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Jason Hackworth and Josephine Rekers

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Executive Summary

Urban theory has historically viewed ethnic commercial strips as a more-or-less organic extension of nearby ethnic residential enclaves. Although this is undoubtedly a useful way to describe such commercial spaces in many cities, this paper argues that some of these areas function as a branding mechanism (intended or not) to produce nearby residential gentrification. Certain forms of ethnic identity attract affluent professionals looking for an alternative to suburban life. Some neighbourhood institutions have recognized this attraction and begun to manufacture a saleable form of ethnicity to tourists and prospective residents alike.

This paper explores the influence of ethnic packaging on the process of gentrification in Toronto, using the examples of four ethnically defined business improvement areas (BIAs) – Little Italy, Greektown on the Danforth, Corso Italia, and the Gerrard India Bazaar. These institutions actively manage and sell an ethnic identity that is increasingly at odds with nearby residential patterns. The commercial areas of these neighbourhoods now function less as areas of identification for the stated group, and more as ways to market each neighbourhood's residential real estate markets. In each case, the population of the stated group is declining, while efforts to market each neighbourhood as a niche to newcomers are increasing.

Though no single pattern has resulted from these efforts, we found that packaged ethnicity is beginning to facilitate gentrification in those places already predisposed to the process. BIA officials are conscious of this connection and are actively using it to improve resources for their organization and their neighbourhood. This form of branding, and its connection to real estate valuation, has implications for gentrification theory and the study of urban landscapes.

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1. Introduction

It has been more than a decade since Canada's main daily newspaper, *The Globe and Mail* (1992), deemed Toronto's Little Italy a geographical case of mistaken identity. As the article correctly pointed out, the neighbourhood was only 10 percent Italian at the time, if measured by mother tongue, and even less Italian, if measured by place of birth or language spoken at home. Most Italians had moved to the suburbs by the 1980s, and the name was little more than a relic – one that irked some of the mostly, though not entirely, Portuguese-speaking population. The label "Little Italy" appeared fated for an eventual change to something more appropriate.

In the 13 years since this article was written, however, no serious attempt has been made to change the name, though even more of its former Italian residents have moved to other parts of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and the neighbourhood is now more Portuguese, Chinese, and Vietnamese than Italian by almost any measure. In fact, the neighbourhood's commercial identity has become *more* Italian over the past decade. The City recently installed thematic street signs, complete with the Italian flag, and invested millions in a streetscape improvement plan. Thousands of Torontonians (some Italian, many not) flock to the neighbourhood every week to dine in one of its many Italian restaurants.

What could account for the dissonance between residential and commercial identities in Little Italy and other similar neighbourhoods? Is there a connection between the commercially manufactured nature of ethnicity in places like Little Italy, and the parallel increase in value of nearby real estate markets? This paper explores this connection through the experience of four ethnically defined business improvement areas and their surrounding neighbourhoods in Toronto. We contend that ethnicity is now sometimes commodified in a way that challenges both explanatory models of gentrification, and traditional notions of ethnic landscapes in urban theory.

2. “Culture” and “Economics” in Gentrification

No other dualism has affected the course of urban studies during the past 15 years more than the one posed by culture and economics (Barnes, 2003; Lees, 2002; Ley, 1996; Mitchell, 1993 and 1999; Walker, 1997). Cultural studies have deeply influenced the methodological approaches and subject matter of the discipline, not only by challenging the emphasis on quantitative methods, but also (perhaps more importantly) by challenging the economism of past urban studies (Barnes, 2003; Mitchell, 1999; Walker, 1997). The latter included not only mainstream economics but also radical political economy that deployed a different, though sometimes equally economic (and often universalistic) epistemology in the study of cities. But this approach began to change in the 1980s and 1990s, as a recognition of the importance and constitutive power of culture began to take hold.

Central to this shift has been the recognition of culture as a meaningful – rather than structurally residual – factor in the production of urban spaces. Culture is seen as a constitutive feature by itself, and a spate of urban studies have explored the role of culture in the production of cities during the past decade (see Mitchell, 1999, for a review of these articles).

But as Mitchell (1993) was quick to point out over a decade ago, it is not a matter of simply adding culture as an extra autonomous variable in the study of cities. Treating culture as an explanatory variable in the production of landscapes can sometimes downplay the ways in which culture is deliberately produced by economic interests to increase the circulation of capital.

Mitchell explored how the ethos of multiculturalism had been deployed and carefully managed by wealthy Hong Kong real estate interests to justify the hyper-valuation of real estate markets in Vancouver, British Columbia. Her article suggested that it is important not to assume that culture is either completely organic or completely autonomous in the production of urban landscapes.

This paper explores the relationship between produced culture and economics in the gentrification of ethnically defined inner-city neighbourhoods. Gentrification – the reinvestment in urban space for the use of an affluent clientele – has been one of the most divisive testing grounds for studying the relative influence of culture and economics on the construction of landscapes (Barnes, 2003). So divisive has this dualism been that one geographer famously

described the opposing schools as “teams,” each with its own “quarterback” (van Weesep, 1994).

Generally speaking, the “culture school” saw gentrification as a spatial expression of a critical class politics (Ley, 1996; Caufield, 1994), built on the notion of consumer dominance, if not sovereignty. According to this view, neighbourhoods gentrify primarily because tastes and preferences have changed. That is, an increasingly large segment of society rejected the suburbs – because of the distance to work, the isolation, the lack of diversity – in favour of inner-city living (Laska and Spain, 1980; Ley, 1986; Mills, 1988). There is considerable internal diversity within this school, but cultural humanism has been the most dominant influence. According to the humanist perspective, human beings, even within a powerful capitalist system, are endowed with a certain degree of decision-making autonomy, and these decisions are not easily predictable according to simple economic calculus (Ley, 1996).

The “economics school,” conversely, focuses on the production side of gentrification. It suggests that the necessary condition for gentrification to occur is the availability of inexpensive real estate. The key explanatory model of this school of thought is the rent gap theory of Smith (1979a and 1996; Badcock, 1989 and 1995; Clark, 1995). Many neighbourhoods in the advanced capitalist world experienced massive disinvestment in inner-city real estate markets during the mid-twentieth century. One result of this disinvestment was the decline in potential rent that could be garnered for a given plot of land in the inner city. Potential rent is a complicated concept that is in part a function of distance to the central business district; it is casually explained as the value of land at its “highest and best use.”

According to this school of thought, the primary explanation for the gentrification of certain cities lies in the concentration of available properties in areas where the actual rent is far below potential rent. That is, the supply and concentration of undervalued inner-city properties is the necessary (though not sufficient) condition for gentrification to occur. Though led in some cities by individual owner-occupiers in search of inexpensive housing, much of the expansion of gentrification has been facilitated by housing producers, primarily developers, but also the state (Smith, 1979b; Hackworth and Smith, 2001). According to this line of thought, gentrification is less an organic shift in preferences than a produced one. The roots of this school lie primarily in Marxian economics (Smith, 1982).

The recession of the early 1990s and its expansionary aftermath were key influences on the development of this literature, but largely perpetuated the dualism between economics and culture. Bourne (1993a and 1993b) in particular was quick to point out that the recession of inner-city real estate markets during the downturn was not only a sign of gentrification’s demise, but also a validation of the demand-side viewpoint. That is, the downturn was in part the result of people choosing to live in the suburbs after the recession as families aged, leaving a comparatively small demographic cohort to consume housing in gentrified neighbourhoods.

Those on the “economics” side of this dualism felt otherwise. Smith (1996) went so far as to suggest that “It may not be too much of an exaggeration to surmise that proclaiming the end of gentrification today may be akin to anticipating the end of suburbanization in 1933” (Smith 1996, p. 230). The post-recession period seemed to vindicate Smith, and the “economics

school” as gentrification re-emerged in most major cities in the late 1990s (Hackworth 2001 and 2002).

In an article about the real estate boom that followed the recession, Smith and Defilippis (1999) argued that the return of gentrification represents nothing less than a “reassertion of economics over culture.” The culture-economics dualism, particularly, though not exclusively, in urban geography, appeared to be alive and well.

In response to what appeared to be the further polarization of this debate, several geographers began to call for a rapprochement of cultural and economic explanations (van Weesep, 1994; Lees, 1994). Some writers criticized one side or the other for being too doctrinaire (Bourassa, 1993; Hamnett, 1991), noting, for example, that “economics” is a misleading label to be applied to only one side of the debate, as the cultural “team” is deeply economic in its thinking too. As Smith (1987) and Ley (1987), the “quarterbacks” of the two teams, had argued years before, gentrification research should draw out *both* the cultural and economic factors influencing the production of such landscapes (see also Hamnett, 1991; Smith, 1992).

Smith (1996) further suggested that Zukin’s 1982 classic *Loft Living* is a synthetic model worth following. Lees (1994) even characterized the two camps as being “two sides of the same coin” rather than polar opposites, arguing that both explanations were of equal importance.

This article takes a slightly different look at the culture-economics dualism. Using examples of efforts in Toronto to package ethnicity for consumption by tourists and gentrifiers, we will argue that the prevailing dualism ignores the ways in which ethnic culture can be produced to sell real estate. That is, the dualism diverts attention from the ways in which cultural amenities – so important to “cultural” explanations – are strategically produced, rather than organically chosen by autonomous consumers.

Art, in particular, has already been shown to have a particularly important role in the gentrification of neighbourhoods, but “art communities” are often produced by developers trying to increase the value of their real estate, rather than “chosen” by consumers in search of a non-suburban lifestyle (Zukin, 1982; Deutsche and Ryan, 1984; Deutsche, 1996; Hackworth, 2002).

Comparatively little has been written, however, about how ethnic commercial spaces are produced as a way to increase the value of real estate markets (notable exceptions are Mitchell, 2000; Mele, 2000; and Anderson, 1987). More often than not, ethnic commercial spaces are framed as a more-or-less organic expression of immigrant culture on the landscape. This article suggests that a process emerging in Toronto could improve not only our understanding of ethnic landscapes but also counter the resilient culture-economics dualism that has affected urban studies – particularly the study of gentrification.

3. Method

This study relies on an examination of four neighbourhoods in the City of Toronto: Little Italy, Corso Italia, Greektown on the Danforth, and Gerrard India Bazaar (see Figure 1). These neighbourhoods were chosen because they are the only four Business Improvement Areas (BIAs)¹ in Toronto that explicitly refer to an ethnic identity in their title. We wanted to explore neighbourhood change in locations where ethnic identity was being actively managed. Of course, these are not the only four neighbourhoods in Toronto where an ethnic identity is managed and reproduced by capitalist institutions, but the only ones where a legal Business Improvement Area has been established to serve in this capacity.

While the four neighbourhoods offer an opportunity for comparison based on this attribute, they are also sufficiently different to provide meaningful contrast. Little Italy and Greektown represent, by far, the most commodified forms of ethnicity, and are the most gentrified, while Corso Italia and India Bazaar appear to be more complicated combinations of commodified culture and traditional landscapes produced and consumed by local residents.

We explore four main issues through these case studies. First, we tried to determine whether or not the cultural identity expressed and reproduced by the Business Improvement Area reflects or contrasts with the current demography of the surrounding neighbourhood. We determined this using census data and historical business name data.

Second, we tried to evaluate the extent to which real estate value was increasing or decreasing relative to the rest of the census metropolitan area (CMA), using basic housing data.

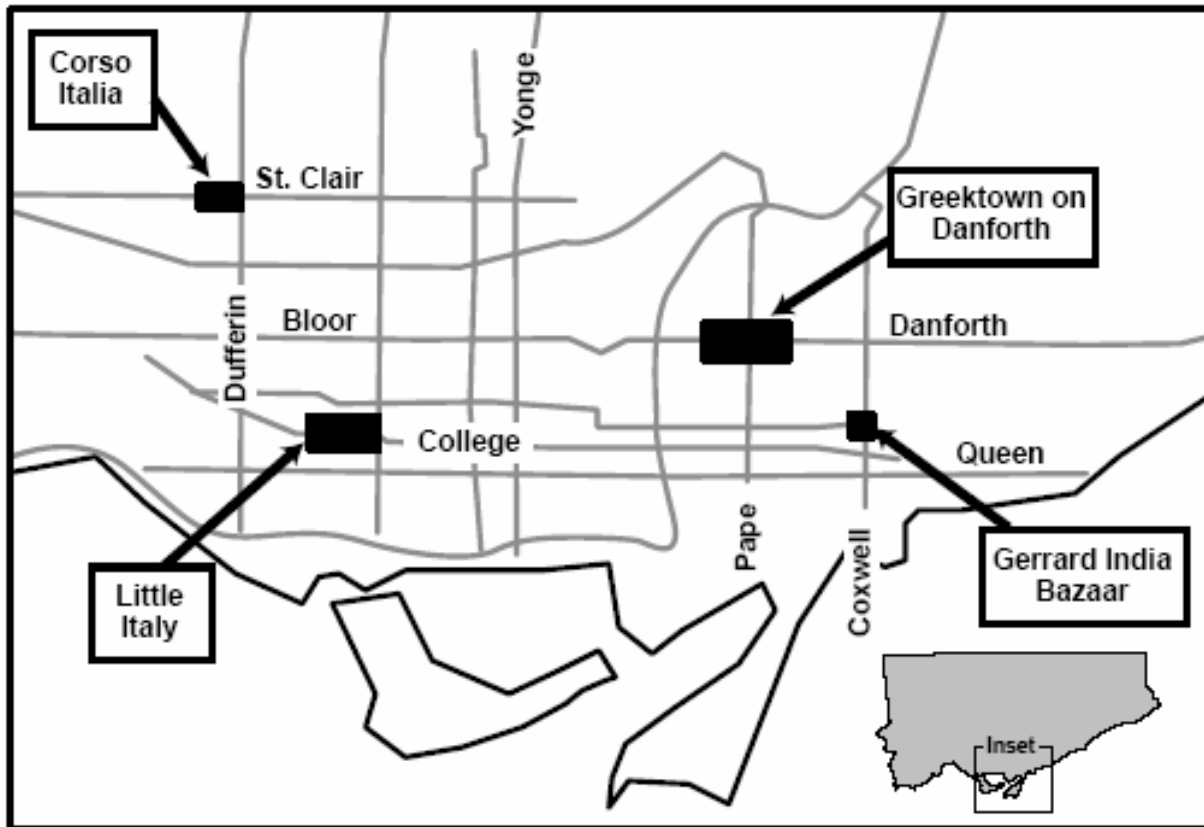
Third, we tried to establish whether there was a connection between the produced identity and gentrification.

Fourth, we tried to understand this connection (where it exists) by interviewing residents, business owners, and BIA officials, and reviewing texts used to promote the neighbourhood.

1 BIAs are collections of property owners that agree to a self-taxation scheme used to provide services to a particular neighbourhood. There are currently 42 BIAs in the City of Toronto, representing 14,000 small businesses, whose property is valued at over \$4 billion (Enterprise Toronto, n.d.).

What follows is a brief, comparative discussion of our findings. The narratives of neighbourhood change are based mostly on census data, business-name analysis, and interviews, but are bolstered by second-hand journalistic accounts to demonstrate the importance of this issue to the local real estate press.

Figure 1: Ethnically Defined Business Improvement Areas in Toronto, Ontario



4. Four Case Studies

Little Italy

Little Italy is a commercially eclectic neighbourhood that runs from Bathurst Street to Ossington Avenue, transected by its main thoroughfare, College Street, just northwest of downtown Toronto (see Figure 2). If pressed to describe the neighbourhood with just one adjective, the local real estate press would likely settle on “hip.” Newspaper articles during the late 1990s and early 2000s extolled the neighbourhood’s trendiness (for example, George, 2002; Taylor, 2003). The popular magazine *Utne Reader* even characterized one of its main intersections (College and Clinton) as one of the five “hippest” places to be in North America in 1997 (Walljasper 1997). As one reporter for the *National Post* (George, 2002, p. TO9) wrote:

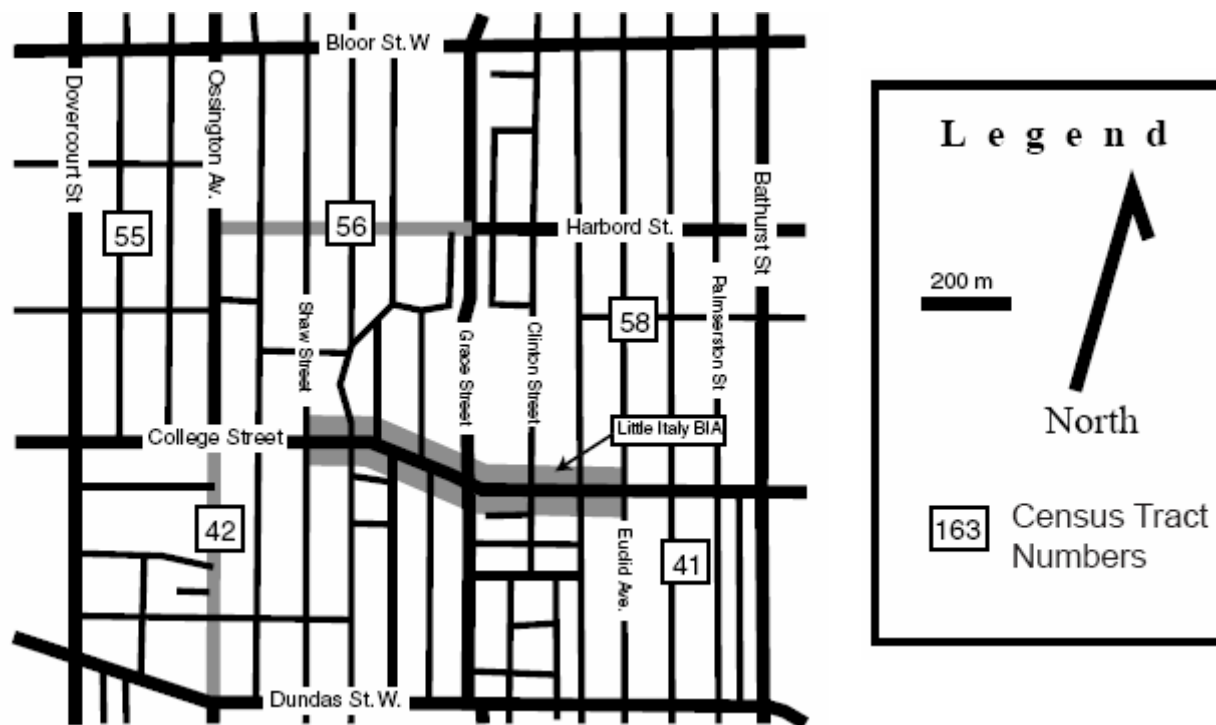
Like all living things, city neighbourhoods go through natural cycles. They’re born, they have growing pains and identity crises, they have a Golden Age, and then they settle into maturity with varying degrees of dignity. In Toronto, rarely is more than one neighbourhood at its peak at one time. In the ’60s, it was Yorkville; in the ’70s, Cabbagetown; in the ’80s, Queen West; and in the ’90s, it was Little Italy... Basically, it [the Golden Age] ends where gentrification begins.

But while it is no longer novel to identify the presence of gentrification in this neighbourhood, important questions remain about the connection between this process and Little Italy’s putative ethnic identity, and the ways that this identity is reproduced as a commodity.

Italians began moving into the neighbourhood in the early part of the twentieth century, replacing the Irish, and then Jewish communities in the western end of what was ominously referred to as “the Ward” (Zucchi, 1988). Within a few decades, the “Via Italia’s” commercial identity began to match its residential identity, with a spate of businesses designed to serve and owned by local Italian immigrants. The neighbourhood quickly became the demographic and symbolic centre of the Italian community of Toronto, if not all of Canada by mid-century.

This identity began to change, however, after the Second World War, when hundreds of Italian residents – suddenly less stigmatized by Canadian society – began moving to other parts of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), initially to St. Clair Avenue West, then to the outer suburbs of Woodbridge, Vaughan, and Mississauga. The exodus accelerated after 1970.

Figure 2: Little Italy neighbourhood map



In 1971, nearly a quarter of the neighbourhood was born in Italy, and more than a third considered themselves Italian or were native Italian speakers (see Table 1). By 2001, only 7.3 percent were born in Italy, and only 9.9 percent were native Italian speakers. The neighbourhood has become less demographically Italian, as Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese, and native Anglo-Canadian residents (now almost 50 percent of the population) now predominate in the area.

Table 1: Ethnic identification of the resident population in Little Italy, 1971-2001

Year	Total Population	Percent Immigrant	Percent Italian Ethnic Origin	Percent Italian Home Language	Percent Italian Mother Tongue	Percent Born in Italy
1971	33,840	62.8	35.8	29.4	33.7	23.9
1976	28,677	-	-	-	20.8	-
1981	25,233	65.1	21.2	14.7	16.9	12.8
1986	23,258	60.0	20.4	12.5	13.8	10.3
1991	23,198	55.2	17.0	9.0	10.6	-
1996	21,921	53.0	15.5	5.7	9.2	6.9
2001	20,746	49.0	16.5	5.8	9.9	7.3

Source: Canadian Census, 1971-2001

Little Italy consists of the following census tracts for the purposes of this study: 41, 42, 55, 56, 58.

The evaporation of Italian residential identity was paralleled by a similar, though much less rapid decline of Italian commercial identity in the neighbourhood during the same period (see Table 2). Of the roughly 154 businesses along College Street between Euclid and Shaw (the boundaries of the current Little Italy BIA), 44.8 percent openly identified with Italy, or the Italian language in their names in 1970.² By 2000, the percentage had dropped to 29.2 percent, while businesses with no clear ethnic identification became 64.9 percent of the total. Moreover, those Italian businesses that remain have been lambasted as “inauthentic” by the local press. As one reporter (Taylor, 2003, p. B01) put it:

Mainly what’s left is Little Italy the brand name, the trademark, the logo, the ethnic “swoosh.” Very little Italy.

Table 2: Ethnic identification of businesses in Little Italy, 1970-2000

Year	Total Businesses	Clear Italian Identification	Clear Portuguese Identification	Other Ethnic Identification	No Clear Ethnic Identification
1970	154	44.8	0.6	2.6	51.9
1980	145	35.9	4.8	0.7	58.6
1990	145	25.5	8.3	3.4	62.8
2000	154	29.2	3.2	2.6	64.9

Source: Might’s Criss Cross Directory

Note: Only the businesses within the Little Italy BIA along College Street are included here.

The cultural critique is partially supported by the change in business composition in the neighbourhood, which is now oriented to tourists and young professionals (see Table 3). Trendy restaurants are in; family bodegas and traditional coffee shops are apparently out. In 1970, only 9.6 percent of the businesses in Little Italy were restaurants, while 21 percent were grocery stores. By 2000, restaurants dominated at 31.2 percent – the largest single category – while grocery and clothing stores dropped to 10.9 and 13 percent respectively. Given the rise in the number of restaurants, it is no wonder that realtors have already begun to deem it “the restaurant district” (Taylor, 2003).

Table 3: Business type changes in Little Italy, 1970-2000

Year	Total Businesses	Restaurants	Grocery/Food Stores	Medical	Apparel	Other/Non-identifiable
1970	154	9.6	21.0	3.8	22.9	42.7
1980	145	9.2	16.2	4.2	26.1	44.3
1990	145	15.9	12.4	6.2	23.5	42.0
2000	154	31.2	10.9	8.7	13.0	36.2

Source: Might’s Criss Cross Directory

Note: Only the businesses within the Little Italy BIA along College Street are included here.

2 This was measured by using the Might’s Street Directory for the City of Toronto for 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000. Business names were judged on their ethnic content and then recorded in Table 2. For example, for Little Italy, all business names that used some version of the word *Italy*, or an Italian word, or a reference to the country or culture of Italy, were counted as having an “Italian identification.”

Given the waning residential and “authentic” commercial Italian identity, it is somewhat curious that the area’s business owners chose to name their BIA “Little Italy” in 1985. At that point, the neighbourhood’s Italian identity – whether measured commercially or residentially – was clearly ebbing. But the label was viewed as an attractive feature for local businesses, which began a self-taxing scheme designed to support an Italian-themed commercial district.

Initially, their efforts were aimed at getting suburban Italians to return on the weekends, but they soon expanded their efforts to appeal to non-Italians as well. Their activities reproduced Italian culture, both subtly, in the form of streetscape improvements to maintain a “café culture,” and less subtly, in the form of the annual “Taste of Italy” festival or the garish “Little Italy” street signs sprinkled throughout the neighbourhood (Little Italy BIA, 2004).

The BIA is still managed from the headquarters of the city’s Italian-dominated³ CHIN-FM radio station – whose founder, Johnny Lombardi, used the station as a platform in the 1950s and 1960s to promote Italian culture in Canada, and Italian businesses (including his own) in Little Italy.

But if the legitimacy of the neighbourhood’s label and carefully manicured identity is suspect, the success of its niche for real estate interests is clear. The neighbourhood’s commercial strip is among the trendiest in Toronto, and its real estate market has transformed dramatically during the past 30 years (Table 4).

Table 4: Housing and income changes in Little Italy, 1971-2001

Year	Mean Dwelling Value (MDV)	MDV as Percent of CMA	Mean Gross Rent (MGR)	MGR as Percent of CMA	Mean Household Income (MHI)	MHI as Percent of CMA
1971	\$31,517	97.3	\$111	73.7	\$9,307	78.0
1976	-	-	-	-	-	-
1981	\$99,544	87.1	\$262	72.0	\$23,119	80.4
1986	\$139,456	98.0	\$454	85.3	\$33,934	78.9
1991	\$287,028	102.4	\$740	99.1	\$47,858	80.5
1996	\$232,846	97.6	\$730	96.3	\$45,433	75.6
2001	\$294,099	107.6	\$891	102.4	\$60,240	78.8

Source: Canadian Census, 1971-2001

Note: Little Italy consists of the following census tracts for the purposes of this study: 41, 42, 55, 56, 58.

The neighbourhood’s population has dropped by almost 40 percent since 1971, owing largely to the substantial renovations to what were once boarding houses and apartments. The census tract geography that spills into several other nearby poorer neighbourhoods makes it difficult to accurately assess the cumulative valuation of the real estate, but by 2001, the average house value and rent exceeded that of the larger census metropolitan area (CMA).

These figures actually understate the level of development and the level of internal variation. The relatively low house values are moderated by condominiums, which tend to be less expensive than houses. Property close to the retail strip along College Street is the most gentrified, while outlying areas are not. A recent check of the Toronto Real Estate Board’s Multiple

3 The station is now broadly multicultural in its programming, but that it was originally developed to promote Italian identity, and still retains much of this emphasis.

Listing Service website revealed that renovated four-bedroom houses close to College Street list for between C\$650,000 and C\$850,000. Moreover, the owners of “traditional” businesses on the western edge of the strip are already beginning to complain that they will be forced to move if rents and property taxes keep rising (Wilkes, 2000).

If there is one iconic connection between the packaging of Italian culture, and the sale of real estate, it would be the recent development of the Europa Condominium Project at College and Palmerston, due to open in 2005. Interviews with the marketing director of the complex reveal that the firm’s developers, Winick Realty Corporation, explicitly tried to tap into the glamour of southern European living to package its real estate. Its promotional material (Europa Condominium, 2004) openly tries to exploit the neighbourhood’s carefully manufactured identity:

Europa is a BRAND NEW condominium on College Street in the heart of Toronto’s most romantic neighbourhood: a vibrant, eclectic, cosmopolitan, sensuous and desirable established residential community, pulsating with European street life, welcoming nightlife, exhilarating cultural life, and a local personality that is pungently unique. There is no other neighbourhood like this one and this is your only opportunity to own a richly detailed condominium in the very heart of this exceptional residential community.

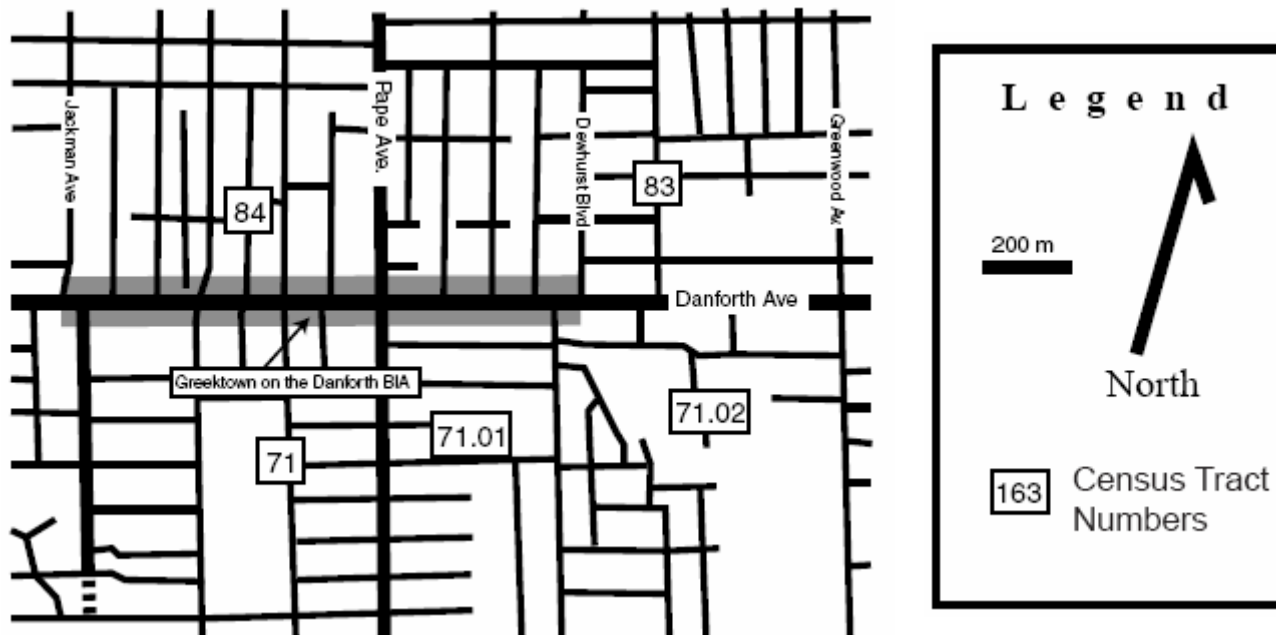
Its 642-square foot, one-bedroom units list for C\$228,000. More new condominium projects are planned for this corridor, as the city’s recent Official Plan promotes the intensification of existing urban transit corridors like College Street, and as demand for condos remains strong. Meanwhile the city’s overheated detached-home real estate market is pushing up prices for all kinds of residential property. Little Italy’s cosmopolitan panache has proven profitable for business- and property-owners alike.

Greektown on the Danforth

Greektown and Little Italy have a fair amount in common as neighbourhoods. Like Little Italy, “Greektown on the Danforth” is misleading as an ethnic label. Greektown is actually a fairly cosmopolitan neighbourhood in Toronto’s near east end (see Figure 1). The neighbourhood includes Japanese, Italian, Cuban, and Afghani restaurants, and its population is no longer predominantly Greek. Also like Little Italy, Greektown has experienced gentrification during the past 15 years that has dramatically changed the composition of businesses, people, and housing in the neighbourhood.

There are also important differences, among them the fact that the Greektown on the Danforth BIA has even more self-consciously packaged a specifically Greek identity than its counterpart in Little Italy. After changing the neighbourhood’s name to Greektown on the Danforth (previously it was just called “Danforth”), the BIA hired a planning consultant firm to help redesign the area with a “Mediterranean flair” (Wong, 1993). In interviews for this study, representatives of the BIA also stated explicitly that they aim for a “double-ethnic” identity – authentic enough to be a symbolic centre for the Greek community in the GTA, yet “mainstream” enough to attract tourists and new residents.

Figure 3: Greektown on the Danforth neighbourhood map



In many ways, they have been successful at achieving this balance. The neighbourhood still serves as a symbolic focal point for GTA Greeks – most of whom now live in the suburbs – but also attracts tourists and outsiders by the millions to its Greek-themed parades and festivals (most notably the “Taste of the Danforth” in the second week of August each year). It is also considered a more “authentic” place than Little Italy, despite its many similarities. As one reporter (Taylor, 2003, p. B1) recently put it: “...who goes to Little Italy anymore specifically to eat Italian? Certainly not in the way the you’d go to the Danforth to eat Greek.”

Like many of Toronto’s innermost neighbourhoods, Greektown on the Danforth began as a reception area for other immigrant groups before retaining its current identity. The area was largely agricultural or undeveloped until 1884, when the City of Toronto annexed the land, but even then it was still separated physically from the city by the Don Valley (Dunkleman, 1999).

The Prince Edward Viaduct was opened in 1918, connecting the Danforth to the rest of Toronto, and residential development almost immediately boomed, but Greeks did not begin to move en masse to the Danforth – previously a working-class Anglo neighbourhood – until the 1950s (Ruprecht, 2001). In the 1960s, the neighbourhood was called “Little Athens” because of its Greek restaurants and atmosphere, but by the early 1970s, the Greek exodus out of the Danforth had already begun, with only 13.6 percent of the population born in Greece, and only slightly higher percentages of residents who routinely spoke the language in 1971 (see Table 5).

Many residents moved to outlying areas, such as Etobicoke, North York, Mississauga, and Scarborough. By 1981, only 12.1 percent of the residents were born in Greece, and only 19.2 percent self-identified as Greek.

Table 5: Ethnic identification of the resident population in Greektown on the Danforth, 1971-2001

Year	Total Population	Percent Immigrant	Percent Greek Ethnic Origin	Percent Greek Home Language	Percent Greek Mother Tongue	Percent Born in Greece
1971	26,445	44.1	-	15.6	18.7	13.6
1976	23,379	-	-	-	17.7	-
1981	20,603	47.2	19.2	14.1	16.9	12.1
1986	19,959	40.6	-	10.2	13.1	-
1991	19,502	37.0	17.9	8.9	10.7	-
1996	19,329	38.3	17.4	7.5	10.1	6.8
2001	19,324	37.1	15.2	4.8	9.3	5.9

Source: Canadian Census, 1971-2001

Note: Greektown consists of the following census tracts for the purposes of this study: 71, 72 (.01 and .02 for 2001), 83, 84.

But while many Greek residents were moving to the suburbs, the area's Greek commercial identity apparently thickened. In 1970, only 5.2 percent of the businesses within the current BIA (which did not exist in 1970) had Greek names (see Table 6). By 1990, over 20 percent of the businesses were discernibly Greek in their identity.

Table 6: Ethnic identification of businesses in Greektown on the Danforth, 1970-2000

Year	Total Businesses	Clear Greek Identification	Other Ethnic Identification	No Clear Ethnic Identification
1970	231	5.2	4.8	90.0
1980	243	17.7	2.5	79.8
1990	220	20.5	1.8	77.7
2000	302	21.9	2.0	76.2

Source: Might's Criss Cross Directory

Note: Only the businesses within the Greektown on the Danforth BIA are included here.

Partly because of this increase, local business officials decided to change the name of the existing BIA in 1993 to "Greektown on the Danforth" – quite openly as a way to draw tourists and residents to the area (Wong, 1993). They hoped to tap into the discontent over shopping in culturally bland suburban malls. As the then-chairperson of the BIA, Andonis Artemakis, put it at the time, "People are sick of going to shopping malls and being bombarded by an enclosed mall mentality" (quoted in Wong, 1993, p. A4). The BIA set about the task of creating an "authentic" ethnic alternative to the mall, because "it was good for business" (Wong, 1993). Trolley service to and from some of the downtown hotels began in 1997, and the BIA administers two parades in addition to a hugely successful "Taste of the Danforth" festival each August.

But while the original intent was to provide both a profit opportunity to the mostly Greek business owners, and a symbolic commercial identity for the region's Greek community, the neighbourhood had to deal with increased outside corporatization and an influx of gentrifiers in the ensuing decade. Residents initially lamented the rise in the number of corporate chains – beginning with Tim Horton's and Swiss Chalet, and continuing with Starbucks and Second

Cup – that moved into the neighbourhood, and the transition of many businesses from those designed to serve a Greek residential community to those designed to sell Greek to other residential communities.

The overall growth in restaurants is only the most obvious outcome of this transition (see Table 7). In 1970, fewer than 8 percent of the businesses along the strip were restaurants, but by 2000, fully one-fifth were. The area has also seen an influx of bars, small offices, and specialty stores, and a corresponding decline in traditional corner grocery stores. Though not as “trendy” as Little Italy, Greektown on the Danforth is still a “place to be” in Toronto.

Table 7: Business type changes in Greektown on the Danforth, 1970-2000

Year	Total Businesses	Grocery/Food				Other/Non-identifiable
		Restaurants	Stores	Medical	Apparel	
1970	231	7.7	11.8	6.9	22.8	50.8
1980	243	13.6	12.1	6.4	22.7	45.1
1990	220	21.1	10.1	7.2	14.3	47.3
2000	302	20.3	7.5	7.5	10.1	54.5

Source: Might's Criss Cross Directory

Note: Only the businesses within the Greektown on the Danforth BIA are included here.

This fact has not escaped the young urban professionals in search of housing either (see Table 8). Rent, income, and house value in the neighbourhood have outstripped growth in the larger GTA over the past 30 years, and the neighbourhood's southern portion (Riverdale) is considered one of the “hottest” markets in the current real estate boom in Toronto. A renovated four- or five-bedroom house in the neighbourhood can sell for C\$800,000, and rents have largely excluded those who are not upwardly mobile young professionals.

Table 8: Housing and income changes in Greektown on the Danforth, 1971-2001

Year	Mean Dwelling Value (MDV)	MDV as Percent of CMA	Mean Gross Rent (MGR)	MGR as Percent of CMA	Mean Household Income (MHI)	MHI as Percent of CMA
1971	\$24,736	76.3	\$107	70.7	8,693	73.0
1976	-	-	-	-	-	-
1981	\$92,419	80.9	\$267	73.4	21,797	75.8
1986	\$120,573	84.7	\$448	84.3	34,684	80.6
1991	\$241,336	86.1	\$681	91.2	50,848	85.5
1996	\$216,733	90.9	\$632	83.4	52,013	86.5
2001	\$270,844	99.1	\$754	86.6	68,374	89.4

Source: Canadian Census, 1971-2001

Note: Greektown consists of the following census tracts for the purposes of this study: 71, 72 (.01 and .02 for 2001), 83, 84.

Culturally, these changes had begun to alter the neighbourhood by the late 1980s, when businesses were torn between catering to the still-sizable Greek resident community, or the influx of wealthier newcomers. For example, the *Toronto Star* (Howell, 1989) chronicled the efforts of one local Greek coffee house, the Dallas Café at 488 Danforth, to weather the “yuppie plague.” The owner, Marcus Alexander, was ambivalent about renovating his business. He was already struggling to retain his regulars, while also paying the rising rents that

accompanied gentrification. “We’ll be renovating into a more yuppie place,” Alexander said. “But it can’t turn too yuppie, or else it will be too trendy for older people” (Howell, 1989).

Almost all the “traditional” coffee shops like the Dallas have been replaced with those that conform to the “double ethnic” ethos of the neighbourhood, or with chains, like Starbucks, that do not bother trying. The packaging of Greek identity along the Danforth has helped to catalyze a fundamental transformation of the neighbourhood. It was indeed “good business” to adopt such a strategy, but apparently at the cost of claims to authenticity.

Corso Italia

Corso Italia is a neighbourhood along St. Clair Avenue in Toronto’s northwest end (see Figure 4), whose BIA proudly packages it as a more authentic Italian experience than its cousin, Little Italy. As its website boasts:

The other Italian area – Corso Italia – also very mixed, is somewhat different. Here the streets are lined with fashionable, high-end shops, Italian lampposts, and trendy gelaterias and cappuccino houses. If Little Italy represents the “heart” of Italy, then Corso Italia is the “skin” – exquisite, fashionable, with just enough attitude to be seductive. (Corso Italia BIA, 2004a)

Figure 4: Corso Italia neighbourhood map



Part of this authenticity is related to the resident community. Unlike its commercial compatriot to the south, nearly a third of the Corso Italia’s residents still consider themselves Italian, and

the street life along St. Clair is not a frequent feature in the *Toronto Star's* Lifestyle Section. It is more geographically and culturally isolated from the city's other trendy neighbourhoods and its tourist hotels. Yet it is an area whose commercial identity is carefully packaged to encourage tourists to visit and young professionals to migrate to the neighbourhood. It is also an area undergoing change. Though more residentially Italian than Little Italy, many Italians have already left Corso Italia, and its housing market is beginning to rise, albeit in more limited ways than either of the two neighbourhoods discussed thus far.

The story of Corso Italia is parallel to that of Little Italy, minus 20 years. It served as a destination point for Jews who had previously inhabited the area now known as Little Italy in the 1950s (Kasher, 1997). In the 1960s it became a destination for Italians from Little Italy, and in the 1980s a destination for the Portuguese from Little Italy. It differs from Little Italy, however, in the strong British commercial and ethnic identity in this history (Buzzelli, 2001).

When the first Italian families began moving into the neighbourhood, they found an area dominated by British and Jewish shopkeepers. The area was then known as "Little Britain," but by the early 1970s, the neighbourhood was firmly Italian. Fully 45 percent of its residents were born in Italy, and nearly 60 percent reported Italian as their mother tongue in 1971 (see Table 9). By the late 1980s this began to change, quite rapidly, as many Italian families moved to the suburbs.

Table 9: Ethnic identification of the resident population in Corso Italia, 1971-2001

Year	Total Population	Percent Immigrant	Percent Italian Ethnic Origin	Percent Italian Home Language	Percent Italian Mother Tongue	Percent Born in Italy
1971	26,030	60.9	64.5	54.4	58.7	45.0
1976	21,655	-	-	-	49.3	-
1981	19,068	59.0	51.3	38.4	44.2	33.4
1986	18,311	53.9	50.5	31.1	35.4	27.0
1991	18,273	53.0	36.8	21.3	26.0	-
1996	18,412	54.4	31.3	15.8	21.3	15.3
2001	17,674	54.7	30.7	13.8	20.7	14.9

Source: Canadian Census, 1971-2001

Note: Corso Italia consists of the following census tracts for the purposes of this study: 110, 112, 113, and 163.

The commercial identity became less Italian, but much less rapidly than the surrounding neighbourhoods during this time period (see Table 10).

Table 10: Ethnic identification of businesses in Corso Italia, 1970-2000

Year	Total Businesses	Clear Italian Identification	Other Ethnic Identification	No Clear Ethnic Identification
1970	218	24.8	0.5	74.8
1980	169	43.2	0.6	56.2
1990	148	38.5	1.4	60.1
2000	190	31.1	1.6	67.4

Source: Might's Criss Cross Directory

Note: Only the businesses within the Corso Italia BIA are included here.

Almost 5 percent fewer businesses openly labelled themselves as Italian in 1990 than 1980. The larger drop came during the 1990s, when the neighbourhood experienced a 7 percent drop in openly Italian businesses.

Yet while Corso Italia's history has generally paralleled that of Little Italy in the past, it is not a foregone conclusion that the neighbourhood will behave demographically and commercially like its southern counterpart in the next decade. Despite recent declines, more than 30 percent of Corso Italia's businesses are still Italian, and the neighbourhood's overall percent of immigrants has remained steady at between 50 and 60 percent during the past 30 years, while dropping considerably elsewhere in the inner zone of the city (Carey, 2003).

Moreover, the neighbourhood's business composition is not nearly as dominated by restaurants as Little Italy – or many of the other BIAs in Toronto, for that matter. Though changing rapidly, only 23 percent of the businesses are currently restaurants (see Table 11) and the retail mix is much more affordable and comprehensive for residents. Stores selling basic essentials have not yet been crowded out by stores catering primarily to residents and tourists from elsewhere. In part, this is related to the formation of the Corso Italia BIA in 1984, which made a serious effort to package the neighbourhood as a less tourist-oriented alternative for Italians and non-Italians alike.

Table 11: Business type changes in Corso Italia, 1970-2000

Year	Total Businesses	Grocery/Food				Other/Non-identifiable
		Restaurants	Stores	Medical	Apparel	
1970	218	10.7	14.3	3.6	42.1	29.3
1980	169	13.8	9.4	5.1	54.4	17.4
1990	148	14.0	8.8	8.8	54.4	14.0
2000	190	23.2	9.4	10.9	37.0	19.6

Source: Might's Criss Cross Directory

Note: Only the businesses within the Corso Italia BIA are included here.

The relationship between this packaged identity and nearby residential real estate development is, however, ambiguous. Corso Italia BIA officials (2004b) have indicated that young professionals are beginning to move back into the neighbourhood, but recent real estate figures indicate that the move is quite limited (see Table 12).

Table 12: Housing and income changes in Corso Italia, 1971-2001

Year	Mean Dwelling Value (MDV)	MDV as Percent of CMA	Mean Gross Rent (MGR)	MGR as Percent of CMA	Mean Household Income (MHI)	MHI as Percent of CMA
1971	\$30,401	93.8	\$119	78.9	-	-
1976	-	-	-	-	-	-
1981	\$89,848	78.6	\$320	88.0	23,528	81.8
1986	\$116,973	82.2	\$506	95.1	34,283	79.7
1991	\$254,842	90.9	\$725	97.1	44,770	75.3
1996	\$203,473	85.3	\$726	95.7	45,437	75.6
2001	\$237,376	86.8	\$815	93.7	57,360	75.0

Source: Canadian Census, 1971-2001

Note: Corso Italia consists of the following census tracts for the purposes of this study: 110, 112, 113, and 163.

Average rents and house values have remained relatively stable at 75 to 100 percent of CMA averages during the past 30 years, except for census tract 113, where these figures are approximately 120 percent of the CMA. More anecdotal evidence suggests that pockets of development are beginning to emerge. Recently, a church (St. David's Presbyterian Church on 10 Harvie Avenue) was converted to condominiums, and the nearby Chelsea Lofts development has attracted attention in the local real estate press (Laporte, 2004).

But while Corso Italia may be exhibiting early signs of gentrification, other signs indicate that such activity may be short-lived. Despite planned improvements to the existing streetcar line along St. Clair,⁴ the neighbourhood remains more isolated than "traditional" gentrified neighbourhoods closer to the city, and its "feel" remains more working-class Italian than young urban professional.

Gerrard India Bazaar

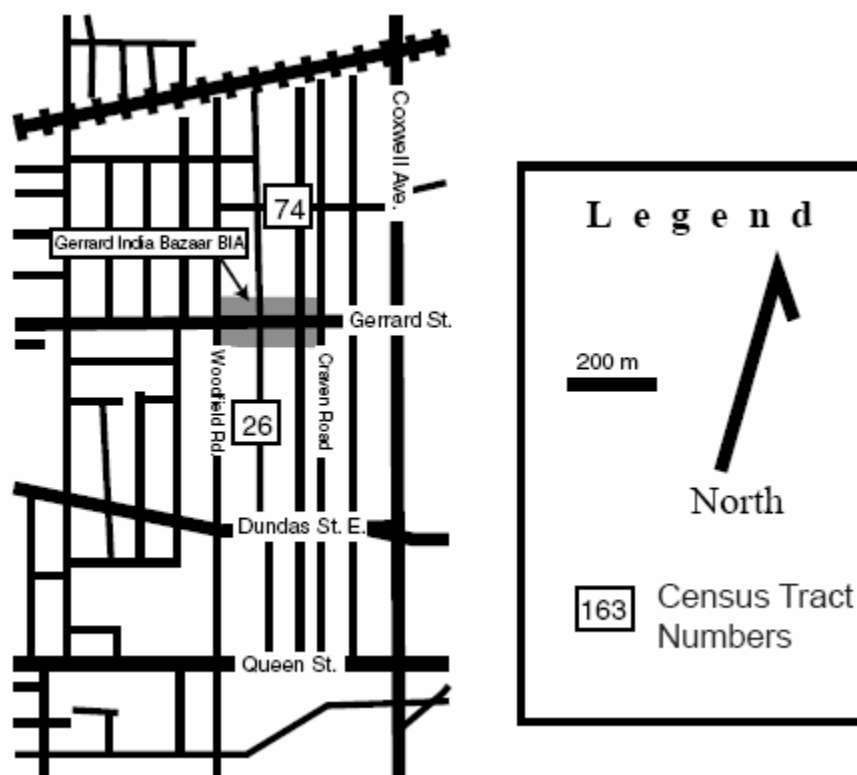
Located just east of the downtown core, Gerrard India Bazaar is the smallest of the four neighbourhoods discussed here, occupying several blocks east of Woodfield Avenue along Gerrard Street East (see Figure 5). It is also the neighbourhood, among those discussed, where the dissonance between commercial and residential identity is most stark.

The short commercial strip, and its accompanying BIA did not, like the other three neighbourhoods, develop initially as a traditional ethnic corridor meeting the needs of nearby residents. Rather, the area and its BIA developed almost by accident, when in 1972, Gian Naz decided to open a movie theatre on Gerrard Street to show Hindi films (Hutsul, 2004). The location was chosen not because of potential interest from the surrounding community, but more pragmatically because rents were extremely low at the time. The Naaz Theatre opened on Gerrard Street East, because it was the least expensive facility that Mr. Naz could find.

But despite the lack of a culturally similar resident community, the theatre was immediately successful in drawing South Asians from around the GTA. Other entrepreneurs noticed the interest and began opening businesses nearby to cater to the theatre crowd – sweet shops, clothing stores, Indian grocery stores. In 1982, a BIA was formed to promote this area, primarily to South Asians living in the GTA, elsewhere in Ontario, and even the United States. The BIA has sponsored physical improvements, and at least three major street festivals, not to mention strategic marketing for the neighbourhood (Gerrard India Bazaar BIA, 2004a).

4 The City is planning to set aside lanes for streetcars along St. Clair between Yonge and Keele (the current end of the line). Some in Corso Italia welcome the change, while many other have complained that it will increase congestion and decrease the availability of parking (McGran, 2004).

Figure 5: Gerrard India Bazaar neighbourhood map



The growth of the commercial strip in the past 30 years was nothing short of remarkable. In 1970, there were no businesses with an obvious association to South Asian culture in their name, but by 2001, nearly 72 percent could be so considered (Table 13).

Table 13: Ethnic identification of businesses in Gerrard India Bazaar, 1970-2000

Year	Total Businesses	Clear South Asian Identification	Other Ethnic Identification	No Clear Ethnic Identification
1970	46	0.0	10.9	89.1
1980	31	45.2	0.0	54.8
1990	36	66.7	0.0	33.3
2000	64	71.9	0.0	28.1

Source: Might's Criss Cross Directory

Note: Only the businesses within the Gerrard India Bazaar BIA are included here.

Much of this growth occurred in the late 1970s after the opening of the Naaz Theatre, but steady growth was experienced in the 1980s and 1990s as well. Many of the new businesses are restaurants that benefit from huge summertime crowds and large lunch orders from firms in the nearby film district, but a notable portion of the retail composition is also apparel oriented (see Table 14).

Table 14: Business type changes in Gerrard India Bazaar, 1970-2000

Year	Total Businesses	Restaurants	Grocery/Food Stores	Medical	Apparel	Other/Non-identifiable
1970	46	8.7	15.2	0.0	26.1	50.0
1980	31	14.8	22.2	0.0	14.8	48.2
1990	36	25.7	25.7	0.0	22.9	25.7
2000	64	30.6	12.2	0.0	32.7	24.5

Source: Might's Criss Cross Directory

Note: Only the businesses within the Gerrard India Bazaar BIA are included here.

As an official from the BIA indicated, “The merchandise available here helps South Asians maintain ancient cultural and religious traditions, and keep in touch with the contemporary lifestyle of the subcontinent” (Gerrard India Bazaar BIA, 2004a). The BIA claims that it is the largest South Asian bazaar in North America (Gerrard India Bazaar BIA, 2004b). Moreover, while Indo-Pakistani commercial districts have popped up elsewhere in the GTA (in Rexdale, Brampton, and Malton among other places), the Bazaar remains the chief commercial core for South Asian identity in the region.

But while the neighbourhood’s commercial identity became firmly implanted during the past three decades, its residential identity never paralleled this trend (see Table 15). Though increasing rapidly in relative terms, the number of people who were either born in South Asia, speak a South Asian language or dialect, or even claim to be of South Asian origin is still very small – in 2001, only 5.8 percent of residents claimed to be of South Asian origin, and only 6 percent had a South Asian mother tongue.

Table 15: Ethnic identification of the resident population in Gerrard India Bazaar, 1971-2001

Year	Total Population	Percent Immigrant	Percent South Asian* Ethnic Origin	Percent South Asian Home Language	Percent South Asian Mother Tongue	Percent Born in India
1971	12,645	33.9	-	0.1	0.0	0.4
1976	11,100	-	-	-	0.5	-
1981	10,007	33.6	0.9	0.6	0.7	0.6
1986	10,302	34.9	1.7	0.4	0.6	0.7
1991	10,756	35.8	2.5	1.5	0.4	1.2
1996	11,562	42.6	4.4	3.8	4.0	1.3
2001	11,490	42.0	5.8	3.6	6.0	2.1

Source: Canadian Census, 1971-2001

Note: Gerrard India Bazaar consists of the following census tracts for the purposes of this study: 26 and 74.

*Before 1981, Indo-Pakistani was both a language and ethnic origin category in the Canadian Census. After this point, both the languages and ethnic origin categories became much more specific (e.g. East Indian, Punjabi), so a broad category – South Asian – was used to be consistent across census years. South Asian includes people from and languages spoken in the following countries: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka.

The lack of Indian or South Asian population is all the more striking, given that the neighbourhood has experienced a fairly significant (relative) increase in overall immigrants during the past 30 years. Much of this is accounted for by the growth of the Chinese community, and Chinatown East (which is actually to the west of the study area). Gerrard India Bazaar has

thus developed in a way that is very different from the other three neighbourhoods. Its commercial strip was not an organic response to the local community, but rather an accident of ground rent designed to serve a regional community.

The Gerrard India Bazaar BIA has been successful at promoting the area as a destination for South Asians in the GTA, and increasingly as a destination for non-South Asians.⁵ It is far from clear, however, that these efforts have led to an increase in the prices of nearby residential real estate, as seen in Little Italy and Greektown on the Danforth.

The larger neighbourhood of South Riverdale (within which Gerrard India Bazaar sits) is beginning to show unmistakable signs of gentrification – an influx of artists, the construction of trendy condo projects, and attention from the local real estate press – but development is occurring only in certain pockets. As Table 16 shows, these pockets of development have yet to meaningfully affect aggregate income and real estate statistics for the neighbourhood. Overall house values have ranged from 60 to 70 percent of CMA averages during the past 30 years, and rents have fluctuated dramatically between 75 and 101 percent of CMA during the same period. Incomes have actually declined appreciably during the past 30 years.

Table 16: Housing and income changes in Gerrard India Bazaar, 1971-2001

Year	Mean Dwelling Value (MDV)	MDV as Percent of CMA	Mean Gross Rent (MGR)	MGR as Percent of CMA	Mean Household Income (MHI)	MHI as Percent of CMA
1971	\$21,930	67.7	\$114	75.2	-	-
1976	-	-	-	-	-	-
1981	\$68,315	59.8	\$268	73.6	21,030	73.1
1986	\$87,663	61.6	\$539	101.4	31,821	74.0
1991	\$188,653	67.3	\$705	94.4	42,237	71.0
1996	\$156,125	65.5	\$649	85.7	40,563	67.5
2001	\$184,181	67.4	\$744	85.5	49,650	64.9

Source: Canadian Census, 1971-2001

Note: Gerrard India Bazaar consists of the following census tracts for the purposes of this study: 26 and 74.

House prices are influenced by the fairly large portfolio of social housing the area, but also by the fact that the neighbourhood is still firmly working-class in its orientation. In short, while the classic antecedents to gentrification appear to be emerging in pockets around Gerrard India Bazaar, it is unclear whether they will germinate and more importantly how (or if) they are related to the Bazaar's ethnic package.

5 According to Hutsul (2004), the decline of South Asian consumers and the increase of non-South Asian consumers has been lamented by some business owners who fear that the neighbourhood's identity will become inauthentic, comparable to that of Little Italy.

But for our purposes, the Bazaar's presence remains a crucial component (along with the nearby film district and Chinatown East) of South Riverdale's bohemian reputation, and has created an ethnic package that has the potential for sale to gentrifiers in the future.

5. Culture, Power, and Economics

The inclusion of culture in the study of urban landscape formation is analytically helpful in the study of cities. A sensitivity to the constitutive powers of culture, in particular, can soften or even replace the strict economism of the discipline's past. But it is important not to overestimate culture as a completely autonomous phenomenon. As a growing body of scholars are beginning to recognize, culture and economics are not mutually exclusive categories. This is as true in the study of gentrification as it is for any other sub-field.

The culture-economics dualism has long plagued the study of gentrification. Though the inclusion of cultural analysis may enrich the study of gentrification, it is equally important to integrate, rather than isolate, culture and economics. The cultural turn for gentrification studies has largely translated either into highly culturalist arguments, or conceptually incomplete calls for a rapprochement between cultural and economic explanations.

This article has attempted to show one way in which culture and economics interact with one another in the gentrification of neighbourhoods. BIAs (whether ethnically labelled or not) in North America and Western Europe are small but highly strategic operations. Many employ media advisers and carefully manicure their neighbourhood's identity. Ethnically labelled BIAs package and reproduce ethnicity for consumption, primarily by tourists and non-resident members of the same ethnic groups in the region. Increasingly, however, their packaging efforts are translating into a constructed multicultural urbanity that attracts young urban professionals of many ethnic backgrounds.

The relationship between ethnic packaging and gentrification is sometimes ambiguous, but it is increasingly the case that ethnic packaging can function in the way that art has functioned in the past for gentrifying communities – as a way to anchor bohemian culture for an outside community looking for something different from the suburbs.

This is not to suggest that the efforts of BIAs have somehow cynically shifted to gentrifying their own neighbourhoods and nothing else, nor is it to suggest that places like Corso Italia or Greektown on the Danforth have no symbolic cultural importance for local ethnic groups. The cultural function of each neighbourhood is clearly complicated. Yet it is just as clear that ethnic packaging in Toronto is functioning, whether intended or not, in a way that is analogous to the artistic community's influence on gentrification.

In some cases, artist or ethnic communities develop autonomously or for entirely pragmatic reasons (cheap real estate) and later become attractive to gentrifiers. In other cases, such packaging is deployed deliberately by city officials, BIAs, and developers who understand the profit potential of these identities. In such cases, the difference between culture and economics is difficult to discern, but it is clear that they are working in concert with one another to increase the value of real estate.

Cases like this also challenge traditional understandings of ethnic commercial landscapes as more or less organic outgrowths of ethnic residential landscapes. Multiculturalism can be highly marketable, so many ethnic commercial strips have remained, well after their resident community has fled for the suburbs.

This could be a uniquely Canadian phenomenon (Mitchell, 1993), both to the extent that so many immigrant communities now reside in the suburbs, but also to the extent that the country promoted multiculturalism before other comparable countries. Yet one can draw analogies in almost every city that aspires to be “global.”

Whatever their current extent, processes like the ones described here are likely to expand in the future. Culture, it could be said, has rightfully been exalted as half of an explanatory dialectic for understanding urban landscapes. This cases shows, however, that culture should not be treated as an independent variable, isolated from power and economics.

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