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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ÉTUDE ORIGINALE

# Community versus Commodity in Francophone Canada: A Multilevel Approach to the Neoliberalization of Immigration

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## Abstract

Since the 1990s, Canada's francophone minority communities (FMCs) have become increasingly involved in francophone immigration governance, and this trend has coincided with the wider neoliberalization of immigration in Canada. This article analyzes the implications of the growing influence of a neoliberal immigration policy and the narrative of an ideal immigrant on Canada's FMCs by focussing on the francophone Acadian community in New Brunswick, Canada's only constitutionally bilingual province. Making use of three types of sources—semistructured interviews, debates in the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, and official and archival documents—the article argues that francophone and Acadian organizations have adopted the federal, neoliberal perspective on immigration, placing greater emphasis on economic integration and the creation of a bilingual workforce. Changes in the type of immigrant selected and role of the community in the lives of francophone immigrants create new challenges for minority language communities that define and identify themselves through language use and belonging.

## Résumé

Depuis les années 1990, les communautés francophones en situation minoritaire (CFSM) du Canada participent de plus en plus à la gouvernance de l'immigration francophone, ce qui a coïncidé avec la néolibéralisation de l'immigration au Canada. L'article analyse les répercussions de l'influence croissante d'une politique d'immigration néolibérale et du récit d'un immigrant idéal sur les CFSM du Canada en mettant l'accent sur le Nouveau-Brunswick, la seule province canadienne constitutionnellement bilingue, et sa communauté acadienne francophone. S'appuyant sur trois sources - entrevues semi-structurées, débats à l'Assemblée législative du Nouveau-Brunswick et documents officiels et d'archives - l'article soutient que les organisations francophones et acadiennes ont adopté la perspective fédérale et néolibérale de l'immigration, plaçant davantage l'accent sur l'intégration économique et la création d'une main-d'œuvre bilingue. Les changements dans le type d'immigrants sélectionnés et le rôle de la communauté dans la vie des immigrants francophones créent de nouveaux défis pour les communautés de langue officielle

en situation minoritaire qui se définissent et s'identifient par l'usage de la langue et l'appartenance.

**Keywords:** francophone immigration; neoliberalization; New Brunswick; francophone minority community (FMC); immigration

Since the 1990s, there has been a transformation in Canada's immigration model as a result of the growing influence of neoliberalism on policy (Abu-Laban, 1998a, 2004; Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002; Dobrowolsky, 2013; Fleras, 2015a).<sup>1</sup> This shift has seen private and third- sector organizations and provincial governments assume additional competencies and roles. Informed by human capital discourse, Canada's points system has been altered to increase the economic benefits of migration and further delineate who is worthy of becoming a Canadian citizen. The growing influence of neoliberalism on immigration policy has also led to the reconstruction of the notion of the ideal immigrant. While skilled, market-based, self-sufficient and entrepreneurial independent immigrants are highly valued by the Canadian state, "family class" immigrants and refugees are less highly valued (Abu-Laban, 1998a; Arat-Koc, 1999; Dyck and McLaren, 2004). These changes to immigration policy and practices highlight issues of citizenship and belonging: who is welcome and who is not, who is in and who is out, who is considered an ideal immigrant and who is considered deficient.

This new understanding of belonging and contributing to Canadian society has implications for Canada's francophone minority communities (FMCs), who have become increasingly involved in immigration decision making and policy implementation since the 1990s. Yet the implications of the growing influence of a neoliberal immigration policy and the narrative of an ideal immigrant on Canada's FMCs has yet to be fully explored in the literature. By focussing on the francophone Acadian community in New Brunswick, Canada's only constitutionally bilingual province, this article addresses the following central research question: How has a neoliberal immigration policy and discourse at the federal level affected policy and discourse at the provincial and community levels?<sup>2</sup>

The article argues that, much like other aspects of immigration in Canada, francophone immigration has been commodified, with francophone and Acadian organizations adopting the federal perspective and placing greater emphasis on economic integration and the creation of a bilingual workforce. While elements of a more community approach to francophone immigration still exist—including the goal of maintaining the French language and Acadian culture and identity through collective effort—overall there has been a shift toward policies and programs that prioritize economic development. The individualization of migration and the commodification of the French language and immigrants are based on ensuring a bilingual workforce and meeting labour needs rather than on identity and community sustainability concerns. Changes in the type of immigrant selected and the role of the community in the lives of the francophone immigrants create new, long-term challenges for those minority communities that define and identify themselves through language use and belonging.

While the neoliberal model creates opportunities for francophone and Acadian organizations, it also constrains their choices. To participate in immigration governance, the organizations have had to compromise on their initial priorities and realign themselves with the economic approach adopted by the federal government. Since they are dependent on certain forms of public funding, FMCs have been compelled, under the current form of neoliberal governance, to shift their discourse away from their core aims. Thus, while some actors perceive the potential economic tools that FMCs can leverage as beneficial, others see them as blunt instruments or even double-edged swords. In the long term, this will have a detrimental effect on the sustainability of the French-speaking community in New Brunswick.

The article makes both a theoretical and empirical contribution and develops a new understanding of the intersection between the politics of a neoliberal immigration regime and language and community sustainability. The article's primary empirical contribution is to show how French is being used as a demographic and economic resource in New Brunswick; more specifically, the article shows how the ideal neoliberal francophone immigrant is helping to build the province's bilingual workforce and economy. The article's second distinctive empirical contribution is to describe and assess the problematic repercussions for long-standing francophone communities of the notion of the ideal francophone immigrant. Increasingly commodified and individualized, the francophone immigrant is less likely to align with a community-building vision based on the French language. In effect, this new type of immigrant is encouraged to contribute to the economy rather than participate in a collective linguistic and cultural project.

The article also develops a conceptual framework based on the "community-commodity" dichotomy and unpacks tensions and synergies between these two seemingly incompatible dominant discourses in order to explore how immigration policy and discursive changes at the federal level have affected policy and discourse at the provincial and community levels. The framework reveals a complex and nuanced portrait of francophone immigration neoliberalization. This finding has wider theoretical implications for discussions of the effect of a neoliberal management method on minoritized and racialized groups, of power dynamics between funders and fundees and of majority/minority group relations. Therefore, in addition to complementing discussions of neoliberal ideologies and governance and linguistic minorities, the article also speaks to wider issues of privatization, commodification, neoliberal citizenship and the politics of marginalization.<sup>3</sup>

Significant research on the influence of neoliberalism on immigration and integration policies has shown that there is now an "ideal type" of immigrant (Root et al., 2014) who is "likely to stimulate economic growth without significant state intervention or expenditure" (Walsh, 2011: 872). This research explores the varied experiences of racialized minorities, the agency of various immigrant groups and their responses to dominant narratives of the ideal immigrant. It also highlights the power relations that lie behind human capital discourses. Much of the scholarship adopts an intersectional approach in order to examine notions of power and inequality through axes of race, class and gender. By analyzing the growing influence of neoliberal immigration policies and human capital discourse on immigrants, scholars such as Abu-Laban (1998b), Barber (2008), Dobrowolsky (2008) and McLaren and Dyck (2004) make significant theoretical, empirical and

methodological contributions to feminist and gender studies and the wider literature on Canadian immigration policy. Barber (2008) adopts a transnational perspective to analyze gender and class in Philippine-Canada migration and argues that Filipinos, particularly Filipino women in caregiver roles, constitute the “ideal immigrant.” While migrant agency and class complexity “serve the interests of sending and receiving countries” (Barber, 2008: 1268), they also intensify “gendered class cleavages between migrants and within Philippine society” (Barber, 2008: 1265). Dobrowolsky (2008: 465) examines the implications of marketization and securitization vis-à-vis citizenship for racialized and immigrant women, claiming that they are “invisibilized” by the Canadian state and increasingly “instrumentalized” yet also possess agency to “challenge these trends and tactics.” McLaren and Dyck (2004) focus on immigrant mothers and how they respond to human capital discourse in regard to economic security, narratives of belonging, and citizenship. This research illustrates how immigrant women, in their struggles over gender, generation, class and race inequalities, negotiate and challenge human capital discourse and experience power relations.

In exploring the quintessential ideal immigrants who are self-sufficient, entrepreneurial and strategic, the research reveals a more complex portrait of these individuals, one in which they resist being both the objects and the subjects of neoliberalization. Creese et al. (2008), for example, argue that the shift toward “flexible” immigrants problematizes the immigrant family, while, in reality, the immigrant household, particularly women’s support roles within them, may be a linchpin to successful integration. Dyck and McLaren (2004) caution against the distinction in immigration practices between positively valued self-sufficient, independent immigrants and negatively valued “family class” immigrants and refugees, viewing it as overly simplistic in a way that masks the unique, individual stories of immigrant and refugee women along with their agency.

The increasing importance of francophone immigration as a key political issue at the beginning of the 2000s has also led to a burgeoning number of studies on francophone immigration. This literature focuses on case studies from a range of perspectives, including francophone immigration in rural and urban municipalities (Andrew, 2008; Gallant et al., 2007; Roy, 2008), the education system (Farmer et al., 2003; Farmer and Labrie, 2008; Farmer, 2008) and the labour market (Belkhdja, 2012; Mulatris, 2010). This research highlights the varied experiences of francophone immigrants and the host communities and shares common areas of analysis, such as recruitment/attraction, reception, integration/inclusion and retention. Language, ethnicity and identity are invariably key themes within the literature on francophone immigration (Belkhdja, 2012; Farmer, 2008; Fourot, 2016; Gallant and Belkhdja, 2005; Traisnel et al., 2013; Violette, 2010). This body of research deepens our understanding of the changes and complexities within FMCs as they adapt to becoming host communities and/or societies, and it builds upon seminal studies on the conceptualization of identity in the francophone minority context.<sup>4</sup> Belkhdja (2012) makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the role that francophone immigration plays in New Brunswick and the Acadian project. By analyzing various case studies, such as international students in call centres, Belkhdja explores themes such as economic immigration, Acadian identity, racism, socio-economic integration and exclusionary practices.

Gallant and Belkhdja (2005) focus specifically on francophone and Acadian organizations to explore understandings of welcome and “othering.” They contend that the organizations perceive immigrants as perpetually “other” or foreign to their community and its perceived needs and show a certain difficulty in adopting a truly inclusive discourse. Traisnel et al. (2013) examine how activists involved in local francophone minority associations refer to the concepts of cultural diversity and immigration in their identity discourse. By comparing New Brunswick Acadians, Franco-Ontarians and French-speaking British Columbians, the authors highlight similarities and differences in the criteria used to define and legitimize belonging to the local francophone community. Farmer (2008) traces the evolution of the francophone immigration portfolio and engagement of francophone and Acadian organizations and explores how tensions between utilitarian and identity arguments play out within the community. In doing so, Farmer reflects on new approaches to, and understandings of, “living together” and inclusion in FMCs.

In their studies on francophone immigration, Wade and Belkhdja (2012) and Violette (2010) explore elements of the wider neoliberal immigration regime. Wade and Belkhdja (2012) focus on the case of Université de Moncton (New Brunswick) to investigate the perception of international students as precious commodities and the role of universities in their attraction, integration and retention. The authors analyze how French-speaking international students are perceived as potentially ideal immigrants, as they are better prepared to integrate into the labour market and represent a solution to low birthrates and an aging population. Violette (2010) adopts a sociolinguistic approach to francophone immigration in Moncton and makes a valuable contribution to the literature on francophone immigration by showing that Acadian society is undergoing a process of transformation regarding its political representation and collective identity. FMCs are keen to redesign their collective identity discourse around an inclusive society project based on the French language yet fail to consider that the language is neither neutral nor homogeneous (Violette, 2010: 3).

While these analyses are original and identify the various tensions and complexities relating to identity, language, ethnicity and minority/majority group relations, they do not explicitly explore the implications of a neoliberal immigration policy on a federal level and the narrative of an ideal immigrant on Canada’s FMCs. The article responds by exploring how the commodification and marketization of immigration and the emergence of the notion of an ideal neoliberal immigrant play out in francophone communities that have traditionally relied on the sharing of a common identity and language to maintain themselves.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, it also highlights how FMCs have engaged with the new institutional and policy context.

The article begins with a discussion of the key concepts that underpin the analysis: the neoliberalization of immigration in Canada and the community–commodity dichotomy. It then proceeds to explain the article’s research design and methodology before turning its focus to explore how policy and discourse changes at the federal level have affected immigration policy and discourse within Canada’s FMCs.

### **Community versus Commodity in Canada’s FMCs: Developing a Conceptual Framework**

Economic integration has historically been an important component of Canada’s approach to immigration (Interview, Office of the Commissioner of Official

Languages), and Canada was one of the first countries to specifically link immigration policy to skills, with the introduction of a points-based system in 1967. However, there was a clear shift toward a more pronounced emphasis on Canada's market principles under Jean-Chrétien's Liberal leadership between 1993 and 2003 (Abu-Laban, 1998a; Abu-Laban, 2004: 133). During this decade, growing emphasis was placed on immigrant integration and self-sufficiency and the continentalization of immigration and border security controls. This approach set the precedent for further changes throughout the 2000s that were intended to make the country more economically competitive (Abu-Laban, 2004: 133).

The election of Stephen Harper's Conservative Government in 2006 heralded a new period in immigration that led to fundamental changes that further aligned immigration policies with market and employer interests. The Harper administration introduced legislative and policy changes that significantly limited refugee claims, scaled back family reunification and prioritized economic immigration, notably through employer-driven programs such as the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) and Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). In January 2015, the Conservative Government introduced the Express Entry program to manage applications for permanent residence under Canada's key economic immigration streams. This two-step process for permanent admission significantly increases the weight given to offers of employment. Through the PNPs, provinces and territories can also recruit candidates from the Express Entry system to meet local labour market needs.

Three concepts frame this article: the neoliberalization of immigration, the commodity discourse and the community discourse. The article understands immigrant neoliberalization as a shift toward immigrant commodification and marketization under the influence of a market-driven agenda (Fleras, 2015a, 2015b; Dobrowolsky, 2007, 2008). In this shift, increasing emphasis is placed on fulfilling the state's economic and labour market needs rather than nation-building and humanitarian needs. In a context where there is greater emphasis on market-oriented, privatizing policies (Arat-Koc, 1999; Dobrowolsky, 2007, 2008), responsibility is transferred away from the federal government and onto providers working in employment and economic integration and onto the immigrants themselves (Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002: 210). Immigrants—as ideal neoliberal citizens—are expected to be autonomous, flexible, cosmopolitan and entrepreneurial, and they are valued for their ability to fill labour shortages and integrate quickly into the job market (Fleras, 2015b: 130; Interview, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages). The commodity discourse has evolved from and encapsulates this form of immigrant neoliberal governance. Immigrants, ideally bi- or multilingual immigrants, are sought for their ability to contribute to the Canadian economy. Principles linked to the community discourse seem to conflict with the commodity discourse, with the community discourse referring to notions of belonging and contributing to a distinct French-speaking community and the language practices that characterize the Acadian community. While the recent diversification of the francophone population means that members of the community may not share a common heritage, immigrants and established members of the community are unified in that they live in French every day and share the desire to transmit the language to their children. Speaking French is perceived as key to joining the



community and contributing toward its vitality. Emphasis is placed on the collective form rather than the individual.

The “globalized new economy” has also commodified language and led to greater value being placed on mobility, flexibility and multiplicity (Heller, 2008: 507). Language is also valued differently in community and commodity discourses. The community discourse emphasizes the value of the French language in the construction and survival of the Acadian and francophone community and is concerned with the reproduction of social and cultural values through family and community networks (Budach et al., 2003: 610, 612). It is entrenched in the sharing of common principles and collective vision, with the French language representing a symbol of belonging to a linguistically defined community. In contrast, the commodity discourse, which is closely tied into the emergent neoliberal model, places emphasis on the individual. The French language is valued first and foremost as a form of economic resource (Budach et al., 2003: 615). Rather than being viewed as something that unites a nation or a community, multilingualism or linguistic competence is reduced to a skill that brings about economic or material success.

The characteristics associated with the ideal immigrant, as constructed by the federal government, seem to lie in contradiction with the traditional community-building priorities of Canada’s FMCs. Thériault (1995: 100) argues that neoliberalism undermines the sustainability of minority language communities, as it “has emptied the public scene of the need for community activity inherent in all human life.” Kymlicka (2013: 99) argues that neoliberalism, “in the name of emancipating the autonomous individual” has profoundly altered the structure of social relationships, and “has eroded the social bonds and solidarities upon which individuals depended, leaving people to fend for themselves”. Therefore, the reconstruction of the concept of the ideal neoliberal immigrant signifies a potential challenge for francophone communities, given that immigrants are expected to be more autonomous and are, therefore, less likely to align with a collective vision that underpins community-building efforts.

Demographic shifts have both economic and cultural/linguistic implications, and this is reflected in the way that demography features as an important component in both discourses. New Brunswick, much like the rest of Atlantic Canada, is facing several major population challenges, including an aging population, a depleting youth base, traditionally low immigration rates and decreasing birthrates. The Government of New Brunswick perceives its demographics as a hindrance to its economic advancement, with an aging population and increased retirements meaning that the province is set to experience rising workforce demands with thousands of job openings becoming available (New Brunswick, 2014a: 2). Such demographic issues mean that immigrants are becoming a sought-after commodity. Given the distinctiveness of New Brunswick as Canada’s only constitutionally bilingual province, francophone immigrants are being used as demographic and economic resources to build the province’s bilingual workforce and, thus, economy. At the same time, francophone immigrants are perceived as a way to bolster the French-speaking community and maintain its demographic strength. The recruitment/attraction, reception, integration/inclusion and retention of francophone immigrants is also perceived as a community-building project based on identity concerns.



## Research Design and Methodology

The research is situated in the grounded theory approach (GTA). Adopting GTA to explore the central research question facilitated theory development on neoliberal immigration and language and community sustainability in an analytically rigorous and creative way (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).<sup>6</sup> This involved following a flexible and integrated approach to the research and moving continuously between processes of collecting, coding and analyzing data (Glaser and Holton, 2007). GTA (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) involves three different types of substantive coding: open, axial and selective. Open coding “is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising the data”. Axial coding is based on “identifying connections between categories”. Selective coding is “the process of selecting a core category and linking this to other categories that are in need of further refinement and development” (Hull, 2013: 9).

Data was based on three types of sources: semistructured interviews, debates in the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick and official documents from the provincial and federal governments pertaining to immigration, language and economy. Combining these three methods, which involved identifying and verifying similarities and differences as perceived by actors working on francophone immigration across multiple layers, allowed us to gain a more nuanced understanding of how the neoliberal model of immigration adopted on a federal level has affected policies and discourses on francophone immigration. Adopting triangulation as a method to explore the research question also led to a more sophisticated analysis of the community–commodity dichotomy and a greater understanding of horizontal and vertical cooperation and contestation between actors in the field of francophone immigration. It also contributed to the validity of the research findings, strengthened the findings and completeness of the research (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) and represented a way to corroborate facts.

The first method that was used to collect data was semistructured interviews—a key source of qualitative data in GTA.<sup>7</sup> The interviews constituted an important source of information as they allowed us to identify hierarchies and power relations between levels of governance (that is, funders and fundees) and individuals, discern and trace policy and discursive shifts both prior to and during the neoliberalization of immigration and understand new identitarian complexities relating to francophone immigration. Interviewees were selected on the basis that they represented organizations that are central actors in defending and promoting the rights and interests of the Acadian and/or francophone community or in francophone immigration decision-making and policy-implementing processes. In total, 21 semistructured interviews were conducted in autumn 2014. Interviewees included a range of public servants and policy makers working on matters relating to francophone immigration on a federal, provincial and community level.<sup>8</sup> The variation in actors interviewed and the levels of governance increased the validity of the findings.

While Corbin and Strauss (2008) advise that interview guides should include some questions based on the researcher’s experience in the field or the extant literature, I went one step further and devised an in-depth interview guide. This ensured consistency and the ability to compare common themes and concepts across interviews. Interviews were transcribed, analyzed and coded throughout

the interviewing period. Undertaking simultaneous data collection and initial analysis activities, such as making observations on common patterns, themes and theories and reviewing field notes (Bogdan and Biklen, 2011), ensured that the data was focused. In some cases, patterns and themes and theories detected in the analysis were tested on key interviewees (Bogdan and Biklen, 2011). Although GTA provides a coding process, the interviews were coded according to Aberbach et al.'s (1975: 14-16) categorization of manifest, latent and global, as they are more tangible codes. Manifest coding items refers to direct responses to the questions provided in the interview guide. Latent coding items include "those where the characteristics of the response coded are not explicitly called for by the questions themselves". Global coding items are based on the impressions and judgements of the data analyst (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002: 675).

The second method of data collection involved evaluating debates on francophone immigration within the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick between 1999 and 2014. Analyzing political debates allowed me to trace the development of discussions on francophone immigration during a critical period in the evolution of the dossier on a provincial level. It also made it possible to ascertain how political representatives who have a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic, linguistic and demographic needs of their local communities interpret and frame the role of francophone immigration and the potential influence of a neoliberal model of immigration on their approach. An in-depth search of Hansard using the terms "Provincial Nominee Program," "*Programme des candidats du NB*," "Migration" and "Immigration," was used to identify common conceptual labels relating to language and immigration such as commodification, marketization, belonging, identity, economy, contribution/value and demography.

The third method of data collection involved analysis of official and archival documents from the provincial and federal governments pertaining to immigration, language and economy. Since these documents are central to discussions of francophone immigration, analyzing them permitted me to understand official positions on francophone immigration and to compare and confirm informal and unofficial viewpoints and themes identified through the interviews. Using this literature also represented a way to enhance sensitivity to subtle nuances in the data, provide questions for initial observations and the interview guide and confirm findings (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

The research design covers a timeframe of 15 years (1999–2014). This timeframe includes several important steps in the evolution of the francophone immigration dossier on three levels: the federal and provincial levels and within FMCs. The beginning of the 2000s witnessed the burgeoning of the francophone immigration portfolio on a federal level. The creation of the Citizenship and Immigration Canada—Francophone Minority Communities Steering Committee in 2002 led to the publication of three key documents: *Strategic Framework to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities* (Canada, 2003), *Towards Building a Canadian Francophonie of Tomorrow: Summary of Initiatives 2002–2006 to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities* (Canada, 2005) and *Strategic Plan to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities* (Canada, 2006). Together, the publications reflect a growing commitment on behalf of the federal government to take concrete measures to promote

Canada's linguistic duality and enhance the vitality of Canada's official language minority communities, particularly in the area of immigration. In 2003, the federal government also created francophone immigration networks (Réseaux en immigration francophone) throughout Canada to enlist the expertise and resources of a variety of actors and sectors to better support immigrants, their families and French-speaking communities. The passing of the new *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* in 2002 (Canada, 2002) also contained fundamental provisions for francophone immigration, providing the legal basis for a range of actors to invest in the francophone immigration portfolio.

On a provincial level, the Government of New Brunswick signed its first immigration agreement, the Canada-New Brunswick Agreement on Provincial Nominees, in 1999. This led to the New Brunswick Provincial Nominee Program (NBPNP).<sup>9</sup> The timeframe also encompasses four terms of office where both the Progressive Conservative Party (PCP) of New Brunswick and the Liberal Party (LP) of New Brunswick were in government: Bernard Lord's Progressive Conservative administration between 1999 and 2006, Shawn Graham's Liberal administration between 2006 and 2010 and the Progressive Conservative's return to power in 2010. Focussing on debates in the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick between 1999 and 2014 allows us to trace the discourse, actions and policies of politicians on a provincial level.

## The Impact of Immigrant Neoliberalization on Canada's FMCs: A Focus on New Brunswick

### *Community versus commodity and francophone immigration on a provincial level*

Analysis of debates in the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick between 1999 and 2014 reveals that discussions on New Brunswick's French-speaking Acadian community and francophone immigration were enmeshed with concerns relating to the province's wider socio-economic and demographic challenges, notably rural economic sustainability and depopulation. Much like the wider discussion on immigration in New Brunswick, emphasis was placed on promoting population growth, economic development and investment, with immigration being primarily presented as a source of financial and entrepreneurial capital.

Evaluations of the first period reveals that there was some ambivalence toward francophone immigration, with only a few references to francophone immigration. References to francophone immigration in 2003 were based on the importance of attracting French-speaking immigration for the province's economic immigration program, the NBPNP (Betts, 2003). The emphasis placed on the NBPNP highlights how immigration was initially perceived as a tool to select and nominate qualified business people and skilled workers, with the aim of contributing to the provincial economy. Further statements in 2004 and 2005 also focused on protecting rural northern New Brunswick in light of its declining population base and employment problems (Mesheau, 2004; Murphy, 2005; Mockler, 2005). Sustaining the French language and identity of the rural French-speaking Acadian community was not a priority during initial debates. Emphasis was placed on guaranteeing the economic prosperity of rural New Brunswick, in view of the wider socio-economic

and employment challenges that these rural communities faced, rather than on immigration as an answer to culture maintenance and community building. While the French-speaking Acadian community needs economic opportunities and a healthy workforce in order to thrive, there was very little emphasis on guaranteeing the community's unique linguistic and cultural identity beyond its role of job creation.

In 2006, under Shawn Graham's Liberal administration, immigration was presented in relation to the party's wider discourse on economic self-sufficiency (New Brunswick, 2007, 2010). This self-sufficiency discourse was encapsulated in New Brunswick's first official immigration strategy, *Be Our Future: New Brunswick's Population Growth Strategy* (New Brunswick, 2008). Immigration continued to be linked to human capital, both as a demographic and economic resource. Despite the Liberal administration presenting the strategy as a "transformational policy shift" (New Brunswick, 2008: 5), there is a clear continuity in terms of themes and issues. This approach to immigration, which echoes principles of the commodity approach, continued into David Alward's Progressive Conservative administration from 2010 onward, though references to "self-sufficiency" and "transformational change" were abandoned during this period.

Elements of the commodity approach were also present in the 2014–2017 *Population Growth Strategy*, which continued to emphasize the role of immigration in growing and sustaining New Brunswick's economy at a time when the province was witnessing lower birth rates, youth out-migration and growing numbers of seniors (New Brunswick, 2014a). The focus on a stronger economy and emphasis on labour market needs is characteristic of the discussions and approach taken by the PCP and LP since the development of the provincial immigration portfolio. This focus is echoed in the province's *Labour Force and Skills Development Strategy 2013–16*, which explicitly presented immigration and the repatriation and retention of skilled workers as a solution to meet the needs of New Brunswick industry and its prospective labour market requirements (New Brunswick, 2013: 17).

Analysis also revealed that Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) across the political spectrum were concerned with the need to respect the province's linguistic balance and ensure that immigration contributes to both language communities, especially following the publication of *Be Our Future: New Brunswick's Population Growth Strategy* (New Brunswick, 2008).<sup>10</sup> The strategy aimed to attract at least 5,000 new immigrants per year by 2015 and achieve a net growth of 100,000 people by 2026 by making greater use of the NBNP as a means to achieve these objectives (New Brunswick, 2008: 11). It also committed to increasing francophone immigration through partnerships with communities, businesses and the federal government and to seeking federal commitment to help attract and retain more francophone immigrants (New Brunswick, 2008: 5). Discussions in the Legislative Assembly also reflected the drafting and publishing of the province's first francophone immigration action plan in 2014 (New Brunswick, 2014b) and a renewed population growth strategy (New Brunswick, 2014a).<sup>11</sup>

In addition, maintaining New Brunswick's unique linguistic duality and sustaining the French-speaking Acadian community was perceived as a way of ensuring that the province has the human resource capital to meet its labour market needs:

Everyone recognises the need for immigration in New Brunswick. The average age is in the forties in New Brunswick, and there are no longer babies, the population is aging. If we want to rejuvenate, if we want to survive, there is a need to find people to come and live in New Brunswick. (Interview, Government of New Brunswick)

This practical, indeed commodity, approach to francophone immigration echoes the more general discussion on the need to populate the province's job market owing to its aging population and demographic decline (Interviews, Government of New Brunswick, ACOA):

A common thing that we will say in the agency is that we used to have a situation in the region where there weren't enough jobs for the people, but now that's shifted, there are not enough people for the jobs. And so you really have to talk about being productive and building the skills of your people and also, how does immigration and immigrant talent come in to play on that, right? So, obviously, there's the link there in terms of the economy. (Interview, ACOA)

In this regard, there is a clear nexus between bilingualism and economic immigration, notably during the latter half of the 2000s. New Brunswick's status as Canada's only officially bilingual province is seen as a marketable tool to attract immigrants, and bilingualism is seen as a commodity and a way to sell New Brunswick to immigrants and attract investment. In this respect, bilingualism, the French language and immigration are viewed as goods and a means of solving the province's economic and demographic problems. This link between creating a strong bilingual workforce and ensuring provincial investment is evident in the *2014–2017 Population Growth Strategy*, which stresses New Brunswick's linguistic character as an asset (New Brunswick, 2014b: 3, 17). MLAs also emphasized that New Brunswick's status as Canada's only officially bilingual province is a strategic advantage to increase and maintain the number of francophone immigrants and guarantee federal-level financial support.

Rather than causing political contention, there is clear cross-party consensus throughout the four terms of office regarding the positive role that immigration plays in growing and sustaining the provincial economy, with MLAs framing immigration first and foremost as a solution to the province's low growth, skills shortage, population decline, insufficient birth rates and aging population. International students, notably those already studying in one of the province's four universities, and business immigrants are frequently identified as a resource to build the province's workforce and economy, with the NBNP providing the framework to facilitate this economic immigration. While not an arena of contestation, there are altercations between the PCP and LP based on measuring success and reaching targets in the field of immigrant attraction, integration and retention. In addition, the cultural contribution made by immigrants—whether francophone or anglophone—is clearly valued, with both parties showing a growing interest in promoting and celebrating diversity and multiculturalism. Thus, despite economic and demographic concerns, the cultural contributions of immigrants are frequently emphasized by members of both main parties.

To conclude, New Brunswick's socio-economic and demographic context clearly influences the way MLAs perceive immigration, and the complex relationship between the province's economic and demographic challenges has had repercussions on the development of the immigration portfolio. References to immigration can be described as pertaining to both the commodity and community discourses, highlighting that the line between both can sometimes be blurred. We see that, on the whole, MLAs endeavour to maintain the province's linguistic duality and the French-speaking Acadian population base, which is mainly located in rural New Brunswick. The most pragmatic way to safeguard the province's linguistic and cultural identity as a result of the challenges of rural depopulation and a struggling rural economy is francophone economic immigration.

### ***Community versus commodity and francophone immigration: Perceptions of francophone and Acadian organizations***

In recent years, key francophone organizations that represent and deliver FMCs' priorities have gained legitimacy and competencies as actors in francophone immigration. Analyzing the response of these organizations to the growing francophone immigration dossier and their involvement has highlighted the implications of a neoliberal immigration policy and the narrative of an ideal immigrant on the FMCs. The main finding is that the pressure to conform to neoliberal ideas espoused on the federal level has led francophone and Acadian organizations to move away from their core aims of community building. While neoliberalism ostensibly provides new opportunities for community organizations to engage in the governance of francophone immigration, the trickle-down effect of the federal model of immigration constrains their choices, leading to long-term detrimental effects for FMCs. In exploring the community versus commodity dichotomy, the analysis revealed a deep conflict between community organizations' short- and long-term priorities. It also highlighted how long-standing power relationships are playing out in a new policy field and that community organizations are becoming agents of the state in the production and delivery of public goods.

During the initial years of the francophone immigration portfolio, organizations spoke of immigration in terms of identity and community vitality and perceived it as a solution to sustaining the French language and francophone community as a result of a demographic deficit within the French-speaking community. Over the years, however, the community approach has been replaced by a commodity approach. There was a clear consensus among interviewees (Interviews, IRCC, SNA, SANB) that the francophone community has sought to align its priorities with the wider neoliberal approach. In this sense, the federal government has shaped the actions of their investees, as stated by a public servant in the federal government:

They [FMCs] have especially understood the message that, in order to benefit entirely from the measures that the government wants to put in place, and currently putting in place in terms of programme reform, they have to join in the endeavour. And especially engage employers in the francophone community with the new system of ... "Entry Express." ... If employers play an active



role, by definition, they are going to attract bilingual francophones. And the community has understood that as well and is on board and the community is working hard to engage employers with us. (Interview, IRCC)

Community organizations felt pressured into redefining their approach from one predicated on sustaining the French language and community to one predicated on meeting labour needs and building a bilingual workforce, as stated by an IRCC official:

I think that the community has also adapted a lot where before we spoke a lot of the identity aspect, in all its complexity, in all its sensibility, even within the community. When we speak of “the” or “an Acadian community,” it is already a sensitive issue. ... In a nutshell; we don’t want to go down that route. ... I think that they have put the identity aspect within a wider perspective. They have added other strands to their outlook and the economic strand certainly plays a larger part in their current outlook. (Interview, IRCC)

While concerns relating to linguistic identity remain important to the community, this has been situated within a wider discourse on human capital and economic value and effectiveness.

In effect, while the initial priority of the French-speaking Acadian community was to maintain the French language by ensuring the demographic weight of the community, francophone and Acadian organizations have increasingly perceived francophone immigrants as individuals that can fill labour shortages and contribute toward the economy rather than members of a collective project (Interview, SNA). This approach represents a break from the initial focus on francophone immigration “for community development” and reflects a merging with other discourses or other values that are often advanced by the federal government (Interview, FCFA). While immigrants are valued for speaking the French language, thus contributing to the vitality of the community, the ideal neoliberal francophone immigrant also helps to build the province’s economy. There has also been a clear shift away from the collective development of a linguistic community and toward the creation of a bilingual workforce. One interviewee stated:

If you listened to the discourse of the SANB, five, six years ago, they spoke of immigration for our francophone communities. That was the discourse. Then, with all the external influence, when I hear them speak, they speak of a bilingual workforce. They have done this discourse to be able to continue the work. They have arrived at a discourse of bilingual workforce ... and I think that they’ve done this because of the influence of their funders. ... I think that from the point of view of the francophones, it is something that we have to do because we are in a country where we need to discuss it. But it isn’t the priority. ... It is no longer, it isn’t a question of contributing towards the francophone community.

Thus, francophone immigration along with bilingualism is perceived as an economic asset:



I am sure that there is an economic angle. In fact, the [then] minister [Chris Alexander] has referred a few times ... that a bilingual or multilingual workforce is extremely profitable for the country. So, I think that much of the reasoning is related to a contribution to the collective wealth. (Interview, IRCC)

To this extent, both francophone immigration and bilingualism are perceived as valuable economic resources, and there is less emphasis on identity and community. The nature of the relationship between the federal government and the community organizations partly explain this shift:

If you ask me, the discourse of the community is a lot more demographic than utilitarian in New Brunswick, I think. But, the federal discourse, because it is a jurisdiction, immigration, it is federal and allocates certain powers to the provincial. It means that we don't have the choice; the New Brunswick government doesn't have a choice but to have a utilitarian discourse like the federal. (Interview, RDÉE Canada)

This statement is insightful and encapsulates several aspects of the argument developed thus far. First, it reflects how New Brunswick's wider socio-economic and socio-demographic concerns have led to immigration being viewed as a demographic and economic resource. Second, it shows how community discourses are still important despite the contemporary predominance of a commodity discourse. Third, the fact that local organizations must adopt a discourse related to commodity in light of the orientations of the federal government reveals the extent of the federal government's influence over community-level actors. Lastly, it highlights the complex relationship between demographic and economic concerns and the way in which demography cuts across both discourses. An increasing emphasis on bilingualism initially led to some tensions within the FMCs.

Nevertheless, the recent activities of francophone communities reveal that this is no longer the case; francophone organizations are now working alongside the federal and provincial agencies to ensure that francophone immigrants receive language training in French and English. Therefore, in addition to prioritizing economic immigration, there has also been a push toward ensuring these immigrants' integration into a bilingual community and workforce. This represents a process of individualization where immigrants are expected to integrate economically and linguistically into both language communities (Interview, FCFA) and be increasingly self-sufficient. Such attributes are considered characteristics of the ideal immigrant.

For actors working to protect the French language in the province, this leads to concerns regarding whether bilingual immigrants will choose to integrate into the province's minority French-speaking community or the majority English-speaking community. There is also the realization that French-speaking economic immigrants may not understand or wish to join the Acadian community in the language-survival fight. According to one provincial public servant, there is a gap between the expectations of the Acadian community and the francophone immigrant who may be looking to establish a new life, which entails learning and living through English (Interview, Government of New Brunswick).

The province's unique socio-economic challenges mean that community organizations see the need for integrating francophone immigrants so that the communities can ensure their retention in New Brunswick and compete with Canada's cities: "An immigrant doesn't come just for a beautiful beach or a nice house, they must have a job. It is a job, a profession, the development of a career that is going to ensure that the immigrant stays here" (Interview, SNA). There are many examples where francophone and Acadian community organizations in New Brunswick are working to engage employers and attract economic immigrants. In 2014, the FCFA and Francophone Immigration Networks (RIFs) organized a series of meetings with employers, recruiters and other economic actors, with the aim of raising awareness of the benefits of employing francophone immigrants. The initiative involved over 50 economic actors in the province. This initiative is one of many events that reflect how francophone communities have adapted to the federal government's economic discourse (Interview, FCFA). In line with IRCC's emphasis on ensuring economic immigration and integration, RIFs have also undertaken more activities relating to employer engagement. The provincial government's Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (PETL) department is tasked with working with economic development agencies, both inside and outside government, to develop a planning strategy for francophone businesses, especially in rural New Brunswick, and to help promote the benefits of immigrant entrepreneurship to rural francophone New Brunswick. A greater focus on economic integration and immigration also means that the Acadian community is in a better position to be able to recruit francophone immigrants; whether the community is able to ensure their retention in the province and integration into the French-speaking, rather than English-speaking, community is yet to be proved. There is a clear divergence between practice and ideology; while organizations are increasingly active in the economic integration of immigrants, ideological tensions remain, and there are contentions associated with the governance of francophone immigration in New Brunswick (Interview, Government of New Brunswick).

This section has highlighted how francophone community organizations have increasingly adopted a commodity discourse in light of the wider neoliberal orientations of the federal government. Despite this, sustaining the French language and the province's unique francophone identity remain central aims. There are clear tensions between the economic ideals espoused at the federal level and the priorities of the French-speaking Acadian community in New Brunswick on the community level. Indeed, while francophone immigrants are perceived as a solution to the province's economic and demographic needs, they are chosen for their ability to be self-sufficient, entrepreneurial and strategic. The perception of the ideal francophone neoliberal immigrant as a commodity (similar to the way the French language is also perceived) raises important questions about the long-term effect of a neoliberal approach to immigration on FMCs that are built on belonging and the notion of a common, collective ideal. While francophone and Acadian organizations have agency to develop interventions alongside federal and provincial actors, in order for them to be able to participate in the governance of immigration, they have had to redefine their initial priorities to align with the wider economic commodity approach.

## Conclusion

This article set out to understand how a neoliberal immigration regime on a federal level has affected francophone immigration discourses and policies on a provincial and community level. By focussing on New Brunswick, the article advanced a number of empirically grounded claims and developed a conceptual framework based on the community–commodity dichotomy in order to deepen our understanding of the intersection between the politics of a neoliberal immigration regime and language and community sustainability. Analysis revealed that the French language is being used as a demographic and economic resource in New Brunswick and that the ideal neoliberal, francophone immigrant is helping to build the province's bilingual workforce and economy.

Given the province's demographic deficit and socio-economic context, MLAs have welcomed the immediate economic contribution of the ideal neoliberal immigrant. In this respect, it benefits from the commodification of the French language and the francophone immigrant. For the French-speaking Acadian community, however, the fact that immigrants are becoming a sought-after commodity represents a long-term challenge to the sustainability of the language community. While the vitality of the community relies on members contributing toward a collective linguistic and cultural project, immigrants recruited in a neoliberal immigration project are valued and rewarded for principles such as self-sufficiency, autonomy and entrepreneurship. The article argues that the notion of the ideal neoliberal immigrant raises new, long-term challenges for those minority communities that define and identify themselves through language use and belonging.

The article also argues that the adoption of an increasingly commodity-oriented approach on a community level reveals the extent of long-standing power relationships between the federal government and community organizations. While the neoliberalization of immigration has allowed political and social actors to engage with and respond to immigration, the top-down nature and influence of funders has led the community groups to redefine their priorities as they attempt to appease them. FMCs have been forced to shift their discourse away from their core aims, owing to the current form of neoliberal governance. This finding has wider theoretical implications for discussions of the effect of a neoliberal management method on minoritized and racialized groups, of power dynamics between funders and fundees and of majority/minority group relations. Therefore, in addition to complementing discussions on neoliberal ideologies and governance and linguistic minorities, the article also speaks to wider discussions on privatization, commodification, neoliberal citizenship and the politics of marginalization. The article also demonstrates the importance of paying attention to local levels of governance and political and social actors when studying state-wide approaches to immigration.

Furthermore, the article revealed that MLAs both in the Progressive Conservative party of New Brunswick and the New Brunswick Liberal party perceive the attraction, recruitment and retention of immigrants as one of the most efficient and effective means of answering the province's demographic and economic deficit in light of its declining tax base, aging population and skills shortage. Immigrants are becoming a sought-after commodity and, given the distinctive role that the French language plays the province, French is also being used as a

demographic and economic resource. In this respect, we also saw how the complex relationship between linguistic, demographic and economic concerns means that discussions on immigration can cut across community and commodity discourses. At times, the lines were blurred, with community organizations and MLAs combining elements of both approaches.

Finally, the analysis revealed how the future of minority language communities is intertwined with the globalized economy. The fact that New Brunswick is officially bilingual serves as a way to sell the province to immigrants and businesses. The fact that French is an international language allows Canada's FMCs to adopt policies, programs and discourses that merge linguistic sustainability with community economic development. Nevertheless, this is not the case for all linguistic minorities, and the process of engaging with a global economy world would represent a different set of constraints, challenges and opportunities for other minority language communities such as Basque, Breton or Welsh. The extent to which these communities are able to participate in the new economic order depends on their ability to engage with economic immigration and present their languages as economic rather than cultural resources.

## Notes

1 There are various federal- and provincial-centred explanations for the federalization of immigration (see Paquet, 2014). However, the author aligns with scholars that identify the influence of neoliberalism as the main driving force for policy change and, subsequently, combines this federal-centred approach with a provincial and local approach to explain how different interests and actions merge and interact over time.

2 There are internal differences between FMCs based on institutional completeness, socio-demographic context, language practices, geography, identity, vitality and community and linguistic representations. Francophone immigration has led to greater diversity, and Canada's FMCs and their organizations are increasingly heterogeneous and variegated based on race, ethnicity and religion, among other things. Therefore, further research is needed to explore potential axes of differentiation or similarity between francophone Acadian groups and other FMCs in relation to immigrant neoliberalization.

3 These include the impact of neoliberal globalization and the restructuring of market-state relations on Indigenous peoples (MacDonald, 2011; Slowey, 2008).

4 These seminal studies include, notably, Cardinal (1994), who analyzes the work of Breton (1983), Juteau-Lee (1980, 1983) and Thériault (1989) on identity yet also focuses on the inclusion and conceptualisation of francophone immigrants within Canada's FMCs.

5 The reaction of the Acadian and francophone community to the neoliberalization of immigration is examined by focussing on the policies and discourses of key francophone and Acadian organizations in New Brunswick that have long-standing relationships with the federal and provincial governments. The analysis also engages with two national organizations that represent FMCs across Canada—the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA) and the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité (RDÉE). These various organizations represent the minority francophone and Acadian community in New Brunswick and oversee many groups and associations active in community, education and political advocacy. The Acadian and francophone community in New Brunswick includes 233,530 people with French only as a mother tongue (31.6 per cent of New Brunswick's population) (Statistics Canada, 2011).

6 We adopted Corbin and Strauss's (2008) latest understanding of GTA, which is far more flexible than their previous works (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998).

7 Ethics approval for the project was granted by the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Ottawa (reference 06-09-12B). Interviewees received an interview guide beforehand and signed an interview consent form prior to the interview. Interviewees were assured of the anonymity of their participation in the study and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. Interviews were conducted in English or French. French quotes have been translated into English by the author.

8 These include the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA); Canadian Heritage; Centre d'accueil et d'accompagnement francophone des immigrants du Sud-Est du Nouveau-Brunswick (CAFI); Dieppe City Council; Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA); Government of New Brunswick's Population Growth Secretariat; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC); Moncton City Council; Multicultural Association of the Greater Moncton Area (MAGMA); New Brunswick Economic Council; Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages; Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité (RDÉE Canada); Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Nouveau-Brunswick (RDÉE New Brunswick); Société Nationale de l'Acadie (SNA); Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick (SANB).

At the time of the fieldwork, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) was called Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). It was renamed in November 2015.

9 The bilateral agreement signalled a new era in New Brunswick's approach to immigration, allowing the province to play an active role in choosing immigrants, business applicants and skilled workers to meet its specific economic needs. The NBNP was amended in 2005 when the federal government made numerous changes to the national immigration system, including caps to the PNPs across Canada. New Brunswick's PNP was capped at 625 nominations annually in 2010 (New Brunswick, 2014a: 4).

10 See Mockler, 2005; Boudreau, 2010 and 2011; Coulombe, 2011 and 2012.

11 Using the NBNP, the plan aims to attract 33 per cent francophone immigrants by 2020 to better reflect the province's linguistic makeup of two-thirds anglophone and one-third francophone. It also sets the target of a 3 per cent annual increase in francophone immigration nomination to reach 23 per cent by 2017 (New Brunswick, 2014a: 5).

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