



Supporting immigrants' and refugees' occupational engagement in minority community spaces



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Background

- Canadian Francophone minority communities are embedded within & diffused throughout predominantly English-speaking areas
- French-speaking migrants settling in Anglo-dominant provinces have to navigate different linguistic spaces
- They must negotiate their linguistic identities through their day-to-day occupations¹

Research question

How do spaces that support occupations for migrants from minority groups influence their integration into Canadian society?

Critical ethnographic methodology

Collaborated with 3 community sites in Metro Vancouver:

- A church
- A provincial federation
- A community association

Step 1

- 6 Observations in each site (minimum)

Step 2

- In-depth personal interview with 20 participants who arrived to Canada as French-speaking immigrants, refugees, or asylum seekers
- Asked questions about motivations, experiences, & outcomes of their occupational engagement in Francophone community spaces
- Follow-up "Go-along" interview
- Engagement in one of the participants' selected occupations

Step 3

- Key informant interviews with 6 representatives from different community spaces, including each of the partnering sites

Theory

- Transactionalism enabled us to look at continuity & transition in migrants' transaction with their environments²
- A transactional perspective also allowed us to consider the situated nature of occupation as well as the multiple layers of the spatiality of occupation³

Findings

➤ Identity negotiation through occupations & spaces

- Francophone community is not as officially recognized in British Columbia as in some other Anglo-dominant provinces
- French-speaking migrants tend to engage in work-related occupations in English while French is used more in their free time (e.g., leisure)
- Some participants have intersectional linguistic identities: for those coming from former Francophone colonies, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, French may not be their mother tongue
- Ethno-cultural spaces allow the performance of multiple linguistic identities

"It's Saturday, I want to speak Lingala." (Church obs. #17)

➤ Spatializing the power of language

- Speaking French is more or less valued depending on the spaces where people are engaging in occupation
- When people have to function in Anglo-dominant spaces for many years, their attachment to their Francophone identity can become increasingly symbolic

*" - Do you want to keep speaking French? Is it important for you?
- Yeah, it is important but the influence of English is so strong."*

(Church, participant 3)

➤ Supporting everyday occupations

- The population targeted & activities offered varied between sites
- Different forms of occupational engagement & outcomes were observed
- In spaces receiving government funding the range of activities was influenced by the funders' criteria
- Privately funded spaces, such as the church, which was sustained by donations had more freedom to be versatile but relied on members' goodwill

➤ Occupational segregation

- The Francophone community claims it is diverse and inclusive
- Occupations supported within different spaces are not always relevant to all cultures or social classes, which can produce unintended segregation

"The difficulty is acceptance, there are times we are wondering: is French a culture or a language?" (Other participant 1)

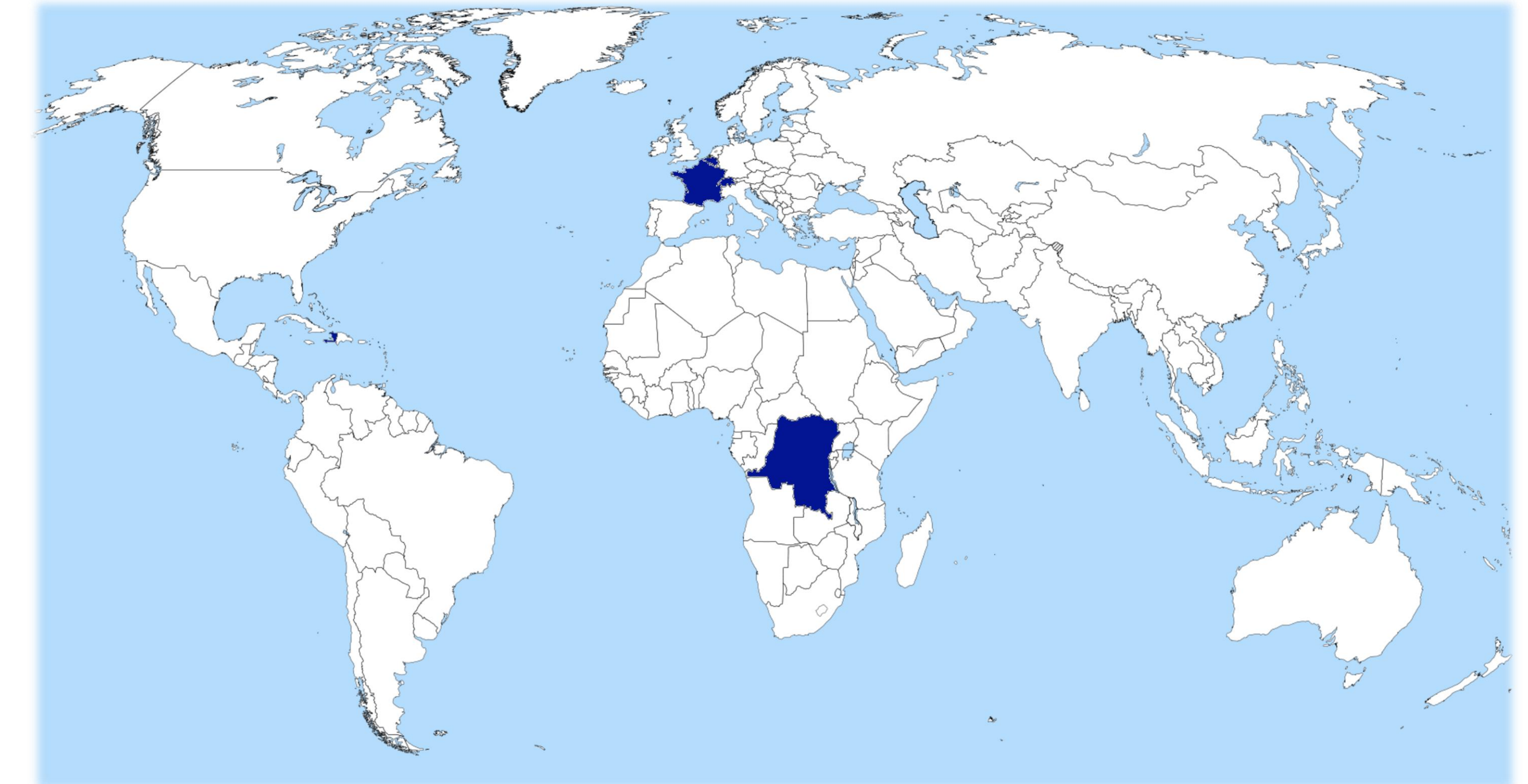


Figure 1. Participants' countries of birth

Discussion

Multiple spaces enable multiple belongings

Occupations available in different spaces enable the performance of certain aspects of one's identity

A sense of continuity

- For some participants, Francophone community spaces are places that offer a sense of continuity in migrants' transaction with their home & host countries (e.g., being able to continue practicing one's religion or educating children in one's mother tongue; receiving support that would have come from relatives in the home country)

An embedded and permeable minority

- Francophone community spaces cannot be considered as detached & isolated from the Anglo-dominant society in British Columbia
- Migrants' occupational engagement in the Francophone community does not prevent them from integrating into the broader Canadian society.
- The Francophone community can facilitate the transition in migrants' transactional relation with their environment in Canada – the Francophone community can be a first point of contact where migrants learn "Canadian ways of doing" and gain social capital

References

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