



The Integration Experiences of African Families in Ireland

By Liam Coakley and Piaras Mac Einri

2007



Funded by the European Refugee Fund

INTEGRATING IRELAND

The Immigrant Network

Vision:

“A just, diverse and inclusive Irish society that ensures the full participation and rights of migrants, immigrants, refugees and people seeking asylum.”

Mission Statement:

“Integrating Ireland is an independent network of community and voluntary groups working in mutual solidarity to promote and to realise the human rights, equality, and full integration of refugees, people seeking asylum, migrants and immigrants in Ireland”

Integrating Ireland was conceived as a means to ensure the lessons of other countries vis-à-vis the integration of ethnic minority groups, refugees or migrants into the social, economic and political spheres of a nation do not go unheeded. History shows that in most countries immigrant communities fall quickly to the bottom of the social ladder, working in menial jobs or on the black market, they are disenfranchised without a voice. Not surprisingly, social problems develop as the next generation grows up in a marginalized world where opportunity does not exist in a society where they do not have a positive identity.

Integrating Ireland aims:

- Develop the regional and national network infrastructure
- Advocate, lobby and raise public awareness about integration
- Develop the organisational capacity of Integrating Ireland

Through the provision of fora for networking and information sharing at national and regional level, training and direct support, and the development of common policy positions, Integrating Ireland seeks to support the community and voluntary sector working with Refugee, Asylum seekers, migrants and Immigrants. Thus enabling this sector in society to speak authoritatively and coherently on the issues relating to being a refugee, asylum seeker, migrant or immigrant in Ireland and prevent the negative experiences of other societies repeating itself in Ireland and ensuring the positive is transferred.

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FOREWORD

Much has been said for, against and on behalf on migrants in Ireland. Many an Irish person has defended her or his position on this subject by prefacing it with remarks that indicate that this phenomenon is a recent one that caught many Irish people by surprise, as it was a people-exporting nation rather than the opposite. Inherent in that type of defence is an admission that there is a lack of knowledge and information about the “new” people. That admission must be addressed with information for education. This report seeks to attend to that knowledge gap.

It is a pleasure for me to write a Foreword to this Report. First of all I would like to say how honoured I am to be associated to the invaluable work done by Integrating Ireland to promote the human rights, equality and full integration into Irish society of people seeking asylum, refugees, immigrants and migrant workers.

This report megaphones the voice of the immigrant and the migrant experience. It is an experience that might have resonance with more people when they recall the history of Irish migration and how those human fears and failures were overcome so that they could the remittances flowing to keep the home fires burning in their villages.

This report on Integration of African families is one of the first to highlight the early part of their journey into Irish society. It focuses on a wide variety of emotions that immigrants experience during their formative years in the country - different feelings of hope, anxiety, disappointment, success and satisfaction. No two immigrants are the same and neither are the challenges they face. Everyone has to experience their own trial and tribulations as they adapt both to an Irish way of life (and weather) whilst simultaneously infusing their personal experiences into the many different facets of Irish society. Although the experience of each is different there are common integration challenges that confront many African immigrants, some of which are positive and rewarding and others negative and discouraging. The fact is that African families have been immigrating to Ireland for more than a decade now and the stories of their experiences are only now being told.

This report attempts to do just this by looking at the experiences of 18 African families who have migrated to Ireland during the past ten years. The report describes their various integration hurdles and sets out a

challenge of its own, with regard to what aspects of future integration policy can be better implemented and managed. If Ireland is to be successful in its integration policies, it will need to carefully re-examine its asylum process, language provision, access to education and training, recognition of foreign based qualifications and experiences, employment opportunities and social services. What the report highlights is that there exists a need for a more coherent approach in addressing these.

I am convinced that this report will contribute to a better understanding of the challenges facing African families immigrating to and integrating in Ireland. I congratulate Liam Coakley and Piaras Mac Einri on a well researched report that articulates the voices of the voiceless so well. In doing so, they have not lost sight of its limitations but have raised higher hopes of a better understanding of the plight of so many. The plea is often made for policies to be developed on the basis of information and understanding, and not anecdotal evidence based on fear. I hope the findings and recommendations formulated in this document will inform and inspire planners, decision and policy makers in their work to create a just, fair and inclusive Irish society, like the one they hoped their forefathers had encountered.



Dr Vinodh Jaichand

Chair of Board of Integrating Ireland
Galway, 11 October 2007

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We would like to express our gratitude to University College Cork for the excellent work carried out by Dr Liam Coakley and Mr Piaras Mac Einri of the Department in undertaking this report. We really appreciate the dedicated manner with which they approached it and the professionalism shown throughout the process.

Integrating Ireland is also very grateful to all the members of the 18 African families that gave up an enormous amount of their time informing this research. Nothing would have been achieved without their participation. With respect, we pay tribute to their honesty, courage and sense of honour, in that they wanted to share their integration journey with others in the hope that what is good was experienced by all immigrants and what was bad, is changed so that none will have to experience it again..

Although the views expressed are those of the authors, we acknowledge the peer review support given to the publication of this report by Prof. Ronnie Munck (Dublin City University) and Dr Mary Gilmartin (UCD).

Integrating Ireland
October 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report examines the experience of African immigrants in Ireland. The research was undertaken in Dublin and Cork. 18 research dialogues were carried out. These research dialogues were highly qualitative in nature and a series of free-flowing datasets were produced, around a number of central themes.

A non-directive approach was taken. All data developed from this project comes from research participants themselves. Participants raised issues of importance to them, in whatever manner made sense to them, in whatever order. The methods used here and the rationale behind the choice of this methodology is an effort to avoid the production of data that is dominated by the questions chosen by an Irish born researcher.

Research participants showed themselves to be thoughtful and articulate commentators on their experiences of settling in Ireland. These immigrants have not mindlessly reacted to the experiences they have encountered but have been internalising and making sense of them in light of their own histories and the desires they have for their future lives in this country.

People tend to be realistic about their prospects in this country. However, many equally remember the keen sense of expectation they had on arrival. It is unsurprising therefore, that disappointment can be voiced when personal difficulties are recalled. This primary distinction arises again and again during the course of this research and should be borne in mind when reading the report. Immigrant groups have travelled to this country in the hope of finding a better life. This does not always happen.

Arrival

Many immigrants from Africa arrive in Dublin, apply for asylum and are dispersed out from the capital. This can be an unsettling experience, and the experience of personal hardship can be intense. However, immigrants are happy to have arrived in this country. Initial perceptions of Ireland tend to be idealised, but thinking back, research participants mostly remember associating feelings of i) safety and ii) opportunity with their hopes for life in this country.

Initial experiences tend to be strongly framed by a person's interactions with statutory service providers. People can be complimentary about these early interactions. Official help, combined with a willing non-governmental sector, was cited on numerous occasions and people felt that these service providers helped a lot in the initial stages of their lives in Ireland.

These positive experiences can serve to encourage migrants to look at the processes in their country of origin, evaluate their correctness anew, and reinforce the feeling that they had taken the correct decision to migrate to Ireland. Nevertheless, often extreme hardship has been experienced. Disorientation can be suffered by all. Some people can be overwhelmed by the need to interact with an advanced information-orientated society. Other people experience the pain of their separation from loved ones. This

reinforces the dislocations experienced as immigrants can often be missing even the most basic social support structures.

Initial memories are often drawn from the experiences gathered whilst living in direct provision. Life there can be challenging. Challenges may arise simply on foot of the uncaring actions of individual staff members or they may be more fundamental in nature. The loss of personal space is keenly felt and immigrants can feel belittled by the experience of living in cramped communal conditions. The loss of freedom is equally keenly felt.

In many ways, such difficulties could be said to be common to all migrant experiences but equally, this data shows that difficulties are inherent in the reception system in this country. Specific interventions are common. These can be effective in policing the immigrant system. They ensure that individuals are processed and that administrative standards are complied with. However, the deeper, more personal difficulties associated with the process of immigration are not generally addressed. Indeed, in many instances, far from receiving aid, immigrants encounter challenges and barriers that can reinforce the hardships encountered.

It is inevitable therefore, that many immigrants' initially idealised visions of Ireland tend to be reassessed and replaced by a more grounded view of life in this country, framed by personal experience. In this way, the experience of arriving in Ireland is marked by a number of tensions. Immigrants are happy, but are conscious of the sacrifices they are making to be here. They look forward with hope to a new life in an advanced post-industrial economy, especially for their children, but are wary of the quality of their reception. People appreciate the supports that are made available to help them settle in to a new life but become frustrated when difficulties are encountered.

Housing

The need to quickly secure an adequate standard of housing is placed at the top of most immigrants' hierarchies of need. This is especially so for people with dependent family members. In a general sense, people are happy to be living in Ireland and to be engaging with a European housing market. The housing stock in Ireland is recognised to be of good quality. Migrant perceptions are mixed however, and research participants commonly experience a pattern of multiple disadvantage whilst seeking to secure a satisfactory level of accommodation for their families.

The accommodation-search process is seen to be frustrating. Families can take some time to source suitable housing and when such housing is identified, difficulties can arise before people are even accepted as tenants. This constitutes a significant axis of disadvantage, not only in the housing market but also in society in general as people's freedom to exercise their right to move house is severely curtailed and the ability to exploit potential advantages that may arise is lessened in proportion.

The immigrants interviewed here predominantly live in the private rental sector and are often in receipt of Rental Allowances. The high price of accommodation here causes hardship. One family, who albeit are in receipt of rent assistance, has a combined monthly income of a little over €2,000 and a rent liability of €1,270. Another has a

monthly income of just over €1,500 but pays €870 in rent (also supplemented by rental assistance). It is unsurprising therefore that many find the need to pay rent stressful, that many people live under financial pressure, and that many rely on social welfare payments to offset some of this pressure.

At the most fundamental of levels, such a reliance on social welfare disadvantages people in the private rental market. It is well established that some private landlords, especially those operating outside the tax net, favour informal payment in order to avoid incurring a taxation liability. Many difficult interactions with private landlords were recounted during the interviews. More fundamentally however, a number of research participants were clear in stating that they experienced difficulties with the administration of social supports here. The requirement to pay a rental deposit is commonly problematic. For many, the lack of an adequate income stream makes it initially difficult to save the necessary money for a housing deposit. Such difficulties can be exacerbated significantly by difficulties experienced when interacting with the invariably Irish-born staff of statutory service providing organisations. It is felt that many such staff members can be more motivated to police compliance with a set of absolute regulations than recognising the real human difficulties that can arise from their actions. A lack of consistency between different staff members can exacerbate this experience and a number of people refer to inconsistencies experienced when interfacing with different members of staff or staff in different regions. Such discrepancies can cause further financial hardship, as it did in one interviewee's case, when he had to rely on a money lender operating in the informal economy. This family knew that this was not a sound course of action but felt that they had no other choice. Significant pressure was placed on the household finances as a result.

It is unsurprising, in this light, that most of the migrants interviewed during the course of this project hope to leave the private rental market in due course. Many hope to own their own home, but most realistically aspire to qualify for inclusion on the local council housing list and see this as their most likely route out of the private rental market, in the short to medium term.

As with almost every aspect of the housing market in this country this long-term housing option presents its own difficulties. The length of time needed to wait is certainly prohibitive. When combined with the high price of rent and the difficulties experienced when trying to find waged work, the slow-moving nature of the public-housing sector constitutes the single most difficult feature of the housing market going forward. Indeed, this combination of factors will almost certainly ensure that many immigrant families will remain accommodated in the private rental sector, supported by the social security system, in the short to medium term.

A pattern of involuntary welfare dependency can already be seen. That many immigrant families are motivated to move beyond this pattern of welfare dependency is not in doubt but this course is not an easy one to take and there is a clear need for planners and policy makers to consider the dynamics of this situation.

Social support

African immigrants recognise the presence of a multifaceted social support network in this country that is capable of delivering different social supports. In these terms, almost everyone interviewed here is mindful of the advantages that living in a European country like Ireland can bring. The organisation of society, the social support structures that are in place and the fact that statutory service providers are accessible to all 'classes' of the population are all recognised as positive aspects of life in this country.

Social welfare services, education, assisted housing, an approachable police force and free medical treatment are all commonly referenced by people who participated in this research and the presence of a system 'that works' encourages people to see Ireland as a country that is organised to provide for human needs. The medical card system in particular is often seen to constitute a progressive measure.

This appreciation of the advantages inherent in Ireland is brought especially to the fore when people take time to consider, in a comparative light, their experiences of medicine in their own countries of origin but most continue to recognise their trans-national identity. The difficulties encountered when interacting with primary service providers can enhance this pattern as while most recognise that such service providers are helpful, many difficulties have been experienced.

While the provision of services is generally regarded in a positive light, the administration of the system is regularly seen to be lacking. The extant organisational culture of work in Ireland creates problems and many research participants find various official application processes difficult to understand and the institutions themselves less than flexible in their approach. One interviewee outlines his frustrations when he states: "*You go to mister A, mister A will tell you a different story, you go to mister B mister B will tell you that he's not aware of what mister A told you*". A lack of confidence in the procedures in place to administer Ireland's system of social support inevitably arises from such negative personal experiences. Equally, while CWOs and staff in housing offices are deemed to offer a good service, many people relate unsatisfactory experiences that they had with staff. A strong sense of dissatisfaction is related to the fact that people feel that staff members may regularly fail to understand a person's requirements. More training of frontline staff is needed.

Better access to primary information would also help here but many people also report on unsatisfactory interactions they had with specific statutory service providers. An Garda Siochana for example, can be held in reasonably high esteem for example, but most people recount unsatisfactory interactions that they have had with them. Time taken to respond to callouts is regularly referenced here.

In any case, while welfare payments and interactions with employment/medical officers are valued by research participants, the vast majority of people in receipt of such assistance would prefer not to have to rely on it. This is reinforced by immigrants' appreciation of the fact that the Irish born population can often see them simply as welfare dependants and not as fully contributing members of Irish society. However, immigrants from Africa find it extremely difficult to move beyond welfare dependency. The difficulties immigrants experience whilst attempting to break into the waged labour market and their often low earning potential when in waged work is especially pivotal

and a bridging situation is required to help those who are willing to move off social welfare and into the realm of waged work.

Waged work

Many immigrants from Africa travel to this country in the express hope of engaging in waged work and providing for their families. In this way, the desire to succeed in the waged labour force is one of the corner stones of the immigrant experience in Ireland.

The increased spending power that comes with success in the waged labour force is valued by research participants but more than this, many hope that their activities in the waged labour force will serve as a base from which their families can prosper in future.

A range of nuanced personal issues are influential as well, and it would be a mistake to view the immigrant labour market in too narrowly defined economic terms. Research participants commonly take a rights-based approach and situate their desire to work in basic human terms. The need to feel valued is implicated here. In this way, people's hopes for a better life can be tied up with the idea of paid employment and work is therefore of fundamental importance to a person's own feelings of worth and happiness.

However, a difficult labour market exists for African immigrants in this country. The job search process can be particularly difficult. Many people refer to the fact that they have made many job applications but have not been successful. Equally, when employed, the immigrant labour market is vertically segregated and most immigrants interviewed here work in low status positions, irrespective of their qualifications and previous experience.

People who have come through the refugee/asylum system refer to the fact that issues of status have impacted on this experience. One research participant was eager to demonstrate that the length of time he spent waiting for permission to work eventually became a de-motivating factor in itself, while another is of the opinion that the time he spent waiting for permission to work ensured that opportunities for work were filled by other groups and that he was disadvantaged as a result.

A lack of success here can lead people to question their own worth, especially those who have families. Loss of status is experienced within the family unit and male research participants, the traditional authority figures in an African family, were particularly vocal about the impact that unemployment was having on their own sense of self-esteem and the impact that it has on both their children and on the power structures present within the family unit.

Research participants are also conscious of the potential message that is sent out to wider society. As an unemployed man from West Africa states, it is important to work to show that you are worthy of inclusion in society.

Research participants are frustrated with this perceived lack of success in the waged labour force.

The need to prove prior experience constitutes a real difficulty, as does attaining an adequate level of English. These are recognised challenges and most people attempt to address the issue and nullify the disadvantages that can accrue. Indeed, no sense of disquiet arises from the interviews in relation to such experiences. People expect to be

faced with such challenges and they are not deemed to be destructive in themselves. It is the cumulative experience of failure in the labour force that is destructive. In many instances, this experience quickly comes to define a person's interactions with Irish society and a discourse of inequality arises.

The African families who participated in this research are not passive actors, waiting for success to visit them, but rather are actively engaging in diverse strategies to try and ensure that they will secure employment in this country. Some people, when confronted with barriers to work, try to drive through them by force of will alone. However, most employ a series of specific strategies to offset frustrations experienced and to try and increase their attractiveness to employers. Some people favour volunteer work, but education is valued first and foremost. English language training and further education courses dominate here. Further education is particularly valued as a method of diversifying a person's skills-set and enhancing their prospects in the labour market.

Educational activity is also commonly valued for the benefits that can come to the wider family group and in particular for the opportunities that an education will give to children. Parents tend to see the importance of education in broad terms. School and schooling represent a key method of integrating and are central to parents' efforts to ensure that their children will be able to access the full range of societal resources placed at the disposal of a person in this country.

However, as in all other areas of activity, difficulties arise.

Immigrants find the financial pressures attached to studying difficult to bear. A raft of ancillary costs are also recognised. One participant, for example, cited the need to pay for childcare here. As such, it is important to note that the people interviewed here are not engaging in a facile pattern of educational activity but rather are doing so as part of their extended attempts to access gainful employment in this country and integrate into Irish society.

Adequate information about entry levels and requirements is not available to many and many encounter difficulties when seeking to demonstrate the worth of qualifications and learning already gained. Structures are in place in this regard in Ireland but such difficulties represent a continued and significant impediment to an individual's participation in further education.

The cost of education at third level is particularly prohibitive. Most people cannot afford to pay university fees. One participant for example, earns €1,500 per month after tax yet, on enquiring about the possibility of enrolling in her desired course in her local university she was told that she would require €5,000 per year to pay course fees. Unsurprisingly, in this instance, access to higher education remains aspirational only. She states *"I am working just to pay the rent and we are working to feed ourselves. I really want to go to school but I don't have the money"*.

Family

The family unit is the key social unit among this population sub-group. Immigrants tend to be very focused on their children and on the need to facilitate their children's lives in this country. One of the key attractions of living in Ireland is the fact that this country is perceived to be a safe location for children, where children have more

opportunities 'to advance' than they would have had in their parents' country of origin. People are happy to have a trans-national identity borne from the experience of life in two very different parts of the world but recognise that their children are less than likely to reverse the process of migration and are likely to have a trans-national identity that is firmly anchored in Ireland. Even children who were born outside of Ireland are seen to have the capacity to become more Irish than not. In many ways, people watch to see how their children are accepted by their peers and use this as a barometer of progress. When children are happy and seem to be benefiting from the experience of being in Ireland, so too are parents.

Parents are willing to forego on other desires in order to facilitate this pattern of successful integration for their children. One family have experienced a pattern of low level social incivility in their residential neighbourhood and have considered moving to another part of the city but have decided to stay in their present residential location because they feel that their daughter is benefiting from the relationships she has forged in school and the social networks that she is beginning to develop.

Difficulties do arise. The nature of family life is different in this country to its counterpart in Africa. Many research participants draw attention to the extended nature of the African family. This issue is important in conceptual terms, and immigrants from Africa can feel isolated in this country without this social structure to draw upon. Different parenting patterns are also highlighted and immigrants from Africa regularly become exercised by the presence of what they perceive to be lax parenting standards in this country and the resultant negative down-stream effects that may accrue for their children. This is generally presented as a negative aspect of life in Irish society and one that these families are keen to avoid replicating. Interestingly, while parents tend to voice their dissatisfaction with this pattern, most clearly recognise that they are raising their children in a different environment to that in which they grew up and accept that these different norms will inevitably have an impact on their children.

Be this as it may however, the experience of family life remains strongly couched in trans-national terms. People are committed to Ireland but have a strong sense of looking back. This maybe manifested as something simple. Some Nigerians for example regularly watch Ben TV. Equally however, many immigrants engage in more fundamentally important trans-national practices and regularly send money back to family members still living in their country of origin. This is one of the strongest patterns to come out of this research. Immigrants from Africa, who may often be experiencing financial hardship in this country, continually seek to support the lives of their relatives in their country of origin.

This responsibility isn't straight-forward and tensions can arise, particularly in financial terms. While they continue to value the primary familial relationship, some immigrants feel that they are placed under undue pressure to maintain this relationship through a pattern of financial support when the conditions of their lives cannot sustain it. People are imbued with status by virtue of the fact that they have emigrated from their country to a western European economy but they are aware of the fact that the reality of their lives in Ireland does not necessarily tally with the perceptions of their relatives in their country of origin. Steps taken by people here include engaging in work on the informal

labour market. One participant has engaged in this type of work specifically in an effort “*to get possibility to help those who are in your home country*” (JP8).

This realisation may lie at the very heart of the African experience in Ireland. “*You cannot throw away what is from Africa*”. Equally however, most people are open to a multi-faceted construction of who they are and most therefore recognise that they cannot live in Ireland and remain untouched by the experience. People can feel very much in-between two worlds.

Friends

Most people interviewed here can point to a raft of satisfactory interactions they have with Irish born people. However, people socialise primarily with members of their own community and a free-ranging social activity pattern that spans all the available public spaces at an immigrant’s disposal does not come to light. Indeed, many people feel that the full range of Irish social spaces are not placed at the disposal of immigrants and social outlets are limited.

In many ways, this may simply be reflective of a wider migrant experience. Social patterns that can extend towards the experience of mutually supporting friendship are difficult to establish outside defined spheres of activity anyway but they are inherently more difficult to establish from a position of difference. Many people refer to the efforts that they have made to interact with Irish born people but feel that these efforts often go unrewarded.

A range of factors, such as the pace of life in this country may be influential. One interviewee certainly states that he does not know many Irish born people and goes on to contextualise this experience in terms of the impersonal manner in which society has evolved by saying “*in this country if you are working you just from your house to your car from your car to work you don’t know what is in mind, here is not like Africa*”.

The dominant position occupied by the public house is influential. Lack of money may also be a barrier. Engaging in a ‘full’ social pattern can be an expensive thing to do, especially for people who may be living on a limited income, especially if childcare has to be paid for as well.

However, more difficult issues arise as well and one has to ask whether the experience of being black in Ireland is influential in this context. A number of people refer to their sense of being evaluated whilst in public spaces such as public houses. This experience can be very subtle or it can take the form of overt discrimination. A number of participants feel that door staff can discriminate against immigrants from Africa.

Of course, some people do enjoy a wide-ranging social pattern. Pubs and clubs are frequented and people attend cafes and sporting fixtures but the home is dominant. The homes of fellow countrymen and women are most commonly used by the people who participated in this research. Community groups and EMLOS tend to meet in this type of location and a significant social pattern can be attached. Religious groups are firmly implicated here as well. People socialise after services, in the homes of other community members or during specially organised prayer gatherings.

One person feels that this spatially constrained pattern can be explained in terms of a lack of opportunity when he states that “*we don’t have a space where we can go, meet and talk, except when there’s an event like a birthday or wedding you can see people, otherwise there is no way you can easily go, see and chat with people*”.

The geography of this particular issue is worthy of far more significant consideration.

Racism and social exclusion

Almost every person spoken to here has experienced difficulty of one sort or another and all are able to recount second-hand stories about the often extreme difficulty experienced by family, friends and acquaintances in this country. It would be very easy in such circumstances for an individual to immediately ascribe the difficulties experienced to the presence of a racist ideology, but this does not happen. We find no rush to adopt a cult of victimhood among these research participants.

This does not nullify the experience. Nearly everybody interviewed here referred to their experience of personally abusive incidents where their skin colour/ethnicity/nationality was used as a weapon against them. This can be especially common during stressful or confrontational interactions.

A number of incidents took place whilst research participants were driving a car. People experience such difficulties whilst looking for accommodation. Racially motivated experiences are seen to take place in the work place as well, and exclusionary practices are particularly common in public spaces such as public houses and nightclubs. Equally, many people feel uncomfortable using public areas such as bus stations. At another level, some people feel that they have been the victims of institutional forms of racism when seeking to interact with a range of statutory service providers.

While most immigrants are likely to have experienced this type of difficulty, most seem equally happy to internalise it, make sense of its root causes, avoid feeling like a victim and move on. A number of key discourses come to light. The immigrants interviewed during this research cope with the experience of difficulty here by rationalising it. The people who are seen to be displaying racist tendencies are regarded with some disdain. The opinions they voice and therefore they themselves are seen to i) betray a lack of experience in the world, or ii) lack basic intellectual ability. Conversely, research participants tend to take ‘the high moral ground’.

A potentially more destructive, but less overt set of experiences also comes to light. Many people, even those who feel that they themselves have not been the victim of racist thinking, state that they have been made conscious of their skin colour/ethnicity whilst in public space but could not identify the exact cause of this experience. Certainly, no one violent or abusive incident needs to be experienced. Rather, the people who report on such feelings tend to state that they felt as if they were being evaluated by the population as a whole. This equates with an incipient sense of racism lurking beneath the surface of daily life. Such feelings can best be conceptualised in terms of ‘the gaze’ and are most commonly experienced in public space.

Many people can recount the experience of subtle social exclusion that comes when one’s difference is highlighted in an abusive or violent manner. However, people can

also feel excluded from society without having experienced an overt form of racially motivated discrimination or abuse and when taken together, both the overt experiences and the more subtle patterns combine to ensure that an appreciation of exclusion is reinforced among the people who participated in this research.

Some thoughts on the future

Research participants commonly feel that they and their communities have been making significant efforts to integrate into Irish society. Most people accept that the incoming population should move towards embracing Irish patterns. However, responsibilities are recognised to exist with both the incoming and receiving populations. Irish society needs to reciprocate and provide these often quite marginalised groups with the economic, cultural and social infrastructure needed. In many instances, this infrastructure is not yet present in this country.

Many immigrants certainly feel that an unfair onus is placed on them in this regard and that more should be done to ensure that integration can occur. Work dominates, and is regarded as essential to integration. Consequently, those who have not been successful in their search for work see this absence as a strong impediment to integration. This concern is linked to the cost of living in this country and in particular to the prospect of owning your own house and therefore having a material stake in society.

Other considerations may have a more philosophical basis. Many immigrants are conscious of the need to engage in other patterns that may allow them to contribute and therefore to feel as if they are progressing in Ireland.

Summary of conclusions and recommendations

The trans-national quality of many immigrant experiences must be embraced by Irish society if any real sense of integration and interculturalism is to be realised. Above all other things, an increased engagement with the reality of racism is required. The mass media has a role to play here, as do educational providers.

The nature of the housing market and people's limited ability to engage with it constitute a source of significant difficulty. Most immigrants hope to move away from assisted living at some point in the future, but the high price of housing in Ireland dictates that much immigrant accommodation will continue to be sourced from the private rental market in the short to medium term. Home ownership is viewed as being merely aspirational for many. Local authority administered social housing and affordable housing schemes are recognised to offer the best opportunity to move away from the private rental sector.

- Informed specialist assistance in the form of a dedicated support office would constitute a useful intervention.
- The potential for social unrest must not be overlooked. A clear pattern of research needs to be instituted.

Immigrants from Africa are strongly motivated by their desire to secure work in the waged labour force. A difficult labour market exists, however. The job-search process

is particularly difficult. Feelings of self-worth are affected and people feel excluded. The recognition of qualifications and experience is of pivotal importance.

- Immigrants who do not have sufficient skills are disadvantaged in the labour force. Schemes such as the ‘flexi-work’ schemes that enable training interventions to be structured around organised release into the labour force may constitute a useful intervention here.
- Along with the recognition of qualifications, the verification of experience and experience is of paramount importance. A resource that would enable potential employers to evaluate work experience would constitute a useful intervention here. Existing expertise in the provision of automated information about the labour market such as that held by FAS, may be harnessed to good effect here.
- A pattern of internship/mentorship would be useful, especially in light of the fact that many African immigrants have displayed a willingness to volunteer in other arenas. FAS seems ideally placed in this regard. This organisation’s ‘One Step Up’ programme could be used as a rough template for such an intervention.

School and schooling are important. Diverse patterns of need are present. The school system has been moving towards a recognition of the increasingly intercultural milieu in which Irish education is delivered. Targeted interventions are common and policy and planning is in place. Teachers are undoubtedly over burdened however, and the supports are not in place to aid their professional development. More continuous professional development is required.

- Children’s education must be increasingly conducted in an intercultural manner and teachers must be provided with the core professional training to deliver such intercultural education in an ongoing manner.
- Access to information is vital. More leaflets, in a multilingual format, need to be produced. These leaflets must be made widely available.
- Access to the third level sector needs to be examined as a matter of priority.
- Full access to educational grants should be granted to all those with status.

Social welfare payments, assistance with housing and ‘the medical card’ are particularly valued. Difficulties come to light and the administration of Ireland’s system of social support is held in particularly low regard. The organisational culture of work in Ireland is not deemed to be helpful and research participants find various official applications processes difficult to understand, the institutions themselves less than flexible in their approach and frontline staff occasionally unhelpful. Inconsistency is also experienced and is deemed to be unhelpful.

- Comprehensive intercultural training interventions are needed for all front-line staff. Frontline staff must be sensitive to immigrant need and be trained to deal with the potentially difficult situations that can arise. There is an absolute need for people to come away from an interaction with a service provider and not feel as if they have been disadvantaged on foot of their race, ethnicity or migrant biography.

Ireland is an information-led society. Access to information and the ability to internalise and use that information is fundamental to a person's use of the resources in place. Many immigrants feel that this information is difficult to come by. Much relevant information is readily available but there is a clear and pressing need for all types of pertinent official information to be stored in a user-friendly manner and to be made easily accessible. While costs would be significant, a centralised service would be useful here.

- Integrating Ireland should use its existing profile and expertise to lobby for the creation of such a national repository.

The primacy of the family must be recognised. The need to operate outside the support structures provided by the extended family was certainly identified as a source of difficulty in Ireland.

- Childcare is often provided informally. If the potential of immigrants is to be harnessed in full, a more complete approach to the provision of such services is needed. Family reunification would address some of these issues but this is unlikely to occur. A clear need therefore exists for affordable childcare to be provided.

Different social patterns exist in Ireland and Africa. This can be an unsettling experience and one that inevitably impacts on immigrants' social/friendship patterns in this country. Immigrants feel that they have made a conscious effort to interact with Irish-born people but very few feel that they have been successful in this endeavour. The interactional patterns uncovered here are dominated by a small number of central places. The home occupies a strong position. This is a concern. Irish society cannot allow immigrants to be pushed away from core social activity spaces. Specific measures are needed to ensure that people feel able to interact with others freely. Free access to society's public spaces will be required.

- Initiatives should be put in place to encourage immigrants to make more use of social spaces. A start here would be the introduction of clear sanctions to be used against staff who discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity.
- Initiatives such as Show Racism the Red Card are useful interventions. Sporting clubs and organisations should be encouraged to reach out to new Irish communities and offer incentives to engage with their core activities.
- 'Soft integration' interventions such as intercultural sports tournaments should continue to be encouraged.
- Planning interventions may be useful. Many immigrant groups meet in marginal locations. Interventions that would allow such groups to claim space in central locations would increase their visibility and bring people into core social spaces at key times.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The management of immigration and integration is rapidly becoming a policy priority in this country. In Ireland, as in other ‘new migration countries’ in the European Union, this challenge is complicated by the fact that the integration of immigrant groups is occurring in a society that has previously been a region of emigration. Such societies typically lack the legal and policy infrastructures, funding, service provision and migrant activism found in more mature immigration societies (Coakley and MacEinri, 2007). Furthermore, because immigration is such a recent and dramatic phenomenon, it could also be argued that this country lacks the cultural and experiential background needed to best address the challenges posed by the presence of a multiethnic and multicultural society in this country.

Through this project, we seek to foster the development of pro-integration policies aimed at combating racism and discrimination and strengthening inter-culturalism by providing primary evidence of African immigrants’ experiences of life in Ireland.

1.2 Recent immigration to Ireland

Immigration has only recently become a significant issue in Ireland. However, large numbers of immigrants have arrived in this country over the past decade or so and as a consequence, the population of this country is more ethnically diverse in nature than at any other time (Watt and McGaughey, 2006). In some ways, this reflects wider European patterns, but in Ireland, this experience has been significant at a level beyond the experiences of many of our European counterparts. The onset of mass immigration constitutes the single most significant axis of socio-cultural change that has occurred since the advent of mass industrialisation and urbanisation in the middle of the 20th century.

The arrival of relatively large numbers of asylum seekers/refugees in the late 1990s first brought this changing pattern to the attention of the public at large. Before this, nearly all those who came here were ‘programme refugees’, for example persons admitted under Ireland’s participation in the UNHCR refugee resettlement programme. Since the late 1990s however, large numbers of individual immigrants have become visible in Irish contexts. Of late, most of these come from locations in the EU10, but significant numbers of immigrants from the continent of Africa have also come to this country in the last 10 years.

The total number of African people resident in Ireland was placed at 35,326 on census night, 2006 (cso.ie/statistics). People from West Africa feature particularly strongly here but immigrants from many different parts of the continent are present, sometimes in significant numbers.

A number of different categories of person are present. Persons granted full refugee status are common as are: i) people admitted, normally for permanent settlement, under the UNHCR resettlement programme, ii) programme refugees admitted for temporary or permanent settlement under Section 3 of the Refugee Act, 1996 and iii) people granted leave to remain i.e. persons who may not meet the full conditions needed to

qualify for full status under the 1951 Convention but who may, for a variety of reasons, nonetheless be granted leave to remain in the State. The largest sub-group here are parents of Irish-born children who have been allowed to remain following the Supreme Court decision of 2003.

While immigration from Africa is clearly not at the level of immigration from the EU10, the presence of these 35,000 people demands the attention of policy makers and planners. Because of the organised and pre-approved nature of arrivals in earlier times and the relatively limited numbers involved, it was possible to implement an approach based on advance planning, the provision of relatively comprehensive support services and a minimal impact on the host society and on service providers. However, Irish society has been shown to be unprepared for the larger numbers who have been arriving in the last 10 years and this country's immigration policies and practices have been overburdened as a result. While individual targeted initiatives have been common, and indeed highly successful on occasion, there has been a lack of strategic planning, a shortfall in funding and a lack of reliable evidence upon which to base future approaches (Mac Einri, 2006).

This fact has not gone unnoticed by Irish planners and policy makers, who have become increasingly interested in this phenomenon and who are now actively engaging with the reality of planning for a multi-cultural Ireland. Support for applied research is gradually coming on stream and an engagement with the development of evidence-based policy is to be seen (see, for example, Coakley, 2006). Without such information, agencies and policy makers will be unable to provide appropriate and effective service delivery to this growing population or to include these groups in their plans and policy making for the future.

1.3 Project Rationale and Objectives

This project seeks to highlight the experiences of immigrants from the continent of Africa in Ireland in the hope of informing evidence-based policy in the area. This impulse is not new. Many previous studies were similarly motivated. However, more often than not, previous studies sought to come to an understanding of the issues based on information garnered from surveys organised around a set series of questions to be asked. This present project is not based on such a survey. While we have operated around a central spine of broadly defined topics, all data produced during this project comes from the research participants themselves, who raised issues of importance to them, in whatever manner made sense to them, in whatever order. This is an important issue and it lies at the centre of the project. We are conscious of the fact that many survey-style methods can be so strongly anchored in the extant knowledge-base of the researcher that they run the risk of simply reinforcing set patterns and not uncovering new insights into the question under consideration. The methods used here and the epistemological rationale behind the choice of these methods seeks to avoid this tendency and allow the voice of the immigrant to be heard properly, not filtered by the questions chosen by an Irish born researcher.

The immigrant families interviewed during the course of this project have proven themselves to be thoughtful and articulate commentators on the experience of settling in Ireland. As the various commentaries used here will show, these people are not

mindlessly reacting to the experiences they encounter but are commonly internalising and making sense of them in light of their own histories and the desires they have for their future lives in this country. This primary recognition lies at the heart of the project. All examinations included in this project are built on immigrants' own understandings of the issues and not simply on an Irish-born researcher's analysis of events recounted by immigrants.

Our objectives are:

- To allow the voices of African families describe the experience of settling in Ireland.
- To highlight how immigrants from Africa internalise their experiences in Ireland and use these patterns to inform our understanding of the need that exists among this population.
- To consider the challenges and obstacles remaining in the way of African integration in Ireland.
- To highlight areas of ongoing difficulty for African immigrants in Ireland.

1.4 Research design

A series of detailed case study type methods are used in this research. 18 interactions took place with African families and research participants were paid €50 for their time. These interactions typically took between 2.5 and 4.5 hours to complete, sometimes spread over two visits. On average these yielded two to three hours of taped conversation and a series of detailed, highly qualitative research dialogues were produced. In our opinion, the use of such qualitative methods allows more insight into immigrants' experiences of Ireland to be generated than if more wide-ranging quantitative methods were employed (see Phelan and Kuon 2005, for example).

Families originating from the continent of Africa were targeted here and interviews were conducted in each research participant's home, in their native language. These interactions were conducted primarily by the research team but, even though we are aware of the dangers associated with the use of interpreters in work of this type of work, interpreters were used on occasion.

While an engagement with issues of absolute representation was not central to this research design, these interactions took place in both urban and rural contexts in different parts of the country. In so doing we sought to engage in a pattern of theoretically sound respondent selection and not in a pattern of pseudo-randomised selection.

Methodology

Drawing upon particular insights developed by researchers working in oral history and life narrative research, migrants' experiences of life in Ireland are placed at the centre of this project. The research is therefore framed by our desire to use "the actual voices of migrants" to uncover the "layers of meaning beyond what is available in a written text" (Devlin-Trew, 2005, p.2). As Schoenberger (1991) states, one of the attractions of such oral data is that it can provide a more personal and subjective perspective on social processes than information gathered using more structured means. More than this however, as we sought to ground the experiences of immigration in the wider social

and cultural realities of Ireland in the 21st century, the data gathered needed to have a wider resonance. We needed to access the personal experience of immigration, but also we needed to be able to contextualise these experiences in the wider setting of 21st century Ireland as a whole. The use of such detailed research dialogues allowed this to happen. These research dialogues are free flowing in nature, around a central core. Research participants are given space to tell their own stories, in their own terms and each dialogue was recorded to preserve the spontaneous nature of each exchange.

The qualitative nature of this research is pivotal on two levels:

- The dynamics of each research dialogue was preserved, through recording. This allowed for a nuanced analysis of the data to be carried out. As Anderson and Jack (1991) state, interview-type data is produced on a number of levels. On the surface, interviewees may impart perspectives that reflect dominant ideologies. On closer analysis however, often contradictory perspectives are imparted in a more subtle manner. Only qualitative approaches that approach field research in a ‘deep’ manner can access these more subtle dialogues and allow the researcher to “listen in stereo, receiving both the dominant and muted channels” (Anderson and Jack, 1991).

In our opinion, this quality is especially important in research that seeks to document the integration experiences of migrants from Africa as much of the data produced will inevitably outline experiences and perceptions that may lie outside the initial expectations of an Irish-born researcher.

- This type of qualitative research valorises the fact that events in a life do not take place in a vacuum and therefore must be seen as part of a process, often developing over a long time. Investigators who utilise such an approach therefore see even extraordinary events such as migration as part of a life sequence that takes the more ‘everyday’ events preceding and succeeding them into account. As a consequence, a broader span of personal history contextualising life-choice is more inherent in narratives constructed using this technique than if other interview-style methods are used. In so doing, as Halfacree (2004, p.241) states, we will seek to “tease out the contours and textures of migration within the lives of the people concerned”, to see the event in the context of the life. It is this wider range of stories gathered that is important in the present research, as this framework also allowed for each unique life sequence to be seen in its socio-historical and geographical context.

Narrators’ experiences and their own interpretations of those experiences were the focus of maximum effort. In so doing, we sought to gain an understanding of complex social events such as integration through the eyes of the individuals concerned, and set these understandings against what is known about the wider social, historical and geographical dynamics of the issue at hand.

1.5 Limitations of the research

This project is based on a small sample of deeply qualitative interactions. The research team is conscious of the fact that this small size may be seen, by some, to constitute a weakness in the research.

A diverse population of African immigrants is present in Ireland. Any accurate portrait of this population may necessarily be strengthened if those who participated in the study can be said to be ‘typical’. Equally, a report may be weakened, in the eyes of some, if it is not possible to make such a claim of representativeness.

In the past, probability-style sampling methods have been used to produce large, randomly constructed samples and as representative a picture as possible was built of the topic under consideration, subject to quantifiable and acceptable margin of error. Such studies tend to be wide-ranging in nature (indeed they draw their validity from this fact) but the depth of each interaction is necessarily compromised in favour of the breath of the project as a whole. Within reason, a researcher cannot conduct very detailed interactions across such a large sample and still hope to be able to process the nuances uncovered within a reasonable timeframe. As a result, such sampling methods were neither valued nor feasible in this instance. This project is built on different foundations. Here, the depth of the primary interaction is valorised over all other concerns. Highly detailed dialogues are produced. These inevitably required a significant amount of time to analyse. In a practical sense, this requirement effectively meant that only a very small number of interactions could be accommodated within the parameters of the study.

Two issues do arise however.

- The small size of the sample and the fact that the target population was in many ways unknowable to the researchers starting out necessarily meant that the project team had to follow a compromise method when selecting participants. Rather than being ‘randomly’ selected, research participants were targeted in a purposive manner and a rough quota system was harnessed to ensure that the people participating in the study were illustrative of the types of people likely to make up the African population in this country. For example, this purposive sampling was geographically informed and people from many different parts of the African continent were included here. Gatekeeper and potentially gatekeeping organisations had to be used to gain initial introductions. Some snowballing then occurred. Most of the people interviewed were either in contact with immigrant groups in Ireland or were contacted by people who had an association with these groups. In this respect, the sample is open to the claim of being self-selecting in nature and the research team cannot with any degree of certainty claim that the totality of the immigrant experience is contained here. For example, it may be that there are groups of immigrants from Africa who are isolated by virtue of culture or personal difficulty and who do not have contact with the immigrant organisations active in this country.

In view of the above, an engagement with absolute representation was not of central concern. Rather, the approach followed was used as it was deemed to offer the most intellectually honest method of engaging with issues of respondent selection, given our initially imperfect understanding of the nature of our target population. The sampling method used here is thus best described as a pattern of sound theoretical respondent selection within the parameters set by the need to produce a deeply rooted dataset rather than an engagement with

notions of absolute representation. This approach constitutes as strong a base from which to proceed as was possible in this context.

- The qualitative interview method used here is reasonably unstructured in nature. This is the key strength of the method. However, all dialogues are therefore an expression of each research interaction and replicable types of data do not exist across the data set. One person may be motivated to talk in great detail about a set of experiences that are influential in his/her life but the same set of issues may barely be touched upon by anyone else. To be true to the method used and to the strengths that are inherent in the method, each research participant was necessarily encouraged to follow their own thought processes and often quite divergent conversations arise. These personal stories lie at the core of the project but some may find the nature of the excerpts unsettling in their individuality.

It is very difficult to counter such claims. All we hope is that the explanatory power of the method is discernable in the text.

1.6 Ethical Considerations

The deeply personal nature of the primary research dialogue means that the issue of ethics is not a small one. In the past, minority ethnic communities in Ireland have been subject to ‘top-down’ research focused on the needs of the state, and not their own empowerment. Some in particular will have been over-researched. We are particularly conscious of this issue and of the problem of ‘research fatigue’ that goes with it.

We recognise that this issue can only be addressed at a real level if truly participative methods are harnessed. Unfortunately, such methods are expensive to conduct in the field and were not possible within the budgets assigned to this project. However, we did seek to demonstrate that the dialogues conducted as part of this project were not situated in a survey style method where the data produced is moulded by the questions asked. Rather we let people speak, in their own time, in their own words, whilst making connections that make sense to them. In this manner, we hoped to produce a person-centred research dialogue that was moulded, in its entirety, by the research participants themselves.

With this in mind, this research project sought to treat the research as a public good, in which the concern to maintain academic standards and rigour was matched by high levels of engagement with the people themselves.

1.7 Report structure and chapter outline

African immigrants’ experiences of arriving in Ireland are outlined in *chapter two*. While this migratory pattern can be unsettling, it is equally informed by the belief that life will be better in Ireland than in the immigrant’s country of origin. Discourses of safety and opportunity are particularly influential here and these tend to be expressed most firmly in terms of the family and anchored in the trans-national experience. Frustrations can be common. People are found to be keen to ‘put their best foot forward’ and therefore try to avoid complaining, but difficulties are outlined. The experience of living in direct provision is seen to be particularly difficult.

Issues that rank highly on a person's hierarchy of need are examined in *chapter three*. Access to adequate housing and social support services is considered. The difficulties experienced whilst searching for accommodation are outlined in some detail. The price of housing is seen to be significant. A pattern of welfare dependency is uncovered but most immigrants hope to move away from assisted living at some point in the future. The availability of social supports such as social welfare and assisted housing is valued, particularly when seen in trans-national terms. Some significant challenges encountered whilst interfacing with service providers are outlined.

Economic inclusion is the single most significant requirement for an immigrant family arriving in Ireland. The difficulties facing immigrants as they try to achieve this are examined in *chapter four*. People are highly motivated to work in the waged labour force but a difficult labour market is seen to exist. The job-search process can be particularly difficult and research participants refer to number of strategies they use to offset this experience of difficulty. Education is deemed to be very important.

A different type of issue is considered in *chapter five*. The discussions contained in this chapter seek to examine the interactions a person has with his/her family and 'friends'. These are seen to be important elements that build towards a pattern of 'soft' integration in this country. The family is seen to be nuanced in nature. Contacts with family 'back home' draw people back to their country of origin but parents' hopes and desires for their children are of pivotal importance in pulling people more firmly towards their place in Ireland and in Irish society. Discretionary contacts with friends are seen to take place mostly within the immigrant community and a constrained geography of friendship is uncovered.

The discussions contained in *chapter six* contend that African immigrants can experience social exclusion on a number of levels. This can be particularly destructive when experienced as part of a racist discourse. Research participants are seen to be balanced in their views and do not rush to adopt the cult of victimhood but the multi-faceted experience of racism is illustrated.

Immigrants' own commentaries on the process of integration are outlined in *chapter seven*. People recognise that this is a two-way process but equally feel that Irish society has not been doing enough to smooth the path to integration in this country.

CHAPTER 2: ARRIVAL IN IRELAND

2.1 Introduction

Most of the immigrants who participated in this research arrived in Dublin, applied for asylum and dispersed out from the capital in due course. Some refer in passing to the experiences they had whilst travelling to this country. Indeed, two people specifically refer to the fact that they were trafficked across international borders. However, most were reluctant to talk about their journey to Ireland and prefer to focus on the experience of arriving in Ireland. This was disappointing but it was not unexpected, and the research team must necessarily respect these omissions.

2.2 Arrival in Ireland and hopes for the future

Arrival in Ireland was an unsettling experience for many but it is clear from the outset that people were happy to be in this country.

Initial perceptions of Ireland are verbalised in the most basic of terms. Thinking back, these African immigrants can remember associating feelings of i) safety and ii) opportunity with their hopes for life in this country. LC1 remembers his arrival in Ireland in the following terms¹. He states: *“I am happy. There is future ahead for my children. They are not going to remain this way. It is an experience for us as Africans to build up better life”*. He goes on to contextualise this statement by saying *“in Ireland, there is things you enjoy. Number one you have freedom, freedom of speech, democracy is existing, democracy is not existing in Africa. Ireland is good, that is why we are going to Ireland”*. LC2, JP1 and LC3 all articulate their initial perceptions of Ireland in a similar fashion.

“I hear people talking and you know, with me I can be in my home and I can feel safe, for me and my children at any time, until now there is no psycho people, there is no weapon out and I think is better like that” (LC2)

“I think I was happy. I was happy because there, I have moved away from a country where I felt in danger. I was now very far. And I said to myself that this country was a democratic country so there was safety. So I came in a democratic country, a country I would find safety I needed. So it was a big joy for me to leave CAR and be in Ireland. The feeling on the first day was happiness, happiness really” (JP1)

“You can’t even compare this place to Africa, to Nigeria, because you are safe here, there you stay in your house and you don’t have any money they will burst into your house and shoot you off, you can’t sleep with you door open, you don’t have any money, will rob you anyway. I don’t miss them, I don’t even miss Nigeria at all, I’m Ok, I don’t have money but I can feed myself, I can sleep” (LC3)

These statements are important. They show us that the experiences of African immigrants cannot be understood in isolation but must instead be seen in trans-national terms. Even though people were unwilling to talk about the process of migration, it would thus be wrong to seek to understand the experience of coming to Ireland without

¹ In the interests of anonymity, research participants’ names are not used in this report. Excerpts are identifiable only on the basis of interviewer’s initials and a respondent number

first noting the impulse that brought people here. This impulse is invariably anchored in the experience of hardship in a person's country of origin.

Some people refer to political difficulties, others focus on the daily inequalities encountered, while others still cite broadly economic reasons for coming to Ireland. However, all are clear in their desire to find a better way of life. As JP 5 states "*in comparing the two countries (Ireland and his country of origin) I would say that basic needs are easily met here; in Africa, you have to fight to meet them. That is the big difference*".

This desire to find a better, safer way of life tends to be articulated regularly in terms of family and children. JP5 refers explicitly to his initial memories of being in Ireland while LC1 makes a more general statement when they state, respectively that:

"I found it good. It was in summer; the hostel was heated. It was impeccable because I was living in peace and there were good future perspectives (sic), especially for my children" (JP5).

"most of the country today, when you watch the news you see war news, like where I am from – Africa, war, everyday, practically the system is happening there, carrying a gun around. Not, nothing like that in Ireland. Since I have been in Ireland the most, Ireland is a place was, which there is man's future, he can plan future, for his children and for himself, because the way they do things to themselves they take everybody equal, everybody equal in Ireland. They don't take one as a slave, like here what I'm happy over both the children are educated, they have go to school, to have education. I'm happy over this" (LC1).

The initial migrant experience can therefore serve to idealise the destination country in the mind of the immigrant. LC2 gives a clear example of this tendency when she states "*I say Ireland is the greatest country. Only the weather, if you change that we will be happy*". LC6 further illustrates this feeling with the following memory:

"We're in the bus station in, and me and Roger saw the picture of a valley and we said to you (to his mother) is that Ireland? And we were like, whoa! You should have seen this place man, it looked like a slice of paradise".

"For us it was a perfect timing to come to Ireland. I mean we adapted very well to the wilderness. It was in-between, it was actually, it actually was, I was 12, Roger was 11, 1994 that summer was probably 1994, 1995, they were two summers in my perception of Ireland, they were the two hottest most beautiful summers before the summers started to get shorter and not as hot those two years were. Like what you'd read in books you know".

It is unsurprising therefore, that people can become disheartened when difficulties are encountered.

2.3 Initial immigrant experience and the experience of frustration

The nature of the immigrant process and the fact that research participants are drawn exclusively from the continent of Africa, means that all families were exposed to the Irish immigrant control system from the outset. Interestingly, many initially positive impressions were voiced.

A strongly consistent pattern emerges. People can be extremely complimentary about their early interactions with statutory service providers. JP5 even goes so far as to state *“I was impressed by the really impeccable organising of my reception”*. Official help combined with a willing non-governmental sector are cited on numerous occasions and people feel that these service providers helped a lot in the initial stages of their lives in Ireland.

In the following excerpts i) LC14 commends those who helped her obtain accommodation ii) JP6 relates how he was expecting to experience difficulties on foot of his inability to speak English but found that adequate linguistic resources were placed at his disposal and iii) JP8 is complimentary about the simple and effective administration of his arrival.

“When I came it was really difficult for me, looking for a house. I needed to see the social welfare, I’m not used to it, with pregnancy and the other, I don’t know where I’m going so it is no good for me. They were very helpful, I was given key to the accommodation and then they told joy, the manager, they were very helpful” (LC14)

“To be honest with you, it could be another history with other people but, surprisingly enough, when I came to Dublin Airport, I just went out and was received by the Immigrant Officer, very friendly. I said, “ I can’t speak this kind of language. If you can have someone who can speak French, Spanish or Portuguese then I will be happy to talk”; so I was like in middle of somewhere you don’t speak the language. Everybody said, “You don’t speak English, how can you manage to come and stay here?” After few minutes, the Immigration Officer called someone on phone; this person could speak Spanish. It was on 16th January 2000 almost at 9pm. At 10.00 they found someone who could speak Spanish. That person became my friend, until now. That Irish person, she is a lady, spoke with me on phone and said, “You are safe in Ireland so we ask you everything in order to know your identity, where you are coming from and why have made that decision to come here. We have your documents and know what happened to you.” So I had to talk to that person in a kindly manner; that person was very good; she could listen without interrupting me and translate to the Immigration Officer. The next thing I remember I was taken from the Airport to the Refugee Commissioner Office in Dublin. That was almost at 11pm. They had to make a decision very quickly to find a place where I would stay that night. One point, I want to make a point for me: I was welcome when I came to Ireland. So I had no problem when I came in this country. But I found out later, in speaking to that person who translator from English to Spanish, that the Immigration Officer asked, “As you are speaking to this person, does he sound honest?” The translator said, “Yes. I have a little French. His French is really high level French and even his Spanish is high level Spanish. I think he is an honest person.” I learnt this after, but definitely when I came to Ireland I was welcome” (JP6)

“To be honest they received me very well. I didn’t have anything to complain about. I introduced myself. They accepted me and gave a form to fill. Then they gave me a seat and ask to wait. At that time after you have to finish first with the administrative side of things and then you are sent to the social section. Here they would look for accommodation for you. I went there and they gave me goods of first necessity which mean at that time a cheque of 120 Irish Pounds. They also gave me map where I could

go and cash this cheque. They already gave me my provisional identity card. They also gave me another map to show where I should go for accommodation. So honestly there was nothing to complain about” (JP8)

These positive experiences encourage migrants to look at the processes in their country of origin, evaluate their correctness anew, and reinforce the feeling that they had taken the correct decision to migrate to Ireland. LC7 for example, compares his experiences on arrival in this country with the difficulties experienced interacting with statutory service providers in his country of origin when he states: *“the hardest part of the whole process was getting the passport from the Nigerian Embassy. That was the hardest part. Just can imagine when you are paying 500 euros to get your country’s passport, your own country’s passport, that is the character back home”*. Nevertheless, often extreme hardship is experienced by many immigrants arriving in this country. Disorientation and pain can be suffered by all.

Some people are overwhelmed by the need to interact with an advanced information-orientated society. LC4, a person who worked as an uneducated farm labourer in an extremely rural environment in his country of origin, experienced difficulties with basic literacy. This was hugely daunting for him. He expresses his delight to be in Ireland when he states *“when I came in fact, it’s like I’m alive again, I’m alive again”* but he quickly goes on to outline the dislocations experienced. He remembers the disorienting nature of this reception in the following excerpt.

“Someone give me money for trim. I never had trim in my life. I said go bank. What is the bank? What is bank for? They give me some cheque. I say, people what is this? They say go to the bank. I say, what is the bank? People take me to bank in Dublin. I just give them the, I’ll give them the paper. I don’t know how. They ask me to sign. I don’t know to sign. I ask for something to put my thumb print. They do. I say I don’t know the meaning of signing”.

Other people experience the pain of their separation from loved ones. Apart from the intense personal sorrow that this entails, it also reinforces the dislocations experienced as immigrants do not have even the most basic social support structures in place. LC5 and LC2 illustrate this common experience.

“Ireland is very strange place, I mean, I didn’t know any place, I didn’t know anybody, so it is strange, very strange to me. Very hard. I’m always crying. I am always crying. I’m always crying. If I remember my husband, remember my daughter, I crying. I’m always crying. I cry all day” (LC5)

“When I came I must say I was some kind of depressing. To tell you the truth, I didn’t really know what’s happening. I thought I was coming for an easy life. Like I will come, go to school. When I was coming, I didn’t really know it was Ireland or something. To tell you the truth, if I wasn’t with (Husband), if I wasn’t with him when I came, I would not survive. I can’t cope, I can’t cope with the lifestyle in Europe” (LC2).

In many ways, these excerpts illustrate common migrant experiences but equally, they can be used to show that difficulties are often inherent in the reception system in this country. Specific interventions are common. These are effective in policing the immigrant system. They ensure that individuals are processed and that administrative

standards are complied with. However, the deeper, more personal difficulties associated with the process of immigration from Africa are not generally addressed. Indeed, in many instances, far from receiving aid, immigrants encounter challenges and barriers that can reinforce the hardships encountered.

Some people want 'to put their best foot forward' and are thus reluctant to voice their concerns. JP2 for example states *"I know some people will say it is a hard thing being black but in a way it is alright you know. Because most people in Africa are suffering and we are like, we can almost do whatever we like, get a job, whatever like. There is not really much to complain about"*. Nevertheless, many people feel that the system has not worked for them. JP5 effectively illustrates the experiences of many. He states

"When I arrived here, the first thing I had was hope. Hope for a life better than the one I am now experiencing. As time is going by, fundamental needs are met and I have additional needs. And while I am evolving in order to meet these needs, I encounter obstacles and life becomes tougher. More obstacles you encounter, the more frustrated and discouraged you become. Once you become discouraged, you become stressed and hopeless, and life becomes unbearable".

Challenges may arise simply on foot of the uncaring actions of individual staff members in statutory service providers. JP9 certainly encountered difficulties on her first day in this country when she was left in Dublin without accommodation or guidance overnight because her case was not fully processed by 5.00 pm and the Irish-born staff wished to finish work. However, the experience of difficulty whilst housed in direct provision is of a more fundamental nature. People are conflicted. Most are happy to have been received in Ireland and to be 'in the system' but the realities of life in direct provision soon hit home. The loss of personal space is keenly felt and many people feel belittled by the experience of living in cramped communal conditions. JP6 states that his experience of direct provision *"was very painful because I was in accommodation with sixteen adult men. It was. Except the time I was a student in Cuba. That was accepted. But as an adult, father of children, living in such accommodation, for one night it was OK, but spending three months in such conditions was extremely difficult"*.

The loss of freedom is equally keenly felt. The immigrant's reliance on sometimes reluctant staff members further reinforces this. JP7 illustrates this experience when he states *"The CWO, the Social Welfare Officers, you talk with them but they are condescending; you find that place is not of good standing, but they find that they are doing you a favour. "This is something temporary while I am getting prepared to restart a new life." They find it tremendous. They have to control you and check whether you were present or out. Where did you go? Actually they treat like a kid"*.

It is inevitable, in light of the difficulties experienced, that immigrants' initially idealised visions of Ireland tend to be reassessed and replaced by a more realistic view of life in this country, framed by personal experience. JP8 chose to come to Ireland. He states that he was on friendly terms with two Irish people in his country of origin and chose to come to this country because he felt that a common frame of reference existed between his experience in Central Africa and the experience of Irish people in general and that this experience could be drawn upon to help ensure that his migration experience would be a positive one. However, even this conscious decision-making

process could not prepare him for the upheaval of coming to a new country, and the difficulties he encountered quickly forced him to see that these thought processes were overly idealised in nature. Here, he reflects on this experience and states:

“You know it is difficult. When you get into the airplane to go to Europe, the picture in our imagination is always terrific compared to the reality. It is maybe caused by history, colonisation. There is an inferiority complex. One always imagines Europe “in colours”. I particularly had some little knowledge of Europe when I travelled to Ireland but in 2000 there was a huge gap between the name Ireland and the reality”.

Unfortunately, this is an all too common perception. The immigrants interviewed during this project are grounded in the realities of life in Ireland and are realistic about their prospects in this country but they equally remember the keen sense of expectation they had on arrival in Dublin and they voice clear disappointments when recounting the difficulties that they have experienced since then. This primary distinction arises again and again during the course of this study and should be borne in mind. Immigrant groups have travelled to this country in the hope of finding a better life. The circumstances of their departure from their country of origin and their modes of travel to Ireland are in many ways subservient to this basic human aspiration.

2.4 Summary

The experience of travel to a new country is outlined here. It is an experience that is marked by a number of tensions. People are happy to be in Ireland but are conscious of the sacrifices they are making to be here. They look forward with hope to a new life in an advanced post-industrial economy, especially for their children, but are wary of the quality of their reception. People appreciate the supports that are made available to help them settle in to a new life but express frustration when the difficulties they encountered are recounted.

The relevance of this type of dissonance is repeated at almost every level of this study and any attempt to map the experience of immigration and integration in Ireland must therefore be handled in an equally nuanced manner. The qualitative methods used here will allow this to be achieved.

CHAPTER 3: ACCESS TO SOCIAL SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

3.1 Introduction

Irrespective of the lifestyle they enjoyed in their country of origin, immigrant families must address the socio-economic realities of living in an advanced post-industrial economy and secure a standard of living that is comparable to that of their Irish-born neighbours. This can be a daunting prospect, but it is best confronted sooner rather than later. Immigrant families are clear on this and a hierarchy of need is quickly recognised.

The discussions gathered together in this chapter consider a number of these primary needs and highlight African immigrants' experiences as they seek to fulfil some of the most basic of conditions necessary for life in this country. The difficulties and challenges encountered whilst seeking accommodation and engaging with service providers are primarily considered here.

3.2 Housing

Housing ranks very high in everybody's hierarchy of need. Indeed, the need to source adequate accommodation is second only to the need to find paid employment in this country. This is especially so for people with dependent family members. As JP5 states "*for me, the important thing was to get a house where I could live with my children*". It is unsurprising in this light, that one of the most significant changes in the social geographies of Ireland in recent years has been the large number of non-Irish born people filtering into the residential property markets in Irish cities, towns and villages.

The immigrants interviewed here predominantly live in the private rental sector and are often in receipt of Social Welfare Rental Allowances (see also, Humphreys, 2006).

In a general sense, people are happy to be living in Ireland and to be engaging with the housing market in an advanced European country. The housing stock in Ireland is recognised to be of good quality. JP3, who came to Ireland from Egypt, is clear in his estimation of the benefits that come from living in a country like Ireland. He takes a wide view and situates his experiences in their trans-national context when he states:

"If you talk about housing, it is far better here (Ireland), as this concept doesn't even exist there (Egypt). There is no official planning; maybe it is being put in place, as I have learned that there are now new towns that the government has now started to build in desert to relieve big cities like Cairo. These are projects they have probably undertaken after we left. So it is maybe changing. But when we lived there, if we have to compare to what is now in Ireland, we can say that the State government puts a lot of emphasis on planning; there is a steady effort to improve people's living conditions in Ireland, should they be Irish or immigrants living here. On this, there is no possible comparison. Ireland is in far better position".

Migrant perceptions are mixed however, and research participants commonly experience a pattern of multiple disadvantages whilst seeking to secure a satisfactory level of accommodation for their families.

3.2.1 *Housing search*

The accommodation-search process is frustrating. Families can take some time to source suitable housing and when such housing is identified difficulties can arise before people are even accepted as tenants.

The length of time taken to find accommodation outside the direct provision system is commonly referenced. This is not a small matter. Apart from the stress and potential disruption caused whilst trying to source such accommodation, these experiences can have an impact on a family's decisions going forward.

LC9's memories are symptomatic of many others. This family spent a frustrating period living with friends and acquaintances because they could not source an acceptable level of housing. This period was so frustrating that it continues to colour their decision-making processes. This family has experienced some social incivility in their current neighbourhood and would like to find a more agreeable residential location, but LC9 remembers the difficulties experienced during initial house search and is reluctant to put the family through that disruption again. He states that "*we wanted to move out from this house to get a new house but it took us three months to get this one*". This acceptance constitutes a significant axis of disadvantage, not only in the housing market but also in society in general as people's freedom to exercise their right to move house is severely curtailed in such instances and the ability to exploit potential advantages that may arise is lessened in proportion.

Migrants recall the difficulties they experienced whilst interfacing with private landlords. Unsurprisingly, many of these difficulties can be conceptualised in racist terms. LC8 clearly situates his inability to find a house in his desired location in these terms when he states: "*I wanted to live in Douglas, because Douglas is near the airport, I went in, this lady she just looked at me and said no. I just look at her as somebody that did not like maybe a coloured person in her house*". The frustrations that accrue in such situations are clear to see, as he continues. "*We were looking for a house. She (LC9's wife) got many houses but when the landlord would see her they would not give her the house, they would not. Even this house, the way I begged her, she just looked at me. I was given it. I was suffering. I was living in people's house, I had to pay the rent and everything*".

Informal social networks can allow people to offset the difficulties experienced in such instances. JP8 was able to secure accommodation through contacts made within his own community in Ireland. He states "*at that period it was so difficult to find a private rented accommodation but I was lucky to make a friend. I went to a shop. I was told that there was Zairian shop that belonged to a guy you might know, (name given). I went to that shop to meet with people who speak the same language, maybe story and get some information. I met (name), a guy I knew from Kinshasa. We used to live in the same area. I was living in a hostel. He told me, "I passed by somewhere here and I saw a house that is being refurbished and they will let it. I went to talk to the owner who told me that they will lent (sic) it after they finish to refurbish it. It was in (street name). So (name) suggested to go and see the guy. As I could speak a bit of English and (name) spoke English, we went to see the guy and he gave us his word that he would lent (sic) the place to me when refurbishment work is completed. As it was very expensive and Social Welfare could rent it just for one person, I had to look for another*

person to share the apartment with. Both we started saving money for deposit. We kept contact with the owner. When everything got ready we moved in”.

The private person operating as a landlord in the rental sector is not positively regarded by the people interviewed here but research participants are balanced in their views and very few ascribe such experiences to the presence of racism at a structural level in the housing market. Positive experiences such as that outlined by JP8 also act as counter-balances here. Nevertheless, the potential to be subjected to racially motivated ‘resistance’ is noted and constitutes an unwelcome factor here.

3.2.2 *Price of accommodation*

Immigrant families who successfully identify suitable accommodation quickly need to find the money to pay the high rents that are common in Ireland. The cost of rent is a significant concern. For example, one family, who albeit are in receipt of rent assistance, has a combined monthly income of a little over €2,000 and a rent liability of €1,270. Another has a monthly income of just over €1,500 but pays €870 in rent (also supplemented by rental assistance). It is unsurprising therefore that many find the need to pay rent stressful. As JP3 states, *“the heaviest charge here for anybody who would like to succeed is rent”*. LC7 mirrors this when he states that *“the rent is just killing here, ya it’s killing you know”*. Many people live under financial pressure as a result. LC4 goes on to demonstrate the impact that this pressure has when he states:

“at the end of the day, you must work, like, like me now. OK, before I used to go to college and I still work full time. There was a time I was going to college and, when I still work 49 hours, coz we need to pay the rent. We need to pay the bills. We need to pay for this, we need to pay for that. You need to buy a phone, you need to pay insurance you know”.

It is unsurprising in this light, that immigrant families rely on social welfare payments to offset some of this pressure.

At the most fundamental of levels, reliance on social welfare disadvantages people in the private rental market. It is well established that some private landlords, especially those operating outside the tax net, favour informal payment in order to avoid incurring a taxation liability. People reliant on support from ‘official’ sources can be seriously disadvantaged here. Migrants recognise this tendency themselves. JP7 for example, states that *“even on housing: things depend on. In fact, all that depends on money. Most of housing estates or landlords would ask you whether you work. They want professionals and not people on social welfare. More fundamentally however, a number of research participants were clear in stating that they experience difficulties with the administration of social supports here.*

The requirement to pay a rental deposit is commonly problematic. For many, the lack of an adequate income stream makes it initially difficult to save the necessary money for a housing deposit. JP5’s experience of moving his family to a house in Maynooth is a salient one.

“I went to Maynooth, which is located at 25 km from West Dublin. It is nearer to where I wanted to study. Unfortunately for me I had a serious problem. I couldn’t secure the house before I paid the deposit. I had to borrow money. I explained the

situation to a friend of mine. He said, "I will lend you money, as you have not received a deposit from the state." Let me say that when I arrived here, the Resettlement Officer gave me a leaflet that said that everybody is entitled to a deposit once. As I didn't receive mine yet, I said if they pay me a deposit, I will pay his money back. The day I went to sign forms to the community welfare office, the officer asked me whether I had already paid a deposit or not. I answered, "Yes, I have borrowed money from somebody; when you pay the deposit, I will pay him back". She said, "No. You have already paid; you do not need it any more". I said, "No, it is not my money; I have borrowed that money from somebody so that when you pay the deposit I pay him back. Otherwise I couldn't have this house; I was looking for a house and I could not get one." She said, "You have already paid, I do not pay anymore". I told her, "Put yourself in my place; I don't work, where will I have money to pay back? She said, "If you want, you can make an appeal to the Superintendent." I made an appeal to the Superintendent and received a negative answer. He said the deposit was already paid, he didn't see the reason to pay another deposit. He asked me to make an appeal at a higher level. I didn't know if it was the national level. I went to a guy in a Citizen Information Centre; he helped me to write the letter. I sent the letter. Meanwhile I had problems with my friend as he put me under pressure. I had to pay his money back. He also borrowed money from a bank...I don't know how you call it... Credit Union. He had to pay back. He did that just to help me. I had to pay this money back. I think one year later, my appeal was successful. (JP5)

In this instance, the difficulties encountered are two-fold. Difficulties are experienced as a result of the need to pay a deposit whilst not working, but these were exacerbated significantly by a breakdown in communication between this person and the Irish-born staff, who demonstrated that they were more motivated to police compliance with a set of absolute regulations than recognising the real human difficulties that can arise from their actions.

A lack of consistency between different staff members can exacerbate this experience and a number of people refer to inconsistencies experienced when interfacing with different members of staff or staff in different regions. LC7 for example, was told that he was not entitled to receive a housing deposit from the Department of Social and Family Affairs in Cork as he had already been in receipt of such a payment in another region. However, on querying this judgement with a different member of staff he was informed that this was not the case and that he was entitled to such a payment. Such discrepancies can cause further financial hardship, as it did in LC4's case, when he had to rely on a money lender operating in the informal economy to provide money for his deposit. The family knew that this was not a sound course of action but felt that they had no other choice. Significant pressure was placed on the household finances as a result.

"We just want some place to live so we don't care. Throughout this period that we were still getting money from social there will be a week that we are out of money, we are getting weekly money from the welfare officer but we have to make up for two weeks, so we have to like join all our feeding, the feeding allowance and the rent, everything. We have to join everything together to pay the rent"

It is unsurprising, in this light, that most of the migrants interviewed during the course of this project hope to leave the private rental market in due course. Many hope to own their own home one day, but most realistically aspire to qualify for inclusion on the local council housing list and see this as their most likely route out of the private rental market, in the short to medium term.

3.2.3 *Housing options for the future*

The desire to leave the private rental sector is most commonly situated in the experience of financial hardship. As LC3 states, *“after job you are looking for council house or mortgage coz this money is too much, too much”*. LC12 is equally definite when he states *“rent is 42.50 per week, council house, you can’t ask more than that”*. The now common county and city council affordable housing schemes represent another attractive option here. However, as with almost every aspect of the housing market in this country both of these options present their own difficulties for this population sub-group. The length of time needed to wait is certainly prohibitive. As LC10 states, *“the list, the list is very difficult”*. This is a demotivating factor and many research participants refer to the frustrations they experience whilst waiting for this slow moving system to yield results.

When combined with the high price of rent and the difficulties experienced when trying to find waged work, the slow-moving nature of the public-housing sector constitutes the single most difficult feature of the housing market going forward. Indeed, this combination of factors will almost certainly ensure that many immigrant families will remain accommodated in the private rental sector, supported by the social security system, in the short to medium term.

A pattern of involuntary welfare dependency can already be seen. LC3 illustrates this phenomenon with the following story.

“All those people who are not working, like a friend of mine, they are afraid of paying the house rent. Like maybe you got 200 - 300 euro work per week, how do you want to meet up with 900 house? That they can’t at the end of the day. No food for children to eat. Even you yourself. Nothing for you to eat. You start working. There are no supports. Nothing, and you are collecting 300 euro. I am collecting 300 at the end of the month. Nothing! You pay bill. You pay gas – nothing. Nothing, so you have to just stay on social”.

That many immigrant families are motivated to move beyond this pattern of welfare dependency is not in doubt but this course is not an easy one to take and there is a clear need for planners and policy makers to consider the dynamics of this situation. JP3’s family is one family that has made this break from a pattern of welfare dependency, but significant hardship was experienced. As with many others, while they acknowledge the role that the high cost of accommodation has, this family’s experience leads them to suggest that government must demonstrate that they are interested in supporting people in their efforts to get themselves out of the welfare trap. As JP3 states:

“Accommodation is costing too much. They should give opportunity to people who are working so that they can pay for council housing rent and get out from difficulties, as rent cost is very high here. They don’t care about people who are working but pay more attention to those who don’t work. They prefer to allocate houses to those who

don't want to work. People like us, who like to integrate into the society, are left with all barriers. It is a very painful situation”.

Given the central role that accommodation will inevitably play in the future well-being of such families, it seems to be a reasonable enough point to raise at this juncture.

3.3 Statutory service providers and the provision of social supports

Access to social supports is essential if people are to be allowed to benefit from the full range of opportunities inherent in Irish society and integrate successfully. At a basic level, African immigrants recognise the presence of a multifaceted social support network in this country that is capable of delivering these supports to them. In these terms, almost everyone interviewed here is mindful of the advantages that living in a European country like Ireland can bring. The organisation of society, the social support structures that are in place and the fact that statutory service providers are accessible to all ‘classes’ of the population are all recognised as positive aspects of life in this country. JP5 encapsulates many people’s attitudes when he states *“I think living in Ireland is far better (than his country of origin); because I have a social security here, which means that I can I can get sick and have medical treatment. I am sure my children will go to school. I know I am housed. I won't suddenly lack a shelter. I have some other social advantages I wouldn't have at home even if I worked. This is a reality”.*

3.3.1 Valued social supports

Social welfare services, education, assisted housing, an approachable police force and free medical treatment are all commonly referenced here and the presence of a system ‘that works’ encourages people to see Ireland as a country that is organised to provide for human needs.

The availability of a working social welfare system is appreciated in general terms. However, many elements of other service providing organisations are also referred to in a favourable light. LC10 for example states *“the situation of social welfare, all that stuff, we didn't really have that system. It is the law of surviving, if you have no one to help, you will die”* (in his country of origin). JP3 is equally clear when he states *“on social welfare and all social services including social allowances, they don't exist in Egypt. So if don't have employment, especially paid employment, you are in trouble”.* He goes on to say *“so on those issues, Ireland obviously is in a better position”* (JP3).

Free access to basic medical care is especially highly regarded and the medical card system in particular is often seen to constitute a progressive measure. LC5 for example, came to Ireland from a location in West Africa where medical care was rudimentary in nature and where access to treatment was often dependent on a person’s ability to pay in advance. She recounts her joy when she came to Ireland and was able to access high quality medical care through a combination of official channels and social networks. She states, *“they give us name of, the name of list, the list and addresses. So I pick through my friends, coz my friend told me that she's her own GP too and she's nice. No problem, nothing, nothing”.*

LC11, a woman who recognises that over-dependence on social welfare is not a uniformly good thing, is equally clear about the benefits that are inherent in the system

when she states that *“the medical card is very very helpful here. The social, as well is good. Is good because they really take care of people”*.

This appreciation of the advantages inherent in Ireland is brought especially to the fore when people take time to consider, in a comparative light, their experiences in their own countries of origin. In these extracts, LC4 and LC5 and LC8 consider the different levels of medical care available in Ireland and in their country of origin.

“I go to hospit (sic), I don’t know What is medicine, before my country, what is medicine, what is drug, what is tablet, I don’t know, who is going to give medicine, why you do have money to buy, you have money to eat food, talking about medicine” (LC7). *“No money, no help, nothing, nothing”* (LC5, in response).

“that is Africa, you know, if you have money, then it can be good for you but if you don’t have, you can die. Because I knew, we had a neighbour, she died when she was giving birth, because the husband went to the hospital and gave money to one of the nurse and she did not want to share with the other people and they did not take care of her properly and she died. It can also happen, it can also happen even if you have money, it also can happen. This is very bad. It is very bad in Africa” (LC8).

The trans-national construction of these migrant lives must be acknowledged here, even when the experience in Ireland is so much more favourable. The following consideration by JP10 illustrates this point. He is clear that there is *“no comparison to do”* between life in Ireland and life in his country of origin but is equally clear that he continues to identify more with his country of origin, which he refers to as *“my country”*, where such supports are less accessible than with Ireland.

“I think there is no comparison to do; it is impossible to compare. If we look at here, when somebody is unemployed, he is eligible for the Unemployment Assistance or for the Health Board. The government know that this is a human being who has right to live. The person receives some money from the government every week to survive; it is a relief. We don’t have such a system in our country. Here when you don’t work or you work but the salary is small, the government will give you a medical card. About housing, here everybody is eligible for the Unemployment Assistance or for the Health Board and is offered a place to sleep. It could be in a hotel, a private rent house or a County Council house. It is the opposite in our country: we don’t have it. With the small salary you receive, you have to pay the rent and everything. I don’t know if there is any change or if the situation is getting better now about the social life in general. As I told before, at that time the teacher salary was about 25 dollars per month; I don’t know how they could survive. With this small salary they had to pay everything: rent, transport, school fees for children, food, wife, medical treatments; it was impossible. It is not possible to compare the social life here and in my country. There is no comparison to do because everything is different and in general life here is better than in my country”.

This is a common pattern and while many such considerations encourage people to conclude that life in Ireland is well supported and therefore of better quality than ‘life at home’ most continue to recognise their trans-national identity. The difficulties encountered when interacting with primary service providers may enhance this pattern as while most recognise that such service providers are potentially helpful, the

difficulties experienced when seeking to interface with them are recognised in equal measure.

3.3.2 *Difficulties experienced*

While the provision of services is generally regarded in a positive light, the administration of the system is regularly seen to be lacking. The extant organisational culture of work in Ireland creates problems and many research participants find various official application processes difficult to understand and the institutions themselves less than flexible in their approach. LC7 for example, outlines his frustrations when he states: “*You go to mister A, mister A will tell you a different story, you go to mister B mister B will tell you that he’s not aware of what mister A told you*”. A lack of confidence in the procedures in place to administer Ireland’s system of social support inevitably arises from such negative personal experiences. This interviewee illustrates his frustrations with the following story.

“I have a friend, she’s from Slovakia, she said she asked the welfare office can she go to school, she say yes you can go to school, you are OK to go to school then we finish the first time then when we resume for the second time they now change the welfare office they have another person there, and that one say that she is not qualified to go to go to school, that she cant go to school, and she is already half way through the programme, just imagine the whole period she was in college for is wasted time, just like that just because misinformed she was misinformed, just because of that”.

Difficulties can be experienced on foot of the most basic of issues. For example, the refugee identity document is only partially useful.

“The travel document. That is the most important thing, the passport, the refugee passport’s useless. They write with a biro on it. There is a problem. You face a problem at any airport. Even the bank when you are using your passport, the person at the bank don’t know what it is. I remember when I was opening my student account, I couldn’t, they told me to provide my passport, I had my travel document. It is the only one I got for a passport. They don’t like they don’t believe it. That’s the only document I have. You have nothing, at any airport you face problem” (LC4).

Better access to primary information would help here as it is recognised that “*there is a serious problem of lack of information*” (JP5). However, many people also report on unsatisfactory interactions they had with specific statutory service providers.

Many African immigrants refer to the difficult interactions that they have had with An Garda Siochana. In itself, An Garda Siochana is held in reasonably high esteem. JP7 for example, sees that An Garda Siochana has set itself apart from the general populous in its attempts to embrace new communities. He feels that the gardai’s efforts to enlist recruits from immigrant communities should be seen to be of “*big symbolic importance*”. However, most people can equally recount particularly unsatisfactory interactions that they have had with them. JP8 for example, relates the following story and uses it to illustrate his perception that An Garda Siochana does not always act in the best interests of immigrants.

One day I came from a nightclub. We decided to go a buy take-away. It was around 2 or 3 am. My friend got out the car and went to queue for order. I stayed in the car. It was when the Kosovo war was going on, in 2000 I think. A Kosovar came to me. He held a bottle of drink in the street. When he saw me, he the entire bottle of drink on the car where I was sitting. When I got out and ask him why he did that, he punched me. I still a scar on me...Then we started fighting. There was a security guy working near there who came to separate us. He called Gardai. But what really shocked me is that he told Gardai that...Actually Gardai asked him who were fighting. He answered, "A black against European". The guy who fought me wanted to escape because his broke his arm when he fell. But the security agent didn't allow him to leave. I thought that he wanted Gardai to come and ask the guy why he did that. The fact is that before Gardai came the security agent took his car and left. He didn't want to give testimony on what he saw. I don't know if Gardai gave him an instruction. I found that bizarre. He called the Police; he should wait for them in order to give necessary explanations. I kept the guy by my own. When Gardai came, the first thing they told was that I didn't have right to keep that guy. They put him in their car; they told me where their Garda Station was. They said if I wanted to lodge a complaint I could go there, without the guy's name. They didn't even take any detail of me. I found that shocking".

JP11 reinforces this perception when she states "*if you call them (An Garda Siochana) they will hear your accent, understand that you are not Irish and come, but late; when they come, the problem is already finished*".

Such unsatisfactory interactions with statutory service providers can come to be conceptualized in racist terms. Certainly, feelings of frustration can quickly come to be expressed in this manner. JP6 for example, states that "*people can talk about racism in streets, pubs, bus and so on. But I would talk about institutional discrimination which so hidden that one can't see it*". He gives examples when he states "*It is a very well hidden administrative discrimination. In Garda Siochana, as well. They way they treat files...They tend to deal with files with a lot of thoughtlessness. This a very institutional discrimination. When they notice that the complaint comes from an immigrant they are not very motivated to run relevant investigations, they neglect it a little bit. There are several examples. I find that institutional discrimination in present in this country but a lot of people ignore that it exists*".

Similar frustrations are voiced in other contexts. LC6, a student who finished his secondary schooling in Ireland, relates how he was accepted to study in a third level institution away from home but could not continue with his studies at the institution as the vagaries of his status prohibited him of accessing educational grants. This difficulty led him to feel different from his class mates. He states "*nobody is in your face saying you're different but this is what I call institutional racism. This is how all the ins and outs because you come from this part of the world or that part of the world that's when it hits you. I feel very resentful*".

JP1, a medical doctor from Central Africa, could not secure a level of paid work commensurate with his experience and qualifications and experienced difficulties interacting with statutory service providers, as a result. This experience leads him to consider the nature of the Irish social welfare/employment system and situate his difficulties in terms of a racist discourse when he states:

“When one doesn’t work and stay at home and only live of what the Social Welfare gives, it is ridiculous. Today one is also stressed because of that. Because the Social Welfare requires you provide evidence you are looking for a job. And you look for a job but receive negative answers. He put pressure on you as if ...finally you ask yourself “Me, a Medical Doctor, I worked for twelve years, today I am looking for a job but nobody wants to give a job, but this man in Social Welfare want to prove me that I am a lazy man, an incapable to look for a job. Do you understand? There is racism. Let’s say it clearly. There is racism. People don’t want to see Blacks in different positions. For them Whites, they have to lead; Black is created to work as unskilled worker. This, it can be, I think even unconscious. They don’t even know that they think like that. They don’t even know that they are thinking like that, but it is like that . You will see the guy in Social Welfare will tell you “Mister, Forget you are a medical Doctor. Look for a job.”

For some, this experience can be a disheartening and demotivating one. JP3 feels that *“one has to struggle”*. He supports this statement by relating what he feels is an unsatisfactory experience in the housing market when he states: *“one has to be registered in the social housing list. This type of accommodation is given by authorities at very low rent rates that allow you to live on what you earn. We would like that this category of immigrants also receive such privilege. Unfortunately it is not the case. This happens in a very selective way. Besides, when we ask the question on how they deal with us, their answer is, “You are not a priority”*.

JP2 refers to a similar experience whilst interacting with a social welfare officer. Just as JP3 feels that the housing office was not willing to support his needs, JP2 feels that the staff member he was interacting with did not understand his requirements.

“Social Welfare Inspector came here to visit me. He asked me whether I wanted to work. I said, “If you have any job, give it to me now I will do it.” He left and two days later he sent me a letter to mean that I was entitled to social welfare assistance. I thought, “I was expecting a job, and you are talking about social assistance!” I laughed but... This is reality, reality of things”.

It is unsurprising, in light of such experiences, that dissatisfaction arises. The assistance given is welcomed and some people feel that they are able to cope with the frustrations that arise through force of will alone. LC13, for example, successfully negotiated a prolonged and frustrating housing applications process by simply persevering. She states: *“I was on the list for two or three years because I go there every day, every week, I have a break from (college), I would just walk down, every week I was there practically. I remember, in the end I wrote to the chairperson of the council. I was there every week, every single week”*. Equally, LC7 relates how he eventually secured a paid position in the waged labour force through perseverance. He states *“this place I got job, I am applying there, I applied there 7 times, they are always telling me, I just like, let me just go again I go to their office and they say ah (name), will you? That is how I get the job – perseverance”*. Nevertheless, most people recognise that a level of stress is inevitable whilst they remain dependent on such assistance from statutory bodies and are determined to arrive at a situation where they are not required to interact with such bodies.

3.3.3 Aspirations for a better life

In many instances, immigrants from Africa have to interact with statutory service providers, but most remain ambitious and ultimately want to live life as independent actors without having to interact with such organisations. As JP7 states, *“depending on social services limits your move. You can’t do whatever you would like to do”*. LC11 is equally clear in this regard when she states that she wants to *“live away from the social, it is my dream”*. She is very balanced about the benefit that has accrued for her family on foot of her interactions with statutory service providers when she recognises that *“the social, they help people”* but in equal measure, she accepts that difficulties are inevitable and remains firmly focused on living life free from such dependences when she states that *“you still have to suffer (when in receipt of social welfare payments) to get what you need, so it is better to be free”*. LC8, LC11’s husband, reinforces this desire when he states that *“the money of the social is too small. Because when they give you that money you have all the stress in the world. They are in your house everyday. They will chase you for this. They will chase you for that. We don’t want anything to do with social. We want to work”*.

These interview excerpts illustrate an important point. Welfare payments and interactions with employment/medical officers are valued by research participants, but the vast majority of people in receipt of such assistance would prefer not to have to rely on it. This is reinforced by immigrants’ appreciation of the fact that the Irish born population can often see them simply as welfare dependants and not as fully contributing members of Irish society. However, immigrants from Africa find it extremely difficult to move beyond welfare dependency. The difficulties immigrants experience whilst attempting to break into the waged labour market and their often low earning potential when in waged work is especially pivotal and a bridging situation is required to help those who are willing to move off social welfare and into the realm of waged work. JP3 illustrates some of the common difficulties experienced in this regard when he talks about the transition his family made from a position of assisted living to one of activity in the waged labour force.

I took this job in ICT. I still hold it even now. But there also some consequences from this employment in a country like this one. We were assisted by the social welfare services. It gave impression that... In all cases this didn’t bring up any concern on our accommodation, as we thought that it was ensured, paid and that government services would help us in this matter. But after taking this job, conditions changed which meant that we are responsible for everything in all areas including accommodation. But in terms of accommodation, we have kept the same accommodation that was supported by the government services; we paid for that.

He goes on to state

My job is not close to my residence. It is quite far from my place. We think that Government should help people who are in a situation like ours, not because we are a very particular situation but we consider that this category of people who make some effort to get integrated, as it passes through employment and other areas, contribution to make this country stronger, when one takes that option Government shouldn’t neglect these people. But apparently Government gives this impression”.

3.4 Summary

A complex pattern of need comes to light in this chapter. People immigrating to Ireland from the continent of Africa commonly experience difficulty whilst trying to settle in this country. Access to a broadly defined pattern of social supports can smooth this transition and therefore aid in the integration of these groups into Irish society.

The full range of basic services and supports are present in this country. These services are accessible to immigrant groups and are valued by the immigrants who participated in this research. The presence of such services constitutes a strong base upon which the integration project can be built. Access to adequate housing, social welfare payments and medical care can allow a person to participate in Irish society more fully than if such social entitlements were unavailable.

In equal measure however, the difficulties outlined here demonstrate that challenges remain. These challenges are all the more important, given the central role that these service providers play in the creation of a socially just and inclusive society in this country. Denial of access to such supports will inevitably constitute a barrier to the creation of an intercultural society in Ireland.

It is incumbent on Irish society to ensure that access is improved and that programmes that can impact on this experience are instituted.

CHAPTER 4: ECONOMIC INCLUSION

4.1 Introduction

All families interviewed here are motivated to engage in the world of waged work and economic integration is central to all immigrants' hopes and aspirations for their families in Ireland.

This desire is most commonly couched in material/financial terms. Activity in the waged labour force is the most significant common goal among the people interviewed here and many people become especially exercised about this issue. People who are working tend to talk at length about their experiences in the labour force while people who are not working commonly express their disappointment at this situation and focus instead on the steps that they are taking to ensure that they will experience success in the labour force at some point in the future. Education tends to be central to this latter group's experiences as, more than any other area of activity outside work, it is recognised to "have a crucial role to play in tackling social exclusion by providing full access to life chances" (DES, 2004).

It is no surprise therefore, that the conversations about waged work and education that were recorded during this project tend to share a similar narrative pattern. Both sets of activities are influenced by immigrants' desire to 'succeed' in Ireland. Similar outcomes are sought and similar challenges and barriers are recognised. African immigrants' experiences in the waged labour force and in the educational sector are thus seen as two elements of the same pattern and are examined together in this chapter.

4.2 Economic activity

Many immigrants from Africa travel to this country with the express desire to engage in waged work and therefore support their families. In this way, the desire to succeed in the waged labour force represents one of the corner stones of the immigrant experience in Ireland.

4.2.1 *The impulse to work*

The high cost of living in Ireland is particularly influential. JP6 for example, is clear when he states that his motivation to work lies in the need to support his family on foot of "*a costly lifestyle in Ireland*". JP3 makes a similar statement but is more explicit when he outlines his family's costs and firmly links these in with the need to work in the waged labour force.

"I can give you figures. We pay €1,270 for our monthly rent. This amount can be insignificant for some people but it is very costly for us. It is enormous because it takes our half salary. I am also going to tell you a confidential information: our salary is around € 2,000, not very far from this amount. We earn €2,000 and some "dust". When we pay €1,270. It is a lot. We have to live on the rest. Charges related to this are accommodation including gas, electricity, telephone to communicate, television as we have children- education and entertainment programmes for them - when they are not at school; all this constitutes a package. We have to live with that and always go to work".

Equally, the desire to work in the waged labour force is anchored in the broader opportunities that can accrue from such activity. The increased spending power that comes with success in the waged labour force is valued by research participants but more than this, many hope that their activities in the waged labour force will serve as a base from which their families can prosper.

“You see, like what we believe in is, I want to be somebody in future. I don’t want to be just an ordinary person. I want to be someone who can send my child to the school. I want to one of the best school, who can afford to like put my hand in my pocket and do what I want to do, at the right time I want to do it or when I need to do it so that time, I believe that I have to work hard and I know that it means working hard” (LC4).

A range of more nuanced personal issues are influential as well, and it would be a mistake to view the immigrant labour market in too narrowly defined economic terms.

Research participants most commonly take a rights-based approach and situate their desire to work in basic human terms. The need to feel valued is implicated here. LC3, a student from West Africa, is firmly focused on getting a job when she states that “we have to work, you see, you can’t be staying at home, you will not be happy with yourself staying at home”. JP 2 from Central Africa reflects this sentiment when he states that “I was born to work, and I would like to work. I don’t want to stay inactive at home”.

For some, it is vitally important to work in an area where they feel valued and can contribute. For others however, the important thing is simply to work in order to earn a living and benefit from the level of self-esteem that comes with that. LC7, a manual worker from West Africa explains this impulse when he states “for myself, I don’t care what I work. If I have my status I don’t care. I don’t care if they give me a job to sweep streets. What I know is the independence of myself. That’s the most important for me. I don’t care where I’m going to work to wash plates in restaurants, to sweep streets. I don’t care to go to social work as far as I can do it. I have my daily pay, my independence, my self-esteem”.

The importance of waged work may be traced back to people’s experiences in their country of origin and therefore be conceptualised in trans-national terms. Many migrants from Africa refer to difficult personal experiences from their ‘home country’ when talking about the importance of waged work, and it is clear that the motivations of this population sub-group are qualitatively different to other workers/job seekers present in the Irish labour market. Both LC4, an unemployed man from West Africa and LC12, a student from West Africa firmly position their need to work in such trans-national terms and in particular in terms of the experience of hardship ‘at home’ in Africa.

“The first thing to do is get my work. That is the most important, the first thing to do. The high street in my country, the high street in my country – someone give you food? If you like sit, sit there till tomorrow, till the next day, a person will just die, if I have the opportunity to work, I work. I don’t depend on anybody. I don’t rely on nobody to come and feed me” (LC7).

“It is not too, a big deal, have why employed, we have some hope, at the end of the day. Like me, I know I will work. Now is difficult but I hope, somebody, that is the main

difference between here and Africa where now there is no hope. If you are born poor you will die poor, because there is nobody to help you” (LC12).

In this way, people’s hopes for a better life can be tied up with the idea of paid employment and work is therefore of fundamental importance to a person’s own feelings of worth and happiness. This can be associated with a person’s move from a self-identification with their migrant status to one marked by their position as a full stakeholder in Irish society.

LC14, a migrant from West Africa experiencing financial hardship clearly articulates such desires when she contextualises her hopes for the future in terms of success in the waged labour force.

“I believe that when I am working, when he is working (her husband), when the children grow up, and I pick up maybe part time job, fulltime job, I think then everything will be good”.

JP1, an unemployed medical doctor from central Africa, continues in this vein when he explicitly refers to the role that success in the waged labour force plays in determining i) his sense of himself and ii) his feelings of integration in Ireland.

“To feel integrated in a country, work is among the most important elements. Do you understand? If you work, first of all work brings you some security, gives you self-esteem; you are proud of yourself. You say yourself you are important, you produce. You are not there to wait” (JP1).

Unsurprisingly, in this light, JP1’s relative lack of success in the waged labour force has led him to experience significant dissatisfaction. He articulates this in terms of his self-esteem when he states that *“the fact of not being able to work make me very unhappy, very unhappy. I have lived with work. Today I have completed five year without work. I feel myself diminished in my inner pride”*. This experience is common and many research participants are at pains to outline the difficulties they have encountered when trying to engage with the waged labour market in Ireland.

4.2.2 Difficulties experienced in the realm of waged work

Most migrants are at pains to demonstrate that they appreciate the opportunities afforded to them in Ireland but equally they are clear in their desire to work. People do not want to exist on social welfare payments. JP3 for example, states that he is happy with the support he has received in Ireland. He states that Ireland and Irish society *“do good to me by give a house and giving food to eat”*. However, he goes on to state that *“ it is no good to me. Asylum seekers they are sitting at home, not allowed to work”*.

The very nature of the social welfare system is criticised for the emphasis it places on sterile compliance with a set of regulations and the lack of real assistance it gives to people who wish to find work.

A difficult labour market must exist for African immigrants in this country (see, for example, MRCI, 2006). A relatively significant number of the present sample are engaged in waged work but the vast majority of people make reference to the difficulties experienced.

People who have come through the refugee/asylum system refer to the fact that issues of status have impacted on their experience of work. JP1 was eager to demonstrate that the length of time he spent waiting for permission to work eventually became a demotivating factor in itself, while LC10 is of the opinion that the time he spent waiting for permission to work ensured that opportunities for work were filled by other groups and that he was disadvantaged as a result.

“five years later when they give us our papers. Find no place to work. No work I would say everywhere boom economy. I would say Polish people employed. How many application I have to do? No work” (LC10)

More than this however, immigrants from Africa are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to looking for work. This experience is common across all skills groups. Testimonies from JP2 and LC13 illustrate this point.

JP2 states that he has *“ten different certificates with various qualifications such as computer, typing”*. He goes on to state that he is *“able to typewrite even more than 30 words per minutes”*. However, he has experienced multiple patterns of disadvantage in the labour market and is frustrated as a result.

“when I present my certificate, no answer comes. I have a FAS forklift driving certificate. If you go to a company to apply for a job, they will say, “Ok. We will call you”. The day after if you go there again, you will find in that job someone who was seeking employment with you, but the person doesn’t have even a FAS certificate but works”. Is a European or African origin related problem? I don’t know. Those who do that know why they are doing so. But I am asking the question. I got an annual contract. After that, finished! I said it is not possible. We have experience, studied and get trained. As evidence in the Methodist Church, maybe newspapers wrote at that time, people who read them surely understood our experience is huge and this can continue in other areas of Irish Society if we are employed. But despite all that, things don’t follow. Some time we stay at home while we don’t want it. We spend our time and register in many job agencies – in almost all agencies in the northern part of Dublin. If you go there you will find my cv and details everywhere. Unfortunately there are very, very few calls” (JP2).

LC13, a multi-lingual West African woman who will graduate from university in 2007, goes further when she states that she feels as if employers are not interested in allowing her to progress into the labour market.

“I’m sending the CVs but I haven’t even had the chance for an interview, nobody has given me the chance to explain. Even when they are not taking you. No feedback. I didn’t get feedback from them, I didn’t get a letter, nobody wants to give a chance to you to come and explain, even to test you to see if you can do the job or not”. I can’t spend three years at UCC and end up as a cashier in Tesco. No, I can’t. I must have a, I will end up doing that, I will end up doing it, after four or five years at UCC. There is no way to explain, you know just feel like we’re excluded from society. It is very bad, morally you know”.

LC3, a married mother from West Africa articulates the feelings that this situation engenders when, in response to her lack of success in the labour market she states *“I*

was getting bored and boring again, and fighting, and now we have the papers to work and nothing coming”.

Other research participants have been more successful in their efforts to engage with the waged labour market but immigrants from Africa consistently refer to problems encountered during the job search process in particular. Unsurprisingly, given the fact that the desire to experience success in the waged labour market is most commonly motivated by the key role that productive labour has in determining a person's self esteem, feelings of self worth suffer when people feel that they are not succeeding.

“it is very hard for me to tell people that I don't work, I am very embarrassed but, but living like this without contributing and work, is not our wish”.

“I feel active and ashamed to depend on others. It is a shame. I had to continue to work. That is my wish for future because work honours human kind and somebody who work is entitled to food. If you don't work, don't eat, as the Bible says. We have to work in order to find feed ourselves” (JP2).

Complex feelings can arise. Just as the primary desire to succeed in the labour force can be linked to the hopes one has for one's family so too can the experience of difficulty in the waged labour force be conceptualised in those same terms. LC10, (West Africa) articulates such feelings when, in response to his unemployed status, he asks *“what will life do tomorrow what will we give to these children”*. As such, the experience of difficulty in the waged labour market has a deep impact on the family dynamic. Loss of status is experienced within the family unit and male research participants, the traditional authority figures in an African family, were particularly vocal about the impact that unemployment was having on their own sense of self-esteem and the impact that it has on both their children and on the power structures present within the family unit. LC11, an employed worker with an unemployed husband further reflects this when she states that *“in Africa men will go to work, women they stay at home. This other way is not good. You will never see a man be happy that the wife work alone. Sitting at home”*. Equally, JP8 whilst considering the role that work has in his life firmly positions himself and his desire to be successful in the waged labour market in terms of the family when he links work to the transmission of social values to his children. He states: *“if you stay in bed until 10am, your child will think that life is like that; when you will wake him up at 8.00am to go to school while you are sleeping, one day he will refuse and you won't have any explanations”*.

Research participants are also conscious of the potential message that is sent out to wider society. As LC4, an unemployed man from West Africa states, it is important to work to show that you are worthy of inclusion in society.

“When someone ask you what are you doing, for living are you working, he look strange, if Irish ask you he look strange, so I'm student or maybe, no he look strange as in look at this man maybe he someone who is doing bad something” (LC4).

Potentially destructive feelings of infantilisation can arise in such instances.

“You know what: it is always very difficult for somebody who knew independence to become dependent again. I was already a responsible. It was hard to depend on other people. That was the other reason that pushed me to work in black market, not only to

help my family but also to feel that at least I have earned and deserved this money. I could feel that I was a man, somebody, a human being. We were penalised and were considered like children again” (JP8).

4.2.3 Feelings of exclusion and the discourse of marginalisation

A common experience arises out of this research and invariably and during the course of our conversations, people express extreme frustration.

“Now when I put my CV in I expect nothing I tell them do whatever you want, do whatever you want. I’m fed up for waiting, it is like begging to go to work. I feel very bad. Very bad” (LC10).

Some people voice their frustrations in response to their simple lack of success in the jobs market. For example, LC8, an unemployed man from West Africa articulates such unhappiness when he states that to be unemployed *“is not a man’s life”* before going on to state that this position is *“very very frustrating. We have too much stress and we have family back home. We have brothers we have sisters we have to help. Can you imagine, I sit like this, my brother, I have problem 5 euros 10 euros, if I cannot give 5 euros, why, it is very very very frustrating, very frustrating honestly”*. JP5, a medical doctor from central Africa alludes to similar frustrations but clearly anchors such feelings in what he perceives to be an unwieldy and unhelpful system.

“I have applied for jobs like Assistant Researcher, Project Worker, International Health Worker within international NGOs such as GOAL, CONCERN, and RED CROSS, to practice what I learned in my study. Difficulties are still there; I have not been called for interview. They simply say they regret they can’t give me the job, but they don’t say anything about why they don’t recruit me. Some of them say there were applications of higher quality than mine. Why mine is of bad quality? I don’t know. I am still waiting for. I don’t know what I should do in order to get a job. Should everybody go cleaning, washing up? I don’t know...I don’t know”.

These statements are symptomatic of many wider patterns. Barriers are placed in the way of people’s access to the waged labour force. The need to prove prior experience constitutes a real difficulty, as does attaining an adequate level of English. These challenges are recognised and most people attempt to address the issue and nullify the disadvantages that can accrue. Indeed, no sense of disquiet arises from the interviews in relation to such experiences. People expect to be faced with such challenges and they are not deemed to be destructive in themselves. However, the cumulative experience of failure in the labour force can be destructive. In many instances, this experience quickly comes to define a person’s interactions with Irish society and a discourse of absolute inequality arises.

When giving an overview of their experiences, most research participants feel that they receive differential treatment based on the specificities of their migrant identity. Interestingly, frustrations experienced here are invariably not aimed at the Irish born population but rather at other (marginalized) migrant groups who are perceived to be doing better in the labour market. Eastern European groups are targeted here. Again, this can be articulated in terms of the family. LC10, for example, situates his dissatisfaction with his unemployed status in terms of his perception that Polish people are more successful in the waged labour market, but more than this, he views this

disparity firmly in terms of relative familial need when he states that “*all our children are born here, the Polish here will go back, we have our family here*”.

This dissatisfaction is most commonly articulated in terms of language. Many African migrants are multi-lingual and large numbers speak fluent English. Those that do not have strong English on arrival in Ireland tend to quickly invest in language training as a first step towards integration. Their desire to engage with the waged labour force is particularly influential here. In this light, it is unsurprising that frustrations are experienced when people place their own lack of success in the waged labour force next to the experience of other migrant groups who are seemingly less well prepared linguistically and less strongly orientated towards integration in Irish society than them.

Some comments are very specific. LC10 for example, goes on to firmly situate his lack of success in the waged labour market in relation to the presence of Polish migrants when he states “*I see some, you know the English I speak with you, there is the Polish people who can't even speak in work. If you go to Supervalu, you can go there. Some people ask me, speak Polish to me (speaks gibberish in an eastern European accent). This man is working, THIS MAN IS WORKING and I can't get a job*”.

JP12, LC11 and LC8 are less specific, preferring instead to focus on other migrant groups' European status, but the experience is the same.

“I see Eastern European who work in Lidl, everywhere over there, they don't even speak English. They are there, if there is a problem, they call the manager. But I did an English course, I speak English but they don't give me a job. I don't know. That situation stresses me” (JP12 11).

“There are many, because of them we can't get a job. I don't know, maybe because they are hard worker, maybe because they are European, because they don't even speak the language. We go to the airport there are many there but they can't even speak English properly but there are many there, they prefer them” (LC11).

“If I go to the interview, with the Polish they won't even speak English and I speak English but the women won't even give me the job it will go to the Polish. This is something I don't understand maybe because they are members of EU, I don't know” (LC8).

It is only a small jump in such instances, for a person to rationalise such experiences in racist terms. LC8 for one, is clear in this regard when he continues and states:

“If you go for an interview with the Polish or Eastern Europeans or the Pakistani they will give the job to them but you - the coloured man - they will never give the job to you. Just for the fact that you are a coloured person and you can be better than them. To be honest Liam I cannot be in Ireland for 5 years but someone come to Ireland for 2 months and they give you the job. For the same position. That is, I mean you can't understand that”.

JP2 offers a similar analysis when he states:

“Every time you go to seek employment and you are lucky enough to be interviewed, they say your English is not good enough. Well, we have a certificate that allows us to do this job. They say our English is not good enough, but curiously all these people

who come from Eastern Europe who don't say even a word in English are taken to work. This person doesn't speak English. But I do. I have a certificate and am fully qualified for various types of work but they always say my English is not good enough. However people who come every single day from Eastern Europe – I don't want to mention country name – if you go to job agencies, they are working. But they don't speak English, how can you explain they are quickly employed and not us? Is there an element, other than English, that is wrong?"

As a rule, the experience of inequality and racism is difficult to access in this context. Many people were uncomfortable articulating such feelings in a direct manner but it would be remiss of us to ignore the often strong narrative pattern that arises in the data. Links can be seen to exist between feelings of frustration in the labour force and feelings of exclusion from society and this pattern is most regularly operationalised along the lines of race or migrant status. This, in many respects is a basic human pattern and, as such, warrants further detailed study, but it is highly nuanced in nature. A more detailed consideration of the dynamics of this issue is contained in chapter six.

4.2.4 *Reactions to this experience*

The African families who participated in this research are not passive actors, waiting for success to visit them, but rather are actively engaging in a number of diverse strategies to try and ensure that they will secure employment in this country. Some people, when confronted with barriers to work, try to drive through them by force of will alone. Participants here refer to their continued efforts to find a job. LC3 for example, specifically targeted a local services company whom she knew to employ people on a casual basis. She states:

"I don't want to stay at home I wanted to work, I have to go to Kelly every day, one, I go to big boss, I wake up to Kelly services, one morning I just, I said it's me, I will need to stay there, they will meet me there. I have to wake up early, 7.00. I said they should please just give anything. I'm tired. I'm frustrated. Please I'm frustrated. I don't like staying at home. They should, please anything. I'm Ok with that. They should just give me something to do, even if it is voluntary I don't mind, even just give me something to do".

In LC3's case, her perseverance achieved the desired result and she secured a position with the company, but *"it was difficult, very difficult"* (LC3). This difficulty is reinforced by LC4, LC3's husband, who was equally motivated to look for work but who did not experience success, even though he *"was always at the FAS office in the city, every morning"*.

It is unsurprising, in this light, that most people employ a series of more specific strategies to offset frustrations experienced and to try and increase their attractiveness to employers.

Some people favour volunteer work. Organisations that work among the immigrant community tend to be targeted here. LC15 and LC7 from West Africa and JP7 from central Africa have experienced multiple levels of disadvantage but all three were determined to find some gainful employment in the voluntary sector.

LC15, in response to his religious convictions, found work with St Vincent De Paul. *“What I did was when I came in here sitting in the house I say no I can’t sit like this even if it is going to be free, I came I went out I saw care association I entered I said I want to work as a volunteer she said no if I want to work as volunteer I have to go to Simon or St Vincent De Paul”*. JP7 sought to use his experience for the benefit of other migrants and became active among groups involved in advocacy on behalf of migrant populations. *“At that time we didn’t have right to work because we didn’t secure a refugee status yet. All what I was doing was in a voluntary capacity: making presentations, explaining some laws, especially international refugee law, etc...Voluntarily. In SPIRASI, Comhlamh, etc. There was not paid employment. But were busy, even very busy. We could receive some tokens and that was it”*. LC7 helped out in the direct provision hostel where he was accommodated. *“I’m not used to staying idle, no matter how mean the you know the jobs is at least I’m not the kind of person who is just used to sitting, I’m just like OK the people working in the hostel I say Ok can you just let come and give you a hand”*.

Migrants’ belief in the ability of such activity to yield positive results is further reflected in the support that arises for the instigation of an internship programme. Immigrants recognise that it may sometimes be difficult for an employer to accept their bona fides in relation to work without documentary proof and therefore most do not expect to be taken at face value. Rather, people are very happy simply to be given a chance to demonstrate their abilities on a probationary basis. People are happy to give their time for free, simply to remain active and contribute to society in general. Equally however, people feel that this pattern could be harnessed by employers and immigrants could be allowed to demonstrate their worth in the labour market without the employer needing to take a chance. LC10, an unemployed man from West Africa voices a common desire when he states that *“I used to say in Europe all is training, let’s say you go to the factory today, they have to train you for maybe one day to do things the one day they train you and you are not able to do it they can say OK we don’t want you coz you can’t perform OK. But if they don’t give you this opportunity to do things how can they know that you can’t do these things*.

This is all done in the hope that one day this effort will pay off and that jobs will arrive but a far more commonly adopted set of strategies are focused on upskilling through education.

“That is why you see most black today, they are not pursuing work, they are pursuing education. Because this is an opportunity for him to go up” (LC1).

4.3 Educational activity

Education is valued first and foremost because it is seen to increase a person’s chances of finding paid employment and ultimately integrating. JP8 illustrates this tendency when he states:

“I told you that I am studying in order to be able to work in Ireland. I have found that Irish people depend on their work and everybody needs a qualification; that is why we are attending college so that one day we can contribute to the progress of this society and live like Irish. You need people to orientate you so that you can know this country’s system. I have spent more than seven years and I can tell you that all what I

know about Ireland come from personal effort. From our observations and research we have concluded that the first thing to do in order to get integrated is to be useful to the society”

4.3.1 Education as a route into the waged labour force

Two specific requirements are recognised: i) the need to improve basic language proficiency and ii) the need to invest in skills and therefore be more competitive in the waged labour force.

English language training

Many Africans are multi-lingual but a lack of proficiency in English remains a barrier to integration. This is well recognised in general (see, for example, Ward, 2002, Kelleher Associates, 2004 and Healy, 2006) but immigrants from Africa are mindful of the impact that a lack of proficiency in English can have on how they are perceived in Ireland. LC16, a woman from East Africa who has been living in Ireland for a considerable length of time and who has thus been able to observe recent immigration from a position that straddles both mainstream Irish society and her more newly arrived African community feels that language proficiency remains a key concern. She feels that many African migrants suffer when they cannot converse in English and states that this remains the key issue for groups seeking to establish themselves as members of Irish society in their own right. She reflects wider patterns of dissatisfaction when she states: *“A lot of them (African migrants) would be kind of taken as stupid, you know. They (Irish born people) talk to you loudly just because you don’t speak the language”*.

People from Francophone contexts can find the transition to an Anglophone country difficult to make. This can be especially acute during their first months and years in this country. JP10 links the linguistic difficulties he had to the feelings of isolation and loneliness experienced at this time when he states:

“I had a lot of problems with the language. I could not speak to people and it was impossible. In the hotel I lived, I was alone from my country. There was another person from my country but he was rare and I could not see him. Other people came from English speaking countries and I could speak with them. Every time I needed some help or went to an office I needed somebody to be my interpreter. I couldn’t speak to people and the language was like a barrier when I came in this country” (JP10).

Such difficulties are particularly disruptive during work. JP7 certainly links his experience of difficulty in the waged labour force with his lack of proficiency in English when he states that: *“I studied Human Resources Management. I am not working now in that area. Because of the language. I think that I have to master English first in order to work in that area”*.

The ability to speak English is therefore of great importance.

People follow different paths towards this goal. Some prefer to follow an independent line of study. LC10 for example, is of the opinion that he learned most of his English from watching television and DVDs and from reading English language magazines, while JP10 *“bought a dictionary and if I saw people talking, I made some effort to understand what they were talking about. If I did not understand, I had to ask questions”*. However, most people interviewed here make use of organised English

language classes. Consequently, the people and organisations who provide such services are valued by the immigrant community for the contribution they make to their lives. LC7, from West Africa, attends a language school run by a religious organisation in Cork. Whilst speaking about the contribution that the school makes to his life he praises the teaching staff and states that *“they are fantastic, they are great. I say people like these save my life, people like these, I haven’t seen people like these in my life, if you have people like these in Nigeria people would not be suffering”*.

This type of educational investment has the added benefit of ensuring that a person can make full use of their free-time and opportunities for social activities. Many Africans are motivated to make friends with Irish born people but JP6 is clear when he states that *“it is not that easy to make friends here because once you don’t speak the language there are a lot of barriers; how could you manage to speak with other people if you can’t speak that language?”* JP5’s thoughts further reflect this when he states that his poor level of spoken English does not *“allow me to express myself as freely as I would wish, as I am always obliged to say, “Can you repeat, please? Sometimes they ask me to repeat what I have already said because my pronunciation is not correct. As a result, it creates distance instead of bringing us together. This sometime weakens our relationship. Language is very important”*. Learning English is a key pursuit on many levels.

Further education

Further education is equally valued, particularly as a method of diversifying a person’s skills-set and enhancing their prospects in the labour market.

JP10, a teacher from West Africa alludes to this common experience when he states that *“it is impossible for me to teach in this country at the moment. That is why I am still studying, learning English. It is not easy to do a job without a qualification. You can find a job but it will be a general operative job. Without a qualification the future is unsure. If I finish my English course I will do a bus driving training course in FAS in. It will allow me to have a qualification and find a job”*. LC15 from West Africa, is another person who recognises the importance of this educational pattern. LC15 has engaged in a pattern of continuous study since coming to Ireland. He recognises that this has been important to him in practical terms when he states that *“studying is my own initiative just to, to help myself maybe to get maybe a reasonable job, if the opportunity arises. At the end of the day I may become a societal liability for a long time. I’m not getting any younger”*. The set of desired outcomes inherent in this statement are commonly identified. Educational success will add to a person’s skills base and therefore enhance their chances of finding paid employment but more than this, the immigrants who were interviewed here feel that this pattern of educational activity will also send positive messages to the Irish born population. Migrants do not want to be perceived as welfare dependents and the vast majority of those who are not working in the waged labour force seek other avenues of activity to demonstrate their willingness to contribute. JP8 is clear in this regard when he states that *“everywhere you will go you will be asked the question, “What do you do?” The answer can be either “I am working” or “I am studying”. I have one of them. I don’t want to be a parasite”*.

Some people turn to education when nothing else is available or when they experience failure in the job market. LC4 for example, only applied for a PLC course in Cork when he experienced failure in the waged labour market. However, most people are proactive and gaining qualifications and experience to aid with job search motivates the vast majority. LC13 offers insight here when she states: *“If I am looking for a job for four months and there a course there, I can do it and get more education and get more experience, I can do it, its better to get education then to stay at home”*.

This strategy does not guarantee success however. LC12’s experience in the labour market is symptomatic of the many difficulties experienced.

“I did two course, Alarm instalment as I said, to get a job. NO WAY. Three months for job hunting. No, because I got a good note in Alarms, I was the best student in my course. No job. Everywhere I sent CV in the three months, because after I finish, I finish the course in may, between May and September, I have no job. Even the interview. I didn’t get one chance to do interview, so I decide to do that course, I did web and design in St. John’s for two years, it was good, but no job. I’m off to CIT I am doing the same course”.

Many immigrants find the financial pressures attached to studying difficult to bear. LC8 is clear in this regard, when he states that *“I have many courses. I wanted to do translating. English Spanish and French. I stated to do courses in Waterford but I have to go to university but I don’t have money to pay”*. A raft of ancilliary costs are also recognised. JP8 for example, cites the need to pay for childcare here.

“This year I am doing a VTOS course on Computer and business language; I am going to complete it this year. Next year I will move to the third level in computer sciences. My wife is doing a course on cooking or gastronomy. This year she will go to DIT to start the third level. We collected information for crèche. It will cost us €208 per week, for people who almost €400; minus 208 per week. That is too much”.

As such, it is important to note that the people interviewed here are not engaging in a facile pattern of educational activity but rather are doing so as part of their extended attempts to access gainful employment in this country and integrate into Irish society. As LC1 states *“we (African immigrants) need education, education is our key to move forward”*. This impulse also extends out from the individual themselves to their wider family members.

4.3.2 Children’s education

The Education (welfare) Act 2000 requires all children in Ireland between the ages of six and 16 years to attend an educational establishment. This is strongly in keeping with international law. Protocol 1, Article 2 of the EU convention of Human Rights states that children are subject to compulsory education, irrespective of legal status (Lodge and Lynch, 2004) and the state is required to extend the right to education to all persons resident in the country, not just to citizens of Ireland (POBAL, 2006). Indeed, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment states that one of their stated goals is to encourage the development of an intercultural education pattern that *“facilitates all children in coming to value their own heritage and the heritage of others”* (Tormey, 2005, 21). As a result, often large numbers of foreign-born children are being educated in Irish schools.

This educational activity is commonly valued for the benefits that can come to the wider family group and in particular for the opportunities that a western education will give to children.

“Ireland as part of Europe is organised, everything is well structured and works well. They understand that youth is the future of country. Thus children’s education is ensured” (JP10).

Parents tend to see the importance of education in broad terms. LC11, for example, wishes to return to university and do a masters degree. She states that *“it is good to be educated”* but she situates this desire firmly in terms of the family when she states that *“also for your kids is good. Because it is good for them to be proud of their parents. I always tell myself, because when I had my baby, I started to learn English language, because my baby was so small people say why do you go to school? I say, I don’t want my baby to be tomorrow and be ah not be proud of the parent, you know that, I want my child to be happy of the parent that they do this”*.

School and schooling are important for children. They represent a key method of integrating and are central to parents’ efforts to ensure that their children will be able to access the full range of societal resources placed at the disposal of a person in this country. As JP2 states: *“they (his children) are going to study, get integrated”*.

LC1 is equally clear when he states: *“When my children are grown with their good education in Ireland, and they refuse to work in Ireland with their good education I think they can go anywhere, anywhere to work”*. Here, LC1 firmly situates his desire for a better life for his children in trans-national terms. Education here is seen to bestow a level of confidence on children that will allow them to behave as independent actors at the level of the world. This is a common desire, but it is important to note that it is a desire that is firmly situated in the experience of educational disadvantage in the person’s country of origin and in the experience of poverty and powerlessness in an unequal society. Gaining education is seen as positive pursuit in itself, but such activity is regularly situated in trans-national terms and is thus vital to our understanding of the central role that it plays in the migrant experience. JP10 illustrates this point in the following passage.

“Here you just need to register your child at school. As parents, you just pay the uniform and books. Parents spend money in September with uniform and books, it is all and that is normal. In our country the first parent big problem is the registration of a child in school. How to find a place for your child? It is not free and parents have to pay registration fees and if they have to do so, there is already a kind of selection. A child whose parents are unable to pay the registration fees cannot find a place and will be unable to go to school. Some children want to go to school but they can’t. If the parents can register their children at school, they have to pay the school fees for each child. Some parents have five or six children. Some children are in primary or secondary school and some in University. It is not easy. It is impossible if the parents do not have enough money. Many children cannot go to school because their parents are poor. They want to study but their parents are unable to send them to school because of lack of money. We know the consequences if a child stays at home and doesn’t receive education. He could become either a bad boy or a bad girl; and a child who doesn’t go to school is different from the others. That’s why we have lots of social

problems in our society. Here, it is different. If a child doesn't go to school the reason may be that he/she doesn't want to study. I am talking about a general situation. In my country all families don't have the same standard of life. There are both rich and poor people. I am talking about the majority and the majority of the population is poor. Rich people have a good lifestyle, they have money and don't have any problems to send their children to school and pay school fees. They eat well and are healthy. There are a lot of people who are poorer than teachers and civil servants. They have nothing and cannot touch even 10 dollars per month. I am talking about those people. Here, there are schools and parents pay nothing. I don't know about University because I don't have a child there. I am just talking about primary and secondary school".

4.3.3 Barriers to education

Migrants are motivated to succeed, not simply as an end in itself but rather as part of a wider pattern that may ultimately be determined by the experiences they had in their home country, but barriers exist and research participants were keen to relay the difficulties experienced.

Difficulties are encountered at every level. People seeking to access either introductory education or English language training report that they experience difficulties because adequate information about entry levels and requirements is not accessible to them. JP5 for example, had hoped to do an IELTS language training course to help him address the language barriers that he had identified as holding him back from being successful in his chosen field in Ireland but he experienced many difficulties trying to source an adequate level of training. He does not place blame at the door of the people he encountered but he does state, quite clearly, that: *"I didn't have the right information. I didn't know how the system functioned. It is necessary the right information be given to people so that they could know their rights and duties"*.

JP8's experiences are symptomatic of this and many wider experiences.

"I got information that there was a school in Clondalkin where it was possible to get do some training for computer skills. I went there... Some people were already there so I went. On the starting day I was told that I wasn't entitled to that course since that course was organised only for people who sign for unemployment benefit or assistance. So I was penalised, as I was still receiving Social Welfare allowance. So I lost opportunity to go to school. I wasted a lot of time. I was granted refugee status two years later. Then I went to Whitehall College. I registered but on the day we had to collect timetables I was told, "You haven't been accepted to this VTOS course because you haven't signed for Unemployment for six months. At that time you had to sign for six before being entitled to a VTOS course. I was again penalised. That was a very difficult moment for me. Education wasn't for everybody. And the unique way to get integrated and know Irish people very well was through education. I got that opportunity far later. I was penalised. That was the thing that was really unfavourable to me".

JP10's experience is similar. He states: *"I got my residency and would like to study but I did not know where to do it. I got some information and found some schools. In particular about colleges, I was told that I was not allowed to go to college at that time because there is a procedure to follow before you go to college. You have to be*

unemployed for at least 6 months. After, you will be allowed to go to college and receive the VTOS payment”.

Migrants who succeed in negotiating their way around the applications process also encounter difficulty when seeking to demonstrate the worth of qualifications and learning already gained.

“There was a problem, relating to evaluating the real value of the qualification. I mean that here, the first employers and recruiters I contacted looked at the documents I obtained abroad with negligence. After looking at them they said, “You know you will need other training to upgrade yourself. In reality this upgrading means another qualification. I am now working with qualifications I obtained here. I think that eventually they didn’t even take into account qualifications I had before coming to Ireland” (JP3).

Structures are in place in this regard in Ireland but such difficulties represent a continued and significant impediment to an individual’s participation in further education in Ireland.

The cost of education at third level is also prohibitive. Even migrants who are gainfully employed tend to be employed at lower levels in the waged labour force. These people earn reasonably low salaries as a result. Those that have ambition seek to invest in education in an effort to gain further skills and make themselves more employable at higher levels. However, the avenue most favoured in this respect, accessing further education in the university sector, is closed to most as they cannot afford to pay university fees. LC11 earns €1,500 per month after tax yet, on enquiring about the possibility of enrolling in her favoured course in her local university she was told that she would require €5,000 per year to pay course fees. Unsurprisingly, in this instance, access to higher education remains aspirational only. She states *“I am working just to pay the rent and we are working to feed ourselves. I really want to go to school but I don’t have the money”.*

4.4 Summary

Hardship is often central to the migrant experience. Many suffer emotion trauma as a result of separation from their family and friends. Others experience significant financial and material difficulty. In some ways, this is expected and most people who leave their country of origin and travel to another country do so in full knowledge that they will encounter such difficulties. However, the desire to benefit from the move is of pivotal importance and most people are willing accept the difficulties inherent in the experience in the hope that their lives will improve as a result of their migrant journey.

It is impossible to improve one’s life in a European country if an immigrant is not economically active and as such, every family is focused on attaining a level of success in the waged labour force. Difficulties are experienced but almost everyone is motivated in this respect and even those who have not successfully gained employment to date are engaged in a pattern of activity that they hope will yield results in due course.

This desire to be included economically is the single most significant requirement for an immigrant family arriving in Ireland. The ability to earn a living not only fulfils

life's needs in material respects but it also allows an immigrant to feel as if they are contributing to Irish society. This is important. The people interviewed during this project are motivated to work and are conscious of the negative message that economic inactivity sends to the Irish-born population as a whole. The difficulties encountered by African immigrants whilst they seek to engage with the waged labour force demonstrate that the labour market in Ireland is not yet open to these groups.

It is imperative that the Irish labour market, and the policies that impact on it, be orientated towards this population as the experience of prolonged inequality in these terms can only impact negatively on the drive to integrate. Economic inclusion is certainly fundamental to the creation of an inclusive intercultural society in this country.

CHAPTER 5: INTERPERSONAL INTERACTIONS

5.1 Introduction

People do not operate in a vacuum but rather interact with a variety of contacts on a daily basis. Some of these can be of fundamental importance to a person's well-being. Contacts here can include a person's close family members and friends. Others are more ephemeral in nature and can include the plethora of casual contacts encountered whilst following a 'normal' daily pattern. However, irrespective of their exact nature the quality of such interpersonal interactions can impact on a person's experience of where they fit in Irish society and can therefore be of pivotal importance to an immigrant's sense of self.

The discussions contained in this chapter seek to examine the nature of the closest of these interactions: a person's interactions with his/her family and 'friends'.

5.2 The place of family

The people who participated in this research are invariably clear about the concerns they have for dependent family members and the role that these concerns play in determining their aspirations for the future and the decisions that they make. This may manifest itself in routine and predictable ways, such as in the concerns a parent has for his/her child's welfare in school, or it may be expressed in relation to a more extraordinary set of considerations such as in a person's recognition of the danger that extended family members face in their country of origin and the influence that such realisations have on a person's desire to succeed in Ireland. Nevertheless, almost all immigrants interviewed here consistently contextualise their actions and desires in terms of the family unit.

This is not a straight-forward experience and the vagaries of this situation must be recognised if migrants from the continent of Africa are to be integrated successfully into Irish society. The experience of parenthood and the concerns that parents have for their children dominate.

5.2.1 *Parenthood and the importance of children*

One of the key attractions of living in Ireland is the fact that this country is perceived to be a safe location for children, where children have more opportunities 'to advance' in Ireland than in their parents' country of origin. Most people feel this to such an extent that they are consciously willing to forego their desire for their children to live in their country of origin. People are happy to have a trans-national identity borne from the experience of life in two very different parts of the world but recognise that their children are less than likely to reverse the process of migration and are likely to have a trans-national identity that is firmly anchored in an Irish identity. Thoughts on the future are important here. LC11 for example, strongly identified with her country of origin in West Africa and would like her children to contribute to society in that country at some time in the future but she is equally clear in her desire to see her children as Irish people. She states "*now our kids are growing here, they are born here we prefer that they even stay here to live, because if they go back they have no future*".

She goes on to state *“we were born in Cameroon, it is always good to go back even when you are old, but for them no, they can stay here forever”*.

The resilience of children is important to this experience. Even children who were born outside of Ireland are seen to have the capacity to become more Irish than not. School and schooling is of pivotal importance here. JP3 states:

“We keep links we had before coming here but we now have here our children in school; they even speak this country’s language better than the language of our country of origin. When they came, they used to speak other foreign languages they have now lost in the profit of the English language. For us who came from the Arab world, from Egypt, our children used to speak Arabic but they lost it. So only English remains, and French that we don’t want them to lose. We are struggling to improve their knowledge. We speak it at home. Obviously their French has taken the second position. English holds court. This is already a strong sign that, for example at children level, they only know my country through its name”.

This acceptance is of pivotal importance, going forward. The African experience of being in Ireland is constructed on a number of levels. People born outside this country have their sense of themselves firmly situated in the experience of growing up in Africa. This can be reinforced by the need to interface with family members still living in their original country of origin but children focus their parents on the experience of being in Ireland and on the idea of integration, at a real level. LC7, LC12 and LC15 all raise such issues when considering the broader question of integration. These participants are clear in their view that their children’s potentialities are more firmly locked into an Irish milieu than are their own. LC7, whilst considering the nature of integration, states that he personally does not feel under too much pressure to integrate as *“it is not problem for family here, parents here, they can go back home tomorrow, but children don’t have future in Africa they only have future here”*. LC12 and LC15 continue in this vein but more specifically state that their children’s lack of experience living in Africa precludes them from ever making a life there. LC12 states that *“this is my second home, but the children this is their home, they didn’t live in Cameroon, I left when I was 23/25 you know. I have this type of life, it is not going to change, I grow, but for the kids they shall feel like you. (name), he was born here, he has never been to Cameroon”*. LC15 is equally unequivocal in his views when he asserts that his *“children are born here now and they are from Nigeria, and maybe they can’t get ahead here, they are thinking of going back to the Nigeria, they don’t know anybody there”*.

Another research participant, JP6 actually conceptualises the experience of integration in Ireland almost totally in terms of his children when in response to a direct question, he states:

“Yes I am integrated, as my children are in the local tennis and football club, my son is one the players in the local Gaelic football team – he is already one of their best players and scorers. Personally I am always at work and in weekend I stay with my little family, participating in parents’ meetings. Weekend sport games and so on is already an effort I am doing. It is integration. And when there are calls for charity in this area to secure roof for a school or a play ground somewhere, I am involved. I think this an important part of integration”.

In many ways, people watch to see how their children are accepted by their peers and use this as a barometer of progress. When children are happy and seem to be benefiting from the experience of being in Ireland, so too are parents. JP3 illustrates this appreciation when he states, *“If we can go back to the early stages of our Irish stay, we noticed that Irish people did accept us and we knew it because our children were accepted. That was a strong signal to mean that this was a country where we could live”*. This sense of happiness is further reflected by LC12 when he states *“she (his daughter) has many friends here, from school, from the area, we are the only African family here, from this place. They are playing with her. The knock on the door. Is (daughter) coming out? Is (son)? Which is good, is good”*.

Parents are willing to forego on other desires to facilitate this pattern of successful integration for their children. LC11 and LC8 have experienced a pattern of low level social incivility in their residential neighbourhood and have considered moving to another part of the city but have decided to stay in their present residential location because they feel that their daughter is benefiting from the relationships she has forged in school and the social networks that she is beginning to develop. LC8 states *“she is four, she is very small, but she like her school, her teachers are good. She has many friends, they always invite her. She like the school very much and she know all her friends her school mates. If you are walking with her on the street, she will tell you this is this person this is this person, even the parents, they know her. If they see us on the street they will greet us. They are good there, for kids I think they are good. This is why we don’t want to move, because it will be difficult for her to move”*.

The opposite effect is to be seen when children are seen to be struggling in school or if they are experiencing racism but most families remain focused on making a life for themselves in Ireland and children’s experiences are pivotal to this.

Difficulties do arise. The nature of family life is different in this country to its counterpart in Africa. The majority of research participants recognise this. Two broad areas of difference come to light. These are: i) the nature of the family is conceptualised differently here and ii) parenting norms are often radically different.

5.2.2 Isolation from the extended family

Many research participants draw attention to the extended nature of the African family. This issue is important in conceptual terms, and immigrants from Africa can feel isolated in this country without this social structure to draw upon. The dislocation experienced by many international migrants is articulated by JP8. The illustrative importance of this passage however, does not lie simply in this recognition but rather in the fact that this dislocation is firmly anchored in terms of the family. Here, JP8 is looking back on his life prior to his emigration and articulates his sense of place ‘at home’ most firmly in terms of the wide-spread familial connections that he enjoyed. He states:

“The first thing I can say is about the meaning of loneliness. I have learned this here in Europe. In our traditions, if you ask me to tell you in our language the equivalent of the word loneliness, I would have difficulties to find that. Maybe, I will try to make up a word from two or three others. I ignore the equivalent of the word “loneliness”. For us if you are born and you are known in this commune, somebody will know you in

every street. Easily, even in the neighbouring communes. It was like that, I, we had a system that during holidays, we could go to some family members, for example young sisters of my Mum. Every friend. If you have your Mum's younger sister, who is of the same age as yours, her friend become yours, so you are known even in that area. That is why we were easily known. In any case when we were kids, it was difficult to go in remote areas because of transport problem. But all youngsters could easily be known without any particular efforts. You could be known by one thousand people, and I am not exaggerating. Without being a star or popular. Just as an ordinary person. You will be known by these people because of the way of living. Here in Europe it is really the contrary".

The widespread nature of the family structure is equally important in operational terms. JP5 identifies the role that this plays in facilitating many lives when he states that *"once born, a child belongs to everybody. This can allow a mother to do what she wants. A mother can go either to work or school, there will be someone at home to take care of the children. There will be someone to cook for and take care of them"*. He goes on to state that the absence of such a structure in Ireland can have negative impact as the supports inherent here have to be paid for instead. Child-minding is used as an example here. Similarly, both JP5 and JP10 refer to the role that the extended family plays in supporting the lives of elderly relatives who can no longer take care of themselves. They both see this as a positive element of family life and lament the fact that this does not seem to happen as regularly in Ireland. JP10, for example, whilst considering the role that the wider family plays in the lives of the elderly, considers the obligations that fall on an African family's shoulders and bemoans the fact that a similar pattern is not common in Ireland when he states *"here you just think about yourself, your wife and children"*. He goes on to use this realisation as an example of the reasons that lie behind his reluctance to fully adopt Irish norms but *"take 50% from each side"*. JP5 is equally clear when he states that the children of African families living in Ireland will miss out on the positive experience associated with living in a large extended African family. *"They won't grow up with love for enlarged family like us. They don't know their uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers. They won't have this love and affection we had for our family and they will individualistically grow up"*.

5.2.3 *Different parenting patterns*

Different parenting patterns are also highlighted and immigrants from Africa regularly become exercised by the presence of what they perceive to be lax parenting standards in this country and the resultant negative down-stream effects that may accrue for their children. JP2 certainly feels that Irish parenting patterns should not be adopted by African families as to do so would be to jeopardize the child's development. He states that *"it is dangerous, especially for our children, as they can move in non recommendable environment"*. This is generally presented as a negative aspect of life in Irish society and one that these families are keen to avoid replicating.

An important aspect of parenting, as seen by the people who participated in this research, is that good manners and respect are instilled in children. As LC14 states *"when children are in a home with good manner they will not go wrong in life, they will have respect, when they know what is right and wrong, I think that they will have respect"*. Most African families are strongly of the opinion that an equivalent pattern is

not present in the homes of the Irish-born population. Research participants voice their concerns about their children's safety in this regard and are afraid that the less structured parenting patterns seen among Irish born families will impact negatively on their own children. LC4 states *"during childhood, parents' words have an absolute value. Children have to comply with. On the contrary, children negotiate orders with parents here. I don't know if it is an advantage or a disadvantage for them. If you ask a child to do something, he will ask you why; even if it is for his own interest. The difficult here is that they acquire this education in streets with their Irish friends. Our fear is that drug use is common. Children start to use drugs very young. They start to use drugs at the age of fourteen to fifteen. This is our worry"*.

The following excerpt from JP10 further illustrates this appreciation. He states:

"The way we educate children is different from here. In Africa, if a child does something bad, you can punish him, give him a punishment, beat him or even forbid him many things. It is just to put him in the best way and everybody is involved in this process. Here we see many things. As parents, you have no right to do this or that to your child; you cannot beat him because a child also has his rights. We have two completely different societies about children education. Many children do bad things here, maybe their parents are unable to educate them. Some children receive bad things through friends they meet in the street. Here if the parents are unable to educate their children at home, it is finished because if a child does something bad nobody else will do anything. One day I was walking somewhere and I saw a small boy about 7-8 years old smoking. I said to myself, "If it were in Africa, I could beat him or react, but here I have no right to do anything." If you try to do something, he will tell you that it is not your business because it is not your problem. I just passed by and I didn't do anything. In Africa it is different: I could go to meet his parents report this fact to them because everybody is involved in children education. Here if you see somebody doing something bad you can't either react or say anything".

A deeper reluctance lies at the heart of this experience. There is evidence to support the assertion that the primary child-parent relationship is conceptualised differently in African families. LC10 illustrates this point when he states:

"I see children talking to their father like they are their friend. Even today, now I am still shocked when I see small girl to talk to his father – 'oh daddy you are so bold' - you know all this make me! It is not in our culture. How is that she can say these things to her father? To mam? 'Leave me alone, oh mam go away'. I say, oh my god! In Africa you can never hear that" (LC10).

Interestingly, while parents tend to voice their dissatisfaction with this pattern, most clearly recognise that they are raising their children in a different environment to that in which they grew up and accept that these different norms will inevitably have an impact on their children. As JP4 states, whilst considering the salience of different parenting patterns *"I can't bring things from Africa here. Things from Africa are for Africa. I have to respect the Irish law because I am living here"*. This realisation impacts on parents' perceptions in Ireland and further reinforces the need for children and therefore their families to be successfully integrated, because for children there is no going back to Africa.

“Even here the relationship between the parent and the children is very different from back home. There is a big gap between, between your father and you. I never speak to my dad. Here your child is your friend. There is no way kids can go back, they would be too frustrated” (LC13).

Be this as it may however, the experience of family life remains strongly couched in trans-national terms.

5.2.4 *The trans-national conceptualisation of family and familial obligation*

A striking aspect of family life is the fact that the migrant’s place within this unit is most commonly expressed in trans-national terms. People are committed to Ireland but have a strong sense of looking back. It maybe manifested as something simple. Some Nigerians for example regularly watch Ben TV. Equally however, many immigrants engage in more fundamentally important trans-national practices and regularly send money back to family members still living in their country of origin.

Some research participants have family members scattered across the globe and have not seen these people for some time, but still see them as essential family members. JP7 for example, has relations in France, Belgium and America as well as family in her country of origin in central Africa. She states that she spends often long periods without seeing these relatives and as such seeing them can be *“bizarre”*, but she still counts them as important members of her wider family unit. However, people interviewed here most commonly include those relatives still living in their country of origin when they talk about their family.

This is not an easy or unproblematic relationship. Length of time spent apart inevitably weakens the bonds that exist. This is especially so if people have not been able to travel back to their country of origin in a long time. JP8 has not seen his mother for 17 years and consequently feels that that *“distance reduces affection. I have learned that. It is true that my mother remains my mother; she is still alive. My sisters are still my sisters, but I have noticed that affection has gone down”*. Nevertheless, most people are clear in their desire to see family members ‘back home’ as important familial contacts.

The importance given to the extended family and common experience of hardship in their countries of origin can be of pivotal importance to the maintenance of this bond. Immigrants from Africa may be focused on making their way in Ireland and ensuring that their children benefit from the experience of growing up in Ireland but they are invariably drawn back to their country of origin as a result of the concerns and worries they harbour for family members who remain. LC1, for example, states that he worries *“about my family at home, it comes to our mind all the time, no need of looking at, look at news, I know what happens”*. LC12 goes further when he states *“if there were a way to remove, not even the family, everybody there and leave the country for the people who destroy it, it would be good to do it”*. This can be an unsettling experience and one that is reinforced by the need to contribute to these relations’ lives in financial terms.

One of the strongest patterns that come from this research is the fact that immigrants from Africa, who may often be experiencing financial hardship in this country, continually seek to support the lives of their relatives in their country of origin.

“I can tell you that even though I am a student I have somebody in Africa that I look after. I pay everything for his studies in Kinshasa. Like I said, although we are facing all these tough situations, conjuncture and financial problems, there are people who are still depending on us. There is a say that you can be a millionaire but if in your family you have 1000 poor, it means that you are the 1001st poor. In our culture, if there is something for one person there is something for everybody. But the reality is that it is hard to satisfy everybody. At the same time we can't close our eyes and ears and as if they are fine. We have to share what we have. It is true that it is not their fault. The reality is that in this country, myself, my wife and children are students, and small resources we have to share few resources we have here with those who are in Africa” (JP8)

Sometimes this is a voluntary activity, born out of a person's sense of responsibility for those who are less fortunate. LC12 illustrates this impulse when he states *“if there is an opportunity, I will send money home. I will do it. I have to pay my bills. I have to have my own life, definitely. If there is something important, I will try to tell myself, try to find a way. We are looking back. Most of the people back home - my family now you know, I am the provider. I am the provider, no. I am the provider basically.* He goes on to say that hardship can be experienced as a result of this attitude but that it is a positive experience for him on the whole. *“It make you feel proud of yourself, everything sometimes it is very hard at least, but at the end of the day you count yourself as a lucky person being in Ireland”.* This pattern is firmly situated in the experience of hardship and in the importance placed on communal responsibility. LC3's family still live in her country of origin in West Africa and she places all her experiences in Ireland in the context of the hardship she knows they are experiencing. She states that her siblings *“are still young, I got one eight years old”* and they *“don't have anything”* and therefore *“any little money you know - 20 euro 30 euro, you know you send it back”.* LC2 further illustrates this pattern when she states *“that is the thing in Africa. So if no today, I was in Africa with all the children, I would get help from uncle from girls. Because something can happen. Maybe today my dad is financially OK but tomorrow the situation can be negotiable and then if me, I refuse to help somebody then nobody will help me, you know”.*

This responsibility isn't straight-forward and tensions can arise, particularly in financial terms. While they continue to value the primary familial relationship, some immigrants feel that they are placed under undue pressure to maintain this relationship through a pattern of financial support when the conditions of their lives cannot sustain it. People are imbued with status by virtue of the fact that they have emigrated from their country to a western European economy but they are aware of the fact that the reality of their lives in Ireland does not necessarily tally with the perceptions of their relatives in their country of origin. The following excerpts illustrate this frustration.

“They ask for money, they do, especially for medical. Sometime to eat. They say we don't have money to eat, even to go to school, to go to school, to pay the school, to eat, for medical treatment. We have too much stress because we are not here only for us. We have family back home. For us that is the most difficult, because you have to take care of your family back home” (LC8).

“Oh yes they are calling for help you know, but we don’t know, they are suffering you know, but the situation now, the situation of Nigeria they say you know, they believe Ok this person is in Ireland you’re in Europe that you should be able at least, for old times sake, is that you should be able to help them out, but I am struggling for rent, you should pay bills” (LC3).

“That something I just keep making them realise this time around what I say is that I just wish one of them would just like opportune, would be like opportune to come to this country one day and see what it is like, that they don’t drop money on the streets, that you have to work for it, that they don’t just drop money on the street” (LC7).

“You know in Africa we live in community. I could pay education fees for my brothers, sisters and children. From time to time people who came in my house could find something to eat and go back home, and so on. They know that I used to do that when I was living in Africa. Now I am a Doctor in Europe so I should do even more because they know that in Europe people are well paid. They expect more from me. Even if I tell them that I am not working, they don’t understand. So, they ask for money every time and it becomes sometimes stressful” (JP5).

Steps taken by people here include engaging in work on the informal labour market. JP8 has engaged in this type of work specifically in an effort *“to get possibility to help those who are in your home country” (JP8).*

Inevitably, this experience impacts on a person’s sense of themselves. JP3 for example, while committed to maintaining this pattern of activity recognises that it has inevitably weakened the bonds of friendship that used to exist because the primary relationship he had with the individuals concerned has been irrevocably changed by the reality of migration. He states: *“I know that they are affected not by what I am or have become but by difficult social and economic situations in the country which have put them in position of “assisted or seeker”.* Nevertheless, a multi-faceted sense of personal identity that is neither fully situated in the immigrant’s country of origin or in Ireland is the dominant impact here.

5.2.5 Family and the creation of identities ‘in-between’

Immigrants from Africa have complex senses of themselves. Most are strongly motivated by a desire to succeed in Ireland and to see their families benefit from the experience of in growing up in Ireland but everyone we spoke to is conscious of his/her African identity. This will inevitably impact on the notion of integration. As JP14 states, *“everybody will always keep his/her originality as a person, where this person is or goes”.* This realisation lies at the heart of the African experience in Ireland. *“You cannot throw away what is from Africa” (JP9).* Equally however, most people are open to a multi-faceted construction of who they are and most therefore recognise that they cannot live in Ireland and remain untouched by the experience. As LC2 says:

“I do all here I can. See I grow up here. All I do all here. I can say I got educated myself. I go to (country of origin in West Africa) now there is some way I do, is not the same way they do any more - the same way I feel. I feel now I think, things different now. I am still (country of origin) but if I go I fall in two parts. This Ireland for me is somewhere my home. How do you call? Is like a soda, some kind of mixed drink. If I

take a soda and I mix in (country of origin) and I mix in Ireland I will say that this is my home”.

To a degree, this experience may be biologically determined. Both JP10 and JP3 raise this point. JP10, for example, states that *“personally, I feel myself in my African or Congolese skin as I am here”*. It is unclear, at this level of analysis, whether this statement comes simply from JP10’s strong sense of himself or whether external factors such as his perception of how he is perceived by Irish society, have a role to play but JP3 is clear in this regard when he states that he is conscious of his African position on foot of the recognition that his colour sets him apart from his Irish born counterparts. He states, *“here people still see us as Congolese, obviously because we still have the skin we got when we were born in Congo”*. Be this as it may however, both of these research participants are equally clear in their recognition of the importance of Ireland to them and therefore in their desire to integrate into Irish society and adopt some norms. JP10 states *“we have to integrate in the Irish society because we are already Irish citizens and we won’t go back to our home country tomorrow. Thus I take the two parts: I am a Congolese (African) by blood; I am also Irish because I have to live in this country forever”*. While JP3 states *“in our head there has been such evolvement that today we are closer to Ireland than Congo”*. He goes on to consider the nature of this experience and articulates these complex feelings in terms of food, which he states he and his family miss. Equally however, he states *“but we don’t miss them so much that we become sad. We can live without Congolese food because Ireland offers other alternatives. One can eat Irish potatoes, chicken or beef meat and feel alright”*.

This situation is not without its worries, especially for parents. JP5 considers the role that this in-betweenness will have in his children’s lives. He feels that his children will benefit from having this multi-faceted identity whilst they stay in Ireland but questions how those who return to Africa will feel as they find themselves *“migrants in their own country”*.

In any case, no one position dominates. Some people continue to identify more firmly with their African identity but others are undoubtedly orientating themselves more towards Ireland and Irish society and the vast majority of research participants have adopted a multi-faceted sense of their identity on foot of the experience of immigration to this country. A number of factors can influence this experience. People who experience hardship, people who are the victims of racism or people who experience difficulties whilst interacting with official service providers certainly find it more difficult than others to identify with Irish society and Irishness. On the contrary, people can be quite clear about when they feel more Irish. Four broad categories of answers come to light here. These are i) material concerns, ii) education, iii) language and iv) work.

The experience of difficulty can have a highly nuanced impact. JP9 recounts how the difficulties she experiences when passing customs and immigration checkpoints make her feel when she states *“I am a black Irish and there are white Irish. I don’t know if Irish people consider us black Irish as real Irish”*. Equally, JP7 calls Irish society’s ability to be truly inclusive into question on foot of the social incivilities he has experienced. He states that Irish society has *“to wake up and realise that we are now living a multicultural, multi-ethnic society”*. He goes on to state that *“it belongs to*

Irish people to wake up and realise that change they have to accept and manage properly. What to do so that everybody feels that he is accepted in this country and can live safely here". Others feel that this binary opposition between black and white is insurmountable. LC15 certainly states "the fact is that, that they are Europeans and we are not Europeans, it is clear, it is black and white".

The conditions that can encourage people to identify more with Ireland and Irishness are varied.

Home ownership is a common aspiration. Maybe it is a reflection of the wider social and economic tenor of the country over the past number of years but a number of immigrants clearly state that property ownership can bestow a greater stake in society on them and their children than would be possible if they continue to rent accommodation. JP6, in response to a direct question articulates his desire to feel more integrated into Irish society, but he does so in very specific terms. He states: *"for me I will feel an accomplished Irish when I will have that possibility to hold my own house keys, neither a council house nor a rented one, but my own house, in my name. Then I will feel Irish. For the moment I am (from country of origin)".* He goes on to situate this very firmly in terms of his family when he states *"A Dad always tries to secure the best future for his children. I think that the best future is when we own and manage well a house, in accordance with our income".*

Such musings as these are clearly linked to notions of success and are, in this regard, symptomatic of many wider migrant experiences. Other people have more specific perceptions. LC6, for example, states that *"I felt Irish coming out of school like. I was Irish by my junior cert"* and JP3 identifies his family's changing use of language as evidence of their increasing engagement with Irish society when he states *"we notice this when some compatriots come to visit us directly from (country of origin in central Africa). We feel it through their discourse. The way we speak is now different. We speak the same language but we don't have the same way to say things anymore".* He goes on to state that this has the effect of reinforcing the feeling of being in-between when he states that *"we are more Irish than (African) now but obviously Irish are going to see us always as (African)".*

Success in the waged labour force can be an important factor as well. JP7 summarises many people's feeling here when he states *"I am a part of Ireland through what I do, my work, contributions, taxes, pensions, etc...I am part of this country. I consider Dublin as my village. I feel very comfortable here. I am a part of this city and country".*

5.3 Discretionary contacts and activities

In many ways, the types of interactions outlined in section 5.2 are set. They are illustrative of the immigrant experience at a fundamental level but their nature can be entirely predictable. Time spent in the company of friends is different as it is discretionary. The nature and quality of these interactions may be particularly instructive and an examination of these contacts may allow us to see into the world of the immigrant on a far more fundamental level than would be possible by simply plotting set patterns of activity in the waged labour force or in the housing market and may therefore act as a barometer of integration at a real level.

5.3.1 Social interactions in Ireland

Most people interviewed here can point to a raft of satisfactory interactions they have with Irish born people. These contacts can be diverse in nature. Some are fleeting, just passing interactions in a specific activity based context, while others can be more lasting in nature. JP6 for example, refers to the “*very good relationship*” he has with the parents of his children’s friends. He recognises that this is a limited relationship when he states that “*it is not really that friendship that we, back home we call friendship where people to your home, stay, have a cup of tea, talk to you; you can visit them, they can mind your kids without both counting hours and require to be paid*” but still expresses his satisfaction with the nature of this interaction. This is a common experience. Immigrants from Africa consistently point to the different quality of their interactions with neighbours but, with some exceptions, recognise that interactions can be positive. JP8 illustrates this common pattern when he states “*I can tell you that I don’t even know the faces of my neighbours who are just beside me, their house in beside mine. I know one or two; I don’t know the rest of them. It is really different from our way*” but goes on to recount how a neighbour made him feel integrated by recognising that he too as a fan of Arsenal football club. Equally, people refer to the positive interactions they have with people they meet through work and through specific interests that they have. It is somewhat surprising, in this light, especially given migrants’ often strong desire to integrate into Irish daily patterns, that research participants feel that they are not strongly integrated into Irish social patterns.

People socialise primarily with members of their own community. LC10 for example, feels that “*for all the black they have no so many Irish friends*”, JP5 states that he “*spend most of my time with my Congolese friends, my wife and children at home*” and LC4 states that “*we socialise mainly with our people*” (his own faith based community).

It would be easy in this regard to state that immigrants from Africa are not interacting with the Irish born population by choice and that they are engaging in a separate, less than integrationist social pattern. This would be to over-simplify the situation however and many subtle factors come into play. JP10 and LC10 illustrate the complex nature of this pattern. JP10, for example, is of the opinion that “*I do not have any Irish friends*” but goes on directly to state “*I do not know many Irish*” while LC10, states that “*I want to have Irish friends, I want to have so many Irish friends, it is very difficult, it’s like gold*”. These comments reflect a wider pattern and far from being isolationist in their thinking most people simply do not feel that they have enough contact with Irish-born people to call them friends.

In many ways, this may simply be reflective of a wider migrant experience. Social patterns that can extend towards the experience of mutually supporting friendship are difficult to establish outside defined spheres of activity anyway but they are inherently more difficult to establish from a position of difference. Many people refer to the efforts that they have made to interact with Irish born people but feel that these efforts often go unrewarded. LC11 states “*I usually invite my colleague from work here, but they never come. They say yes I will come, yes, yes but they will not come*”. Language is almost certainly influential here. LC11 speaks good English now but was raised in a Francophone environment and did not have a high level of proficiency in English on

arrival in this country, but this experience can be unsettling and it is understandable when people situate it by making reference to Irish society's resistance to immigrants. JP6 is clear in this regard when he states that *"it is not easy to make friends, as I said, we have to rely on friends from your own community"*.

A range of factors, such as the pace of life in this country may be influential. LC4 for example states that he does not know many Irish born people and goes on to contextualise this experience in terms of the impersonal manner in which society has evolved by saying *"in this country if you are working you just from your house to your car from your car to work you don't know what is in mind, here is not like Africa"*. JP8 further illustrates this issue when he states that he knows many Irish people and does not have difficulties in how he is received by these people but does not feel that he has a deep relationship with them.

"It is almost eight years that I have been living in Ireland. But I can tell you I haven't made more than five Irish friends, though I interact with Irish people. It is true that if they know you they trust you. If you need some help they provide you with it, but they don't consider you as their friend, though. For Irish people it is not easy to become their friends".

Although he does, inevitably, go on to unfavourably compare this situation in transnational terms, JP8's assertions reflect other people's positions here. People from Africa feel unable to fully engage in an Irish social pattern – a pattern that is not seen to be anchored in a series of deep, mutually supportive, kin-based and often geographically bounded interactions, but rather one that is more ephemeral in nature, pivoting on patterns of shared interest and activity. JP3 states:

"The thing I really miss the most about Congo is our way of living social relationship and socialising. We live in family. A neighbour is not a neighbour anymore. He/she becomes a member of the family. If you go out of your house, you will talk with your neighbour, you sit on chairs outside and you talk. But here there is something... We are like locked up. If you don't know each other well with your neighbour, it will be difficult to greet. When he/she sees you, they look at another direction; so you can't greet him/her. It seems to you like your neighbour won't appreciate it. But in country we don't leave like that. We live in family".

The dominant position of the public house is influential. JP6, for example is clear when he states *"it is not easy to socialise in Ireland. What I see in Dublin mostly you have to get out to meet people. You have to get out in pubs, in social events so you can meet people"*. He goes on to reinforce this point by stating *"if it is not in your environment – work or school – it is still very difficult to make friends"*.

These difficulties may simply be a function of opportunity. Lack of money is a barrier. Engaging in a 'full' social pattern can be an expensive thing to do, especially for people who may be living on a limited income. While he would like to, LC8 does not socialise in public houses. He states that it is *"very scare to go out. Sometime. Because of money, it is very expensive"*. LC15 is equally forthright when he states *"given our circumstance we have little social life, we don't go out that much"*.

The routine costs associated with 'normal' family life can impact on this pattern as well. Migrants who do not have extended family members to draw upon may not have

access to childcare. This constitutes a further impediment to a person's ability to go out and meet people during activities that are not child-friendly in nature. LC7 illustrates this when he states.

"Since I am not working weekdays so I have to take care of her (his daughter), we can't still pay childminder from 4 o'clock I leave college at 4 and I will be back home at 5 so I have to stay with her, so there is not much going out at night".

In many ways, this may be symptomatic of a wider migrant experience. LC15 certainly does not feel that this pattern poses undue hardship for him. Instead, he focuses on the benefits that will accrue for him and his family in Ireland and situates his reduced social life in such terms when he states:

"the social life we have is along our church, it is the only social life we have at present, you have to sow a seed to get an harvest, this is the price we are paying to kind of put ourself (sic) together. The time we used to socialise I will use it to sleep, you know to rest. I would have loved to socialise. I would not call it difficult I would call it the price, the price I am willing to pay, it will not be forever, it is just for sometime".

However, more difficult issues arise as well and one has to ask whether the experience of being black in Ireland is influential in this context. A number of people refer to their sense of being evaluated whilst in public spaces such as public houses. LC10 firmly situates the fact that he does not engage in an 'Irish' social pattern in these terms when he states *"if you go in the pub, you won't see so many black here in Ireland, because when you see a black man come into the pub, people look at him the black takes all these things into consideration. Black want to go somewhere where people won't notice him. You know he come into the pub, he want to be somewhere else where they don't notice him. That's why blacks don't go to the pub".*

This experience can be very subtle or it can take the form of overt discrimination. A number of participants feel that door staff can discriminate against immigrants from Africa. LC12 for example, feels that people are refused entry to such establishments simply as a function of their skin colour. He states:

"Every time you go. Every time, and sometimes you even show your id. At some stage, I even show. This is not right! Sometimes he just see you. Not tonight! He didn't even look to see the id. Not tonight, nothing. It is really this way, what you want to do?"

A free-ranging social activity pattern that spans all the available public spaces at an immigrant's disposal does not come to light. Indeed, many people feel that the full range of Irish social spaces are not placed at the disposal of immigrants and social outlets are limited. This pattern will have a serious negative impact on the integration project. LC14, for example, an unemployed married mother of two small children, states that she does not go out and has few friends. She states *"I take my baby to park, maybe one two hours, that's all".*

5.3.2 *Some geographies of friendship*

A limited range of social spaces dominate here. The home acts as a strong central location. Other common activity sites include community halls and the meetings rooms used by religious/community/special interest groups.

Of course, some people do enjoy a wide-ranging social pattern. Pubs and clubs are frequented and people attend cafes and sporting fixtures but the centrality of the home cannot be overlooked. The homes of fellow countrymen and women are most commonly used by the people who participated in this research. Community groups and EMLOS tend to meet in this type of location and a significant social pattern can be attached. LC8 is involved in his country's community group in their current residential location. This association meets on a monthly basis to discuss issues pertinent to their lives in Ireland and to consider the situation in their country of origin. Equally however, there is a strong social element to this activity. This is not simply determined by expediency. Rather, there is much evidence to point to the deliberate nature of this pattern. LC10 for example, is similarly involved in his community. He illustrates this mix when he states that *"every month my community meet. We talk, we eat together, drink together. What we try to do, we do that in each home, to know their place, to know their home. When our people have birthday party for children we meet together we dance"*.

Specific activity-based contacts are also used. JP13 joined a women's group in her residential location while JP12 joined a multi-cultural women's group in an effort to meet people and have an impact on their perceptions.

Religious groups are an important social outlet. In general, it would be hard to over-estimate the role that the faith based community plays in the lives of some people. However, it is clear that this structure fulfils as important a temporal role as a spiritual one in the lives of many and an array of social activities take place on the fringes of this primary activity space. People socialise after services, in the homes of other community members or during specially organised prayer gatherings. As LC1 states, *"our social life is our church"*.

One person, JP6, feels that this spatially constrained pattern can be explained in terms of a lack of opportunity when he states that *"we don't have a space where we can go, meet and talk, except when there's an event like a birthday or wedding you can see people, otherwise there is no way you can easily go, see and chat with people"*. In this light, what may be needed is someplace in-between to reflect the nature of the experience. Immigrants from Africa interviewed here are often not free to engage in a full Irish social pattern and for that reason find it difficult to mix with their Irish born counterparts. JP3 illustrates the frustrations inherent in this position when he states that:

"I think there are things that need to be done to make life more agreeable. It means you can have money but don't have where to go. One wouldn't say there is night-clubs, as one can always say, "This or that night-club exists." The problem is that, from our origins, we weren't born in Ireland, we came from another culture and now we are adapting to Irish culture which is also now in us, but we have got rid of original culture; in fact, we are a sum of these two cultures. And we have difficulties to find a place for this type of people here. It means that here either you stay at home or you go to a totally and typically Irish ambience. That's it. We would like places where people could mix up, as it is happens like in some countries like France where people are encouraged to create mixed night clubs: Caribbean's for example. When they say

Caribbean's nightclubs, there are Europeans as well. But there is a real "tropical colour." We would like to have such kind of places here as well".

People also tend to meet in an informal manner. However, the home again acts as a strong central location during this activity. LC11 for example, states "*we socialise with each other, we go to each house, once a month, we try to socialise to know each other. Maybe they can give ten, ten euros or five, five euros, and we cook or drink. Maybe we drink together maybe one drink, we cook, cook together, that's all*".

Frustrations can be voiced on foot of this activity pattern. Individuals who are more motivated to engage in a wide-ranging social pattern can sometimes blame Irish-born people for the experience of social isolation in this country. JP6 for example states that "*it is not that easy. People can be friendly but they keep themselves. They just say one or two words and that is it. When we say friends it means you can speak to the person, call, visit, go out with and talk to the person*". Equally, LC11 states "*people were not too friendly. It was very difficult. Every day I would say oh my god why are these people so difficult with me*".

5.4 Summary

Interactions with family members and friends are commonly important.

The family unit is the key social unit among this population sub-group. Immigrants tend to be very focused on their children and on the need to facilitate their children's lives in this country. Most are therefore extremely focused on following an integrationist pattern but many nuances are discernable. A predictable pattern comes to light. The family unit is strongly implicated in the experience of migration to this country. Many people contextualise their hopes and desires in terms of this unit. The experience of the nuclear family and of children in particular is of pivotal importance going forward, but equally, links are maintained back to members of the extended family who may still be living in the immigrants' country of origin. This results in a strongly trans-national construction of family and one that is differentially experienced depending on the quality of the primary contacts. People are focused on integration in Ireland, especially for their children but continue to be 'pulled back' by the importance that they continue to ascribe to contacts with people still living in Africa.

The construction of this identity 'in-between' will inevitably have an impact on the experience of integration for many and this 'in-between-ness' must necessarily be embraced by Irish society if a truly intercultural construction of what it means to be Irish is to be progressed in the 21st century.

A less than integrated friendship pattern is to be seen however and most of the people interviewed here follow a reasonably constrained pattern of interpersonal contacts. Immigrants are keen to interact with Irish born people but tend not to do so. This is not a reflection of resistance on the part of the immigrant but rather seems to be clearly anchored in the limited scope people have to interact with people outside their own communities and the more limited access to socialisation space in their cities and towns. The geography of this particular issue is worthy of far more significant consideration than was possible here and elements of social life pertinent to the integration project may come to light in this regard.

CHAPTER 6: RACISM AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

Recent studies of integration in Ireland show that immigrants can be exposed to multiple exclusionary practices in this country and that these practices are often couched in racist terms. However, be this as it may, it is important to note that this experience is difficult to access and caution is required lest a study of this type simply reflect and reinforce 'standard' patterns outlined by previous researchers.

On one level, such experiences can be difficult to recount and individuals may not be comfortable relaying such experiences to an 'unknown' researcher. More fundamentally however, it is important to note that such experiences will rarely be discussed in a predictable manner but rather tend to be folded with layers of meaning depending on the outlook of the individual concerned and how comfortable he/she is within his/her own research dialogue. Both these caveats are influential here.

Many of the most thoughtful individuals interviewed during this research project have invested much intellectual energy in internalising the experience of being black in Ireland but still do not feel comfortable referring to their daily experiences in the language of racism. This is a common pattern and one that deserves recognition at an early stage. Almost every person spoken to here has experienced difficulty of one sort or another and all are able to recount second-hand stories about the often extreme difficulty experienced by family, friends and acquaintances in this country. It would be very easy in such circumstances for an individual to immediately ascribe the difficulties experienced to the presence of a racist ideology, but this does not happen. When asked, most research participants state that they have not really been subjected to the types of experiences that could commonly be classified as springing from a racist discourse. For example, in response to a direct question, JP8 states "*to be sincere, I wouldn't say that Irish people are racist*" and "*I haven't personally experienced racism*". JP5 certainly feels that he has experienced difficulty but stops short of consciously identifying his experiences as being experiences informed by racism when he goes on to state:

"I don't know why I do not get a job. Is it racism? I can't say that. I don't have proofs. Go where blue collar workers work. It is like that. It is reported by a qualified immigrant who worked there as a blue collar worker. He could not tolerate it and left his job after one week. Some times on street you can hear 'Dirty black'. If you insult me "Dirty black", I say: "Dirty white". Is that racism? I don't know. They can insult me and I don't understand what they are saying; I don't care. I haven't personally and openly experienced racism".

Difficulty is experienced but JP5 is reluctant to situate the experience in the broad terms of victimhood. This is a common pattern. People recognise that they have experienced difficulties as immigrants. They recognise that racism may be influential. However, they often shy away from making such statements and it is only on reflection that such patterns are recognised.

In this light, we find no rush to adopt such a cult of victimhood among these research participants. Rather, people display high levels of analytical maturity when considering their experiences. For example, LC6 states *“I think that the racist card is spun a lot, it is such a delicate matter, it is too easy. I know there are a lot of people out there that are using it and this is one of the biggest disappointments is that these ones are coming to Ireland who use it. We joke about it”*.

LC16, LC6’s mother offers the following story to support her son’s analysis. She states that she was the victim of a significant verbal assault when she moved to her current residential location. Her first instinct was to walk away but she refused to be bullied and confronted the family involved. She states *“I felt really insignificant and small and I felt will I always run back into my home and just politely getting into my home and I thought no that’s not me it is almost an important thing to recapture my dignity and I knocked on the door and I walked away feeling a million dollars, I actually felt dignified*. She goes on to analyse this experience and states *“When I relate this story I ask were they really being racist. They possibly were racist but they were ignorant mostly”*.

This does not nullify the experience nor does it show that people are reluctant to talk about such experiences. Rather, this type of excerpt demonstrates that such passages need to be unpacked very carefully if the reality of the situation is to be assessed ‘successfully’. The following consideration is therefore not designed to paint a picture of difficulty and automatically ascribe this difficulty to the presence of a racist ideology in Ireland. The many difficulties experienced by African immigrants in Ireland are comprehensively outlined in other sections. Rather, these passages seek to examine how African immigrants are seeking to engage with the exclusions encountered in light of their recognition that a racist ideology may be at work. This examination will in turn inform our understanding of how the difficulties inherent in the migrant experience are negotiated in light of difference more generally.

6.2 Experience of difficulty and the racist ideology

Many people refer to difficulties they have encountered whilst living in Ireland. Some of these are impersonal in nature such as those that are experienced on foot of a system that is clearly not working for them, others however are couched in highly personal terms. Some of the most destructive of this latter group occur when an immigrant has been subjected to an experience based on the colour of his/her skin or his/her ethnicity.

This is not an issue that is specific to Ireland. As JP1 states *“you will meet racism everywhere. Even amongst Africans, you can meet racist people. So I say these are things, black or white colour, among whites you will find racism; among blacks as well there are racist people”*. Unfortunately, these experiences can be common.

LC12 provides a good tri-partite conceptualisation when he states *“there are three types of people. i) People who don’t know anything. You are black, you are yellow, whatever. You are human being. They can be against you. Where you come from it does not matter. 2) There are those types of people who are really really really racist. They don’t want to hear anything you talk to them, they don’t want to hear, they don’t want to know. 3) There are those people who pretend to like but they don’t like. It is because the system makes them, they had to accept. There is people like that”*. The

experiences recounted as part of this project fall most strongly into categories two and three.

The experience of exclusionary behaviour is common and is disheartening in nature. Nearly everybody interviewed here referred to their experience of personally abusive incidents where their skin colour/ethnicity/nationality was used as a weapon against them.

One man from a bike, from a bike told LC12, what you doing here, go back to your country fucking bastard, go back, go back (LC13)

This can be especially common during stressful or confrontational interactions. A number of incidents took place whilst research participants were driving a car. JP5 gives an example of such behaviour when he states “*in the traffic situations. If you drive badly they can insult you ‘Dirty black’*”. LC7 goes further as he explains how this experience has led him to change his behaviour in the car. He states

“the experience is when like if I am driving, difficulties especially in hold up. That’s why in hold up I don’t look at face of people next door. Always straight, because when you look, someone will give you a bad word, some can, they just ask you your time, you know, just ask you what is your time. They are telling you your colour. There is a lot of them, especially these teenagers. What is your time, is telling you your colour. Ask you to watch your colour, you are black”. He goes on to explain “sometimes if you have a misunderstanding with a driver, a white driver, he can say black man what are you doing? Fuck you, fuck you. Go to your country. What are you doing here? Go back to your country, fucking black man. What are you doing here? Much, much fuck you, black”.

This type of experience can be especially disheartening when such behaviour is aimed at one’s children.

“It happened once to my child. I said to my children if somebody call you “Monkey”, you call him “Pig”. One day, a group of children insulted him “Monkey”. He replied by saying “Pig”. They then beat him. He came at home crying” (JP5).

However, in many ways, this is not troubling to many. The people who are interviewed here are certainly not cowed by such experiences.

6.2.1 Experience of overt racism

The type of overtly abusive experiences recounted here can occur in all spheres of life. People experience such difficulties whilst looking for accommodation. Equally, even though waged labour is regularly held to be a strongly positive experience, racially motivated experiences are seen to take place here as well. Exclusionary practices are particularly common in public spaces such as public houses and night clubs and many people feel uncomfortable using public areas such as bus stations. At another level, some people feel that they have been the victims of institutional forms of racism when seeking to interact with a range of statutory service providers.

While most immigrants are likely to have experienced this type of difficulty, most seem equally happy to internalise it, make sense of its root causes, avoid feeling like a victim and move on. A number of key discourses come to light. The immigrants interviewed

during this research cope with the experience of difficulty here by rationalising it. The people who are seen to be displaying racist tendencies are regarded with some disdain. The opinions they voice and therefore they themselves are seen to i) betray a lack of experience in the world, or ii) lack basic intellectual ability. Conversely, research participants tend to take 'the high moral ground'.

The lack of experience, particularly experience of the world, is commonly seen to lie at the heart of the racist discourses people experience in Ireland. LC7, LC15, and JP9 all situate their experiences in these terms.

"Sometimes you don't blame them because if you don't travel you don't know" (LC7).

"I can understand why the Irish people are like this it is the first time they are seeing different people coming to their country and it will take some time to actually can say, ya it is good to live together" (LC15).

"Irish people who know God are very kind and friendly. Those who never travel outside Ireland are not friendly" (JP9).

People also tend to question the intellectual ability of those who are seen to be engaging in this type of behaviour. LC8 poses this question when he states *"I don't know if they just don't care about people or if it is just slowness, I don't know what's wrong but they never learn about different cultures"*. In a similar vein, LC6 refers to a difficult incident with a workmate who was being abusive and using racist terminology and remembers how he was able to move beyond the abusive nature of the experience by drawing on his perception of the fact that he was going to do more with his life than the person who was abusing him in a racist manner. LC6 states: *"this guy was calling names. I did what you always taught me mum, I said nothing. I just looked at him and said nothing. All I said man, was he was a labourer mixing concrete and this is one nigger who won't be collecting the dole"*. LC6 further elaborates on his thinking when he goes on to state *"the way I'd experience racism would be if somebody has a big nose, somebody is going to shout out to him, hey big nose because they are weak or something obviously you know their nose it is probably somebody stupid who couldn't even put through three decent sentences to run together. You feel sorry for them"*.

In this respect, people tend to adopt 'the high moral ground' when confronted with such experiences. JP2 and JP1 illustrate this point:

"Another day a lady greeted, looked at me and said, "Go home. What are doing here? Go back home." I looked at the woman and said, "Poor lady, what can I tell you?" I think that she doesn't have a life experience like mine" (JP 2).

"I always said that racism is something anchored in the individual, in what I call little men. It is in them. If I reported that to Gardai, one can threaten him but this won't ever remove from him racist feelings. So I find it is a waste of time to go and report to authority. That wouldn't change anything in that person who will continue to be racist. I was also victim of something similar. I see a young boy, a youth, in Dublin just beside Trinity College, I passed and this little boy spitted at my feet. I was with somebody who got upset, "Have you seen what he has done?" I said "What did he do?", then he continued "Didn't you see how he spitted at you?" I said "I only find that he is a street impolite child. A normal child wouldn't do that. This is a child... These are racist"

children. These are racist assaults. So I have a mental flexibility that allows me to bear those things. It doesn't even bother me. I say to myself these things can happen. Mentally, I am already prepared. I say these things can happen. I can say these are two concrete actions that I have experienced, these two actions. Others, they can happen. Some can speak slang, I don't even understand. They talk, I pass. They insult, I pass" (JP1).

6.2.2 *Subtle racism and the public gaze*

While this type of overtly racist behaviour is disheartening, a potentially more destructive, but less overt set of experiences also come to light. Many people, even those who feel that they themselves have not been the victim of racist thinking, state that they have been made conscious of their skin colour/ethnicity whilst in public space but could not identify the exact cause of this experience. Certainly, no one violent or abusive incident needs to be experienced. Rather, the people who report on such feelings tend to state that they felt as if they were being evaluated by the population as a whole. This equates with an incipient sense of racism lurking beneath the surface of daily life. Such feelings can best be conceptualised in terms of 'the gaze' and are most commonly experienced in public space.

"In the bus station or somewhere, when you just arrive. You go there, the breath, whoooo. You know then, they never go near you" (LC10).

"we go to the City Centre, some looks were hostiles, you could read in them astonishment even rejection. And that was from both young people and adults, especially elderly people. When some of them looked at us we could feel that we were appreciated. They constantly looked at you, couldn't look at somewhere else but you, until you disappeared from their sight, without saying a word. This was hard to handle, that look. This was hard to bear" (JP3)

The amorphous nature of this experience effectively means that it is far more difficult to confront, internalise and rationalise than most of the highly specific experiences outlined here. It is therefore potentially far more destructive in nature and will require a far deeper understanding to be fostered at the level of society as a whole before effective measures can be instituted to combat it. The media may have a role to play here. Unfortunately, some immigrants feel that the media has been a negative influence in this regard. As JP6 states *"they should stop spreading the image that African people are not good at anything"* and start instead to inform the population about the difficulties faced by these population groups. *"Media should be educated to consider immigrants and Irish as equal"*.

6.3 **Summary**

Many people can recount the experience of subtle social exclusion that comes when one's difference is highlighted in an abusive or violent manner. However, it is inevitable, in light of the excerpts outlined here, that people can also feel excluded from society without having experienced an overt form of racially motivated discrimination or abuse and when taken together, both the overt experiences and the more subtle patterns outlined here combine to ensure that an appreciation of exclusion is reinforced among the people who participated in this research.

While most research participants are loath to place themselves as victims here, the considerations contained in this chapter show that the experience of being black does inform how African immigrants interact with elements of wider society in this country. This should be borne in mind during any subsequent consideration of the specific difficulties encountered by this population sub-group in Ireland.

This pattern certainly poses a question for integration, going forward. As JP8 states “*to be honest, it is difficult to identify yourself with country where you are always excluded*”.

CHAPTER 7: LOOKING FORWARD

7.1 Introduction

It is entirely in keeping with the methodological pattern followed here that research participants' own views on the integration project be presented. Most people certainly offer their opinions on the nature of this project.

7.2 Some thoughts on the future

While much time has necessarily been spent examining some of the minutiae of the African experience in Ireland, many of the people interviewed here also tended 'to take a step back' and conceptualise their experiences at the broader level of society as a whole. These considerations inevitably turn towards a person's thoughts on the future.

Research participants commonly feel that they and their communities have been making significant efforts to integrate into Irish society. As JP6 states *"on my side I would say that I have done a big step, I am talking here about myself as an individual and maybe my little family as well, not on behalf of other people. For me I have made a lot of efforts such as learning this country's language (which is not easy), getting culturally integrated in particular at work, through the language and participating in socio-cultural events – sport and charity events. I am quite present. I think I have made my part of integration"*.

This is unsurprising. Most people accept that the incoming population should move towards embracing Irish patterns. This is generally seen to entail the adoption of a series of norms across all aspects of daily life. However, responsibilities are recognised to exist with both the incoming and receiving populations. For example the ability to interact with Irish born people and understand their perspectives is regarded as a prerequisite to integration. The people interviewed here do not favour the development of separate cultural groupings in Ireland. However, they feel that this cannot occur if the incoming population cannot speak English. There is therefore an onus on immigrants to learn the language. Equally however, it is recognised that people cannot learn the language if opportunities are not available to do so, and cannot interact with the Irish-born population if they cannot exist as equals in this country. Access to waged work is seen to be particularly important here. JP10 illustrates this multi-faceted acceptance in the following excerpt.

"For me when a foreigner enters a new country, he is still a foreigner. He does not know anything but he has to live the same manner as the nationals do. To do this the foreigner has to accomplish many things. It is the beginning of the integration process. It depends on the country you enter.

If the language is the same as yours, the first problem is out and the language problem is solved. If the language is different from yours, this becomes the first barrier and you have to face it.

When you face the language problem, the other problem is that you don't know where you have to go if you need help, what office or service you have to consult, and what service can guide you to solve your problem. You don't know; you feel like lost.

The other problem is work. You have to start a new life: language, work, making relationship with the nationals. It is not easy.

You come in a country and you don't know anybody, you have to make friends. How to create relationship? You need to be introduced by somebody to make it. When I came in this country, I knew nobody but slowly and progressively I got friends. You want to do this or that but you don't know how to do it. You do neither have information nor know how to get it. And nobody will give you this exact information you need. I think that is all you have to do: study, learn the language, work and follow or respect the country laws. I think with all these things you slowly start to integrate in the society. I know that this process takes a long time and you will slowly and progressively discover and understand things. You will say to yourself, "If I knew this or that I could directly go there; I went there and they told me that." You start to understand. After that you will be integrated in the society (JP10)

Be this as it may however, many immigrants feel that an unfair onus is placed on them in this regard and that more should be done to ensure that integration can occur. JP8 and LC15 express such feelings when they state:

"it is true that responsibility is on both sides but they have to welcome you first. You need occasion to show what you are able to do. Without that it is very difficult" (JP8).

"If we are talking of inclusion you must give people the opportunity to actually be included you can't say I want you to be here and actually you don't want the person to be there because you are not giving him the opportunity to be there" (LC15).

Practical issues are most commonly valued and nearly everyone identified a range of issues that they feel, if addressed, would help smooth the process of integration in this country.

Work dominates, particularly on foot of its ability to advance a life in material respects. JP5 for example makes this type of primary connection when he links the efforts he has made to integrate with the prospect of financial reward.

"As far as I am personally concerned, I have made enormous efforts and I deserve to touch money (laughing) so that I can pay taxes and levies to build up this country. This is what I would say".

JP7 is equally clear when he associates the fact that he is fulfilled professionally with his feelings of contentment in general. He states *"I feel integrated. Integration happens at different levels. At work I am integrated, since I have my position and am doing my job properly. I am participating and bringing my contribution in terms of culture, ideas and intelligence. So I am integrated at work level. At that level I am totally integrated: my vision and way of dealing with situations that I have brought from abroad – my education is from abroad – are accepted in my work. So I am totally integrated".*

Conversely, those who have not been successful in their search for work see this absence as a strong impediment to integration. JP5 for example, does not feel that he has been able to integrate into Irish society. He states *"to me, getting integrated means participating positively in the process of building up and developing this country. From this point of view, I would say no because since I have arrived here, I only live on*

social welfare. I don't see my contribution to the development of this country". He goes on to illustrate this further and link the frustrations he feels with this gloomy prospect when he states "there are no other words to say that. If I don't work, I think I am in limbo of the society. I am like a free electron which is wandering around looking for an area to be attached in order to produce something. I have expertise and skills that both I and this country cannot use. So, I don't feel integrated. This is my point of view".

Such feelings can be particularly pertinent in this regard, as people can see this lack of success as a sign of an unwillingness to help on the part of the Irish authorities. It takes only a short leap, in such instances, to feel as if Irish society is actually not interested in integration and therefore is not interested in your presence in this country. JP5 has been unable to secure work in his field. He is clear when he states that this reflects badly on Irish society as a whole when he states "*society hasn't allowed me to integrate. I have made efforts like a devil, but today I will complete five years and I am nowhere*".

This primary concern is commonly linked to the cost of living in this country and in particular to the prospect of owning your own house and therefore having a material stake in society. JP6 considers his future in Ireland in these terms and links it firmly to housing when he states "*I work. But there are still two or three points that push me to think to my future ten years in this country. The first is that house prices are very high here. This requires you be indebted until the last day of your life*".

Other considerations may have a more philosophical basis. Many immigrants are conscious of the need to engage in other patterns that may allow them to contribute and therefore to feel as if they are progressing in Ireland. JP5 for example states that

"I have integrated into this society because I am member of some organisations. I am a volunteer for Mental Health Ireland where I help mentally disabled people to reintegrate into the society and interact with the society. They are Irish people. We go out with them. We can go to the cinema, watch football matches on TV or go either for a chat in a restaurant or in a hostel in order to break their isolation. I participate in this association as a volunteer. I also am a board member of a project. We monitor how the project is managed and what should be done so that the project continues to exist after the end of the funding period. In this point of view, I would say I have integrated the society. That's it (laughing). It is both sides. I make effort to integrate into the society. I don't stay at home crossing my hands. The fact I go to University, looking for job, working as a volunteer and going out with ill Irish people who need support, prove that I am integrated in this society and am member of this society. I would even add that I feel that I am Irish when I watch a rugby match on TV - like what happened recently when France beat Ireland, I was mad (laughing)".

7.3 Summary

The immigrants interviewed during this project are conscious of their obligations to try and integrate. This can be expressed in very overt terms or it can be more subtly put. Nevertheless, immigrants from African contexts are prepared to make that step. Irish society needs to reciprocate and provide these often quite marginalised groups with the economic, cultural and social infrastructure needed. In many instances, this

infrastructure is not yet present in this country. This, more than any other issue, constitutes the single most significant barrier to the integration project in this country.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

The families interviewed during the course of this research have been thoughtful and articulate commentators on what is the most significant axis of socio-cultural change that has occurred in this country since the advent of mass industrialisation/urbanisation in the middle of the last century. As the various commentaries used here show, people are not mindlessly reacting to the experiences they encounter but are commonly internalising and making sense of them in light of their own histories and the desires they have for their future lives in this country. The qualitative methods used have been able to access these patterns and, in our opinion, the insight garnered from these conversations has been significant on a level beyond that possible if survey style-methods were used.

The conversations conducted were wide-ranging, free-flowing and often quite individualistic in nature. A significant qualitative picture of each individual's experience arose out of these research dialogues and people's experiences, thoughts, hopes and frustrations were outlined, in often significant detail. The dialogic pattern that was pursued resulted in the production of quite divergent research transcripts but when taken together and analysed qualitatively the data garnered from these interactions allow the research team to build towards a comprehensive treatment of the African experience of settling in Ireland.

It is not our intention to over-state the divergent nature of the data and many common patterns are discernable. People often talk about similar experiences and refer to the fact that these experiences prompt the same types of feelings, both good and bad. Equally, these recollections can be anchored in the same narrative across a number of different research dialogues and can therefore build into a strong pattern. More than this however, individual statements, when taken together, help a general appreciation and foster an understanding of the issues experienced by African immigrants at a level that is deeper than that possible by simply charting commonalities across a dataset.

8.2 There remains a need for strong inter-culturalism

African immigrant communities engage in strongly trans-national practice. This is constructed at many levels. Families are focused on achieving a level of 'success' in Ireland but they do not move far from their African identity. They see themselves as having a multi-faceted identity anchored in their country of origin by virtue of their own experiences. This is then reinforced by the need to interface with family and friends who are still resident there. While this requirement can cause stress and incur financial hardship on people who may not be experiencing a level of material success equivalent to the perceptions of those still resident in Africa, most people are happy to maintain these links, as they represent a real connection back to their country of origin and to their previous lives. Equally however, people are focused on life in Ireland. Ireland is seen to offer hope for the future, on a level far beyond that which is available in their country of origin, and life in this country is embraced on this level. This is especially pertinent to the management of children's lives. Children are recognised as

having their parents' African heritage but their own potentialities are even more firmly anchored in Ireland than those of their parents.

An identity in-between is created. This multiplicity must be embraced by Irish society at large if any real sense of integration and interculturalism is to be realised and both the Irish born population and immigrant groups must move towards an acceptance of the multi-faceted nature of the immigrant's place in this country.

In some ways, the path towards the creation of such an intercultural society has begun to be mapped in this country. After a slow start, Irish policy makers have engaged with the need to legislate for the presence of a multi-cultural society in this country and the promotion of equality, inclusion and interculturalism is now central to many efforts in the public domain (Coakley and Mac Einri, 2006). Three significant initiatives: i) *Integration: a two-way process* (DJELR, 1999), ii) *National Action Plan Against Racism* (D/JELR, 2005) and iii) *Common Basic Principles* (EU, 2004) are illustrative of this drive. What is needed in this regard is not a new initiative or series of initiatives. 'There is no need to reinvent the wheel'. Rather, basic measures are required that can inform the population at large about the difficult realities of an immigrant's life while not losing sight of the needs of an Irish-born majority, and reinforce the intercultural project that is set out in such documents.

- Above all other things, an increased engagement with the reality of racism is required.

A diverse pattern of multiple exclusionary practices is encountered. Some of these experiences are overt in nature, such as instances of physical violence, name-calling and discrimination when seeking to access public space. Others are far more subtly put, such as the experience of institutionalised racism at the level of society. However, all build towards a realisation that an individual's potential is defined by elements of his/her racialised identity. Difference is recognised, not ability. A particularly difficult example of this tendency is provided by the people who quite clearly state that they have been made conscious of their skin colour/ethnicity whilst in public space but could not identify the exact cause of this experience, other than to say that they felt as if they were being evaluated by the people around them. Here, people are articulating their feelings of being different and not in control of their own space. This is a very powerful expression of the challenges to inter-culturalism and integration that exist in Ireland.

Most adults can recount experiences of difficulty whilst seeking to engage with the Irish-born population but people do not rush to 'play the race card'. Indeed, many deliberately avoid making such judgements. Nevertheless, people are conscious of their racialised position and measures must be instituted to reinforce the unacceptable nature of attitudes and actions that impact on this perception. Interculturalism cannot be achieved without acknowledging this experience of difference and exclusion. This should be operationalised at a number of levels.

- Equality of access to societal resources must continue to be encouraged if a truly intercultural vision of life in Ireland is to be fostered. Any lingering pattern of institutionalised racism must be excised from the immigrant experience. In part, difficulties experienced can result for the poor

organisational culture and lack of attention to customer care that exists in certain sectors in this country in general. However, realistic interventions can be achieved on two levels i) through the continued provision of information on rights and entitlements and ii) through the institution of proper intercultural training for front-line staff in service providing organisations. Many African immigrants simply feel as if the staff they deal with do not understand their needs.

- Equality of access to public space must be reinforced. This is of vital importance to the experience of daily life. Immigrants feel that they are not in command of the public spaces of their villages, towns and cities. This can be experienced on many levels. Door staff for example may effectively deny immigrants access to a huge range of social spaces on foot of the discriminatory practices that they engage in. Equally, many immigrants recount being the victim of incivilities whilst in public space. Furthermore, immigrants also report on the experience of unease whilst in public space, in the absence of any clear cause. When taken together these experiences build towards an appreciation of difference and exclusion and that urgently needs to be addressed at national level. The institution of procedures to combat specific sectoral difficulties is laudable, but this can only go so far. Interventions that move towards ensuring immigrants' rights of equal access to societal resources are essential elements of the integration project but, if integration is to be realised at a fundamental level, Irish society must address the prevalence in this country of deeper ideologies that differentiate between people on the basis of race and ethnicity and use this differentiation to determine a person's 'place'. Equal treatment in law, in the economy, in education, and in social welfare can only be effective if a wider realignment takes place as well.

The mass media has a role to play here. Immigrants often feel as if the richness of their culture and their contributions to Irish society are sidelined in reportage in favour of reports that emphasise the difficulties that arise.

- Educational interventions may be useful. While many parents express their satisfaction with the education of their children. The importance of a strongly intercultural curriculum must be reinforced and teachers must be trained in the delivery of such programmes in a culturally appropriate manner. This will inevitably impact on the tenor of society as a whole in years to come.

8.3 Participation is key

The immigrants from Africa who were interviewed here feel that they have proven themselves willing to move towards Irish norms. All they ask of Irish society is that conditions that allow them to continue to do so are fostered. The long-term creation of an ideologically intercultural society is of pivotal importance here but practical issues also need to be attended to. Unfortunately, negative experiences come to light in this research.

- Economic exclusions are recognised. A closed labour market exists in Ireland. Particular difficulties are seen in terms of job search.

- Social exclusions are commented upon. Difficulties are encountered whilst trying to access relevant support services. These difficulties can arise in many contexts as, for example, in the housing market when people experience difficulty sourcing adequate housing for their family.
- Cultural exclusions are highlighted. Difficulties can be particularly negatively experienced at local level.

Some of these difficulties are strongly practical in nature. Basic requirements in the areas of housing, access to employment, education and social services are central and there is a pressing need to address difficulties and shortcomings at this level.

Other, more intangible difficulties also come to light. The fight against racism and discrimination for example, must be at the forefront of action nationally (indeed, progress is being made this area) but the testimonies gathered here demonstrate that there remains a strong need to address such issues in terms of the emerging realities of an intercultural society. The highly constrained geography of friendship and leisure outlined in this report is implicated in this regard.

8.3.1 The ability to source appropriate family housing is of fundamental importance

Housing appropriate to the needs of immigrant families is required. The experience of living in direct provision has left a mark on many people and the desire to secure suitable accommodation ranks very highly in immigrants' hierarchies of need.

People generally express themselves to be happy with the conditions in which they live. While many immigrant families struggle financially and are consequently active at the lower end of the private rental market, the housing stock occupied by the people interviewed here is deemed to be of reasonable standard. The difficulties identified are of a more wide-ranging nature. The nature of the housing market in general and people's limited ability to engage with it in particular are commonly held to constitute a source of significant difficulty.

The high price of housing in Ireland dictates that much immigrant accommodation will continue to be sourced from the private rental market in the short to medium term and that immigrant families will continue to bear the expense of the high rents payable here, albeit often supported by social welfare rent allowances. Pragmatism dictates that such interventions will also continue to be important but it is notable that most immigrants hope to move away from this type of assisted living at some point in the future.

The challenges and barriers encountered by immigrants whilst trying to source private rented accommodation as well as the sheer length of time taken to secure this housing for their families and the difficulties encountered when trying to interface with Irish born landlords and Irish-born staff in housing offices are remembered and are influential in focusing people on the need to secure a more lasting form of accommodation in this country. The desire to be seen as other than a welfare recipient is also pivotal here. Nevertheless, for many, the idea of home ownership is aspirational at best. The resources necessary to meet the requirements for a mortgage are simply beyond the means of many of these low-income families. The experience of hardship whilst moving from the position of rent assisted social welfare recipient to that of

private tenant is also brought to mind here. People who have experienced such difficulties are reluctant to expose their families to such financial pressure again.

In this way, the dynamics of the housing market are immutable. Immigrants recognise this fact but experience frustration nevertheless. The high rates of home ownership historically common among the Irish-born population must further reinforce any sense of isolation and marginalisation that is harboured by immigrants in this respect. Local authority administered social housing and affordable housing schemes are recognised to offer the best opportunity to move away from the private rental sector. Many families are focused on this route out of this pattern of welfare dependency, but waiting lists are prohibitive. Immigrant families recognise that this is the reality of the housing market in this sector and that many Irish born families also experience the frustrations whilst waiting for such accommodation to become available, but frustrations inevitably arise. Such frustrations may be lessened if a clearer pattern of information dissemination was provided.

- Racially motivated discrimination in the private rental market is a common experience. A culture of disclosure must be fostered and sanctions against such behaviour must be put in place.
- While we appreciate that statutory agencies may not be in a position to provide segregated services it is reasonable to suggest that difficulties encountered by African immigrants in this area could be effectively ameliorated if they had access to informed specialist assistance in the form of a dedicated support office. Non-governmental organisations are already active in this area. Some of these functions could be carried out on a statutory basis, at relatively little cost.
 - Difficulties experienced whilst interacting with private landlords could be addressed. An intermediary service is clearly needed to enable those in receipt of rent allowance to engage more easily with the privately rented residential property market in the city. Equally, this would help offset this client group's association of the difficulties experienced with racism on the part of individual landlords.
 - Occasional difficulties are experienced when interacting with statutory agencies. For example, no family should, as a result of financial hardship, be forced to resort to informal money lenders to secure a housing deposit. Such an office could provide clear information about entitlements here and support immigrants in their interactions with statutory service providers
 - Queries about housing lists could be fielded by this office and information pertinent to the administration of social housing lists and access to affordable housing could be disseminated.
 - Such an agency could also help smooth the path from direct provision for many and help identify suitable accommodation for this client group.

- No real evidence of localised conflict was uncovered here. For example, the vast majority of research participants like the area in which they live. However, it is worth noting that such conflict may arise in the future. New communities are now well established in this country are spreading out from their initial core areas. The potential for social unrest must not be overlooked. A clear pattern of research needs to be instituted to evaluate this key geographical issue.

8.3.2 *Economic inclusion pivots on the recognition of ability and experience*

Immigrants from Africa are strongly motivated by their desire to secure work in the waged labour force. This impulse is firmly anchored in their recognition of the need to pay their way and establish their families in this country. Ireland is not a cheap country in which to live. Many people are in receipt of social welfare payments but this should not be taken as a sign of disengagement from the world of waged work. This population sub-group are singularly motivated to work and importantly, to be seen to work.

While some are unskilled, many immigrants are qualified, skilled and experienced. A difficult labour market exists, however. Some people cannot find work. Others are unable to find work at an appropriate level. The job-search process is particularly difficult. Many people relate the difficulties encountered. Even people who have gained qualifications in Ireland feel that the jobs market is more closed to them than to Irish people and to the members of other immigrant groups. The perceived success enjoyed by migrants from Eastern European contexts is held to be illustrative of this fact. Feelings of self-worth are affected and people feel excluded. It is understandable when people begin to conceptualise this experience in terms of a racist discourse.

The recognition of qualifications and experience is of pivotal importance. The nature of many refugee experiences means that many have departed from their country of origin without adequate preparation or forward planning. The necessary documentary proofs of qualifications and experience can be missing and difficulties here can constitute a significant impediment to an individual's potential in Ireland. While structures are in place to deal with this issue, it remains that people feel disadvantaged here. Other difficulties include the need to find adequate childcare, but this, in many ways is not an issue that is unique to this population sub-group.

The danger of income deprivation cannot be ruled out. The very real risk of immigrant groups being caught in a pattern of welfare dependency must be counteracted at every level. Equally, any pattern of downward mobility must be counteracted if these essentially vulnerable groups are not to become overly concentrated at the lower, less well paid levels of the labour market and experience a pattern of vertical segregation in the labour force as a result. Immigrants themselves recognise this and are not passive in this regard. Some people simply continue to try and secure work by perseverance and by force of personality alone but most have analysed the jobs market and come to the conclusion that education and upskilling are vital to their chances of securing a job, going forward.

Measures must be instituted to allow immigrants from Africa demonstrate their ability to contribute in the labour market. We recognise that structures are in place to allow

for the recognition of qualifications but more wide-ranging measures would be welcome.

- Immigrants who do not have sufficient skills are disadvantaged in the labour force. Schemes such as the ‘flexi-work’ schemes that enable training interventions to be structured around organised release into the labour force may constitute a useful intervention here. Such schemes have had some success in other country, especially when instituted to help the long-term unemployed re-enter the labour force.

Significant input would be needed by all relevant actors here. However, if the correct structures were put in place at sub-regional level and if employers could be persuaded of the relevance of such a scheme, this type of intervention could prove useful.

- Immigrants do not want to be given work by right, but are willing to demonstrate their worth to the economy. This does not tend to happen. Along with the recognition of qualifications, the verification of experience and experience is of paramount importance here. With the best of wills, it is possible for even the most engaged employer to struggle when presented with employment histories and references from another country. A resource that would enable potential employers to evaluate work experience would constitute a useful intervention here. Existing expertise in the provision of automated information about the labour market such as that held by FAS, may be harnessed to good effect here.
- A pattern of internship/mentorship would be useful, especially in light of the fact that many African immigrants have displayed a willingness to volunteer in other arenas. This may be an especially useful intervention for highly skilled and experienced individuals, especially if equivalency of experience and qualifications could be demonstrated as well. Organisations with existing command and control experience in this area could be brought in to administer such interventions. Again, FAS seems ideally placed in this regard. This organisation’s ‘One Step Up’ programme could be used as a rough template for such an intervention (see, for example, FAS, 2006).

8.3.3 *Education must be made more easily available*

The impact that education has in the determination of a person’s access to societal resources is well known. Equally, educational disadvantage is generally recognised to be a causal factor behind much social and economic exclusion. The design and delivery of educational services in Ireland has always reflected this and there has regularly been some recognition of the need to accommodate diversity (see, for example, Tormey, 2005 and Murray 2006) but today, the need to provide for an ethnically diverse population frames this type of policy formation at every level.

Immigrant communities readily appreciate this quality and school and schooling are seen to be important on many levels. Parents are very focused on their children’s education. This is inevitably driven by the desire to see their offspring benefit from the opportunities that can accrue for the ‘educated’ in a country that is deemed to be more meritocratic in nature than many in Africa. Equally however, immigrants feel that

schooling can play a significant cultural role, educating their children about the norms of Irish society while educating young Irish-born people against racist and discriminatory ideologies.

In many ways however, education is elevated to an even higher position by adult learners as they invest in themselves in the hope of securing gainful employment in the labour force. This is a mature response to the experience of difficulty and further signals the degree to which these immigrants are operationalising their desires and aspirations in an Irish context. This educational pattern is important on another level as well. Much research demonstrates that parental education influences the level of educational engagement experienced by their children.

Diverse patterns of need are present. The school system has been moving towards a recognition of the increasingly intercultural milieu in which Irish education is delivered. Targeted interventions are common and policy and planning is in place. Teachers are undoubtedly over burdened however, and the supports are not in place to aid their professional development. There is much anecdotal evidence to support the charge that teachers lack adequate training. For example, teachers are aware that they are not trained in ESOL, yet increasingly they are required to teach students who have inadequate proficiency in English. More continuous professional development is required at local and regional level. This will equally impact on schools' ability to create a supportive intercultural environment for immigrant children.

Adult education is more problematic in nature. For example, while language supports are in place for children, PLC colleges are not eligible to receive the types of language supports for immigrants enjoyed by primary and secondary schools. Immigrants can experience difficulty here, especially in understanding the eligibility criteria for admission to courses and grants but this sector is popular and valued as a method of up-skilling in preparation for work in the labour force.

The situation at third level is even more problematic. Structural impediments are almost certainly influential. The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2006) for example, states that "equity of access remains for the most part on the margins in higher education, it is not yet part of the day to day practical agenda of institutions". In this light, in spite of stipulation contained in the Universities Act (1997) to promote equality of opportunity, difficulties to entry must remain for those who are entitled to apply.

At national level, what is required is a structure that can organise this client-service provider landscape. Targeted interventions such as language training for children in school will always be useful but the establishment of a centralised coordinating structure would pay dividends. In some ways, county and city VECs could fill this gap at local level. What is needed is this type experience to be brought to bear locally, in a nationally integrated manner.

- Children's education must be increasingly conducted in an intercultural manner and teachers must be provided with the core professional training to deliver such intercultural education in an ongoing manner. Increased emphasis should be put of intercultural CPD-style summer courses. Training for teaching in an increasingly complex linguistic setting should also be increased.

- Access to information remains a problem and immigrants often find that they do not have all necessary information at their disposal. This can lead to misunderstanding the entry and qualification requirements for some courses and conflict can arise. It remains, even at this stage, a priority for adequate information to be placed at the disposal of potential learners. More leaflets, in a multilingual format, need to be produced by the relevant PLCs and these leaflets be made available to the public. Non-governmental organisations such as the Immigrant Council of Ireland already have some expertise in the production of such literature. Such expertise could easily be drawn upon here.
- Access to the third level sector needs to be examined as a matter of priority. Pobal (2006: 31) offer evidence to support this point when they state that all five major HEA reports on access to 3rd level education commissioned between 1980 and 2003 do not examine the position of ethnic minorities. Full access to educational grants should be granted to all those with status.

8.3.4 Social support services are valued but an easier user interface is required

The social supports available in this country are highly regarded. Social welfare payments, assistance with housing and ‘the medical card’ are particularly valued. This value is firmly placed in a trans-national milieu and immigrants regularly compare this level of service with the lack of an equivalent pattern in their country of origin.

Many difficulties come to light however. The administration of this system of social support is held in particularly low regard and claims of institutional racism are difficult to counter. The organisational culture of work in Ireland is not deemed to be helpful and research participants find various official applications processes difficult to understand, the institutions themselves less than flexible in their approach and frontline staff occasionally unhelpful.

This is further exacerbated by the experience of inconsistency when interfacing with statutory service providers. Different staff members may have different appreciations of the same issue. This was particularly strongly illustrated in terms of the changing qualification requirements that were presented to people in relation to the social welfare housing deposit payment.

It is not unreasonable to ask whether these inconsistencies ultimately serve to reinforce people’s feelings of exclusion and marginalisation. In any case, this reflects many wider problems, and while people value the services that are provided, a lack of confidence in the ability of the system to work for them is outlined. The problems immigrants experience during their interactions with An Garda Síochána illustrate this. African immigrants are comfortable in the knowledge that the Gardai’s role is defined by the requirement to serve the people and do not see them as an organisation to be feared but, in equal measure, most people can recount interactions they had that were less than satisfactorily concluded and mistrust them as a result. Inevitably, people feel that such difficulties are encountered on foot of racist attitudes that exist in Ireland in general.

- Comprehensive intercultural training interventions continue to be needed for all front-line staff interfacing with immigrant groups. Many potential clients are operating from a position of significant disadvantage and do not often have the

language skills required to fully articulate their requirements/desires. Frontline staff must be sensitive in such instances and be trained to deal with the potentially difficult situations that can arise. There is an absolute need for people to come away from an interaction with a service provider and not feel as if they have been disadvantaged on foot of their race, ethnicity or migrant biography.

8.3.5 Greater access to information is required

Ireland, as is the case in most developed societies, is an information-led society. Access to information and the ability to internalise and use that information is fundamental to a person's use of the resources in place in that society. Immigrants are no exception here and access to information of all kinds is an essential prerequisite to a person's successful engagement with Irish society. Many immigrants feel that this information is difficult to come by.

Much relevant information is readily available. Both statutory and non-statutory organisations provide information but difficulties arise. Many new residents in this country may not know where to find information. Many clearly cannot access this information on foot of language difficulties. At present it is the non-statutory sector that is interfacing most effectively with the immigrant population in this regard. For example, the ongoing provision of one-to-one supports has meant that significant expertise has been developed by local development organisations. These groups have been effectively filling the information/support gap. There is a clear and pressing need for all types of pertinent official information to be stored in a user-friendly manner and to be made easily accessible. Effective translation of key information must also be completed. Too often individual staff members are required to interact with members of the immigrant population without the necessary linguistic support. Equally, members of the immigrant community are attempting to access official information and procedures from a disadvantaged position and no effective support is provided by statutory providers. While costs would be significant, a centralised service would be useful here.

- The creation of a national repository for all information relevant to immigrant lives would constitute a useful intervention. An easily accessible user interface should be developed. A possible model of best practice here may be in the European Information Points that seek to provide information about European procedures and documents for the public at large. Such a resource would necessarily have to be automated in nature.
- Integrating Ireland could use its existing profile to animate in this regard.

8.3.6 Family is important and children must be facilitated

The extended family is influential in people's lives at a level that is now rarely replicated among the Irish born population. Since migration, this experience is firmly anchored in the trans-national experience, but it is no less important for that. Equally however, parents are extremely focused on their children and refer to them in many different contexts.

The primacy of the family must therefore be recognised. While it is not a dominant concern in these narratives, family reunification must be an issue. In a more general sense, anxiety arising from a person's separation from loved ones is part of the wider immigrant experience. This may contribute to difficulty. The need to operate outside the support structures provided by the extended family was certainly identified as a source of difficulty in Ireland and people draw attention to their need to adjust to this different pattern.

Issues such as childcare must be implicated here and this can impact negatively on a range of other arenas, for example, work in the waged labour force. The cost of professional childminding services may certainly be prohibitive.

- Some childcare needs are being met by community-based providers. However, a more common response is for childcare to be provided by other migrant women. This gendered division constitutes a burden on individuals, especially in the regular absence of wider familial-based support networks. If the potential of immigrants is to be harnessed in full, a more complete approach to the provision of such services is needed. Family reunification would address some of these issues but this is unlikely to occur. A clear need therefore exists for affordable childcare to be provided. This is particularly pressing, given the demonstrable tendency for migrant groups to be active in i) lower paid sectors of the waged labour force, ii) full-time education.

8.3.7 Immigrants must be encouraged to engage more fully in Irish social patterns

Different social patterns exist in Ireland and Africa. Many people draw attention to the fact that their social pattern in Africa was more firmly organised around a series of deep interactions based on kin and length of time than is possible to replicate in Ireland. Wider kin-based relations are not accessible, on the whole and the nature of the neighbourhood social unit is qualitatively different. People therefore feel distanced from a sense of community they took for granted before immigrating. This can be an unsettling experience and one that inevitably impacts on immigrants' social/friendship patterns in this country.

People feel that they have made a conscious effort to interact with Irish-born people but very few feel that they have been successful in this endeavour. Neighbours are regarded as friendly, but distant. Some people are friendly with work-mates but most interactions are forged from common pursuits. Inevitably, these contacts come from other immigrant groups and the social patterns outlined during the course of this research are often segregated in nature.

Some of the same types of spaces are used but equally the interactional patterns uncovered here are dominated by a small number of central places. The home occupies a strong position. Most people favour interacting with friends in such locations. Other common interactional sites include community meeting places and locations associated with religious observance. This is a concern. Irish society cannot allow immigrants to be pushed away from core social activity spaces. To do so will be to ensure that immigrants not only occupy a separate social sphere but one that is marked by its marginality to the mainstream.

Many factors will inevitably influence this pattern and it is not necessarily the case that these activity-sets are moulded by resistance. Simple pace of life may be influential. The experience of financial difficulty can certainly exclude people from more commercially orientated social spaces such as public houses. However, disappointment is noted on many occasions and the salience of racially-motivated thinking cannot be overruled in light of the number of people who refer to the experience of being refused entry into establishments without a reason being given.

The 'soft' integration inputs implicated here should not be ignored. Specific measures are needed to ensure that people feel able to interact with others freely. Free access to society's public spaces will be required here but a series of deeper realignments such as those discussed in section 8.2, may be required in advance.

- While the cost of 'going out' will remain prohibitive, there is a real danger that immigrant groups will be consigned to the margins of the Irish social pattern. Initiatives should be put in place to encourage immigrants to make more use of such social spaces. A start here would be the introduction of clear sanctions to used against staff who discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity. All front line staff in leisure/social sites should be introduced to the importance of the intercultural model.
- Initiatives such as Show Racism the Red Card are useful interventions. Sporting clubs and organisations should be encouraged to reach out to new Irish communities and offer incentives to engage with their core activities. League of Ireland football clubs offer a good model to follow. Clear intercultural guidelines should be in place in all sporting clubs that engage with young people are children.
- 'Soft integration' interventions such as intercultural sports tournaments should continue to be encouraged.
- Planning interventions may be useful. At present, many social activities take place in conjunction with religious services and groups. Unfortunately, many of these faith based communities now meet in marginal locations, in industrial estates, or in disused meeting halls. Interventions that would allow such groups to claim some space in central locations, would increase their visibility for the population at large and also bring the community into some core social spaces at key times.

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