

The Way Forward: African Francophone Immigrants Negotiate Their Multiple Minority Identities

Amal Madibbo¹

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Abstract This article explores multiple affiliations that first-generation Francophone sub-Saharan African immigrants in Alberta build with their communities of origin, the Francophone community in general, and the broader Canadian society. This article posits that dominant racial and ethnic ideologies generate feelings of exclusion from multiple communities. It also sheds light on major challenges faced by this population in the process of integration and illustrates how these barriers are related to racism and linguistic discrimination. At the same time, we observe that African Francophone immigrants reinterpret their social identities in inclusive ways that draw our attention to alternative means of approaching identities. In addition to immigrants' identity strategies, some initiatives have been implemented within the mainstream of the Francophonie and the broader Alberta society that allow us to identify ways of avoiding identity exclusion and increasing equity.

Keywords Francophone immigration · Alberta · Africa · Racism and language discrimination · Identity exclusion · Equity

We challenge, culturally and politically, an old group narrative that fails at the beginning of this new century to capture even a fraction of our rich diversity and heterogeneity. (Johnson 2008, p. 41)

Introduction

The analysis of the construction and negotiation of the African Francophone immigrant identities draws upon theories relevant to race and ethnicity, discrimination, and

✉ Amal Madibbo
amadibbo@ucalgary.ca; <http://soci.ucalgary.ca/profiles/amal-madibbo>

¹ Department of Sociology, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada

identity. Race is a socio-historical and political construct that associates morphological differences with power, marginalization, and privilege (Dei 2009). A distinction is made between race and ethnicity in that the former refers to morphology or skin color, while the latter incorporates attributes such as gender, cultural attitudes, age, education, and migration patterns (Isajiw 1993). In this article, discrimination refers to racism and linguistic discrimination. Racism encompasses a set of ideologies and practices that serve to disadvantage minority racial groups (Labelle 2011), while linguistic discrimination entails unfair treatment because of one's language (McAndrew 2010). Competing perspectives of identities as being essential and static versus mutable and evolving (Nederveen- Pieterse 2007) enable for understanding the dynamics that turn identity differences into issues of power and domination.

With regard to methodology, critical ethnography proved to be an appropriate philosophical underpinning for this analysis due to its goals of (1) overcoming social oppression by identifying and challenging the mechanisms by which oppression is reproduced and (2) understanding people's lived experiences from their own perspective (Madison 2012). Similarly, qualitative research methods proved suitable to generate the in-depth information about subjectivities and identities, as well as the culturally specific meanings required of this study (Van den Hoonaard 2011). These methods allowed us to achieve critical ethnography's purpose of understanding peoples' experiences and identifying and challenging mechanisms of power and control.

Thirty-four first-generation immigrants from sub-Saharan African countries such as Senegal, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo were selected using the snowball sampling technique. Participants were between the ages of 22 and 50 and were recruited to represent a diverse sample in terms of gender, age, class, education, nationality, employment, and migration patterns. There are, however, certain similarities between participants in terms of racism, discrimination, and identity exclusion, as well as the strategies participants developed to counteract marginalization.

The data were collected through the use of semi-structured individual interviews and secondary sources.¹ The interviews were guided by a list of open-ended questions, with each interview using an identical base set of questions to ensure that differences in response were not a result of the question's structure. Participants were interviewed about self-identification, their feelings of acceptance within the communities they identify with, and how they negotiate their feelings of inclusion and/or exclusion. The secondary sources consisted of 40 public and internal documents, including studies, reports, and community newsletters, which dealt with race and racism, immigration and identity, and community initiatives. The data were then analyzed by identifying common themes, convergences, and patterns in the responses that were subsequently situated in the context of relevant literature. We identified two thematic codes that constituted the analysis of this article: (a) multiple identities and the sub-themes of racism, linguistic discrimination, and belonging; and (b) the negotiation of identity and the sub-themes of identity safety and reinterpretation of identity.

¹ The analyzed data are part of the project of the Racial and Ethnic Identity of African Francophone Immigrants (2008–2011), which was funded by the University of Calgary. All interviews were used to identify the themes of analysis; however, excerpts from eight interviews were employed in this article and numbered from no. 1 to no 8.

To understand the multiple affiliations and negotiation of identity, we provide the context of current immigration in Alberta and the historical and contemporary experiences of two communities, the Francophones and the English-speaking Africans/Blacks, with whom French-speaking African immigrants share identity makers of language, race, and ethnicity. We then focus on the affiliations that African immigrants build with multiple social groups, which primarily include associations with Canadian society, more broadly; the Francophone community; and the ethnic community of the source country (Huot et al. 2014). Our analysis then presents the negotiation of identity by way of seeking identity safety and interpreting identities to finally showcase that although racism and linguistic discrimination are prevalent, some spaces of inclusion have been created, alluding to the possibility that perceiving differences in attributes, such as race and language, in inclusive ways could help foster inclusion.

Context

Alberta's strong economy has attracted substantial numbers of immigrants to the province, making Alberta's population of 4,025,074 one of the most diverse in Canada. The increase in the proportion of new immigrants in Alberta from 20,860 in 2007 (8.8 % of total immigrants to Canada) to 36,092 in 2012 (14.0 % of total immigrants to Canada) (CIC, 2013) makes Alberta the fourth largest immigrant destination in Canada after Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia, respectively. Alberta's largest cities—Calgary, Edmonton, Brooks, and Fort McMurray—attract the majority of these new immigrants. The largest proportion of this new population comes from Asian countries of origin (50.9 %) with the remainder immigrating from Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, and Africa. While the majority of Africans are English-speaking, the number of French-speaking immigrants, especially from sub-Saharan Africa, has been increasing since the late 1990s.

These demographic changes have sparked numerous political and academic debates about the incorporation and socio-economic integration of immigrants so as to better understand the immigrant experience and improve Alberta's capacity to welcome new communities. To date, the research examining immigration in Alberta has documented both the challenges and successes in the trajectories of communities, such as the Chinese and Vietnamese (Ngo 2012), Indians (Agrawal and Lovell 2010), and English-speaking Africans (Tetty & Pupilampu 2005). There remains, however, a need to understand the experiences of French-speaking African immigrants.

Even though the arrival of these immigrants in Alberta is relatively recent, their identities are largely influenced by the historical and contemporary experiences of two communities: the Francophones and the English-speaking Africans/Blacks. Francophone heritage in Alberta dates back to the earliest days of the fur trade, when Alberta was a part of the Northwest Territories (NT). The Francophones in the NT have engaged in a long struggle to gain their linguistic and identity rights, their efforts having culminated in positive outcomes. At the local/provincial level, for example, section 110 of the NT Act “made the use of French and English mandatory in the writing and publication of statutes and other parliamentary documents, and elective in debates of the Legislature, pleadings, and court proceedings” (SLMC, n.d.), making both French and English the official languages of the NT. In 1870, respect for the

linguistic rights of Francophones was a condition for the NT joining Confederation. When Alberta became a province in 1905, French and English became the official languages of both the Legislative Assembly and the courts.

At the federal level, Francophones outside Quebec were recognized as Official Language Communities in a Minority Situation (OLCMS), a status that guarantees some constitutional rights. The Canadian Official Languages Act, adopted in 1969, accords the OLCMS political representation and resources for community development, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, endorsed in 1982, confers to them the acquisition of French-language schools and school governance.

As Cardinal et al. (2008) explained, the OLCMS in Canada have been focused for a long time on achieving “the project of the Francophone Space” (p. 21), which encompassed both the ideological and physical notion of space. The project meant establishing autonomous institutions and organizations that function in French, thus creating a community for Francophones to belong to and enabling them to organize themselves, claim services in French, and impact policy. The OLCMS have since endeavored to build spaces that are in line with the political and social contexts of their respective provinces.

In 1988, the Government of Alberta adopted its Language Act, Bill 60,² which made Alberta a unilingual, English province. In so doing, the province abolished the French linguistic rights conferred by Article 110 of the NT Act. Despite this, the province has confirmed its commitment to the abovementioned constitutional obligations attributed to the OLCMS. It is important, however, to note that not all of Alberta’s governments have remained true to this commitment. In some cases, Francophones were not given the financing necessary to open or maintain their own school, resulting in the closing of some schools. However, these patterns of linguistic rights violations were met by those Francophones who were determined to fight to protect those rights through legal means and mobilization.

To date, the Francophones in Alberta have succeeded in creating a Francophone space, one which African immigrants join. However, Alberta’s French-speaking people—including 81,045 who have French as their mother tongue and 65,105 who list French as their first official spoken language (Statistics Canada 2011)—continue to experience linguistic discrimination that, as we will observe, impedes the flourishing of the Francophone community and consequently hinders the development of the Francophone identity.

The other community whose trajectories have influenced African Francophone immigrants, Black/Africans, started arriving in Alberta in the mid-1800s. A strong opposition surfaced when the numbers of Blacks increased as a result of the influx of Blacks emigrating from Oklahoma between 1908 and 1911 (Palmer and Palmer 1985). Those Blacks were met with public resentment and protests such as being refused admission to swimming pools and dance halls, and exemplified in media headlines like the Edmonton Journal’s statement “We want no dark spots in Alberta.” Those reactions were accompanied by official informal exclusionary measures, including instructions to Canadian immigration officers in the USA to discourage black immigration to Canada.

² In response to MLA Léo Piquette case, who took legal action against Alberta government when he was prohibited to ask a question in French in Alberta’s Legislative Assembly, the Supreme Court of Canada invalidated Bill 60 in 1990 confirming that section 110 of the NT Act was still in effect since it has never been formally revoked.

Faced with such hostility, Black pioneers in Alberta strategized to counter marginalization and oppression. They concerted efforts and established a community with schools, churches, and associations; the Coloured Protective Association was formed in Calgary in 1910. That community enabled Blacks to celebrate their religious and social events, enhance community formation, and fight discrimination and racial stereotyping.

Ensuing waves of black immigrants from the Caribbean and English-speaking Africa, and more recently from French-speaking Africa, arrived in Alberta beginning in the 1960s. The 2011 Census of Canada enumerated 74,435 Blacks in Alberta, who constitute the third largest black population in Canada after Ontario and Quebec. This population has found itself in a context where overt racism towards Blacks and other racialized groups has decreased but also given way to more subtle types of racism, such as the ones that will be explored in this article, which trigger marginalization in society.

In such a context, our research participants' discourses depict multiple associations with Canadian society, the Francophone community, and the ethnic community. As we will see in the following section, these identities are defined in specific ways and that participants feel both excluded from multiple communities and that they are not considered equal citizens.

Multiple Identities, Multiple Jeopardies

The sense of belonging to the Canadian society is expressed in the following words:

Being Canadian to me means living in this great country [Canada]... appreciating all these opportunities, the freedom, the possibility to work. It [being Canadian] means accepting differences, other cultures and ways of being... the way people dress and eat, and you can pray [practice your religion] and you don't have to lose your own culture... It means do[ing] your best to be a good Canadian, and help your [Canadian] society achieve its goals. (No. 1)

Immigrants' relationships to Canada are perceived in terms of the legal rights and social benefits this country offers and in terms of their respect for the main duties that come with citizenship, such as voting; respect for Canadian political institutions; and civic involvement through volunteerism. Immigrants appreciate the values of multiculturalism, like being accepting of people of other ethnicities, backgrounds, and religions. In addition, they feel connected to Canada and committed to its prosperity and progress.

However, as the following excerpts illustrate, the problem of racism from the broader Canadian society gives rise to the perception that immigrants are not considered genuine Canadians:

When you are an immigrant or refugee, there are a lot of barriers. When you have a black skin, people think you are... less intelligent than others... and you're not capable of doing anything [significant]. I myself faced these experiences. I [once] had a job that did not even correspond to my knowledge [qualifications], people under-estimated me. They thought that, because of my skin colour [black], I couldn't do a good job, and couldn't be in a leadership position. I decided to find

a better job, I went back to school and started all over again. But even that didn't help. I still can't find a good job... this prejudice keeps you [racialized minorities] down [while] you see other [white] Canadians continue to advance. (No. 2)

Participants teased out the numerous types of racism that they encounter that hinder their inclusion in Canadian society, including negative stereotypes, racial profiling, devaluing of their credentials, as well as discrimination institutionalized in the basic structures of society, such as the labor market, where they face the difficulties of incorporation and advancement within institutional hierarchies. These forms of discrimination illustrate the current manifestations of racism in Alberta and the rest of Canada: racism is subtle, and many people continue to be treated differently or confined by the glass ceiling (Das Gupta et al. 2007). They also remind us that, in the Canadian context, racial ideology remains largely a “system of belief interwoven with material conditions and interests” (Hartigan 2010, p. 29), which continue to produce and reproduce an asymmetric racial order. Racial ideology assigns hierarchical meaning to human difference; it classifies people into various racial groups then accords more value and worth to some and less to others. As such, whiteness is associated with positive images while racialized bodies are linked to contrasting negative stereotypes (Omi & Winant 2014). Consequently, perceptions about Blacks mirror what Toni Morrison (1992) terms the “assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people [Blacks]” (p. 7). Blacks are associated with forms of violence, criminality, and liability, creating differential meanings that have real and powerful consequences. They impact identity and belonging in such ways that white Euro-Canadians are considered the normative Canadians while racialized groups are situated outside the notion of Canadian-ness (Berns-McGown 2013). In turn, these identity constructs influence people's status and life opportunities; they manifest in the abovementioned types of racism that confer power and privilege upon normative Canadians while limiting racialized groups' opportunities and advancement in society.

When it comes to the sense of belonging to the Francophone community, participants feel excluded from the Francophone space of belonging. It is important for immigrants to engage with the Francophonie, which has been an integral part of their socio-cultural heritage and contemporary life for a long time:

[before I immigrated to Canada] I identified myself as an African Francophone, and now I see myself as a Francophone of Alberta. In Africa, French obviously became my language. It was the language of my schooling and the most used medium of communication at work and with the rest of the world. Here, I was happy to learn that there is a Francophone community, and I immediately wanted to be a part of it. I speak French with friends and [other] people and I want to use it at work [and] everywhere [else]. (No. 3)

Participants' relationships with French and the Francophone culture started in their source countries where French is either one of or the only official language. There, they studied in French, used the language in work and public life, and incorporated it in cultural aspects like music and poetry. In Canada, French and Francophone culture continue to be important to them. Participants feel an attachment to the Albertan/Canadian Francophone community and to its struggles, successes, and aspirations. In

this new context, “being Francophone” to participants means “living as Francophones in Canadian society as a whole” and “being an integral part of the Francophone community” (no. 3). These contentions allude to participants’ goals of using French in their daily life, at work, and as a means of communication, and also to partake in the Francophone space, its institutions and events.

The linguistic discrimination faced by Francophones in Canadian society, coupled with the racism faced by immigrants within the Francophone community does, however, result in perceptions that Africans are not recognized fully as Francophones. Participants described the linguistic discrimination that manifests in Alberta as follows:

Before you immigrate to Canada you hear that Canada is a bilingual country, then when you are here you find that you [the Francophones] are cornered. The Francophones have to fight and keep fighting to build a community and obtain what they need [community infrastructure and French-language services]... and you find that you [French-speaking immigrants] can’t do a lot because you don’t speak the language [English] and when you try to say something [in English] they tell you that they don’t understand you. I think they just don’t like our English [accents]. (No. 4)

Participants reiterated a lack of sufficient resources and services that are adapted to the Francophone population. While the proportion of Francophones is increasing, the number of French-language schools remains small, with some schools not receiving the necessary funds to improve defective infrastructure. When it comes to postsecondary education institutions, there exists only one French-language institution (Le Campus St. Jean in the University of Alberta) that offers a few undergraduate programs, yet it does not receive sufficient resources to extend its graduate program beyond the Masters in education and Masters in social sciences. Similarly, while there are services and resources in French for groups that include children, seniors, and immigrants, there are few resources available in the fields of health, public service, and employment placement (Denis 2008).

The linguistic discrimination against the French language and the Francophones in Canada, and more specifically in Alberta, reminds us that not all majorities are equally privileged. While white Euro-Canadians are the dominant majority in Canada, hierarchies of power within the category of whiteness give primacy to white Anglo-Saxons while relegating white French-Canadians to a second-class status of citizenry (Satzewich and Liodakis 2013). In this case, we see that, like race, ethnicity too is a “complex... [system] of ideas and practices that do important... societal work” (Moya & Markus 2010, p. 21). Because of the ethnic differences of language (French), religion (Catholicism), and culture, white French-Canadians are differentially constructed as being less valued than the white Anglo-Saxons in a manner that marginalized French-Canadians.

Linguistic discrimination impacts all Francophones in negative ways, primarily by preventing them from fully exerting their right to utilize the official language of their choice—French (Gallant 2011). We are also reminded, however, that not all minorities are equally disadvantaged as linguistic discrimination leaves African immigrants with fewer options than their Francophone counterparts in terms of resources and opportunities. New immigrants who lack proficiency in English do not acquire all the services

they need in French, such as in hospitals or banks. In addition, immigrants are not able to easily obtain or upgrade postsecondary qualifications and skills in many fields due to an insufficient supply of French-language postsecondary education institutions. In employment, the unilingual Francophone labor market is too small to accommodate African immigrants and their lack of English makes them unwelcome in the larger bilingual or English unilingual labor market, which is only exacerbated by perceptions of immigrants' English accents as being "foreign"; further, the nonrecognition of credentials obtained outside Canada poses an additional obstacle to employment. Therefore, immigrants' perception of "being Francophone" as "living as Francophones in Canadian society as a whole" (no. 1) is far from being a reality as linguistic discrimination confines French-language services and resources to a very small arena of social life.

The racism within the Francophonie that makes some immigrants reluctant to identify themselves as Francophones was illustrated as follows:

We [African immigrants] are a part of the Francophone community in Alberta but when people [white Francophone] here talk about Francophones, they say Franco-Albertans, they mean people who are French-Canadian. They don't mean [visible] minorities or people who came from other places [countries]. Then you realize that you don't get the same resources. (No. 5)

Dominant racial ideologies within the Francophone space associate the Francophone identity with being white, Catholic, Canadian-born, and having French as a mother tongue (Ibrahim 2010), which pushes racialized groups out and diminishes their capacity for belonging. These associations have led to further forms of racism, which are illustrated by the difficulties faced by participants who attended French-language schools in Alberta, difficulties that include fitting in with peers, navigating teachers' low expectations of them, and the paucity of available role models from their communities (Moke-Ngala 2006). Other participants pointed out the insufficient inclusion of ethnic and racial diversity and the inequitable underrepresentation of immigrants in Francophone institutions and in key positions of power and decision-making.

These types of individual and institutional racism serve to reproduce oppression. White Francophones, as a group who has been discriminated against because of their language, religion, and culture, draw upon dominant racial ideologies to construct themselves as being the normative Francophones in such a way that marginalizes others, in this case African immigrants, because of their skin color and place of birth, among other factors. In essence, this is a case where, rather than dismissing the entire system of marginalization, collective protests against dominance dismisses only those elements that oppress it. In such instances, the collective denounces the subjugation that it experiences in some social contexts but does not challenge the privilege that it has in others. Instead of installing inclusive patterns within its own group to ensure fairness for disadvantaged people, the concerned collective replicates the hierarchies of inequality that are dominant in society in order to maintain its power in the social ladder, thus contributing to the persistence of some forms of oppression.

The foregoing tells us that participants have multiple minority identities; they simultaneously belong to a linguistic minority and to racialized minorities, disenfranchised both within the Francophone community and Canadian society at large. Having a minority status has problematic ramifications in terms of economic inequality

and reduced access to opportunities, as well as in terms of one's general well-being, attention and memory, self-esteem, and performance (Williams and Williams-Morris 2000). Moreover, as Nabors (2012) attests, the impacts of discrimination are "compounded for people with multiple minority identities" (p. 29); this is in part because of the multiple stresses they experience from a multitude of sources (Olaoye 2012). Participants are aware of these effects, and as we will see in the following section, they negotiate their multiple identities by building a sense of belonging to their ethnic community and redefining the meaning of ethnic, Canadian, and Francophone identities in inclusive ways in order to counter identity exclusion and its consequences and to create a place for themselves in society.

The Negotiation of Identity

African Francophones in Alberta have created their ethnic groupings such as the Congolese community and the Senegalese community. These communities consist of an array of organizations and social and religious associations who implement initiatives, such as events celebrating national holidays, sports activities, art exhibits, or picnics, in order to provide immigrants with a community to belong to, strengthen intra-ethnic cohesion within the immigrant community, and create more opportunities for community development and social and economic integration in the new immigration context. These efforts achieve some successes, in part because the communities become sources of ethnic symbolism, which empowers immigrants and helps them fight against racial inequality and stereotyping:

I identify with the Congolese community because it reminds me of my history, my place of birth... and the land of my ancestors. It reminds me of people and close relations we built with friends and neighbors and extended families. It reminds of my cultural background, all the values I learned while growing up there. It is good to have a community here [in Alberta] because you feel connected... [you] feel there are people who care about you. When you attend [community] events you talk with people, you see the dance and [eat] the [ethnic] food and you forget all the trouble out there [in society]. (No. 6)

The identification with the ethnic community represents to participants a compilation of social heritage; genealogy; geography or a shared country of origin; common historical symbols; values and beliefs such as respect, solidarity, and caring for people; along with dimensions of popular culture like expressive traditions, food, art, and music. In this case, the community offers immigrants what Davies et al. (2005) label "identity safety": an environment where they feel valued, appreciated, and welcomed. The community turns into a forum for immigrants to deconstruct dominant narratives and beliefs of the dominant culture (Harris-Lacewell 2004). Within this forum, immigrants replace negative stereotypes and generalizations about Blacks with emancipatory images and cultural productivity. For example, participants stress the centuries-long presence of black people in Canada, and the struggle of black slaves and pioneers for Blacks' civil rights, as indications of strength and resilience and as signifiers of their being integral parts of Canadian history, present, future, and the building of Canadian

society. These contributions give participants pride, which they express through art, speech, or educational activities during community events, among other occasions. In this regard, ethnic identity plays an important role in supporting people and cultivating their sense of self against the backdrop of imposed marginality (Walters et al. 2006).

Nevertheless, social hierarchies of power surface within the immigrant communities in the form of ethnocentrism, for example. After immigration to Canada, some immigrants continue to construct their ethnic or regional identity as superior to others in their community, triggering competing interests, contrasting political goals, antagonism, and tensions between groups (Erel 2010). Currently, these problems do not prevent immigrants from gaining a shared sense of solidarity and “identity safety”; however, over the long term they could damage internal cohesion within the community and integration into society, more broadly. There is a need, then, to build strategies that deconstruct normative thinking about ethnic identities.

Within this context we observe how identities are negotiated by reinterpreting their meanings in inclusive ways. Participants who oppose the ethnic antagonism that prevails within their community suggest rethinking ethnic identities in the context of a new community, in a new country:

You have to integrate in society. You need to know that you have acquired new values, and that [the new] society influences you in positive or negative ways. You keep the good values [associated with the ethnic identity] but you have to leave those [ethnic] problems [lived in the source country] behind, and instead think of what you need to do. Think of the unity [solidarity] that you need against all the trouble [racism and discrimination] and to help yourself, your kids and others to... make it in this society. (No. 7)

In this case, the reinterpretation of identity entails keeping some identity dimensions, refuting others, and adding new elements to one’s identity. Participants retain the aforementioned values of respect and caring for others that they associate with their ethnic identity, avoid reproducing negative stereotypes about some ethnic or regional groups, and showcase community cohesion and the successful integration of their community in society as the goal of their collective (ethnic) identification.

Similarly, participants offer alternative views to the dominant thinking about Canadian and Francophone identities. In one instance, an interesting perception on Canadian identity emerged in a participant’s elaboration of the meaning of “being Canadian,” when she mentioned that all her friends are Canadian:

“Canadian” means that some of them [her friends] are white, some are like me [black/African], some are Indian [from India]. There are also First Nations... and I also have a friend from Yugoslavia. They speak different languages... Some are born in Canada, some are like me [first-generation immigrant]. And we hang together, we eat pizza and Thai [food]. We attend [multicultural] festivals. And we go to the movies together. (No. 8)

In this instance, Canadian-ness is not limited to the “old group narrative” that associates the Canadian identity with whiteness. Rather, it embodies diversity in all its senses; in multilingualism, whereby someone who is French-speaking and/or

English-speaking is considered Canadian, as someone who speaks Punjabi, Swahili, or Cree; in ethnic and geographic diversity; and in the different trajectories of people, both those who have lived in Canada for a long time and those who are newcomers. This view on Canadian identity posits that the current social fabric of Alberta's society is increasingly ethnic and racially diverse, enhanced by immigration. Diversity is not just a fact of society, it is increasingly incorporated into the ties that people of different backgrounds build and the interactions that they carry out in various social settings, including restaurants and multicultural celebrations.

When it comes to the reinterpretation of the Francophone identity, participants redefine it to include as a sense of belonging:

Us [African immigrants] and others, all the people who choose to identify themselves as Francophones, and take part in the Francophone events and issues [institutions and the struggle for linguistic rights], and seek a good future for themselves and their community. (No. 5)

Not only does this view consider white, Catholic French-Canadians as Francophones, but it also extends to other individuals and groups that inhabit the Francophone space: the French-speaking First Nations, old and new immigrants from Africa, Asia, and Europe or other places, and people who speak French as a mother tongue or second or even third language. This perspective on the Francophone identity acknowledges the historical struggle of the Francophones and the need to promote linguistic rights, while also taking into consideration the impact of immigration on the Francophone identity (Belkhdja 2012; Carlson-Berg 2012). The “old group narrative” of the normative Francophone identity is being challenged in order to cope with the changing demographics of society and to give justice to the individuals and groups who contribute to the Francophone community in big and small ways.

This positive change is not confined to immigrants' initiatives as more inclusive ideologies started to take shape within the mainstream of Alberta and the Francophonie. In Alberta, concerted efforts resulted in the creation of platforms such as the Anti-Racist Action Network-Calgary and events like Calgary's annual Human Rights Forum and Edmonton's Annual Heritage Festival. These settings are allowing Albertans to open dialogue, share cultures and ideas, and also address and redress discrimination and dominance. Though these platforms are limited in scope, their very existence tells us (and the stakeholders who are readying to receive larger numbers of immigrants) that positive change has been made and that these initiatives could and should be extended to broader societal and institutional arenas to facilitate immigrant integration and inclusion in society.

Among the mainstream Francophone initiatives of inclusion is the *Réseau de l'immigration francophone de l'Alberta*, a network whose purpose is to foster immigration to Francophone minority communities and identify and raise awareness about the needs of immigrants and newcomers. Furthermore, the *Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta* (ACFA), which has been the spokesperson of Alberta Francophonie since 1926, publicly defines its vision for the Francophone community in Alberta as:

An inclusive community, a community where all the French-speaking people and friends of the Francophonie are valued and able to achieve their potential. This community is necessarily pluralist. (ACFA, 2009).

This vision of the ACFA is an important one as it comes from the most crucial Francophone lobbying and liaison agency in the province, which has the ability to impact policies and practices. In fact, the ACFA has already started applying its vision and is implementing inclusive initiatives, such as in hiring, to enhance the representation of diversity within various levels of the Francophone community. The efforts of the ACFA and other Francophone organizations have helped to create dialogue and increasingly equitable practices that allow diverse groups of Francophones to enable inclusive identity formation, build dialogue, and plan for the future together. This set of perspectives and initiatives speak to an inclusive racial ideology that welcomes the different backgrounds and ethnicities of Francophones, promoting social and political equality (Dei 2009). As such, we are reminded that, to some extent, the Francophone identity is being reinterpreted in more inclusive ways both by immigrants and white Francophones. However, these initiatives do need to be extended to the entire Francophone space in a timely manner so that people can achieve the goals that they set for both themselves and their community.

The foregoing tells us that the reinterpretation of belongingness by acknowledging the past, taking social and demographic change into consideration, and planning for a shared future is a strategy of negotiation used against exclusion and subjugation. Not only is this strategy intended to reduce the multiple impacts of minority status, it is also meant to enhance interactions among diverse individuals and communities and allow marginalized groups to occupy a deserved place in the images and narratives of the nation.

Conclusion

An array of discourses, narratives, and symbols show that, to date, identity in the Canadian context is largely constructed differentially. Racial ideology remains pervasive; race and ethnicity impact how people identify themselves and how they are perceived and treated by others. Because of invented categories and associated stereotypes, particular groups in society represent the “norm” of being both Canadian and Francophone while other groups are relegated to representing “the difference.” These images trigger racism that, while less overt than in the past, continues to have significant impacts on racialized groups, such as the alienation that African Francophone immigrants experience in their quest to belong and their underrepresentation in important areas of society. Hierarchical images about identities also participate in ethnic hegemony that devalues the language, religion, and culture of the Francophones who, consequently, find themselves as second-class citizens, struggling to protect their rights. Exclusionary beliefs are further reflected in the existing ethnocentrism within immigrant communities, which creates internal divisions along ethnic and political lines, among others. These issues remind us that “racial and ethnic identities can... be the basis of prejudice, discrimination, and inequality” (Markus 2010, p. 372).

Reinterpreting belongingness in inclusive ways draws our attention to the other side of “racial and ethnic identities... [as] the source of pride, meaning, motivation, and belongingness” (Markus 2010, p. 372). Apart from the participants’ discourses, other spaces of inclusion have been created, exemplified in the policies and practices outlined in this article—the Canadian Official Languages Act and forums of dialogue within the

Francophone and Canadian society at large. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, we Canadians both should and could have done better. Some policies still need to be applied at broader, societal levels; institutions need to be more representative of the social and ethnic fabric of Canadian society, and the economic wealth, resources, and opportunities available need to be more equitably accessible for and distributed among Canadians.

Our analysis of the research interviews and secondary sources allowed us to achieve critical ethnography's goal of identifying the mechanisms that reproduce oppression, represented in the hierarchal construction of race and ethnicity. We are also able to accomplish critical ethnography's goal of overcoming social oppression by adopting a more productive approach to human difference. We could, for example, perceive the differences of race, language, culture, and geography, among other identity markers, as enriching and enabling. We could think of the advantages that could be drawn from differences, including the various social ties, educational, and economic outcomes that are made possible through difference, and the diverse and encompassing worldviews that difference allows to formulate. Approaching difference in this alternative way could potentially help change the "old narratives" about racial groups and identities, preferring instead a constructive system of beliefs and images. Changing ideas and ideals is an important step in the process of social change as we project these ideas onto our social interactions and institutional practices, further enabling transformative justice and equity—an admirable goal of a truly multicultural society.

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