

Ameeriar, Lalaie

*Downwardly global:*

*women, work, and citizenship in the Pakistani diaspora.*

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In Canada, the underemployment and unemployment of foreign-trained professionals is a recognised social problem. This ethnographic and theoretically informed study demonstrates that this is as much a problem for immigrant women as it is for men, even though the stereotypical immigrant in Canada is the Indian taxi-driver who was a doctor back home. In her fieldwork for *Downwardly global*, Lalaie Ameeriar met many Pakistan-trained professional women - engineers, lawyers, doctors, pharmacists - whose immigration had been favoured by the Canadian system under the skilled worker category but who were working in temporary, precarious 'survival jobs' (p.6), such as selling fast-food at a theme park.

What went wrong? The usual explanation is bureaucratic failure to match supply and demand. Ameeriar instead locates Pakistani immigrant women's downward mobility within Canada's racist cultural practices, which operate under the guise of multicultural tolerance. Since Canada's immigration policies are usually considered exemplarily liberal and tolerant in comparison with those of United States and many European countries, Ameeriar's important, critical examination of multiculturalism deserves setting out.

On arriving in Canada, foreign-trained professionals find their qualifications are unrecognised but that they can attend 'workforce trainings' offered by state-funded settlement agencies. Over a hundred of these agencies are located in Toronto, where Ameeriar conducted her fieldwork. Her observations show that in these sessions,

foreign-trained professionals are neither placed in work nor taught professional skills, but are instructed in how to manage their appearance and smells in ways acceptable to Canadian employers: "Change your name if it's hard to pronounce" and "Don't wear a hijab" (p.1)..."Always dress in plain clothes and in plain colours" (p.25)..."Always be sure to shower first...[don't] smell like Indian food...present yourself as clean and professional"(p.85). Individual women must thus render their Pakistani-ness undetectable to the noses, ears, or eyes of potential employers; by this logic, a foreign-trained professional woman's failure to obtain work must be the result of her assumed and untamed cultural attributes, rather than of discriminatory employment practices.

Nursing is the apparent exception because foreign-trained nurses do re-enter their profession without extensive retraining. Yet, unlike the traditionally masculine domains of engineering, architecture, and medicine, nursing is women's work. Workforce trainings for nurses focus on techniques for self-managing emotions to fit the model of the docile female carer - cultivating patience, walking away, breathing deeply, or singing rather than swearing or shouting; foreign-trained nurses must mould their affective responses to stressful situations to conform to the expectations of an idealised, global female worker.

These processes represent the flip side of Canada's celebrated multiculturalism, which entails a flattened and reified notion of cultural difference, exemplified in the state's use of the label South Asian as a blanket term for people from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal etc. The mostly thirty-something Pakistani Canadian professionals in Ameeriar's study reject this label, but nonetheless engage with it strategically at the numerous cultural festivals that take place in Toronto where South Asian clothing, jewellery, dance, music, and food become sensually attractive,

colourful and appetizing commodities. Here, as citizens of the multicultural state, women should display the 'Otherness' that must be hidden at work.

Of interest to scholars of citizenship and governance, globalisation and neoliberalism, gender and embodiment, multiculturalism and race, this book is a rich read for its deployment of analytical concepts and the creation of two new ones: pedagogies of affect and sanitized sensorium. Cultural festivals display inclusion in terms of multicultural politics, but 'emerge as a type of sensorium in which subjects are supposed to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate moments to display their Otherness' (p.96). Also, as this book depressingly shows, women's appropriate navigation of these contexts is no guarantee of their economic integration and security because the overall trend is downwards in the likelihood of foreign-trained professionals finding secure, skilled work.

The penultimate chapter, 'The catastrophic present', recounts personal experiences of living in precarity from the perspectives of seven of Ameeriar's interlocutors, two of whom were earlier migrants to Toronto, born in pre-partition India, whom Ameeriar met at an organisation for Muslim seniors. These narratives were for me a particularly engaging part of the book, adding nuance, humour, and human dignity to a situation to which women are resigned; yet they persevere in the hope of a better life, if not for themselves, then for their children. Ameeriar views these hopes as a form of 'cruel optimism' (Lauren Berlant 2011) - an attachment to an unachievable fantasy of a better life marked by upward mobility, job security, social equality, and durable intimacy - by means of which her interlocutors come to terms with their current circumstances.

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