

Extracts from research thesis undertaken for University College Dublin in part fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in MSocSc, Migration, Race and Ethnicity.

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ABSTRACT

The micro-ethnographic study of Swords Library was prompted by the question of the integrative potential of local authority spaces and services, in view of the recently transformed, diverse user base in the library; the view that empirically grounded studies are reflective of wider society and engagement with scholarship on integration. Drawing heavily on Knowles (2003), Karner (2007) and Anthias (2008), the research aimed to explicate the spatial dimension of the materiality of everyday life in order to build on narrative and discourse concerning integration. It emerges that 'positionality', i.e. social position as practice and process in relation to the global local nexus is managed through the spaces and services of the public library. The library is established as one site where individuals, building on socialization in the library, manage the effects of accelerated transformations associated with globalization. It provides the space and resources to enable lifelong learning, prompted by the requirement for constantly upskilled, educated, computer literate individuals, as well as escapism from the chronic anxiety that is associated with such transformations in contemporary times. The public library thus emerges as a translocational space.

Furthermore, social analysis in the library through the lens of 'race' finds it is a site in which individual action, narrative and reflexivity highlights the potential for permeating constructed boundaries and notions of belonging, subsequently opening up the potential for a more inclusive intercultural society based on mutual performativity and positive informal interaction; a space where white privilege is avoided and therefore a space where integration happens. The study of ethnicity, including whiteness, captures the dynamic and process of an emerging New Ireland, highlighting the ambivalence involved in everyday life, and the heterogeneous nature of contemporary Irish identity.

The Public Library: A Translocational Space

This research was motivated by the focus on the integrative potential of public libraries in light of the recently diversified user base and the viewpoint that the public library is reflective of wider social trends. Social analysis of the public library, in particular the negotiation of diversity within its space, highlights one aspect of peoples' lives at the global-local interface. By capturing specifics - which in this case pivots on individuals' actions and interactions, and performances emerging in the co-presence and negotiation of bodies within the confines of the library space -, the research highlights the racial grammar of human interaction in public space; the process of race making or ethnicization and how it hinders or enables integration. This involves the mundane everyday social action of entering the library, reading notice boards, queuing haphazardly and negotiating the relatively confined space of the library.

These particular processes are thus indicators of more general social processes involved in race-making and therefore intercultural integration in contemporary Irish society. Moreover, the interviews compliment and are supported by observation in the library space, showing how personal stories are related to wider social structure - whether in terms of the need for mobile labour and the impact of global recessionary trends; or 'race', its associated meanings, implications and expectations and in questions of belonging - and how the stuff of everyday life is constitutively intertwined with both national and wider global processes.

This research focused on the social aspect of integration; a complex process best researched at the level of individual experience. Integration is underpinned by access to education, employment, and the spaces and services of the community. Despite focusing on social integration, levels of access to all of the above emerged from the research; for instance how one respondent's unemployed status was a motivating factor in staking a claim in the library to the point that he was present for six days a week; how

some respondents pursue more educational qualifications, and how most respondents cite the lack of spaces in which to get to know others. Furthermore, the level and quality of interaction - both verbal and non verbal - that occurs within the library emerges from the social morphology of the space, thus highlighting the nature of social relations in the library and the potential for social integration more widely.

Race-making and ethnicization are people-centred processes, involving the making of subjectivities, ways of being in the world, through which we make and remake ourselves through everyday activities. We as persons are formed relationally, such that we are socially inscribed, and 'dialogical' (Knowles, 2003: 32; Karner, 2007). For Knowles, the spatial conception of race making emphasizes the importance of peoples' subjectivities at the interface of regimes; how organizations and the individuals involved in and with them interact with otherness; how the existential - the interior emotional and moral reflection - that belongs to the individual and the social fabric is affected in relation to regimes and the networks of social relations. It is through these 'subjectivities as capacities' that we '...confront, contest and collude in, publicly calibrated notions of who we are in racial or ethnic terms' (Knowles, 2003: 46).

As such, the level of interaction, whether positive or negative impacts on positionality and therefore the level of integration. This research shows how structural positions or categories, what Knowles (2003: 32) refers to as 'subject positions', such as legal or 'racial' categories, impact on notions of belonging, through lenses and constraints linked to what a category entitles one to and what one expects. One Nigerian respondent's experiences, here with her family, highlight how her subject position, i.e. visible 'race' and anecdotal stories of racism, meant discrimination framed her anticipation of life in Ireland, which, happily, has not materialized as the central dynamic of this respondent's life. This implies that in spite of an often discriminatory national discourse on immigrants - particularly non EU migrants, evident in immigration policy - that the agency of those the

respondent interacts with, in the form of positive informal social relations, both in the community and in the library space, has the power to overcome barriers shaped by subject position or racial category. Moreover, the respondent's subjectivity formed relationally at the interface with regimes, in the form of the public library, is framed by positive interaction, to the extent that the respondent stakes a claim in the safe space of Swords library. This points again to the fluidity of positionality, how it is impacted upon through the quality of social relations, and the potential positive informal social interaction has to overcome what are commonly construed as fixed categories.

Yet, subject positions or categories do have the potential to supersede positive interaction on the ground, particularly when related to legal category, as in the Nigerian mature student, whose family is not permitted by the Irish government to join him, and who feels 'like an outsider' despite his perception that Irish people are nice. Knowles (2003: 35) asserts that agency is pivotal to race making; that subjectivities are formed '...in the interface between people and the social categories by which they are recognised and positioned in the world'; that the potential to influence how things lies with us; that how and what we do and say fundamentally forms the social fabric. Consequently, the ethnography highlighted the importance of the social morphology, i.e. the spatial dimension of the materiality of everyday life to build on narrative and discourse, centred on the public library in Swords, which explicated the social processes involved in race-making, and therefore the potential for integration, now and for the future.

The findings indicate that the public library, an abiding and now widespread phenomenon that began with Andrew Carnegie's philanthropic effort in 1881, is a space and service providing equal access to the resources made available to enable the ongoing process of accumulation and maintenance of cultural capital. In addition, the research shows that it

represents fixity in a mobile, increasingly fluid and sometimes antagonistic world; a place for escapism from and the management of ambivalence associated with Beck's concept 'risk society' and accompanying chronic anxiety it produces. Respondents' reflexivity in relation to contemporary social, political, economic and technological transformations demonstrates their awareness of '...a global sense of place in their social relationships', a feature of the re-inscription of global processes at local level (Knowles, 2003: 120).

Moreover, for respondents, it represents the only accessible 'meeting' place for all in the community; a space valued variously as 'an escape pod', a focal point, a meeting place, and a 'luxury'. It is here that belonging is negotiated; where action and interaction underpinned by an ethos of equity occur and where white privilege can be relinquished, thereby regenerating the subjectivities of those within it, potentially generating a template for more inclusive social relations. Interestingly, the public library ethos precedes and parallels the vision and principles for an integration framework, as set out by the publication *Towards Integration: A City Framework*. (DCDB, 2008) based as it is on equality of access, participation and outcome for all, human rights, social inclusion, anti racism and interculturalism.

The concept 'translocational' (Anthias, 2008), which further extends the intersectional framework of class, gender and ethnicity, to a more spatially tinted perspective, takes account of global migration patterns, its effects on people 'on the move' and on the places and spaces in which they live. The concept 'positionality' incorporates social position as practice and process in relation to globalisation. Translocational positionality concerns acknowledging the fluid nature of the concepts 'identity' and 'belonging' in relation to both the processes and the outcomes of globalisation. Identity - considered a process - means an individual's location or social position, perceived through experience and practise are '...context, meaning and time related' thereby dissolving essentialised notions of both of these concepts

(Anthias, 2008: 5). Consequently individuals are contemporarily conceptualised in relation to a multiplicity of positions. The usefulness of applying the concept translocational positionality to this research, is that it involves recognising how individuals are positioned in relation to others, not only regarding 'race' or ethnicity, but in terms of class, gender, nationality and age, all the while acknowledging the impact of global processes underway in the local context, i.e. at the level of the global local nexus. In addition, this phenomenon encompasses the transformations that occur in the places where the broad continuum of categories involved in the concept 'migrant' settle, and as such affects individuals in communities regardless of their mobility or lack thereof, and thus the locales in which they live.

Anthias (2006: 28) points out that societies aiming to overcome otherness, i.e. to realise integration through social inclusion measures, must break down '...difference and identity that exclude and devalue'. Consequently, considering the research findings, the translocationality of the public library in Swords is established, underpinned by equitable, socially inclusive practises and processes. The library, which continually strives to meet the needs of the local community; where difference is negotiated and diffused, allows for and enables the fluidity of identity, belonging and intercultural interchange of its patrons. Furthermore, despite the perception of the public library as parochial, communicated through the phrase 'local library' and through policy and practise that often sidelines the library, evident in urban policy that prioritises selling the city as a cosmopolitan space, versus the antecedence of local public facilities; the public library emerges as an important translocational site where individuals manage fluid positionalities and the chronic anxiety associated with contemporary society.

Implications

The findings of this research have implications for both national and local level policy. Firstly, because the provision of public spaces in which people can comfortably stake a claim is a prerequisite to developing a sense of belonging, local authority services and spaces, particularly libraries, but also parks, arts centres and through sport should be acknowledged for this role by continued resource investment, development and future capital projects despite recessionary trends. Until recently, developers and local authorities collaboratively attended to often skewed regeneration or developmental urban projects at the expense of community based spaces, already few and far between (Punch et al, 2007). Continued retrenchment of public sector investment has the potential to inhibit further development of public libraries, parks, sports and community services, increasing the probability of a negative outcome for the integration process in the long term.

Secondly, and in parallel, the focus on racism must not be sidelined; continued vigilance is required at every level, particularly the local, where agents in the field have the power to affect it. The recent murder of a black child in Blanchardstown points to the lack of spaces available to the general population, but particularly the youth, and to the need for additional public libraries and community spaces for diverse communities as a matter of urgency.

Thirdly, it will have implications for designing libraries ‘...in terms of the social interactions that they can generate’ (Harris and Dudley, 2005: 30). Moreover, it should initiate further research into the spatial and interactional dynamic of migrant settlement in the future. It is proposed access to public space will continue to be a key policy recommendation for social integration underscored by empirical evidence in an Irish context.

Fourthly, and finally, this research has implications for contemporary scholarship on integration and its associated concepts, such as 'race', ethnicity, race-making, identity and belonging. Following Gunaratnam (2003), researchers should employ strategies to enable them simultaneously work with and disassemble categories that potentially reinforce dominant thinking in the area of 'race' and ethnicity. This involves the requirement to include 'whiteness' as an ethnic category. Finally, researchers would benefit from using the perspective encompassed in the concept translocational positionality, as defined by Floya Anthias, to capture the nuanced and fluid nature of identity and belonging endemic to contemporary societies. Consequently, and as implied by O'Laoire researchers must overcome the tendency to imply dualisms, for example - host and newcomer - symbols of fixed not fluid social processes that belie the true nature of contemporary social relations.