers in the labour market but also showcase novel digitally mediated forms of civic engagement as indicated by board member from SAO:

Maybe one of the most important programs we had was the e-mentorship program, which was connecting mentors to mentees in our community. That was addressing two pillars, one was mobility and one was representation. Because you don't see a lot of...we were trying to highlight the mentors, like the Bengali women who are doing amazing things but are underrepresented. Board Member C, SAO

This quote from Board Member C at SAO highlights a significant grassroots effort to address social and economic challenges within the diaspora. Through the e-mentorship program, SAO seeks to improve social mobility among its stakeholders. This idea includes not just labour market opportunities but also social mobility and empowerment. It particularly focuses on enhancing representation in positions of power and decision making for racialized diasporic women, who often face marginalization within the diaspora and broader society.

This quote addresses the structural disconnect that diasporic women experience under neoliberal capitalism, where social relationships often take a backseat to labour markets and occupational success. Within the fold of neoliberal capitalism, individualistic personal growth becomes less rooted in social supports and collective solidarities. SAO's e-mentorship program acts as part of a countermovement, re-establishing social, economic, and cultural connections in response to labour precarity and social marginalization. By intentionally linking mentors and mentees within the diaspora who share similar experiences and aspirations, the e-mentorship program does more than just transfer knowledge and skills - it builds meaningful social networks and fosters a sense of

shared purpose, tackling the isolation that individualism creates. Moreover, such mentorship initiatives, addresses the challenges related to social mobility and representation that arise from some young people feeling shy or discouraged from vocalizing and sharing their struggles as the children of racialized immigrants. A member and volunteer at JOS explained:

I think one of the biggest things is that I feel like as immigrant children. We often like to downplay our experiences. You know what I mean, because you know my parents have immigrated here know they went through so much until we feel like we're... so we feel like we're kind of, sometimes we feel like we're ashamed to talk about our struggles.
Member & Volunteer C, JOS

This powerful reflection by Member & Volunteer C at JOS highlights the hidden social and emotional burdens of the generations 1.5 and two given the numerous challenges faced by the first-generation as well as other family members back home as well as throughout the migration and settlement processes (see Hess & Korf, 2014; Islam et al., 2021; Kelly, 2014; Portes & Zhou, 1993). The speaker expresses a familiar sentiment among children of first-generation immigrants: a tendency to downplay their struggles due to the sacrifices and hardships their parents and elders endured. This creates a cycle of suffering, where the pain and struggles faced by the younger generation can be dismissed, resulting in silence rather than support. This silence and suffering have serious consequences for mental health among the Bangladeshi Canadian next-generation (Islam et al., 2021). The bottling up of pain and suffering can have disastrous consequences as evidenced by a string of multiple suicides among young Bangladeshi Canadian men in Toronto (Bengali Employment & Information Services, 2020) and generational conflicts ripping apart families (Husain, 2024; Islam et al., 2021).

The quote suggests a form of disconnection, where personal feelings, such as shame, are severed from the larger geographic and historical contexts that shape them. Generations 1.5 and two may perceive their pain and struggles as personal failures rather than recognizing them as the result of

structural barriers and historical trauma (see Husain, 2024; Islam et al., 2021; Kelly, 2014, 2015). The parochial focus on personal strength, independence, and success, especially when driven by cultural and familial pressures to get the best education and career possible, can further isolate young members of the diaspora from their own family members and social networks (see Islam et al., 2021). However, when this speaker chooses to express their thoughts verbally, they are also taking an essential step toward reconnection - reclaiming their voice, acknowledging shared struggles and pushing back against the internalized belief that pain must remain unspoken. The DCOs under study which are led by next-generation Bangladeshi Canadians are starting to create conditions that promote these moments of recognition and healing.

Furthermore, family and social networks play a key role as members of the 1.5 and second generations often depend on parental support and approval to take part in civic engagement. Many are still reliant on their families to support them. As such, DCOs serving generations 1.5 and two must be attentive to intergenerational dynamics within families. The success of their initiatives will hinge on strong familial and social support networks. Stakeholders from JOS and SAO also highlighted structural barriers, such as dismissive attitudes from funders and policymakers towards their efforts, as well as a lack of funding opportunities for youth-focused programs and services. These pressures highlight the complex landscape that JOS and SAO navigate. As one volunteer from JOS shares:

Honestly a lack of resources and access [is holding our organization back], but I think that can be said about any organization. Additionally, getting parents to trust us is a big one, especially for younger members. Funding for things like food and transportation, etc. Although living in Toronto you get easy access to the TTC [buses streetcars and subway trains], for those living in the GTA [Greater Toronto Area, outside the City of Toronto], commuting is an issue. Volunteer A, JOS

This quote from Volunteer A at JOS highlights several barriers facing Bangladesh Canadian DCOs which are led by and serve generations 1.5 and two. These barriers relate to material challenges

and social dynamics. The speaker points out that a lack of collective and individual resources is a common issue for DCOs and their young stakeholders. Some of the resources mentioned explicitly include organizational funding (monetary resources) to provide food and transportation tokens for those accessing programs and services. The speaker also emphasizes more specific aspects of exclusion, such as spatial mobility and disconnect between the location of DCO activities and participants' neighbourhoods of residence as well as intergenerational trust and diasporic youths' relationships with parents. This reflection shows the need to rethink our understanding of resources and mobility through social, cultural, and economic lens. The speaker suggests food and transportation are more than logistical issues, they are key elements for ensuring equitable civic engagement for youth. Access to a meal or bus fare enable civic engagement for this member of JOS and their peers. These meaningful non-market exchanges support diasporic civic engagement, forming a crucial part of the diverse economic practices that are often overlooked because they do not fit with the capitalistic notions of productivity, efficiency, and market-exchanges (see Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008).

The reference to gaining parental trust underscores the social and cultural work that DCOs like JOS and their stakeholders must undertake. This work is often unpaid and undervalued since JOS is a purely volunteer run organization. JOS is not just providing programs and services for local diasporic youth; it is developing shared trust, safety, and inclusion among its stakeholders and their broader social networks, in this case parents and caregivers. These efforts represent solidarity economics in action, where value stems from relationships and collective support, rather than profit or market competition.

Finally, the mention of spatial disconnect indicates that youth living farther from the city centre are also far from main public transit nodes which could facilitate their civic engagement. Access

to strong public transit networks can bolster greater civic engagement among generations 1.5 and two. The time and monetary costs of taking transit may discourage young people from commuting to DCO programs and services if these organizations do not have the funds to provide free transit tickets. The efforts of JOS to deal with some of these spatial constraints by creating accessible cyberspaces are discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

Generation 1.5 and second-generation Bangladeshi Canadians are playing an increasingly pivotal role in reshaping diasporic civic engagement. This chapter demonstrates how younger members of the diaspora navigate social, cultural, and economic challenges by forming DCOs that differ from those established by and mainly serving the first-generation. DCOs led by generation 1.5 and two address issues that are relevant to younger diaspora members, such as mental health, holistic well-being, and early career development.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter examines how superdiversity impacts Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto, focusing on their ability to navigate gendered, occupational, and generational differences within the diaspora. Building on existing superdiversity and third-sector research, this novel case study of three Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto reveals how superdiversity shapes DCO mandates, programs, and services. Moreover, the structural challenges facing DCOs such as civic invisibility are brought to the forefront.

The studied DCOs continue to struggle for greater recognition, representation, and resources. Civic invisibility does not stem from a lack of engagement or apathy; rather, it is a result of urban inequality between groups and neighbourhoods that exacerbates the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities. The findings show that DCO stakeholders repeatedly called attention

to a shortage of long-term funding for capacity building as well as insufficient support from policymakers, emphasizing that good intentions are not enough to build their organizations. The studied DCOs operate under precarious conditions, relying on the collective goodwill of volunteers and members, who make many personal sacrifices to be involved with these organizations.

This research demonstrates how superdiversity functions on two levels: within the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora and among diasporic groups across Toronto. Internally, the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora is diverse and heterogenous, an embodiment of different gendered, class, occupational, generational, religious, and geographical groups. This diversity is reflected among the stakeholders of DCOs studied here that include a women-led advocacy group, SAO, a youth-led digital collective, JOS, and an occupation focused agency led by first-generation migrants themselves, BIES. Each DCO addresses specific needs within the diaspora, with unique mandates, programs, and services. At the same time, Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs work alongside other diasporic groups and their organizations in Toronto. While shared experiences of marginalization can foster positive intergroup relationships, there is also competition for resources, space, and recognition, even among DCOs. This research found that neighbourhoods with a high and medium concentration of Bangladeshi Canadians create a conducive environment for DCOs to start and grow but scaling their impact proves difficult under resource constraints. Being physically close to other co-diasporic institutions can lead to some beneficial networks and mutual support but DCO stakeholders voiced how much more needs to be done for meaningful collaboration and coordination across organizations. Sometimes there is a lack of adequate collaboration and coordination despite efforts being made at a high level, such as the involvement of local politicians. Despite funding constraints, the findings highlight the impressive adaptability and resiliency of the DCOs in this study. All three DCOs demonstrate a strong commitment to meeting local needs by

delivering flexible programs and services grounded in the needs of their diverse stakeholders - shifting towards multi-service models, enabling them to adequately serve the local diaspora and other urban residents. The studied DCOs deliver targeted programs and services that reflect the gendered, occupational, and generational identities in the local diaspora as well as among urban residents of Toronto. While helping members find meaningful employment is a core part of their mandate, DCOs like BIES recognize the variegated social and economic challenges that many Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto face, such as poor nutrition, unstable housing, and declining health conditions. As a result, BIES's focus has expanded beyond employment supports to include mental health services and senior care, showcasing a need-based and locally informed approach to civic engagement.

The experiences of BIES, JOS, and SAO show that superdiversity is a complex but significant force shaping Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto. These organizations not only navigate the internal diversity within the diaspora but also confront civic invisibility and structural barriers that limit their access to resources and opportunities. Despite these challenges, the DCOs under study demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability to achieve their collective commitment of addressing the multifaceted needs of the local diaspora and other urban residents.

Chapter 6: The Impact of Digitization on DCOs

6.1 Overview

Digitization has greatly impacted how DCOs operate (see Brinkerhoff, 2009; Kok & Rogers, 2017). The DCOs in this study often serve transnational networks which can be reached more effectively online. Digital platforms can enhance engagement and efficiency in connecting with people located in multiple places. However, digitization has its own challenges. Many organizations have limited access to the technical resources and skills needed for digitization. Online participation can be difficult for some DCO stakeholders due to their limited technical resources or skills. This chapter investigates both the positive and negative effects of digitization on the operations and structure of DCOs.

Digital platforms give DCOs novel modes to connect with stakeholders across multiple places (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024) given widespread cellphone and internet access across contemporary urban centres (Brinkerhoff, 2008). Popular social media platforms enable continuous communication among transnational diasporic networks, allowing DCOs to share information about programs and services in real-time. Digitization can especially benefit DCOs working from superdiverse urban centres, offering flexible ways to engage with members living in distant places and from diverse social backgrounds. By using digital platforms, DCOs can create safe cyber spaces that welcome people with different identities, languages, and cultural practices, thus improving inclusivity and participation among stakeholders (Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). Digital platforms also enable DCOs to connect with younger stakeholders who may prefer online engagement over face-to-face interactions (see Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Shome, 2023). Digital outreach can expand volunteer recruitment and civic engagement to a new generation who

are comfortable with digital activities (see Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Samuelson-Cramp & Bolat, 2017).

Digitization also presents notable challenges that require careful consideration. A key concern is the digital divide, which can widen existing disparities in superdiverse places. People without access to necessary technical tools and skills may miss out on the benefits of digitization (see Graham, 2011; Warschauer, 2004). Cases of digital exclusion and inaccessibility can hinder DCOs in promoting solidarity and inclusion (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024).

As digital tools transform how DCOs operate, it is essential to evaluate the impact of these changes on their mandates, programs, and services. A deeper examination of how digitization impacts DCOs can lead to a better understanding of current opportunities and challenges for third sector organizations, particularly those serving diasporas whose lives are marked by intersectional identities and transnational networks. Ultimately, the intersection of technology, migration, and civic engagement presents both opportunities and challenges which play out across built and cyber spaces (see Brinkerhoff, 2007; Kok & Rogers, 2017; Ruiner, 2021).

The complexity of diasporic identity calls for innovative approaches to civic engagement. Digital platforms have the potential to elevate marginalized voices and promote cross-cultural understanding (Kok & Rogers, 2017; NurMuhammad, 2016; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). Cyberspace can serve as a potent platform for local and transnational civic engagement, enabling DCOs to address issues that transcend borders and garner support from diverse members of the diaspora and their allies.

This research examines how digitization impacts the involvement of the 1.5 and second generation in their approach to diasporic civic engagement via cyberspace. This research also documents how

DCOs have adjusted their operations and structures in response to new digital technologies, thereby adapting their mandates, programs, and services while seeking to advance core principles such as solidarity, inclusivity, and serving the needs of marginalized stakeholders. The final section of this chapter discusses the limitations and potential risks of digital engagement, including exclusion due to technological access. This chapter repeatedly emphasizes the importance of a balanced approach that appreciates the integrative nature of built and cyberspaces in facilitating diasporic civic engagement.

6.2 Digital Diaspora, Civic Engagement, and the Next-Generation

Digital diasporas are a relatively new phenomenon, with their growth linked to the spread of cyberspace and the ability of people to quickly and easily communicate across large distances (Brinkerhoff, 2009). The emergence of digital technologies is an important aspect of the transnational diasporic networks, shaping how members connect, organize, and engage (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Kok & Roger, 2017). Ethnographic studies of DCO stakeholders who use cyberspace for civic engagement can shed light on how transnational diasporic networks are navigating digitization to reach new places and groups. Although transnational engagements occur daily among members of diasporas, detailed investigation of the digital platforms used for civic engagement can provide valuable information for understanding the ways that DCOs operate, and the success with which they fulfill their mandates through cyberspace (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2019; Sahoo & Shome, 2024).

In addition, examining digital approaches to civic engagement can illuminate the potentially novel ways that DCOs led by the 1.5 and second generation conduct their affairs (Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Shome, 2023). The 1.5 and second-generation diaspora members are often digitally savvy,

comfortable, and eager to interact using the latest technological platforms (Sahoo & Shome, 2024). In theory, digital tools can offer effective and efficient ways to deliver an organization's message to a broad audience as well as engage many existing and new audiences online (see Greenleaf, 2016; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). The impacts of diasporic civic engagements by generation 1.5 and two and the confluence of built spaces with cyberspace are starting to garner the interest of contemporary researchers (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Shome, 2023).

Being actively involved with DCOs may play a significant role in encouraging members of generations 1.5 and two to maintain strong ties with their diasporic roots and transnational networks as well as address civic issues impacting their places of reception (Hess & Korf, 2014; Horst, 2018; Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). For many DCO stakeholders, transnational networks which reaffirm the claim to diaspora are a central part of their experiences and aspirations. In this research, I have come across several young people leaders at the helm of DCOs who have expressed deep personal attachments to Bangladesh, and their ancestral roots, despite never having visited the country. This symbolic connection is nurtured through civic engagement in high and medium concentration diasporic neighbourhoods as well as via cyberspace where co-diasporic members interact and engage with each other. As one individual shared, their motivation to engage with a DCO stemmed from a desire to stay connected with other Bangladeshi women through being part of a collective and collaborative effort which the organization provided:

I think it's organically drawn [our DCO] the attention of a lot of Bangladeshi [and] Bengali women in our community. And the way they have all contributed to the organization makes it what it is today. Board Member A, SAO

This same interviewee commented on the significance of diasporic identity. They explained how civic engagement enriches diasporic networks and shapes supportive diasporic social spaces that are welcoming for young women with similar experiences and aspirations:

In the diaspora and in the mother land as we create a relationship between women in the diaspora and in the motherland. Board Member A, SAO

Some generations 1.5 and two Bangladeshi Canadians staked claims to broader geographic regions and diasporic identities, emphasizing how involvement with DCOs connected them to other young people from South Asia.

[I joined the organization] to stay involved in my relevant South Asian community which JOS has a connection with and to connect with more youth of today. Member & Volunteer D, JOS

As the Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto become more spatially dispersed across the metropolitan area, pertinent challenges and opportunities emerge for DCOs. There are physical limitations for DCOs to reach diasporic members who move away from the neighbourhoods currently served by in-person programs and services. Moreover, with limited resources, DCOs can offer face-to-face services in a limited number of areas and to a set number of people. DCO stakeholders have realized that cyberspace potentially allow them to serve stakeholders who are far away while minimizing the costs related to outreach and engagement:

Now since the pandemic, I am not sure it will be worth it paying rent [for an office space], like you know if it's worth spending, being in debt for an organization. For an office space. There is already so many [organizational] expenses. I don't think we want to add on additional expense that can go towards people in Bangladesh. Board Member C, SAO

In fact, SAO has redirected funds to directly giving aid and services in Bangladesh. Figure 6.1 below shows a picture from the SAO Instagram for an initiative to distribute essential aid, medical and food staples, during COVID-19 in a Bangladeshi village called Nilphamari.



Figure 6.1 Essential supplies distribution facilitated by SAO and its transnational networks in Nilphamari, Bangladesh during COVID-19

The DCOs considered in this study rely on access to low-cost physical spaces in the Toronto neighbourhoods where their members congregate. This strategy not only brings programs and services close to members of the diaspora in local neighbourhoods but also serves as a cost-effective strategy to secure spaces for the programs, services, and administrative activities while keeping costs low. A staff member from BIES shared their thoughts about access to adequate space:

I would say office space is one of the challenges, we have a small, you see we are renting [a] basement [of a local co-diasporic business] so we don't have a space accessible to all. Staff A, BIES

Furthermore, DCOs consistently grapple with the intersectional identities and transnational networks of their stakeholders when crafting their mandate. For example, JOS specifically centred its mandate around a specific and bound geographic area despite its transnational network:

Although there are big and small NGOs who work with youth, our organization is a bit different as we have a geographical focus on Scarborough, Toronto. Board Member B, JOS.

In contrast, SAO's mandate posits a more global approach, striving to connect members of the local diaspora (in Toronto) with the motherland (Bangladesh). Although its leadership is primarily based in Toronto and consists of generation 1.5 and two Bangladeshi Canadians, SAO has carried out programs in rural Bangladeshi villages with the help of a co-founder based in Bangladesh, particularly in the village of Nilphamari (see Figure 6.1 above). The latter is a profound example of how cyberspace can facilitate diasporic civic engagement across transnational networks.

SAO's origin story shows the potential of transnational networks among diasporas to incubate ideas and support each other through civic engagements. The idea for SAO started when a young woman from a Bangladeshi village met their co-founder, a second-generation Bangladeshi Canadian from Toronto at an international conference in Oslo, Norway. Their ongoing communication online eventually led to the legal formation (incorporation) of SAO in Toronto. This story illustrates how digitization enables DCOs to operate across borders and highlights the use of cyberspace to communicate and collaborate among the next-generation.

The use of digital tools is not exclusive to young people nor the next-generation of diaspora members. BIES, a DCO led by first-generation immigrants who include many middle-aged adults¹¹, has a strong online presence with a dedicated website and Facebook page that provide program updates and organizational documents.

All three DCOs in this research reported reaching audiences beyond Toronto through cyberspace. People in Ottawa, Montreal, New York, California, London (UK), and Dhaka interacted with DCO programs and services. These examples illustrate how cyberspace is crucial for expanding

¹¹ Statistics Canada classifies "Adults" in a broad bracket between 25 and 64 years old, with the latter years (typically 45–64) aligning with late middle age.

geographic reach and potentially scaling DCO operations. The observed difference in digital footprints between the studied DCOs was that the organizations led by generations 1.5 and two prefer platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Tik Tok instead of Facebook, since they appeal more to a younger demographic which SAO and JOS serve. As stakeholders from both JOS and SAO, two DCOs with a strong presence of generation 1.5 and two diaspora members within their ranks, shared with me the significance of social media platforms that appeal to today's young people:

I think we had volunteers like learn as they go but I think for, I think for the future of SAO it's really helpful when someone is up to date with marketing strategy like Tik Tok. Board Member A, SAO

And, and I help with like marketing as well so that help with creating posts, like graphic design posts for our Instagram on top of our YouTube. And then I help upload the podcasts that we have. Volunteer A, JOS

6.3 The Impact of Digitization on DCO Form and Function

Digitization is changing the form and function of DCOs, impacting core activities such as fundraising, outreach, service delivery, volunteering, and staffing. This research investigates how digitization has changed the structure and core functions of DCOs as well as the human talent and technical resources used in the DCOs' digital operations. The findings demonstrate how DCOs are constantly adapting to meet their mandates by implementing the labour and technical processes required for digitization.

The effects of digitization on civic engagement are widespread, affecting the very core of DCOs: their mandate, programs, and services. When it comes to daily operations, digital platforms can simplify administrative tasks, improve data management, and boost fundraising efforts through online campaigns. However, these benefits often require investing in new technical expertise and

digital infrastructure which can be very costly and require people with the right technical skills (see Ruiner, 2021; Yeritsian, 2018).

Funding

Funding constraints within the third sector often limit the effectiveness of their civic engagement. In general, the third sector's reliance on government funding and support undermines organizations' autonomy and effectiveness (see Chapman et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2016; Meinhard et al., 2003; Richmond & Shields, 2024). Due to their dependence on government funding, third sector organizations need government commitment to key issues such as housing, poverty, and food insecurity before they can tackle these issues (see Elson, 2014). Dependency on government funding can also lead to a precarious funding environment, particularly during economic downturns when public funding is cut, thereby limiting the capacity of organizations to deliver services effectively when they are most needed. Moreover, disparities in resource allocation within the third sector can exacerbate existing inequalities. Unlike well-established and large organizations, small third sector organizations often struggle to engage with the local public sector due to their limited resources and capacity (Thompson et al., 2017). Without adequate support from the public sector, the ability of the third sector to serve marginalized populations is impeded, potentially exacerbating cycles of poverty and exclusion (Kissane, 2010; Thompson et al., 2017).

Both JOS and SAO board members reported dwindling funding during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the closure of in-person programs and services as well as direct cuts to youth funding. There are several reasons for the exceptional strain on these two organizations' resources during the COVID-19 lockdowns. There were widespread cuts to youth program funding at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Toronto (Sharp, 2020) that affected all three DCOs under study. Funding reductions affected their capacity to engage multiple generations through targeted programs for

diasporic youth that range from youth councils at BIES to digital podcasts on topics relevant to the youth at JOS. Moreover, all three DCOs reported receiving less in-kind donations and assistance from their stakeholders because of pandemic lockdowns and physical gathering restrictions. As a board member at SAO explained to me, due to programs and services being entirely online, there were not as many expenses that could be funded in the first place e.g. food, space rent, transit tickets, and childminding. The loss of funds was detrimental for DCOs who rely heavily on short-term grants from different government agencies to run programs and services. Other stakeholders explained that the in-kind support DCOs received from members and volunteers could not continue digitally, so they had less in-kind assistance overall. The latter issues are significant because DCOs often need to demonstrate their capacity to collect monetary and in-kind contributions on their own before applying for program funding grants.

I also heard about the limited funding available to address the digital inequalities that were exposed during COVID-19 lockdowns. Only one of the DCOs under study succeeded in receiving COVID relief grants from large organizations such as United Way and Red Cross, who distributed monetary assistance from provincial and federal levels of government to grassroots organizations. The grants were small (\$5,000-\$25,000) and one-time only. These small short-term pandemic grants that allowed some organizations to provide direct aid such as food packets for those who fell ill and were forced to isolate did benefit some third sector actors. However, the small grants did not allow recipients to invest in the technical expertise and infrastructure that were needed at the time:

COVID-19 was an unsettling time for us, and we had to come up with a different path forward. There were some small grants by Red Cross and United Way that we were unsuccessful for. But the money was small, it was peanuts, barely like a few thousand dollars and it had to be spent on direct program expenses. So instead, we teamed up with a bigger community centre in our neighbourhood to deliver some grocery packages and medical items

across Scarborough to households where people were sick and had to isolate. Board Member A, JOS

Aside from outreach and engagement, rapid and sudden digitization at the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic hampered the collection of donations and other fundraising activities among the studied DCOs. Many fundraising events are held in person, and DCOs often attract residents through events such as neighbourhood barbeques. The events and gatherings where funds are raised for the studied DCOs are difficult to replicate online because the social ambience is required, and the overall experience is vastly different from an in-person event as a Board Member at SAO shares:

Like our launch event it went so well it was heartbreaking to not be able to do it the year after, to make it our annual signature event to fundraise. So, we were not able to [conduct] fundraising events because it's hard to make some kind of profit that would obviously go back to the community but it's hard to do it in a virtual world. Board Member B, SAO

Furthermore, for DCOs who rely so heavily on volunteerism and the goodwill of their stakeholders, in-kind assistance was nearly impossible to replicate online, as a staff member at BIES shared with me:

Though we are not getting like funding from individuals, right, a lot, but we get a lot of support from the community people. Right. So, there's also in-kind support is doing kind of like benefit [in person]. And, yeah, since, since a long distance [we are no longer getting those benefits]. Staff A, BIES

The lack of sustained and long-term funding remains a persistent challenge for the studied DCOs. DCO stakeholders contribute their valuable time and hard-earned monetary resources to help the organization survive. The individual contributions and sacrifices are generally not sustainable, considering that the people involved have limited time, energy, and money. Meaningful systemic support is needed to ensure that the valuable work of DCOs continues.

The pandemic underscored the financial vulnerabilities of DCOs and the limits of goodwill, voluntarism, and reciprocity, particularly as everyone was forced to digitize on short notice. While digitization offers the potential for DCOs to expand their reach and engage with stakeholders in distant places; it also presents significant challenges that required additional investments and skills. Many DCOs need better technical resources, such as training for staff and costly software and hardware, to effectively operate via cyberspace. However, securing adequate funding to acquire the resources needed for meaningful digitization has proven very difficult, as traditional sources of support, such as in-kind donations and face-to-face fundraising, have been severely impacted. As a staff member from BIES shared with me, the increased resource demands of digitization coupled with dwindling monetary, in-kind, and in-person supports pose challenging dilemmas:

Sitting together like talking to each other is actually [effective]. So, it makes a huge difference, in, in building a relationship. So, if the relationship is not firm and strong, then, then, they are not willing to support each other [and the organization], you know, maybe financially maybe in kind. Staff A, BIES

When asked further about the in-kind benefits and supports, the staff member at BIES outlined a list of voluntary services which included stakeholders giving each other free rides to the DCO's events, the distribution of free food and drinks at outdoor events, and diasporic professionals giving up their valuable time to mentor others. Similarly, a board member at SAO also shared the benefits they received from pro bono professional services, which would otherwise be costly such as accounting and web development:

All these costs add up. But dealing with squarespace [for our website] when none of us have that kind of skillset was like suddenly, we have to become web developers. And these things add up so we are looking for pro bono, I don't know if this is technical, but we are looking for an accountant that would do pro bono work for us. Board Member A, SAO

Online fundraising is a well-known tool among DCO stakeholders, but it presents a unique set of challenges for raising substantial sums of money. The studied DCOs appear to lack the resources

to get started with online fundraising in any meaningful capacity. Simultaneously, the decline in traditional in-kind support, such as donated goods, volunteer labour, and access to physical space, has worsened the vulnerability of DCOs. For digitization to truly support DCOs and their civic engagement, they require targeted financial assistance to build digital capacity and infrastructure. This includes targeted funding and support for investments in software, hardware, and technical expertise to offset the loss of traditional fundraising and in-kind contributions associated with digitization. Without such targeted funding and support, the sustainability and impact of DCOs, especially those increasingly operating online, remain at risk.

Service Delivery and Engaging Members

The shift from neighbourhood community centres to cyberspace is not only technically challenging, but it also requires changes in organizational processes. However, if implemented currently there are some benefits, such as DCO stakeholders living far from the organizations' offices benefitting from online programs and services. In principle, many third sector actors have adapted to digitization and attempted to use these changing processes to increase their effectiveness and efficiency (see Greenberg & McAulay, 2009; Greenleaf, 2016). When DCOs digitize, they aim to take advantage of underlying technological developments that have caused digital communication (mediated through smartphones, laptops, wi-fi, and other tools) to be widely accessible to the public in Global North cities (see Brinkerhoff, 2009). As a member and volunteer at JOS enthusiastically shared with me regarding their programs and services on Zoom:

...when you're online. You know, the dance floor is open for everyone, you know, everyone can participate, no matter where you're from. And that's what I think is the biggest advantage is that networking factor or the fact that everyone can join from wherever they are, and there's no filter for that. General Member & Volunteer D, JOS

This quote from a general member and volunteer D at JOS speaks directly to the democratizing and connective potential of cyberspace, capturing what scholars of digital diaspora and

cyberethnography have long emphasized: that digital platforms can radically expand participation, visibility, and solidarity across boundaries. When the speaker says, “...the dance floor is open for everyone... there’s no filter for that,” they emphasize how cyberspace can flatten barriers to access that restrict participation in physical environments, especially for geographically dispersed groups such as diasporas. This sentiment reflects a core tenet of cyberethnographic research: that digital spaces are not merely communication tools but civic terrains where identity, belonging, and collectivity are actively produced and negotiated (Madianou & Miller, 2013; Ponzanesi, 2020).

For the DCOs led by the 1.5 and second generation, cyberspace is not only a platform for outreach but a constitutive space for civic engagement and cultural co-production (see Axel, 2005; NurMuhammad, 2016; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). For example, JOS utilizes Instagram and YouTube (see figure 6.2 below) to amplify the voices of diasporic youth, spotlight, and share creative content that blends personal experiences, youth activism, and mental health advocacy through videos and podcasts online. Their online podcast, recorded fully digitally without the participants being in the same room, has invited diasporic youth from across Canada and the United States to participate in real time.

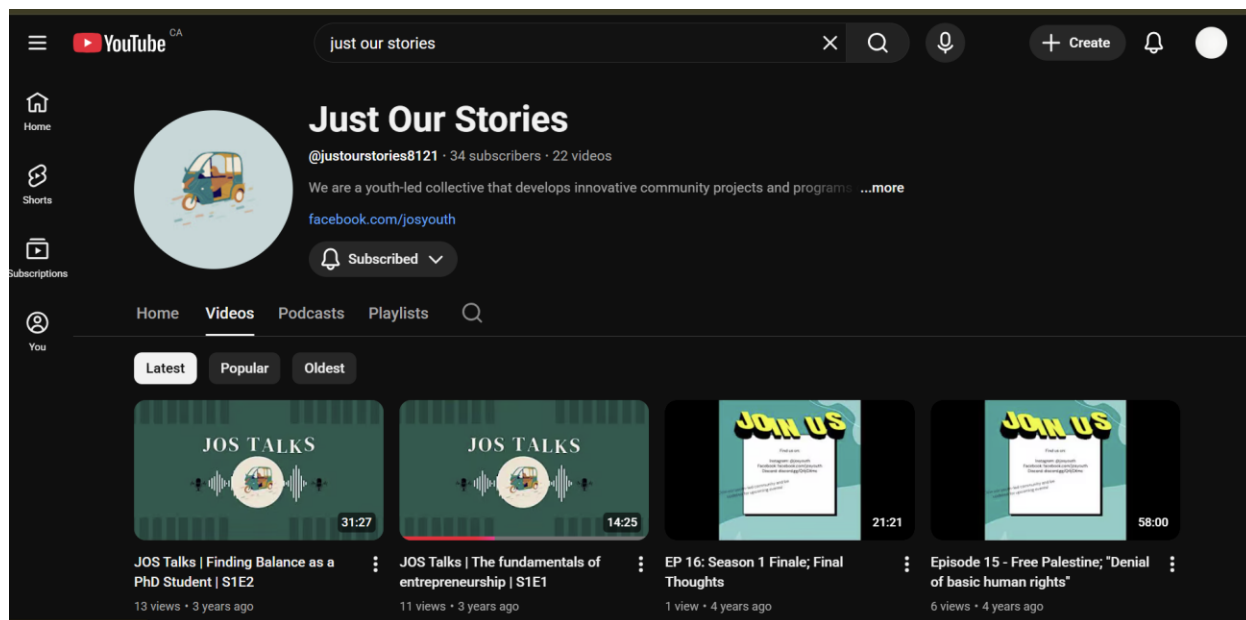


Figure 6.2 A snapshot of the official JOS YouTube page

SAO also routinely uses digital platforms such as Zoom to host e-mentorship sessions, organize transnational dialogues among diasporic women, and foster cross-generational engagement on such topics as gender equality and representation. SAO has effectively used Zoom and Instagram to promote and carry out its e-mentorship program, which connect generation 1.5 and two Bangladeshi Canadian women with professional role models from multiple occupational backgrounds to strategically address the labour market and economic challenges confronting diasporic women. Figure 6.3 below shows a collage of an online zoom event, focused on e-mentorship, created by the social media director at SAO and then shared onto their Instagram page for greater outreach and visibility.

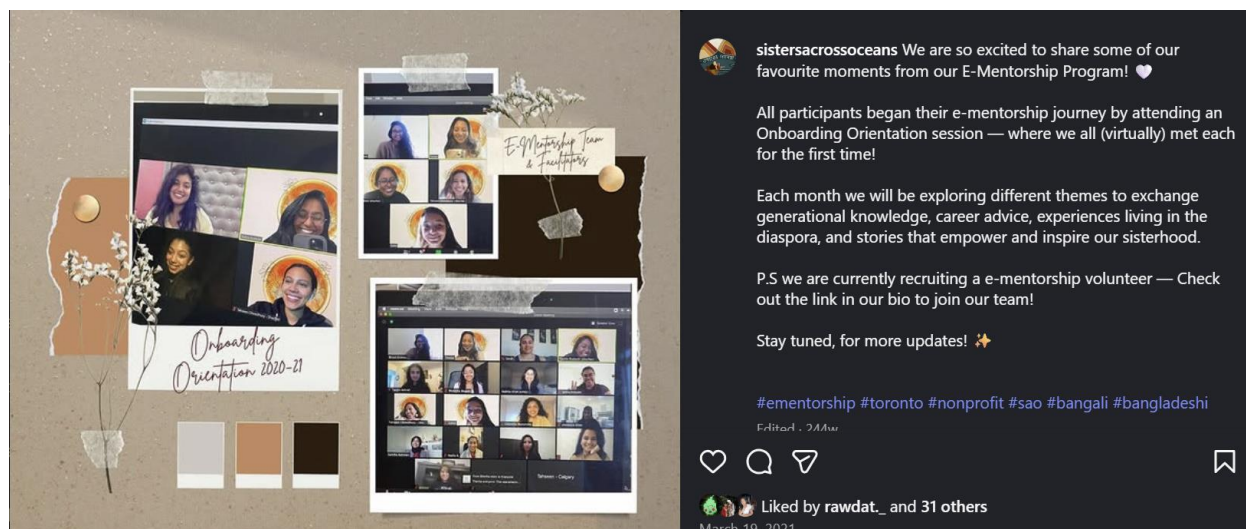


Figure 6.3 A collage of pictures from the e-mentorship held by SAO on Zoom

Similarly, BIES uses Zoom and Facebook to conduct outreach and deliver programs and services. A key difference between JOS and SAO versus BIES, was that BIES focuses much more on its Facebook audience (see figure 6.4 below) than other social media platforms. BIES did not diversify its presence onto Instagram and TikTok which draw a younger audience overall and are popular among stakeholders of JOS and SAO who tend to focus on the generation 1.5 and two.



Figure 6.4 The BIES Facebook has over 2,000 members and has become a key part of their online outreach.

These examples of innovative digitally mediated programs and services, often focused on economic concerns such as career development, demonstrate the high levels of coordination and collaboration that cyberspace can catalyze. JOS, SAO and BIES, in their own unique ways, have created decentralized, affective, and mutually supportive transnational diasporic networks that facilitate civic engagement. In cyberspace, these three DCOs re-embed civic life into everyday practices of care, culture, and collaboration, offering counterpoints to the market-driven, competitive, and individualistic logics around labour markets and economic success promoted by neoliberal capitalistic systems.

The ways that DCOs meet the needs of their stakeholders are rapidly evolving with widespread digitization. Given the expense and time involved in commuting, stakeholders are more likely to take part in proximate programs and services in safe and familiar areas near their places of residence (Kissane, 2010). This is true for different stakeholders; board members, general members, staff, and volunteers of DCOs when deciding where, when, and how to take part in

diasporic civic engagement. In recent years, remote work and teleworking have increased significantly (see Althoff et al., 2022; Mouratidis & Papagiannakis, 2021), and DCOs have been no exception to broader patterns of digitization (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Shome, 2023). However, DCOs serving vulnerable populations, such as seniors living alone, cannot rely solely on digital platforms because their vulnerable members may only be accessible in person or over the phone (Rouf, 2025). To achieve effective and equitable programs and services, there must be a balance between digitization and in-person offerings that match the mandates of the DCOs and the needs of the stakeholders that they seek to serve. As a staff member from BIES shared with me regarding the challenges of running programs and services for seniors:

So, why, then we are still we're using our phone [instead of computers, Zoom and Facebook]. I mean, cell phones to reach them [the seniors and elders] out. But you know what, it is still not sufficient. They need the support in person. And they feel good. They feel better, you know, senior people are very isolated. Staff A, BIES

As evident from the excerpt of Staff A at BIES, there is a limit to the effectiveness of digital outreach among organizations serving first-generation elders. There resource and capacity constraints surrounding digitization are also shared by the generation 1.5 and two led DCOs studied here. Some may assume that somehow the younger diaspora members would be digitally savvy and fluent, however the DCOs serving them also face challenges in sustaining meaningful online engagement (see Sahoo & Shome, 2024). As JOS Board Member A highlights, "And someone [a volunteer] who is, who has the equipment, so say you don't have a very good computer, then it's very difficult for them to do anything [for the organization]."

There are also other technical challenges with bringing people together online, such as communicating and collaborating across different time zones. As a volunteer from SAO shared with me about their experiences coordinating online meetings and gatherings via Zoom:

And so, like for example if we were to like, organize meetings, I think it's the time zone difference, like for example, if folks are in a different time zone just like making sure that they are able to meet or engage meaningfully whenever we have meetings or if there is an event. Like for example the career panel if some if like we had a speaker who was coming in and joining us from a different time zone and making sure that the event works with their schedule. So, these are like, it could be seen as the challenges but this also like speaks volume of like the global scale of like how much this program was able to expand due to the pandemic right. Volunteer A, SAO

Moreover, the DCOs under study have other concerns about the impacts of digitization on their programs and services. Like other third sector organizations and their stakeholders, they are also concerned that a reliance on social media can lead to superficial forms of engagement, where individuals may 'like' or 'share' content without committing to deeper forms of engagement. There are important questions about the quality and sustainability of digital engagement by organizations and whether it translates into meaningful action on the ground (see Samuelson-Cramp & Bolat, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). The pressure to maintain an online presence and compete for visibility in a crowded digital landscape can also divert attention from core organizational activities, potentially compromising a genuine commitment to organizational mandates within the third sector (see Greenberg, 2016; Greenleaf & MacAulay, 2009).

A staff member at BIES shared with me the shortcomings and limitations of using social media for DCO outreach and service delivery, particularly the demands of digitization and shortcomings as well when reaching populations not usually present online:

Like, using the digital media and social media, internet, to email WhatsApp group, whatever, you know, so we can is usually a tweet that ... we are constantly learning like [how to be effective on social media], yeah, that's what is the new things [features and platforms] coming up. So, but the problem is when we go for supporting like our older community, senior people, to...using this media then that's very challenging. Staff A, BIES

Sometimes, social media campaigns run by DCOs may target local places, such as specific neighbourhoods or city regions with an existing membership base, rather than aiming for broad

geographic reach. For example, SAO ran a ‘Shop Local’ campaign during the pandemic on their Instagram page. While this was an online campaign conducted through their Instagram social media page, the strategic focus was on local initiatives taking place in Toronto neighbourhoods, especially around Scarborough and Toronto’s Bangla Town, where Bangladeshi Canadians reside in large numbers. As a board member at SAO explains:

During the pandemic we noticed a lot of people starting businesses, like at home. We wanted to highlight Bengali women who were starting these initiatives to highlight what they are doing and what they are selling. It was a way to support Bengali women, the economy and their initiatives [through our organization social media platform]. Board Member A, SAO

This quote from Board Member A of SAO exemplifies a Polanyian interpretation of economic life as embedded within social and cultural relations, particularly in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than treating economic activity as a separate or purely market-driven domain which is the norm under neoliberal capitalism, this person acknowledges the interconnection between micro-enterprises launched by diasporic women with solidarity and that support that their platform could provide for them, all done for free with nothing expected in return. The decision to use the online platforms of SAO to give these small-scale entrepreneurs exposure to other diasporic women shows the significant of reciprocity and goodwill within DCO work. The campaign that highlighted small home-based businesses was not merely about promoting entrepreneurship and profit-driven enterprises; it was a deliberate act to support diasporic initiatives, increase their visibility (online and offline) and strengthen networks to help each other out.

To reiterate, Polanyi emphasized the idea that economic actions are situated within and shaped by social institutions, cultural meanings, and moral obligations. This stands in stark contrast to neoliberal capitalistic logic, which views economic activity as self-regulating and detached from social and cultural relations. In this instance, SAO’s efforts to spotlight diasporic women’s

enterprises reveal a form of re-embedding, where economic aspirations are placed back within the social and cultural fold of diasporic civic engagement. The digital promotion and marketing of these micro enterprises demonstrate how DCOs support informal economies, especially in contexts where marginalized groups may be excluded from formal employment and meaningful labour market opportunities (see Akbar 2016, 2019).

SAO's Shop Local campaign was simultaneously place-based and digital. This approach makes sense for diaspora members who lead transnational lives (Kok & Rogers, 2017). Bangladeshi Canadian women, particularly those living in and around Toronto's Bangla Town, often turn to small at home entrepreneurial ventures to support themselves and their families when full time participation in the labour market is not a viable option (Akbar, 2016, 2019). The pandemic period was especially difficult due to job losses and a reduction (or elimination) in work hours across sectors due to physical gathering restrictions and widespread lockdowns. However, as the different modes of service delivery and engagement during the pandemic period prove, all three DCOs under study found creative means to continue engaging their stakeholders in meaningful ways through campaigns such as Shop Local.

Work and Volunteering

The third sector's heavy reliance on voluntarism often limits organizational sustainability and effectiveness, especially when volunteers are not being meaningfully engaged (De Clerck et al., 2021; Ward & Greene, 2018). While third sector organizations are often well-positioned to foster civic engagement, reliance on volunteers can lead to inconsistent service delivery and burnout (De Clerck et al., 2021; Ward & Greene, 2018). Inconsistency can undermine the quality of programs and services, particularly when ongoing support is needed in areas such as mental health and senior care (Chadborn et al., 2019). Issues with burnout and consistency may be exacerbated by the

pressures and demands of digital program and service delivery that often diminishes physical boundaries between work and home (see Rouf, 2025). Digital work is difficult work, in the sense that it is time consuming and often has a steep learning curve to acquire the required technical skills. In addition, many forms of digital labour are voluntary and reciprocal (see Wright, 2010; Yeritsian, 2018). A volunteer from JOS frankly shared with me the stressful nature of learning and using digital tools for DCO activities, especially when they are synchronous:

I think the biggest one [challenge with digitization] is just the sheer like no one's used to do things online, like moving events from like in person to online. It was such a difficult time [at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic], I remember I had to do a candidate event [outreach event with local political representatives as well as other participants], and I was kind of in charge of like the youth part. And I remember the director [of the organization] during that time was like, don't worry, we will figure this out. And it was stressful because we were still quite new to Zoom. And so, learning the logistics [of digital applications] of it was quite interesting. On top of that, like using other [digital] applications simultaneously. And so, it was a very big learning curve for the people in the background [running the technology and facilitating the online event]. Volunteer B, JOS

A staff member at BIES also described similar technical challenges with the demands of digitization. The time-consuming nature of digital work and the need to learn new technologies often means working overtime and toiling away for uncertain outcomes, such as how many people will interact with your post online. Then there are additional time spent monitoring and moderating engagement with online posts such as program and service outreach posters:

So, using it now [photo editing software] me making a poster it takes like couple of hours. And we have to post. Different like [social media] platform. And it also takes time, people are... also asking questions. So, if we go to answer those questions or respond to these comments. It takes also time. So, it's also time consuming, it's not like it's very easy. And also, the other thing is, I cannot forget the people in a particular community because it is it circulate all over the world. I don't know who is seeing and who is not seeing [our content online]. Staff A, BIES

As Bangladeshi Canadians disperse across the Toronto CMA, the DCOs serving them must demonstrate innovation and adaptability in effectively engaging stakeholders throughout the urban region to build and scale their organizations. There were some positive accounts of remote work across all three DCOs. A staff member at BIES passionately explained the benefits of remote work to me:

I live in Brampton. And our [organizational] offices[are] in Scarborough so if we go there, it gets like, I mean, for me, it's like three hours [in Toronto traffic]. Yeah, it's so far away, so I can save this time [by working online]. Staff B, BIES

A similar account from a board member at JOS reveals similar sentiments about the time saving and increased outputs that remote work could unlock, although the benefits may be the greatest for those with the right technical skills and access to required software and hardware:

I am a big fan of remote work and have been for a long time even before the pandemic. My first fully remote job was back in 2014, or what some people call teleworking. I also tried to help implement a digital first strategy at JOS although we do have on the ground in person outreach as well. It [being remote and online] just saves so much time and hassle when you can roll out of bed and just log into whatever you need to do that day for your organization. Board Member A, JOS

Despite physical distance, involvement with DCOs often kept stakeholders connected with other members of the diaspora. Digital tools, such as WhatsApp that were used to communicate with family back home, are now used for DCO work. These digital tools facilitate rapid communication and collaboration across physical distances, increasing the possibility of digital work done by DCO stakeholders who live in distant places and different time zones:

So yeah, it [digitization] has made things more flexible and accessible for me, if I am in a different part of the world, I can still keep up with the work I need to do. For example, one of members, she moved to Cali[ifornia], so she is still part of SAO. One board member, she started school in the UK [United Kingdom], but she is still on the board, so it's made it that you can be apart from anywhere. Board Member C, SAO

This quote from Board Member C of SAO demonstrates the convergence of between economic, cultural, and social spheres of activity that digitization can create. For example, serving on a board and contributing to DCO programming is simultaneously an act of labour (often unpaid), a social commitment (to collective goals), and a cultural practice (rooted in diasporic identity and solidarity). The notion that “you can be a part from anywhere” speaks to the rise of transnational networks among the Bangladeshi Canadian diaspora and their DCOs. This quote is testament to the burgeoning global Bangladeshi diaspora which spans multiple continents inhabiting large and well-known urban centres from Singapore to London to New York (see Rai & Reeves, 2008) and how transnational networks can facilitate diasporic civic engagement via cyberspace (Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024; Shome, 2023).

Moreover, the quote highlights how digital connectivity fosters a sense of diasporic simultaneity, enabling shared, real-time participation with a collective despite physical separation. Such practices resist the ideas of nationalism that solidarity must occur within bounded territorial spaces. Instead, cyberspace becomes a vital segment of diaspora space, where the economic (volunteerism and non-market exchanges), cultural (diasporic identity and networks), and social (mutual care and solidarity) are entangled and co-constitutive.

However, not every DCO stakeholder provided glowing accounts of the relations between digital work and civic engagement. Some felt that their quality of work was adversely affected by the lack of in-person interactions. As a board member from SAO frankly shared with me, some of their best meetings and brainstorming sessions happened in-person, in the so-called pre-Zoom era:

When we are in person we can come up with some great ideas and energy. The last time we had a board meeting in a place we rented for three hours, we were discussing the structure, organization and governance. It was one of the best meeting[s] ever. It was very hands on.
Board Member A, SAO.

Multiple stakeholders from BIES and SAO also expressed their frustration with digital work due to its time-consuming nature and steep learning curve. However, they did not offer similar accounts of past in person meetings being markedly superior to the digital alternatives.

Across the three DCOs studied, there were mixed reviews about the impact of digitization on volunteer recruitment, which is a vital function for these organizations. Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto remain largely volunteer-driven organizations with limited capacity and resources (see Halder, 2012). The studied DCOs and their passionate stakeholders make many sacrifices to participate while continuing with their day jobs, family, and other commitments. The heavy reliance on volunteerism and goodwill was often due to a lack of funding to hire long-term staff who would develop the technological, marketing, and administrative capacities within the organization. The urgent need to train volunteers and other DCO stakeholders to operate digitally and its implications for the quality of civic engagement was highlighted by a board member at JOS:

We do not have the funds to recruit [paid employment] people to run our digital platforms, hence we really rely on volunteers who have the capacity, because JOS is volunteer run. Digital skills are a special set of skills, which I think requires specialized people who has some [technical] background. Board Member A, JOS

Even for digitally savvy volunteers and other stakeholders, using new digital tools was not always a positive experience. There were several reports of technological failures at crucial times such as during online meetings. Digitization was especially difficult for those who might not have the right software and hardware, e.g. a fast internet connection and a good laptop computer:

And the next thing is sometimes like disruption of internet [during organizational meetings and events]. And if it was us trying to speak on something and then internet is disrupted so it's like the flow of communication is cut off. Staff A, BIES

Another important consideration is technical training to use digital tools effectively. A considerable amount of time and energy was spent by DCO staff and volunteers to teach other stakeholders the necessary technical skills to sustain their organizational presence online in a meaningful manner. The reliance on volunteerism and goodwill meant that members and other stakeholders are expected to take on important roles and responsibilities within an organization and acquire valuable technical experience through hands on involvement and take on important roles and responsibilities within an organization. As a general member and volunteer at JOS shared with me:

...for example, and the first year [as a part of this organization] I would be doing podcasts and like I was the one who's editing, like the first couple of podcasts, then I had, I ended up getting a job [somewhere else] and so I needed to teach a new youth how to do editing.
General Member & Volunteer E, JOS

This quote paints a cautious picture of the labour-intensive and precarious nature of digital work within DCOs, particularly when organizations are volunteer driven. As DCOs adapt to digitization, they encounter numerous technical and labour-related challenges. The struggles with digital work in the three DCOs under study align with critiques of third sector labour to resemble the capitalistic private sector (see Martin, 2011, 2012; Richmond & Shields, 2024) and broader commodification of digital labour across sectors (Yeritsian, 2018). Martin's concept of flanking, drawing on Polanyian critiques about the commodification of labour, sheds light on how third sector actors are increasingly expected to absorb the consequences of state retreat under neoliberal capitalism. Consequently, the DCOs studied here that are compelled to carry out essential social and cultural functions without adequate monetary funding and policy support often rely upon informal and unpaid labour rooted in solidarity and reciprocity. The shift toward digitization appears to intensify the latter challenges, particularly for precarious workers performing digital labour, despite the theoretical potential of the digital commons and peer-to-peer collaboration (see Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013; Wright, 2010; Yeritsian 2018). Some stakeholders among the DCOs shared

resentment that a formerly vibrant in-person collective dynamic, filling up community neighbourhood centres and DCO office spaces, is now fragmented and mediated through sometimes unreliable technologies, burdened by Zoom fatigue and dependent upon invisible hours spent on technical troubleshooting and training. As previously discussed, in-person engagements often fostered richer dialogue and high levels of energy among DCO stakeholders, underscoring the loss of embodied solidarity that often occurs in cyberspace. There are also additional burdens for volunteers and staff who juggle their employment and other social commitments alongside their involvements with a DCO. The transition to digital operations required volunteers to be trained via Zoom, a process that is itself fraught and was challenging for the DCO stakeholders. The expectation that one must learn, teach, and then delegate digital work, all while navigating precarious employment creates immense pressure on DCO stakeholders. It is labour and toil demanded by systemic gaps but rarely acknowledged or compensated adequately. The quote above from JOS general member and volunteer E, who had to train another person to edit podcasts after securing paid employment elsewhere exemplifies how digital labour is communal. However, the quote also indicates that communalism may be borne of necessity rather than choice.

6.4 Downsides of Digitization and Civic Engagement via Cyberspace

DCO stakeholders often provided critical accounts of how social and economic marginalization affects digital forms of civic engagement, particularly the uneven access to technical skills and resources required for digitization. Building on critical digital studies (Garcia et al., 2009; Ponzanesi, 2020), this research further probes how digitization may reinforce existing social, spatial, and economic inequalities within superdiverse urban contexts. By focusing on Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto, an urban region with many superdiverse neighbourhoods, this research contributes to a balanced understanding of digital diasporic civic engagement, especially

during the COVID-19 pandemic, which served as a real-time test for civic engagement via cyberspace.

Studies on inequality and digitization often examine who benefits from the internet and who is left behind (see Ponzanesi, 2020; Rybas & Gajalla, 2007; Wright, 2010). I examine the intersection of digitization with diasporic civic engagement, particularly the ways that social, economic, and spatial inequalities typical of superdiverse urban locales may play out in cyberspace. Greater operational efficiency among DCOs does not always translate into programs and services which help organizations meet their mandates better. Many DCO stakeholders felt that efficiency could be optimized with digitization, but the quality of their engagements with stakeholders was deteriorating. The negative impacts of digitization were clearly revealed when digital programs and services became the norm during the pandemic. Several DCO stakeholders shared their fears about the long-term repercussions of digitization on their programs and services, their health and well-being, and social relations among organizational stakeholders:

And also, you know that mental health and also physical health is impacted, always looking at that screen [working online]. So, physically, your eyesight and also neck and everything and mental health might be, you know, right, not very good, bad [negative outcomes]... and experience other challenges, not right now but down the road is a negative outcome might be long term. Volunteer B, BIES

This quote from Volunteer B at BIES draws attention to the embodied consequences of digital labour, specifically its detrimental impact on mental and physical health. The speaker emphasizes how prolonged screen exposure, ubiquitous with digitization, can lead to health issues such as eye strain, musculoskeletal problems (e.g., neck pain), and psychological stress.

Prolonged screen time has been linked to physical health issues such as eye strain, which can cause dry eyes, blurred vision, and headaches, as well as poor posture leading to chronic neck, shoulder,

and back pain (see Kaur et al., 2022; Yue et al., 2023). Beyond physical health, the mental health implications are also concerning, as constant connectivity and the pressure to remain available can lead to heightened stress, anxiety, and burnout (Meshi & Ellithorpe, 2021; Sharma et al., 2020). The impersonal nature of digital communication can foster feelings of isolation and loneliness among users (see Moretta & Buodo, 2020). For some, social media use leads to low self-esteem and depression as people compare their lives to idealized and unrealistic representations, they encounter online (Meshi & Ellithorpe, 2021). These are all important considerations as DCO stakeholders spend more time online and in front of screens rather than directly engaging with people in neighbourhood community centres and their organizations' offices.

The critical observations expressed by Volunteer B at BIES not only highlight an often-overlooked cost of digitization but also open a window into understanding labour precarity in the third sector through a Polanyian lens. The Polanyian concept of the double movement speaks about a larger historical tension between a market society (e.g., the push for productivity and flexibility in the third sector which have been heightened with the onset of digitization) and societal pushbacks for worker protection and dignity. The quote points to a latent countermovement in the making: an early call for recognition, regulation, and care around digital work's toll on DCO stakeholders such as themselves. The expressed concern in the quote above represents the early signs of demand for re-embedding economic practices within social protections, resisting the notion that labour can be endlessly extracted in the name of progress or innovation, even if within the third sector.

The abuse of labour can occur within the third sector like the private and public sectors, especially when there are high expectations of goodwill and voluntarism (Martin, 2011, 2012; Richmond & Shields, 2024). The issues of labour precarity within the third sector are further exacerbated with

the rise of digital labour which can lead to forms of work which are invisible (behind screens), under-appreciated, and under-compensated. The conditions for digital labour exploitation are readily entrenched (see Yeritsian, 2018). The anticipatory tone of the speaker "...down the road is a negative outcome..." is significant because it reveals an awareness not just of the daily pressures of digital labour but of the sustained erosion of care for third sector workers.

As previously mentioned, during the height of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the DCOs in this study could not operate any in-person programs and services. Activities in neighbourhood community centres were replaced by Facebook, WhatsApp, and Zoom overnight. These were difficult transitions for many DCO stakeholders. Prolonged cancellation of in-person programs and services severely disrupted stakeholder engagement and the flow of work among staff, volunteers, and board members. Historically, DCOs have excelled at creating safe neighbourhood spaces and trusted local networks among diaspora members (see Brah, 1996; Kastoryano, 1999). With digitization, the sites of diasporic civic engagement have shifted dramatically from the neighbourhood community centres to cyberspace:

In that case, I will say that the real relationships. I mean, that has been changed. Actually, because when I, when we sit together like face to face, and the quality of relationship developed used to develop before and now I am talking to [people online], like, but surely, It's not. It's not the same. Staff A, BIES

The quality of social interactions is increasingly at risk, as communication through screens may lack the subtle cues - such as body language and vocal tone - that are crucial for fostering trust and empathy, potentially weakening social bonds over time (see Caplan, 2005; Ceyhan, 2011; Reddy, 2019). Although digital tools offer convenience, they can also displace meaningful in-person engagements, contributing to a gradual erosion of personal relationships and a growing sense of social disconnection. Over time, the cumulative impact of these changes, including diminished

physical and mental well-being and frayed social ties, may lead to broader societal consequences, such as reduced social cohesion and rising healthcare costs. For the third sector, these challenges are particularly pressing, as organizations must strike a careful balance between leveraging the potential benefits of digitization with equitable and effective supports for the well-being of their different stakeholders.

The frequency and quality of in-person engagements that DCOs pride themselves on started to disappear with the onset of widespread digital communication and collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns at the time of the research interviews, several stakeholders hinted that full scale digitization may not be sustainable for their organization long term:

I think that the downfall [of digitization] is, definitely there is more that sense of connectedness in person, it hits different, when we are trying to create a sense of community, the in-person presence is always wonderful. Everyone's presence coming together is different. Board Member C, SAO

Digitization forces DCOs to design thoughtful programs and services that not only leverage cyberspace but also prioritize health, foster deep social connections, and ensure that the long-term impacts of digitization are constructive rather than detrimental.

Moreover, technical skills as well as the software and hardware underpinning digitization can be costly to acquire. DCO stakeholders repeatedly mentioned how they could not afford to pay for software and hardware, because their organizations did not have the budget for these purchases. Consequently, many DCO stakeholders relied on free software and their own personal hardware e.g. personal laptops, phones, and tablets. Often, the software was low, or no cost and the hardware was basic, forcing DCO stakeholders to be creative to complete digital tasks using the available technology. In some instances, DCO board members shared with me that they were pitching in

from their own pockets to keep the organization running and to fund digital infrastructure such as an organizational website and telecommunication tool subscriptions:

We [board members] were paying for square space and it's like very expensive. It's hard to find someone who will just build your website for free. A lot of things come out of my pocket then annually we are trying to gather the funds but it's mainly from us.... But again, we are still paying for it, and it's in USD. Board Member A, SAO

Without sustainable funding for technical capacity building, digital infrastructure, and the associated recognition of the true costs of digitization, DCOs risk becoming sites of burnout and exhaustion rather than solidarity and empowerment. DCOs often cannot afford to hire highly skilled technical professionals to build their digital infrastructure and rely instead upon the goodwill and voluntarism of stakeholders with the willingness and free time to learn. Some of these stakeholders have jobs and professions in IT, marketing, and other technical fields which can assist organizational capacity development, but without the right systems and supports in place they can only do so much. The spread and intensification of digital labour within the studied DCOs raises vital questions about how civic engagement is valued and how to resist its silent exploitation in the name of empowerment, as shown by something that Board Member from SAO shared with me:

But it's really about who has capacity [in different technical fields], because this [our organization is] volunteer driven. But most often, it [learning] is a skill, I think, requires someone who has some [technical] experience. I think it does help that someone, of course, like we are able to [have these technical skills from before], [or else] someone [within SAO] can train someone, but then something, I think we had volunteers like learn as they go. Board Member C, SAO

This quote from Board Member C at SAO draws attention to the digital skill gap that affects how DCOs can remain relevant within fast-paced digital ecosystems. The speaker points to the critical need for technical knowledge and skills, particularly in digital and social media marketing strategies, for their organization to engage with audiences and maintain relevance online.

However, digitization within DCOs exposes several intersecting themes, namely the digital divide, civic invisibility, and labour precarity which adversely impact volunteer-driven organizations led by and serving marginalized urban residents.

The speaker's focus on "who has capacity" underscores a fundamental aspect of civic invisibility. The ability to effectively reach, mobilize, and serve stakeholders online increasingly hinges on access to technical skills, time, and reliable technological infrastructure. However, these resources are unequally distributed, especially among organizations led by and serving low-income and racialized diasporic groups. This uneven access becomes a civic engagement issue when technical barriers limit representation, advocacy, and cultural co-production, resulting in what can be described as civic invisibility: the inability of certain groups to fully engage in public discourse or be recognized within civic spaces. On the ground, this inequality translates into pressure on DCO stakeholders to "train someone" or "learn as they go" - patterns that reflect a flanking strategy wherein marginalized civic actors are compelled to absorb the consequences of systemic neglect by overextending their already limited capacity to meet organizational goals and mandates (Martin, 2011, 2012). While some existing research into organizations and collectives view digitization as a democratizing and equalizing force (see Ash et al., 2018; Wright, 2010), the variegated experiences of the DCOs in this study clearly illustrate that digitization without the right technical skills and resources can exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities. Today, civic visibility is not just about having a message; it's about knowing how to package, target, and circulate that message through different digital platforms and social networks. In this way, the architectures of visibility privileges those with up-to-date digital marketing fluency, sidelining some groups that lack access to technical knowledge and skills.

6.5 Conclusion

Chapter 6 examined the transformative role of digitization in shaping the form and function of DCOs. The findings highlight how digital platforms may offer unprecedented opportunities for transnational connectivity and intergenerational engagements among DCOs and their stakeholders while simultaneously presenting significant challenges linked to unequal access to digital literacy and skills. Overall, many DCO stakeholders lack the technical resources needed to engage digitally, leading to disparities in access and participation. Despite the barriers, all three DCOs in this study have leveraged different digital tools and platforms to extend their reach and respond to the evolving needs of their stakeholders. Beyond technical constraints, there are concerns about the adverse impact of digitization on social connections and the health of users. The shift to cyberspace has altered the nature of civic engagement and socialization among DCO stakeholders, sometimes replacing face-to-face interactions and trust building with arguably more superficial online interactions.

As the empirical findings reveal, civic engagement in cyberspace raises serious concerns about the reproduction of social, spatial, and economic inequalities. While digital tools have enabled DCOs to adapt and sustain their activities during periods of disruption, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, this shift may also be exacerbating existing disparities faced by DCO stakeholders and other marginalized urban residents. The reliance on digital platforms has contributed to perceived declines in the quality of social interactions, increased pressure on already limited organizational resources, and heightened stress for staff, board members, and volunteers. DCO stakeholders who lack access to adequate technical knowledge, skills, and resources face additional barriers to participation in cyberspace.

The erosion of in-person engagement may also be weakening the trust and solidarity that DCOs have traditionally cultivated through face-to-face relationships, raising questions about the long-term viability of digital programs and services. These challenges require a balanced strategy that leverages the advantages of digital tools and platforms while actively mitigating their limitations to ensure inclusive and effective service delivery across built and cyber spaces.

The findings suggest the need for a hybrid model of civic engagement, one that combines both digital and in-person approaches. While cyberspace offers valuable tools for transnational diasporic connection, it cannot fully replicate the relationships and networks fostered by in person interactions in built spaces such as neighbourhood community centres, which have long served as crucial sites for DCO activity. To enable DCOs to continue meeting their mandates in the digital era, sustained investments are required in the form of stable funding, digital infrastructure, and technical capacity-building. Forward-looking policies may also address the digital divide and the civic inequalities that disproportionately affect certain diasporic groups in superdiverse urban places and cyberspace. Confronting these daunting issues will be essential to strengthening the role of DCOs in fostering resilience, advancing advocacy, and fulfilling their mandates.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This dissertation analyzed some of the spatial, organizational, and digital dynamics influencing Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto. The work engages with key discussions on urban superdiversity and diasporic civic engagement. Focusing on a place-based case study on a racialized local diaspora, Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto, who are facing serious social and economic issues from intergenerational tensions to poverty, this research delves into the role diasporic civic engagement and cyberspace can play in addressing civic invisibility and urban inequality. To reiterate, this research is guided by three main questions: how DCOs handle economic and multi-generational socio-cultural challenges, how digitization affects organizational structure and function, and the labour and technical demands of digitization.

Conceptually, this research draws from three broad but interconnected phenomenon: superdiversity, diaspora, and digitization. This research builds on superdiversity studies by drawing attention to inequality and marginalization in superdiverse places and their implications for diasporic civic engagement. Rather than merely acknowledging and describing superdiversity, this research employs it as a critical lens to investigate how class, generation, gender, and occupational status affect DCOs.

Given the case study presented here, how DCOs provide essential civic infrastructures in low-income and racialized diasporic concentrations within Toronto is a central concern. These organizations respond to program and service gaps exacerbated by government cutbacks, austerity, and decades of neoliberal capitalistic logics and practices. While some DCOs adopt programs and service models aligned with private sector market expectations (especially when it comes to labour) under pressure from funders, others resist by prioritizing non-capitalist forms of value and

exchange (goodwill and voluntarism). These tensions are examined through the Polanyian concepts of the double movement and reciprocity, as well as Gibson-Graham's solidarity economies. By employing these latter conceptual frameworks, we can begin to understand how DCOs balance complex social, cultural, and economic mandates with neoliberal capitalist pressures. While paradoxical, DCOs simultaneously play dual roles as both extensions of the state and the market and as sites of local care, resistance, and creativity.

The framework of solidarity economies from Gibson-Graham adds depth to the empirical analysis, illustrating how DCOs heavily draw on voluntarism, mutual aid, care work, and cultural expression to fulfill their mandate and serve their stakeholders. Moreover, the practical challenges created by neoliberal capitalist systems require collective resistance, as per Polanyi's double movement, that re-centre and re-embed social and cultural practices within economic thinking and practices. The latter concerns are especially relevant to the studied DCOs, who, despite their limited financial funding and political support, continue to foster cross-generational and transnational networks through volunteer-driven programs and services. Providing empirical insights into how DCOs are spaces of both opportunity and contradiction, this research contributes to contemporary thinking around reciprocity, double movement, and solidarity economies.

This research foregrounded differences among members of a diaspora as a central analytical concern. Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto are not a homogeneous group; they are differentiated by generation, occupation, and gender, and these differences produce uneven experiences of racialization, poverty, and civic belonging within the same urban neighbourhoods. DCOs operate at these fault lines, and it is here that the concepts of solidarity economies, reciprocity, and the double movement reveal their analytical promise and their limits. Gibson-Graham's framework of

solidarity economies offers a lens for understanding how DCOs mobilize voluntarism, care work, and mutual aid to build civic infrastructure that reaches across internal social boundaries, yet the framework risks romanticizing these efforts if it does not account for the impacts of racialization, concentrated poverty, and underfunding that DCOs confront daily. Similarly, Polanyi's double movement illuminates the structural pressures pushing DCOs toward market logics, but it does not capture the relational and culturally specific forms of resistance that emerge in diasporic spaces. What this research ultimately shows is that civic infrastructure in racialized diasporic concentrations is built not despite intragroup difference and material constraint, but through a constant, often unresolved negotiation of them, and that solidarity, where it exists, is less a given feature of civic engagement than a fragile and ongoing achievement.

Research Contributions and Impact

This research closely investigates diasporic civic engagement in a superdiverse urban context and cyberspace. By doing so, this dissertation contributes to contemporary human geographic research on diasporas, which emphasizes the need for spatialized and ethnographic approaches (see Blunt, 2007; Brettell, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2019). Through a place-based case study of Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto, this research provides critical insights into the impact of intersectional identities and transnational networks embedded within superdiverse places on diasporic civic engagement.

By focusing on neighbourhoods with high concentrations of Bangladeshi Canadians, this work investigates how diasporic groups respond to the everyday social, economic, and cultural dynamics of superdiverse environments as past studies have shown (see Ahsan, 2015; Ghosh, 2014a; Halder, 2012), DCOs are important actors within local neighbourhoods with high diasporic concentrations,

offering opportunities for civic engagement while resisting broader forces of exclusion and marginalization. Embedded in local neighbourhoods and interacting with rich transnational networks, the studied DCOs connect with residents and mobilize resources for civic engagement, while simultaneously expanding the scale and scope of their programs and engaging in cyberspace. These DCOs are creative third sector actors with mandates shaped by the diverse intersectional identities of the local diaspora and their stakeholders, and they express a range of gender, generational, and occupational experiences and aspirations.

The concerns about digitization reshaping diasporic civic engagement are timely. Cyberethnography was used to closely investigate how digital platforms facilitate communication, coordination, and collaboration among DCO stakeholders. Cyberspace fosters new forms of civic engagement while also exposing inequalities in digital access, giving rise to the dual realities of digital liberation and a heightened digital divide (see Hetland & Mørch, 2016; Ponzanesi, 2020). As cyberspace becomes a critical site of scholarly inquiry and practical engagement for third sector organizations, questions of digital access become central to understanding who is included and who is excluded. Given the fieldwork time frame during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, significant empirical insights were gathered as widespread digitization was underway across many sectors and segments of society. As the empirical evidence demonstrates, there were varied experiences, with both benefits and challenges arising from widespread digitization for the studied DCOs and their stakeholders. The results are a warning that researchers must carefully evaluate digitization and its impacts, with an objective view of the context in which the processes take place.

This research also sought to move beyond the binary thinking of homeland and hostland by showing how diasporic actors use digital tools to maintain transnational networks while simultaneously contributing to local civic engagement in superdiverse urban places that bring together different gendered, generational, and occupational identities. By adopting a fluid, process-oriented understanding of intra- and interdiaspora diversity, this research contributes to dismantling rigid typologies. To achieve the latter, the empirical case study encompasses multiple generations of the local diaspora, highlighting their unique aspirations and experiences, from first-generation immigrants who create DCOs that reflect their pre-migration occupational, geographical, and other identities formed in Bangladesh to the 1.5 and second-generation members forming their own DCOs to respond to evolving social, cultural, and economic realities within Toronto and across transnational diasporic networks.

The empirical study also closely investigated how DCOs fill the social and economic support gaps left by decades of neoliberal policies within superdiverse urban centres. The studied DCOs, which are small and under-resourced organizations, act as non-capitalist innovators in built and cyber spaces (see Kok & Rogers, 2017; Sahoo & Shome, 2024). However, the capacity of DCOs, like other third sector actors, to make systemic change is limited. Resource constraints can reinforce market-based logics.

This research employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative spatial analysis of superdiversity in the Toronto CMA using census data with qualitative ethnographic methods. Spatial entropy measures, specifically, the Shannon-Weiner Index, are used to evaluate ethnocultural diversity in Toronto census tracts. This mapping is paired with qualitative methods, including interviews, field notes, and analysis of digital archives, to create a multidimensional

portrait of diasporic civic engagement, superdiversity, and cyberspace. The layered methodological design integrated detailed field observations and interviews with quantitative methods to paint a portrait of the intricate social and spatial patterns of superdiversity (see Berg et al., 2019). The empirical evidence highlights how DCOs navigate multiple geographical scales of transnational diasporic networks and the intersectional identities across built and cyber spaces. Every day, DCOs and their stakeholders operate across the uncertain terrain of urban inequality, generational, occupational, and gendered differences, and the ongoing digital transformation. Their ability to adapt, mobilize, and sustain civic engagement in this context benefits their stakeholders, the members whom they directly serve, and the larger Bangladeshi Canadian population concerned about maintaining their language, culture, and identity. The DCOs also serve and benefit other urban residents who attend their programs and services beyond just members of the local diaspora.

The use of institutional and cyberethnography offers a blended practical approach to third sector research. As demonstrated, the integrated methods allow for effective analysis of how diasporic civic engagement is organized across multiple intertwined built and cyber spaces. The dual lens reveals how social, economic, and cultural activities shape intersectional identities and civic engagement within local and transnational networks. This research highlights both the grassroots vitality and the broader spatial reach of the studied DCOs.

As aforementioned, three DCOs served as focal points of analysis: BIES (focusing on employment and settlement), SAO (centred on gendered well-being and transnational advocacy), and JOS (driven by youth-led civic expression). These organizations grapple with challenges of civic invisibility, intergenerational friction, deprofessionalization, and the uneven impacts of

digitization on their stakeholders. As the findings show, their institutional strategies illustrate the evolving nature of diasporic civic engagement in increasingly digitized, superdiverse contexts.

By framing cyberspace not just as an extension of civic engagement but also as a site where diasporic actors contend with the challenges of digital labour, the study highlights the challenges of digitization for poorly funded third sector organizations. Cyberspace offers tools for greater visibility and connectivity, while it imposes new demands on under-resourced groups, leading to unpaid digital labour and volunteer burnout. The empowering and exploitative dimensions of digitization coexist.

Ultimately, this research illuminates how some Bangladeshi Canadian DCOs in Toronto employ diverse civic engagement and digital strategies. Grounded in local settlement and integration struggles but shaped by transnational networks and the intersectional identities of stakeholders, DCOs embody the nuanced nature of diaspora. These DCOs are rooted firmly in the principles of voluntarism and non-market exchange despite their limited institutional capacity. Despite resource constraints, the studied DCOs place great emphasis on cultural preservation, intergenerational solidarity, and transnational linkages, and appear to be quite responsive to evolving local diasporic needs, such as gendered violence, racism, and mental health. The findings underscore the need for robust third sector support, including sustainable funding, digital infrastructure, and policy recognition. As the empirical findings suggest, to ensure the long-term viability of DCOs, inclusive and equity-based funding and policy frameworks that acknowledge and support their essential contributions to the social, cultural, and economic empowerment of marginalized urban residents across Toronto are needed.

Future Research Directions and DCO Interventions

As the empirical findings show, DCOs navigate contested urban spaces with resilience and determination while confronting civic invisibility and urban inequality. DCO stakeholders are actively engaged in diverse activities, including digital outreach, delivering programs and services, promoting voluntarism and goodwill, and cultivating robust social networks that counter the commodifying forces of neoliberal capitalism. Their work highlights how DCOs can act as agents of resistance against the erosion of public goods and social services. As such, their effectiveness in navigating these pressures merits in-depth empirical analysis, as demonstrated in the place-based case study presented in this dissertation.

Looking forward, additional comparative research about other diasporic groups and superdiverse urban settings is needed. Future studies of DCO coalitions across multiple diasporic groups could demonstrate in more detail how solidarity economies and alliances can multiply the social, economic, and cultural impact of their work. There is also a pressing need for politicized and historicized understandings of diasporic civic engagement in built and cyberspaces to inform policies. Policy often lags the rapidly evolving realities of civic engagement and urban life among diasporic groups (see de Graauw, 2015; de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2024). Comparative empirical research can better inform third sector actors and policymakers on how to assist contemporary diasporic groups.

Moreover, future research could also deepen and extend the conceptual frameworks underpinning solidarity economies offered by Gibson-Graham and Polanyi by examining how DCOs enact diverse, non-capitalist economic practices at scale through unique structures such as cooperative ownership, mutual aid, and gift economies, that resist market logic and prefigure alternative community economies. In addition, researchers should play extra attention to the role of people

who build these organizations despite notable social and economic challenges facing them such as racialization and poverty. Drawing on Polanyi's historical insights and Gibson-Graham's contemporary case studies on how economies are embedded in social relations and institutions, longitudinal and comparative studies could trace how diasporic solidarity economies are themselves embedded cultural, political, and spatial contexts, illuminating the conditions under which they stabilize, scale, or fracture over time.

This research is relevant to policy and practical discussions about the effectiveness of DCOs and the third sector more generally in superdiverse places and cyberspace. Existing research demonstrates that DCOs fill systemic gaps in employment, mental health, youth leadership, and women's well-being. While my research uncovered the diverse programs and services offered by the three DCOs studied, there were clear gaps in their interventions. Given the need for effective intergenerational programs and services, a good next step for DCOs seeking to be more inclusive would be to genuinely listen to the voices and concerns of all generations without judgment. DCOs can give younger stakeholders genuine decision-making power to shape programs and services, rather than simply benefiting from their hours as volunteers or the need to build their resumes. The lack of long-term vision and engagement dissuades young people and compels them to create their own DCOs because they are dissatisfied with tokenism.

There is also a glaring gap in the mandates, services, and programs of the DCOs studied here. None provided housing-related services. It is partly due to the prohibitively high cost of housing interventions and the complexity of housing policies. The absence of housing services, or even visible advocacy around housing policies, is likely the result of the funding received by the three studied DCOs, as well as the need to focus on a limited set of issues within their scope and control due to constrained resources and capacity. Housing is not one of the priority areas for which the

studied DCOs can or have received funding to begin with. While DCOs play a critical role in addressing some of the social, cultural, and economic needs of the diaspora, their ability to address housing precarity is limited, even though census data underscore the significant challenges of housing affordability and suitability among Bangladeshi Canadians in Toronto.

In summary, this research makes a timely contribution to the fields of superdiversity, diaspora, and digitization studies. It underscores the importance of viewing diasporic civic engagement as treading multiple built and cyber spaces where innovative forms of social interaction, economic practice, and resistance emerge. The findings highlight how racialized and low-income diaspora members within superdiverse urban centres, despite facing significant structural barriers related to settlement and integration, continue to shape civic engagement from the margins, demanding greater recognition, support, and solidarity.

Chapter 8: Appendices

Appendix: Interview Guide

Opening

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. We will be talking about the organization you are involved with, your role within the organization, some of the organization's current and planned online activities, some of the successes and challenges with digitization and cyberspace as well as the role of Toronto and the diversity here in shaping our civic organizations. It is meant to be a free-flowing and engaging discussion as we go along, I am interested in your thoughts, ideas and feelings about these topics. Feel free to come back to and clarify any questions as we go along. Do you have any additional questions before we begin?

Let's talk a bit about **your role within the organization**.

- a) What is your formal role and relationship with the organization?
- b) How did you get involved and how long have you been with this organization?
- c) What keeps you motivated in being involved with this organization?
- d) How have organizational activities and services changed in the time that you have been involved?

Let's talk some more about **the organization**.

- e) How would you describe the organization and its activities to a stranger?
- f) What socio-cultural and economic challenges facing migrant groups and diasporas, and their next generation, does this organization seek to address?
- g) What are some services and activities the organization is currently providing?
- h) What are some of the main goals of this organization?
- i) Are there other organizations similar and comparable to this one? What reasons in your opinion make them similar?

Let's move on to the **organization's online activities**

- j) Where is the organization present online?
- k) Why do you think the particular online platforms were chosen?
- l) How has the pandemic and its demands to go digital affected the organization, its activities and services? *Probe for specific examples of each effect.*
- m) How has the pandemic and its demands to go digital affected the work you do with this organization?
- n) What are the main advantages of online activities? What about the disadvantages of online activities?
- o) Are there specific services or activities that you think work better online than offline? *Probe for specific services and activities from my list if needed.*

I would like to learn a bit more about the impact of going digital **on the organization and your work within it.**

- p) How has going online changed the organization's activities and the ways the organization operates? *Probe for forms of membership, funding, volunteering, employment and/or outreach activities.*
- q) Who in the organization does the work required to set up an online presence e.g., building a website or opening a social media account? *Probe for other information beyond an individual name.*
- r) Who in the organization is responsible for maintaining online presences e.g., updating social media posts regularly?
- s) Who usually makes the decisions on which activities go online and delegating the responsibilities of maintaining an online presence?
- t) What specific knowledge and skillsets are required for your organization to successfully go digital?
- u) How does the organization usually find people with the technical skills to assist with going digital? *Probe for advantages and disadvantages of this approach.*
- v) What tools and resources would help enhance the organization's access to the technical skills and people required?
- w) How has having to conduct tasks digitally been for you personally? What technology-related challenges you have experienced? What about technology-related successes?
- x) In the future, which activities and services do you think will remain online? Why will these activities and services stay online?

Now let's talk a little bit about the idea of **diversity and civic organizations across the GTA**

- y) What factors motivated you to get involved with an organization like this in the first place? *Probe for experiences and personal motivators.*
- z) What are some built spaces in the city and neighborhoods, for example, community centres, where organizational activities were conducted before going online?
- aa) Going forward, do you think these offline spaces be less used or used in different ways by organizations like yours?
- bb) In your view, what are some key present challenges facing migrant-led and diasporic organizations in Toronto?
- cc) Does your organization actively collaborate with other civic organizations in Toronto and beyond? What are some of the main partnerships that have happened? *Probe about the history; time frame, initial reasons and length of key partnerships.*

Closing

Once again thank you for your time and effort. This has been very insightful. Your copy of the informed consent has my contact information, feel free to reach out any time in the future. As promised, an electronic gift card will be emailed out to you in the next few days and you will

hear from me in the coming months once the research is complete and the findings are made public.

Appendix: DCOs List

Name	Year of Founding/ Incorporation	Vision	Activities	Online Platforms	Focus Demographics Served
Bangladeshi Canadian Community Services (BCS)	2001	Helping people help themselves	Settlement counselling, referrals to other community organizations, senior recreational program, youth afterschool, cultural events, educational workshops	Facebook Instagram Website Twitter	Youth, Children, Seniors, Newcomers
Bangladesh Centre and Community Services (BCCS)	2011	Empower South Asian newcomer communities living in Toronto to transition to social and economic integration in Canadian society.	Settlement services, youth council, women's support group, art therapy, language classes, health workshops, cultural events	Website Facebook	Working-age adults, Bangladeshis living along Danforth Avenue, Scarborough-Bangladeshi women, next-generation youth
Bangladeshi Canadian Canadian Bangladesh (BCCB)	2013	Journey of Hope	Online discussion forum, decentralized gatherings across Canada organized by local groups, many offshoots such as	Facebook	Bangladeshi Canadians-Bangladeshis interested in migrating to Canada

			BCCB Capital Markets and BCCB Matrimonial		
Bangladesh Canada Hindu Cultural Society (BCHCS)	1995	Pass on Hindu heritage to youth- Promote charity and work with other Canadian charities- Be a centre for socio- religious services	Religious and social centre in GTA, religious and cultural festivals, Sunday school for kids/youth, cultural arts classes, health promotion workshops	Website Facebook	Hindu Bangladeshi Canadians around the GTA
Bangladesh Information and Employment Services (BIES)	2011	A community where everybody lives with dignity and prosperity.	Information and referral services, employment services, settlement services, research and advocacy	Website Facebook	Working-age adults Newcomers
Durham Bangladeshi Canadian Community INC.	2016/2018	Serve Bangladeshi community in Durham	Cultural events, youth leadership, language classes, senior health and recreation	Website Facebook	Seniors and Youth, Durham region dwellers
Jalalabad Association of Toronto	Unclear	Unclear	Cultural events, social and recreational gatherings	Website Facebook	People from Jalalabad, Sylhet in Bangladesh
Just Our Stories Youth Association	2010/2020	Equal opportunity for all young people.	Youth leadership and volunteering, recreational	Website Facebook Instagram Discord Spotify	Racialized and immigrant youth

			events, podcasts and other digital production		
Sisters Across Oceans (SAO)	2017/2019	Supporting Bangladeshi womxn's growth, well-being, and representation in the diaspora and Bangladesh	Discussion circles, health and wellness sessions, online youth resources, local spotlights	Instagram Facebook Twitter LinkedIn	Bangladeshi and South Asian diaspora young women
South Asian Women's Rights Organization (SAWRO)	2005	To provide marginalized newcomer women with the services and supports they require to participate fully and equally in Canadian economic, civic, and social life.	Workplace skills trainings, girls leadership, girls dance club, advocacy for girls' and women's rights, cultural events	Website Facebook	South Asian women Working-age adults Next-generation young women
Youth Force United	Unclear	Unclear	Community hub, game nights, cricket team, counseling and academic advice	Website Facebook Instagram	Bangladeshi Canadian youth

Chapter 9: Works Cited List

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