

Studies of youth attachment to urban spaces are germane to the general policy issue of the absorption capacities of cities and states to shape the construction of identities and affiliations as part of urban and human development. They also provide insight on how urban neighbourhoods and landscapes are transformed, in theory and in practice, by immigrant youth.

Youth and Urban Places as Forms of Attachment: A Calgary Study

YVONNE HÉBERT
University of Calgary

JENNIFER WENSHYA LEE
National Taiwan University

There is currently an increasing interest in the notions of identity and place, especially as this pertains to youth and in their construction of self, culture and knowledge as they become citizens of pluralist democratic countries. Of critical interest to countries seeking to incorporate immigrants and refugees within their bounded but porous territories, are youth's processes of attachment and identification; these are central to recurring issues of social cohesion and shared values. The intersection between youth's emerging cultures and the social relations that constitute space, as well as their significance to citizenship, will be the focus of this article.

Cities, neighbourhoods and youth

Cities work by policing their territory, producing their people, constructing their citizens, defining their monuments and services, and constructing places of memory and commemoration (Osborne 2001). Neighbourhoods receive immigrants and introduce people to spaces, thereby modifying existing forms of neighbourhoods and public places and creating new ones (Appadurai 1996). Just as affinities with friends and families may be of variable strength and durability, so too are the ties to neighbourhoods. These help to give newcomers local bearings as they offer familiar and familiarizing streets, thoroughfares, shops, means of transportation, and institutions such as schools, hospitals, courts, and places of worship. Moreover,

conceptualizations of culture have changed from roots to routes, as posited by Massey (1998), so that young people's roots/routes in urban settings assume a considerable importance for integration.

While public controversies, according to several Australian studies, tend to centre on youth activities in public spaces, the fact remains that the primary place of social interaction for youth is in the private setting of the home. Youth in Melbourne spend most of their time at home or at a friend's place (White et al. 1997, as cited in White and Wyn 2004). For youth in Melton, the criteria that make a place youth-friendly or unfriendly include: type of people, acceptance, friendly people, environment, good entertainment, no violence or threats to safety, and cheap food and drinks. Unfriendly places were characterized by bad service and location, being treated badly by staff, fights and feeling unsafe, drugs and alcohol, police presence, and being alone as a teenager in such a place (Wooden 1997). Although neighbourhood ties and allegiances can co-exist with racist practices and views, shared residence and locality are foundational to the establishment and maintenance of interethnic friendships and street territoriality (Hewitt 1986, Wulff 1995).

Calgary, methodology and participants

Calgary is situated on a vast, oil-rich prairie near the foothills east of the Rocky Mountains. The

city's population is rapidly growing and was established by the 2006 Census at 988,193, a significant increase of 12.4% over the previous census, when compared to the 5.4% increase of the Canadian population for that same time period. The city is divided into four quadrants: Northwest (NW), Northeast (NE), Southwest (SW) and Southeast (SE) – all including a mix of residential types – in addition to the downtown area. Generally speaking, the NW and SW quadrants are the more affluent areas of the city whereas the two eastern quadrants offer the highest concentration of heterogeneity.

Three hundred and ninety students enrolled in 11 senior high schools as well as one heritage language Saturday school participated in a study on the preferential use of urban spaces, involving an urban mapping exercise with 14 follow-up interviews.¹ Participants were asked to provide the name of their neighbourhood, the length of residence there; then, for each quadrant and beyond city limits, to identify their two preferred places and to provide written reasons for their preference, on each of five city maps of reduced scale.²

At the time of data collection, the majority of the participating students (74.1%) were in Grade 11, 20% of students were in Grade 12, with the remainder in Grade 10. One hundred sixteen (29.7%) were first generation immigrants, whereas 105 (26.9%) were second generation immigrants; the remainder were native-born.³ Of the 390 youth, 41.3% were male and 58.7% were female. In response to a query about their ancestry,⁴ participants specified their ethnic

backgrounds as being 20.8% East/Southeast Asian, 11.5% British, 10% Continental European, 5.6% Canadian, 9% Arab/West/South Asian, 4.1% Latin American, and 13.6% reporting multiple origins. Nearly 19% of participants did not indicate their ethnicity.

Parents of participants living in the NW quadrant have a much higher level of educational achievement than in other quadrants. In the NW, 73.7% of the fathers have one or more university degrees, as compared to 27.2% in the NE and 33.3% in the SE, where the percentage of parents who have completed high school is the highest. The educational levels of participants' mothers show a similar pattern.

Malls are the most preferred urban places

The top six choices of places in Calgary that are preferred by participants are shopping areas, homes, sports facilities, institutional and non-institutional meeting places, and the outdoors (nature), all of which are spaces that are specific or friendly to youth.⁵ The majority of participants who explore the downtown area and the SW quadrant are drawn to the large shopping malls that predominate in these Calgary areas; however, participants who explore the SE area have a different pattern of preferred places, and are drawn to homes more than they are to malls, as shown in Table 2.

¹ The data discussed in this paper are drawn from the *Identity Formation of Immigrant Youth: Strategic Competence* project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Multiculturalism Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Prairie Metropolis Centre, 1998-2001 (Yvonne Hébert, principal investigator). Research assistants were Wen-shya Jennifer Lee, who coded and analyzed the statistical data, and Christine Racicot, Chiara Berti and Xiaohong Shirley Sun who, along with Wen-shya Jennifer Lee, interviewed participants. A colleague, Jim Frideres, helped with some statistical analyses.

² All quotations in this paper make use of a case number or a pseudonym (code name), the latter voluntarily selected by the youth themselves upon completion of the questionnaire, followed by markers for gender, school, grade, age, and immigrant origins.

³ The "first generation" category includes youth and their parents, all born in a country other than Canada, while the "second generation" category includes, for this analysis, youth born in Canada who have one or both parents of immigrant origin. The "youth of non-immigrant origin" category refers to those youth and parents who were born in Canada.

⁴ Grouped to facilitate the statistical analysis of aggregated data, the categories of ethnicity used in this analysis include the following groupings. The East/Southeast Asian category includes, for example, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Cambodian, Vietnamese and Indonesian groups of origin. The British category includes English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh groups. The Continental European category includes, for example, Austrian, Dutch, German, Swiss, French, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian groups of origin. The Canadian category includes Québécois, Acadians, French-Canadians and those who self-report Canadian as their ethnicity. The Arab/West/South Asian category includes Egyptian, Iraqi, Lebanese, Moroccan, Palestinian, Arab, Afghan, Iranian, Turkish, Persian, Bengali, Punjabi, Bangladeshi, East Indian and Kashmiri groups of origin. The Latin American category includes Chilean, Guatemalan, Hispanic, Salvadorean and Venezuelan, among others.

⁵ Shopping areas include malls, strip malls, as well as small neighbourhood shops. Sports facilities include playing fields, courts, rinks, leisure centres, YMCA, and parks if used for sports. Home includes the adolescent's home, a friend's, boy/girlfriend's home, a relative's home, and a private teacher's home (e.g., music lessons). Institutional meeting places include youth and community centres, school/university campus, and churches. Non-institutional meeting places include arcades, pool, bowling clubs, and restaurants. The outdoors (nature) includes public parks, off-leash areas, waterways, beaches and forests.

TABLE 1

Generation of immigration by quadrant of residence in Calgary (N=379)

	Northwest	Northeast	Southwest	Southeast
First generation youth	24.5%	32.6%	44.4%	42.5%
Second generation youth	26.9%	27.4%	27.8%	32.5%
Youth of non-immigrant origins	48.6%	40.0%	27.8%	25.0%
Total	(208)	(95)	(36)	(40)

$\chi^2 = 13.1; p < .05$

TABLE 2

Exploration of city quadrants by most preferred types of urban places (N=360)

	Shopping malls	Home	Sports facilities	Institutional meeting places	Non-institutional meeting places	Outdoors (nature)
Downtown	72.2%	2.2%	6.9%	3.3%	4.1%	4.1%
Northwest	40.6%	18.4%	9.8%	9.5%	–	8.4%
Northeast	46.2%	16.1%	12.4%	–	6.8%	–
Southwest	52.7%	10.3%	16.4%	5.5%	–	4.1%
Southeast	27.1%	30.5%	15.3%	–	6.8%	11.9%

Thus, youth living in three quadrants (NW, NE and SW) – 49.2% of whom are of non-immigrant origins – prefer malls over homes, whereas youth in the SE quadrant, 75% of whom are of immigrant origin, have a greater preference for homes, probably due to strong cultural influences and familial attachments.

In response to the three questions for each of two preferred locations on the urban mapping exercise (Why do you go to this place? What is it that you like there? Why do you prefer this place?), a participant wrote about the Eau Claire market area near the Bow River in the SW quadrant:

To play games and the arcades and to walk around and shop...All of our friends enjoy playing games and shopping; also to get away from the older Lebanese people, because they will talk if you're out late. (Tony Montana, #287, F, School J, gr. 11, age 17, Lebanese, self and father born in Lebanon, mother born in Syria, 12 yrs in Canada)

Follow-up interviews provided an additional explanation to this strong preference for home:

I like being home...My sister's there, my younger sister, we talk, you know, about the day when each other has a problem, just for fun. I like home, I don't like going to the mall, hanging out, you know. I don't go to a nightclub, anything like that, it's just home, a place because it's familiar...Home is called a place I like... (Il Trumpetor, #350, F, School M,

gr. 12, age 17, British/American/Irish ethnicity, born in Canada, father born in U.K., mother born in U.S., 17 yrs in Canada)

Roots are important...

Analyses of the possible influence of the educational level of parents, generation of immigration, and gender revealed no statistically significant differences with regard to the type and nature of urban exploration by participants. Ethnicity, however, intersects in interesting ways with participants' exploration of and attachment to urban spaces in Calgary. Among the Arab/West/South Asian youth, the preference for their home quadrant is influenced by strong family and ethnocultural attachments. This grouping and the British are the only ones who chose sports facilities among the most frequently chosen places within their home quadrant.

The frequency of the top three reasons given by the East/Southeast Asian adolescents for their attachment to the Downtown quadrant are, in order of importance, functionality (49.1%), appreciation (19.8%), and friends (12.8%). The top three reasons cited by Arab/West/South Asians are functionality (52.1%), appreciation (18.8%) and friends (10.4%), whereas those provided by Canadian adolescents are functionality (50.8%) and appreciation (29.2%). Illustrating these patterns, a participant provides reasons linked to functionality, appreciation, and family:

I go to the NE Sportsplex to play soccer and use the big gym. My uncle's team practices

TABLE 3

Youth's preferential exploration of Calgary and beyond by ethnic group

	Arab/West/ South Asian	Canadian	Latin American	East/Southeast Asian	British	European
Exploration in Calgary						
Without home quadrant	2.9%	0.0%	18.8%	10.3%	9.1%	2.6%
Only home quadrant	48.6%	23.8%	31.3%	11.5%	29.5%	21.1%
Downtown and other quadrants	34.3%	33.3%	37.5%	59.0%	38.6%	36.8%
Exploration outside Calgary	14.3%	42.9%	12.5%	19.2%	22.7%	39.5%
Total number of responses	(35)	(21)	(16)	(78)	(44)	(38)

* $\chi^2 = 50.8$; $p < .05$

there. My second choice is the Leisure Centre, to play B-Ball; there are always people to play with. (Big Bow Wow, #296, M, School J, gr. 11, age 16, Punjabi, self born in Canada, parents born in India, 16 yrs in Canada)

The location of Chinatown in downtown Calgary motivates a high level of exploration of the area among East/Southeast Asian adolescents, as illustrated by a teenager of Chinese origin:

I go to Chinatown to visit my friend. I can feel like I am close to Chinese people. (#318, M, School L, gr. 11, age 18, Chinese, self and parents born in China, 3 yrs in Canada, NW)

The Canadian and Continental European predilection for exploration outside Calgary is influenced by attachments to nature, including the land. A female reflects on the ubiquitous mall, in comparison with her strong attachment to the farm, a place imbued with profound mythical meaning:

Oh, yeah, the mall, you know, you lose your familiarity with it 'cause they are changing so much. Like, our mall, Northland Mall, it's losing, they're trying to gain older people, so older stores like Tan Jay, you know, that type of clothing. The farm, I would never stop, never stop loving that. It's a retreat; even if it changes, it will still be my heaven, I'll also have my sense of familiarity out there... I'm a cowgirl at heart, so to speak, I'm a country girl... (Evann Vaughn, #239, F, School L, gr. 11, age 16, Caucasian ethnicity, self and parents born in Canada, 16 yrs in Canada)

Routes are important...

What is perhaps most important is the general similarity of all groups in their style of exploring the social landscape, both within and outside the city limits:

I pretty much hang out at friends' house, or I hang out downtown, in the 17th Avenue area, or downtown in general, or I hang out at my house...Because, I mean, I'm not old enough to actually go out anywhere, so I pretty much just go downtown. I don't have a car. I can't get around that easily. I'm living in the middle of nowhere, which means that it takes me two hours to get down here by bus, so I usually don't bother, if I want to go somewhere, my parents are usually take me, providing that they agree that's it's an okay place to go... (Carla, #82, F, School S, gr. 12, age 17, Chinese, self and parents born in China, 10.5 yrs in Canada)

Participants clearly expressed an awareness of the importance of building place and memory in order to form significant local attachments as part of becoming a resident and citizen. For example:

When you live in a place, you feel you belong to it. That's why you start liking it, I guess. If you go far away from it, you would probably miss it...Time goes by, with places you have been to but not stayed in for long, or where you haven't done anything that you can remember forever, unless you have some kind of memory of it, special memory, like, maybe, pictures or something... I guess you would forget it if you didn't have any of that stuff. (#56, F, School Q, gr. 11, 16 yrs, Kashmiri, self and parents born in Kashmir, 3 yrs in Canada, NE)

Preferences are subject to change however, as explained by an East Asian respondent who is detaching from Chinatown:

It's not just because I don't like the people there, it's because most Eastern people go there and then they make me feel like it's a totally different place. They make the place isolated. I see less Canadian people there. It makes me

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feel like the place is more isolated. (#88, F, School L, gr. 12, age 19, Chinese, self and parents born in Taiwan, 6 yrs in Canada, NW)

In seeking to be more of a Canadian, this participant illustrated her desire to have multiple connections within and beyond her ethnic group, by somewhat distancing herself with places that are imbued with shared meaning of a powerful ethnocultural community.

Interpretations and conclusion

Unlike the Australian youth cited earlier, these Calgarian youth tend to prefer malls first and homes second, with the exception of the youth in the Southeast quadrant. This has considerable import in terms of public space and citizenship.

Historically, the notion of “public space” meant a street, a common area, a square or a public park. The advent of the shopping mall challenged this idea, as malls are carefully tailored environments, shaped for shopping, entertainment and recreation, creating safe middle-class enclaves. There are at least two interpretations of what this changing notion of public space might mean. According to the first interpretation, the notion of public space in Calgary is being redefined to include intensely used spaces (Livesey and Down 2000). These include, for example, small fast food places and coffee houses, post-secondary park-like campuses, shopping centres, multiplex cinemas, and hybrid stores that serve as bookstore, library and café. The attraction of such small indoor spaces is heightened by the cold climate, especially during severe Canadian winters. The second interpretation argues that a redefinition of intensely used public spaces blurs the distinction between spaces that are conditionally open to the public, such as malls, churches and coffee houses versus those that are unconditionally open to the public, like Calgary’s Olympic Plaza in the downtown area (Maas 2002). For example, a destitute beggar in ragged, odorous clothes would soon be dispatched from Holt Renfrew or Starbucks, but has the right to sit in a public space such as Prince’s Island in the downtown area.

Given the strong tendency of the youth who participated in this study to head downtown and to malls, it is clear that these youth have understood the appeal of these spaces, assigning them aspects of vitality as unconditional public spaces. These become meaningful places of attachment by a process of localization. Moreover, our findings support Appadurai’s theories of the production of locality as essential to identity formation, social cohesion and citizenship.

Studies of youth attachment to urban spaces are germane to the general policy issue of the absorption capacities of cities and states to shape the construction of identities and affiliations as part of urban and human development. They also provide insight on how urban neighbourhoods and landscapes are transformed, in theory and in practice, by immigrant youth. The preponderance of places of consumption in a neo-market economy, however, is worrisome in terms of citizenship, as it suggests that shopping replaces voting and civic engagement. As Ken Osborne predicted in 1997, the consumer-citizen would soon be here.

The nature of these connections, ethnically conditioned for youth of immigrant origins, calls into question what it means to be Canadian. A majority of new Canadians settle in large urban centres and their fundamental connections to this country are established through their ties to their city of residence. According to our analysis, the nature of citizen attachments is shifting towards a greater focus on the production of urban localities with transnational attachments that vary over time and space. This plurilocality allows for ambiguity in understanding integration as inclusion, cohesion and federation (Bauböck 2001). Since the construction of citizens occurs in an imagined community (Anderson 1991), the imagination must move beyond abstract and legal conceptions of what it means to be a Canadian, to encompass flexible conceptions and practices of belonging based on significant social relations within meaningful places. But whither is the consumer-citizen?

About the authors

YVONNE HÉBERT is Professor at the Faculty of Education of the University of Calgary. She is interested in citizenship, cultural issues and minority studies in education. Her books include *Negotiating Transcultural Lives: Belongings and Social Capital Among Youth in Comparative Perspective* (co-edited with D. Hoerder and I. Schmitt) and *Citizenship in Transformation in Canada*.

JENNIFER WENSHYA LEE is Assistant Director at the Center for Teaching and Learning Development, National Taiwan University. She received postdoctoral and doctoral research bursaries from the Chian Ching-Kuo (CCK) Foundation, both held at the University of Calgary. She has recently published in the *International Journal of Citizenship Teaching and Learning*, and the *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*.

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