

'I'm More At Peace in This House'

The Importance of Housing and Place in the Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Dublin

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Presentation Overview

- Research Overview
- Methodology
- Concepts
- Residence Histories/Narratives
- Conclusions
- Questions



Research Overview

- The importance of housing and place in the creation of home in exile.

'Housing is the right that underpins all others in allowing human flourishing. Housing, in that it offers a place to be, is the principal right that allows private life and therefore social relations to flourish. Without housing one is not able to function and integrate oneself into social life'
(King, 2003:97)



Presentation Overview

- Motivation for Research



Methodology

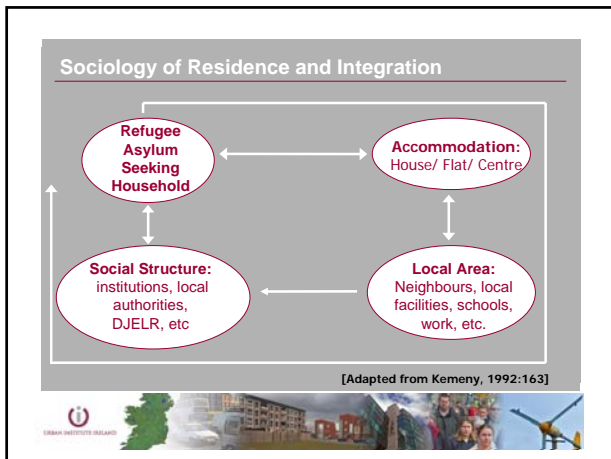
- Qualitative Methods
- Access & Ethical Issues
- In-depth interviews with 22 refugees and asylum seekers in Dublin
- Sociology of Residence
- Quantitative and Cartographic data



Methodology

'At the centre lies the relationship between the household and dwelling. Beyond this lies the relationship of the household-in-dwelling to local society: town, suburb, village, rural area. Particularly important in this context is the relationship of the household-in-dwelling to the larger institutions and organisations of society that impinge directly and indirectly on issues of residence: housing finance institutions, central and local government, etc'
(Kemeny, 1992:157).





Key Concepts

- Developed theoretical analysis *around* respondent experiences, rather than attempting to 'fit' their experiences into predetermined conceptual boxes.
- Concepts used resonate closely with respondent experiences and provide the foundation for the analysis.
- Integration, Exclusion, Being or Belonging.

Integration

- Integration is a process of change involving hosts and hosted which occurs via a process of negotiation and co-operation.
- From respondents input, I identified three aspects of integration; everyday integration, neighbourhood integration and friendship formation.
- Everyday integration: acceptance/tolerance from Irish society on an everyday level. *'it would mean to belong, to be accepted . . . By Irish society. That [they] actually accept that I can be one of the Irish people'* (Amir)

Integration

- Neighbourhood integration: acceptance/ tolerance from the local area and from neighbours

'where I really made friends and I couldn't feel like I was a foreigner or a newcomer, feeling I was home' (Deo)

- Friendship formation: more difficult

'I'm not properly integrated. My friends are all X, like myself, only where I shop I meet other nationals and they are not my friends. Maybe you will be my first Irish friend' (Sarah)

Exclusion

- The terms 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' are automatically associated with exclusion, poverty and disadvantage.
- Mind the Gap.
- Within respondents stories, there appeared to be considerable overlap between their experiences of poverty/ exclusion and their lack of integration.
- Similarities between social inclusion measures and integration objectives – participation and acceptance being key

Exclusion

- Multi-dimensional exclusion experienced by respondents – social, spatial and material exclusion (from Ratcliffe, 2002).
- Social Exclusion: dynamics between hosts and hosted & processes of acceptance, integration and belonging contested daily.

'Always being asked Why? Why? Why? Why? Why are you here? Are you going home? . . . I just say I don't care about what they think and try not to let it bother me' (Carina)

Exclusion

- **Spatial Exclusion:** Respondents spoke of being denied access to places in Dublin in which they might interact with Irish people, of being restricted to housing in dangerous or hostile areas.

'When you go for a walk, the kids wanted to break my head. I was just taking a walk . . . And they threw stones at my head . . . Four times they throw stones at my head. Now there are no walks' (Evelyn)



Exclusion

- **Material Exclusion:** Respondents tended to downplay the material element of their exclusion, but housing costs were cited by almost all respondents as a difficulty.
- *'For feeding you can always manage one way or the other. But the housing problem and the cost of living in Ireland is very high'* (Jennifer).
- *'Some landlords tend to make it hard for refugees, like asking two months deposit. Sometimes they ask them four months deposit and then asylum seekers they pay it because they have no choice'* (Deo)



Being , Belonging and Home

- *'For those who have no place that can safely be called home, there must be a struggle for a place to be'* (bell hooks cited in Keith & Pile, 1993:5).
- Being refers to respondents initial experiences in Dublin (focussed on survival and stability rather than integration or belonging).

'Y was a very tiny place like that. There was a bedroom and the sitting room, with the kitchen, you know, combined. I could hardly turn my body around in that house let alone being there with a baby and a partner. But it was okay, I suppose' (Marie)



Being , Belonging and Home

- Belonging involves beginning to feel at home, recreating home in exile.

'the people who live around you make you feel at home and you like Ireland' (Gloria)

'belonging somewhere it's when it's involved your stability. And if I ask 'am I stable?' . . . Four years, four addresses . . . I belong nowhere because I'm stable nowhere' (Deo)



Residence History – Respondent Narratives

- New arrivals are categorised as; asylum seekers, programme refugees, quota refugees, etc.
- Thus labelled, individuals are treated according to that status. From arrival and through each stage of resettlement and integration, status remains key.
- Respondent narratives detail experiences at each stage from 'alien landing' to 'beginning to belong'.



Alien Landing

- Jackie arrived from Southern Africa in 2001 with her husband and two children. Initially accommodated in a direct provision centre.

'Because I had a lot of problems in the hostel, with the children and there are . . . plenty of problems that I faced, there's no privacy, there's no, I mean, the main problem was you had to go for meals at allocated times and if you miss, if your child is sleeping at the time of a meal, you miss it, that's it, you can't keep the food for the child, so they have to starve like that' (Jackie).



Alien Landing

- Jackie and her family were entitled to move from the hostel and into private rented accommodation

'for you to leave the hostel, to get accommodation on your own, it's very, very difficult because first of all, most landlords they want rent and deposit . . . they want it in advance, like you have to pay before you move in, but the system that pays our rent does not do that, they want to pay you – you have to live in the house first at the end of the month they pay' (Jackie) .



Alien Landing

- Jackie describes the accommodation she eventually accessed.

'It was very very dirty, the carpets. When we moved in, the children started having chest problems, dusty, you know, it was terrible. But I had no choice. I tried to talk to the landlord to change the carpets or to do something . . . I had no choice, I just stayed there for a year' (Jackie)



Alien Landing

- Reception systems varied considerably depending on status and year of arrival.
- With the exception of programme refugee, respondents initial accommodation in the private rented sector was of poor quality.
- Huge variation in the level of support afforded to people on the basis of their status.
- Financial hardship in attempting to raise deposits and rent upfront to access rental sector (charged higher rents and higher deposits).



Finding Your Feet

- Chelsea and his wife came to Ireland as asylum seekers from Western Africa in 2000. They hold Irish residency on the basis of their two children.
- Having lived in emergency accommodation for nine months, Chelsea and his family moved into RIA 'step down' accommodation

This is also a hostel, but it's a hostel where I have to pay, 'cause I'm working, but it is a reduced rate, you know, subsidised by the Government' (Chelsea)



Finding Your Feet

'When it's self-catering, you know, you do what you like, you can do your own traditional food, it's a relief . . . The self-catering is a big comfort, the kids have some playing grounds, where the B&B, they don't have that, they are just stuck in the room' (Chelsea).



Finding Your Feet

'because the law made by the Justice Minister then at the time, was if you are working full-time, you are not allowed to be in a B&B. So, I was given 24 hours to pack my stuff. . . My son and everybody were sleeping with a friend, I had to sleep in the car. We don't see each other for three weeks before I got a place, in X'.



Finding Your Feet

'Because somebody says that they don't want kids, and they don't want on social welfare, they don't want Health Board. . . I say I'm not Health Board, but they see you and that you have two kids, and they say 'no'. It's very difficult' (Chelsea).

➤ Eventually Chelsea secured accommodation for his family. It was a two-bedroom house, shared with another (non-Irish) couple, which cost €700 per month.

➤ Overcrowded & less than ideal. But an improvement from sleeping on floors and in cars.



Finding Your Feet

➤ This phase no longer open to asylum seekers.

➤ No specific accommodation provision for this phase of resettlement – respondents tended to access poor quality private rented housing.

➤ Aside from programme refugees, no assistance or support available to assist in the move from emergency accommodation into the private rented sector.

➤ Substantial difficulties in accessing suitable accommodation.



Beginning to Belong

➤ Marie came to Ireland from Western Africa in 1998. She holds Irish residency and is in full time employment in Dublin. Since her arrival, she has lived at five different addresses, and now lives with her two children in a social rented house in Dublin.

➤ They have lived at this address for two years and it is this stability, combined with the fact that Marie feels *'more at peace in this house'* that merit her inclusion in the 'beginning to belong' phase.



Beginning to Belong

➤ Marie describes last-minute difficulties that arose with her social rented tenancy

' . . . So, it was really like, a very emotional moment for me, cause I had all my hopes on here. I had already been given letters saying, you know, you've been offered this house and then, you know suddenly, I was told, you might end up not having the house . . . and it was really, really a bad moment for me' (Marie).



Beginning to Belong

➤ She discusses the difference that social rented housing has made to her life

'I suppose it definitely makes a difference in the sense that rent now is, you know, not the same as in rented accommodation and, and the fact that the tenancy is for a longer period, you know. The time is not determined' (Marie)

'I think the kids, they've also settled, you know, I think they're also happier here' (Marie)



Beginning to Belong

'Oh, it's been really, really difficult. . . Just a woman came and smashed it [front door]. She said that she, that she doesn't like black people. And even when the police came, you know, she was still cursing and cursing saying how she hates black people and things like that. I worry' (Marie).

'I suppose I would like to look for an area, an area where there's no racism there, but then which are actually can I go there where I won't face any racial abuse. I don't know, I don't know. Be it in Dublin or in Ireland, the whole of Ireland, I don't know yet' (Marie).



Beginning to Belong

'I think, despite all what I've been going through, I would say I'm more at peace in this house, you know, because I feel free' (Marie).

'I don't want to move 'cause I just think that I've been moving quite a lot, maybe I should just settle here now and see if things change around me, rather than me moving all the time' (Marie).



Beginning to Belong

- Housing was key to this phase. Insecurity of private rented accommodation mitigated against integration and belonging.
- Respondents began to tire of the instability, poor conditions and frequent moves associated with private rented accommodation and sought more stability.
- Owner Occupation and Social Rented housing offered more security of *tenure*, but sometimes at the risk of personal safety.



Conclusions

- Asylum seekers and refugees are only guaranteed housing at reception, e.g. provision of accommodation or assistance simply stops after direct provision.
- Respondents relied mainly on the private rented sector for accommodation. The instability of the private rented sector mitigates against belonging or integration.
- Respondents appeared to spend several years just 'being' in Dublin.



Conclusions

- Housing was frequently a source of additional stress (costs, availability, frequent moves, poverty traps).
- Aside from programme refugees, respondents received no statutory support with their resettlement or integration.
- Housing should be seen as a key dimension of integration/inclusion.



Thanks & Questions

Thank-You for Your Attention

Any Comments, Suggestions or Questions?



References

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