Negotiating Networks of Self-Employed Work: Strategies of Minority Ethnic Contractors

Abstract
Within the increased flexible, contracted work in cities, employment is negotiated through network arrangements characterised by multiplicity, mobility and fluidity. For black and minority ethnic group members, this network labour becomes fraught as they negotiate both their own communities, which can be complex systems of conflicting networks, as well as non-BME networks which can be exclusionary. This discussion explores the networking experiences of BME individuals who are self-employed in portfolio work arrangements in Canada. The analysis draws from a theoretical frame of 'racialisation' (Mirchandani and Chan, 2007) to examine the social processes of continually constructing and positioning the Other as well as the self through representations in these networks. These positions and concomitant identities enroll BME workers in particular modes of social production, which order their roles and movement in the changing dynamics of material production in networked employment.

Flexible work in various forms has become prominent in urban contexts in recent decades. Much of it is precarious (Fudge and Owens, 2006) and organised through networked arrangements. These work networks can range in elasticity, formality and fluidity, domains of interaction (virtual and real), purpose, mode of constitution, and so forth. Questions of difference and exclusion are important when considering diverse individual workers' participation in and benefits from these networks, such as individuals referred to as black and minority ethnic persons. Particularly in cities, typically characterised by population diversity due to migration and to concentrations of minority ethnic groups, these questions of how difference actually is enacted amidst the dense networks enabled by urban centres become critical. This discussion examines the experiences of mostly immigrant 'BME'[1] individuals living in Canadian cities who are negotiating these networks of flexible work, and the meanings they ascribe to these experiences. Their voices contribute useful information to our understanding of networked employment arrangements in contemporary urban communities: how such networks are constituted and sustained, how they configure urban social and economic patterns, and how network participation is interrelated with work, identity and well-being. More particularly, their experiences raise important issues about how race and ethnicity affect participation in networks for flexible work. What processes of racialisation are generated in these networks? How are these processes experienced, negotiated and shaped by ethnic minority workers? These issues form the focus of the following discussion.

---

[1] The term 'BME' is not commonly used in Canada where this study was conducted. It has been adopted throughout the discussion here partly in anticipation of a largely UK readership, partly because of reviewers' request for consistency in terminology, and partly because there doesn't appear to be any one term among the wide range in use that is inherently better. In Canadian discussions of multicultural groups and individuals, different writers refer to 'visible minorities', persons 'of colour' or even 'racialized' persons. 'Black' or more specific categories (African-Canadian, Caribbean-Canadian) might be used. Indeed, all of these terms appear in different participant quotes throughout this article. Of course, the ongoing problem in using any of these labels to analyse social patterns, including 'BME', is their tendency to stabilise and essentialise difference. The best we might do is to hold the tensions open as reflexively as possible.

The discussion draws from a study of BME individuals engaged in a particular form of flexible work in Canada: self-employed contract work, which is often precarious, and sometimes debilitating. The individuals featured in this article contracted their work in various activities, from foot-care nursing to computer servicing. Two things became clear in this study. First, the networks that these individuals negotiated are complex, crossing diverse communities and structures of race and class. Second, these workers developed sophisticated strategies to navigate the relations of these networks. Their strategies were not only about gaining entry and membership in exclusive networks, but also about working the contradictions of position within these networks. Contradictions were encountered when individuals found themselves building credibility or social capital within the racialised, even stereotyped positions that networks assigned to them while trying to recast these positions. The discussion shows how these self-employed BME workers adopted various strategies to negotiate the contradictions of racialised positions across different network forms. These positions, and concomitant identities, enroll them in particular modes of social production that order their roles and movement in the changing dynamics of material production, in what McRobbie (2002:101) terms the 'lottery' economies of networked cities.

Self-Employed Work and the Centrality of Networks

Flexible non-standard work has been increasing in Canada, particularly in service sectors and small decentralised workplaces predominantly employing women and (often BME) immigrants (Cranford, Vosko and Zukewich 2003). Own account self-employment is argued to be the most precarious form of non-standard employment given the uncertain wages, lack of regulatory protection, and lack of employees (Fudge, Tucker and Vosko 2002). The particular form of own account self-employment work featured here, called 'portfolio work' by some authors (Cohen & Mallon, 1999; Gold & Fraser, 2002), is where individuals engage in multiple contracts with various employers, without an employing intermediary. This sort of self-employment is also described in terms of boundaryless workers, 'itinerant experts' (Barley & Kunda, 2004), freelancers or contractors. This work is typically project-based, defined by independent bounded contracts juggling various activities to multiple employers simultaneously, including organisations and single individuals (Fenwick, 2004). These employers present different work contexts, demand very different forms of work activity, and often require the worker to assume different roles and identities. Contracts in these diverse contexts often are conducted simultaneously. Work conditions are inherently flexible, mobile and often precarious. That is, this work demonstrates conditions often characterised as precarious: low degree of certainty of continuing employment; low control over working conditions, wages and pace of work; lack of regulatory protection; and often income levels that may be insufficient to maintain the worker and his/her dependants (Cranford et al. 2003). In the subsequent discussion, references to self-employment and the self-employed individuals in the study are intended to indicate these portfolio forms of work.

While some commentators celebrate what they characterise to be the liberatory aspects of portfolio self-employed work arrangements, others have shown its contradictions and repressions, and the complex enrolments of individuals' complicity in these (Fenwick 2006; Fudge and Owens 2006; McRobbie 2002; Vosko 2000). In self-employment, individuals lack protection of sickness, disability and pension benefits, and self-exploit their own labour through unpaid overwork, unpaid periods between paid projects, and unpaid work volunteered as a way to make contacts and gain entry into networks. As Winson and Leach (2003) show in their

extended study of the disruptive effects of contingent work on people's lives and community, individuals not only face long commutes, unstable jobs, and diminished earnings, but also don't have sustained organisational contexts in which workers often develop cohesive relationships, even long-term friendships, and collective support.

Particularly in this sort of self-employment, participation in social and occupational networks are critical (Staber and Aldrich 1995). First, these workers' capacity to find and maintain clients depends on informal networking. One's income depends on one's clients valuing the knowledge/skill on offer, which depends partly on other networks that establish which knowledge is most relevant. Second, these workers' labour is often bound up with continuous production and transfer of knowledge. As such, they need both connections with social networks of information and opportunity, and the capability to identify and translate knowledge across different networks. Urban centres in particular tend to offer a density of cross cutting networks that are both regional and transnational, occupational and social, institutional and informational. Urban centres also can enable easier network access for personal interactions, which are particularly valued by self-employed contract workers where 'word of mouth' is one of the most relied-upon forms of transaction, and where network relations serve many purposes (Fenwick, 2006). As Barley and Kunda (2004) show, contractors must constantly manage who they know as well as what they know to survive in the market: a labour of managing one's self, knowledge, and social capital. These networks are not just conduits to institutions offering employment, but can also create networked spaces that produce and distribute goods and services. Networks function very differently than the social structures of the organisations to which self-employed workers might be contracted. For one thing, networks of flexible employment are ephemeral and easy to dismantle. McRobbie (2002) argues that because networks are formed through temporary activity and fleeting social interaction rather than through long-term collective structures, and linked to personal association and goals of self-promotion and self-advancement, they can be highly exclusionary. Divisions and inequities along lines of race, class and gender, even age and (dis)ability, are often rendered invisible.

Race and Class in Networks

Much of the literature documenting self-employed workers and their networks has focused on white men and women. Zeytinoglu and Muteshi (2000) urge closer attention to 'how race, class, and citizenship have been underlying forces in the constructions and arrangements of flexible work' (p. 111). Without examination of race, whiteness becomes positioned as an invisible norm. However, issues of difference come to the fore when examining the professional network opportunities for those often finding themselves socially excluded. Studies of self-employed minorities have long focused on the difficulties that many have in penetrating financial or other powerful networks (Teixeira 2002), and have noted their smaller business size and income. In a report of BME enterprise in the UK, Ram and Smallbone (2001) find a continuing lack of access to finance, language barriers, lack of confidence, and low propensity to use mainstream business support services.

In urban centres, ethnic segregation has long been studied as a dominant dynamic structuring economic and social patterns (van Kempen and Özüekren 1998): past analyses of BME self-employment often assumed that urban ethnic enclaves (spatial concentrations of particular ethnic groups) provide the strong ties and cultural supports that assure more successful business and growth. For example, some have examined enclaves to conclude that Caribbean people in Canada are the least likely to be self-employed (Lo, Teixeira & Truelove 2002).

However, the ethnic enclaves approach has been criticised because it overlooks important networks and distributed arrangements of entrepreneurial work conducted by ethnic individuals that reach well beyond a particular community (Basu & Werbner 2001). Much entrepreneurial activity, argue Basu and Werbner, is actually conducted through intra-ethnic trading and economic networks that are distributed across geographic territories and can be invisible when analysis focuses only on the ethnic enclave. This propensity to distribution and mobility might be more visible in particular occupations and sectors, such as information technologies, cultural industries, and professional consulting where BMEs are emerging (Ram and Smallbone 2001). It might also be attributed more to some groups than others. Shan (2010) for example, found that Chinese engineers in Canada were relatively mobile and worked almost exclusively in shifting multi-ethnic networks of project-based work. However a further complication to the ethnic enclaves approach to understanding self-employment are sub-ethnic and cross-ethnic complexities: one study of Sino-Vietnamese businesses in Toronto's Chinatown revealed diverse networks cutting across Chinese, Vietnamese and Hong Kong suppliers, customers and employers, but these networks were constrained as well as facilitated by the competitive culture of the Chinatown enclave (Phan and Luk 2007). Overall, a 'mixed embeddedness' perspective is recommended by Ram and Jones (2008), in their review of research and policy in the UK, to move beyond a focus on 'ethnic culture' or specific ethnic ties, and to analyse ethnic minority businesses within broader social, economic, geographical and institutional processes

One problem in trying to expand analysis is that among self-employed workers, BME persons may be underrepresented, argues McRobbie (2002). This is likely to be the effect of complex factors, including the categorisation and representation of BME individuals. Virdee (2006) suggests, for example, that increases in self-employment among Asian workers are mostly in inferior conditions, and represent complex relations among geographical location of different BME groups, anti-racist activism, educational qualifications and racism. There is also evidence of discrimination circulating through informal networks, which may indeed be disadvantaging BME workers. For example, in one of the few studies available of self-employed 'women of colour', Mirchandani (2003) found that many had experienced networks as structures of nepotism and exclusion.

But simply adding categories of race and class to analysis tends to reify these categories as fixed, identifiable and essentialised markers of bodies. Some theorisations of race-class-gender, for example, have posited a 'multiple jeopardy' or 'matrix of domination', which makes sense in abstract conceptions but goes little way to explain the complexities of human experience that flows across such categories. More recent analyses have explored the situated nature of race, gender and class as processes in specific geographical and historical contexts. Glenn (1999) argues that such processes take place through representation (symbols, images), micro-interaction (norms) and social structure (allocation of power along race/class/gender lines) (p. 9). Razack (1998) urges exploration of the meanings of this dimensions, and their shifting relations, as they come together to structure individuals in different and fluid positions of power and privilege (p. 12). In the case of self-employment, Morokovasic (1991) redirects attention to its activeness: she asks how ethnic minority individuals who are socially constructed as passive and as victims demonstrate in fact that they can and do engage in self-employment which inherently requires dynamism and assertive behavior (p. 408).

This line of analysis is developed in the conception of racialisation explained by Mirchandani and Chan (2007). While racialisation is a more complex set of ideas than can be fully expressed here, its importance for the present discussion is an emphasis on race as a fluid, socially constructed category rather than a fixed biological marker. What becomes visible as 'race' is in effect created through 'racialisation', which involves the social processes of continually constructing and positioning the 'Other' through representations while constructing the 'self' through 'racialisation from within'. These processes function differently and are negotiated differently for different people, even when individuals share the same racial group. Particularly in movements of racialisation-from-within, individuals define themselves and learn strategies of response according to how their position, visibility and ascribed power changes from one community or network to another. Further, Mirchandani and Chan show the critical dynamics of class that infuse racialisation. That is, different modes of social production are established within the process of material production and orderings created in the political economy of global capitalism.

Overall, this conception goes much further than racism understood as prejudiced acts inflicted by the racist (white) powerful upon (non-white) victims. Racialisation helps to understand how different social locations along with their attendant inequities and privileges come into being and are sustained through ongoing relations. This is a particularly useful approach to examine a phenomenon like networking among self-employed workers, where BME persons must negotiate positions that are produced by economic, cultural and social relations, and upon which their future economic survival depends.

Study Method

This qualitative study explored work experiences narrated by self-employed individuals who contract their services to various organisations and clients. Nineteen in-depth interviews in total were conducted, involving seven men and eleven women who may be described as BME persons. An additional interview with a white woman who worked closely with a non-white partner has been included because this person also reported interesting insights about the racialisation processes experienced within their partnership. The aim was to explore individuals' experiences and strategies in using networks to conduct self-employed work, rather than to identify particular patterns of work or racialisation within particular ethnic groups, occupations or urban regions. Therefore the concern was to obtain reasonable diversity in the sample and to locate individuals willing and able to narrate details of their experiences of self-employment and networking as a BME person, not to represent particular populations and proportions. The research team recruited participants in two Canadian cities through 'snowball' methods, obtaining initial potential names through the researchers' own contacts in immigrant communities, then obtaining further referrals from these participants. Ten of the 18 BME participants immigrated to Canada as adults: all ten had professional credentials obtained through post-secondary education in another country. Participants contracted their work in a wide rangeof activities: services such as commercial cleaning and computer maintenance; construction such as painting and carpentry; sales (real estate); as well as professional work: organisational development, home nursing, journalism, and engineering consulting.

Participants all lived and worked either in Edmonton, the capital of the western prairie province of Alberta (city pop. 782, 439 in 2009), or in Toronto, Ontario in central Canada (city pop. 2,503, 280 in 2006). Toronto's BME population is 46.9%, compared to Edmonton's total of 22.4%. While clearly Toronto is much more diverse in multicultural demographics, the top self-

reported BME groups are the same for both cities on the 2006 municipal census: South and Southeast Asian form 13.5% of Toronto's population and 6.5% of Edmonton's, Chinese are 11.4% of Toronto and 6% of Edmonton; Blacks form 8.4% of Toronto and 2.6% of Edmonton, Filipino is 4.1% of Toronto and 2.5% of Edmonton, while Latin American is 2.6% of Toronto and 1.2% of Edmonton. While Toronto and Edmonton offer different urban environments of culture and BME diversity, the study aim was not to compare BME experiences against regional characteristics; and in fact, the study sample is far too small to attempt such analyses.

Participants' regions of origin were also diverse, and included the Philippines (two men), Caribbean (five men and two women), Africa (two women), Singapore/Malaysia (two women), China (one woman), and India (four women). Such labels, however, can be misleading in representing complex ethnic identities and communities with which individuals feel affiliated. For example, here is how Faith, a Caribbean nurse whose Canadian husband lived with her in Trinidad several years before they relocated back to Canada, describes her ethnicity:

> My background is I'm half Chinese, Spanish and French. My father is originally from China. I look Filipino but I'm actually am you know Chinese, from Trinidad. … I don't like to be mistaken for Filipino. It happens all the time. (Faith, ll. 146-152)

In the interviews, participants were asked to describe their overall activities, clients, and work processes in self-employment, then to explain their experiences in developing and using networks in this work. Participants were asked to describe specific networks that were most valuable to their work as well as those that were not helpful, reflecting on their strategies of joining, the challenges and experiences of participating, and the different relationships and outcomes that they experienced through these networks. In-depth interpretive analytic procedures (Ely 1991) were used to create and validate a narrative representing each participant's experiences, after which transcripts were coded and categorised at increasing levels of abstraction to discern both shared and exceptional themes. The findings were then analysed critically, drawing from Mirchandani and Chan's (2007) framework of racialisation, to identify the active ways in which BME men and women structure their self-employment while negotiating the complicated politics of conflicting representations and constructions of racialised identities. Multiple lines of analysis could be pursued. However the following discussion has been limited to one theme in particular, focusing on a few participant voices who best articulate these theme within the theoretical emphasis on racialisation: the strategies of network participation developed by BME workers, which include becoming visible as an (in)visible minority, building credibility, and negotiating network boundaries. The dynamics of race and racialisation are the focus in the discussion of these processes, although it is understood that these dynamics inevitably are also enmeshed with important dynamics of class and gender.

Importance of Networks in Self-Employed Work

Networks replicate the social organisational hierarchies of power but they do so in an informal way so that nobody's held accountable…. In a network the whole basis is you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours, right? They're not going to look at how to make this a more inclusive group, because then there'll be less for you and me. So let's talk about - honestly here, about what are the odds of expanding a network to be inclusive. Why would they want to? (Jamila, organisational developer)

An overall finding of the study was first, confirmation of the central need for self-employed workers to participate in diverse networks to ensure contracts and income, and second, the difficulties of doing so for non-white contractors in Canada. Reputations are built in an informal, tacit realm where judgments about a person's capability and trustworthiness can be based on hunches, rumor, appearance and personal prejudices. Betty, an organisational developer, claimed: 'It's very much word of mouth and in that respect it's very privileged too because it's mostly white people hiring'.

This comment implies a covert, systemic racism which other participants mentioned. Basir for example, arriving in Canada in 1989 from Malaysia with an MBA in international business law, could not obtain sustained professional employment despite numerous job applications. Eventually she turned to self-employment, creating a portfolio of work from cooking and catering contracts:

> Canadian society was not open. It was a very conservative...in some way I found to be a minority hard, very, very hard. Actually I lost my [government] job to a person who doesn't even have a bachelors degree. (Basir, caterer)

Jamila, who had immigrated to Canada from Kenya with her parents, built her business largely upon contracts with organisations. Larger organisations, she explained, tend to have more resources for hiring consultants, so contracts tend to be higher paying, with generally decent working conditions and more opportunity for repeat contracts. As a self-employed consultant in organisational development (OD), it was important for Jamila to gain access to networks that touched those organisations. Her partner Betty, who happened to be white, indicated that minority ethnic persons tended not to be hired by organisations except for equity work. In her own teamwork with Jamila, Betty noted that follow-up referrals tended to request her, not Jamila or the team of them both. She explained:

> I get a lot of calls because I'm a white person. I do good work but so do lots of people of colour and they're not in that network. And there's a resistance to bringing new people into the network particularly if there are some white people hiring, and some people of colour who could do the work. (Betty, organisational developer)

Self-employed workers often make efforts to join formal networks such as the Chamber of Commerce, which some claim will yield valuable contacts that can open access to new client networks. However, for beginning contractors with limited resources, the membership fees or luncheon charges required to attend such groups are often prohibitive, and the meeting times, often at breakfast or dinner, can be difficult for women with children. But even for those who persist, there appear to be further barriers which Sanaz, a human rights consultant, suspected were related to quiet racial discrimination. This is her story of trying to participate in a Chamber of Commerce in a large central city of Canada:

> After I'd met with everybody and got my membership they didn't call me about any volunteer positions. So I phoned them and I said, 'You know I apply on all these committee's - let me know. [They] said, 'Oh yeah, yeah. We'll get back to you. You know we're just going through the people that signed up. We'll get back.' Three months later nobody called. So I called them back and they said, 'Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.' And they didn't call me again. I kept phoning them and

the guy that was there at the time I think he really wanted me to be on the [Human Rights] committee because he kept, 'Well, I keep sending your name forward.' But I never heard from them and then he left. He was a person of colour. (Sanaz, human rights consultant)

Becoming Visible as an (in)Visible Minority
Here is Jamila's tale of attempting to join a white professional network as an ethnic minority person:

> So I go to a meeting and let's just say I don't blend when I arrive and then - just the whole way in which the meeting is run - the culture, the norms, the way in which people interact, the way in which I'm perceived clearly as someone who needs to be mentored maybe. That's by the people that actually talked to me. Never mind the people that just avoided me. Because clearly, *I* couldn't be a source of work. And they 'know' this within seconds of my appearing. (Jamila, organisational developer)

The exclusionary practices involve a series of positionings that deny power and full participation to Jamila. She feels herself to be constructed as unimportant, uncredible as a potential contractor, and in fact requiring assistance – mentoring – to participate. So how do self-employed workers cope with exclusion by homophilous networks (where members bond with others most like themselves)? Participants told stories of personal determination and persistence to struggle against race-based assumptions about their ability and identities. Many worked persistently to become 'visible'. Just as Sanaz fought to gain entry to the Chamber of Commerce, Nirupama Viswewaran fought a years-long battle for name recognition:

> The first big, big challenge was getting my name by-lined the way I wanted it to be. Not shortened, not Anglicised, just the whole name. Don't tell me that three names don't work. Don't tell me that funny pronunciations don't work either. (Nirupama, investigative journalist)

The insistence on proper recognition of one's name is a specific act of achieving visibility through explicit identity performance. In reclaiming control of the representations of her identity, Nirupama not only compels others to recognise her 'funny' presence but establishes that presence as assertive and unruly, not docile and manageable. Many others worked this strategy, establishing visibility by performing a self that was capable and strong, not dependent on others and not diminished by prejudicial acts:

> I walked very independently, even as I was rejected for so many things. I don't give up, I say 'I'll show you my ability and what I can do'. Maybe it's just personality. (Basir, caterer)

> A positive attitude, that's what you need. You can't be crying about unfair things are. Also, being 'All here with my head'. Having pride. (Badriya, cattle trader)

Badriya, who had to form networks in a western province where cattle-raising is associated with a white masculinist ranching culture, told of how she often found herself

explicitly defending her capability in the face of tacit assumptions that she was out of place:

> Sometimes people don't take you seriously … You have to challenge the system and say, 'How dare you tell me I can't do this. I can do it and I can do it better than anybody.' (Badriya, cattle trader)

The strategy is explicit refusal of others' constructions that diminish one's importance and one's ability. These workers insisted, some aggressively, on being heard and being recognised as competent in order to gain entry into client networks. They also had to learn the strategies of visibility:

> I had to learn how to make myself visible, how to make myself heard, how to get credited with some level of competence and then how to build on that to actually be able to work effectively. All (laughs), that's before I even start getting to learn the organisation. (Jamila, organisational developer)

Jamila went on to point out the contradiction in this work: 'So when Betty and I walk in a room, the attention that goes to her means that I have to fight to make myself visible. Isn't that ironic considering I'm called a visible minority?' Achieving visibility is about coming into presence as a recogniseable identity, a potential peer, when dynamics of racialisation render one an exotic 'visible minority', an other which needs to be taught, domesticated, and managed. But further, visibility for self-employed workers is about compelling a network's recognition of an identity that is competent. A worker needs to reframe racialised constructions to reposition the 'self' as a reliable expert in whom others can begin to extend the necessary trust that seeds social capital and allows a reputation of credibility to build.

Building Credibility

Direct client relations required self-employed workers to establish credibility anew in each contract, and this credibility often depended on client recognition and valuing of their knowledge. The central issue is one that all self-employed workers face – that they are outsiders to a network or organisation trying to build sufficient credibility to motivate the offer of a contract. Race adds an additional wrinkle:

> As an external person, you have to build your credibility, you have to get taken seriously as an outsider. You have to actually know how to put your outside status on the table and work it. And, woman of colour? Definition: outsider. (Jamila, organisational developer)

Reputation is key for referrals and appears to be short-lived, based on one's performance in the most recent contract. Reputations are built in an informal, tacit realm where judgments about a person's capability and trustworthiness can be based on hunches, rumor, appearance and personal prejudices. In a competitive market of service offerings, without the instant status and credibility afforded by employment with a recognised organisation, self-employed workers must find ways to prove themselves trustworthy to each new client. As Nirupama explains,

> When you say to someone you're a freelancer they don't know what to make of you. And they're not exactly sure whether you're serious. And they're not exactly sure where what they tell you is going to wind up. It would be much easier if I could say I'm working for [a major corporation]. (Nirupama, investigative journalist)

Educational credentials would appear to be essential in establishing credibility, but almost all of the individuals interviewed who were new immigrants to Canada had been forced to find work in occupations other than what they had been educated to do. Accreditation for their own professional qualifications involved either extensive further training and internship or expensive examinations. For example Elina, a professional engineer, said that the only jobs available to her upon arrival in Canada in 1988 were cooking, cleaning or sewing. After some months in the difficult conditions and low wages of a garment factory, she quit and began to contract out her own sewing services. Damo, a dentist, started a janitorial business and then an alarm installation service on the side to help pay for the cleaning equipment, as well as a DJ business to earn extra income at night.

So from the start, these people confront the challenge of building credibility in unfamiliar networks – in areas much different from their training – at the same time as they are learning how to do the new work. But the credibility and networks they are developing is for manual labor or non-professional services, which moves them further and further away from the professional spheres in which their own knowledge might be valued and contracted. Women especially, regardless of their professional qualifications, tended to be drawn into work that contracted forms of labor often characterised as feminised: cooking, child care, home nursing, sewing and cleaning. This physical low-wage labor distances self-employed workers from broader, inter-organisational networks and requires long hours to make a living wage, isolating them in one-to-one networks of personal services where there is little time left for building professional networks and undertaking recredentialling.

But even for portfolio workers who contracted to larger organisations, the struggle for credibility was acute:

> Maybe because I'm a woman, maybe because I'm visible minority woman but sometimes more difficult for people to take me seriously because they don't know the knowledge that I have. They underestimate the values that I have and I find that I, I have to convince people. I have to work harder convincing people in order to make them realise that I do have a great knowledge in Human Rights, which I've worked in this area for seventeen years [sic]. (Sanaz, human rights consultant)

Accepting personal responsibility for constructing and reconstructing a position as knowledgeable was a common strategy voiced by these self-employed workers. Many resigned themselves to continually educate and re-educate customers about the values of their service. Another strategy to appear more knowledgeable included obtaining multiple specialised formal certificates that would be displayed to potential clients, such as a nurse becoming certified in 'therapeutic touch', 'Myers-Briggs personality indicators', and 'emotional intelligence' as well as in foot care. A third common strategy was to create an illusion of total, exclusive commitment to a client, masking or diminishing any reference to other clients.

These stories all – across sectors and regions of practice - illustrate a layer of special persuasive work beyond the marketing required of all self-employed workers to establish each contract. These workers could not rely on the 'word-of-mouth' business reported by so many non-minority contractors (Fenwick, 2004), networks that seemed to unfold after a few years of building initial contacts and establishing a track record for reliable good-quality work. Instead, these workers had to continually and actively position themselves as credible, they had to continually challenge and reframe the racialised constructions of themselves as not knowledgeable, and they had to explicitly compel others to recognise their capabilities. In

engaging these strategies, these workers are constructing a particular internal self. They read themselves *against* others' racialised representations of them, as well as *within* them. As Sanaz's story illustrates, these workers become positioned through racialisation to accept and internalise the 'difficulties' experienced by others, and to inhabit this position actively as a self that must always prove itself.

Negotiating Network Boundaries

A further network complexity for these self-employed workers was the work of negotiating complex politics of racialisation generated through overlapping wider networks in which their interactions unfolded. Maintaining trust simultaneously in networks opposed to one another, while resisting a rigid subject position, required a delicate continuous dance. One's own ethnic networks sometimes provided close support, but could become alienating, or felt to be so, as an individual moved more closely into a racially different network. Yet entry into some mainstream organisations or networks sometimes led one into confinement within a clearly racialised position as spokesperson for a particular group. In this rigid position, the individual may be assumed to share perspectives and sympathies with that group, whether or not there is any basis for assuming commonality besides skin colour. This 'sympathetic spokesperson' assumption by white communities could land a contract or chase one away:

> Some groups or some companies would see me and think, 'Well good, she would understand the issues.' Whereas other companies especially if they're dealing with somebody that is filing a complaint, look at me and think, 'Well she is going to take the side of the person who's complaining because she's herself a person of colour.' So yeah, it has worked for me and it has worked against me. (Sanaz, human rights consultant)

As a free-lance journalist, Nirupama also fought rigid positions created for her in white networks, where she was called only to do 'the ethnic or culture piece' or where she was suspected of bias towards a minority group. Yet Nirupama observed that among members of her own ethnic community her work was also met with suspicion, requiring additional effort on her part to counter their fears that she was aligned with white stereotyped perspectives. So she had to invest efforts into

> … convincing people of minority groups that I'm not out to nail their community. I'm not out to make them look like a bunch of pimps, hookers, gangsters, drug dealers, am I missing something? Muggers. (Nirupama, investigative journalist)

Nirupama described herself as positioned either as a 'white' or 'brown' reporter in different situations, requiring her to first figure out the position and second to work it in ways that did not alienate clients (risking loss of the contract), perpetuate stereotypes (which her very career was dedicated to resisting), or diminish her professional credibility.

Meanwhile, for some individuals, their 'own community' networks, which appear to be densely interconnected and extensive especially in the cities, were viewed as ambivalent sites of support and conflict. Damo relied almost exclusively on his 'own' Filipino community for clients in home alarm installation. In contrast, Clive said he did not draw business from his own Jamaican community because,

> I suppose your own people expect you to do things for them for nothing. Whereas the other people - you give them a price they say, 'Yeah' or 'nay.' Your own - they want you to do it for nothing or they try to beat you down with your price. And then, OK, if you agree from that and you do the job, then the other trouble is getting your money from

them. You know, so -it's more hassle working for your own. So I - I try to stay away from them. (Clive, finishing carpenter)

Lan explained that she needed clients who were willing and able to pay for her foot care services: these did not often come from her own contacts in her South Asian-Canadian community. She resented that members of her community expected obligations of kin, apparently unaware that 'I have to make a living too . . . Friends, like some people, my own people-- I'll stay away from. They expect you to do something for them for nothing.' So Lan, already somewhat distanced from her ethnic networks through her marriage to a white Canadian man and her participation in wider networks through her 17 years working in a Canadian hospital, avoided networking with her ethnic community.

The dynamics within ethnic communities are also complex. Nirupama learned to accept the distrust and negative regard she received from particular Sino-Canadian groups:

> My father's caste is very unusual. So they're not well looked upon because they're landowners. . . . As much as I can, I *do* look for stories. But it's very tricky. Because they pull out the song and dance they would reserve for the white reporter. You know, if I get the brown reporter treatment, I'm still getting a song and dance because no one wants to be portrayed in a negative light. (Nirupama, investigative journalist)

Clive wondered if jealousy or resentment of his active entrepreneurism was the alienating element in his Jamaican community: 'Your own people just do not support you, give you business. I don't know if it's envy or what the heck it is, but they figure if you've got a head you're going to get rich'. In any case, he deliberately distanced himself from his own community, which he described in racialised terms:

> They're not dependable, because Black folks not dependable. Back in the old country there's a 'I'd be there at seven o'clock' and nine o'clock they're still not there. And when they come they come with a big stupid grin on their face, you know. So you know, you just try not to deal with that because it frustrates you more than ever. (Clive, finishing carpenter)

Racial politics among racialised groups in Canada can also be complex, as various markers of power are negotiated through subtle indicators and exclusions. Jamila tells of a collaborative project with other ethnic minority women where she felt excluded on a number of dimensions: ideological position, language, relation to dominant groups, and ethnic knowledge:

> [They] didn't think that I was anti-racist enough. Like, I didn't quite cut it, I didn't make the grade because - and I think some of it was a legitimate criticism of exactly, you know, what I talked about as 'the compromises' when I first started in taking on the work in order to get access to the learning opportunity and, just, bloody money. I did work a lot with white consultants, right? And, but what I felt like [was] part of the requirement in order to fit into this group because - I didn't speak another language. And two of them were south Asian, like you know, being a unilingual brown woman, born in Kenya, doesn't know how to put on a sari. Like, there's so many strikes [against you]. (Jamila, organisational developer).

The multiple criss-crossing threads of racialisation create complex spaces for individuals to negotiate within homogeneous communities and across diverse communities, where different others are marked not only through marginal spaces mapped by a dominant group but also through networks among subaltern groups. Indeed the multiplicities across and within these groups, as well as within individuals themselves, belie the existence of any clearly distinguishable 'group' or community. The networks fold and unfold across them, offering precarious links of inclusion and continuous risk of exclusion.

Discussion and Conclusions

This analysis has focused on the networking experiences of BME self-employed workers in Canada, self-employed individuals who typically juggle contracts simultaneously in various contexts with different clients. What is abundantly clear, first, is the critical importance of access to and membership in informal socio-economic networks for their economic survival as self-employed workers. Both potential new clients and continued relations with past clients are assured through networks. Access to higher-paying and longer-term contracts are available through social networks that can open contacts with higher-income individuals and organisational leaders. Networks also open contacts with colleagues for contract opportunities as well as for knowledge and social capital development that can enhance one's marketability and afford social and personal support. The self-employed spend considerable time and energy in activity that may be described as 'developing networks'.

The stakes are higher and the labour more onerous for BME individuals, where social networks often prove to be sites of racism and classicism. As Jamila said, 'Being a racialised woman means that I had to learn how to survive. That is quintessentially about organisational power'. But these are complex sites where the relations are tangled, escaping simple descriptions of prejudice inflicted by the dominant upon the submissive. Self-employed workers commonly found themselves being inscribed into positions of low value by those with whom they struggled to establish connections. Their identities, their knowledge and sometimes their very presence created 'difficulty' for non-visible minorities in various networks: organisational managers in government and non-profit organisations, professional associations, private patients as well as professionals in health care, individual consumers, even personnel in the media sector which is arguably network-driven. Entry into these networks required unusual persistence. To survive, to establish sufficient connection with a potential client to obtain a paid contract and hopefully further contracts, they positioned themselves through a series of strategies of identity and material production. Often, they found themselves occupying racialised positions as different, difficult, less valuable or invisible, then actively challenged these positions and representations. Their strategies included assertion of a visible presence and proving credibility – through repetition, educating others, aggressive challenge, performances of pride and independence, and external artifacts of recognition such as multiple certificates attained in addition to considerable formal qualifications. Education of potential and actual clients about one's services is not unusual as a networking strategy among self-employed workers more generally. But like Anna and Sanaz, these workers took unusual pains to educate their clients to actually 'see' their capability and the value that their work contributed. Many also found themselves educating clients about diversity issues – whether teaching the need to pronounce ethnic names properly like Nirupama or explicitly pointing out and challenging the racial dynamics inherent in networking and contracting activity like Badriya and Jamila.

Their strategies were not only about gaining entry and membership in these networks, but also about working the contradictions of position within these networks. Contradictions were encountered when individuals found themselves building credibility or social capital within the racialised, even stereotyped positions that networks assigned to them *while* trying to recast these positions. Their ongoing struggle was managing to become visible, to be recognised as unique and desirable contractors, while rendering their racialised location invisible. Even networks within individuals' own communities of visible minorities were filled with particular contradictions. The tales of Clive and Lan reveal the tensions experienced by the individual entrepreneur between expectations of collective solidarity and individual competition – the demands for social ties of special protections within one's 'own' community and the market demands of self-reliance and independent financial success. Clive found himself distrusting his 'own people', ultimately internalising a racialised gaze that positioned himself as explicitly 'other' to his homophilous networks in the same way that Lan found herself positioned at a distance from her Chinese relatives. Sanaz and Nirupama tell of the difficulties in navigating back and forth across what they describe as clear 'brown' and 'white' colour lines, such as being distrusted by their own community if they are perceived to be a little too closely aligned with white networks and therefore 'out to get them'. But outside of her own community, Nirupama describes feeling positioned as both a sympathetic spokesperson for an ethnic minority while simultaneously being distrusted as being biased towards the community. Confronting suspicious affiliations on both sides of this boundary, these women told both of learning to discern precisely how they were being positioned in the different networks, then strategically challenging the position or occupying it to personal advantage. Further complexity for them both inhered in their ethical struggles with the internalisation of these conflicting positions: building social capital on both sides of the colour line in ways that neither diminish their credibility nor perpetuate racialised stereotypes.

These are just some of the dynamics of racialisation that unfold in the negotiation of networks. As Mirchandani and Chan (2007) explain, environments of racialisation construct and position representations of the Other while constructing particular identities through racialisation from within. As the narratives of these self-employed workers illustrate, individuals define themselves and learn strategies of response according to how their position, visibility and ascribed power changes from one community or network to another. While they depend upon these networks for their employment and knowledge, as ethnic minority persons they experience exclusion and disadvantage within them. However, they learn strategies for survival that demonstrate high levels of resilience, resourcefulness and creativity, defying stereotypes of the helpless victim that appear in literature describing ethnic entrepreneurs and immigrant women. Further, some construct positions allowing them to simultaneously inhabit conflicting racialised positions in order to navigate difficult racial politics as a major part of their self-employed work. In the process of generating and sustaining personal relationships that can be directed to business purposes, these self-employed workers identify fruitful points of connection and actively construct identities for themselves at the nexus of these points. These identities ultimately enroll them in particular modes of social production, which order their roles and positions in material production. In what McRobbie (2002) describes as today's 'lottery economy' where 'labor is reorganised along wildly free market lines by promoting talent as that which lies within us all, waiting to be tapped into' (p101), their struggles in racialisation assert active identities amidst the intertwining of many dynamics: precarious flexible employment, individualised hyper-

competition, values of self-reliance and self-promotion, and entrenched if subtle strategies of othering whatever is perceived to be undesirable difference.

These workers' stories, offering insights about dynamics of racialisation functioning within the networks critical to contractor workers' survival, offer important counter-narratives to network analyses that fail to acknowledge interplays of race and class or that ignore the active strategies and self-determinations that racialised persons achieve within these networks. However, these narratives only begin the analytic work required to explore the economic effects of racialisation across multifarious networks in a range of economic relations embedded in but extending far beyond self-employed workers and their clients and colleagues. West and Austrin (2002), for example, in examining existing analyses of gendered relations in work and networks, argue that the danger in stopping at such interpersonal analyses is reducing work to the production of identities. This form of analysis fails to examine the local and wider networks that configure gendered and, we might argue, racialised, inequities in market relations, and thus stops short of examining alternative possibilities. West and Austrin urge examination of actual network ties: looking at different outcomes, the development and decline of particular activities in local settings, and the cross-cutting wider networks (such as market forces, state and policy networks, professional discourses) that connect the actors, analysing how these relations historically came to be. This is the sort of work that needs to unfold from here, examining racialisation that functions in socio-economic networks at local, regional, national and international scales. If commentators such as McRobbie (2002) and Barley and Kunda (2004) are correct that the nature of urban work is increasingly dominated by flexibilised, individualised forms such as the self-employed work discussed here, analysis of network racialisation will become vital. In particular, analysis is needed of the cross-cutting networks constituting such work to illuminate the complexities of racialisation in relation to economic potential, barriers, and alternate network configurations in a volatile lottery economy.

References
Barley, S & Kunda, G. (2004), Gurus, Hired Guns and Warm Bodies: itinerant experts in a knowledge economy, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
Basu, D. and Werbner, P. (2001) Bootstrap Capitalism and the Culture Industries: a critique of invidious comparisons in the study of ethnic entrepreneurship, Ethnic and Racial Studies 24 (2), pp. 236-262.
Cohen, L. & Mallon, M. (1999) The Transition from Organisational Employment to Portfolio Working: perceptions of 'boundarylessness', Work, Employment & Society, 13 (2), pp. 329-352.
Cranford, C.J., Vosko, L.F., and Zukewich, N. (2003) Precarious Employment in the Canadian Labour Market: A Statistical Portrait, Just Labour, 3, pp. 6-22

Ely, M. with Anzul, M., Friedmen, T., Garner, D., and Steinmetz, A. M. (1991) Doing Qualitative Research: Circles within Circles, London: Falmer.

Fenwick, T. (2004). Learning in portfolio work: Anchored innovation and mobile identities. *Studies in Continuing Education, 26* (2), 229-241.

Fenwick, T. (2006). Contradictions in portfolio careers: Work design and client relations. *Career Development International*, 11 (1), 66-79.

Fudge, J., E. Tucker and L. F. Vosko (2002) The Legal Concept of Employment: Marginalizing Workers. Ottawa: The Law Commission of Canada.

Fudge, J. and Owens, R.J. (2006) Precarious Work, Women, and the New Economy: the challenge to legal norms, Portland: Hart.

Gold, M and Fraser, J. (2002) Managing Self-Management: successful transitions to portfolio careers, Work, Employment and Society, 16 (4), pp. 579-598.

Glenn, E-N. (1999) The Social Construction and Institutionalisation of Gender and Race: an integrative framework, in: M.M. Ferree, J. Lorber, & B.B. Hess (Eds.), Revisioning Gender, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Lo, L., Teixeira, C., and Truelove, M. (2002) Cultural Resources, Ethnic Strategies, and Immigrant Entrepreneurship: A comparative study of five immigrant groups in the Toronto CMA (Working paper no. 21). Toronto, Ontario: Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement.

McRobbie, A. (2002) From Holloway to Hollywood: happiness at work in the new cultural economy? in: P. du Gay and M. Pryke, (Eds.), Cultural Economy, pp. 97-114). London: Sage.

Mirchandani, K. and Chan, W. (2007). Criminalizing Race, Criminalizing Poverty: Welfare fraud enforcement in Canada, Halifax: Fernwood.

Mirchandani, K. (2003) Challenging Racial Silences in Studies of Emotion Work: contributions from anti-racist feminist theory, Organisation Studies 24(5), pp. 721-742.

Morokovasic, M. (1991) Roads to Independence: self employed immigrants and minority women in five European states, International Migration, XXIV (3), pp. 407-417.

Phan, M.B. and Luk, C.M. (2007) 'I don't say I have a business in Chinatown': Chinese sub-ethnic relations in Toronto's Chinatown West, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 31, pp. 294 – 326

Portes, A. (1981) Modes of incorporation and theories of labor immigration, in: M. Kritz, C. Keely, and S. Tomasi (Eds), Global Trends in Migration: Theory and Research on International Population Movements, (pp 279-297.). New York: Centre for Migration Studies.

Ram, M. and Smallbone, D. (2001) Ethnic Minority Enterprise: Policy in Practice. Final report prepared for the Small Business Service. Available at: http://www.google.co.uk/search?q=Ram+and+Smallbione+2001+ethnic+minority+enterprise+small+business+service&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a. Accessed November 2, 2010.

Ram M. and Jones T. (2008) Ethnic-minority businesses in the UK: a review of research and policy developments Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy 26, pp. 352 – 374

Razack, S.H. (1998) Looking White People in the Eye: gender, race and culture in courtrooms and classrooms, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Shan, H. (2009) Learning as Socially Organized Practices: Chinese Immigrants Fitting into the Engineer Market in Canada . Unpublished doctoral thesis. Toronto: University of Toronto.

Storey, J., Salaman, G., and Platman, K (2005) Living with Enterprise in an Enterprise Economy: freelance and contract workers in the media, Human Relations, 58 (8), pp. 1033 – 1054

Teixeira, C. (2002) Black Entrepreneurship in Toronto, Toronto: Black Pages Publications.

van Kempen, R. and Özüekren, A. (1998) Ethnic Segregation in Cities: New Forms and Explanations in a Dynamic World , Urban Studies, 35, pp. 1631-1656.

Virdee, S. (2006) 'Race', employment and social change: A critique of current orthodoxies, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 29, pp. 605 – 628

Vosko, L. F. (2000) Temporary Work: The Gendered Rise of a Precarious Employment Relationship. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

West, J. and Autrin, T. (2002) From Work as Sex to Sex as Work: networks, 'others' and occupations in the analysis of work, Gender Work and Organisation, 9 (5), pp. 482-503.

Winson, A. and Leach, B. (2003) Contingent Work, Disrupted Lives: Labour and Community in the New Rural Economy. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Zeytinoglu, I.U. and Jacinta, K. M. (2000) Gender, Race and Class Dimensions of Nonstandard Work, Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations, 55 (1), pp. 133-167.