

Micro-level Processes of Immigrant-Native Integration

Zoua M. Vang
McGill University

Background

Immigration in Ireland has transformed formerly homogeneous urban areas into multiethnic cities and has both enriched as well as brought new challenges to urban life. One interesting feature of the urban landscape in Ireland is the lack of residential segregation between Irish nationals and immigrants. Dissimilarity index scores measuring segregation between Irish nationals and major racial/ethnic immigrant groups are within the 30s – 50s range. Furthermore, in major urban centers such as the Dublin metropolitan area, local segregation patterns reveal that African, Asian and Eastern European immigrants all experience the same degree of spatial *integration* with Irish nationals in suburbs (Vang 2010). In other words, a racial hierarchy in locational attainment does not exist in Ireland.

The level of spatial integration observed in Ireland is remarkable given that the country has only experienced large-scale immigration within the last 15 years. Typically, immigrants are expected to cluster among co-nationals in inner-city immigrant or ethnic enclaves until they achieve socioeconomic mobility and acculturate to mainstream norms, values and culture. It is only when improvements in SES and acculturation have taken place that the social distance between immigrants and natives is expected to have diminished enough to facilitate residential integration. Yet, residential integration occurs in Ireland even for the most disadvantaged immigrant minority groups such as African immigrants.

This paper examines the extent to which racial prejudice (Charles 2000) and ethnocentrism (or the lack thereof) (Clark 2002) helps to explain patterns of immigrant-native residential integration in Ireland. These micro-level processes are explored within the context of African immigrants' and Irish nationals' neighborhood ethnic composition preferences.

Methods

In-depth interviews with 30 African immigrants and 20 Irish nationals residing in the Dublin metro area are used to examine social processes underlying immigrant-native residential integration patterns. Interviewees were obtained through a two-stage, non-probability sampling strategy. Interviewees were selected from a pool of 141 survey respondents. Selection was based interviewees' residential neighborhood and a number of demographic characteristics including gender, SES, and country of origin. Interviews took place mainly in respondents' homes and lasted anywhere from 40 mins to 3 hours. All of the interviews were conducted between January and August 2006.

An adapted version of the Farley-Schuman (Farley et al. 1978) showcard methodology was used to ascertain African immigrants' and Irish nationals' neighborhood ethnic composition preferences. The showcards were used to obtain an objective measure of racial tolerance/preference for out-group members and to stimulate discussions about where and with whom African and Irish respondents preferred to co-reside as well as the reasons underlying their choices. The discussions revealed information about self-segregation tendencies (or the lack thereof), group stereotypes, active avoidance of ethnic minorities, and so on.

For the African interviewees, I showed them 6 neighborhood scenarios with varying degrees of African-Irish composition. They were told that all neighborhoods are of same quality in every way. The only difference among the neighborhood scenarios is the people living around the potential home. Respondents were asked to select their MOST and LEAST preferred neighborhood. For the Irish interviewees, the scenarios began with an all Irish neighborhood and ended with a scenario where 80% of neighbors are African; research in the US shows that 80% minority was the upper limit at which whites were willing to live in a neighborhood.

Results

Figures 1a and 1b show the results from the Farley-Schumann neighborhood scenarios for African immigrants and Irish nationals respectively. The scenarios are arranged on the x-axis according to the proportion of African and Irish neighbors, with increasing proportions of Irish/African neighbors as you move from left to right. The pink bar represents the proportion of African/Irish respondents who chose the particular neighborhood scenario as their **most** preferred or desired neighborhood. The gray bars are for the least preferred/desired neighborhood. The majority of African respondents desired neighborhoods with a mix of both Irish and African neighbors. Forty-five percent of my African respondents picked scenario 4—a neighborhood with 50% Irish and 50% African—as their most preferred neighborhood option. Twenty-eight percent desired a neighborhood with even greater proportions of Irish neighbors—scenario 5, with 86% Irish and 14% African neighbors. Fewer than 25% of the respondents chose a neighborhood in which Africans were in the majority as their number one neighborhood choice. The scenarios considered least desirable were the hypothetical neighborhoods which consisted entirely of either all African (scenario 1) or all Irish neighbors (scenario 6). There were no gender or age differences in neighborhood ethnic composition preferences among the African interviewees. Equal proportions of men and women and younger and older African immigrants preferred neighborhoods with 50% or more Irish neighbors.

Figure 1a. African immigrants' preferences

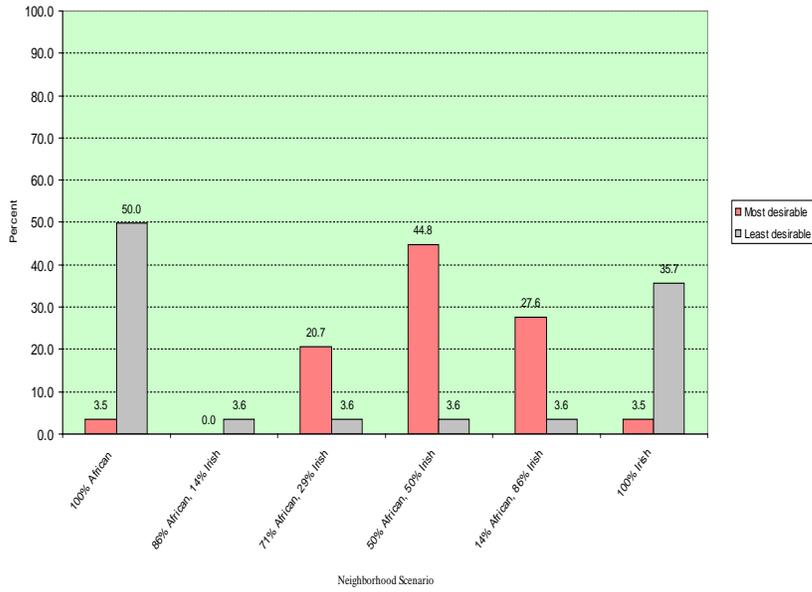
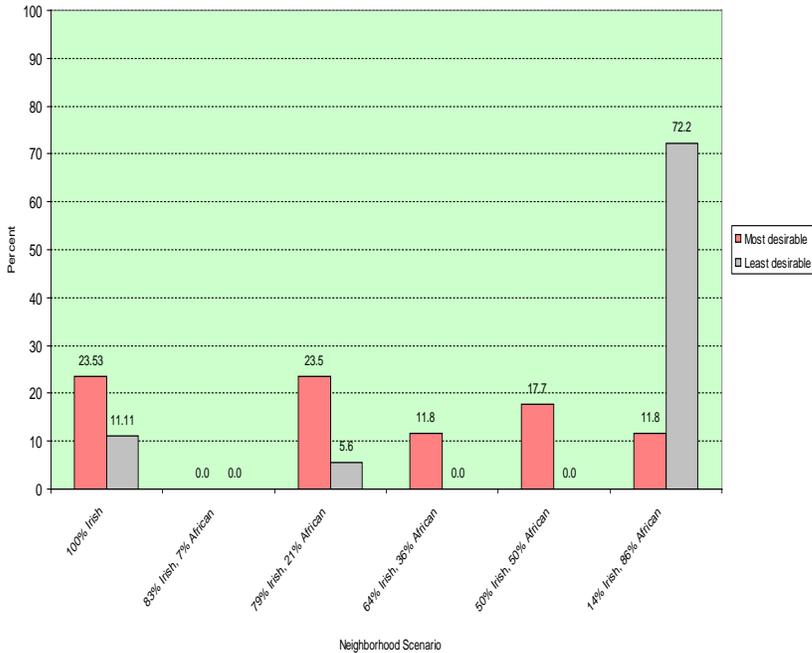


Figure 1b. Irish national's preferences



Unlike the results for the African respondents, most of the Irish interviewees preferred neighborhoods in which Irish residents are in the majority. More than half of the Irish interviewees picked as their number one choice, a neighborhood scenario in which there were at least 64% or more Irish neighbors, with close to one-quarter preferring an all-Irish neighborhood. Only a small proportion of the Irish respondents chose a 50-50 mixed neighborhood or a majority African neighborhood as their most preferred neighborhood. Among the least desirable neighborhood configurations was the scenario in which there is a majority of African neighbors (scenario 6). 72% of the Irish interviewees reporting that this is their LEAST preferred neighborhood.

There were significant age and gender differences in Irish respondents' neighborhood ethnic composition preferences. More women than men preferred neighborhoods with low proportions of African neighbors. Older Irish respondents tend to prefer fewer proportions of African neighbors than younger respondents. Thus, it is the older Irish women in my sample who are more likely to prefer neighborhoods with few Africans and where the Irish are in the majority. The typical profile of an older, Irish woman with a preference for a majority-Irish neighborhood is someone who is in her 40s, resides in an integrated suburb, and has either a working or middle class background. More often than not, she has had negative interactions with African immigrants in public settings (e.g., in grocery stores). Concerns about social isolation, cultural and linguistic differences, and personal safety were the most common reasons older Irish women gave for their neighborhood preferences. Irish men's reasons for wanting integration were more related to a desire to avoid the creation of ghettos (as opposed to a desire to integrate due to lack of prejudice, group stereotypes or ethnocentrism).

Finally, I found that all of my Irish respondents held some negative stereotypes about African immigrants. However, I did not find any systematic difference by in the negativity of the stereotypes by gender or social class. And in general, the racial stereotypes did not influence Irish interviewees' neighborhood ethnic composition preferences in a systematic manner.

Upon further discussions, I discovered an uneasy tension that laid beneath my Irish interviewee's neighborhood ethnic composition preferences. This tension had to do with an overall desire for immigrants to assimilate, shed their ethnic distinctiveness and blend into Irish society without upsetting the status quo. But immigrants are not necessarily blending into Irish communities the way my Irish respondents want and expect them to. Instead the immigrants are maintaining their cultural and ethnic distinctiveness and even institutionalizing this difference within their neighborhoods by setting up ethnic businesses, social organizations and ethnic activities. So this makes the Irish feel as though their physical and social spaces are being invaded. And it is in this context that my Irish respondents expressed their concerns about immigrant ghettos and residence in majority-African neighborhoods. This quote from a young Irish man captures this sense of threat very well.

"Ghettoization is happening already. If you go to Parnell Street, you'd see that areas that 10 or 15 years ago were indigenous are now completely ghettoized or colonized by different rising [immigrant] communities. There are positives to [immigrant] communities living in the same area, but there's negatives as well...the indigenous people [Irish] who live in those areas have their local pubs and shops and all the rest. But after a while they don't necessarily feel at home anymore. They feel like an outsider. So for example if their pub has just always been the local [Irish owned pub in the neighborhood] and then all of a sudden it's the Czech pub or the Polish pub—okay they know that they can go in there for a drink but they're still going to feel like an outsider because the pub is specifically for Polish people and they'll specifically have Polish beer and most people [in the pub] will be Polish and the music and all the rest will be Polish. So of course the Irish residents are going to feel like an outsider because the pub isn't geared towards them." (*Irish man, 26 years old, Dublin suburb*)

Irish respondents' preferences for majority-Irish neighbors and few African neighbors do not reflect benign ethnocentrism or a lack of racial prejudice per se. Rather, they stem from underlying intergroup tensions and power struggles over physical and social space. As this quote illustrates, the struggle isn't necessarily between Africans and Irish alone, but extends to other immigrant groups who are perceived to be "invading" Irish neighborhoods as well.

Fears of ghettoization also formed the basis for African immigrants' preferences for integrated neighborhoods. African interviewees discussed at length about the potential perils that might await them if they were to live in a predominantly black neighborhood. The potential perils stem not from other co-ethnic neighbors but rather from the larger Irish community. The African interviewees believed that spatial clustering would make African immigrants more visible and "stick out like a sore thumb," and therefore make it easier for Irish nationals to target them. Some of the African immigrants expressed concerns that predominantly black neighborhoods may get stereotyped as hotbeds of crime and vice by the police and other outsiders, and as such, residents may become the victims of racial profiling and police abuse and surveillance.

Interestingly, African immigrants' wariness of living in neighborhoods where they would be the only non-Irish family (e.g., scenario with 100% Irish neighbors) was also dominated by concerns with violence and discrimination. Similar to the Irish interviewees, African immigrants couched their concerns within the discourse of cultural difference, however. They brought up examples of how having one or two African neighbors—who share their language, culture, or know "where they're coming from"—would help minimize feelings of social and cultural isolation. Yet underneath this expressed desire for common ground is a mistrust and fear of their Irish neighbors. In short, African immigrants were unsure as to whether they could turn to Irish neighbors for assistance in times of emergency. They were especially worried about victimization and discrimination in low-income, Irish-dominated neighborhoods. Many of the African immigrants had lived in low-income, social housing estates previously and had experienced violence and discrimination first-hand. Thus, the idea of safety in numbers was at the forefront of African immigrants' neighborhood ethnic composition preferences. But too high of a concentration of Africans in any one neighborhood was also seen as a threat to personal safety as well.

Finally, African immigrants' preferences for residential integration were also largely influenced by desires to integrate into Irish society. As one Nigerian man noted, "If I wanted to live in another Lagos, I would have stayed in my country." African immigrants saw spatial integration as a means to help them and their children become incorporated into Irish institutions (e.g., schools) and society more generally.

The interviews reveal that residential integration is the preferred choice for both Irish nationals and African immigrants because both groups view the formation of African enclaves as undesirable, albeit for different reasons. The presence of African-dominated neighborhoods—and immigrant enclaves more generally—threaten the group position of Irish nationals. It strips away Irish nationals' control over physical space, which in turn diminishes their cultural and social influence. For the African immigrants, living in mixed ethnic neighborhoods was a way to escape the potential stigma and racial profiling associated with ghetto residence. Integration was also viewed as a way to help their children become more embedded in Irish society. In short, spatial integration is occurring in Ireland despite the existence of racial prejudice at the individual and group levels and amidst significant social distance between African immigrants and Irish nationals.

References Cited

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