

Ethnic Identity and Integration among Brazilians in Gort, Ireland

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between ethnic identity and integration among Brazilian migrants in the Irish town of Gort in County Galway. According to recent estimates, the population of Gort is now over 30% Brazilian, yet very little is known about the experiences of the migrants themselves. Responding to the striking dearth of research on this significant 'new' migrant group in Ireland, the study examines how the everyday practices and interactions of the migrants themselves impact upon their situation and the places to which they are connected. It contributes to this growing field of research through discussing the complex relationship between 'integration' and 'transnationalism', how it is manifested in this particular case, as well as the wider conceptual and policy implications. The paper also draws on empirical research conducted with Brazilians and Irish residents in Gort. It reveals how the experiences of Brazilians reflect a positive interaction and identification with both Irish and Brazilian identities and places. However, the paper also points to the limitations of the situation, and the barriers that continue to exist to the 'structural integration' of Gort Brazilians.

Introduction

Gort is a small rural town in County Galway, in the West of Ireland. While at first glance there may be little that distinguishes the town, it has received significant media attention in recent years in response to the considerable influx of Brazilians who have migrated there. The first Brazilians arrived in 1999-2000 to work in a local meat processing plant that was on the brink of closure, and ever since it has become the destination for many new migrants from Brazil who now make up over a third of the town's overall population of approximately 3,000 (Hoskins 2006).

The social landscape of Gort has thus been dramatically transformed, becoming the "fastest growing town in Ireland" (O'Shaughnessy 2007) with a population that has not only dramatically diversified, but doubled in the last five years. Media coverage has portrayed the 'Brazilianisation' of this small Irish town as an example of successful integration, "a rare success in the usually glum history of migrations in Europe" (Ibid), becoming Ireland's own "Little Brazil" (Hoskins 2006) and bringing colour and life to this formally sleepy 'one-horse' town. Yet while the media has highlighted the visible and largely positive aspects of the situation - and tended to sensationalise the national stereotypes of Brazilians and Irish - there is a striking lack of

in-depth research into the experiences of the migrants themselves, and the wider implications of this phenomenon.

Issues related to the 'integration' of migrants have been the subject of endless debate and re-examination (Joppke & Morawska 2003; Favell 2003; Snel *et al* 2006; Vasta 2007). Early theories and policies included 'assimilation' or 'acculturation' - themselves vague terms, but which broadly refer to processes whereby migrants are seen to 'assimilate into' the socio-cultural and political norms of their receiving society (Alba & Nee 1997). More recent theories have incorporated concepts of cultural pluralism, or 'multiculturalism', which involve participation in host societies, but with the recognition and acceptance of cultural difference (Vasta 2007). However, within conceptualisations of 'integration' there has been a tendency to regard the 'transnational' practices of immigrants - maintaining strong ties with their ethnic counterparts both in the receiving society and in their country of origin - as somehow 'an impediment to immigrant integration into the host country' (Snel *et al* 2006: 287).

This paper draws on empirical research conducted in Gort to examine the everyday practices and interactions of the Brazilian migrants in Gort, and how these impact upon their situations and the places to which they are connected. Moreover, drawing on different

conceptualisations of 'integration', it seeks to examine what is meant by the notion of the 'successful integration'. This research suggests that integration is occurring - despite the existence of strong 'transnational' ties among the immigrants. However, questions arise as to the sustainability of such a situation and the extent to which this 'integration' is in fact limited to the "social and cultural" (Snel *et al* 2006) realm rather than the economic and institutional, where opportunities are shrinking due to declining economic growth and increasingly restrictive immigration policies.

Migration, Integration, Belonging

Integration and the ways in which "immigrants adapt to their new environment" have been widely debated within migration research (Snel *et al* 2006: 287). The uncertainty surrounding the notion lies, in part, in its use both as a description of the "post-immigration" experiences of immigrants, and as a key policy concern for receiving societies (Favell 2003; Vasta 2007). Indeed, Joppke and Morawska contend that "state policies" are often very far removed from the actual "practices and adjustments" of immigrants themselves (2003:1). In the UK, the current debate centres on a re-think of the policy of 'multiculturalism' and a shift towards a more 'assimilation'-inspired notion of 'community cohesion' in response to Britain's ever-increasing 'super-diversity' (Vertovec 2007a; Vasta 2007). The prevailing multiculturalist approaches have been widely criticised on the grounds that they are culturally essentialist, or that they refer only to 'ethnic minorities' and thus deny the multi-dimensionality of integration (Parekh 2006; Vertovec 2007a, 2007b; Vasta 2007). Moreover, as a result of a "crisis of confidence" among policy makers the notion of 'community cohesion' has emerged, as the formation of separate communities within immigrant groups is seen as "an impediment to integration and cohesion" (Vasta 2008: 2). Vasta contests this critique of multiculturalism and the subsequent shift toward more assimilatory policies, arguing that it fails "to concentrate on the ongoing inequality experienced by many immigrant groups throughout societal institutions and

structures" which, she argues, represents the principle "barrier to integration" (2007: 25). Thus, rather than abandoning multiculturalism as a policy, Vasta suggests that the notion should be expanded to address such structural barriers (Ibid).

In Ireland, where large-scale immigration is a far more recent phenomenon, the integration debate is still in its early stages, yet the "dominant ideology of homogeneity" (Fanning 2002: 4) has meant that multiculturalism (known as 'interculturalism' in Ireland) remains "weak", "characterised by a narrow focus on liberal democratic rights with little focus on racism as a factor in inequality and discrimination" (178). According to Lentin, the transformation of Ireland into a country of "in-migration" has led to what she describes as "crisis racism", whereby migrants are perceived as "problems" and "the state repeatedly refuses to admit that its punitive migration policies lead to racism" (2007: 621).

Indeed, a clear problem with a discussion of integration is the vagueness surrounding its meaning. Thus in an analysis of the relative success, or level of integration in a particular context, it is important to determine what is actually implied by the term. Snel *et al* make a distinction between "structural integration" and "social and cultural integration" (2006: 287). While "structural integration" refers to the incorporation of migrants into the socio-economic "structures" of the host society - such as education and the labour market, "social and cultural" integration, according to their definition, describes the "informal social contact of immigrants" with members of the host society, as well as "the extent to which immigrants endorse the host society's prevailing moral standards and values" (Ibid). While the two are "strongly related" (Ibid), such a distinction is useful as it also enables us to examine the interrelationship between the day-to-day practices and interactions of immigrants with members of their host society, and the broader structural processes and changes. Moreover, it suggests that the two dimensions can be experienced unevenly, so

that, “social and cultural integration” can occur to a greater degree than “structural” integration.

Another area of dispute surrounding immigrant integration is that it implies the existence of a cohesive structure or system into which immigrants “integrate” (Samers 1998; Joppke & Morawska 2003). Moreover, as Samers argues, “integration” as a concept “suggests a static notion of society where the ‘them’ confronts the ‘us’, and ignores the dialectics and ambiguities of social and cultural change” (1998: 129). Indeed, the ever-increasing diversity of many European states, and the practices of immigrants and communities whose practices can be conceived of as ‘transnational,’ challenge such a bounded and static notion of societies (Favell 2003). Yet, as Favell argues, rather than bringing an end to the “integration paradigm”, “transnationalism in Europe has to be seen as a growing empirical exception to the familiar nation-centred pattern of integration across the continent” (Ibid: 36). Thus, as this research seeks to illustrate, the study of the transnational practices of immigrants can in fact shed light on integration processes and have wider policy implications.

There are few empirical examples of work that discusses the relationship between transnationalism and integration (Kivisto 2003). Giorguli-Saucedo and Itzigsohn’s broadly quantitative study (2002), and their more recent elaboration that incorporates a gendered perspective (2005), represent important contributions, as do Morawska’s discussion of different “combinations of transnationalism and assimilation” (2003) and Levitt’s research among Dominicans in Boston (2003a). However, these examples remain limited to the specific US context. Snel et al’s (2006) study, discussed above, is perhaps the most thorough European example, which examines the relationship between transnationalism and integration in relation to immigrants living in the Netherlands. While the authors point to the need for more research into the issue, and the complexity of making any concrete conclusions, the overall suggestion is that “transnational activities and identifications do

not need to constitute an impediment to integration” (304).

The interdependency of transnationalism and integration is further examined by Vertovec (2007a: 20). Significantly, he suggests that neither ‘transnationalism’ nor ‘integration’ are “of a piece”, and “various modes or components can be selectively combined by migrants” (21). It is this “selective combination” that I examine in the context of Brazilians in Gort, looking at the different levels of their experience so as to challenge any linear explanation. Vertovec’s notion of “civil-integration” will also be useful in my analysis (2007b). The concept suggests that ‘integration’ need not involve “deep, meaningful, sustained relations,” and that in fact practices based on “civility”, and mutual acceptance and tolerance, are equally if not more important for promoting “social cohesion” (*Ibid*: 3).

Research Methods

The empirical research for this study was in conducted in Gort in June-July 2008. This involved first, a two-page questionnaire survey, which was carried out with forty-five Brazilians (twenty-one women and twenty-four men) to elicit basic socio-economic data. This included basic questions relating to their migration experience, their transnational practices, and their everyday lives in Gort. This initial stage was followed by twenty-three in-depth semi-structured interviews with Brazilian and Irish respondents. Of the Brazilian respondents who agreed to be interviewed, I selected a sample of fifteen, which aimed to capture as far as possible the diversity of the Brazilian population in Gort, in relation to factors such as gender, class, regional origin, age and religious affiliation. Irish respondents included the local police Superintendent, the police Ethnic Liaison Officer, a doctor, a community worker, two teachers, a shop owner, and a priest.

These stages were complemented further by other ethnographic methods including participant observation while I was living in the town. The portrait of Brazilians in Gort presented in this study by no means purports to

be entirely accurate, but rather represents a general insight based on the experiences conveyed to me by a sample of immigrants and local residents. The questionnaires and in-depth interviews with Brazilian respondents were carried out in Portuguese in most cases. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, and translated where necessary. The quotes from interviews are cited in the text in italics and are my translation. Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

Research Context

Ireland, once a place where people were compelled to leave through lack of opportunity, is now a place to which they come because of the opportunities which exist. (2)

The above citation reveals the dramatic demographic transformation in Ireland in recent years as a result of the country's economic boom in the 1990s - known as the 'Celtic Tiger'. According to Ruhs, "[n]et migration to Ireland increased from 8,000 in 1996 to over 41,000 in 2002, and remained high at 32,000 in 2004" (2005: x). Such a dramatic demographic transition has undoubtedly been fraught, and created challenges both in practical and policy terms, and with regard to widespread perceptions of Irish identity (Healy 2007; Fanning 2002). Many non-EU nationals living in Ireland came having been offered work permits by Irish employers which, until 2003, were almost entirely employer-led and allocated with a relative lack of restriction (Ruhs, 2005: xii). In 2003, however, the Employment Permits Act was introduced, which implied a much more interventionist role for the government, imposing a more restrictive skills based system, with priority to workers from new EU member states (Ibid: xii).

In Gort, a large number of the migrants have been affected by this policy change, and either become undocumented unwittingly - as their existing work permits expire - or have entered the country and stayed on, working as irregular migrants. As Ruhs suggests, the recentness of widespread labour immigration to Ireland means that very little research exists into its

consequences and impacts (Ibid). While this paper does not discuss in-depth the economic impact of labour immigration, or indeed irregular migration, a focus on the particular experiences of immigrants in Gort does point to some broader implications for integration in Ireland, and their potential relevance for policies in other receiving countries.

As with many examples of migration flows, the influx of immigrants from Brazil to Gort is a consequence of both 'macro' and very 'micro' factors. It began in 1999, when the meat exporting factory, Sean Duffy Meat Exports Ltd., situated on the outskirts of Gort, obtained six work permits and hired people (four men and two women) from Vila Fabril, a suburb of the Brazilian town of Anápolis in the state of Goiás (Healy, 2006: 150). These workers had previously been employed at a large meat factory there - of which the manager was an Irish expatriate - that had recently closed down (Ibid). Following the 'success' of this initial wave of migrants, gradually more people came from Brazil to Gort, and recent reports state that the Brazilian community now accounts for somewhere between a third and half of the town's population.

While Sean Duffy's meat factory was the original catalyst bringing Brazilians to the town (3), many more came over to work in other sectors - with men filling labour gaps in areas such as construction, farming and fisheries, or manufacturing, and women filling gaps in the service industry (gaps formally filled by Irish women) in restaurants, hotels, nursing homes, or as domestic cleaners or childminders. Moreover, while the original Brazilian arrivals were from Vila Fabril - and later from elsewhere in the state of Goiás - the community in Gort now includes people from other Brazilian states.

The existence of strong social networks and what Massey terms the "cumulative causation" of migration flows (1990), has clearly represented an important 'pull' factor drawing more people to Gort. The fact that there already exists a strong Brazilian presence in Gort reduces the costs - both financial and emotional - of migration and thus influences

the decision of potential future immigrants. Gort has thus become a “first stop” for many new Brazilian migrants to Ireland who arrive there to find information about issues such as employment and accommodation before moving on to elsewhere in the country (McGrath, 2008: 3).

However, as recent reports confirm (Pereira, 2008), increasing numbers of Gort Brazilians are returning to Brazil as a result of labour shortages and declining economic opportunities. Some of my interviewees also mentioned how the economic situation in Brazil is now improving, and that this is another reason why people are returning, or at least plan to return soon.

The Importance of the Local

[P]laces do count. Contrary to the image of transnational immigrants living simultaneously in two worlds, in fact the vast majority is at any moment located primarily in one place. (4)

In Europe, speculation over different integration ‘models’ has re-entered policy debates in response to the unprecedented rates of immigration that have fuelled widespread public and media attention. The tendency has been to focus on - and exaggerate - the negative dimensions of this phenomenon, and immigrant communities that participate in ‘transnational’ activities are seen as a “threat” to what is perceived as an “already integrated, bounded society” (Joppke & Morawska 2003: 3). As such, multicultural policies that accommodate such cultural diversity are falling widely into disrepute (Vasta 2007; 2008). Yet within these policy debates - often influenced by highly reactive media sensationalism - there is little emphasis placed on the actual processes occurring and the experiences of immigrants themselves (Favell 2003; Vasta 2008).

The practices of Brazilians in Gort and their direct contact maintained with Brazil do suggest the emergence of a ‘transnational social space’ that encompasses networks and circuits spanning Gort and Brazil. However, my research suggests that this does not represent an alternative to, or substitute for, engagement

with the local place but rather that transnational practices and local attachment can, as Kivisto contends, “co-exist in a dialectical relationship” (2003:12). In what follows, I reveal some of the ways in which this “co-existence” is manifested through the everyday practices of Brazilians living in Gort. I consider different dimensions of the ‘integration’ of Brazilians in Gort in terms of firstly, what Vertovec calls “civil-integration”: “getting on with” each other in ways that do not necessarily involve “deep and meaningful interaction” (2007a: 40) and secondly the two-way mutual respect and appreciation that exists between Brazilian and Irish residents in the town. Finally, I discuss the barriers that still exist with regard to what Snet et al (2006: 287) call “structural integration”, which reveals the power of the nation-state to determine and control the full extent of integration.

Separate spaces and “Civil-Integration”?

The way it works here at the moment seems to work really well. The Brazilians and the Irish mix, but not too much. ... For the locals it’s like having a friend who comes once a week, but they don’t stay too long. I think the Irish people like us because we know when to leave (Milton, 17.06.08).

The above quotation aptly conveys the way in which integration is in many ways occurring despite the fairly separate lives led by members of the community and their Irish counterparts. The majority of my respondents said that they do not really have Irish friends with whom they socialise, yet they have many acquaintances - made through work, or through day-to-day activities. Thus, for example, Brazilians do not frequent Gort’s many pubs - important places of social interaction for a large proportion of the town’s Irish residents. For some, this is because they do not drink alcohol (in fact around half of my Brazilian respondents told me that they drink no alcohol at all), or that they do not have time as they work long hours and tend to go home, eat and sleep. However, respondents also said they could not understand why Irish people drink in pubs - such enclosed, dark spaces, where people drink

large quantities of cloudy beer! (Roberto, 11.06.08). Most of my Brazilian respondents said they preferred to socialise at home - having barbeques (weather permitting!), or parties with loud Brazilian music and dancing.

As the situation in Gort suggests, however, it is not necessarily that Brazilians cannot go to more characteristically 'Irish' places, or attend the Catholic Mass in English, nor indeed that Irish people cannot go to the more 'Brazilian' places. Rather, there seems to exist in the town a mutual acceptance of difference and openness to the gradual processes of adaptation. This tolerance is perhaps at the heart of the generally harmonious co-existence. As Luis remarked,

I think that the Irish have one way of living, and Brazilians have another, and in that sense there is no "integration". But at the same time there are lots who have more contact, there are families that are mixed - Irish married to Brazilians - with Irish kids. And in the world cup there were Irish people in the Brazil kit, with Brazilian flags... (10.06.08). (5)

The processes of 'integration' occurring in Gort reflect, to some extent, Vertovec's notion of "civil-integration" mentioned above, which, he suggests, "helps us to understand that a lack of 'deep and meaningful interaction' between communities ... does not necessarily mean poor social cohesion" (2007a: 40). Moreover, it is perhaps illustrative of the possibility of "selective combination" of "various modes or components" of both transnationalism and integration (Ibid: 21). The practices of Brazilian immigrants in Gort reflect a combination of both participation in a 'Brazilian space' and an attachment to, and interaction with, where necessary, the wider community.

Mutual Appreciation

While some of the stories I heard did challenge the predominantly celebratory portrayal of Gort in the media as a benchmark for integration, the general impression I received was indeed of a positive situation, for both Irish and Brazilians alike. All but two of my Brazilian interviewees said that, despite going through hard times at first, the experience

overall had been entirely positive, both for financial reasons and with regard to how it had changed them as a person. João remarked,

I feel like I've grown up a lot here living in Ireland. The experience that you get here - not just economically, but the experience itself...we learn to economise, to live, we learn to respect and to be respected... we go through hard times, but it's all part of growing up. Today I feel like a different person, I have grown in so many ways - mentally, and spiritually (13.06.08). (6)

A few people did mention exploitation by Irish people, such as not being paid for work done, or being given false cheques. Yet those who did recount such stories tended to see it as inevitable "it happens everywhere" (Luis, 10.06.08) - and said that Brazilians would - and have - done the same thing. Moreover, those who said they had been exploited said it had been because they did not speak any English and that as soon as they learnt some their situation improved (see Mcgrath 2008: 15).

In general, however, people seem extremely grateful for the opportunities they have had through coming to Gort. One of the only complaints was the lack of "lazer" - leisure activities or entertainment - in the town for both adults and children. However, this was nearly always counterbalanced by the more important issue of safety and security, particularly with regard to children. As Ana told me, "it's so safe here in Gort, we can even leave the front door open. You could never do that in Brazil" (17.06.08). Carlos, who has three children in Gort, including a seventeen-year-old son said,

for him [his son] it's really hard in Brazil because of the violence - drugs and stuff...he said he wanted to stay here. To live, to bring up kids, there is no better place than Gort (16.06.08). (7)

Moreover, just as the arguably strong degree of 'integration' of Brazilians in Gort is evident through their adjustment to certain local practices and places, there is also little doubt that the town of Gort itself has been radically transformed as a result of the Brazilian presence there. Siobhan, a local shop owner remarked,

Integration can't be successful unless it comes from both sides...locals have to go a bit of the mile as well. We have to meet somewhere in between (05.06.08).

To some degree, it seems this two-way process of adaptation has occurred, and is occurring, in Gort. Indeed, a major factor contributing to the positive experiences of Brazilians in Gort is the way in which local residents have welcomed them on the whole. As Siobhan said,

When people first came, people barely knew where Brazil was on the map. Then the community grew and grew ... They are a natural part of the community now (06.06.08).

Claire, who teaches the 'immersion class' at the main secondary school, described the influx of Brazilians to Gort as bringing, "a ray of light into a dark Irish town." (19.06.08).

The local population have welcomed the Brazilian community, not just in terms of the 'colour' they have brought to the town, but also with regard to the undeniable economic transformation witnessed in Gort since their arrival. Many Irish residents now own second - or several - properties that they rent out to Brazilian households. Furthermore, a lot of Irish families now employ a Brazilian cleaner, and businesses in sectors such as construction, mechanics, catering or care, rely on Brazilian workers. Brazilians in my study noted how they have been well received, as people's perceptions of Brazilians have changed. Tereza remarked when I asked her what she thought of the integration between Brazilians and Irish,

Before the Irish people must have thought "who are these people arriving here - South Americans, from the favelas?" ... I think that over time they've seen that we work, cleaning the houses of Irish people. They've seen that Brazilian women aren't like that image they had of sexy women - they see that Brazilian women are responsible, organised, hard working -and this has changed people's ideas (09.06.08). (8)

The Superintendent of the local Gardaí (Irish police) spoke of the astonishingly few problems they have had with Brazilians. During our interview he told me that he had been doing his

crime statistics that morning and, of the twenty-four crimes reported in May, not one had been committed by a Brazilian (13.06.08). In fact, the majority of crimes related to Brazilians in Gort have in fact involved the arrests of rogue Irish employers who have exploited migrant workers, or a few cases of drunken violence towards Brazilians. There was a general consensus among people in Gort to turn a 'blind eye' to immigration status, a factor which undoubtedly attracts Brazilians to Gort and contributes to their sense of security in the town. Ana told me that she knew of six women in the nearby town of Roscommon who had been deported, as the Gardaí there are nowhere near as tolerant as they are in Gort (17.06.08).

Places of Interaction

While there clearly exist some distinctly 'Brazilian' places in Gort and a degree of separation between the lives of Irish and Brazilian residents, the community does not exist in a "bubble that isolates them entirely from the impact of the host society" (Kivisto, 2003: 16). Rather, Brazilians have undergone inevitable adjustment and adaptation processes that form part of the migration experience (Favell, 2003: 15), and there are many places in Gort where both Brazilians and Irish people interact with one another. Indeed, the small size of the town facilitates this interaction so, for example, while many of the newly built housing estates are inhabited predominantly by Brazilian households, there is not the same degree of residential segregation as may exist in bigger towns or cities. Moreover, while Brazilians do go to Brazilian shops to buy specific products, all of my respondents said that they shopped in one or more of Gort's supermarkets, which now stock plenty of beans and rice. Parenthetically, branches of the supermarkets Lidl and Aldi have opened up in the town in the last two years, and there is talk of a branch of Tesco being built. In addition, Siobhan told me that she had started stocking Brazilian products since half of her customers are Brazilian:

I was worried about what they were eating. I started asking people to write down what kind of

food they would like ... Now we always get limes in for example (05.06.08).

Siobhan's shop is also a meeting place for Gort Brazilians, as well as place to find work as she spreads the word to Irish people who are looking for cleaners and labourers. Moreover, Siobhan has taken a Portuguese course, though she says she rarely needs to speak it nowadays as so many more of the Brazilians speak English.

Schools are also fundamental places of interaction between Brazilian and Irish children in Gort, and for their parents who bring their children to and from school and attend parents' evenings, and so on. Approximately 40% of children in the main primary school and 10% of children at the secondary school are Brazilian and this has undoubtedly had a major impact on the educational environments. Both schools have taken steps to accommodate the growing numbers of Brazilian pupils, employing at least one Portuguese-speaking teacher, and even establishing an 'immersion year' for new arrivals during which they can get their English up to a level in order to participate in the relevant classes.

Of course, it has not been totally free of problems, and Claire told me about the challenges that they had faced coping with some of the 'cultural' differences between Brazilian and Irish pupils and the language barriers. On the whole, however, the new pupils have been welcomed. Moreover, education is clearly a key factor contributing to the decision of many Brazilians to stay longer. Beatriz told me that the most positive thing for her family about living in Gort is,

the education for my daughter, and the cultural experience - it opens your mind. For the Brazilian kids here in Gort the education they are getting will influence their lives forever (17.06.08). (9)

My research visit to Gort in June coincidentally coincided with the 'Quadrilha' carnival, a traditional Brazilian (originally Portuguese) festival to celebrate St John's day, which has taken place annually in Gort's main square for the last five years. The event was organised by volunteers within the Brazilian community,

including one of my interviewees, Maria, who choreographed many of the traditional dances and helped put together the costumes. People were dressed in extravagant, brightly coloured outfits and, as well as the music and dancing, there were stands serving Brazilian food and drinks. The festival went ahead despite the heavy rain, and there were some Irish as well as Brazilian participants dancing and enjoying the atmosphere. Thus for one day each year, Gort's main square takes on an entirely different identity, becoming re-imagined and re-fashioned by Brazilians living in Gort.

Barriers to Structural Integration

This paper has so far discussed some dimensions of the 'integration' of Brazilians in Gort. I have suggested that the widely positive image projected by the media is to some extent justified, as there seems to be a general sense of mutual tolerance and respect among Irish and Brazilians living in the town. There is also, without doubt, an acknowledgement on both sides of the town's transformation, which is perceived by most as a positive change for both economic and cultural reasons. Yet my focus has been on the practices and adjustments of immigrants, and indeed local residents, with little discussion of the policies of the Irish state. The former reveals strong levels of what Snel et al call "social and cultural integration" (2003: 287), and in other ways exemplifies Vertovec's notion of "civil-integration" (2007a).

A focus on state policies, however, and a deeper examination of the lives of many Brazilians in Gort, reveals considerable barriers to "structural integration" (i.e. their participation in "central societal institutions", Snel et al, 2003: 299). Twenty-nine of the forty-five people I interviewed were undocumented, and this undoubtedly has a major impact on their lives, as many live in fear of deportation and as such are reluctant to claim their rights. Tereza replied when I asked her if she went for support at the town's Family Resource Centre,

No, I don't ask anyone ... I'm always scared that I may be deported. I'd rather work quietly, not draw attention to myself for anything and stay here, than risk being sent away (09.06.08). (10)

Moreover, many of those who are undocumented are afraid to leave, as they fear they would not be able to come back again. Magda remarked,

I don't know what to do...because the first year that you're here, you come across many obstacles. And gradually you overcome all the obstacles...and now I have, how shall I put it, victory, in my hands...and I'm going to go back. But I'm scared to go back and, as lots of Brazilians who have gone back have found, to have nothing again and not be able to come back here (11.06.08). (11)

It may be argued that some “structural changes” have taken place at the local level in Gort through, for example, the establishment of the ‘immersion year’ at the local school, and the tolerant attitude of the Gardaí. As Vasta writes,

“[m]utual accommodation is not just about cultural recognition, but about structural changes where necessary and ensuring structural equality for ethnic minorities” (2007: 26).

In Gort, however, these structural changes are not official, so for many immigrants, the future remains uncertain. The local community may well turn a ‘blind eye’ to immigration status, and to the large number of Brazilians in the town, as currently the situation is beneficial to all. However, as immigration policies become increasingly restrictive throughout Western receiving societies, the sustainability of this situation is doubtful. It thus remains to be seen whether this extremely positive example of ‘integration’ will continue or whether these predominantly happy, hardworking and law-abiding migrants will be the first to bear the brunt of future economic, political and legislative shifts.

Conclusion

This brief insight into the everyday lives and experiences of Brazilian immigrants in Gort reveals the complex ways in which transnational practices and processes of adaptation and integration are interrelated. While the Brazilian community is inherently diverse, the majority engage in practices that

reflect the forging of a common sense of Brazilian identity in the town and facilitate the maintenance of ties to people and places in Brazil. Moreover, such practices, and the places in which they are carried out, have in fact facilitated the immigrants’ attachment to Gort and their sense of belonging there.

However, while this study corroborates the notion that transnationalism and integration can be complementary as opposed to contradictory, it also suggests that academics and researchers need to move beyond this important recognition and explore how such insights can be constructive in making concrete changes in the lives of immigrants. A “bottom-up perspective” (Favell 2003: 15) on the processes and practices of adaptation and place-making among Brazilians in Gort does suggest that integration is occurring as Brazilians play an increasingly important role in the social and cultural life in Gort. However, the ‘top-down’ actions and policies of the Irish (and EU) government create and reinforce barriers to structural integration, barriers that are becoming increasingly hard to penetrate. Lentin writes,

“despite an explicit admittance that in order to maintain economic growth, Ireland is in need of immigrant labour, the state is doing all it can to restrict immigration” (2007: 616).

Restrictive measures include frequent cases of deportation, the increasing scarcity of work permits for non-EU workers, and the passing of ever more restrictive legislation, such as the removal of “birth-right citizenship for the children of migrants” in 2004 (Ibid: 610).

Increasing numbers of Gort Brazilians are undocumented and live in fear of deportation, despite the fact that the local community have chosen to ignore this fact in recognition of the vital role that the Brazilians play to the local economy. However, as Vertovec writes, “group inter-relations are closely dependent on the existence or absence of competition for local resources and services” (2007a: 5). As the Irish economy has begun to take a downturn, cracks will very likely appear in the apparently harmonious co-existence of Brazilians and Irish

in Gort, and questions will arise as to the future prospects of the situation. Already for new arrivals in Gort, work is much harder to come by, and more and more are choosing to go back to Brazil (Mac Cormaic 2008; Pereira 2008). Integration is thus revealed to be limited as state policies continue to pay little heed to the

actual practices and experiences of immigrants themselves, and to the undeniable benefits they provide for the national economy, working for low wages in vital sectors of the labour market.

Olivia Sheringham

Notes

1 Olivia Sheringham is a PhD candidate in the Department of Geography, Queen Mary, University of London. Her doctoral research examines notions of transnationalism and integration among Brazilian migrants in London. Her academic background is in Modern Languages and Latin American Area Studies. More recently this has developed into an interest in Latin American immigrants and their experiences of living across borders. I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Economic and Social Research Council. I would like to thank Dr Cathy McIlwaine from Queen Mary, University of London for her helpful discussions when writing this article. I would also like to thank Frank Murray for all his help with organising my visit to Gort, as well as his support and friendship while I was there. My deepest gratitude also goes to all the Brazilian and Irish families and individuals who participated in this study through generously sharing their time with me, and without whom this research would not have been possible.

2 IOM, 2006: 187.

3 The meat factory in fact closed down in September 2007.

4 Kivisto, 2001: 571

5 'Eu acho que os irlandeses têm um tipo de vida e os brasileiros têm outro e ali, não existe integração. Mas existe alguns que têm mais contacto, que têm mais integração - têm famílias que são misturadas - irlandeses casados com brasileiros - com crianças irlandesas. Y também no copo do mundo você já vê irlandeses vestidos no kit do Brasil. Muitos. Com bandeiras brasileiras.'

6 '... cresci muito de viver aqui na Irlanda. A experiência que a gente pega aqui, não só de dinheiro mas de experiência mesmo - a gente aprende a economizar, a gente aprenda a viver, aprende a respeitar e a ser respeitado...passa muitas dificuldades - é tudo parte de um crescimento. Hoje eu me sento uma outra pessoa - cresci demais - mentalmente, e espiritualmente.'

7 '...porque eu tenho filhos adolescentes - um rapaz de 17 anos, então para ele no Brasil - e difícil conviver lá. Por causa da violência, de homicídios. Da droga. Então ele também optou de ficar aqui.'

8 'antes os irish devem pensar - quem é isso que chega aqui - o sudamericano, da favela, hoje não - acho que já depois de um tempo eles vêem que trabalhamos, fazendo cleaner casas de irlandeses eles vêem que os brasileiros não são aquele imagem de sexy - eles vêem que as mulheres brasileiras são responsáveis, são organizadas, trabalhadoras - principalmente que são trabalhadoras - e isso foi mudando a idéia.'

9 'Então, eu acho que o positivo é para a educação da minha filha e a parte cultural - a mente abre demais. Para as crianças que estão em Gort a parte positiva é que aquela educação vá influir a futura de elas.'

10 'Não falo com ninguém de eles [family resource centre]. Fico sempre com medo que me deportem, prefiro trabalhar quietinha, não chamar a atenção a nada...para fazer tudo.'

11 'Não sei se vou ficar...não sei que vai passar...a gente fica em dois mundos diferentes...porque o primeiro ano que a gente está aqui a gente enfrenta muitos obstáculos. E depois você empece a superar todos os obstáculos. E agora eu tenho como se diz, vitória, na mão...e eu vou voltar. E ali tenho um medo de voltar e [...] não ter nada de novo.'

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