

Facilitation of immigrant integration in Canada: Storytelling for educational  
understanding

Natacha Rapson

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By: Natacha Rapson

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Signed by the final examining committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Examiner  
*Hourig Attarian*

\_\_\_\_\_ Examiner  
*Ailie Cleghorn*

\_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor  
*Arpi Hamalian*

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
*Sarita Kennedy*  
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

March 27, 2020 \_\_\_\_\_  
*André Roy*  
Dean of Faculty

## **ABSTRACT**

Facilitation of immigrant integration in Canada: Storytelling for educational understanding

Natacha Rapson

After a review of three doctoral dissertations examining the differential adaptation and acculturation of African youth and adult immigrants and refugees to Canada and the U.S.A., several important factors are identified: language, cultural heritage, community support, schooling and academic concerns, cultural identity, social relationships and gender. These same factors are also highlighted in the novels by Kim Thuy, telling through compelling vignettes the immigration and settlement story of a Vietnamese mother and her children as refugees in Canada.

Contrasting the academic research approach to the storytelling approach, the thesis makes the case for using authentic storytelling by immigrants and refugees for a better educational understanding and positive facilitation of acculturation and adaptation.

Five structured case studies/vignettes are then developed telling the stories of five different African immigrants to Canada and the United States. In order to enact this storytelling approach with different stakeholders a framework of seven domains of inclusion developed by Dei and McDermott is proposed: 1. Representation; 2. language; 3. Family, community school interface; 4. Co-operative education; 5. Equity and values education; 6. Indigenous/community/local cultural knowledges; 7. Spirituality and learning.

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patient with myself and allow myself time to be better and that we can learn from our mistakes as long as we are honest with ourselves.

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## **Chapter 1. Statement of the Problem and Literature Review of Three Dissertations**

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is a tremendous need to study the existing support for Canadian adult immigrants or refugees, newcomers to Canada in general, to overcome major obstacles they face daily for successful integration. The answer is not necessarily to ask them to self-manage their stress or seek medical intervention and treatment. Daily issues cannot always be resolved by taking medication or hoping that the problems will disappear over time. Through this thesis, I seek to motivate adult newcomers to Quebec and Canada, as well as their service providers and policy makers on immigration matters, to develop a more authentic educational understanding of the issues involved and protect them from feeling discouraged. I hope to help them to be courageous, to understand that there is always hope and that someone in their life can provide a listening ear and reassurance. Maybe even someone they never would have expected. There is still someone to make you smile, and help you believe in and trust yourself.

My goal in this thesis is to help adult immigrants like myself who have chosen to immigrate with hopes of achieving their dreams. I want to help them make those dreams come true. I am talking about international students entering to obtain a Canadian diploma and work experience. I am also writing this thesis for adults in undergraduate or graduate studies who are desperate about their career choice or academic curriculum adventure. I am seeking friendly advising without the pressure of a need for acceptance from someone or being accepted first. I am trying to understand how adults interact to help others and themselves to feel better. It is an introspective, deep understanding of the

human process of learning and reflection. Comer (1991) offered questionnaires to 73 newcomers in an organizational system and showed that they learn through peers, and not through the organization's needs. Gray's (1994) interpretative study on coordinator experiences of online storytelling demonstrated adults' abilities to learn from each other and actively participate. They are constructing a collective identity and also a personal one at the same time.

In this thesis, I am trying to challenge the assumption that academic or professional advising is the best approach for adult life issues. I think that unconscious, informal learning can be one of the sources that help resolve issues for some adults. My thesis is based on the fact that we are all different. Consequently, some adults might view informal experience-sharing as their primary resource for tackling issues. Others might take it as a secondary support system that complements their experience of formal advising.

The assumption here is that adults need each other to make sense of life issues. They must understand that they are all in the same boat and that there is not only one solution to a problem. They can be different, but encounter the same issues that they will resolve together. The conventional social research suggests that we should consult a specialist such as a doctor or a therapist, and pay for it. In the alternative approach of story-telling pursued in this thesis, there is no financial aspect involved; it is based on voluntary participation in sharing stories to heal and help ourselves and others too through educational understanding. The facilitator or service provider is encouraged to have a collaborative relationship with the newcomers who are trying to gain integration

in the new society and therefore they will be called upon to share their own issues as well. They will try to find solutions as a team.

This thesis is a qualitative study which seeks to describe immigrant experiences through their own story telling. The approach of *vignettes* will be used. This is the most effective way to share authentic experiences. The aim of the thesis is to provide interesting reading and discussion materials for educators and learners who are trying to understand the issues encountered by immigrants and refugees as they try to adapt and integrate into Canada. The hope is to become cognizant of the importance of preserving cultural identity while integrating into Canadian society and influencing policy dialogues.

This thesis focuses on the experiences of immigrants and refugees in Canada. This leads us to an important question: How can we use story telling for educational understanding? This is a tool that can be helpful to teachers, social workers, policy makers and influence the ways to improve the experiences of immigrants and refugees (newcomers) in their adaptation process to their new country. There is evidence in the literature that story telling influences learning and the more authentic the story is the better it will lead to a deeper understanding of the person telling the story (Atkins, 1973; Becker, 1961; Brauner, 1974; Stake, 1980; Wax, 1971; Webb, 1966; Wolcott, 1976).

### **Vignettes and Pre-Structured Cases or Stories**

Vignettes and pre-structured cases/stories will be used to establish some examples that learners, education professionals and policy makers can use for a better and more authentic understanding of the needs of immigrants and more effective problem solving.

## Vignettes

Studying the issues and concerns immigrants have through case studies, ethnographic approaches or narrative interviewing do not always lead to easily establish the flow of events while a story can be remembered with resonance. Miles (1990) describes vignettes as providing a snapshot, or perhaps a mini-movie of a person's experience in living and learning a particular task or event. In the case of a professional he writes: "They engage the professional directly in reflecting on a recent episode of practice, first describing it, and then producing thoughtful explanation. They embrace a systematic, structured approach with the expression of "emic" or "personal meaning" (p. 38).

According to Miles (1990, p. 41):

- The vivid reflective quality of the vignette is very productive
- The vignette can also be useful for in-service training and be used for diagnostic and intervention practices
- Vignettes can be used for problem solving and policy planning

According to Barter and Renold (1999), a vignette is a valuable qualitative research method. It will help reveal people's perceptions, beliefs about specific situations or sensitive subjects. The primary goal is to create reactions from readers. By reading these short scenarios which can be pictorial, some immigrant realities will be better exposed and understood. It will be a step toward clarification of individual judgments from readers such as teachers, policymakers and also immigrants themselves. These short scenarios will serve as the icebreaker to question ourselves about what would we do if we were the third person in the story? It is a way to facilitate the discussion and the educational understanding of issues involved.

Through these vignettes, cultural norms will be clarified and lead to more participatory learning and action (Gourlay, 2014, p.2). By using vignettes and pre-structured cases or stories this thesis helps pave the way to the comprehension of newcomers' situations and major issues experienced by them. It is a way of being able to interpret human behavior in their struggle of integrating into the Canadian society. Through vignettes, readers are exposed to immigrants' realities and their subjective experiences as they relate to discrimination, domination, lack of knowledge or access to information.

### **Pre-Structured Cases or Stories to Shape Public Policy**

Jones and Crow (2018) clearly recommend that setting the stage, establishing the plot and casting the characters are all vital steps towards stating the moral of the story and suggesting solutions to policy problems. Therefore, in addition to suggesting the use of selected vignettes from novels, books and personal lived experiences the thesis will develop and illustrate some stories to describe the selected issues faced by immigrants and refugees. Jones and Crow (2018, p.221-223) recommend that the process of telling the story shall follow the following steps:

- Telling a story
- Setting the stage
- Establish the plot
- Describe the cast of characters
- State the moral

## **Literature Review**

The first task will be to review some literature to establish the main factors that influence the adaptation process of immigrants. Three doctoral studies will be reviewed in order to prepare a list of factors. These are by the following authors: Girmay (2017), Shephard (2005), and Kumassah (2008).

### **The Dissertation by Girmay (2017)**

Each year thousands of international African students leave their country to study abroad, mainly in the United States of America. It could be argued that leaving one's family is the easiest part of the adventure. Integration into the American student life is often overlooked. Thus, Girmay chose to write a thesis on the difficulties of African international students' integration to American universities. The author focuses on the experience of African international students based on his own experiences. He explains that international African students are often victims of cultural, social, financial and academic barriers. It should be noted that there is very little research done on the cultural adjustment of African international students despite their presence in large numbers in American universities (Girmay, 2017, p.12).

Girmay aims to understand the practical process of the adjustment to the American university education systems by these international students seeking higher education in the western world. He based his study on three fundamental questions: What role does cultural heritage and social status play in the preparation for integration into the American educational process? What are the barriers that African students face during

their university studies? How does cultural heritage enable African students to overcome the barriers within American academic culture & their adjustment?

Initially, Girmay chose to build his study on the acculturation of African international students. However, through the stories of the participants in his research, he discovered limitations to this approach. He tried the acculturation approach to better understand the adaptation of African students in the American university path. He explains that the theory of acculturation takes into account the idea of integration with the culture of the host country and neglects the role of the cultural heritage. However, he still used acculturation to see how African international students adapted to their academic way of life. He concluded that acculturation can lead to isolation from the dominant culture if the student fails to integrate. We are talking about the direction of acculturation (Girmay, 2017, p.23). In the case of success, it is two-dimensional acculturation. From these different forms of acculturation can arise psychological stress from cultural interactions. Girmay explains that acculturation depends on the degree of identification of the individual with the dominant culture. It goes without saying that Girmay, in his interest in acculturation, undertook research on integration and different types of capital (social and human) that can be formed in the process of adjustment.

## **Methodology**

Girmay chose a qualitative research approach in order to be able to identify the complexity of the experience of African international students. The author wanted to be able to "understand, believe, perceive ideas" (Girmay, 2017, p.52). Also, this research approach would allow him to gather as much information as possible about the experience of international students and share the experience by collecting complete and

in-depth descriptions. According to Girmay, the use of open-ended questions to gather information to understand the social and psychological aspects of the student experience was incredibly insightful and helpful to recreate a reality based on social development and experience (Girmay, 2017, p.52). This qualitative approach also allowed him to reflect on the influence of his own identity, values, assumptions, interests and beliefs on the process.

In order to carry out his qualitative research, he opted for collecting data in two ways. First, he established a criterion to determine the type of population in his study. At the beginning, he wanted to interview African international students attending his university or having graduated within a year and not having a permanent residence in the United States. His initial target population was African international undergraduates and graduate students who met the criteria outlined above. He wanted international African students who had lived a minimum of one year in the United States at the time of the study or who had undertaken a year of study in their home country.

Girmay admitted to having encountered recruiting problems due to the period when he chose to start his study. Summer was not a good choice because of the lack of students enrolled in courses. Thus, autumn was the most favourable period for his research. This was based on his ability to establish more connections during the fall season.

Girmay used convenience sampling. This type of recruiting was in the form of invitation offered to Ethiopian students like him. He requested help from the African students' association. He was at their general assembly to present his study and requested the participation of the members in attendance. He also used teachers who had done similar studies (Girmay, 2017, p.55). Girmay had to vary these methods of recruitment



because some did not give him enough volunteers like Facebook groups that yielded very low participation.

The method that allowed him to have a large number of participants is *snowball sampling*. This sampling method involves relying on participants to use word-of-mouth to solicit more participants. This gave him flexibility in interviews. He was able to gather a wealth of information on the context of the experience, the academic level, the climate on campus and the cultural transition of the various participants. In order to gather the right information, he developed pre-designed, open-ended questions that led to detailed answers and explanations. He also used a semi-structured questionnaire to collect demographic information about the composition of the sample group.

It took two iterations to collect the essential data for his study. This is due to the difficulty of finding participants in his study. At first, he managed to have 17 participants in the first round. Thereafter, he had 11 participants. In total, there were 28 participants who were interviewed for 23 to 38 minutes. It had a total of 31 volunteers, and 29 eligible, but 28 real participants. Girmay explains that his 23-minute interview did not allow him to gather enough information. He stated that he conducted these interviews in large lecture halls at the university or at the library or at cultural religious centers the participants identified with, in person or over the telephone. The goal was to make the participants as comfortable as possible (Girmay, 2017, p.60).

One thing that surprised me a lot in Girmay's study is the importance he gave to the presentation of his study. He linked demographic questions about the origin and the number of years at the university in the United States to understand responses from the participants. There were two participants who after these questions became ineligible

because they studied in England, and another was in the USA for a seminar in Caribbean culture. Then, he asked the participants about the parents' occupation and the family's annual income. He had to change his approach to these questions because the participants did not have the answers or refused to answer them. During his study, he made sure to make telephone reminders or emails to these participants. One did not answer so he had been eliminated from the study. Girmay also made sure that the consent form was signed by the participants either electronically or in hard copy. He took notes to summarize the emerging themes to compare with the results of his literature review.

### **The Result**

The adjustment of international students varied according to their economic status in their country of origin. There are two categories of students in the Girmay study: those who are from the upper class of society and those who are from the middle-class. African families with greater economic means generally prepare African students to study in the West (Girmay, 2017). These students have a pre-established educational experience that enables them to adapt easily during their studies abroad. They are encouraged by their parents most of whom have already studied abroad. They have role models that they aspire to and who enhance their desire for studying abroad. To reinforce this need for Western academic success, these students go to private high schools based on the western education system. Thus, these students are not disoriented once they arrive to the United States of America (USA). According to Girmay, these same students often have the opportunity to go on vacations to the USA before officially commencing their studies there. The other category of students Girmay mentioned in his study are international students whose parents are middle class and who encourage their children to study abroad

to establish better financial stability. These students have a little more difficulty to adapt, according to Girmay, because they are new to the Western way of life, so they encounter some difficulty of integration.

According to Girmay, education received in the country of origin can prepare international students to adapt to their country of origin. He found that, in general, international students are exposed in advance to students from various sources in the private schools they attend prior to their arrival in the United States. They also face a competitive and rigorous education system that can allow them to adapt to their new life in the United States.

### **Cultural Heritage**

According to Girmay, the international students highlighted the cultural difference between their culture of origin and that of the host country to be one of biggest problems for them: Community-based culture from where the students come to the American culture based on individualism. The international African students who are adapting smoothly, according to Girmay, are those who manage to juggle the two cultures successfully. Related to culture, Girmay spoke about language barriers. English was a problem for some African students who did not have a solid foundation in it. They had difficulties in expressing themselves in English. However, according to Girmay, those who studied in private high schools with a strong Western base had less of a problem when it came to expressing themselves in English.

### **Academic Experience: Barriers to Adjustment**

Religious differences and community orientation are values that create barriers to adaptation according to Girmay. One of the research participants told Girmay that since

his arrival in the United States, he had practised his religion less. Girmay also found that international students experience culture shock when they arrive in the United States. One example is the use of alcohol, which is more widespread in the United States and goes against their religious beliefs. The other shock is concept of individualism that African international students claim to experience when they arrive and also during their second year of study. According to Girmay, they report an absence of community support.

### **Academic Problems and Prejudice**

According to Girmay, international students have problems with learning the language and history of the United States. However, international African students seem to excel in mathematics and science according. He explains that African international students can only integrate into a local culture if it is open and inclusive. The tendency is for students to succeed when they feel accepted by the local culture. Girmay also noted that there are international African students attending white universities who have felt racial discrimination and cultural stereotypes on their campuses. This creates psychological stress. It is to be known that African international students are subject to negative judgments due to their African accent, race and culture. However, according to Girmay, some of these students use these negative stereotypes as motivational drivers to work hard and succeed.

### **Relationship between Barriers and Adjustment**

Throughout their academic studies, international African students experience cultural, academic and social barriers that matter to their academic adjustment. According to Girmay, this is due to a conflict between their traditional cultural values and the fact that

university values are not always compatible with their expectations; this clash of values creates socio-cultural, academic and psychological difficulties.

### **Recommendations**

Girmay suggests that future studies take into account more nationalities for purposes of comparison. He recommends this because he had difficulty finding participants. He thinks that different nationalities take into account more ethnic groups or tribal affiliation (Girmay, 2017, p.224). Girmay thinks that it would be good if other studies take into account different institutions in order to provide more information on the institutional role and the socio-cultural climate for the positive adjustment of African international students. Finally, Girmay is considering a longitudinal study that would make it possible to see the barriers students face throughout their educational career. Finally, Girmay recalls that his study focuses on the concept of acculturation, but he has not been able to see all the aspects of cultural heritage and its contribution to the adjustment of international students.

### **Discussion**

Reading Girmay's research, I was surprised and fascinated. I realized that finding research studies on this topic was not as obvious as I thought. Reading Girmay's dissertation, I realized that there is not much research available on the experience of African international students. The idea of conducting interviews seems easy but finding participants who can offer enough information seems difficult. You can also find yourself in a situation with too much information.

The research angle used by Girmay is very interesting, but I would have liked to have concrete examples of stories about the contribution of the cultural heritage of African international students. I think that informing future African international students about what to expect is very important. Real life stories are more interesting and informative.

Girmay adopted the concept of acculturation to base his idea of the African experience in American universities. What was surprising is that he wants to incorporate integration into American society according to the culture of the African student. The question I am asking myself is whether I did not acculturate completely to the Quebecois society. My accent changed and I became bilingual. I found it normal to be that way, but I realize that I have completely adapted to the Quebecois society. Is this what I want to highlight in my research? I want to be able to highlight in my research that the integration of each one depends on their will of adaptation and their own goals in the immigration framework. Girmay allowed me to realize that. I can write about my university experience that can serve as a guide or example to my colleagues of Togolese origins.

### **The Dissertation by Shepard (2005)**

In this essay, Shepard talks about the cultural adaptation of refugee children from Somalia to a public college in the United States of America (USA). The author insists on keeping the exact place private, even though she describes in some passages the city of Boston and the North Eastern United States. This writing is based on four questions she used to interview participants in her study (Shepard, 2005, p.6). The first is about the way young Somalis characterize and give meaning to their cultural adaptation. The second is about different types of identities that correspond to the different levels of adaptation.

The third question relates to the influence of their families, peers, schools, and communities on their adjustment and academic engagement. The last question is about the way gender influences the acculturation process of the participants in this study.

To carry out her research, Shepard questioned six young men and six young women, teachers and adults who rub shoulders with the college. Then, she draws up their individual profiles with the information gathered. She bases herself on these profiles to examine more precisely the context of acculturation whether it is school, family, community or friends. Shepard articulates her study along the notions of autonomy, restriction, judgment, acceptance, integration, and non-integration. Finally, the author is also interested in the role of religion in the cultural expectations for girls and boys in the context of conformity into the host society from which the title of this dissertation comes from: “Acting is not becoming” (Shepard, 2005).

## **Theory**

It is crucial to understand that this study is based on the notions of Muslim Somali, African, Black and American youth. Shepard works with young people between the ages of 16 and 20 who have been living in the United States for two to eight years, who are of Somali origin and are refugees. Since all these characteristics determine them, it is important for the author to understand the hierarchy and social diversity that influence their cultural adaptation when they are forming their identities (Shepard, 2005, p.5). Before deciding the theories that the author wants to use, she takes the time to carefully pre-select the participants in her research because she wants to understand the acculturation style that affects the academic commitment of young Somali college students participating in the research. First, she interviewed adults, teachers who interact

with Somali youth (Shepard, 2005, p.9). It emerged that they found young Somali college students had "Americanized," but in the 'wrong' way. This was visible because of their lack of respect, their dressing, their choice of music, and the use of African-American vernacular to melt among other young Americans. In addition, Shepard discusses the negative change of attitude in their school career. According to adults, the "Americanized Somali youth" had poorer academic performance. Finally, the author also discovered during her pre-selection that acculturation was different depending on the gender of the young Somali. She found that girls were subject to a double standard of behaviour while boys had more autonomy to act. Girls had less freedom because of the need to preserve the cultural capital that is an essential foundation of traditional Somali values (Shepard, 2005, p.10). According to the author, girls must preserve themselves for marriage so as not to dishonour their parents. Failure to comply with this rule would mean a breach of the rules of religion.

### **Literature Review**

Before going into the thick of it, Shepard took care to build her study on particular notions that she had knowledge about and that she chose to explore more deeply. This research revolved around two types of identities: ego and ethnicity. Then, she became interested in the formation of identity through the acculturation and academic engagement of young Somali refugees in college.

### **Different Forms of Identities**

It is important to remember that this study is articulated around the concept of identity at the psychological, anthropological, sociological and cultural levels (Shepard, 2005, p.13). The author draws on Erik Erikson's (1963) definition to explain that the first



identity transformation experienced by young Somali refugees takes place during adolescence. This is the moment when they form their identities according to their individual needs based on the notions of autonomy and freedom. This can lead to some crises in the face of the individualistic American identity (Shepard, 2005, p.14).

To further accentuate the formation of adolescent identity, Shepard uses the social identity explained by Tajfel (1978) to make it clear that Somali youth are also going through a transformation of social identity. It is the idea of holding several identities. However, the author would like to point out that Tajfel's theory does not quite match the types of identities that can best explain the Somali youth she interviewed. She notes that individual identity may differ depending on the context. As a result, identity development is not the same from one person to the other. Finally, social identity does not explain that identities change (Shepard, 2005, p.15) and that Tajfel's idea of identity is not a possible answer to Shepard's discoveries. The author chose instead to draw inspiration from Barth (1969), according to whom the perception of identity comes from the ethnic limits of each individual. To better explain this, the author takes the religion aspect of the study to underline that Islam is a guide and a pillar for the young Somali refugees she interviewed. To add to this, she explains that identity is built day by day based on social interactions that young Somali refugees live in school, with family and with friends.

### **Identity through Acculturation**

Shepard in her study often speaks of Americanization. This is why she decided that the ideas of Framboise (1998) are based on five models of identities: assimilation, acculturation, alternation, multiculturalism and fusion. She focuses on revisiting Zephir's (2001) ideas of the principle of cultural acceptance, cultural denial, ambivalence and

cultural insecurity to explain the behaviours of young Somali college students (Shepard, 2005, p.12). Through this study (Shepard, 2005, p. 18), cultural adaptation appears to emerge in the form of visible cultural identification through language, cultural, religious and family dynamics (adult supervision, economic resources and parenting). The young Somali participants in the study shared with the author their religious vision and expressed their academic difficulties. In some cases, it was to explain that their identity and their feelings towards certain realities that they live on a daily basis were not in line with their values, which allowed Shepard to notice the level of academic commitment of each participant. She therefore classified these different types of commitment into two categories. We are talking about "cultural difference theory" which explains the poor school performance that may be due to differences between home and school values, cognitive types and social interaction. The other type is "culture discontinuity" which explains the difficulties in appreciating education because of low levels of schooling (Shepard, 2005, p.19).

## **Methodology**

The particularity of this study is that Shepard had previously conducted a pilot study on the subject, which allowed her to establish a good foundation. She opted for a qualitative approach based on an ethnographic study. This study included twelve young Somali refugees aged 16 to 20, attending a college offering a study program in the Somali language and English. There were also three adults including a Somali teacher, a Somali university student and an ESL teacher. The research was conducted between January and June 2003. The author visited the school once a week during the study and conducted

three home interviews with three female participants. Each participant had to be present for three days of different interviews.

### **Conceptualization and Triangulation**

Shepard based her study on group and individual interviews, where she asked each participant to take pictures of their everyday life in relation to the pre-selection guide she had prepared with them. After collecting the pictures, she went on to do individual interviews with the adults. Then, she retrieved the school and academic attendance sheets of each participant. Finally, she made observations in the classrooms of three of these participants (Shepard, 2005, p.25).

### **Group Interviews**

The author conducted two separate group meetings, one for girls and the other for boys with the help of two opposite-sex facilitators. She chose to do this because she noticed during her pilot study that when the group is mixed, boys tend to participate more than girls. During these meetings, she presented her study to the participants and discussed with them the problems of their daily lives. Thus, they all set up a grid to guide the photos to be used in the study (Shepard, 2005, p.26). The questionnaire she drew was based on the experience and opinion of the young refugees about their participation in their high school, their opinion of their life in the United States and their life before arriving to the United States. According to Shepard, the goal of the groups was to find ideas that require inclusion of the groups in the study. In addition, the goal of the photo was to encourage observation, analysis and provide a basis for the oral interview and allow follow-up (Shepard, 2005, p.28).

## **Individual Interviews**

Shepard continued with semi-structured interviews of 60 to 90 minutes recorded and transcribed in a meeting room with each participant. The individual interview was composed of three parts: the biography, the description of each photo and the social context (family, friends, school). The biographical part included information on the place of birth, the number of parents, the history of young refugees before their arrival in the United States. The description of the photos involved knowing where they were taken, what was thought while taking the pictures and explanation of the reasons behind these pictures. Each participant was paid thirty dollars and received a copy of these pictures. The author also explains that the analysis of the data is based on several readings and re-readings of information that she had to classify and reorganize in order to be able to classify the answers into themes (Shepard, 2005, p.39).

## **Difficulty Collecting Data**

Shepard explains that data recovery has not been easy. It took two weeks for all participants to bring back the pictures so she could conduct the individual interviews. She also had to make reminders the night before interviews or the same day to be able to continue the study (Shepard, 2005, p.29). What is most interesting is that the author made observations of participants in classes of three participants to get information about their classroom behaviours and hear informal conversations. Finally, she had access to participants' academic records to analyze attendance reports and test results (Shepard, 2005, p.30). Shepard insists that she wanted the participants, the city and the school where the study was conducted to remain anonymous and that she received permission from the school system of the city and the school principal before driving her research.

The criteria of her study are that the participants are young Somali refugees living in the United States for more than two years. Consent forms also had to be signed by their parent or legal guardian (Shepard, 2005, p.35).

### **Ethnographic Context**

Shepard took the time to introduce the four factors that explain the psychological, socio-cultural and educational issues faced by young Somalis college students who led them to become refugees in the United States. First, it is important to know the historical background of Somalia's foundation. It is a country of British colonization in the North and Italian in the South. Thus, Somalia is a divided country that has experienced war to conquer its independence. The war continued to be part of the reality of these inhabitants, which led many of these people to go into exile in neighbouring countries like Kenya or Ethiopia (Shepard, 2005, p.43). It is the beginning of the epic of refugee camps where they live between 6 months to 10 years in difficult conditions waiting to be relocated to the United States. They depend on food distributed by international aid agencies and money sent by their relatives living abroad (Shepard, 2005, p.56). Secondly, we must also understand that religion also occupies a great place in the life of Somalis because it is a country with a Muslim majority. This reality is why religion and culture are two factors that define the identity of these immigrants. It is also a very patriarchal society where the woman occupies a very important socio-economic place where she must remain under the dominance of the man (Shepard, 2005, p.49). However, according to Shepard, Somali women enjoy more freedom in education, work and travel than other Muslim countries. They must remain virgins to preserve the dignity of their family and are generally married at a young age.

## **Results**

After Shepard's qualitative research, the first conclusion is that religion plays a role in developing the identity of young Somali refugees. Most of the twelve participants, both girls and boys, consider themselves Muslims first and then claim to be Somalis (Shepard, 2005, p.209). This vision has been forged in response to the perception that Americans have against Muslims following September 11th 2001 attacks. The majority of the participants in the study use religion for cultural and moral base. The second conclusion is that Somali youth have a strong support group among themselves that strengthens their solidarity. This is a form of protection against individualism, social assimilation advocated by the host country (Shepard, 2005, p.210). The third conclusion that emerges from this study is that some participants chose to express their culture through their style of dress and their musical tastes (Hip Hop) to claim their authority at school (Shepard, 2005, p.211). The author also found that these young people did not participate in extracurricular activities for various reasons such as the need to help with housework at home, for girls, or to practice their favourite sport for boys.

### **“Acting Cool Was not Becoming American”**

The title of this paragraph extracted from Shepard's dissertation is very representative of the young Somalis participating in this study. They have many obstacles that prevent them from really saying that they are totally part of the host country. First, girls are subject to more parental restrictions than boys, which means they have less time to socialize (Shepard, 2005, p.211). According to Shepard, in Muslim and Somali culture, girls must be preserved for marriage and must have a good reputation not to tarnish the reputation of the family. Boys, on the other hand, have more autonomy but are thus more

exposed to violence, drugs and police harassment when they roam the streets of their neighborhoods that are not always safe. These differences between girls and boys are the first form of obstacles to a possible Americanization. The school commitment is another layer of the issue. Shepard observed that two of the girls surveyed had a major disengagement from school. However, boys were more bicultural because they explained the importance of being American and moving forward in their schooling (Shepard, 2005, p.212). She also found that young people with paternal figures at home tend to use them as a model for advice and guidance. Those who lived in the absence of a father figure referred to their group of friends, the distant family for advice.

### **Recommendations**

This dissertation shows a great negotiation of social boundaries through language, cultural values, gender, race and socio-economic status. Educators need to be better informed about the needs of Black African immigrants so that they can better help them in their academic difficulties. The consequences of rapid assimilation, rational causes and selective assimilation must be better studied in order to be able to ensure the educational development of these young immigrants in the host society (Shepard, 2005, p.216).

.According to the author, it is essential that politicians modify the rules and the school curriculum so that they adapt a little more to young college students who integrate these programs. It is already a very good idea to have school programs where these young refugees can have the opportunity to study in their native language and be among themselves. However, it should also allow the English program to facilitate a better transition between their educational background in their native country and the

acceleration required to be at the same level as young Americans who are native speakers of English.

## **Discussion**

This essay is very interesting given the approach chosen by Shepard. She chose to include the participants at each stage of the study. While reading, I felt that the participants were almost the investigators of this topic because their opinions were asked for the selection of questions. She also gave some form of flexibility for taking pictures that allowed the participants to freely express themselves, so that she collected rich information. As the author has explained, we can end up with too much information that must be sorted out. It means more meticulous work and a lot of reading, so you have to spend a lot more time researching.

The other issue that I see is the time she spent on her research. It is quite long in duration because the participants did not always respect the deadlines imposed on them. However, the stories told by the participants are touching and allow any immigrant who has experienced something similar to recognize themselves in the story. The choice of narration is a track that I would definitely like to explore because I loved the pillars she chose on which to build her research. I think that in the case of a Togolese immigrant like myself, it is interesting because religion is great moral support for us as well. The fact that these young people attach great importance to certain religious principles as a moral basis in their lives is quite impressive. This, however, may remove them from having a chance to explore the opportunities that the host country can offer them. I think I would like to explore this idea from the perspective of the individual personality. In my opinion, I tend to adapt to the environment that I am facing but I do not think that I can be



completely assimilated. I choose to try to blend in as a survival method for me.

Definitely, the duality between adaptation to the host country and the need to claim one's own origin, can be limiting and sometimes spread all too thinly.

### **The Dissertation by Kumassah (2008)**

Canada expects to receive 980,000 newcomers in 2020, something unprecedented in Canadian history (Gigon, 2018). Among them, there is a good number of Africans. It is often the minority that goes unnoticed. This number is scary; we are talking about people leaving their country hoping for a better life in Canada. Leaving seems to be the easiest part of the adventure while arriving in Canada can be another surprise. That is why it is important to learn about our peers' experiences. Through the research of Kumassah (2008), we discover the possible obstacles that the African population may encounter in this process. This story is to be taken as a guide, but it must also be understood that there is always the possibility of enriching it. Through his study, the author describes problems of integration and adaptation. This is at a relational level and racial discrimination. The author bases his research on racial theory by adopting qualitative research. He offers some recommendations that the Canadian government could implement.

### **Theory**

Kumassah's research focuses on the issues of immigrants and African refugees living in Saskatchewan for more than two years and trying to integrate Canadian society. The author wishes to explain the historical context of African immigration. The purpose of this study is to find the specific problems and obstacles faced by African immigrants and refugees through their personal experience (Kumassah, 2008, p.12). That is why his

research questions are, “What is the experience that immigrant and refugee Africans encounter in integrating Canadian society? What are the social implications for new immigrants or refugees to improve their integration?” (Kummassah, 2008, p.2). The author tries to extract individual experiences and realities lived by these immigrants.

Before beginning, the author talks about his ideas on adaptation and integration. According to him, the latter are variable and subjective. That is why he wanted his research to allow participants to interpret their own realities without influencing them (Kumassah, 2008, p.3). To understand his study, the author attaches great importance to defining certain notions as African immigrants and integration. In the context of his research, an immigrant or African refugee has been a resident of the City of Regina for more than two years and over the age of 18 years. When he describes integration, he refers to the adaptation of African immigrants to Canadian living conditions such as their acclimatization to the climate, social relations, and the ability to freely participate at the economic, social and political level in Canada (Kumassah, 2008, p.3).

### **Problems Faced by African Immigrants**

At the educational level, as the author explains, the qualifications and diplomas that immigrants like him possess are not always recognized or accepted in Canada, so they sometimes have to acquire new degrees (Kumassah, 2008, p.4). Language is sometimes another barrier to integration for Africans. This can become a source of social exclusion. The inability to speak French or English prevents communication or participation in Canadian society. This can be a barrier in finding a job or participating in political decision-making that may affect their conditions in Canada (Kumassah, 2008, p.6).

## **Importance of the Study**

Firstly, this research provides clues for information about African literature. This promotes the development of knowledge about African immigrants who can be used by social workers (Kumassah, 2008, p.7). Secondly, it is an opportunity to understand African culture and values in order to be able to better determine the needs of this population. To achieve these two goals, the author incorporates his personal experience to show that he understands the issues raised by these participants.

There are two major issues emerging from the study. The first issue is the difficulty of establishing social relationships, racism and discrimination in the process of adapting to Canadian society (Kumassah, 2008, p.8). For example, the author recounts the isolation problem he experienced as he came to Canada alone without his wife and children. To overcome this, he became a member of a church where he met people who became friends. It also taught him how to behave towards these new friends (Kumassah, 2008, p.9). However, having gained a new community, the feeling of isolation was always present even after years of his migration.

The other problem he has encountered is racism in the workplace. He mentions that he had refusals about being overqualified or under-qualified for certain positions for which he had applied. In addition, he claims to have had negative comments from his co-workers on his origin (Kumassah, 2008, p.9). Moreover, the author mentions minor inconveniences such as winter and absence of African food. However, in general, both the author and all participants in the study remain positive about their Canadian immigration experience. They found themselves lucky to have the opportunity to know a

better education compared to their country of origin. They appreciate the chance to have better economic opportunities if you are a hard-working person (Kumassah, 2008, p.10).

### **Literature Review**

The author explains that African immigration to Canada began in 1961. Before that, immigration policies excluded non-white immigration. Africans were not part of the desired ethnic groups. 1962 marked the period when Canadian policies were sharply criticized, leading to the abolition of white Canadian immigration (Kumassah, 2008, p.24). This has contributed to a slight increase in the African population in Saskatchewan from 30 to 2310 between 1961 and 2001 (Kumassah, 2008, p.25).

In addition, the author notes during his study that the difficulties encountered in African immigration to Canada depend on race, origin, socio-economic status, age, gender and immigrant's marital status. That is, "pre-migration and post-migration" determine the success of African immigration. It is important to note that Pre-migration includes reasons for leaving, age, gender and marital status. Post-migration refers to the process, programs and procedures for adaptation and integration into Canadian society (Kumassah, 2008, p.26). Finally, it is crucial to understand that most of the author's research is based on the theory of racial deficit. Kumassah explains this by the fact that North Americans have a biased view of Africans mainly due to the media they are exposed to. They often give a negative image of Africans who end up being stereotyped as being less intelligent and unable to control their emotions. It is fair and factual to say Black people are a marginalized group in North America (Kumassah, 2008, p.39).

## **Methodology**

Kumassah (2008) undertakes qualitative and descriptive research because he wants participants to express their opinions about their experience and to interpret their realities. Thus, the participants are the sources, the actors and the spectators of the information that they will divulge. They will uncover and at the same time understand the nature of their experiences. That is why the interviews were audio-taped (Kumassah, 2008, p.52). The recordings were confidential and would be kept for a period of 5 years before being destroyed. Participants had the opportunity to request a copy of their personal recordings (Kumassah, 2008, p.49). The interviews could be interrupted in case the participant became too emotional. Then, the author makes a careful examination of the language used by the participants to describe their experience. Kumassah ended up with a total of twelve participants, these included six women and six men over the age of eighteen, who had immigrated to Canada since more than two years and had never participated in this type of study (Kumassah, 2008, p. 43). The author recruited these participants from African associations in Regina.

At first, he had forty volunteers and ended up to have twelve actual participants. He first collected confirmations of verbal participation. Then, he mailed requests for written entries to each participant. These requests contained information about his email address, name and phone number of the supervisor of his committee (Kumasaah, 2008, p.49). He obtained a formal written consent signed by the participants before the beginning of their interview.

## **Data Collection**

Kumassah explains that it is important to understand that he was the researcher and participant in his study because he is African and has experienced some facts told by the participants. Therefore, he had to distance himself from the participants' comments and content himself with seeing, hearing and not commenting on the participants' comments so as not to contaminate these results (Kumassah, 2008, p.44). Thus, he expresses one of the difficulties of his research approach. However, he was able to build his study around an interview guide that develops categories of topics to explore. He insists that each participant was interviewed and recorded only once for a period of thirty minutes to two hours. The interview took place at the participants' place or at the place of their choice.

Once the interviews are completed, the researcher must organize the collected data into themes and translate the recordings. This involves a lot of reading and listening (Kumassah, 2008, p.45). It is by categorizing the data that the two major problems have resurfaced: adaptation and integration. Subsequently, subcategories had to be organized based on answers, recurring ideas and themes. Finally, Kumassah advises the readers that the data analysis involved his personal judgment in determining the meanings of the information provided.

## **Limitations**

The author remarks that his study has certain limits. Kumassah advises that the size of the sample for his research is not necessarily representative of all African immigrants so we cannot generalize the information gathered to them all. There is absence of triangulation, which is also due to the fact that it has used a single search

method to avoid compromising these data (Kumassah, 2008, p.46). The author also realizes that his personal knowledge can present a biased view but also can be seen to benefit his research. He is afraid to influence the participants, but he also has to interact with them to put them in a climate of confidence to make them comfortable for better participation in the study (Kumassah, 2008, p. .47).

Despite these drawbacks, the study has the power to inspire positive action in helping social workers get an understanding of African immigrant's integration process. The purpose of this study is to shed light on the difficulties Africans face. If successful, Canadian social workers will be able to expand their knowledge at the national level hopes the author (Kumassah, 2008, p.48). His research was successful as participants shared their appreciation and gratitude with the author at the end of the interviews and gave positive feedback (Kumassah, 2008, p.50). Finally, despite the small number of Africans living in Saskatchewan, the author found that he had in front of him a very active African community, organized in associations that he heard and saw at festivals like "Mosaic". At these events, African culture is exposed and transmitted to young Africans who share songs, dances, food and clothing with festival attendees (Kumassah, 2008, p.52).

## **Results**

According to the author, the difficulties that African immigrants encounter in this study can be understood through certain factors. First, it must be kept in mind that these people immigrated as adults and are already deeply imbued with their basic culture. They already have African values and norms to which they are attached (Kumassah, 2008, p.92). By immigrating or becoming refugees in Canada, they are forced to adopt a new

lifestyle, which can cause problems. They find themselves in an individualistic society, while African values aim at notions of collectivity. Thus, they fall into a world without support that especially affects women. They are alone at home while their husbands go to work or their children go to school. They come from a society where they are usually surrounded by family members who help them in their daily lives (Kumassah, 2008, p.93).

Immigrating to Canada, for Africans, means to accept being a minority when they come from a society where they are the majority. This creates discomfort that causes them to be aware of how they are perceived. We are talking about transitional adaptation. It is at this level that the Canadian government must take action by facilitating family reunification by reducing processing times, eligibility criteria and the cost of applications (Kumassah, 2008, p.94). To promote a better transition in the integration of African immigrants, it is also important for the government to be less intrusive in educating the children of these immigrants. During the study, the participants shared their annoyance about the police presence in their household, which they believe helps to diminish the respect of children for their elders and parents. They do not want the police to come and teach them how to educate their child. African immigrants have expressed the desire that Canadian authorities interfere less in their family affairs unless there are physical or emotional dangers to children.

### **Recommendations**

Healthy integration also means better access to social services. The African refugees in this study shared their gratitude for the help they receive to settle in Canada, as opposed to immigrants who do not (Kumassah, 2008, p.95). To improve this, the



participants advocate assistance from Canadian authorities to engage members in African associations that will be trained to help newcomers and provide them with the information needed. Also, with the aim of facilitating the integration of African immigrants, the author proposes that a television channel be devoted to African programs with the aim of sharing a positive public image of Africans (Kumassah, 2008, p.97). Finally, the Canadian school agenda should include African history, which will lead to a better understanding of African history and an understanding of certain behaviors. For example, the notion of non-disclosure of personal family problems to foreigners can decrease stigmatization or harm (Kumassah, 2008, p.98). In his study, Kumassah questions the difficulties of adaptation and the problems faced by African immigrants and refugees, so he suggests that future research will tackle the mental and financial aspects of these integration problems.

## **Discussion**

Immigrating to another country is a wonderful experience but can be a one-way experience. This is the first thing I remember from this writing. Kumassah relies on the theory of racial profiling to build his research. I find it very interesting, but I'm wondering if it's really that. I understand better the political aspect. Seeing that politicians for economic reasons preferred a certain immigrant category is more acceptable to me, as a person of African origin. I am a little disappointed to see that we can be considered less intelligent and less civilized. Shouldn't cultural differences be a source of beauty? I was very moved by some problems encountered by my peers because I personally dealt with these problems.

Finding work in Canada is not always easy. This is an opportunity to question, but definitely cherish an adult experience and pass on to the future generation. I would add to Kumassah's observation that we are partly at the origin of the problems of adaptation and integration that arise. I do not think we have to constantly accept being the only ones working towards integration. We must first be accepted by the host country. It takes more than a few festivals to spread African culture to the host communities. Canadians should begin by accepting our multicultural identity. We thank Canada for welcoming us, but should participate in preparing a better adaptation by sharing more of our experiences that can serve as pillars for future arrivals. We all want a successful immigration process or experience that will benefit immigrants and their hosts.

## **Chapter 2. Review of Three Novels by Kim Thuy as Sources for Vignettes**

I will review the novels of Kim Thuy (2009; 2014; 2019) a Vietnamese refugee to Canada. Each of her three novels presents in a succession of short vignettes the story of the immigration and reintegration process of the author herself and her family as refugees. The three volumes provide a rich source for extracting vignettes to facilitate the discussion of problems encountered and possible positive solutions proposed and enacted by different players and professionals involved in the process of the successful integration of newcomers. She vividly describes in short chapters and story episodes both her personal experiences and the experiences of her family members and their encounters with members of the receiving community and country. She describes specific issues such as acquisition of a new language, isolation, gender issues, food and cultural understanding and meaning ascribed to daily routines and tasks.

### **Ru (2009)**

*Ru* examines the stories of Kim Thuy's life. From her childhood in Saigon to her refugee life in Malaysia, to her new life in Canada, each page depicts an experience. She begins her stories on a memory based on a word or an action. It is a collection of elements from her past and present that she juxtaposes to create a sad or humoristic poetic description. Her melancholy comes from painful memories on the boat from Saigon to Malaysia where many individuals died. However, the author explains that she believes it is humorous that her family lives in Granby - a small city in Canada where the locals have welcomed them.

In this autobiography, humor is a type of learning that the author uses to explain some problematic realities that were faced. An example was the time Kim's mother sent

her to get sugar, as her daughter speaks French. By seeing her daughter struggling to communicate, her mother always helped her by calling the shopkeeper herself. The mother wanted to offer tools to her daughter without realizing that they were perhaps not the appropriate ones, as when she chooses to send her daughter to the military to learn English because she thought it was free.

The author's mother also teaches her children to be humble by doing the same chores as their nannies to be prepared for the eventual lack of privileges. That is why Kim's mother had been able to occupy different jobs such as a cook and nanny in Canada. To explain the harsh realities of issues of forced migration faced by families such as hers, Ru advises us that her parents told her that they would not offer money as an inheritance, but only memories (Thuy, 2009, p.44). And indeed this book uses the author's memories to share stories of her past and her current integration into the Canadian society.

### **Man (2014)**

*Man* reveals more aspects of Thuy's life in Canada. It is written as a cookbook, a fable or personal diary where pages follow one after another, each beginning with a new recipe. Each chapter is slightly more than a page long, and is written as a poem. Vietnamese cooking is indeed present. The first page of the book is astonishing because we discover immediately that Man has three mothers. She has a biological mother who left her to a nun who becomes her second mother. Finally, her third mother is the one who raised her and found her a husband. Her third mother wants to secure her future, and finds her a husband and sets up a wedding to a Vietnamese man.

We can deduce the need of adaptation from *Man*. It is the story of a woman who learns how to define love based on her personal experience. The language, the food, and

the memory places are essential in this book. It is a moving story because it questions the type of love that women receive in a non-developed country and a Western one. In the beginning, love seems to be strange, isolated and without meaning. It leads us to question the place of women in both societies. In Western countries, women are emancipated, and women can experience love as they choose. Can we say that Man is wholly integrated into the Canadian society? Thuy leaves this as a mystery that everyone can judge and decide on.

### **Vi (2018)**

*Vi* recounts the adventures of the youngest child of a Vietnamese family of four. She escaped the troubles of the Vietnam War, and her name means small and precious. During her childhood, she lived in Saigon. Because of the war, she had to leave with her family and become an illegal refugee. This was only possible due to her mother and her friend, Ha. They left behind her father who was the last link to a spoiled childhood. She survived a difficult situation where she learned the challenges of the refugee camp before they arrived in Montreal, as one of the "Boat People." Vi is a typical example of an immigrant because she grew up in Vietnam, then lived her adult life in Canada, and her full life, as a woman, all over the world.

In this book, women's strengths, such as being entrepreneurial are depicted. She was also a solid base for her husband, which is perhaps the most important lesson in the book. We learn that according to Vietnamese societal norms, women give unconditional love to their husbands and children without thinking about giving it to themselves. Vi's mother had a lazy husband and made the decision to leave him in order to provide an excellent education to her children, by raising them in a western country. She wanted to

give her children the opportunity to live in a calm country, rather than a dangerous one.

The author compares Canada and Vietnam to illustrate how life is more stable in Canada, as she wants us to value the luck that we have to be living in Canada. *Vi* is the story of refugees who had to reinvent themselves in a new country while trying to maintain their own culture and identity. As immigrants, we must remember that our origin is a source of tremendous wealth, as mentioned in the reading through the memories of *Vi*'s childhood to adulthood.

It seems absurd to think that our education can be based on our memories, but it is the most precious thing that we have. Memories build our cultural identity. The importance of the language, education and the cultural identity of an immigrant is also emphasized in this piece. *Vi*'s mother understood the importance of language without even realizing it. She was an interpreter in the refugee camp, and her French knowledge helped her to immigrate to Canada with her children. She then helped her children to achieve excellence in their studies. In this situation, immigration was an opportunity for a good education and a decent job. It was an accomplishment for a mother to see her daughter become a lawyer, who eventually returned to her home country to help her own.

I recommend the three volumes by Kim Thuy as a rich source for selecting vignettes to start a discussion around immigration and adaptation questions with all stakeholders including immigrants and refugees themselves, in schools, in learning circles for decision makers, politicians and service providers.

## **Four Main Vectors of Integration**

When I arrived the first time in Montreal, at the airport the custom officer said, “Hi and Allo.” My reaction was to question myself why he was telling me “Allo.” I was really surprised because I thought he was talking to someone else since I was in front of him. My response was due to the fact that in France “Allo” is the answer that we provide over the phone when we answer calls. Since I was confused, I replied “Hi” which was a familiar word for me. Then, the custom officer proceeded in English. However, he asked me my first language and I replied French. He switched to French and asked me why I did not reply in French. I explained to him that I did not understand, and he laughed. This first interaction seems simple, but it was my first step toward integration in Quebec. I had been lucky that the custom officer was comprehending, but I cannot say that it can be everyone’s experience. Some people might have a different experience and can find it frightening or scary. That is why I think, language is the first vector of integration. As an immigrant, it is important to understand that language cannot be everyone’s cup of tea. It is also important for the welcome country population to accept the fact that everyone is different, but it can be interesting to learn different types of French for example. It is a beautiful step toward acceptance. That is why, in this part of the thesis, we will review the place of language in integration. Through Thuy’s books, there are issues of language, cultural identity, individualism and education that have been mentioned. In the following, we will review each of them in details. We will compare to the different types of issues in Girmay (2017), Kumassah (2008) and Shepard (2005).

## *Language*

The notion of social integration starts with linguistic assimilation. In order to integrate a society, we must be able to speak the local language. In the case of Thuy's books, Vietnamese immigration implied learning English and French. All her books expose language through different aspects. In *Ru*, the perfect example is the issue that the main character had while she was sent by her mother to get sugar. She has a lot of difficulties to accept her mother's requests due to her inability to speak the local language (Thuy, 2009, p.25). By the end of the book, we can see that Ru masters the language correctly in order to study and find a job. Expressing ourselves in a foreign language is a different step from understanding. Linguistic integration is a long and constant process.

In the case of Girmay (2017), he studies international student in the United States having difficulties because English is not their first language. They are confronted to a cultural shock between their traditional culture and the welcoming country. Some of them adapt themselves, and others reject the local culture. Therefore, they are in a dilemma of rejecting their culture and language. Consequently, we can say that mastering a language does not mean being integrated. Integration is only possible if we are willing to discover and respect the values of the welcoming country.

Thereby, integration can take different forms. In the case of Girmay (2017), Kumassah (2008) and Shepard (2005), language is an essential tool in succeeding in school. It is a type of academic integration in order to enter the job market. We are not learning a language for fun but a specific purpose. Then, it is difficult to know if language fosters total or partial integration because it is instrumentalized. There are



immigrants who can stay in a country for years without speaking the local language because they do not feel the need.

In the books of Thuy or the dissertations of Girmay, Kumassah and Shepard, language has an essential place in the immigration process even if it has a different purpose. It is fantastic to see people from different origins understand each other through a specific language which is not their native language. For example, I have been through it myself. I have three cousins: a 17-year-old, eight-year-old and a four-year-old. The 17-year-old was born in Togo. She understands and speaks English, French, and Mina (Togolese local language) but she can only write and answer in English. The eight-year-old and the four-year-old were born in the USA. The eight-year-old only understands English and Mina but can write and respond in English. The four-year-old can understand English and French but only answers in English. This shows that in the same immigrant family, there are varieties of languages spoken, but only one links them together.

Based on my personal experience as an adult, I realized that I have the tendency to speak the language of the environment where I spend most of my time. It sometimes creates confusion in my personality. As an example, the last time I went back to my home country, Togo, my family and friends were calling me “Simelan” in my native language. It means the foreigner. They were telling me that my attitude, my way of thinking, my manner and my way of talking had changed since I left. I was used to denying this affirmation. However, everywhere I was going, people were noticing right away that I was not living in the country even if I was speaking my native language: Mina. I did not give it so much importance at the time. However, once I came back to Montreal, I had an interview for a job position and the interviewer told me that she was happy to hire a

French person. She liked the French accent that I had and my expressions. It made me think, “Who am I?” Since then, my cultural identity seems to be something that I like to fight for.

Depending on the situation, I might say that I am African or Canadian. I think the reason behind my answer is that I would like to please my interlocutors. As an adult immigrant, I think that we can face the issue of cultural identity. We can sometimes take too much from the host country and neglect our own culture. Now, I like to see myself as a “Canadian-French-Togolese” or simply put: a citizen of the world. I am proud of my mother culture. I am also proud of being a Canadian because I had to earn my place. Therefore, I love to mix the cultures. I do my hair as a pure Togolese. I dress in a mix of African and American styles. Finally, I drink coffee while I eat my African food. This is a perfect example of my own personality; everyone is different. The beauty is to be able to find your own path as an immigrant even if I strongly believe that it is important to mix and match from the different cultures one has encountered and adapted elements from.

### ***Cultural Identity***

**The Flavor Palace.** Speaking a language can be an excellent source of food. It is like a tiramisu that melts on the tongue. Immigration leads us to discover different food. The search of flavor can be difficult. Then, the cultural impact can happen. This shock reveals a duality between the local and the traditional culture. In all of Thuy’s books, the first aspect of the Vietnamese culture is through food. The author always describes characters that use their ability to cook to insert themselves into the local society. For example, in *Man*, the main character uses her cooking talent to get close to her husband

who has a restaurant in Montreal. In this way, she tries to integrate and adapt to her husband but also to find her place in the Canadian society. In *Vi*, the mother cooks for her son and his friend when they come to their house to study. Thuy takes food as a base for socialization as we can see in *Ru* where she explains that the heroine and her family were invited to eat with the local inhabitants of Granby trying to please them with the best rice possible. It is a way to show that Canadians are open-hearted and welcoming. They also try to learn about different cultures by sharing meals. A good meal is never refused, and it is a way to share learning, teach and share our traditional culture to our children and local people. Food is an international language that gathers everyone together. However, it is not always possible to find the right ingredient to cook traditional food as mentioned by one of Kumassah's (2008) participant. Either way, food stays an important vector of socialization. We can then affirm that integration through food reduces distance and barriers between two cultures.

### **Social Relationship: Individualism Versus Communitarianism**

While food brings us together, different perceptions and lifestyle can separate us. Immigration means knowing a new lifestyle. In most of Thuy's books, the community is an essential aspect. In *Ru* and *Vi*, the heroine and her family live together and help each other getting along in their new world. Therefore, they share moments, family memories that they will transmit to their children. In Canadian society, it can be absurd because individualism is extreme. Living in an individualistic society and practicing communitarianism is not always easy. It is a way to reinforce our traditional culture, but the beauty is in the flexibility to be able to juggle both at the same time. The communitarianism is visible in Shepard's study based on a support group of Somalian

refugees. It strengthens the feeling of solidarity, and it is a form of protection against individualism and social assimilation (Shepard, 2005, p.210).

Cultural identity is not only a question of origin. As one foundation of cultural identity is the social interaction. Being an immigrant means being able to interact with others. As an example, I was at a Togolese wedding last summer in Montreal, for one of my childhood friends. Even though, it was her special occasion, most of the invitees were concerned by the fact that I was one of the single women almost in my thirties. My mother was ashamed by the fact that I was still single and without children. It is really impressive that in my Togolese culture a woman's accomplishment is based on her capacity to build a family and have children. Almost everyone during the wedding was playing match-maker without taking into consideration my desire. They were all confident that God would help my future partner in overcoming obstacles and provide financially for us.

In contrast, I went to a Canadian wedding, everyone there were happy for the couple-and focused on them. I met some university friends there who were single, but it was not perceived as a bad thing. They were there to have fun and mingle. It is an example of the different types of social expectations that women can encounter during immigration. As a hybrid woman, as I call myself, I like to defend myself on the fact that I live in a country where women have the right to be free from judgement. However, I understand the necessity of family, but it should not be at the expense of my own happiness. As I get older, I think that it is not necessary to go too fast, there is time and opportunity for everything. I have been able to make up my mind about the social interaction, but maybe some immigrants might be struggling with the issue. The question

is more “what is happiness for you?” It should be something that we questioned ourselves about. That is why in this part of the thesis, I will review integration by gender.

### ***Integration by Gender***

Through her study, Shepard (2005) establishes that integration can depend on the immigrant’s gender mostly among a young population. The best way to describe integration or assimilation through Shepard is toward the catch line: “Acting cool was not becoming American.” She explains that the study participants have different rules depending on their gender. The girls have more parental restrictions than boys. Therefore, young Somalian girls have less time to socialize (Shepard, 2005, p.2010). Thuy comes to the same conclusion about this type of socialization by talking about an arranged marriage such as the one described in Man, or Vi’s and the need for a woman to be obedient to her husband. In the case of Vi, her mother’s expectation was confusing. Her mother wanted her to live with her friend Ha who married a Canadian diplomat for her to learn a specific western behavior and freedom. At the same time, she expects her daughter to follow some Vietnamese traditional rules such as being obedient to her man.

In non-Western cultures, such as African or Asian ones, women's place seems to be obscured. In this type of society, women have a crucial place but that is not recognized publicly. However, in countries such as Canada or the US, women are supposed to be equal to men. It can be hard for immigrant women to be in a western country but having to follow non-Western rules. It is visible through the negative reaction of Vi’s boyfriend, who insults her for accepting his first kiss, in the car. It makes me question the different type of education that immigrants are exposed to.

As an adult immigrant, I came to Montreal to get a Canadian diploma in order to integrate in the work market. Therefore, education was a key component to my integration. In my mind, a Canadian education would facilitate my integration. Being an international student, I had to juggle a lot between my cultural education and my Canadian education. Back in my country, the teacher wanted us to learn and memorize by heart in order to get the best grades. However, in Canada, we have to think and provide our opinion. It is a dilemma that I encounter, and some immigrants might relate. From there, we have to do a lot of formatting of our brain at an adult age. It is not easy. Consequently, in the next section, we will review the family education and the academic education that an immigrant has to deal with.

### **Family Education and Academic Education**

Living in a foreign country as an immigrant implies the duality between home and school education. It is also important to keep in mind that the age of an immigrant can impact their integration. Shepard focuses on the immigration of young people. This type of immigration can be through clothing, musicals choices and acceptance of families' rules or not. As a child, immigration is not always integration or acculturation but seems more flexible once we are adults.

The fantastic part of Thuy's books is that the immigration is depicted as being a gradual process and experience, because immigration goes from childhood to adulthood. *Man* is the only book where the immigrant starts as an adult, but we have the impression of a child discovering love for the first time. Love is a perfect example of the different adaptation that an immigrant has to go through in a Western country. It is difficult to accept some obvious aspects of the experience of love in Western society. In Canada or

the USA, love is touchable, expressed and visible. People hold hands in the street or kiss in public places. While in Africa for example, public display of affection does not have a place. It is only visible in private. The immigrants can be stressed being pulled between adhesion to their cultural roots and adhesion to local cultural expectations in the new country.

### **Summary**

Living one's country and family ties behind are not always easy tasks to accomplish. Then, arriving in a host country where language is the first barrier that one needs to overcome to be able to integrate the society, is an additional burden in the life of an immigrant. However, it is always possible to overcome this obstacle with courage and intention of learning. The reason behind the need to understand a language, it helps to study, socialize and be accepted by the people of the host country. There are other issues such as local culture of individualism, but it is also easy to tackle this obstacle through the non-Western culture of food. As long as we take time to question and be curious about each other, integration is possible.

The most surprising thing that I discovered is that sometimes, integration depends on gender. It is such a curious issue, but it is due to the background of each immigrant. Through immigration, we can shape a new cultural identity based on our experiences in the host country that we can mix with our cultural heritage. Everything depends on each immigrant's personality and desire to become a well-integrated immigrant or not. The cultural identity can be based on our education and social interactions that we encounter during immigration. My thesis is not about giving a straight answer to the transformation of every immigrant's cultural identity. However, it is based on reflecting about our own

identity as immigrants and seeking positive integration and adaptation strategies and solutions.



### **Chapter 3. Presentation of Vignettes Based on Personal Experience**

According to Barte and Renold (1999), a *vignette* is a valuable qualitative research method. It will help reveal people's perceptions, beliefs about specific immigrant's situations or sensitive subjects. The primary goal is to create reactions from readers. By reading these short scenarios which can be pictorial, some immigrant realities will be exposed. It will be a step toward clarification of individual judgments from readers such as teachers, policymakers and also immigrant's themselves. These short scenarios will serve as the icebreaker to question ourselves about what we would do in each situation if we were the third person in the story? It is a way to facilitate the discussion to reinforce the main issues discussed early in this study. Through these vignettes, cultural norms will be highlighted to initiate more participatory learning action (Gourlay, 2013).

After covering traditional academic research approaches, through the reading of authors such as Girmay, Shepard and Kumassah, I realized that these types of readings are not friendly and easy to understand outside of academic and specialized circles. There are so many coding and technical vocabularies that someone lacking the specific educational background will not be able to understand easily. We, as immigrants, like to share our experience through stories. That is why I choose vignettes to relate reader friendly stories that immigrants can relate to. These stories can be used as icebreaker for teachers or policy makers or other decision makers in order to interact with immigrants.

In this section, I will prepare some pre-structured cases based on personal observations of immigrants trying to make sense of their new status in their receiving communities. We will have five vignettes/pre-structured cases or stories, so five different

stories on characters who are newcomers (immigrants or refugees). The five specific stories will be based on main issues culled from the literature review. After presenting each story, short questions will follow to gather reactions that might emerge. These will be personal reactions and perceptions that I myself often pause to myself to facilitate educational understanding and in-depth discussion on the issues encountered. It is a way to put the reader at the center of each situation and push them to ask what each one of them would do in this situation.

The goal is to understand immigrant reality and offer realistic and optimal solutions to the issue under consideration. It is a way to link actions with perceptions. By analyzing the story being presented, a person can gain an educational understanding to better discern and identify issues pertinent to the problem faced by the newcomers. It is a form of sensitization. The limitation in this approach is that some readers might not relate to the stories and the issues because individual perceptions and reactions vary. Readers might also question the validity of the short scenarios. However, as mentioned earlier, the four vignettes or short stories that I will develop are an echo of the issues mentioned in Kim Thuy's books and the dissertations reviewed.

I firmly believe that this thesis proposes a way to understand immigrant's issues through an authentic method. It is always easier to read a short story that can make you laugh, so we remember easily. It is a beautiful opening to a further discussion on the issues. A great deal of social science research exists on the matter of newcomer integration in the welcoming communities and countries, but my thesis advocates a specific purpose: the comprehension of the issue through the newcomers' views to come

to an educational understanding in paving the way to realistic and positive resolutions for all concerned.

### **Vignette 1: Germaine's Mail Experience**

It is easier to accept critical changes by laughing them off. That is why with Germaine's permission I am going to tell her "mail story." Germaine came to Montreal from Togo for a visit, at the beginning of winter 2015. She was taking care of the house while her son and her daughter were balancing university and work. A few days after her arrival in Montreal, some mail was delivered to their home. As an African woman, it should be noted that Germaine enjoys talking. She had a long and friendly discussion with the mail carrier, and when the lady was leaving, she bid Germaine farewell with a cheerful "see you later."

Returning home from work at 5 pm, her daughter saw her seated comfortably in a chair at the door, waiting patiently for the mail woman to come back. It's important to note that she was waiting outside, in the snow. She told her that the lady was very nice to her and that she did not want to miss her return, so she decided to wait outside. She had been waiting for a whole hour in the cold. She was freezing, of course, but wanted to be polite by making sure that the lady wouldn't miss her. Her children had to gently explain to her that the lady would not be coming back until the following day. She seemed to feel so sad and stupid, and the next morning when the mail carrier arrived, she insisted on telling the lady that she ought to use her words carefully when making promises, because she is a "woman of honor."

## *Discussion*

This story demonstrates how immigration adaptation and culture shock can be at times amusing. It is not always so easy, and Germaine was lucky since she had her children around her to explain things.

Therefore, I want to understand how an adult, or an adult immigrant, can more easily integrate and feel comfortable within Canadian society. What types of informal support is available for adult immigrants without strong social ties within Canada? How can they overcome lifelong cultural differences in their Canadian journey as immigrants, or even just adults?

I am very interested in the notion of developing friendly support materials because I believe that formal academic or non-academic support is not the ideal answer for everyone. The idea of seeing a therapist who is a stranger, might make some adults uncomfortable and hide essential details about their life due to trust issues. Some adults prefer to discuss their concerns with someone they know and trust for many different reasons. Everyone has a diverse background and culture. Everyone interprets ideas in different ways, depending on their cultural frame of reference. It is my opinion that there is no "one-size-fits-all." To date, the problem is mostly viewed from an academic perspective. The most common answer to the support requirements for an immigrant successfully overcoming life obstacles is to refer them to a specialist. In the case of adult immigrants, the strategy sometimes is to get an education and meet school advisors for guidance. Is there another way?

### ***Description of the Process***

There is a tremendous need to study the existing support of Canadian adult immigrants or adults in general to overcome lifelong issues. This study would help others understand that these particular adults ought to be considered similar to children because they have to overcome new obstacles each day. The answer is not necessarily to ask them to self-manage their stress or seek medical intervention and treatment. Daily issues cannot always be resolved by taking medication or hoping that the problems will disappear over time. The human brain is already bombarded with information that is far more complex than the fairy tales it was brought up with. Through this study, I hope to motivate adults and prevent them from feeling discouraged. I hope to help them be courageous, to understand that there is always hope and that someone in their life can provide a listening voice and reassurance. Maybe even someone they never would have expected. There is still someone to make you smile, and help you believe in and trust yourself.

In the next section of this thesis, I will relate four more vignettes, but I won't use the same format because I think immigrants' experiences of significant situations are not necessarily the same from one person to another and are usually told differently according to people's personalities and degree of comfort about sharing their mistakes.

### **Vignette 2: Afoua's Job Experience**

Afoua holds a graduate degree in accounting and is an experienced professional employed in France in her field of expertise. She decided to move to Quebec. She was full of hope and dreams about finding a job in Quebec based on the marketing campaign that had been done in Paris about the lifestyle and opportunity that she can land in

Quebec. Therefore, full of dreams and stars in her head, she left her job in Paris and came to Montreal as a permanent resident. This incident started the depression cycle since her diplomas were not recognized to their full potential as promised.

Nothing is more frustrating than arriving in Quebec after long years of wait and financial sacrifices, only to end up having your knowledge and experiences not accepted and ignored. Therefore, she started from scratch. She studied for a bachelor's in accounting at University of Quebec in Montreal. After graduation, she was full of hope to find a job in her accounting field. Some of her friends told her that she should start applying for jobs through Kijiji. She happily did it. She started applying online on junior accounting positions. She got a call an hour after applying. She talked to a man and they convened her to an interview the following day, at three in the afternoon.

She prepared herself and went with her diploma, paperwork and well dressed. Once she arrived she saw a lot of people in the waiting room. She was surprised when they offered them first a group interview. She was shocked when the man told her about a vague position and asked her if she was willing to start at a lower position in order to evolve in a year as manager. She immediately accepted. Then, they told all the people left in the waiting room that a car will come and pick them up to show them the place where they will be working.

They were packed in a small bus. It took them about an hour to arrive to destination, an almost deserted industrial area. They ended up in a warehouse where workers were packing drugs in boxes. They had been told to try to see if they can do it. They just got introduced to the entry level position. After an hour of this charade she could not take any more and she wanted to leave. They told her that she had to wait for everyone to

finish the tour. Otherwise, she was informed that she could leave on her own. She waited until nine PM. Afterwards, she was dropped in an area of Montreal that she did not know. She had to call an Uber.

In the next part of the story, Afoua managed to arrive home safe and told her story to her mother staying in Ivory Coast. It is easy to feel how scared the mother was for her only daughter. Afoua, herself was feeling lost and sad about her job hunt. She was not feeling valued. She felt discouraged. She spent weeks in her apartment unable to go out, too scared. She stopped her job search. Then, running out of savings, she got referred by a friend to work in a call center where she was being paid the minimum wage at the time. It was not the ideal job for her but at least it was helping pay her bills and feel appreciated for the work she was doing. She spent four years in the call center before finding a junior accounting temporary position through a placement agency.

Afoua's story is an example of the struggle for finding a job without having a Canadian job experience. It is the issue of immigrants with an educational background from their country of origin and who need to readapt their education to the Canadian system. Nobody can imagine the type of issues immigrants can go through while looking for a job to feed themselves or their families. It is quite demeaning for someone educated to experience this kind of problem. This story illustrates a challenge faced by immigrants. Most of immigrants can relate to this story. However, some native Canadians might not be aware of the existence of this type of issue. Some people could say that Afoua should have applied to receive Employment Insurance. However, we should ask ourselves whether immigrants always know about their options. We need to know also how they feel about asking for help.

### **Vignette 3: Aminika's Adaptation to Québec's Education System**

Here is the story of Aminika, an eighteen year old student arriving from Togo (a West African country). She just graduated from a French High school in Lomé. She was to study towards a political science B.A. degree at Concordia. She is the oldest of a family of two daughters. She was sent to continue her education in Montreal because she was an excellent student, graduating with Honors and a first place in the English language course.

#### ***Hope for Other Opportunities***

First day of her course, Aminika found herself lost in this university, not knowing how to prepare. She arrived an hour late in class. She took out her book to take notes and quickly realized that most of students were on their laptops, each with an Apple logo. She tried to pretend that she was not annoyed by that. Then, the second surprise was when the teacher said that all the course materials will be online and they have to log in their portal to access them. She had not been able to follow properly the two hours of class. At the end of the course, she asked a classmate the reason why nobody was taking notes on paper and whether having a computer was a requirement.

#### ***Bad News and Disappointment***

The next thing is that Aminika called her parents to tell them that she had been told that she needs a computer. She was sad to announce that to them. She knew that her parents had borrowed money to send her to university in Canada, in the hope that she will get her degree and be able to sponsor them eventually to immigrate to Canada. She advised them that she had been told at university that she can work 20 hours per week on campus. Therefore, she will find a job and pay for her computer in order not to subject



them to further financial worries. The part that she avoided mentioning is that she did not know how to find a job.

### ***Social Encounters***

In order to find a job, she thought that by asking people around, someone might be willing to refer her or provide her a job. Here is the first cultural contrast. Back in her country, she could find a job through connections of relatives and friends. It could have been the same here but nobody knew her. However, another African student referred her to work with him in a call center where she had to conduct surveys.

### ***Balancing Work and Study***

After six months, Aminika did not have her computer yet because her mother got really sick back home, so she was not working. It was one less income to help. She was in charge of paying her own food and rent. Therefore, she had to pick up a second job. Then, she started the non-stop days of work and school without barely enough sleep. She was struggling to work two jobs and do full time studies.

### ***What Could Have Been Different?***

It might have been helpful information for the university to advise prospective students in her program that a computer is a requirement at the time of applying for the program. It seems that this requirement had not been transmitted properly because she found out about it in her first day in class. I think in this story the lack of information support is the main issue. It is possible the information was not provided properly. If universities have in place some services to guide new students at their arrival, it might help alleviate the shock somewhat. If these support services were present at the

registration office, the situation would be less painful. This story is another example of an important obstacle that an international student will face. The most important task is for us to become aware of this obstacle and find solutions together. Working together towards a positive resolution is the only valid and reasonable way for a successful immigration.

#### **Vignette 4 : Yannick's Learning about the Canadian Financial System**

This is the story of Yannick, an eighteen-year-old Togolese man arriving in Montreal to study. Having graduated from high school in Lomé, he arrived in Montréal in 2012. His parents gave me twenty thousand Canadian dollars in cash. I had been asked to be his guardian because he was my brother's friend.

I was not in Montreal when he arrived, but I gave him guidance to open a bank account. He was reluctant to do so. Once, I came back, he was telling me how rich he felt because his parents never gave him so much money in cash and the bank made him richer. He said that he had three cards: a debit card, a MasterCard and a Visa card. He told me that he had been issued two credit cards, each with a substantial credit balance. He was so happy to tell me that he got himself clothes and shoes in less than an hour with these cards. However, he was upset because he was not able to use the card anymore after two months. He also did not appreciate that the bank's agent kept calling him to pay the cards. For him, the money was given by the bank as a welcome gift, so he happily used it. The American dream vanished for him once I started explaining to him that it was not his money.

Could he have prevented this situation? He is from a country where one only spends by cash. It means that only spending available money. It is possible that he did not

understand the explanations of the banking advisor who opened the cards for him. He also might not have asked any questions. Asking questions in his country to older people is deemed a lack of respect. As of today, the cards are closed but, he had to take a payment agreement to pay them back. He graduated last year and found a job at the bank and half of his salary is paying back these debts. The result is that his credit is below five hundred which is a low score. He also cannot have a credit card as of now. He relies on people to borrow their credit cards if he really needs to pay by this method. He also put his parents in debt by asking them to help with a part of his debts. It is an example of shame for his parents. They are happy that he has a diploma, but now they keep warning new parents who are sending their children here about this type of issue.

It is sad that he did not have the chance to get a warning about the difference between two financial systems. I am not saying that it is not his fault, but I think the government can help prevent better these kinds of issues. It is a perfect example that immigrants need more support and guidance in integrating the local environment. I think that it is an act of Canadian citizenship to be able to protect newcomers from some types of negative or misguided encounters that might happen to them while immigrating.

### **Vignette 5: Kosi's American Language Integration**

This is the story of Kossi, a forty-year-old Togolese man arriving in Atlanta for work. He just joined his wife and daughters after he received his green card. He told me this story five years after his arrival on the day he was becoming an American citizen. He wanted to share with me the adventure that he had been through before getting his citizenship. Basically, he was proud of himself, being able to speak English after five years. In this context, it is important to keep in mind that Kosi chose to immigrate to the

United States because of the educational chance that his daughters could benefit from. Prior to immigrating there, Kosi did not know any English.

A few days after his arrival, he decided to wash their car. He went to the car wash. While he was parking, a lady just crossed him with her car and went in front of him. Then, he lost his place in the waiting line. He told me that he was so frustrated that the only things that he could tell the lady were: “What is wrong? What happened? What is the problem?” While he was telling me the story, he was laughing at himself. He also added that he wanted to use F words but because she was a woman, he did not know if he was allowed to insult her. The issue was that he did not know what else to say. He was more upset with himself for not being able to speak English. He also did not like and understand why the lady did not bother to answer.

### ***The Issue***

Kosi did not know how to express himself in English and he did not know the social code of interactions in the United States. He felt powerless because he had not been able to tell the lady to wait for her turn. That could have been an emotional stress for him. However, he insisted on the fact that in his culture a man can endure anything, so has to be strong. He mentioned that he felt diminished and unprotected because he was not in his country. He also felt disrespected by the lady. He started doubting about himself and his decisions to live in the United States.

It is a perfect example of language issues that immigrants can encounter. However, I think he had been courageous because he went through his immigration process and even got his citizenship. I think he should be proud of himself because I am

pretty sure that he had more language issues during his immigration process. He developed a protection mechanism in order to overcome these types of obstacles.

Could he have acted differently? If maybe the lady had answered him, he would have felt less powerless. I think that the fact that he stayed without explanation did not help him. The reason is that during his story, he was trying himself to figure out the reason behind the lady's behavior. Maybe if he had an answer, he would have told this story to his peers in order to understand the situation. He did not mention anything to anyone until his citizenship ceremony.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I offered concrete examples of obstacles/learning opportunities that immigrants can be faced with. We can reflect on the cultural shock leading to identity questions or self-doubt. Moreover, I made the difference between an immigrant as an adult and a teenager, the question of identity might not be the same. Let us also keep in mind that I am offering my perception on the subject as an immigrant myself, but it is a call and opportunity for reflection for anyone who reads the story. The issues described in these vignettes can be resolved through peer support because I feel that it is a part of basic information that immigrants might be missing in their knowledge while they immigrate to Canada or the USA.

For some people, integration comes through language, food, religion or social relationship. There is no specific type of integration, in the case of an immigrant, integration is defined by each one, depending on each one's circumstances. Therefore, each one can decide and plan how they want to live their insertion into the host society. Some people will choose to learn the ways of the new country in order to make friends or

in order to evolve in the society on a career level. Other people will be more interested in food and will take the opportunity to share their cultural immersion through food exchanges. People might also become learners by choosing to study, get educated for different reasons: pleasure of learning and degrees to access the job market.

It is impossible to say that there is one magic type of integration. Deciding to leave your home country is to be ready to adapt yourself and discover yourself at the same time. It is an adventure depending on each immigrant's goal. The insertion into the host country can be possible if the immigrant, leaders and local people are working together to make the new place like home for the immigrant. There is a need to be accepted through our difference. In this thesis, I tackle some issues that immigrants can encounter as represented through the lens and coding of academic research, or creative writing such as the novels of Kim Thuy written in the form of a succession of vignettes or by telling some of my stories. Each stage of the immigration adventure needs to be shared authentically by the immigrants themselves and listened to with empathy by members of the host society who share their cultural knowledge with the immigrant and in turn be willing to learn from them.

Immigration is not always easy but the most important thing for an immigrant is to succeed in his immigration journey. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the fight starts once one has arrived in the new country and requires the help of everyone. We need to face adaptation to the new culture, lifestyle and way of thinking. We are also all different and we did not immigrate through the same channels. However, we all have the challenge to create ourselves anew and modify our personal cultural identity.

## **Serendipity: Tracing Pathways to Move Forward**

As I was working on the final version of my thesis, two interesting events came to my attention. I guess this is how serendipity works in research. The first one was a conversation held between Kim Thuy and Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau on February 14, 2020 in Munich Germany. Mr. Trudeau was attending the Munich Security Conference which since its founding in 1963, has become a premier event for international security policy dialogue (Grün, 2020). While attending the conference, the Prime Minister participated in an armchair discussion with Canadian author Kim Thuy, showcasing Canada as 2020 Guest of Honor of the Frankfurt Bookfair. It gives some important validation to the claim I have made in my thesis about the power of storytelling, my choice to illustrate it through Kim Thuy's books and the importance of bringing it to the attention of policy makers at all levels of society and politics.

The second serendipity was coming across a new book by Dei and McDermott (2019) just being advertised, and titled *Centering African proverbs, indigenous folktales and cultural stories in curriculum: Units and lesson plans for inclusive education*. In two earlier works, Dei, James, James-Wilson, Karumanchery, and Zine (2000) and Dei, James-Wilson, and Zine (2002) had put forward seven conceptual domains for inclusivity as a way to rethink schooling and education. I will present these seven domains of inclusive education because the authors of the chapters in Dei and McDermott (2019) use these domains to give examples of lesson plans and discussion questions and resources to be used in conjunction to the inclusion of proverbs, folktales and cultural stories. They argue "Productive inclusion is about transformative practices and beginning anew. This can be accomplished as an integrated systemic approach to change." (p.4).

The organization of the book revolves around a Prologue and Introduction by the two authors setting the stage, followed by two main parts. Part I titled “Centering Proverbs in Curriculum”, consists of six chapters. Part II titled “Weaving Units Around Kenyan and Ghanaian Folktales” adds six more chapters.

In order to save space and facilitate the application potential of the seven domains of inclusion developed by Dei and McDermott (2019), I have summarized them in the following table alongside chapters four and eight, one example each from Part I and Part II , highlighting the useful application of the framework and the proverbs and folktales in curriculum development.

I have not given examples of how to enact the five stories I have told in curricula or in learning-circles for different stakeholders involved in the integration journey of newcomers to Canada. Dei and McDermott’s new book (2019) gives several chapters of examples of how to do this, following the inclusion framework they have developed.

**Table 1**

*How to use authentic stories in the framework of seven domains of inclusion*

Adapted from Dei & McDermott (2019) – Introduction and Chapters 4&8

<p>Seven domains of Inclusion (Dei &amp; McDermott, 2019)</p>	<p>Natacha Burford, “Coming up from the Roots” (Dei &amp; McDermott, 2019)</p>	<p>Sarah Hussain, “Reclaiming traditional storytelling and indigenous knowledges”,</p>
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		( Dei & McDermott, 2019)
<i>1. Representation</i> involves three forms: Knowledge, visual, physical. (p.4)	<p>“Acknowledgement of “other” knowledges rather than the “dominant” knowledge base to be used throughout the unit plan.</p> <p>Use of diverse pictures and proverbs from several African Cultures” (p.126).</p>	<p>“Students will focus on the art of storytelling and bring a voice for their family and community. Through this they will share their culture, histories, and personal knowledges”. (p.237)</p>
<i>2. language</i> is about how schools promote and enhance local/Indigenous, minority and first languages of learners. In each unit use of the language in which the proverbs, folktales and cultural stories are presented as well as in English translations (p.5)	<p>“Language is deeply connected to worldview, shaping knowledge production. By inviting student voices along with critical literacy practices, we begin to recognize the different ways language shapes our worlds” (p.126).</p>	<p>“Community stories will be looked at to show that language can be used as a mode of transmission of culture, history and identity”. (p. 237)</p>

<p>3. <i>Family, Community and School Interface</i>. Break the between the school and home culture. Teachers invite student and community perspectives as they take up the role of learner (p.5).</p>	<p>“The importance of bringing family values and beliefs within the classroom, as well as inviting community partnerships in the school. Also going out to the community to familiarize students with the resources that exist there.” (p. 126).</p>	<p>“By inviting community members and Elders into the classroom students will see them as knowledge producers and power-sharers in the learning process.” (p. 237).</p>
<p>4. <i>Co-operative education</i> Success includes both academic and social success. The sociality of educational success calls for creating educational communities. Success is seen as holistic rather than the flip side of failure (p.6).</p>	<p>The idea that through African proverbs true community is created by students learning about themselves and others. Students realize that their learning is connected to others and therefore there is a need to work collaboratively” (p.126).</p>	<p>“Students will have multiple opportunities to work with partners and in small groups. Assessments will be conducted in group settings to promote collective learning beyond individual success. Social success will be emphasized over</p>

		academic success.” (p.237).
<p><i>5. Equity and values education.</i></p> <p>Learning and schooling are about embodied identities.</p> <p>Affective domain emphasized along the cognitive. (e.g. appreciation of love, justice and responsibility) (p.6).</p>	<p>“The notion of inclusivity and promoting student voice within the classroom” (p.126).</p>	<p>“Learning will be engaged through immersive and emotionally felt experiences. Students will engage in learning about bullying and the effects of exclusion.</p> <p>Students will also learn how values re passed down through stories” (p. 237).</p>
<p><i>6.Indigenous/Community/Local Cultural knowledges.</i> Elders in schools, learners utilize knowledge based on careful observations of their surroundings, environment, homes, and communities, and revealed knowledge (intuition,</p>	<p>“The connecting of African proverbs to students’ cultural and community knowledges” (p.126).</p>	<p>“By bringing in items of cultural/family significance, interviewing parents, and sharing personal stories and individual experiences students will gain new entry points of learning” (p.237).</p>

emotion, revelation, dreams and visions). (p.6).		
7. <i>Spirituality and Learning</i> . The idea of embodiment – knowledge is grounded in lived experience. Interrelationships and connectedness become appreciated. Knowledge production entails using the personal histories, stories, and individual experiences/epiphanies as sources of or entry points to teaching/knowing (p.7).	“The harmonizing of mind, body and soul to analyze identity and how it related to learning. The principle of intergenerational teachings throughout the lessons promoted by the proverbs” (p. 126).	“Students will engage with their personal histories, stories, and individual experiences as sources/entry points of knowing” (p.237).

The brief description of the seven domains of inclusion and the example of two lessons from the book, chapters four and eight, as summarized in the above table, should give the reader of this thesis a good idea about the ways some of the vignettes from Kim Thuy’s book or the ones I have developed can be inserted into the seven domains of inclusion framework, to prepare curricula, lesson plans or discussion and learning-circle opportunities for decision makers and immigration authorities and other stakeholders.

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