



## THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN CANADA: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY & BELONGING

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## ETHNICITY & THE IDENTITY OF AFRICAN-CANADIANS: A Theoretical & Political Analysis

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### INTRODUCTION

CANADA'S EFFORTS to build an inclusive and democratic society are marked by many policies. The *Immigration Act* in 1967 and subsequent changes, for example, were to create a somewhat level playing field for those seeking to immigrate into Canada. The 1982 *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees equality and freedom from discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, and other ascribed characteristics. Beginning in 1971 with official multiculturalism, the passage of the 1988 *Multicultural Act* made Canada the first official multicultural country in the world. In principle, the act provides the policy platform for celebrating cultural differences.

Overall, these policies provide the context and the space for legal membership and, hopefully, optimum participation in the Canadian political and socio-cultural family. It is important to note that their enactment was controversial at the time. However, the very fact that national leaders implemented them can be taken as an indication of their

desire to address some historically embarrassing episodes in the treatment of certain groups of people. These policies support Canada's official multiculturalism policy and offer a guide to the future trajectories of the country's journey towards building an inclusive and truly democratic society.

As a country built by immigrants from different generations, Western Europeans dominated the early history of Canadian immigration, leaving the Aboriginal population, the original inhabitants of the land, in a subordinate position. As far as Western Europeans were concerned, the English and French were the major players, with the English in a relatively dominant position. It is therefore not surprising that Western Europeans constituted the majority of the earlier waves of immigrants, hence Canada's self-image – religion, language, and values – were inherently European (Samuel and Schachhuber 2000, 16). However, the traditional source of immigration to Canada, Western Europe, started to dry up in the 1960s following a period of political stability. Meanwhile, with the formal end of the colonial era in many developing societies, especially in Africa, new sources of immigration were emerging. These new sources could only be engaged if changes were made to the previously exclusionary and racist immigration policies. Canada was also eager to keep pace with global changes to eliminate discriminatory laws, especially when Lester Pearson won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 and later served as prime minister (1963–68). These were some of the antecedent factors for revising Canadian immigration policies in order to woo immigrants from previously *non-preferred* regions.

The changes in immigration policies since 1967 gave rise to the arrival of immigrants to Canada from previously non-preferred sources, basically non-Western European countries. From the latter part of the 1990s to the early part of the 2000s, significant waves of immigration came from the People's Republic of China, India, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2002). One particular source or group of people who also benefited from the changes in the immigration policy were Africans. Even though Canadians of African descent have been in Canada since the seventeenth century, this study examines the life experiences of Africans who migrated to Canada since the 1960s. The figures for African immigrants to Canada have increased considerably over the last two decades. While 64,265 Africans immigrated to Canada during the whole of the 1980s, the number between 1991 and 1996 alone was 76,260 (Statistics Canada 1996). The number of African immigrants in Canada jumped to 282,600 in 2001 (Statistics Canada 2003).

With the arrival of various ethnic and racial groups, it became imperative to have a "public policy which is inclusive" (Samuel and Schachhuber 2000, 15). Multiculturalism was the policy position designed to engage diversity within the framework of equality (Fleras 2001). "From afar, Canada strikes many as a paragon of racial tranquility" (Fleras and Elliott 2003, 55). However, ethnicity and race feature, whether intentionally or unintentionally, in human

interactions. They shape access to political, economic, and social resources in Canada, even though Canadians, compared to Americans, tend to hold on to a mythical refrain that “race doesn’t matter here” (James 1994, 7). The historical account shows the salience of race in social policies in Canada. National policies on immigration, from head taxes to the outright refusal of entry of *undesirables* or *non-preferred* groups, are illustrations of race-based policies. In the pecking order that has ensued, the English and the French have been at the top, several other groups are in-between, while African-Canadians and Aboriginal Canadians compete for the bottom rungs (see Boyko 1995). The status and power differentials that go with this pecking order create dilemmas, tensions, and frustrations for African-Canadians as they attempt to define their identity, control their representation, and forge their integration within Canada.

An understanding of how African-Canadians deal with the issues of identity, representation, and integration, and how the larger society responds to it, is extremely significant if the goals of liberal multiculturalism, for example, are to be attained (Rickard 1994). After all, the aspirations of foreign-born Canadians are not drastically different from their native-born counterparts – that is, the desire “to build a prosperous, secure, peaceful life for themselves and their families” (Samuel and Schachhuber 2000, 21), as well as contribute to the well-being of their new home or country. A major challenge to the realization of these aspirations, however, is the prerogative that the French and the English have arrogated to themselves, as the two charter groups (or *founding nations*), to decide “what other groups ... [were] to be let in and what they ... [would] be permitted to do” (Porter 1965, 62). Pertinent to an understanding of identity and to the implications for representation and integration, therefore, is how particular groups fit into, and respond to, the structures and processes established by the founding nations.

Group dynamics over access to resources are contingent in nature. Contingency presupposes that these dynamics be situated within the social, cultural, economic, and political nuances of inter-group relations and the construction of meanings that comes with them. As Cornell and Hartmann (1998, 12) observe, there is an “unanticipated and often dramatic staying power of ethnic and racial identities ... [in] significant parts of the modern world.” Consequently, these factors constitute an intrinsic part of the dynamics that shape access to resources and can engender bitter struggles within social systems (Giddens 1984).

This chapter addresses the theoretical and political difficulties posed by the location of African-Canadians as they explore the problematics of identity, representation, and integration. It specifically examines how government policies, particularly those on immigration and multiculturalism, shape those problematics. The chapter argues that there are considerable inconsistencies between the official discourse on African-Canadians and the reality of African-Canadian experiences. These inconsistencies are reflected in systematic, systemic,

and interpersonal structures of interaction. It is argued that the nature of those structures account, in part, for the difficulties that confront African-Canadians.

#### ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In Canada and in other multi-ethnic societies, the question of identity relates to how several ascribed and socially determined factors interact to define people's sense of self and their treatment, or place, in the larger society. Two significant factors in the definition of identity are ethnicity and citizenship. The terms *ethnicity*, *ethnic*, and *ethnic groups* have a flexibility or elasticity about them that has made it difficult to arrive at a common definition. In many cases, they are used according to the whims and caprices of the source(s) employing them and their motivations.

Fleras and Elliott (2003, 86) identify several ways, both positive and negative, in which ethnicity is used. First, it is presented as a blight on modernity because of its tendency to revert to *tribalism* and *groupthink*. Ethnicity, in this context, is used in a negative sense. In the second usage, ethnicity refers to the way in which individuals and groups experience the world and relate to others. Here, it is seen as a positive force, because it shows the remarkable variations of human differences, differences that add to the diversity of the world (see also Kallen 1995, 61). Third, ethnicity, depending on the context and the rationale for invoking it, can have both positive and negative connotations. Finally, ethnicity is a political tool used in framing and setting the basis for the competition over scarce political, economic, and socio-cultural resources (Fleras and Elliot 2003, 86). Irrespective of how ethnicity is used, it does have socio-political import. In this chapter, we examine the significance of the concept in terms of how it shapes identity and opportunities for integration in Canadian society within a multicultural policy framework.

Ethnicity forms the basis for social struggle among groups. However, few social theorists have paid attention to the role of ethnicity in competitive political and socio-economic relationships, even though several social theorists have addressed broader questions regarding the nature of group solidarity and conflict and of social inequalities (Driedger 1996, 4). In modern societies, ethnicity, either intentionally or unintentionally, looms large in the dynamics of group solidarity and the processes that give rise to, or sustain, social conflict and inequalities. Max Weber devoted a chapter to ethnic groups in his massive, three-volume study, *Economy and Society*, and provides what is perhaps the most insightful definition of ethnicity. According to him (1996, 35), ethnic groups are

those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be

important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic membership (*Gemeinsamkeit*) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter ... ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common identity.

Weber's conceptualization of ethnic groups contains several important elements that have informed various sociological discussions of ethnicity (see Puplampu and Codjoe 2001, 88–89; Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 35; Schermerhorn 1978). First, ethnic groups identify themselves on the basis of a subjective belief tied to a real or assumed common descent. This common descent may be based on claims of a common genealogy, shared history or heritage, and/or attachment to a real or imagined territory or homeland. In addition to being an avowed basis for ethnic identification, others may ascribe ethnic labels to groups of people, a process which subsequently generates a degree of collective consciousness among those so designated. A second element implicit in the relational nature of ethnic group formation is power. How it is distributed and employed among various groups has significant implications for inter- and intra-group relations.

Many sociological studies tend to discuss ethnicity and race as separate concepts. In Canada, however, ethnicity and race tend to be used interchangeably (Kendall et al. 2004, 49; James 2003, 50–53). Generally, the criteria employed in ethnic classification vary with changing social conditions (Kallen 1995, 64). Weber's conceptualization of ethnic groups has a clear reference to similarities of physical type, a biological criterion. Indeed, if the biological criterion is employed in human classification and identity, what “we may speak of is [a] *racially defined* ethnic category” (Kallen 1995, 64; emphasis in original).

From a Weberian perspective, this study would consider race within the broader context of ethnicity. As Richmond (1994, 23) argues, ethnicity “combines different dimensions of cultural identity into a relatively coherent whole.” Weber's outline on ethnic groups contains variables that “define ethnic identity” (Driedger 1996, 5). The variables that are important for this study are race, kinship affiliation, and peoplehood, or nationality (see Driedger 1996, 5–9). Ethnicity is based on a subjective belief attached to similarities in physical type and cultural practices. Physical type constitutes the basis for the discourse on race. For that matter, height and the shape and texture of hair, eyes, and nose could all form the basis for theorizing ethnicity and race. However, skin colour has been the most consistently used criterion, and this has given rise to the crude formulations of *White* and *non-White* human types. The former serves

as the *gold standard*, and the latter includes all other colours. This typology has significant theoretical problems.

First, the characterization between White and non-White has given rise to the equally unsophisticated and erroneous belief of equating White to a *superior* status and non-White to an *inferior* one (see Fleras and Elliott 2003). Second, there are inconsistencies in the genotypical and phenotypical colour designations. The former, largely invisible, is the genetic basis of human types, and despite the attempts to classify human beings and impute differences in worth, the genetic basis of human beings is the same. For example, one cannot tell whether an unlabeled blood sample belongs to a White or non-White person. The phenotype is the visible expression of the genotype. These expressions are different as demonstrated by the variety of human beings. However, the labels given to the expressions are not consistent with the colour types. For example, the phenotypical expression labeled as White is not the same as snow, which is also called white. Third, even though white is also a colour, non-White human types are those referred to in the literature and everyday discourse as *people of colour*, implying a normality of *Whiteness*. This practice, in part, sustains the process of *othering* and the view that Whites are *colourless* and do not constitute an ethnic group, hence Sollors' (1995) classic question, Who is ethnic?

However, if Weber's conceptualization of ethnicity is taken to its logical conclusion, there is no doubt that every single soul in Canada is an ethnic. Hence the view of Hughes and Hughes (1952, 7) that "we are all ethnic." In reality, ethnicity is often used in a pejorative sense to give the impression that some, and not all, are ethnic. The process of othering makes it possible to blame the ethnics for undesirable social outcomes, and encourages the questioning of any claims they might make on the larger society in terms of political, economic, and socio-cultural goods and services. That is why, for example, Jacques Parizeau, the former Premier of Quebec, contended that the *Yes* side lost the 1995 Quebec referendum because of "the power of money and the *ethnic vote*" (Seguin 1995, A1; italics ours).

The idea of race and the physical features often used to delimit it are creations of human beings, and the processes involve never-ending political and social struggles over meanings and the social construction of reality. As Thomas and Thomas (1932, 572) argue, "If men (*sic*) define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." These consequences are germane in the conceptualization, operationalization, and reality of ethnicity on the basis of racialized constructions (Codjoe 1998; Allahar 1993).

Beyond race, kinship also looms large in Weber's concept of ethnic groups. Kinship derives from blood or marriage (affinal) ties or relations. Tracing blood ties to earlier generations in the absence of written records can, however, be challenging with regard to the accuracy of memories. Given that memories can fail, it goes without saying that to base ethnicity, and for that matter, identity,

on such ties would be a highly subjective process. As Weber (1996, 35) clearly maintains, “it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists.” Consequently, “the fact of the common descent is less important than the belief in it” (Puplampu and Codjoe 2001, 89). The belief in blood ties, or what Barber (1995) calls *blood brotherhood*, contributes greatly to peoples’ attempt to create a sense of belonging, especially in times of rapid social change. Kinship ties integrate individuals and collectives, and are socially constructed and recognized in human relations (Wellman 1983; Granovetter 1995, 1983). Individuals and collectives “may have differential access to valued resources (wealth, power, information). The result is that structured systems tend to be stratified, with some components dependent on others” (Ritzer 2000, 430; see also Turner 1998, 520–21). The dynamics that emerge from these systems determine the nature of social exchanges and access to opportunities. It is on the basis of these dynamics that somebody might *drop a word* in the right place for an acquaintance (Wallace and Wolf 1999, 348). Thus, contrary to the assumption that

the advent of *modernization* leads to a widespread use of formal and *universalistic* procedures, liberating individuals from the limitations once imposed by particular social milieus ... empirical sociological studies continually demonstrate the crucial importance of informal interaction in systems that are formally rationalized. (Granovetter 1995, 4)

Peoplehood, or nationality, is another key feature in Weber’s conceptualization of ethnic identity. The historical antecedents of nationality, as part of the broader national question, can be situated in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the consequent forging of the imaginary concept of the nation-state (Breuilly 1994; Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 1991; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1997). Peoplehood, or nationalism has been expressed in terms of belonging or community, territorial integrity, language, race, and ethnicity. The sense of belonging is the backdrop for various forms of nationalism (see Ignatieff 1993), and the mark of nationalism in modern, large-scale societies is the imagination of a community (Anderson 1991).

This imagination is fostered by several symbols provided by the nation-state. The nation-state had to devise strategies to operationalize the imaginary concept of the nation. The operationalization called for, among other things, cultural institutions (e.g., the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) that would produce and give legitimacy to existing social beliefs, norms, myths, and symbols (e.g., the national flag) in order to enhance social reproduction (Morrow and Torres 1995). These institutions and symbols give members or residents in the community the conviction of their togetherness and belonging, even though they have no real knowledge of the living circumstances of members residing in distant communities. Again, it is evident that perception is the key

galvanizing force, as subjective notions of the imaginary construct of the nation frame peoplehood, as do discussions on nationalism and citizenship. It is therefore not surprising that these concepts are contested.

The link between nationalism and citizenship deserves some further remarks. In its classical form, “citizenship ... [is] the status of the individual in relation to the land, the state, and to each other. It reflected the emergence of liberal individualism, and a growing democratic emphasis on liberty and equality. As a formal-legal construct, it means that citizens enjoy rights and have obligations within the territorial boundaries of their nation-states” (Gibbins, Youngman, and Stewart-Toth 1996, 270). The formal construct of citizenship has evolved and can now be conferred on the basis of “place of birth or length of residence. For instance, an individual is a Canadian citizen because [he or] she was born in Canada, or immigrated to Canada, remained in the country and ... applied for legal membership in the national community” (Gibbins, Youngman, and Stewart-Toth 1996, 271). Formal recognition, however, does not guarantee one’s social acceptance in the community. The discrepancies between formal citizenship and informal citizenship, as discussed later in the chapter, have significant implications for identity formation and community attachment. Indeed, the question of “who does and does not belong – is where the politics of citizenship begins” (Hall and Held 1989, 175; see also Isajiw 1999).

The foregoing discussion highlights two related aspects of identity – subjectivity and power. Subjectivity has several components. One component is how individuals and groups “contribute to the integration of society as a whole in their intentions and their consequences” (Isajiw 1999, 29). Another aspect is the extent to which individuals, and subsequently group behaviour, can be understood with respect to their sense of self. The idea of the self, as used here, is an active entity, and so it is capable of deriving meanings from a given social situation. These meanings are drawn from state-sanctioned symbols and rituals. However, the meanings are interpreted according to the position (ascribed or achieved, real or imagined) of the individual or group and constitute the social construction of reality. Ethnic background, for example, plays a role in determining the extent to which people feel a sense of belonging and identify with particular symbols and rituals, thus creating “their meanings and their identity” (Isajiw 1999, 30). The impact of power on identity becomes obvious when individuals and groups compete for scarce resources. Powerful groups tend to legitimize their identity in relation to the nation-state, while labeling others as not belonging and therefore not qualified to be considered authentic members of the polity. It is in this context that identity and belonging are contested, a contest that could give rise to social conflict (Puplampu and Codjoe 2001).

Having used Weber’s framework to theoretically situate ethnicity and identity, in the next section we examine how the subjective construction of these concepts shapes government policies on immigration and multiculturalism,

and creates a discrepancy between their professed intent and their practical manifestations vis-à-vis African-Canadians. We also discuss the role of ethnicity in identity construction among African-Canadians and argue that that process is, in part, a response to government policies.

#### IMMIGRATION POLICIES AND AFRICAN-CANADIANS: THE POLITICS OF GETTING IN AND CREDENTIALIZATION

The Canadian government, like many others, offers the structure and mechanism with which to address the identity, representation, and integration of the various ethnic groups. After all, the government has historically been the sole authority for setting the terms under which groups have entered and stayed in the country, even though, in many cases, it left the actual process to market forces and private institutions (Whitaker 1991). Therefore, government actions or inactions set the stage for the treatment of respective ethnic groups, and for that matter, their engagement with the dynamics of identity construction. As Bibby (1990, 21) notes, government “historically was the direct or indirect agency of minority misfortunes. Discrimination was either perpetrated or tolerated by the government well into the latter half of the twentieth century.” Policies from the latter half of the twentieth century to date have also not been without implicit discriminatory undertones.

The nature of the relationship between government policies and the identity of African-Canadians can be analyzed at two related levels: first, at the level of policy, and second, the impact of such policies. At the policy level, a racial dimension underpins immigration and multicultural policies and subsequently informs how government authorities (e.g., immigration authorities) deal with Africans. The 1967 immigration policies abandoned the notion of preferred and non-preferred countries as a determinant in the immigration process. In its place, the emphasis (in addition to other considerations) has been on age, education, and potential contribution to Canadian society. These indicators, under the points system, are supposed to create a level playing field for potential immigrants, including Africans. The steady increase in the number of immigrants from continental Africa might give the impression that this goal is being achieved. Such an impression would, however, be naïve. Simmons (1998) identifies an important policy variant in Canadian immigration and calls it neo-racist. Such a policy reveals “significant racist influences and outcomes within a framework that claims to be entirely non-racist” (Simmons 1998, 91). A neo-racist immigration policy has several features: rationalization of immigration outcomes on economic and other legitimate grounds; constrained access to immigration officers and difficulties with application procedures in certain countries; an attempt to link crime with immigration, and by extension, an entire ethnic group; and labour market segmentation in

Table 2.1 Location of Canadian Immigration Officers Worldwide – 1980

Geographical Location	Immigration Officers
Europe	46
Australia	2
Japan	2
South East Asia	26
South Asia	10
West Asia	5
Caribbean	11
Latin America	8
Africa	8
Worldwide	118

Source: Simmons 1998, 104.

which the *ethnics* occupy the bottom rungs in terms of wages and benefits, despite their qualifications and skills (Simmons 1998, 91–92).

Canadian embassies and consulates are the first point of contact for potential immigrants. Thus, the distribution of such offices and the resources they have to work with in different regions of the world would be a good indicator of the desire of the Canadian government to encourage immigration from a particular region. Simmons (1998, 104) shows that, before the cost-cutting programs began about two decades ago, specifically in 1980, the location of the 118 Canadian immigration officers worldwide were distributed as shown in Table 2.1.

Currently, six African countries (Morocco, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Egypt, Kenya, and South Africa) have Canadian missions that deal with immigration issues (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2004). Based on the number of countries served by each of these offices, the crowded spectacle of prospective applicants at these locations, and the delays that potential immigrants have to endure to get processed relative to applicants in other locations, it can be safely speculated that the facilities have resource constraints (both human and physical) in dealing with the demands of growing numbers of Africans intent on coming to Canada.

It can be argued that the increase in immigration offices between 1980 and 2004 does not necessarily remove barriers for African immigrants. They still have to contend with the ingrained default mindset among immigration officials, not only from Canada but from other industrialized countries, that they are economic refugees and potential burdens on their countries’ social systems. These mindsets influence the attitudes of officials towards applicants, the kind of scrutiny they undergo, the rates of success among applicants, and

the services they receive at Canadian immigration offices in their countries (see Olarinam and Williams 1995). Complaints by many Africans in Canada suggest, at least anecdotally, that there is a high rate of rejection of visitor visa applications by their parents and other immediate relatives who want to visit them.

Those who are fortunate enough to be granted visas find out that their African origin does not make the situation any easier when they arrive at a Canadian port of entry. The case of Tinoula Akintade, a British citizen who was not allowed to enter Canada, is an example of how an encounter with Canadian immigration officers can be mediated by unstated assumptions. According to the Canadian immigration officer, she “did not sound British” and had “an accent.” In this particular case, the supporting documents of her British citizenship, including being born in London, were of no value because, according to the immigration officer’s logic, sounding British was of greater significance than having documents showing British citizenship. The British, according to the same logic, are not supposed to have an *accent*, and so, for failing to sound British while having British documents, she had to spend a night in jail while her Britishness was being verified (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [hereafter CBC] 2001a). It seems that some immigration officials have a static notion of linguistic systems, fail to recognize variations within them, and equate accents to citizenship. Thus, if someone claims to come from a particular country but does not have the expected accent, he or she must be an imposter!!

The stereotypical connection between Africa and disease also features in the immigration experiences of Africans as they attempt to enter Canada. They are therefore required to undergo extensive medical examinations that are strictly enforced. The disease-carrying image of Africans was in full force when a woman from Congo arrived in Canada and fell ill a day later. The media headline was “Deadly Ebola Virus May Be in Canada,” because the woman was from Congo and had symptoms common to Ebola and other hemorrhagic fevers prevalent in Central Africa (CBC 2001b). Given the fact that there is no cure for Ebola, the health authorities took unprecedented steps, including allowing experimental drugs to be administered to the woman until test results ruled out the Ebola virus (CBC 2001c). The issue here is not the duty consciousness of the health authorities, which must be commended, in theorizing that the woman might have the Ebola virus. It is the idea that anyone from Congo who arrives in Canada and falls ill within a short period of time must have the Ebola virus. The processes followed in declaring the woman a likely carrier of the Ebola virus suggest nothing less than unwarranted stereotyping. It is this stereotyping that eventually leads to racism.

It is worth contrasting this case with the experience of Kosovar refugees who arrived in Canada in 1999 to show how race and ethnicity are implicated in immigration decisions. Perhaps based on the image of Europeans as being *clean* and not being health hazards, the immigration authorities did not require

the refugees to undergo any of the extensive medical examinations required of African immigrants. Unfortunately, however, some flight attendants on the planes that brought the Kosovars to Canada and a woman who worked as a Salvation Army volunteer at Camp Borden, a large military training establishment near Toronto, contracted tuberculosis (CBC 1999). The two cases clearly show the limitations posed by stereotyping whole groups and communities.

While the economic- and public health-based stereotypes about Africa continue to influence how African immigrants are treated, the emphasis on skills, language, and other aspects of the immigration process is proffered as evidence to debunk any claims of racism against these immigrants once they arrive in Canada. It is argued that the point system offers equal chances to all prospective immigrants, irrespective of their countries of origin (see Laryea and Hayfron in this volume). However, a question that has not been critically engaged is how the educational credentials and skills of immigrants are evaluated and valued in Canada (Harding 2003; Dixon 2003; Reitz 2003, 2001; Li 2001; Dabrowski 2000).

Though immigration policies encourage the migration of highly skilled labour, the system of credentializing and legitimizing the knowledge of immigrants involves multiple agencies – the federal government, provincial governments, post-secondary institutions, professional bodies, and employers. The legitimation process brings, once again, racialized ethnicity to the fore. There is an implicit hierarchization of knowledge embedded in the process that tends to devalue and/or delegitimize certain kinds of knowledge.

The correlation between the value assigned the skills of specific professionals and their country of origin can best be illustrated with medical doctors. The province of Manitoba, until February 2003, had preferred and non-preferred International Medical Graduates (IMGs). Graduates from the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa were preferred, and their licensing requirements were different from those of their counterparts from non-preferred countries. For example, Dr. Dumatol-Sanchez, a family doctor in the Philippines, took almost eight years to secure the accreditation needed to practice in Canada (Dixon 2003).

South Africa's inclusion in the preferred category needs to be put in perspective. The official apartheid system in that country gave Whites preferential access to medical training. Consequently, the vast majority of South African medical doctors in Canada are Whites, thereby raising questions about the extent to which the racial history of medical training in that country informed its inclusion in the preferred category. The government of Manitoba, in abandoning the preferred and non-preferred categories, argued that the changes were aimed at ensuring all IMGs went through the same licensing requirements. However, it is also obvious that the basis for the earlier categories, like Canada's pre-1967 immigration policies, was based on an implicit notion of superior and inferior countries and knowledge systems.

Beyond foreign-trained medical doctors, the market chances for other skilled immigrants from Africa have been disappointing, to say the least (Toneguzzi 2003; D'Aliesio 2003; also see Laryea and Hayfron in this volume). These trends are consistent with findings from Henry and Ginzberg's (1985) classic study of racial discrimination in employment practices in Toronto. One aspect of the disappointment, discussed shortly, is how political- and social-networking are becoming unstated factors in one's ability to secure a job. This is a trend that undermines notions of merit and equity, values that are supposed to be at the heart of a diverse and democratic society.

The categorization of preferred and non-preferred countries and the implicit questioning of the competence of graduates from the latter set of countries are not justified by the evidence. Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that the rate of competence among immigrant professionals from the non-preferred countries who have been given the opportunity to prove themselves have, as a group, been any worse than their Canadian-trained counterparts. Thus, while the shortage of skilled labour continues to make national headlines, there is a significant brain waste due to the complexities of evaluating foreign degrees (see Stromquist 2002; Finnie 2001; Bloom 2001; Hayhoe 1993). The conservative attitude to accreditation in Canada has led Jim Gurnett, executive director of the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, to conclude that "some of the European countries that have a more progressive approach [to the accreditation process] will increasingly pick off the best educated, the brightest, and the people who have a lot to contribute" (cited in D'Aliesio 2003, A2).

We are not calling for an uncritical acceptance of knowledge systems. Rather, the emphasis should be on being open-minded enough to acknowledge the value of training systems based on objectively ascertained merit, rather than arbitrarily drawn distinctions of preferred and non-preferred countries, thereby shielding the accreditation system from bureaucratic or professional interests. These interests sometimes masquerade as protectors of the public interest when, in fact, what they are protecting is their own political and economic agendas.

As pointed out in the previous section, ethnicity serves as a basis for social networks of privilege or exclusion. The configuration of ethnicity and race in Canadian society places African-Canadians and their social networks in a subaltern position. Thus, beyond the problems of credentialization, they are further disadvantaged by a lack of access to powerful social networks within organizations as they seek employment opportunities. Job advertisements in Canada stress the principle of merit in addition to encouraging visible minorities or under-represented groups to apply. It seems, however, that instead of enhancing their chances, these designations instead constrain opportunities for members of these groups as they navigate their way through the social structures and connections that characterize institutions whose meritocratic credentials have been questioned.

Miller (2001), for example, documents how, even though he had the requisite qualifications, it was his connections (social capital and networking) that opened several job opportunities for him in his career. He indicates that, in most cases, there was no point of comparison or competition because the job was not advertised, and so there was no one to compete against. In essence, no other search was conducted, and his powerful insiders simply handed the job over to him. He also notes that “it is not easy to build and maintain procedures that are truly meritocratic,” arguing further that “[e]ven the simple open posting (what currently is termed *transparency*) of job openings is easily subverted” (Miller 2001). Several years ago, he found a “position which asked for a most unusual combination of experience and interests. [He] learned that the job description was written to fit the individual whom the [organization] wanted to hire.” Based on his experiences and analysis, Miller (2001) poses a critical question. “If decisions [for example, hiring] will always come, in part, through social capital and networks, how do we ensure that the poor, the minority, the disadvantaged, get into the loop of the privileged?”

The revelations made by this personal narrative were confirmed in a September 2002 study on the hiring practices of Canada’s Public Service Commission (Curry 2004). The report found that there was nothing like merit-based hiring in about 51 percent of placements (out of 1,000 hirings analyzed) across the public service. There were instances where job advertisements were *tailor-made* for specific persons, and some managers prepared lists of potential candidates even when no competition was ever held to select them. The inevitable result is that nepotism and cronyism have become the norm with respect to hiring practices in the public service, giving rise to instances where some managers offered jobs to their kinsfolk, turning the departments into the exclusive preserve of families – husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, cousins, and so on. This constrains opportunities for applicants who do not have the *proper* political and social networks.

#### MULTICULTURALISM AND THE IDENTITY OF AFRICAN-CANADIANS

Since 1971, official multiculturalism has been the policy platform to manage diversity in Canada, a platform that also derives its legal and constitutional undertones (equality guarantees) from the 1982 *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The arrival of a large pool of immigrants from previously non-preferred regions of the world, among other reasons, account for the multicultural policy. As a policy, multiculturalism evolved from a folkloric orientation, through an institutional focus, to a civic focus in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, respectively (Fleras 2001, 340–41).

The folkloric orientation to multiculturalism emphasizes the *celebration of differences* as a means of eradicating prejudice and racism. Institutional

multiculturalism focuses on *managing diversity* by establishing relevant organizations and adjusting the modus operandi of others, with a view to addressing systemic and systematic barriers to access and hence *equalizing the playing field* for all actors in the political, economic, and socio-cultural spheres. The principal focus of civic multiculturalism is to forge a sense of citizenship and belonging as a way of deepening loyalty and allegiance to Canada (Fleras 2001, 341). Multiculturalism, in practice, has been the subject of critical reviews (see Henry and Tator 2000; Bissoondath 2002; Bibby 1990). For African-Canadians, the practical implications of multiculturalism are similar to the problems they encounter in their interaction with immigration policies.

One major tenet of multiculturalism is to promote the equality of all cultures. However, the reality is that certain cultures are accorded a pride of place in Canadian society, while the values and practices of other cultures, which are not concordant with those of the dominant groups, are rejected and/or denigrated as *backward* and likely to contaminate the *civilized* ethos of the dominant culture. Minorities are thus put in a situation where they have to reject certain parts of their culture if they want to gain acceptance in mainstream society. The equality that is expected from multiculturalism is, therefore, a mirage, as minority cultures are, at best, subordinated, or at worst, derided, even criminalized.

This is illustrated by the protocols set out for naming children in Canada. In African matrilineal societies, for example, children are not necessarily given the surname of their father, and siblings may have different last names. This is because the practice is to name them after a maternal uncle or uncles from whom they will inherit. There is, however, little understanding of this tradition by state institutions. Thus, when an African-Canadian invites a sibling to visit him or her, immigration officials question the veracity of their relationship and refuse to grant the relative a visa, using the Eurocentric lens of a common last name for siblings. Canadian hospitals also manifest this Eurocentric practice when they insist that birth certificates of newly born children should definitely bear the last name of one parent or the other. Consequently, they have denied African-Canadian parents the desire, indeed the right, to give their children a last name other than their own.

State policies dealing with child care and discipline constitute one area of major conflict between Africans and mainstream institutions, such as schools and law enforcement agencies. There is no question that children, as the most vulnerable members of any society, must be adequately protected. In fact, the protection of children is recognized by African societies as much as any other, and appropriate social sanctions are brought to bear on parents who step beyond the bounds of acceptable behaviour, whether physical, verbal, or otherwise. We therefore want to sound a caveat that the critique below is not an endorsement of child abuse, but a caution against universalizing what constitutes abuse based on subjective predispositions and values. It seems that, in Canada, various African

strategies of child rearing are questioned and criminalized. Stern rebukes from parents and spanking are said to constitute verbal and physical abuse. Many African-Canadian families complain about the fact that they are sanctioned for bringing up their children the *African way* which, in the uni-dimensional system defined by mainstream society, is construed as *backward* and abusive. These differences in perceptions about the right way to bring up children have led to a clash of values between Africans and Canadian state institutions. What makes the situation even more contentious is the fact that there is no incontrovertible evidence to support the subjective notions of abuse that the latter are accused of. The only basis for designating their child raising strategies as such is the fact that it does not conform to the practices of the mainstream society. It must be pointed out that, even within mainstream society, there is no consensus about the right way, as shown by the recent controversy surrounding the Supreme Court's ruling on spanking (CBC 2004).

The following narrative about cases involving social agencies further illustrates the uni-dimensionality of knowledge and values, and the attendant assumptions that characterize some Canadian institutions. Bissoondath (2002, 82) cites the case of two young children in Surrey, British Columbia, and three toddlers in New Brunswick who were detained by daycare personnel on suspicion of abuse. The evidence for the *abuse* in both cases was the *Mongolian blue spot* – a light birthmark common to children of Asian and African descent. The duty consciousness of the daycare workers, while commendable, exposes the nature of their training, as well as the broader issue of the nature and quality of knowledge about the *other* at various levels of the Canadian educational system. The liberal-technocratic paradigm of education that has sustained the Canadian educational system is excellent at promoting a “cultural understanding which is fragmented into superficialities and trivialities” (Toh 1993, 10). Consequently, “we are cognizant of the differences – the shape of the eyes, the colour of the skin – that do not count, but we remain uninformed of the ones that do” (Bissoondath 2002, 82). Canadians, in the face of stereotypes, do not really know each other as well as they think they do (Bibby 1990, 171).

Hyphenated identities are a celebrated part of Canadian multiculturalism. However, while policy makers use hyphenation to showcase the diversity of Canadians, it is applied inconsistently, leaving some, but not all, Canadians hyphenated. For example, one rarely hears about *European-Canadians*. The inconsistency leads, either intentionally or unintentionally, to distinguishing *real* Canadians from *mere* Canadians. The ethnicized and racialized character of identity in Canada, in a context where White is normalized and considered the non-ethnic standard, leads inevitably to a situation where only non-Whites are hyphenated in both official and unofficial discourse. Hyphenation then presupposes an adulteration of the *standard*. This implicit meaning of hyphenation is what makes non-Whites, including African-Canadians, the most likely candidates for the question, ‘Where are you originally from?’ The issue, as

Tettey (2001, 172–73) argues, is not the fact of the question being raised, since the question could be asked without malice; it is the persistent probing “even when they identify themselves as Canadian.” There appears to be an unstated assumption that “to be Black [in Canada, and unlike the others], you have to come from somewhere else [outside the country]” (Shadd 1994, 10). It is the frequency and persistence of such questions, based on the assumptions stated above, that cast African-Canadians as perpetual outsiders and eternal immigrants, no matter how long they have been legal citizens.

One consequence of the dichotomization of citizenship, in terms of the *authentic* and the *adulterated*, is that those who are categorized as the latter become targets of derision and disdain in times of economic difficulties in particular, and social or political difficulties in general. They are seen as the undeserving intruders sponging off what the *real Canadians* have achieved, or held responsible for society’s woes and told to “go home.” This reality is a persistent aspect of social relationships in Canada at the same time as official multicultural policies trumpet the virtues of equality and tolerance. The outsider status of the hyphenated Canadian is brought into bold relief, particularly when those who are not considered Canadian enough engage in anti-social behaviour. This is exemplified by the shooting death of a man at the hands of a Calgary police officer in October 2003. The deceased’s Sudanese origin was trumpeted in the media – which begs the question, ‘Why?’ What was the relevance of his birthplace to the issue at hand? Does his Sudanese status help us understand what happened? The only impact that his identification as Sudanese had, as far as *mainstream* society was concerned, was to introduce an *us versus them* mentality that pitted “our civilized police officer” with “their innately aggressive and culpable other.” He is not the only one who has had a deadly confrontation with the police. Indeed, there are examples of incidents involving White people, as well, but we almost never hear about their place of origin or birth. The media are not the only institution to construct these inconsistent and binary classifications of citizenship. Police authorities have also been known to racialize their strategies and patterns of law enforcement (see James 1998; Henry and Tator 2000).

The process of otherness is not unique to African-Canadians. Indeed, otherness (whether based on race, place of origin, or something else), as a general pattern, comes in handy when the mainstream wants to dissociate itself from a situation. Take the cases of Ben Johnson and Valery Fabrikant. Ben Johnson was the Canadian who won the gold medal in the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, until the results of his drug tests were announced. When the results indicated that he had tested positive for banned substances, he quickly became the Jamaican-Canadian – the cheating outsider and immigrant. Johnson was a *Canadian* when his fame as an Olympic champion made him worth embracing, and an *immigrant* when his positive test made him a pariah (see Bissoondath 2002, 107). Valery Fabrikant, a research professor in the Faculty

of Engineering and Computer Science at Concordia University in Montreal, shot and killed four of his colleagues and seriously wounded an administrative staff member (Pocklington and Tupper 2002, 121–37). Born elsewhere, Valery Fabrikant was referred to as the *Russian émigré* murderer (see Bissoondath 2002, 107; italics in the original).

It is fascinating to note that the prefix of the hyphenated identity tends to be dropped altogether when immigrants are involved in major positive achievements, and they are accepted simply as Canadians. For example, John Polanyi, born elsewhere, is the *Canadian* Nobel Prize winner in chemistry; Michael Ondaatje, also born elsewhere, is the *Canadian* Booker Prize winner (Bissoondath 2002, 107; italics in the original). What the foregoing discussion about the selective use of Canadian vis-à-vis immigrants shows are the connotations implicit in ethnic identifiers and the fact that they are only applied to those who are not members of the country's *founding peoples*, especially when they are involved in negative cases or situations.

Apart from hyphenation, simplification of culture is another problem in multicultural Canada. Culture is simplified when the supposed exotic features of the *ethnics* are put on display without any context or intention to learn anything of value, let alone challenge existing stereotypes. Simplification of culture is best seen in the so-called *ethnic festivals* that are part of the summer rituals in several Canadian cities. Policy makers present these festivals and related cultural differences as mechanisms “towards intercultural sharing [and] ... a means of demolishing barriers” (Fleras 2001, 344). However, sharing cultural foods and music, which seem to be the main practices at such festivals, would not, by themselves, contribute to demolishing intercultural barriers. To put it bluntly, ethnic festivals cannot engender acceptance of the equality of cultures and respect for differences unless they are anchored in critical learning and interrogation of culture that promotes intercultural learning and understanding. African groups have organized festivals and other events, such as Independence Day celebrations, to showcase their cultures and histories to the larger society. By and large, however, these events only tend to reinforce their otherness, as those who attend only focus on the *strange* and *exotic* performances and cuisines.

## CONCLUSION

Government acts, whether consciously or unconsciously, play a major role in the consistencies or inconsistencies in the theoretical and practical implications of identity construction. With implicit and explicit barriers to belonging in Canada, it is no wonder that African-Canadians seem marginal in terms of their social location. This outcome is both the result of, and the response to, structural and attitudinal constraints.

The foregoing analysis invites some policy recommendations. It is reasonable to argue that, of all the groups that are most likely to be hyphenated, Africans in Canada would be at the very top. Hyphenation shows the simple fact that government policies cannot, therefore, promote equality and celebration of difference, because the implicit “separate but equal” tone in the call would not guarantee equality of outcomes for all and sundry. This is because, for the vast majority of Africans in Canada, there is no way for them to change their physical attributes of colour to a colourless one, and they therefore remain the most visible of the so-called visible minorities.

Government policies on classification of Canadians combine physical features (read, colour) and geographical categories. It is important to clarify the basis for the classifications and the context in which features and geographical categories would hold sway. If the goal of classification is to showcase the diversity of the Canadian population, it would be necessary to be consistent in the classification. Otherwise, some Canadians, irrespective of the length of their stay in the country, would continue to be perpetual immigrants who, because of that, could easily be invited to go home in times of political and economic difficulties or upheavals.

Government immigration policies should begin to alert potential immigrants, in no uncertain terms, about the reality of the Canadian job market. The problem is the inconsistency of encouraging and approving the application of highly skilled immigrants to come to the country, only to find that their qualifications and skills are not valued. The result is a complete waste of talent, and the Canadian society at large is the ultimate loser. It is also important to confront the rhetoric and reality of merit in hiring vis-à-vis the job market. The use of political and social capital to secure jobs as documented in the Public Service Commission study might reflect a general, but reluctant, admission that, in Canada, a good job is reserved for a chosen few. Meanwhile, the aspirations, hopes, and dreams of the broader society are limited to the recitation of feel good multiracial and multi-ethnic (cultural) slogans. Underlying the inconsistencies in immigration and multicultural practices are beliefs and values that inform social attitude, behaviour, and practices from the individual to the institutional levels.

Education is often cited as one viable option to address some of the stereotypical and prejudicial origins of values and beliefs. The question is: What kind of education? Perhaps that education should include an understanding of political, socio-cultural formations that have affected, and continue to shape, the experiences of several ethnic groups in Canada. It should be a transformative education that “empowers learners, not only to critically understand the world’s realities in a holistic framework, but also to move learners and teachers [and the larger society] to act towards a more peaceful, just, and liberating world” (Toh 1993, 11).

While enacting policies to ensure successful integration, the ability of the Canadian government to implement its policies is hostage to the complex interaction between internal domestic, socio-political forces and external structures of the global, political economy. Indeed, the broader context of belonging, treatment, and participation of citizens is the ability of the nation-state to forge the collective sense of identity. In Canada, as in other countries, that ability is mediated by forces of globalization (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Laxer 2000). At the same time, there is nothing inevitable about policy choices. Hence, if the goal of an inclusive and democratic society is still a policy objective in Canada, policy makers need to better address the theoretical and political barriers in the identity, representation, and integration of Canadians, not only of African descent, but of all descents.

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