

Addressing the Ground of Anti-Black Racism Social Work in Canada: Afrocentric Education and the United Nations International Decades for People of African Descent

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Abstract

Dominant epistemologies, methodologies, and ontologies within education and Social Work remain deeply Eurocentric and often fail to account for the lived realities of Black communities. These gaps contribute to negligence, discriminatory practice, and harmful outcomes. This study draws on African/Black Studies and Social Work to investigate the presence, engagement, and utilization of Afrocentric perspectives across Canada during the first United Nations Decade for People of African Descent. We explore how Afrocentricity informs Social Work pedagogy and practice, particularly in relation to equity and anti-Black racism. Using interviews with Black scholars and practitioners in three provinces, the analysis highlights how Afrocentric frameworks shape teaching, identity formation, community engagement, and advocacy. Findings show that Afrocentric curriculum and pedagogy offer essential pathways for advancing equity, strengthening anti-Black racism initiatives, and expanding more justice-oriented approaches in education and the social sciences. This study underscores the need for institutional commitment to Afrocentric knowledge, community-led initiatives, and systemic transformation in the upcoming Second Decade.

Keywords: Afrocentricity, Canada, people of African descent, social work, education, research

1. Introduction

1.1 Afrocentricity in Canada

“One of the most awful conclusions or results of colonialism is that it rewrote the history of Africa. So, one thing that I really appreciate about Afrocentrism overall is that it goes back into history and looks at what we were not taught as Africans” (Sierra Leona - participant 10).

Our study aligns with the *United Nations (UN) International Decades (ID) for People of African Descent (PAD)*; the first decade spanned from January 1, 2015, to December 31, 2024. The second decade (2025-2034) was declared on December 17, 2025. The theme continues to be *Recognition, Justice, and Development*. Our research focuses on the first decade while seeking to create an understanding of equity, and anti-Black racism in Canada as necessary topics in Social Work education and social sciences disciplines in general (Mullings et al., 2021). Our paper uses *African – Black – people of African descent* interchangeably and understands *Afrocentric* or *Africentric* as synonyms.

Our thesis is that every theory finds its roots in a given period of a societal problem. These roots breathe through the philosophy and ideology that theory uses to shed light on explaining the problem and demonstrating

perspectives to solve the problem. Therefore, a theory allows us to have some knowledge in understanding the problem and prompting us to figure out solutions. A theory has a context and an aim; it is pursuing an agenda and leads to power, as knowledge is power. It is because of that power that Eurocentrism dominates the educational curricula and therefore forges frames of reference that serve the Eurocentric agenda.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of Afrocentric perspectives in shaping research, education, policy, and community practices that center African identity, heritage, and values. This shift reflects a broader movement toward decolonizing systems of knowledge and addressing systemic inequities faced by Black and African-descended communities. The qualitative findings from interviews with diverse research participants reveal a rich tapestry of approaches and philosophies that emphasize cultural affirmation, systemic advocacy, community empowerment, and transformative education. These insights illustrate how Afrocentric principles serve as a foundation for fostering courage, perseverance, self-confidence, and continuity in passing ancestral wisdom among African descent diaspora populations across various contexts in Canada (Asante, 2007; Mazama, 2003).

Looking back at the last decade, the field of social sciences in general and Social Work in particular has made significant strides in mobilizing knowledge in critical paradigms related to decolonization and indigenization (Freeman, 2017; Dei, 2016). Therefore, Social Work remains firmly committed to equity, social justice, self-determination, and culturally informed approaches that foster transformational changes. From the Civil Rights Movements (the United States of America one being the well-known) through the globalization era, non-Eurocentric epistemologies, particularly Indigenous knowledge (Escárcega, 2010) and African diaspora perspectives (Dei, 2000) have gained prominence challenging curricula to decenter dominant narratives. Afrocentricity is one of these perspectives; it finds its roots in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America. Asante, whose scientific work focuses, since 1980's, on Afrocentricity's knowledge and methodology, sees Afrocentric curriculum's foundations grounded in an African perspective (Asante, 1991). It means looking at the problem from an African viewpoint to decenter African epistemologies from the margin to the center. In other words, it is about bringing African descent narratives into the center, to stand on the same level as Eurocentric narratives or as Asia centered narratives.

Afrocentricity is therefore a critical analysis of culture, economy, history, language and more from a conceptual, methodological, and theoretical paradigm that emphasizes people of African descent's agency. With Asante's works, which contributed to popularizing it, many African descent scholars and professionals have adopted the theory as a code of conduct (Martin, 2008) and a theoretical framework that grounds their research and practice (Walker and Burbanks, 2010).

1.2 Afrocentric Theoretical Background

Afrocentricity is the conscious process by which a person locates or relocates African phenomena within an African context. It is then location, as opposed to dislocation; centeredness, as opposed to marginality (Asante, 2003; Smith, 2020). According to Asante (1998), the theory of Afrocentricity is founded on the core pillars of: cosmology, axiology, epistemology, and aesthetics. These pillars focus on the inquiry around the following: the interaction with the universe to understand African descent role and experiences culturally; the examination of values and ethics to seek truth, balance, and harmony in the interaction; the creation of knowledge, which recognizes the frame of reference of the African holistic view; and the centeredness on African culture and symbols. Karenga's Nguzo Saba (1998) completes these four pillars by emphasizing the shared orientations of the African cultural characteristics.

What makes Asante's work unique is that it is rooted on Cheik Anta Diop's works (Asante, 2007). Cheik Anta Diop is an African thinker whose works politically and culturally led to the liberation of Africa and those of African descent (Diop, 1993). Indeed, Diop's scientific works demonstrated that Africa has a Black civilization and is the mother of humanity (Diop, 1991). Therefore, Africa has a history and has been contributing to global histories, arts, culture, sciences, and inventions through centuries (Asante, 2019). Diop's findings are determinant, because they rejected the legitimization of the epistemological violence that Eurocentrism has been imposing as the only way of knowing, applicable to education. Eurocentrism, therefore, oppresses the diverse knowledge existing globally, like those informed by the Afrocentricity pillars that can be used to address humanity's development.

Afrocentricity, therefore, is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. The Afrocentric theory emerged in two disciplines: History (Asante 1994; Karenga, 1998) and African Psychology (Akbar 1984; Nobles, 1986) to speak to the sociocultural and political-economic needs of people of African ancestry. Karenga (1998) developed a value system based on components of traditional Africa that spoke to the liberation needs. The scheme is Nguzo Saba and it embraced the values of unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. Asante's works (1988) combined the values and practices of traditional Africa with people of African

descent's liberation needs. Afrocentricity as an inclusive frame of reference describes the need to center Africa and people of African descent in any analysis and understanding of the lives of Black people.

Afrocentricity is the theoretical background of the proposed study, because its rationale is intertwined with the need for Afrocentric education recommended by the UN Working Group of Experts on PAD (UN General Assembly, 2017). Disciplines like History and Psychology use Afrocentric ideas to speak to the sociocultural and political-economic needs of PAD. Seminal works in psychology informed by Afrocentricity perspective are discussed in the field of African Psychology (Akbar, 1984). Those in History are twofold: one based on components of traditional Africa that spoke to the liberation needs, and embraced the values of unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith (Karenga, 1993); and the second developed as a paradigm that combined the values and practices of traditional Africa with PAD's liberation needs. This model is Afrocentricity; it is the inclusive frame to describe the need to center Africa and PAD in any analysis and understanding of the lives and experiences of Black people (Asante, 1988). According to Schiele (2017), the term 'Afrocentric' emerges from Afrocentricity (p.8). The idea developed in African psychology and Afrocentric history, which were integrated in Social Work. Schiele's (1994) approach is a critical inquiry of Eurocentric and Afrocentric worldview in Social Work. It strongly calls for the adoption of the latter to enact effective transformational change in Social Work practice.

1.3 Afrocentric Education in Canada

A common narrative that people of African descent have once asked about their educational experience is that they have faced curricula which are disempowering as contributing to the decrease of their self-esteem and dehumanizing their connection to their own culture. In fact, the Working Group of *United Nations International Decades for People of African Descent* proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly issued on August 16, 2017, a report calling Canada to consider this declaration in Education in implementing *the recommendation 94 (e): Strengthen Afrocentric education curricula and implement the recommendations made by the Black Learners Advisory Committee in its report on education, Redressing Inequity — Empowering Black Learners, and accepted by the Nova Scotia Department of Education in its report, expanding from Equity Supports to Leadership and Results. The provincial ministries should collect disaggregated data and ensure that adequate remedies are available to African Canadian students impacted by discriminatory effects of disciplinary policies, including racial profiling* (UN General Assembly, 2017).

This recommendation, which focuses on a weak Afrocentric Education in Canada that needs to be strengthened aligned with UN IDPAD, is the main problem of our study. The United Nations understood people of African descent as Africans who were displaced to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade numerous generations ago, [about 250 years ago in Canada (Walmsley, Bernard, and Este, 2021)] and/or more recent migrants who have traveled to the Americas, Europe, Asia and within Africa itself. People of African descent synonymous to African or Black or visible minority (in Canadian context) around the world constitute some of the most marginalized groups in many countries throughout five continents (Africa, Central Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America) and are a specific victim group who continue to suffer discrimination and racism today (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2016).

Statistics Canada's (StatsCan, 2019) *Ethnicity, Language, and Immigration Thematic Series* published in conjunction with both the UN International Decade for PAD (2015-2024) and Black History Month concluded that Black populations in Canada account for 3.5 percent of total population and 15.6 percent of the population defined as visible minority. Compared to Statistics Canada (StatsCan, 2024) this population now accounts for 4.3% of the total population and 16.1% of the total racialized populations in Canada.

In Canada, as aforementioned, the infusion of Afrocentricity in Social Work finds its theoretical ground in the USA perspectives, while emphasizing fields like education, healthcare, and social services. Contrastingly, the works of Dei, G. J. S. focus more on knowledge development and waves Afrocentric ideas with indigenous perspectives (Dei & Cacciavillani, 2024; Dei, 2014). Pioneers like Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard and Dr. David Este (there are probably more pioneers in Canada, but we cited here those whose seminal works and brief literature review were able to reveal) have been engaged in education, community work, and mentorship to establish Afrocentricity in Canadian Social Work. Concretely, they both strengthen the visibility of Black Social Workers in Canada (Bernard, 2020; James, Este & Bernard, 2010).

The presence of Afrocentricity is therefore through research, publication, community work, and day to day countering systemic racism in Canada. The existence of Black Social Workers Associations (Alberta, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan) and the growing engagement with Black History Month (February in Canada) show the presence of Afrocentric perspectives in Canada. Moreover, as part of the results of our seminal works and brief literature review, Afrocentricity's presence is demonstrated by the launch of the Afrocentric Bachelor of Social Work at Dalhousie University. This presence in the post-secondary education system reinforced the long-standing presence of the Afrocentric Alternative School in Ontario, in Toronto, as the only school of this

kind in Canada, which began operating in September 2009 in response to an initial community request for such a school in June 2007 to address a high dropout rate and achievement gap affecting students of African descent (CBC Kids News, 2024; Al-Krenawi, Graham, & Habibov, 2016).

1.4 Literature Review

Seminal sources are major studies that initially presented an idea of great importance or influence within a particular discipline. The main inclusion criterion of curating seminal works is to consider works published in the past 20-50 years. Furthermore, the authors of such works who are thinkers and/or researchers find their works being discussed by everyone whether current research agrees with their findings. Our study uses the seminal work search process to identify and curate Afrocentricity's works from the 1980's to 2025, considering USA and Canada as a geographical inclusion criteria. While we recognize that this documenting methodology can lead to outdated sources, it does allow our study to cover foundational knowledge around Afrocentricity and to examine its presence as well as impact in the Canadian context (Conyers Jr., 2016).

Seminal Works, therefore, are core bodies of literature that present new and groundbreaking ideas that are used within and outside of a field (Conyers Jr., 2016). The time in which most seminal works around Afrocentricity were published ranges from the 1970's to the 1980's for US American works, and 1990's to the early 2010's for Canadian works. Some works, such as *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (1980) revised and expanded in 2003 by Asante, M. K appear in almost all the articles that were reviewed, proving Asante to be the most referenced/popular scholar within that academic space.

Seminal works (McDougal, 2014) on Afrocentricity within the Canadian context are tied back to the US American works, it was therefore hard to find a thinker of Afrocentricity in Canada the same as Asante's works are for the US American context. Most of the discussions surrounding Afrocentricity within Canada were on education, Black Canadian youth, and anti-racism. Often the articles were focused on Afrocentricity in education, and its ability to impact the conversation on systemic racism in the Canadian education system. The literature review showed that most Afrocentric works within the Canadian context focused on education and anti-racism. It demonstrated that there was not a lot of work on Afrocentric theory thinkers from the Canadian realities, but Afrocentricity adapted from the US American context is utilized across social, health, and educational services in Canada. In other words, Afrocentricity is a lot more theorized in the US American context, whereas it is extensively being utilized in the Canadian context. The most popularly referenced scholar as Afrocentric thinker within the Canadian context is Dei, G. J. S., and the most popular work cited was the Stephen Lewis 1992 Report (Government of Ontario, n.d). This policy related document is a pivotal marker in the fight against racism in Canada and seminal work within the lack of Afrocentric thinkers' space in Canada.

Consequently, Afrocentric perspectives, coming from social and humanities sciences in the context of the United States of America (USA), were able to infuse Social Work Education curricula presented in USA colleges. For example, Reid-Merritt's (2015) works in Afrocentric Social Work focuses on the translation of the knowledge derived from Afrocentricity into African/Black communities. In other words, it is about how Afrocentricity is useful to African/Black Communities in their day to day lives. Schiele's (1997) Afrocentric Social Work centers on using Afrocentricity to render Social Work organizations and welfare system more equitable, just, and culturally sensitive with a critical lens of Eurocentrism; Graham's (2016) Afrocentric Social Work is interested in developing an anti-discriminatory intervention model that articulates Social Work' perspective of anti-oppression and anti-racism of Afrocentricity (Howard, 2017).

Regarding the social work discipline, two forces emerged since the late 1960's: first, the establishment of the National Association of Black Social Workers (Reid-Merritt, 2010), and second the integration of the Afrocentric ideas from Psychology and History into professional social work practice and literature. In social work practice Dr. Aminifu Harvey established what could be argued the first Afrocentric comprehensive mental and social problems counselling program known as the MAAT Center based in Washington, D.C. (USA) and established in 1986 using Nguzo Saba value system (Harvey, 2018). In term of social work literature Dr. Schiele published the first social work peer-review articles that relied on African psychology and Afrocentric history to develop a broad conceptual paradigm for social work practice to apply to the array of human service issues and dilemmas (Schiele, 2000). Schiele's approach is a contrast between Eurocentric and Afrocentric worldview in social work claiming the adoption of the later to enact effective transformational change in social work practice. In the context of Canada, the book titled *Fighting for change: Black Social Workers in Nova Scotia* edited by Dr. Bernard (2006) is a seminal work that highlights Afrocentric social work practice and Black Social Workers' experiences. The same as in the USA, Black Social Workers' Associations continue to play a pivotal role in developing Afrocentricity perspectives that inform social work discipline.

To sum up, Afrocentricity adapted to the Canadian context focusing on the discipline of Education. Professor Dei's works nourished the interdisciplinary perspectives, which scholars, using Afrocentricity in Canada can benefit from. For Social Work education despite the lack of theoretical thinkers grounded on African/Black

Canadian realities, there are some noteworthy actions, books, educational materials, and an immense number of vibrant community activities engaged with Afrocentricity. Their engagement builds a ground for fighting anti-Black racism in Canadian educational spaces. Therefore, the Afrocentricity perspectives that educators, community organizers, and government employees present are an excellent contribution to the school of thought on Afrocentricity in Canada. Our conducted semi-structured interviews highlight the presence and utilization of Afrocentricity perspectives in Canada.

2. Method

We employed a qualitative perspective (Bryman, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018) grounded on narrative approach informed by Afrocentric methodology (McDougal, 2011) to collect and analyze the data. Key documentation of seminal works, scoping literature review, and semi-structured interviews with educators, community organizers, and provincial government employees in three Canadian provinces: Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Alberta. The choice of these three provinces is based on the statistical information of Statistics Canada around the demographic trend of people of African descent in Canada. Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Alberta, are the three provinces where people of African descent live as the longest, largest, and growing Black populations (StatsCan, 2019, 2016). The choice is based on information gained through the seminal works and scoping literature analysis, which revealed the presence of Social Work educators, practitioners, community organizations, community workers, and political stakeholders promoting and utilizing Afrocentric Education and Paradigm (BLAC, 1994; Mazama, 2001).

The semi-structured interview method of data collection is used with conversational approach closely connected to African storytelling (Osei-Tutu, 2023). In the semi-structured interview, each respondent is asked to answer a specific set of questions. However, the semi-structured interview maintains a dialogical approach in which the interviewer probes the respondent and is free to ask questions in a different order for all respondents. Although a semi-structured interview involves a standard set of questions, it also allows the interviewers to ask sub questions and develop new questions based on the interviewees' responses (McDougal, 2017).

Our study consisted of fourteen questions divided in three parts: Engagement with Afrocentric Education (four questions), Utilization of Afrocentricity (four questions), and Equity and Anti-Black Racism (6 questions). To close the conversation, participants were asked to conclude with the UN PAD decade working group *recommendation 94 (e)* related to strengthening Afrocentric Education in Canada. These questions were not asked following a linear manner, in the contrary it was following the flow of the conversation (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2021; Chilisa, 2020) while making sure that participants contributed to all three parts with information to respond to the research questions as follows: **1) What are the emerging forms (in terms of concepts and praxis) of the Afrocentric approach in the Canadian context? 2) What is the current state of the presence and utilization of the Afrocentric approach and practice through Afrocentric pedagogy in higher education? 3) In what ways can these Afrocentric forms inform/advance social work education and practice to render services to PAD centered on equity and anti-African/Black racism? 4) In what ways can the Afrocentric paradigm be promoted in a culturally grounded Social Work context in Canada?**

2.1 Qualitative Data Collection

We obtained an Ethical approval for this study from MacEwan University Research Ethics Board (REB # 102020). Afrocentric approach was employed in recruitment and sampling as we used the information obtained from the seminal work and scoping literature analysis to establish a potential list of participants. Then, we used the email's contact information to distribute the study's invitation, including information regarding its ethical approval, the socio-demographic form to fill, only if participants are accepting an interview, and the consent form. We also kindly asked people to distribute the information to their network so that a snowball effect was included in the recruitment of participants. Day and time for the interview were at the convenience of the participants. As data collection process, the semi-structure interviews were conducted online through WebEx (online meeting platform), recorded, and transcribed. The interviews' length was between 45 minutes to 1h15minutes complemented by a socio-demographic form. As compensation, participants received \$50 e-gift cards for items in Black Own Shops.

The Semi-structure interviews were conducted with sixteen participants (9 women and 7 men) from the three Canadian provinces (Alberta, Ontario, and Nova Scotia) between March 2023 to October 2023. The main two inclusion criteria for the participants recruitment were to be educators, community organizers/workers, and government employees/workers in Canada (1) and employing Afrocentricity in the type of work they have been doing (2).

In each of the categories: participants as workers in higher education (1), or in community organization (2) or in government (3) we planned to recruit 2 participants per category: a total of six participants per province and an overall total of 18 participants. We ended up with sixteen semi-structured interviews as follows: Ontario was the

only province with six participants with as planned two per category; in Nova Scotia, because we couldn't recruit two participants in higher education and one participant in the community, we had three participants in that province; in Alberta, we had seven participants, because we conducted a probe interview and were satisfied with our questions. Thus, we decided to keep the probe interview because in Alberta, unlike Ontario and Nova Scotia, none of the political stakeholders (City councils or Members of Legislative Assembly or Members of Parliament) responded favorably to our invitation. Therefore, for our research, including seven instead of six interviewees in Alberta, it was the way to amplify the voice of citizens since none of their representatives did not participate in the study.

2.2 Thematic Data Analysis

The collected data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis, a flexible qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns (themes) within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We considered the colonial hegemony that still shape Black Canadians lived experiences; therefore power, domination, and agency were examine as an Afrocentric perspective in the analysis. This approach allowed for both inductive (data-driven) and reflexive processes to ensure rich and meaningful analysis. The Afrocentric reflexivity was informed by our critical engagement with self-determination and agency as analytical lenses of Afrocentric consciousness (Asante, 2003; Conyers Jr., 2016) in the dialogical analysis process we adopted.

Thematic analysis followed the six-step framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): 1. *Familiarization with data*: We immersed ourselves in the transcripts through repeated readings to relate and gain a comprehensive understanding of the narratives. 2. *Initial coding*: We generated semantic and latent codes systematically across the dataset. 3. *Theme search*: We clustered the generated codes into themes reflecting participants' experiences in engaging with Afrocentricity in their work. 4. *Theme review*: We refined the themes to ensure coherence and consistency with the research questions we presented in the previous paragraph. 5. *Defining and naming themes*: We developed meaningful themes to capture the essence of participants' narratives. 6. *Report production*: We analyzed the final interpretative patterns (themes) and presented the findings with illustrative quotes to highlight the key results.

We analyzed the data in being sensitive to the gained Afrocentric information from the seminal work and brief literature results as well as our own sociocultural positionality as Black scholars. For example, we anonymized the participants in randomly assigning them names of African countries. This initiative is to acknowledge the diversity and the quest for the centeredness of Africa intertwined as complicated (Ibrahim et al., 2022) and necessary to truly utilize Afrocentricity. The complications and necessities of the grounding point on Africa also known as Sankofa from an Afrocentric perspective (Mugumbate, 2023) were expressed in diverse terms and wordings by the participants across the interview's transcripts. In our analysis, we decided to use African countries because their names are intertwined with colonialization, resistance, and the quest for self-determination, the same as the quest for a true utilization of Afrocentricity from our perspective. In this vein two levels of thematic analysis (semantic and latent) were employed. This dialogical analysis allowed us on one hand to capture explicit, surface-level meanings within participants' statements (*semantic themes*) and on the other hand to explore the underlying knowledge and experience (*latent themes*) shaping participants' Afrocentric perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 1. Data extracts, early descriptive codes and broad themes

Data Extracts	Early Descriptive Codes	Broad themes
Whether that is in my teaching, in my work as a [stakeholder], I always bring the lens of being an African Canadian in everything that I do, so my work is very much grounded in Africanness, African Canadian, but also Africans in the diaspora.	Being an African Canadian is the lens in teaching and the work I do, as a stakeholder. This lens in practice (teaching and stakeholder's activities) is grounded in Africanness. Africanness is not only about African Canadians but also Africans in the diaspora. It is about Africans in Canada and outside Canada.	African, education, mentorship, and cultural preservation
African studies, in a broader context, covers all these areas and therefore, the diaspora is becoming a bigger part in some universities, there is no separate departments between Africans studies and Black studies. Some will have African and Black studies together, and so on, prefer to have them separately and so forth. So, but in our case, we still cover a great deal of African diaspora we have a course now on [anti] -Black racism. We have Introduction to Diaspora Studies.	There are some nuances between African studies and Black studies. The course focuses on anti-Black racism. Diaspora studies cover issues around Afrocentric perspectives in curricula.	Afrocentric education and curriculum development
My particular role is to keep on reminding people of that in regard to antiracism, and particularly anti-Black racism. So, I guess one thing that's really key in terms of African education is recognizing our unique experiences and our histories. And I say histories and plural, because often what we find in government is people focus on particular countries and see that as being Africa or black. And we try to remind people Africa is a continent, not a country, and so forth. So, our job in equity policy is to remind people of the uniqueness of these different countries, to understand the cultural context of those countries, the histories.	There is the use of self as knowledge so it derives from context and experiences. Then there is the use of factual knowledge to emphasize the importance of storytelling, amplifying Blacks' narratives, and challenging harmful stereotypes to reshape perceptions. There are efforts to explore anti-Black racism, systemic inequalities, and policy development to address discrimination.	Equity, policy, and anti-Black racism

The table (Table 1) presents some illustrative data extracts, showing how they were translated into early descriptive codes and then refined into broader themes.

3. Results

Our results highlighted the engagement with Afrocentricity's perspectives in participants' works in education, community, and government sectors. The findings examined a persistence of systemic racism, which reinforced structural inequities and shed light on enduring discriminations. These results show how actions in anti-Black racism lead to equity and social justice, even if these remain roadblocks, participants demonstrated it to be feasible.

3.1 Presence, Engagement, and Utilization of Afrocentricity Perspectives in Canada

Results showed that the engagement with Afrocentricity perspectives strengthened Afrocentric education in Canada and needed to remain a continuing effort. Indeed, participants had extensive histories of working with Afrocentric principles, dating back to the 1980s and 1990s. For example, some had been involved in teaching African studies since the 1990s, had been using Afrocentric methods for over 23 years, and had been promoting Afrocentric perspectives for more than three decades. Specific milestones included starting in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, with continuous involvement up to the present. Participants' narratives highlighted a long-term engagement and experience with Afrocentric education.

"I actually started using Afrocentric perspectives probably back in the 80s when I was first introduced to it, I was first introduced to Afrocentric perspectives in education. Back in the 80s and then was quite interested in how it moved and it was working in Social Work then um in 1992, 93, I began to look specifically at Afrocentric perspectives in research. I've been practicing Afrocentric perspectives since I would say the late 80s, I've been teaching about it since the teaching about it since the early 90s." (Sudan – participant 15)

"I started reading about Afrocentricity in the 1990s and I think I've been using it at least for the last 23 years." (Benin Republic – participant 6)

Based on the semi-structured interviews, many participants were introduced to Afrocentric concepts during their academic journey, particularly in graduate studies (Masters and PhD). They highlighted how Afrocentric principles became part of their research, teaching, and capacity building, which revealed the Integration of Afrocentric approaches during academic and professional development.

"I was introduced to it [Afrocentricity] when I was doing my masters, so I feel like I've always been using it." (Uganda – participant 8).

Participants emphasized a sustained and evolving engagement with Afrocentric perspectives, with references to always teaching or using Afrocentricity. They also mentioned periods of growth, such as the last decade, and specific community or literacy initiatives indicating ongoing commitment and development in Afrocentric work over the years. Their actions demonstrated the ongoing practice and evolution over time of the translations of Afrocentricity perspectives in educational books and activities.

"So Y story started with the launch of the book X in 2020. And essentially what a fit emerge was we you know we sent the book out to a number of different publishers and you know there wasn't a lot of interest at the time I was told by one publisher that you know there wasn't a really a market for Black stories and Black Canadian history and so we decided to crowdfund for the funds...with the funds that we had raised that we did end up using to publish the book we used to kick off Y story and to begin to create space to work with other story Black storytellers." (Ethiopia – participant 13).

Research participants described various Afrocentric practices emphasizing community, collaboration, and cultural appreciation. Many included collectivism in their work, prioritizing teamwork and shared voices, as seen in Social Work supervision and community engagement. They also valued direct, transparent communication, building rapport through openness and empathy. Cultural sharing, such as sharing foods and celebrating diverse African traditions, fosters cultural pride and awareness within communities. Participants emphasized the importance of finding and connecting with others of African descent through networks and community groups to build solidarity.

"Finding your people. Whether it's within where I work, we have a lot of collectivities of people of African descent in various ways. And that's been a way to find space where we can share and network can share, and it kind of builds a solidarity." (Nigeria – participant 11)

Some participants incorporated Afrocentric principles into their academic and practical work, drawing on theories like anti-racism, critical race theory, and Afrocentric paradigms. Their ideas centered on community, storytelling, cultural appreciation, and applying Afrocentric philosophies in various contexts. They highlighted their persistence in using Afrocentricity even when they do switch to allied terms, like anti-Black racism.

"So right now, in, in the political space there isn't really, in the provincial political space I have to be specific there doesn't seem to be, understanding of Afrocentricity, like as that language. But there is an opening for us to say anti-Black racism. And so, what I do find to be most effective is to just name it as racism, talk about anti-Black racism, and not talk about, Afrocentric education; although what I think I'm doing is engaging in many principles of Afrocentric education." (Uganda – participant 8).

Research participants engaged with Afrocentric ideas through various methods. They emphasized community involvement, such as participating in forums, connecting with elders and relatives, and sharing stories to preserve cultural wisdom. Others implemented initiatives, like book clubs to foster dialogue on Black Lives Matter and racial issues. Some focused on transforming systems by designing curricula that center Black voices

and experiences, advocating for incidental learning and curriculum reform. Participants also highlighted the importance of information flow within communities, noting how collective sharing enhances understanding. In professional settings, they embedded Afrocentric perspectives into policies, community work, and problem-solving efforts. Additionally, some worked to combat stereotypes by emphasizing the value of Black individuals and raising awareness through reports and public discourse. The engagement spanned personal storytelling, education, systemic advocacy, and community-driven initiatives.

“Community forums, meeting with people who are, immersed in the field and in the work. But if there aren't opportunities to connect, whether it be virtually or in person, I think there's a lot of great work out there, articles, videos, podcasts, interviews like media such a tool that has so much content and for me that's what I've been normally leaned on to gather knowledge and to really, I just gained knowledge and wisdom as far as what and Afrocentric approach means and what it looks like, but I think outside of that too, I mean I have elders and it's a part of my own identity and culture to, seek out family members and listen to relatives who share, sharing this experience and sharing this wisdom. Just be present with what is going on in the next generation and with the young people.” (Niger – participant 12).

Research participants' ideas about how their work relates to Afrocentric perspectives revealed diverse approaches emphasizing African identity, heritage, and values. Some focused on welcoming and supporting Black and immigrant communities, highlighting Afrocentric styles and cultural values in practice. Others engaged in educational initiatives, such as teaching African history, diaspora studies, and developing Afrocentric Social Work practices, fostering an understanding of African and Black histories. The engagement with Afrocentricity mobilized efforts and was a source of creativity and concretization of educational projects for uplifting African identity, developing policies, and teaching best practices for finances.

“I really focus on welcoming immigrants and Black people, that is where my work shows, I think my work shows up in an Afrocentric way. The modalities that I utilized, my style of practice is very Afrocentric, is center on African identity or African values especially if the client also identify as of been of African descent.” (Liberia – participant 1).

“Our mandate is to help the Department of Education develop policies and implement policies that have an Afrocentric component. ...we work with the community to conduct proper research that will provide a better understanding of how the school system can work with the community to support the learning outcome of Black learners.” (Mali – participant 16).

“We need to understand the financial issues as this country perceives it, because we are judged based on how we handle our finances I got a group of African kids in one of the secondary schools and bring it out and get it to the kids, so that they understand that they apply it to ourselves.” (South Africa – participant 4).

3.2 Systemic Racism, Anti-Black Racism, and Discrimination

Systemic racism and structural inequities emerged as significant barriers within educational and organizational systems, shaping the lived realities of Black and African professionals in Canada. Research participants described how these inequities were deeply embedded in institutional frameworks, educational curricula, and decision-making processes. They emphasized that these systems were not originally designed to accommodate or affirm Black identities, leading to exclusion, marginalization, and persistent disparities in access to opportunities.

“There's been a lot of, of you know talk about the need for us to be at committee, to be at the table where decisions are being made, um, and yet we are never invited to that table or rarely invited to that table every piece of legislation impacts Black communities. Black Folks are overrepresented in interactions with the police that end in violence, harm, sometimes death.” (Uganda – participant 8).

This revealed the reality that systemic racism was not just incidental, but structural, stemming from the foundational design of systems that historically excluded Black people. As Participant 5 stated, the very architecture of institutional frameworks and curricula perpetuates anti-Black racism by privileging Eurocentric knowledge systems and professional standards. This insight aligns with Afrocentric scholarship, which challenges the epistemological dominance of Western paradigms and advocates for educational models that reflect African cultural heritage and knowledge.

“It shows up the in the system where the system was designed to begin. It wasn't designed with the intent purely truly consider Black people, or else the building the system would have been designed with Black and African people. It wasn't and so if we take a look at or even our education and training modules and the curriculums that professionals go through to show up and work in in the in the areas that while they may be having academic expertise and that may be professional experience, we have to be able to consider how anti-Black racism and discrimination has been infiltrated through the design and development of these systems.” (Niger – participant 12)

Also, research participant responses revealed how systemic inequities manifest in professional spaces, reinforcing racialized labor stratification. Participant 2 observed that highly qualified Black professionals remain underutilized; this reflects the structural barriers to career mobility and the lack of recognition of their expertise. It also points to organizational practices that fail to capture and respond to systemic disparities through data and policy reforms. Likewise, in Participant 8's experience of exclusion from decision-making tables, it shows the persistent marginalization of Black voices in governance processes, despite rhetoric on diversity and inclusion. From these experiences, we saw the contradiction between institutional commitments to equity and the reality of racialized exclusion.

"We know that the system isn't fair, um we don't you know we don't have any expectations that anyone's gonna come and you know recognize that hey you have certain skills and potentials and this kind of thing. Um, when I look at my colleagues and that you know you have people with PHD's, and they're not being utilized, and as a system I don't think they're capturing the right information the right data to uncover inconsistencies and you know the, the lack of addressing systemic issues in the organization" (Burkina Faso – participant 2).

Participants' narratives highlighted the enduring impact of systemic anti-Black racism in shaping Social Work education and practice. They articulated the pervasive presence of anti-Black racism within various systems, including education, workplaces, and policies. Participants from different regions shared insights on how systemic inequities are embedded from the outset, often excluding Black voices from decision-making processes. Many acknowledged the persistent disparities in opportunity, representation, and treatment faced by Black communities. Collectively, their reflections revealed the deep-rooted challenges and the critical need for national actions to dismantle anti-Black racism across societal institutions. The responses demonstrated that anti-Black racism is not an occasional incident, but a pervasive and normalized reality embedded within Canadian society. Some participants reported that "being Black in Canada means you are dealing with anti-Black racism". This means that anti-Black racism has systemic and enduring nature. For research participants, racism remains as an everyday practice that shapes interactions, institutional policies, and lived experiences, reinforcing historical power imbalances rooted in colonialism and white supremacy.

"anti-Black racism, to be Black in Canada means you're dealing with anti-Black racism. Means it's an everyday practice and so anti-Black racism becomes one of these forces that you would continually have to deal with." (Sudan – participant 15)

The psychosocial consequences of anti-Black racism are revealed in Participant 1's response, particularly in workplace settings, where issues of racism intersect with identity and mental health. The reference to "conflictions" and the need for advocacy highlighted a dual challenge of meeting professional expectations while resisting systemic and interpersonal racism. This experience resonates with the concept of racial battle fatigue, where the constant negotiation of racialized spaces results in chronic stress, burnout, and compromised well-being. While advocacy signals agency, it also exposes institutional shortcomings in addressing structural inequities, placing the burden of change on those most affected by oppression.

"Sometimes there are issues that come up, workplace issues of anti-Black racism having these conflictions about what happen to Black people right, having those concisions around racism, identity how it impacts people mental health, I try to advocate" (Liberia – participant 1).

In Canada, Anti-Black racism is a deeply rooted reality that extends beyond individual prejudice to systemic and institutionalized discrimination. It manifests across education, employment, healthcare, policing, and social systems, disproportionately impacting people of African descent. Within the context of Social Work and Afrocentric education, anti-Black racism presents persistent barriers to equity, inclusion, and cultural recognition. Research participants showed, in their responses, how this form of racism is not incidental but a structural phenomenon shaping daily life, professional environments, and educational policies. Therefore, Afrocentricity, as articulated by some participants, will force the actions to implement policies that will move Blacks from dehumanizing to humanizing from incapability to capabilities:

"The problem lies in the dehumanization of our people in most of the workplaces and schools, so we need to find a way to help even ourselves, as Blacks to believe in our identity, and it has to go beyond that then in our community and others trying to humanizing this. We have to have a way to think about that. If we can see the great deal of all of it. Then we can develop programs and the mindset and believe in every individual that we all have capabilities and the system can work to support those. I mean the way we think about Afrocentricity and how it should work or should function. The challenge I see here is how do we incorporate this in the policies, specially education policies and how do we implement those policies with that mindset, with Afrocentricity ideas and we believe in humanity as a core, believe that every student have the capability to succeed." (Mali – participant 16).

Research participants saw equity through a lens that deeply interrogates the historical and structural roots of

injustice. They argued that true equity requires centralizing Blackness and acknowledging the legacies of colonialism, exclusion, and intergenerational trauma. This perspective challenges superficial interpretations of equity that fail to consider systemic harm. The research participant's emphasis on trauma and history highlights that equity is not a neutral or generic concept but one embedded in social justice work that must actively dismantle oppressive legacies. This interpretation raises a critical question: Can institutional equity efforts that ignore these historical dimensions ever achieve meaningful change, or do they risk reproducing the very inequalities they claim to address? Looking at these colonial histories and their ongoing effects, the research participant moves beyond policy rhetoric to demand an approach that is reparative and transformative, not merely reformist.

"Equity, for me, is a way of treating people according to their needs. That's the case, then by centralizing blackness, then we are asking ourselves, what are the needs, what are the specific needs of blackness? How do we deal with this? How do we deal with the history of colonialism, discrimination, exclusion, and the middle passage and the kind of trauma and intergenerational trauma that is accumulating." (Sierra Leone – participant 10).

Participants critiqued conventional understandings of equity that conflict it with equality. There are structural disadvantages, such as lack of internet access or the need to work multiple jobs, that create barriers for Black students. This perspective directly contests colorblind frameworks and exposes the limitations of "one-size-fits-all" approaches often embedded in institutional practices. Research participant responses revealed the tension between equity as a principle and its implementation within Eurocentric dominated educational systems. This means that equity cannot exist without structural changes that account for lived realities shaped by racism and socioeconomic inequities.

"This is a Black student who comes from a family where he can't do homework, they don't even have internet, they don't even have their space to do it, or he is working two or three jobs, right. So, when it comes to the issue of equity and if equality, when you give them the same, you know, they are all submitting on the 21st right, but equity comes in when you say you are all submitting but this particular student, I'm giving him or her two weeks extra time to work on it. So, the idea is, is not trying to treat people equally. So, equity actually requires going beyond. The idea of "oh yeah, we want to treat everybody equal", no. Equity is about social justice." (Guinea Republic – participant 7).

In terms of discrimination, personal and collective experiences of Black people; being stuck in an employment system with a scarcity of chance to enjoy promotions even when they are overqualified. Research participants highlight persistent structural immobility, where Black professionals face systemic barriers that limit career advancement despite their qualifications. This is not an isolated experience, but a collective reality embedded in organizational practices that normalize racial inequities. Subtle, often unconscious, forms of racism shape workplace policies, hiring practices, and promotion pathways, rendering competence and excellence insufficient for advancement. Such structural constraints undermine meritocracy and reveal a gap between organizational diversity rhetoric and lived experience.

"Yet mobility in our workplace is not guaranteed, and it's all because of the tenants put in place by blatant racism, that even the perpetrators are not aware that they are exercising it." (South Africa – participant 4).

"But you come in and you see overqualified Black people, um, you know wanting more but no opportunity so even the way our organizations or structures um are created there's no room to move up anyway." (Burkina Faso – participant 2).

This was also the case in the post-secondary education systems; participants shared how anti-Black racism initiatives are utilized to uplift Black scholars in the academia in Canada. Initiatives about Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) brought as a solution to deal with underrepresentation of Blacks in workplaces to relate back to the three pillars of the UN IDPAD might be a good path; however, EDI initiatives do not address racism as they focus more on achieving diversity.

"So when it comes to equity diversity and inclusion initiatives at universities I think that these initiatives take away from the specific focus on anti-racism or anti-Black racism initiatives and so one of the things they different universities have done in terms of equity is that they've engaged in this process to hire Black professors cut across various faculties to deal with the underrepresentation of Black faculty members and on one hand that's a positive thing but it still doesn't deal with the issue of representation in administrative ranks such as what are the opportunities for Black faculty members across Canada to become deans or other senior administrators in the university. I think that and I can only speak to our equity diversity and inclusion initiative group that they've got to be cognitive that it's not just an issue of hiring more Black professors because it's one thing hiring Black professors but it's another thing in terms of understanding the challenges associated with being a Black professor in white dominated universities" (Benin Republic – participant 6).

4. Discussion

The significance of the results of our study is that Afrocentricity is present in Canada as concepts, as actions, and as lived experiences, which impact education, community engagement, government, and policy work. Afrocentricity is expressed as anti-racism, critical race theory, lived experiences perspectives, and critical anti-oppressive (Montgomery, 2022; Parris & Brigham, 2010; Wainwright, 2009). An observation in the results is the role that George Floyd's assassination played in forcing attention to the contributions of Black Lives Matters (Maynard, 2017) regarding the three pillars of the UN IDPAD which are recognition, justice and development. This corroborates with the idea that Afrocentric curriculum prioritizes culture, values, and history of people of African descent in promoting agency and self-determination (Asante, 2017; Verharen, 2000). Indeed, participants' narratives highlighted their multifaceted engagement with Afrocentric ideas, often rooted in long-standing personal and professional histories dating back to the 1980s and 1990s (Schiele, 1994; Akbar, 1984; Asante, 1988; Karenga & Carruthers, 1986). Many have been involved in African studies, Social Work, community organizing, and policy advocacy for decades, continuously evolving their practices to incorporate Afrocentric paradigms. Their approaches encompassed community engagement, storytelling, curriculum development, and systemic reform, all aimed at challenging dominant narratives that marginalize Black experiences (Parker, 2022; Dei, 2018; Pellebon, 2012). Several participants emphasized the significance of storytelling and lived experiences as powerful tools for reshaping perceptions, amplifying Black voices, and fostering understanding within and beyond their communities.

The UN ID PAD has been welcomed in Canada and served as an advocacy means to strengthen African descent people's contributions in curricula. The United Nation ID for People of African descent serves as an advocacy means to strengthen African/Black Canadian voices in education. For example, the recognition of Black History Month in Alberta in 2017 and more recently in 2024 the call for consultation with historians, educators, and the Black community by the Ontario Minister of Education to develop and include African/Black Canadian content in the curricula. These actions will contribute to addressing racism, discrimination and exclusion of the African/Black contributions to world and Canada's history, sciences, art, and culture in Canada (Dei, 1998; Antoine, 2018; Ridley-Padmore, 2020). Indeed, a recurring theme in our study was the emphasis on education -both formal and informal- as a vehicle for cultivating cultural pride and historical awareness. Participants have developed Afrocentric curricula, initiated community dialogues, and promoted culturally relevant Social Work practices that acknowledge the diversity and richness of African histories and diaspora experiences. These efforts often include addressing harmful stereotypes, confronting anti-Black racism, and advocating for policy changes at local, national, and global levels.

Equity, justice, anti-Black racism are roadblock to effect social changes (Lateef et al., 2022; Bernard & Smith, 2018; Gulson & Webb, 2013; Asante, 2003). They were articulated by participants as the exclusion of Afrocentric identities within the Canadian social work curriculum, including components such as the impact of biases on students' learning journeys and moving away from traditional teaching methods as they can be isolating for Black students conducive for example to higher rate of school drop off (Dei, 1996; Turner, 2023; Allen, 2010). Indeed, the findings revealed a nuanced understanding of Afrocentric practices, which prioritize community, collectivism, and cultural expression. Participants described how Afrocentric methods -such as community storytelling, mentorship, cultural celebrations, and collaboration- serve to reinforce identity and foster solidarity (Foggo, 2020; Ridley-Padmore 2020; Grant, 2018). These practices are intertwined with theoretical foundations rooted in anti-racism, critical race theory, and Africentric paradigms, guiding research and practice toward social justice and systemic transformation. The long-term engagement with Afrocentric principles underscores their significance as an ongoing journey of learning, activism, and community-building. It means that participants saw the need for a continued focus on implementing Afrocentricity within their educational, community, and government works and workspaces. Even if they mentioned experiencing a push back to the word Afrocentricity itself, explaining why they decide to use alternative perspectives like critical race theory and/or critical anti-oppressive. The pushback of the word 'Afrocentricity' aligns to the hegemonic views and threatening discourse towards the investment on developing anti-racist practices. Participants insisted that there is more nuanced exploration of how anti-racism continues to require centering Whiteness, also not differentiating between anti-racism and anti-Black racism (Mullings et al., 2021). Often Afrocentricity is used interchangeably with the term anti-racist, as it attempts to center a non-White perspective. Also, regardless of the focus on anti-racism, there is an underlying assumption that the pedagogy and material must respect Whiteness norms, objectivity, and definitions of what knowledge is, resulting in difficulty for implementing true transformational curricula (Dei, 2012; King & Swartz, 2016; Brathwaite, 2010).

Participants generally supported the UN IDPAD 94e's recommendations, emphasizing education, representation, curriculum reform, and systemic change. They stressed the importance of Afrocentric curricula across disciplines, increased Black leadership, and community-driven initiatives to achieve meaningful progress. Despite systemic challenges, there was optimism about collective efforts to foster racial equity, cultural pride,

and social justice, recognizing that systemic reform, community engagement, and ongoing advocacy are essential for transformative change. This also showed the necessity for the second UN ID PAD (2025-2034) which builds on the first decade (2015-2024). This second decade will allow us to implement actions against systemic racism while focusing on reparation as the cornerstone of recognition, justice, and development. For Afrocentric education in Canada, it means a continuing more strengthened engagement and actions to make the presence of African Canadian histories, culture, arts and sciences in curricula. For the Social Work discipline in Canada, on top of enhancing Afrocentric Social Work in curricula; this might be a selective or alone standing course. Furthermore, it means concretely the implementation of the recommendations formulated by the study supported by the Canadian Association of Social Workers and the Association of Black Social Workers about reparations for Social Workers of African descent (Este & Walmsley, 2022).

5. Limitations and Conclusion

There are several limitations that should be noted. The sample reflects the perspectives of Black scholars and practitioners who were already engaged with Afrocentricity and therefore may not represent the full range of viewpoints across Canada. The research does not capture francophone regions, rural communities, or Afro-diasporic groups who may conceptualize Afrocentricity differently. In addition, while the interviews provide deep insight, the geographic scope and number of participants limit broader generalizability. These limitations do not detract from the value of the findings but point to areas for future research, including comparative provincial analyses and studies that examine Afrocentricity in applied front-line or policy settings.

To conclude, the findings reveal an optimistic outlook grounded in collective action, education, and advocacy. Participants emphasized that increased representation, inclusive curricula, community participation, and policy reforms can catalyze meaningful change. They stressed that Afrocentric perspectives are not simply about celebration, but are essential to advancing social justice, restoring human dignity, and pursuing systemic liberation. Afrocentricity calls for fundamental transformation and the boldness to imagine new possibilities for Black communities. As Thomas Sankara reminds us:

“You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness. In this case, it comes from nonconformity, the courage to turn your back on the old formulas, the courage to invent the future. It took the mad men of yesterday for us to be able to act with extreme clarity today. I want to be one of those mad men... we must dare to invent the future.” (Thomas Sankara, 1985)

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