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The Role of Community Lands Trusts in Protecting Immigrant Businesses from Gentrification: Case Studies of Parkdale and Little Jamaica in Toronto

Nicole Gordon and Dr. Zhixi Cecilia Zhuang

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Businesses from Gentrification:
Case Studies of Parkdale and Little Jamaica in Toronto**

Nicole Gordon, MPI
Toronto Metropolitan University

Dr. Zhixi Cecilia Zhuang, MCIP, RPP
*Professor, School of Urban and Regional Planning
Toronto Metropolitan University*

Series Editors: Richa Shivakoti
Research Lead, Migration Governance, Global Migration Institute

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Abstract

Many immigrant businesses in Toronto face the risk of displacement as gentrification threatens their communities and neighbourhoods. Community Land Trusts (CLTs), as non-profit, community-owned organizations, can leverage community assets, protect affordable housing, and resist gentrification by providing commercial space for small businesses. Specifically, CLTs own land for community benefit and sustainable development while addressing socio-economic inequities. This study examines two neighbourhoods in Toronto, Parkdale and Little Jamaica, which have experienced gentrification at different stages but aim to acquire land for collective benefit. CLT research in Canada mainly focuses on housing and rarely examines commercial uses. This research aims to fill this gap by highlighting CLTs' role in protecting immigrant businesses in mixed-use neighbourhoods. Based on a review of the CLT literature, field observations, and a series of semi-structured interviews with immigrant entrepreneurs and CLT workers, this study evaluates how CLTs preserve neighbourhoods, maintain immigrant businesses, and confront cultural erasure and displacement.

Keywords: community land trust, immigrant businesses, gentrification, Parkdale, Little Jamaica, Toronto

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1.0 Introduction

Many neighbourhoods in Toronto, especially racialized immigrant communities, are disproportionately impacted by gentrification, a process in which higher-income residents move in and displace existing residents and businesses, reshaping the area's character and socio-economic identity (Epstein, 2017; Keatinge & Martin, 2016; Takahashi, 2017). Canadian cities are becoming increasingly 'less equal and more polarized' as immigrant and racialized communities experience housing unaffordability and unemployment at alarmingly high rates (Epstein, 2017, p. 708). Displacement is a result of gentrification, in which disadvantaged residents are being pushed out of their community due to rising costs.

Community Land Trusts (CLTs) can help address these pressures by purchasing land collectively for community benefit and protecting it from the speculative market. CLTs do more than take land off the market by de-commodifying it, as they also preserve the affordable housing stock (Lim, 2024). By providing greater stability against commercial rent increases, CLTs can help small businesses to stay in place, allowing community members to continuously afford goods and services in their neighbourhood (Lim, 2024). Most existing research has focused primarily on residential properties and affordable housing, which has proven that CLTs help promote economic and racial diversity by building and preserving more affordable housing in communities (Choi, 2017, p. 396). However, the role of CLTs in protecting small businesses from displacement has been largely overlooked. This study aims to fill this research gap by investigating the effectiveness of community land trusts in preserving immigrant-owned businesses from gentrification and displacement by examining their impact on business resilience, preservation strategies, and economic sustainability measures. Specifically, the research questions include: 1) How have immigrant businesses in Toronto's neighbourhoods built community in the face of gentrification? 2) How can a CLT help mitigate displacement pressures to support immigrant entrepreneurs?

Centring two case studies – Parkdale and Little Jamaica in Toronto – this research employed mixed methods, including a review of the CLT literature, field observations, and go-along interviews in both neighbourhoods. The study explored concepts of place-making, place-keeping, and the preservation of public spaces within the CLT framework, alongside discussions of immigrant entrepreneurship and the threat of commercial gentrification. The impact of multiculturalism on community change was drawn upon to understand how place and immigrant businesses are intertwined and why they are significant to communities. Based on this analysis, the paper concludes with recommendations on how CLTs can strengthen business resilience, promote preservation strategies, and accelerate economic mobility.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 An overview of the CLT model: Its origin and organization structure

A community land trust (CLT) is a non-profit organization that acquires land and property to benefit the community in which it exists. Through community ownership of land, the CLT can limit resale prices and contribute to collective ownership of land (Meehan, 2014, p.116). The literature discusses that the primary goal of a CLT is to support the community's needs by providing affordable housing and social services within the community to benefit them directly. Many CLTs aim to protect affordable housing by removing land and housing from the market through purchase or donation (Agha, 2018, p. 2). Other than housing, CLTs aim to support various

land uses, including agricultural, residential and commercial use, with the goal of affordability for the community.

CLTs originated in the late 1960s as a social innovation developed by the Black community and later widely recognized as a social enterprise aimed at addressing socio-economic inequities (Meehan, 2014, p. 115). Activists across North America have advocated for a new form of community property ownership to achieve and maximize collective community benefits. The first CLT in the United States of America is New Communities Inc. in Albany, Georgia (Meehan, 2014; Kruger, 2020; Lowery et al., 2021). It was established in the 1970s in response to land issues faced by African Americans in the South, where many people lost their land-based livelihoods due to economic forces, systematic racism, and exploitation (Meehan, 2014). Therefore, New Communities Inc. raised a large sum of money to secure land for the community and made significant progress in securing land for Southern Black farmers (Meehan, 2014).

CLTs have emerged in Canada since the 1980s, and currently there are over 40 CLTs across the country. The movement is fueled by the original goals of CLTs by advocating for the control of land for the community that has been negatively impacted by urban planning. For instance, the Vancouver Community Land Trust Foundation was created in 2014 in response to the rising housing prices and the concerns about the limited affordable housing stock in Vancouver (Bunce & Aslam, 2016). Another CLT in Canada is the Kensington Market Community Land Trust (KMCLT), which was formed in 2017 in response to pressures from residential and commercial gentrification in Toronto. It was a sister branch of the Friends of Kensington Market, a resident-led and neighbourhood-based committee that had been actively engaged in protesting 'big-box' retail outlets on the arterial roads and adjacent to the street entrances of Kensington Market (Bunce, 2020). Kensington's built environment is embedded with shared memories, including a synagogue, a bookstore, and a café that held significance for Toronto's Jewish community. Preserving these neighbourhoods aids in place-making for immigrant communities through religious institutions, cultural events, and language (Stevens, 2017; Phan & Luk, 2008). Across Canada, an increasing number of land trusts are emerging, many of which are led by Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) (Pace & Davis, 2024). The BIPOC-led CLTs aim to reclaim and remain a presence in neighbourhoods and communities from which their members have been displaced as a product of gentrification, infrastructure projects, and other processes of settler colonialism (Pace & Davis, 2024).

CLTs advocate for anti-gentrification initiatives, as evidenced in Toronto's Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT) which has been able to retain diversity and resist gentrification while promoting social cohesion and inclusive planning (Choi et al., 2018; Epstein, 2019; Kruger et al., 2020; Lowe et al., 2022; Veronesi et al., 2022). The CLT model is rooted in activism that re-engages residents, business owners, and workers to re-imagine community and public spaces (McLean & Rahder, 2013). These examples have demonstrated that CLTs have the potential to mitigate gentrification through community-owned land initiatives and by restricting displacement caused by private development.

CLTs are designed to be membership-based organizations governed by an elected board of directors, often composed of community residents and workers (Agha, 2018, p.2). In the United States, the CLT model is governed by a tripartite board composed of equal representation from three groups: residents who live on CLT-owned land, community members, and public stakeholders (Lowe et al., 2022; Williams, 2018; Lowery et al., 2021). Since two-thirds of the board comprises community members, the community holds the majority of the votes. The nature of the board indicates that CLTs are often community-controlled organizations (Lowery et al.,

2021). In Canada, most CLTs incorporate elements of the traditional CLT governance model, which relies on a ground lease to separate land ownership from the unit to ensure affordability when units are sold; however, only 15% adopt the tripartite board structure as is common in the United States (Trana et al., 2023).

2.2 Benefits of Community Land Trusts

2.2.1 Place-making, Place-keeping, and the Preservation of Public Spaces

CLTs' acquisition of community lands has a significant impact on place-making, place-keeping, and the preservation of public spaces. Place-making is regularly known as "creating quality places that people want to live, work, play, and learn in" (Loh et al., 2022, p. 1680). Place-making occurs in public spaces through everyday activities and the interactions of diverse individuals (Ostanel, 2020). These spaces allow people to interact with others with different identities, such as gender, class, and ethnicity. Signs, symbols, and markers, such as language or ethnic food, reflect the presence of socially and culturally distinct people within these spaces (Ostanel, 2020). However, as cities are becoming increasingly segregated, the privatization of urban space increases the displacement and further marginalizes equity-seeking communities (Ostanel, 2020, p.9). A CLT can be a mechanism to preserve public space and engage in place-making and place-keeping activities. Place-keeping differs from place-making, as it emphasizes on protecting and sustaining existing spaces to safeguard community identity, cultural heritage, and social equity (Matunga, 2013). Emerging from place-knowing in land-based Indigenous planning, place-keeping holds a deep connection to the land and the maintenance and preservation of its social, cultural, and historical significance (Matunga, 2013).

Community-driven and land-based CLTs seek to preserve and maintain affordable and culturally significant spaces, providing an equitable mechanism to support both place-making and place-keeping activities that promote the preservation of public space.

2.2.2 Immigrant Entrepreneurship and the Threat of Commercial Gentrification

Many immigrants in Canada experience disadvantages in the labour force due to unrecognized educational credentials, limited language proficiency, unfamiliarity with workplace culture, and discrimination (Phan & Luk, 2008, p.294). As a result, immigrant entrepreneurship has become a vital pathway for newcomers to achieve economic mobility, foster social cohesion, and integrate into their communities through place-making and place-keeping practices, transforming and reshaping existing neighbourhoods and communities (Zhuang, 2019, 2024). However, despite their significant social, economic, and cultural contributions, many immigrant businesses have been threatened or displaced by gentrification (Zhuang, 2019, 2024). Ostanel (2020) discusses the concept of visibility and invisibility regarding inclusion and exclusion within public spaces. Marginalized communities are always more vulnerable to gentrification due to stigmatization, racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination.

Commercial gentrification occurs when the commercial character of a neighbourhood changes – higher-end shops, chain restaurants, or upscale businesses replace existing local businesses – often accompanied by demographic changes as higher-income residents move in (Keatinge & Martin, 2016). Governments have promoted a 'social mix' to obscure the effects of gentrification (Takahashi, 2016), while municipal authorities have embraced gentrification as a

strategy to increase property values and tax revenues. Commercial gentrification is thus often an outgrowth of demographic change driven both by entrepreneurship and government policy (Keatinge & Martin, 2016). It can also exacerbate racial and economic segregation, as unequal access to resources, municipal services, and economic opportunities reinforces displacement and inequality (Chronopoulos, 2020). The social equity and collective benefit mandate of CLTs can serve as a tool to counter gentrification and displacement and to safeguard immigrant-owned businesses.

2.2.3 Multiculturalism and Neighbourhood Change in Toronto

Since the 1970s, Canada's official multiculturalism policy has encouraged the celebration of immigrants' contributions to the country's cultural heritage (Dickau et al., 2021). Newcomers have left their marks on Toronto's landscape not only in neighbourhoods such as Kensington and Chinatown, but also in Little Jamaica and Parkdale. Kensington Market reflects significant historical themes in Canada relating to urban migration and settlement patterns, the development of small businesses, and entrepreneurial endeavours contributing to Canada's economic growth (Li, 2015, p. 23). Kensington Market and other immigrant neighbourhoods helped the formation of cultural and religious identity through community organizations and the expression of social and cultural history. The influx of immigrants into Canada reshaped local economy and newcomers' cultural influences, while also transforming the commercial landscape through architectural design and social services (Li, 2015). These immigrant place-making practices provided a sense of a 'home away from home,' offering familiarity, comfort, and belonging within the community. Immigrant businesses also created employment opportunities for other immigrants, allowing them to gain economic stability and social support.

In the case of Little Jamaica, many Caribbean immigrants arrived and settled in the neighbourhood in the 1950s following changes to the Immigration Act and the introduction of labour schemes (Sabeta, 2024). Little Jamaica has been a place of belonging for many members of the Caribbean and African diaspora for more than 70 years (Sabeta, 2024). The community is experiencing change and faces threats of erasure due to the Metrolinx Eglinton Crosstown Rail Transit (LRT) project. In the past, the area was full of life, filled with laughter, aromas from Caribbean food and vibrant melodies of reggae music. The essence of Little Jamaica has changed, and it has become almost unrecognizable due to many empty storefronts and boarded-up buildings (Sabeta, 2024). To fight against gentrification and the changes enforced on the Little Jamaica community, Black Urbanism Toronto (BUTO) was established to advocate for the protection and preservation of Black culture, economic opportunities, and social significance, incubating the Little Jamaica Community Land Trust (BUTO, 2025).

Parkdale is an older neighbourhood in west-central Toronto, where 62% of Toronto's Tibetan population lived according to the 2006 census, making it a prominent area for the Tibetan community (Logan & Murdie, 2016). Parkdale has long provided familiarity and strong social connections for Tibetans and other newcomers (Logan & Murdie, 2016). Originally a desirable middle-class neighbourhood in the late nineteenth century due to its proximity to Lake Ontario and downtown Toronto, Parkdale underwent significant change by the early twentieth century as middle-class residents moved elsewhere. Single-family homes were converted into rooming houses, and by the 1950s and 1960s, many purpose-built and affordable apartments were constructed, a shift reinforced by the construction of the Gardiner Expressway, which reduced access to the lakeshore and diminished the area's appeal to higher-income residents. The establishment of the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT) offers a mechanism to preserve long-standing affordability and protect culturally significant spaces amid ongoing redevelopment

pressures. By placing land under community ownership, the PNLT can help stabilize immigrant communities and support place-keeping while resisting displacement driven by market forces.

2.3 Barriers and Limitations

CLTs have many benefits as they aim to preserve community assets, protect affordability, and promote social equity; however, CLTs still face significant barriers. In particular, CLTs in Canada often encounter challenges when securing funding and acquiring land tenure for the community (Spicer et al., 2024). Municipalities can fund CLT organizations, or they can enter partnerships with them through statutes granted by the province (Auger, 2024). Municipal legislation also grants municipalities the ability to enact bylaws which impact CLTs' operations. It is more important to obtain government support for CLTs to adequately protect community assets and achieve long-term economic sustainability. More support from the federal government is needed to enable CLTs to better serve the community's needs and shape their local development politics (DeFilippis et al., 2018).

CLTs face other challenges such as the impacts of market-driven development that has caused gentrification and displacement and the difficulties of securing and retaining affordable housing (Bunce, 2020). Additionally, CLT staff found it difficult to build organizational capacity as well as obtain funding for their organization (Bunce, 2020). Many CLTs are run by volunteers, resulting in less organizational capacity as people are less incentivized to engage in unpaid work. CLTs have fewer options for the necessary acquisition of funding; therefore, they are left to advocate for donations. The lack of funding is a significant challenge for CLTs; however, in Toronto, the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT) and Kensington Market Community Land Trust (KMCLT) have formed to mitigate these challenges through advocacy for and the creation of a Canadian CLT Network (Bunce, 2020).

Many scholars have highlighted a tension within CLTs between the need for skilled professional support and their commitment to the democratic involvement of low-income residents in decisions involving CLT-owned land (Williams, 2018). The time constraints of low-income residents can limit their ability to take part in decision-making. Also, if CLTs do not engage their residents meaningfully and intentionally in the decision-making process, they may risk becoming service organizations of an invisible form of governance (Williams, 2018). Due to these challenges, there are some critiques on how sustainable CLTs are, as some may fail due to a lack of social, community, and financial support (Fujii, 2016).

3.0 Research Approach

The study employed mixed methods, including go-along interviews, semi-structured interviews, literature and policy review, and case studies. The project focuses on the Little Jamaica and the Parkdale neighbourhoods from which the data was collected (Figures 1 and 2). Ten interviews were conducted in total, which included community members in Little Jamaica and Parkdale and Community Land Trust representatives (Table 1)



Figure 1: Map of Go-along Interview Routes in Little Jamaica

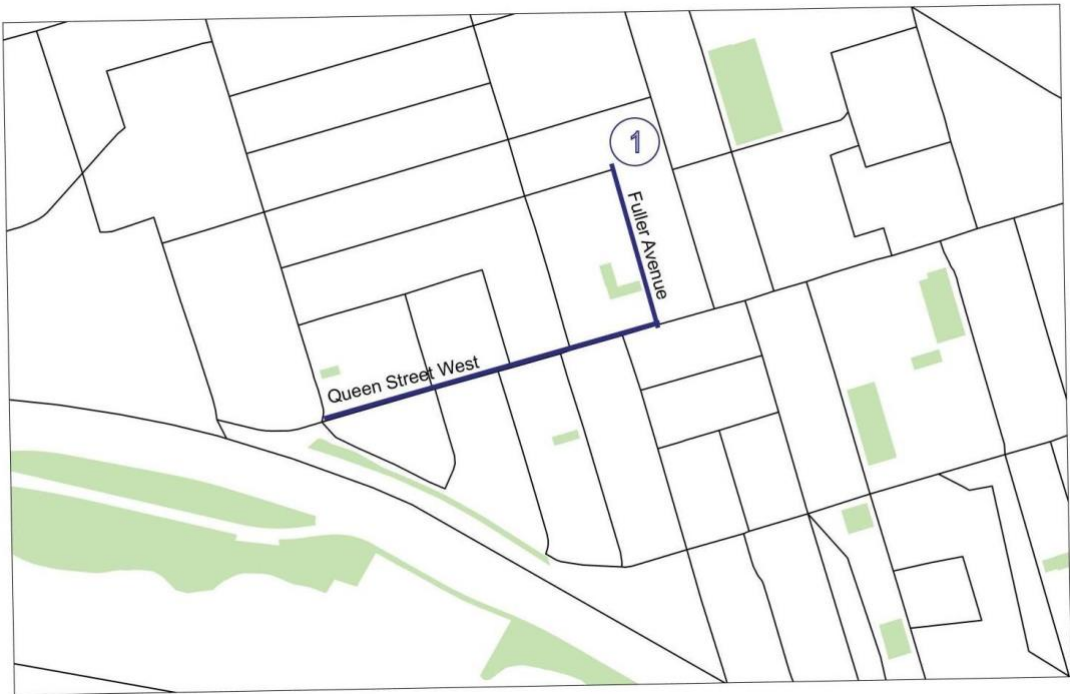


Figure 2: Map of Go-along Interview Routes in Parkdale

Table 1: Interviewee background information

Participant	Role	Country of origin	Racialized individuals?	Type of Business	Location
1	Community member	St. Lucia	Yes	-	Little Jamaica
2	Community member	-		-	Little Jamaica
3	Community Land Trust Staff	-		-	Kensington Market
4	Community member	Jamaica	Yes	Hair salon and Barber shop	Little Jamaica
5	Canadian Network of Community Land Trust Specialist	-	Yes	-	
6	Community Land Trust Representative	-	Yes	-	Little Jamaica
7	Community member	El Salvador	Yes	Cafe	Parkdale
8	Community member	-	Yes	-	Little Jamaica
9	Community Land Trust Staff	-		-	Kensington Market
10	Community member	-	Yes	-	Little Jamaica

A go-along interview is when an interviewer walks alongside the interviewee around their neighbourhood while asking them questions. It is an ethnographic research tool that allows the researcher to contextualize participants lived experiences and interpretations of the space (Berg et al., 2023; Kusenbach, 2003). Go-alongs create opportunities to collect 'unobserved' observations of social settings and situations that may be hidden or unnoticed by habitual relations unaware to outside observers (Kusenbach, 2003; Evans & Jones, 2011). The technique allows researchers to observe their informants' spatial practices in situ while accessing their

experiences and interpretations at the same time (Kusenbach, 2003). It is an engaging research method to obtain participants' insight into their experience and their connections to physical and social space within their neighbourhood. This method is relevant and significant in the study because the researchers gained participants' personal insights into what the built environment means to them. These go-along interviews have enriched our understanding of community experiences and CLTs' involvement in mitigating gentrification.

Each go-along interview session took approximately 1.5 hours. The first 45 minutes of the interview focused on the interview questions, and the following 45 minutes of the interview was the go-along portion. Participants were instructed to take the lead researcher on a "tour" of their neighbourhood and follow a path based on the previously shared interview questions. Each participant was able to choose a mutually agreed upon starting point for the go-along portion. Participants were asked to identify destinations that held significance, that they enjoyed visiting, or that showed signs of gentrification; these could be linked to their existing and aspirational activities for recreational, cultural, education, and business spaces. A GPS tracking app called Footpath was used to map out the path during the go-along, and photos were taken of the significant spaces the interviewee discussed. *Figure 1* and *Figure 2* depict the chosen routes participants took in Little Jamaica and Parkdale; each number represents a route in the same colour. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four CLT representatives via Zoom. The interviews were audio/video recorded on Zoom.

The go-along interviews were recorded using a voice memo app on an iPhone, and the semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed through Zoom. The transcript data was entered into NVivo for coding. Through a thematic analysis, the codes were organized into themes, which could then be identified to better understand the topics and perspectives of the interviewees.

4.0 Case Study Areas

4.1 Parkdale, Toronto

Parkdale is located in Toronto, Ontario, and it includes part of Queen, King, Dundas, and Bloor Streets from Roncesvalles Avenue and Dufferin Street (Figure 3).

In the late 1990s, immigrants from South and East Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean moved to Parkdale, followed by Tibetan refugees (Epstein, 2017). According to the neighbourhood profile, Tibetan is one of the top non-English languages (Toronto, 2016). Parkdale is known as 'Little Tibet' throughout Toronto, even though other groups reside in the neighbourhood.

Parkdale was once seen as one of the most affordable downtown neighbourhoods for ethnically diverse community members; however, in the last 10 years this has been changing (Ostanel, 2020). According to the 2016 census data, the recent immigrant population has been decreasing, and the non-immigrant population is growing. Long-term housing supply is shifting toward short-term rentals through services like Airbnb, which have doubled in Parkdale in the past three years (Ostanel, 2020).



Figure 3: Map of the Parkdale Neighbourhood

Parkdale was originally an affluent suburb that was later amalgamated with the growing city. Higher-income individuals gradually moved out, and the community changed following the Great Depression and the construction of the Gardiner Expressway (Zentner, 2017). In the 1970s, Parkdale was the location of one of Canada's most extensive psychiatric facilities, which misrepresented the community with a reputation of being a hotspot for poverty, crime, drugs, homelessness, and a large number of people living with mental illnesses (Ostanel, 2020, p. 5). The public discourse of inexpensive housing options such as rooming houses and smaller apartment units destroyed the streetscape (Ostanel, 2020, p. 5). The previous Victorian houses were converted into low-cost housing that attracted many low-income immigrants and refugees, particularly the Tibetan and Roma communities to reside in Parkdale (Zentner, 2017).

The Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT) started in 2010, and it is a grassroots community-based land trust located in Toronto (Agha, 2018; Bunce & Aslam, 2016; Ostanel, 2020). The condo developments in Parkdale threatened to gentrify the neighbourhood as it increased housing prices where 90% of the population rents, and 36% of the residents live in poverty (Agha, 2018). According to Census Canada 2021, 48.1% of the population rents city-wide and 10% live in poverty (Statistics Canada, 2022, 2023).

PNLT partnered with local organizations in Parkdale to secure land for community use, negotiate below-market rental opportunities for owners, and raise capital for acquisition and site planning through community donations and grants (Agha, 2018). PNLТ leads a community-based planning process with diverse residents to identify a plan for site redevelopment. The organization states that "through the community land trust model, PNLТ will acquire land and use it to meet the needs of Parkdale by leasing it to non-profit partners who can provide affordable housing, furnish spaces for social enterprises and non-profit organizations, and offer urban agriculture and open space" (Bunce & Aslam, 2016, p. 30). Community land trusts such as PNLТ fight against the privatization of urban space and obtain community ownership. The increase in privatization threatens to further displace and marginalize particular groups of people, especially racialized immigrant communities (Ostanel, 2020). Ultimately, PNLТ fights against the financialization of housing by protecting the affordable housing stock within the neighbourhood.

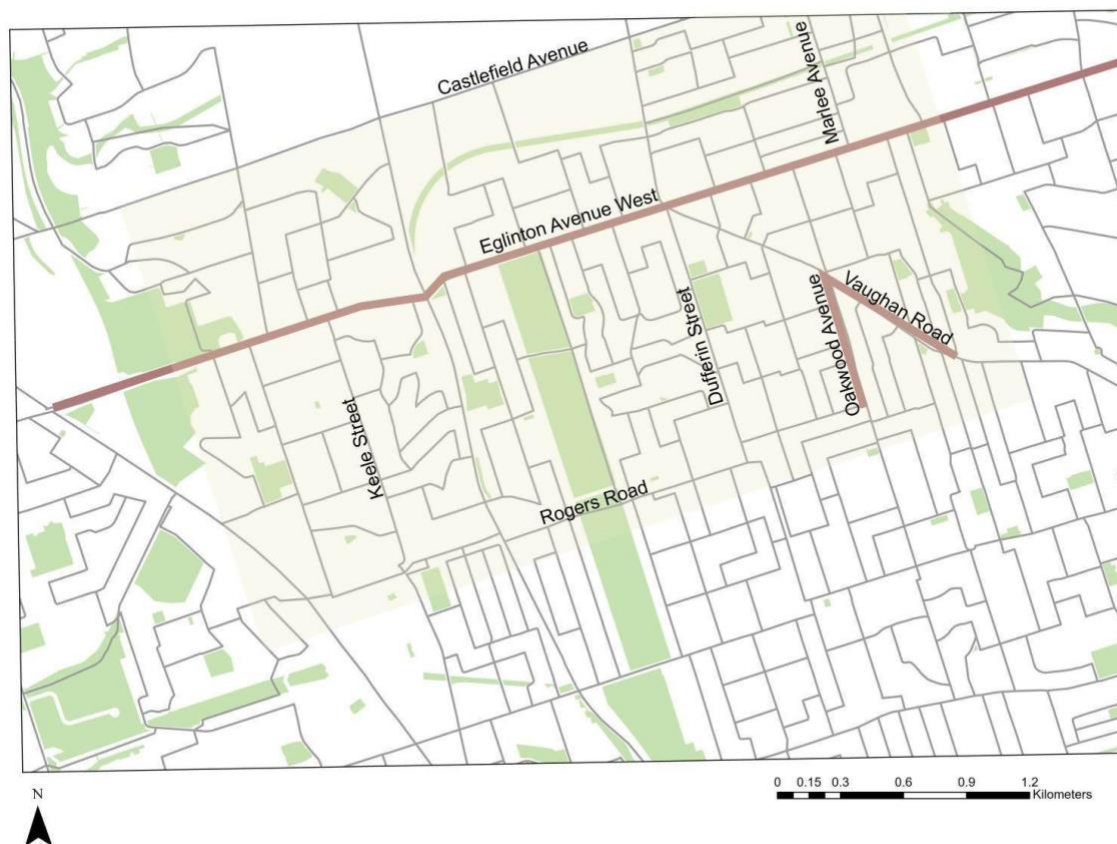


Figure 4: Map of the Little Jamaica neighbourhood

4.2 Little Jamaica, Toronto

Little Jamaica is located in Toronto, Ontario, with neighbourhood boundaries extending from Castlefield Avenue to Rogers Road and from Keele Street to Allen Road (Figure 4).

As seen in Figure 4, the commercial district runs along Eglinton Avenue West and the intersection of Oakwood Avenue and Vaughan Road. The neighbourhood's areas are Keelesdale-Eglinton West, Caledonia-Fairbank, and Oakwood Village. It was formed in the 1950s as an influx of Caribbean immigrants became established in the neighbourhood. This occurred due to the West Indian Domestic Scheme, an immigration program where approximately 3,000 women from the Caribbean came to Canada to work as domestic servants (BUTO, n.d., p. 5). Many other cultural groups reside in Little Jamaica, including people of Chinese, Italian, Portuguese, Hungarian, and Filipino descent (City of Toronto, 2016).

Early Jamaican enclaves included Kensington Market and a cluster of businesses along the northwest corner of Bathurst and Bloor Streets. More settlement occurred along Eglinton West and later Rexdale, Jane and Finch, and numerous neighbourhoods in Scarborough (Baker et al., 2020). In the 1970s, Little Jamaica became one of the largest Jamaican expatriates in Toronto and globally (Baker et al., 2020).

Little Jamaica faces transit-oriented gentrification as the Eglinton Crosstown Light Rail Transit (LRT) threatens to displace businesses and residents (BUTO, n.d., p. 5). The ongoing construction of the LRT is putting extra strain on the community, especially after the economic downturn from the COVID-19 pandemic. Little Jamaica is a hub of economic and cultural opportunities, especially for the Black community which is at risk of business closure, cultural erasure, and loss of community heritage.

According to the *Pathways to Community Ownership* report, 10.6% of the properties in Little Jamaica are owned by businesses, many of which are small businesses. Of the remaining properties, 9% are institutionally owned, 39.7% are privately owned, and 40.7% are corporately owned (BUTO, n.d., p. 28). It would be important to implement a CLT to protect immigrant businesses, especially with the impact of the construction and the creation of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, the aftereffects of COVID-19, and the threat of transit-oriented displacement. There are many benefits to transit; however, public transit may not be equally beneficial to all population groups (Chen et al., 2023). Most studies discussing transit-oriented development and gentrification claimed that public transit could promote neighbourhood renewal and increase existing land values, which could potentially price out residents. In this sense, although mobility is improved, the most vulnerable groups risk being priced out and displaced from their community (Chen et al., 2023).

Near the end of April 2024, BUTO developed the Little Jamaica Community Land Trust (LJCLT). The LJCLT aims to increase community property ownership for small businesses through models such as CLTs and other investment models to promote economic sustainability for the Black community (BUTO, n.d.). This model will help mitigate the challenges faced by Black-owned businesses through affordable rent. The organization will also act as a source of knowledge mobilization through community-led events, and support communities to have a say in what occurs in their neighbourhood. The LJCLT will present various methods for economic growth and investment models that can support the preservation and extension of Black-owned businesses in Little Jamaica (BUTO, n.d.). Business owners in Little Jamaica have discussed a significant reliance on personal credit to operate their businesses (BUTO, n.d.). They also experience a denial of mortgage applications when they want to purchase the buildings they currently occupy. In this case, Black-owned businesses are being restricted from accessing property ownership. LJCLT works towards supporting Black businesses and improving economic opportunities for community members.

5.0 Research Findings

The research findings are presented under three emerging themes: 1) Community Identity and Belonging; 2) Challenges of Access to Space and Displacement; and 3) Community Planning, Advocacy, and Support.

5.1 Community, Identity and Belonging

Participants described Little Jamaica and Parkdale as neighbourhoods where they felt a strong sense of belonging to their local communities. The interviewed participant (#7) in Parkdale, an owner of a cafe, shared that it was a tight-knit community where people supported each other and were always willing to lend a helping hand:

“So, um, that's one thing I really liked was, um, I got to know everybody, like, whether it was the shop owners, whether it was the neighbours. I felt like everybody just sort of watched out for each other. Like, we would often talk to some of the people that were unhoused and just got to know them too. And I felt like everybody knew me and my kids and I liked it.”

This individual's experience within the community provided a sense of safety and security, as everyone looked out for each other. The individual also discussed that the communities that they belonged in, for example, the parent community was a big part of their identity. They were able to socialize with other parents and help with school activities.

For many participants in Little Jamaica, significant spaces were those that allowed for networking, gathering, and information-sharing, regardless of whether they were formal, institutionalized settings (e.g., libraries, community centres) or informal, privately owned spaces. Participant #1, an immigrant from St. Lucia, discussed that, *“I built relationships with people there going to the laundromat. And, I mean, it looked like something that was, um, to someone else. It may not be all significant, but to me it was, oh, the place for community.”* Informal gathering spaces were important to many people as they could build relationships, gain support and acceptance. Participant #4, an individual who owns a hair salon and barber shop, discussed how their salon is a community gathering space and a knowledge hub for the community. *“Well, the community is a sense of identity. When you are part of a community, it's like a resource center.”* People are able to learn about job opportunities, housing options, educational programs, as well as culture, society, and a range of other topics. Another interviewee discussed the significance of barbershops and how they are seen as a support system, as Participant #9, a CLT representative, shared:

“I will say ...something that really broke my heart was we had a barbershop in our building. I always said that the barber, a barbershop, is more important than an art gallery in terms of culture. And the barbershop, you know, the people there were amazing. come to the barbershop, and [it forms] its own community. And from there they're like, where can I get XY right? And so, there was. It's almost like this support system that's really important to me. It's just such an important piece of the community. It's a business where people come back and back and back, and they meet.”

The places discussed in this section are laundromats, hair salons, and barbershops that are informal, privately owned community gathering spaces where people regularly visit. In these places, people are able to gain resources, socialize, and foster a sense of belonging within their community.



Figure 5: Image of a co-working space that is now vacant

Placemaking emerged as a key theme among participants, particularly in regards to summer activities, farmers' markets, and community initiatives that took place in formal, institutionalized public spaces. Significant places in Little Jamaica were identified by interviewees including the library, local farmers' market, and community centre that host various programs for youth and older adults. The library was an important place for many participants as they were able to use the desktop computers or printers there to complete work. This was especially helpful for people who did not have certain technologies or spaces. Participant #2, a community member, discussed that the library's collection was diverse, featuring books that reflected a wide range of lived experiences and walks of life. The library is also a gathering space for public consultations and community events. Overall, the library functioned as a space where people could access services and support, socialize, and participate in community events and programming.

The farmers' market was a significant place for many participants, where they and their families participated in arts activities, children's programs, tasted cultural foods, and learned about other cultures. Participant #2 discussed that they were able to buy callaloo (a popular Caribbean dish) and try it for the first time and they really enjoyed it. Participant #10, a community member in Little Jamaica shared that the community centre was a significant place for many people, particularly due to its publicly accessible pool, which was used by people of all ages. During the go-along interviews, other participants pointed out the Nia Centre for the Arts which is Black-led on Oakwood Avenue, a relatively new development that serves as a community space with art programming, offices, and a workspace for individuals.

These public spaces functioned as important 'third places' where many residents could gather, socialize, and share information. Third places are defined as places outside the home or workplace that foster social interaction and a sense of belonging (Littman, 2024). One notable third place within the Little Jamaica neighbourhood was a co-working space that many community members went to; unfortunately, the space is now vacant (*Figure 5*).

During the go-along interviews in Little Jamaica, participants pointed out various businesses operated by Portuguese, Spanish, Ethiopian, Cuban, and Jamaican owners, highlighting the area's cultural and community diversity. In both locations the demographic composition is constantly changing, with different waves of immigrants drawn to the areas over time. Participants #3 and #6, both CLT representatives, noted that the public spaces within the neighbourhoods can also function as business incubators by offering pop-up opportunities, business support services, and affordable rents for small immigrant- and Black-owned businesses. This approach has been piloted in other community centres across Toronto and is currently being implemented by the LJCLT.

Additionally, the LJCLT aims to maintain Black businesses. Preserving cultural heritage and spaces in Little Jamaica for the Black community was addressed, as explained by Participant #6:

"We're working with some developers in the neighbourhood about potentially being able to retain their retail space to the land trust. So, in a world where there's already twelve developments happening in the neighbourhood, the most that we are able to do, hopefully, and the best that we can do to maintain cultural heritage and cultural spaces, particularly for Black folks, is to get into those developments. And so, for us, that's like a non-negotiable like, we're not doing things that don't encompass small business ... where Black people are living right now ... where Blackness is holding on."

Giving back to the community through the concept of the Black dollar was highlighted by several participants, as elaborated by Participant #1: *"I like to go to the community [to make purchases], exactly. And you also help in the community. That's the thing. And I like that. It's like an ecosystem."* The Black dollar is a concept that describes the Black economy through the selling and purchasing of goods within the Black community. When communities contribute to the Black dollar, they strengthen the Black economy and support Black communities' businesses. Participant #4 further reaffirmed that it is important to unite as a community and support each other's businesses in order to improve the Black community's economy:

"We have to unite. If we don't unite, then there will be no, um, nothing. Nothing will work. You'll have individuals... who will rise, but no, when they get to the problem, no one looks like this. That is a problem like the Black dollar. The economy that buys Black, gives back to the Black community. So, then the economy will get better for everyone."

Placemaking in Little Jamaica and the Parkdale neighbourhood was important in fostering a strong sense of belonging and identity among many community members. It was discovered that similarly, interviewees discussed the importance of having space to gather and socialize with others. In the Parkdale context, the participant stressed the significance of knowing your community and engaging in formal public spaces in which safety is provided. Contrastingly, the participants in Little Jamaica discussed the importance of informal community gathering spaces and the importance of knowledge exchange.

5.2 Challenges of Access to Place

Participants highlighted the cultural impacts of displacement caused by transit-oriented development and construction, noting that decreased foot traffic negatively affected local businesses along main streets. Chain stores also threatened to gentrify neighbourhoods by displacing immigrant-owned business and local stores. As a result of the displacement, many

racialized immigrant small businesses were forced to close down. The challenges of access to place correlate with the notion of rights to the city and the unequal distribution of opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs in Toronto.



Figure 6: Image of one barrel on Eglinton Avenue West

There was a sense of “no place” during the interviews as people discussed a community whose identity has been lost either to displacement, new development, or unaffordability. Participant #9 discussed that small businesses are engines of culture and she shared that there is a fear of that loss. Participant #1 echoed a sense of cultural loss, highlighting the importance of barrels as BBQ grills on sidewalks, used by restaurants to cook jerk chicken and pork: *“When I saw the barrels, the barrels would bring significance to me. Um. But walking there, we only saw one barrel. But even in the thick of winter, -25 whatever, you would see barrels lining up that street [in the past]. I like that, um, because there is some history to it.”*

Neighbourhood change is evident in the decreasing number of barrels seen on the streets (Figure 6). These barrels were historically used by the Caribbean diaspora to send non-perishable items back to their home islands, or as BBQ grills for restaurants and street vendors, a business practice particularly popularized in Little Jamaica. It was seen as a connection to home and a way to support your family or friends. There is a sense of loss and erasure because there is so much history of Caribbean people here. *“A lot of history dating back to the 1960s, 1970s, and maybe could go even way back. But that's where the majority of them. It's devastating. See what could happen, or what is happening?”* said Participant #1. The change that has occurred over time depicts the erasure of cultural history due to the structural forces of displacement and gentrification. The community faces barriers to remain within the built environment and maintain the sustainability of local businesses and livelihood of community members.

Participant #4 and Participant #6 discussed the impacts that construction had on Little Jamaica and local businesses. The construction has been ongoing for 15 years, causing devastating displacement of many people and businesses, often without the necessary support and resources for the community. Participants highlighted that the construction had adverse effects on businesses, with some reporting issues such as rats, flooding, and structural cracks in their building. For example, Participant #4 shared that he had flooding in his basement due to construction and spent a lot of time and money cleaning up all the mould. Displacement is a product of gentrification, which has been accelerated by the construction of the LRT, resulting in negative impacts on businesses in Little Jamaica. The displacement threatens one's access to

space as they are pushed out of their neighbourhoods, as their business can no longer survive, and they are priced out.



Figure 7: Image of new development on Eglinton Avenue West

Many businesses closed down due to construction, which disrupted commercial activities and decreased foot traffic, making it difficult for customers to navigate the space and buy goods. Participant #6 noted that, *"We lost real cultural staples. Um, real, real cultural staples in the neighbourhood. We lost to the displacement and all. The rise of the cost of living, the construction, um, it definitely, the displacement is like, always, I think the biggest one."* Community members shared that Little Jamaica used to be a vibrant community where people are outside, walking, music is playing, and there is good food in the atmosphere. However, this has all changed due to the new LRT development as businesses have been forced out of the neighbourhood (Figure 7). As a result of displacement, the neighbourhood becomes empty, the demographics change, and the sense of the community is lost. Overall, the emotion expressed by many interviewees was a sense of sadness and loss of the community.

Participants argued that the Little Jamaica community is devalued and neglected as the government does not seem to care about the area. There was also a large discussion on how Black individuals are excluded from ownership of places due to racism and injustices. Participants highlighted a common hatred towards Black people as it has been historically planned to divide thriving Black neighbourhoods and displace community members. Participant #5, a Canadian CLT Network representative, argued that Black displacement has historically happened within urban planning and continues to as more communities become gentrified. There is a constant tension to fighting gentrification when it seems impossible to keep up with:

"I'm sure, [gentrification is] happening in Parkdale and all over, but all over the country, like in Hogan, like Hogan Alley [in Vancouver]. That's an older case in the 60s, that displacement happened. But we're now, we're just seeing now, like that community being

gentrified. And again, folks are trying to organize a pace to keep up with something that's impossible to keep up with, right?"

The fight to mitigate gentrification by organizing to keep up with the changes in their community is an example of fighting for access to place. Black communities have been historically displaced and restricted to the space and places that they can occupy; therefore, the importance of organising and fighting to remain in place is significant for many communities facing gentrification.

Participant #4 discussed the inequalities that Black entrepreneurs face as the banks do not give out loans to Black businesses: *"And that goes again with the fact that the banks ain't giving you nothing, so that you think that who's hiring you?"* There is a sentiment that Black people have to fight harder than other communities as they have to face many barriers against them. This is evidenced when there is a narrower avenue to find a job, nonetheless, find support for your own business. According to Participant #4, over 256 small businesses have closed down in Little Jamaica. The impacts of commercial gentrification and increasing rents caused many people to lose their jobs and livelihoods; therefore, they are forced to move out as it is no longer affordable or sustainable.

5.3 Community Planning, Advocacy, and Support

Community planning and the importance of advocacy and support were addressed by participants. They stressed the need for community members to be involved in the planning process. There needs to be more awareness and education to what is occurring development-wise within communities. There needs to be support for CLTs and for immigrant businesses to be sustainable.

More Involvement in Community Planning

Participants argued that there should be more Black individuals involved in the community development process. Participant #4 discussed that, *"One thing I realized about my community, um, we'll be getting attacked, and we don't even know."* The community is often not aware that they are being targeted in the name of transit-oriented development or revitalization until it happens, at which point it is too late to stop the destruction of neighbourhoods. Participants stated that the community is not well represented as there is no one that has the professional background to bring knowledge into the discussion in the best interest of the community.

Community consultations and engagement in urban planning are frequently viewed as merely checking a box rather than meaningfully involving the community, as elaborated by Participant #8: *"All you have to really do is put a sign up, send a letter or two to people around the neighbourhood, around a certain radius, around the development. And that's it really, that they really have to do the city posts on their website."* There are notable disparities in community engagement, as lower-income individuals often face time constraints that prevent them from attending public meetings, due to long work hours or multiple jobs. Consequently, a particular demographic – those with awareness, access, and time – tends to dominate the public consultations, leaving other groups underrepresented. The Planning Act (1990) mandates that prescribed public bodies be consulted during the preparation of plans and provided with an opportunity to review all supporting information and materials. However, these policies often fail to ensure proper and meaningful public engagement in reality despite their mandates. Community consultations and engagement exercises are frequently conducted as tokenistic procedural

formalities without fostering genuine dialogue with community members. Limited access to information about meetings further worsens the intended outcomes of public consultation, resulting in a lack of proper representation among marginalized communities.

Participants addressed that they want community control and community power, which is crucial for designing and building spaces based on their lived experiences rather than having them dictated by outsiders. The community should be involved in the very beginning and there should be community representatives at the table who are part of the decision-making process. *“I want us Black folks to be the leaders of those conversations as to what's going to happen to our neighbourhood,”* said Participant #6. Planning should actively involve local community members who have lived experience and knowledge of the area to co-design spaces and inform decision-making. This approach ensures that businesses and community spaces are supported by addressing the actual needs and priorities of the community.

Participants also highlighted the importance of educating the public and spreading political messages through artistic methods. This can be done through writing, plays, films where people can listen, watch, and learn about each other's stories. CLT workers emphasized the importance of community engagement in the CLT model, and they described events where people are able to learn more about the land trust and be involved. For instance, the KMCLT has organized walking tours and recently ran a program featuring a 'passport' that included numerous local businesses. Individuals visited any of the local businesses listed in the passport or a local business with a passport sign in their window to receive a stamp with or without a purchase. This was a creative and interactive initiative that encouraged individuals to visit local businesses and purchase goods. These initiatives provided opportunities for community engagement while supporting small businesses, especially those owned by immigrants.

Supports for CLTs

CLT interviewees addressed that capacity is limited as these organizations are non-profits with limited staff or are volunteer-run. Much of the work for CLT staff focuses on growing the land trust, acquiring land, and securing funding. A common obstacle for CLTs has been funding as they have limited economic resources, as explained by Participant #6.

“I think land trust models in Canada right now are doing amazing work, but they're not making money right? They're not making their own money. They're making ends meet through grants and through rent from their tenants. But we wanna be making money and also add, like, as a model that we're trying to get for Black folks. We want Black people to be making money,”

The LJCLT aims to improve the economic status of Black people and add money for individuals as well as the community. In order to achieve their goals, CLTs need to apply for grants and loans or raise funds through donations to support land acquisition and operational costs. The problem that they are facing is that they are all competing for the same grant. CLT interviewees also stated the importance of having community as the centre of the organization. Additional funding support is needed from governments to increase CLTs' capacity and meet their goals.

Support for Immigrant Businesses

Interviewed entrepreneurs argued that there should be more funding and economic support from the government to help with rent and start-up costs. All levels of government need to be more involved with supporting small businesses, especially racialized immigrant businesses.

There should be one standardized lease, along with community benefit charges and protections for commercial tenants. A standardized lease would decrease the loss of businesses and would aid in recognizing the importance of small businesses in place. The enactment of vacancy control from the provincial government for business would protect renters from renoviction. Furthermore, it would decrease the frequency of commercial displacement of immigrant businesses. Community benefits charge was discussed throughout to support community development. Developers are obligated to provide community benefits which can be used to maintain and preserve immigrant businesses. The LJCLT leveraged community benefits to provide space within mixed-use buildings; for example, the first floor of condo buildings for spaces for Black-led businesses. The Community Benefits Framework was adopted by the Toronto City Council in 2019 to create inclusive and equitable economic opportunities through community benefits initiatives (City of Toronto, n.d.). A range of outcomes fall under the term “community benefits” when the City of Toronto buys, builds, provides financial incentives, or any other opportunities. The outcomes from community benefits include employment and training opportunities for local businesses (City of Toronto, n.d.).

Currently, there are no protections for commercial rents, as commercial rent control has not been legalized in Ontario. Participant #3 elaborated on their frustration:

“No funds, or anywhere in Canada that would say, hey, we’ll help you buy land as a commercial entity. It’s all about residential right now, and we think it’s the biggest gap possible, because it’s like, we can’t protect the housing [without protecting] the commercial businesses, because then we’re losing our communities, right?”

As a precedent, the KMCLT holds the land for businesses and increases rents by approximately 2% annually to match inflation. The price per square foot that they are holding for the building fosters affordable commercial spaces for immigrants. Participant #2 emphasized that the lack of commercial rent control is a significant issue because many businesses are evicted when property owners double rents. When people open a business, they want to make sure it is sustainable for the long-term and the unpredictability of high and increasing rents is an obstacle. Participants also urged that there should be more pathways to ownership. It would be beneficial to support rent-to-own models in order to increase long-term ownership of commercial businesses.

6.0 Discussion

The study found that racialized immigrant communities are becoming increasingly gentrified, which is impacting the sustainability of immigrant businesses and the community's connection to space. Fostering a community identity and inclusive place-making has a significant impact on preserving culturally significant spaces. Based on the insights from the interviews, many participants discussed how important placemaking practices are in providing community spaces, learning from each other, providing a social network, and promoting sustainable immigrant businesses. Participants discussed that the Little Jamaica and Parkdale neighbourhoods are places of belonging in which they have a strong sense of identity. Many

participants discussed both informal, privately owned spaces and formal, institutionalized public spaces as ‘third places’ where they could network and share information. These third places included the laundromat, community centres, parks, farmers’ markets, schools, restaurants, Western Union, hair salons, and barbershops, to name a few.



Figure 8: Image of Soul Provisions, a staple for many community members

Many participants discussed the diversity in their neighbourhoods and the representation of a “home away from home.” The demographics of both neighbourhoods are constantly changing, reshaped by the influx of immigrants. Soul Provisions (*Figure 8*) was a business a few participants pointed out during the go-along interviews as a place to obtain provisions such as yams, cassava, and cocoa. The business gives people access to staples that they would enjoy back home and represents the feeling of a “home away from home.” Diversity contributed to a high density of diverse businesses and cultural spaces, especially the Black community in Little Jamaica. The cultural spaces provide a sense of identity and significance for the Black community. This finding reflected similarity to the literature as immigrants settled in areas that reminded them of their country of origin. This occurred as previous immigrants were attracted to settle in an area due to the affordability, access to cultural foods or amenities and services (Li, 2025; Logan & Murdie, 2016). They can give back to their community, strengthen the Black economy, and create a livelihood for themselves and their families.

The significance of Black culture and businesses and the impact on place-making was an emerging theme from interviews, specifically in Little Jamaica. Immigrant-owned businesses contributed to individuals' sense of belonging and identity. In Little Jamaica, Black culture and businesses have been facing erasure and neglect. There is a struggle with gaining access to ownership and sustaining identity within space due to discrimination, rent hikes, and pressures from transit-orientated displacement. The interviews provided deeper insight into the disparities experienced by Black business owners that had not been fully identified in the literature. Historically, the impact and legacy of Black communities in Toronto have been continuously erased by planning practices. In the context of Kensington Market, Black businesses are

drastically leaving the area. As one participant discussed, a barber shop, which was an anchor of the community, left as they could no longer afford rent. There is an erasure of Blackness as Black communities are priced out and forcefully removed from space. The erasure of Blackness is similarly discussed in the literature, which demonstrates how historically Black communities have experienced, and continue to experience displacement and erasure (Sabeta, 2024; Pace & Davis, 2024; Black Urbanism Toronto, n.d., p.5). Black communities are excluded from the planning process and disregarded when their community becomes gentrified. Despite the injustices they face, Black communities strive to maintain a strong sense of identity, community, and belonging, a theme that was prevalent throughout the interviews. Many participants discussed the strong ties to their community through social spaces, farmers' markets, restaurants, and other businesses. There was a strong sense of community as many participants reflected on how they could rely on one another, as many people knew their neighbours. Overall, third spaces provided a sense of community and safety that united the community.

Transit-oriented development, new development, and the influx of big-box chain stores resulted in a cultural loss. Racialized immigrant businesses are increasingly threatened by gentrification, which can lead to displacement and force businesses to close. As more businesses close, the neighbourhood begins to experience a growing sense of emptiness and placelessness. During the go-along interviews, participants reflected on how their neighbourhood had changed over the years from a once vibrant area with thriving businesses to one marked by business closures. The challenges differ for Little Jamaica and Parkdale, as Parkdale did not experience the traumatic impacts of gentrification and displacement which is supported by literature (Zentner, 2017; Ostanel, 2020; Baker et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2023). A participant in Parkdale discussed that the Tibetan community, which primarily resides in Parkdale, has a strong foothold in the neighbourhood. The community supports one another and rallies against development that threatens to gentrify their neighbourhood. The individual discussed how local businesses created a tight social connection, in which community members gathered to protect local businesses. This context differs from Little Jamaica, where many Black communities often recognize the threats only after development has occurred.



Figure 9: Business for lease

The emptiness of neighbourhoods shows a sense of "no place," and the neighbourhood becomes a shell of itself (*Figure 9*). The buildings are present; however, the identity has been lost, and the street has less diversity of people. The unique identity and mom-and-pop shops are lost when there is a more significant influx of chain stores. It was evident within literature and during interviews that small immigrant businesses were the fabric of community identity and a sense of belonging (Sabeta, 2024; Pace & Davis, 2024; Li, 2015; Black Urbanism Toronto, n.d.). Immigrant businesses provide economic opportunities, especially for Black entrepreneurs who face additional barriers to receiving financial support by receiving loans and funding from banks, renting a commercial space, or remaining in space due to racism and discrimination. Black entrepreneurs face greater difficulty obtaining loans and are therefore more likely to rely on their own support networks (Lee & Black, 2017; Mishra, Short, & Dodson, 2024; Fairlie, Robb, & Robinson, 2021). One participant discussed that they only received support from the government during COVID-19. The experiences of Black entrepreneurs show the lack of economic support the government gives Black entrepreneurs. There is a lack of available literature about discriminatory practices that limit financial opportunities for Black entrepreneurs. This study indicated that there is a gap, especially in the Canadian context. It calls for future research to understand the inequalities Black business owners experience in Canada.

Transit development construction impacted the businesses in Little Jamaica, specifically the cross-town LRT. Many businesses were forced to close due to less foot traffic as the blockage from construction impacted the number of consumers. Metrolinx workers also took many parking spots, which created difficulties for customers as they could not find anywhere to park. The construction contributed to fewer customers and fewer economic opportunities for businesses. This finding expands on existing research as not only does the development of transit displace individuals but the construction processes significantly impact the community (Chen et al., 2023; Sabeta, 2024; Chava & Renne, 2022; Black Urbanism Toronto, n.d.). Metrolinx declared that they would not be in a particular area for a while; however, they did not keep their promise. The construction was stagnant, and it had permanent effects on many immigrant/Black businesses. Furthermore, the transit development process was not planned based on the needs and priorities of the community.

Lower-income communities have more time constraints to engage in public consultations, as discussed in the interviews. The findings suggest that urban planning should include meaningful and inclusive engagement with communities, and the planning process should centre around community voices. Current legislation on public engagement depicts a gap between the intended goals of consultation and engagement policies and their implementation on the ground. While the legislation broadly defines engagement, it does not provide support for meaningful participation; for example, holding a single public meeting is often insufficient to achieve intentional and substantive community engagement. The number of public engagement meetings alone does not indicate adequate engagement; inclusive and meaningful engagement also requires integrating community voices and actively listening to their needs and priorities. Involving diverse community voices will result in a more vibrant and inclusive neighbourhood that is developed in the interest of the community and maintains the community's cultural heritage. The interviewees further discussed the importance of immigrant businesses, noting that they have contributed not only to Canada's economic growth, but also to the nation's diversity and cultural heritage (Li, 2015, p. 23). The cultural heritage can be seen in both communities as Parkdale has an impactful Tibetan community with many family-owned Tibetan local businesses and Little Jamaica has a significant Jamaican presence. The restaurants, barber shops, and community spaces contribute to Canada's economic growth and cultural identity.

Community neglect and the struggles of preserving public space connect to the previous theme, as a CLT can be seen as a preservation strategy. Community neglect was discussed in the interviews as neighbourhoods have been disinvested by the government due to a lack of maintenance for infrastructure, funding for businesses, schools, or public spaces, and care for community members. Disinvestment occurs in many low-income communities, especially racialized communities in which there is less financial support from the government. In Parkdale, community members were able to organize and protest against gentrification as their local businesses were threatened by the development of chain businesses.

Interview data reveal the systemic discrimination faced by Black entrepreneurs in accessing business loans. Racialized immigrants face structural barriers to ownership and commercial space, which are further exacerbated by the destruction of neighbourhoods. This pattern of racial exclusion reflects the historical displacement of Black communities due to the colonial foundations of planning practices. During the interviews, many participants emphasized the need to 'de-plan' neighbourhoods as traditional planning has disrupted and continues to disrupt many communities. The concept of 'de-planning' highlights the need to shift in the way planners develop communities to a more community-based approach by planning with communities, protecting community assets, and working to de-commodify land.

Cultural loss and place-keeping strategies were discussed during interviews as immigrant neighbourhoods are impacted by development that changes the fabric of the community. Participants discussed the impacts of cultural loss and the sense of losing their community within space. The creation, maintenance, and preservation of community spaces were evident through interviews and supported by the literature. CLTs have been proven to engage in public spaces where everyday activities occur in dynamic relations between space and different individuals (Ostanel, 2020, p. 1). CLTs provide a structure for direct community governance and agency in land use and development. A CLT can spread awareness and promote community development, encouraging community-centered planning. Previous studies have highlighted how CLTs mitigate gentrification (Epstein, 2019; Kruger et al., 2020; Lowe et al., 2022; Veronesi et al., 2022; Choi et al., 2018); however, this study demonstrates that community rallying and support are equally important in resisting gentrification. The findings suggest that communities can host events and rallies and participate in place-making and place-keeping to preserve areas when they unite. In Parkdale, community members came together to rally against a chain restaurant entering the community, which forced the restaurant to move farther from the commercial core. Also, the momo crawls in Parkdale, and the farmers' market in Little Jamaica are community events that foster a sense of community and market local businesses. Immigrant communities continue to preserve local businesses and public space through community events, programming, education, and the creation of third spaces.

CLTs can be used to mitigate gentrification, which can be seen in Kensington Market and Parkdale as they protect affordability and provide community members with agency and control through collective governance. The most significant struggle for CLTs and immigrant businesses is finances, as there is not enough funding for CLTs and immigrant businesses. Funding is available; however, it may be competitive and difficult for some people to navigate. There are also no commercial protections, which leaves commercial businesses more vulnerable to rent hikes as there is no commercial rent control. Also, there is no standardized lease for businesses, which contributes to discrepancies and uncertainty for entrepreneurs. The research has shown that all levels of government need to collaborate to increase funding and support for both CLTs and immigrant business owners. Furthermore, CLTs strengthen community access to space and promote equity within the built environment. Policy should protect small businesses as they are our cities' cultural and economic engines, which many participants emphasized.

CLTs can also protect immigrant communities, foster a sense of community, and strengthen a sense of belonging. The interviewees' findings align with the literature, showing that CLTs help retain diversity, resist gentrification, and promote social cohesion and inclusive planning (Choi et al., 2018; Epstein, 2019; Kruger et al., 2020; Lowe et al., 2022; Veronesi et al., 2022). The CLT interviewees emphasized the need for greater government support from all levels of government. Echoing the literature, they noted that CLTs face limited government funding and insufficient legislative support. Conversely, the CLT interviewees explained that there is a lot of community buy-in to become part of the CLT programs and events. The literature discussed difficulties attracting members to activities and events; however, the study signified that many people are very interested in CLT-run events (Kruger et al., 2020, p. 645). The key for CLT organizations is to be marketable to reach the community and provide knowledge about their practices, goals, and involvement.

7.0 Conclusion

The study investigated how immigrant businesses in Toronto's neighbourhoods built community in the face of gentrification and how a CLT can help mitigate displacement pressures to support immigrant entrepreneurs. CLTs can mitigate gentrification's impact on immigrant businesses by buying property or holding rents at an affordable rate compared to market value. Community members can support local businesses and engage in placemaking practices to provide a sense of community and belonging. Through both informal, privately owned spaces and formal, institutionalized public spaces, people can receive goods and services, socialize, share information, and build community bonding. CLTs facilitate placemaking by organizing community events in public spaces that promote local businesses and increase residents' awareness of cultural diversity. Such initiatives empower the community to take agency in neighbourhood development and urban planning processes. Based on these findings, the study offers the following recommendations for planning policies and practices.

1. Immigrant businesses and CLTs need more support. The provincial government should expand rent control and rent protections to commercial businesses. Stronger protections are needed for commercial immigrant businesses to prevent drastic rent increases. According to the Residential Tenancies Act, residential rent can only be increased by 2.5% each year; this should be similar for commercial businesses (Province of Ontario, 2024).

2. There should be a standard lease throughout all small businesses and more financial support for immigrant businesses, especially for racialized immigrants that have greater difficulty obtaining loans. This standardized lease should be a requirement by every landlord within the City of Toronto to encourage equality and transparency for businesses.

3. CLTs need more funding to support their organizations. The funding would support staffing, increase capacity building, and enable the acquisition of land and buildings for the community. There should be a higher funding capacity from all levels of government, especially provincial and federal, since municipalities have limited resources.

4. When new development is built within pre-existing immigrant communities, it would be beneficial to partner or have an agreement with developers to have Community Benefit Charges that would give back to the community. This could involve spaces for immigrant businesses in the ground level of condominiums for an affordable rate or a share of units being given to CLT organizations. Despite community change, this would allow residents to stay within the community

and become part of the change. As a result, fewer community members and racialized immigrant businesses would be displaced.

5. Governments should implement stricter, multi-step community engagement guidelines that require developers and planners to meaningfully involve community members in planning processes. Engagement strategies should include accessible events, arts, and cultural programming to reach out to diverse community members intentionally and inclusively. The goal is to foster broader, more equitable, and inclusive participation in planning decision-making and community-led initiatives such as CLTs.

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