POST-MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION EXPERIENCE AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN

CANADA: A CASE STUDY OF AFRICAN NEWCOMERS IN ST. JOHN'S, NL.

By

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic had a variety of impacts on marginalized groups in Canada, exacerbating existing inequalities in society. The integration process of newcomers, immigrants and non-immigrants, was significantly affected as they rely heavily on informal social connections to access information about housing, employment, and other social institutions. Existing studies on the experiences of newcomers during the pandemic have predominantly focused on the impact and effects of the virus on these groups. However, the voices and interpretations of newcomers' challenges have been largely overlooked, even though their understanding of these challenges greatly influences their integration. This thesis aims to explore the integration experience of African newcomer immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic. It focuses on how they interpreted their social interactions while facing challenges after migration. The study took place between 2020 and 2022 in St. John's, a mid-sized Canadian city that actively seeks to attract and retain immigrants. The thesis is based on data from 17 semi-structured interviews conducted with newcomer immigrants who migrated from Sub-Saharan Africa and self-identified as racialized. The theoretical approach of the study is based on symbolic interactionism, and the analysis relies on Blumer and Cooley's orientation. The findings reveal emotional struggles such as loneliness and anxiety and difficulties in social and economic integration. The notion of dual skepticism and misplaced social-cultural values are the main social challenges experienced by immigrants. They exercised agency and coped by relying on faith, self-advocacy, transcending predetermined labels, and showcasing adaptability and resilience.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, African immigrants, integration, Atlantic Canada.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated social inequalities in Canada (Mensah & Williams, 2020; Amoako & MacEachen, 2021), particularly for newcomers such as immigrants and non-immigrants. Before the pandemic, these newcomers faced significant challenges in their first few years after migration to Canada, including limited language proficiency, devaluation of education obtained before migration, and loss of social connections (Johnson et al., 2021; Campbell, 2020). During the pandemic, these challenges intensified due to the rapid systemic changes caused by the COVID-19 outbreak (Shields & Abu Alrob, 2023; LaRochelle-Côé et al., 2020; CBC News, 2020). In response, and considering the existing inequalities faced by immigrants and non-immigrants, studies have assessed the pandemic's impact on various groups, including recent immigrants, international students, and older immigrants (Bouka & Bouka, 2020; Lamb et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022; Firang & Mensah, 2021).

Even though these studies have made important contributions to our understanding of how the timing of migration (Kazemipur, 2008; Jakobson et al., 2023) and the historical narratives of immigrants and non-immigrants racial status in host countries (Wu et al., 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2019) influences the integration lived experiences. How newcomers interpret this impact, and resultant challenges have been largely ignored. How do racialized newcomers particularly sub-Saharan Africans in Canada who have been hit the hardest due to overlapping systems of race, gender, and class (Mensah & Williams, 2020; Amoako & MacEachen, 2021) interpret these experiences?

Studies on immigrant integration experience in Newfoundland and Labrador is relatively scanty. The existing studies on integration challenges indicate minimal settlement and integration support, English proficiency, overcoming racial and cultural differences, accessing health care services, and the

isolated geographic location's influence on immigrants' experiences. (see Coombs-Thorne & Warren, 2007; Gien & Law, 2009; Mullings et al., 2021). Also, Graham and Pottie-Sherman (2021) found that immigrant newcomer entrepreneurs in St. John's face business operation barriers due to a lack of social networks and awareness of available services, often forcing them to self-teach business regulations, leading to financial stress.

The studies that have explored the experiences of racialized immigrants categorized as black or visible minorities in Newfoundland and Labrador have primarily focused on gender. Nderitu (2008) focused on women from Kenya, while Giwa et al. (2021) focused on the settlement and integration needs of racialized LGBTQ newcomers in Newfoundland and Labrador. Both studies note that newcomers encounter racism, sexism, isolation, and discrimination. Giwa et al. further highlight deficiencies in meeting the settlement needs of racialized LGBTQ newcomers, citing inadequate services and a lack of training, knowledge, and resources among service providers. While the studies reviewed provide valuable insights into the experiences of different categories of newcomers, immigrants, and non-immigrants in Newfoundland and Labrador, they were conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic. It would be important to examine the timing of migration/integration – during the COVID-19 pandemic would influence newcomer experiences.

This gap highlights the importance of exploring the lived experiences of African immigrants in a region that aspires to be a gateway, as identified by Pottie-Sherman and Graham (2021). It illustrates the importance of Crea-Arsenio et al. (2022) call to shift the focus of immigrant integration studies in Canada from the national level of newcomer immigrant integration to include the provincial or city level and the need to use diverse immigration categories as a medium to study lived experiences. Thus, this study aims to answer the following questions: What was the integration process like for African immigrants in St. John's during the COVID-19 pandemic (between 2020 and 2022), with emphasis on

the difficulties and their interpretation of the difficulties? How did they exercise their agency while navigating this experience?

In Canada, the term "newcomer" refers to recent arrivals to individuals who have been in the country for up to a decade. Newcomers to Canada may be considered permanent residents, refugees, and temporary residents (students, workers or temporary resident permit holders). Most newcomers in Canada can be broadly categorized into two immigrant and foreign nationals (Gilmore, 2022). An immigrant is a person who is or has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident with the right to live permanently in Canada granted by immigration authorities. Whereas a means a person who is not a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident and includes a stateless person (Statistic Canada, 2017; *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*.). The term has been increasingly used by federal, regional and provincial governments such as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada use this term on their websites and in their services. Also, companies and support groups refer to immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, and sometimes foreign students. This inclusive term is meant to avoid the stigma that can be associated with immigrants, foreign nationals, and refugees (Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies, 2019[1]).

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[1] TD Canada Trust. (n.d.). New to Canada. Retrieved July 1, 2024, from https://www.td.com/ca/en/personal-banking/solutions/new-to-canada

Canada is a multicultural nation that values human rights. This is exemplified by its adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 and its historical role in providing refuge to refugees, including fugitive slaves from the United States (Donovan, 2014). Canada's immigration history dates back to the 16th century with the settler colonizers. This quickly shifted to Irish and loyalist immigration, mostly including people displaced by the American Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries and farmers from Ireland. This transitioned into the massive migration of non-English speaking immigrants who settled in major cities like Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto (Troper, 2022). In the 19th century, Canada's immigration policy was largely unrestricted, promoting white immigration, especially to Western Canada. However, the 1869 Immigration Act discriminated against individuals based on class, disability, and race. Furthermore, race-based discrimination was prevalent. The government imposed a head tax and the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 to restrict Chinese immigration. This racism persisted until the late 1940s. Even among white immigrants, there was ethnic discrimination, with Anglo-Saxons from Britain and the US preferred over Italians and Greeks, who were seen as harder to assimilate (Dirks, 2024). In the 1960s, the points system was introduced, where applicants were evaluated based on age, education, language skills (English or French), and job demand. These criteria yield immigrants from diverse backgrounds and contribute significantly to Canada's cultural, social, and economic landscape (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2023). According to Statistics Canada (2017), immigrants are selected based on three main objectives: enhancing economic development, reuniting families, and fulfilling international obligations while upholding the humanitarian tradition of helping refugees. About 60% of recent immigrants, including principal applicants, spouses, and dependents, are admitted under the economic category. Of these economic immigrants, 48% entered through the skilled workers program, and 27.3% through the provincial and territorial nominees program (Statistics Canada, 2017). Asia and Africa are the top sources of recent immigrants. While over half of

all immigrants settle in major cities like Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal, there is an increase in those who choose to settle in the Atlantic provinces.

Most immigrants migrate with the mindset that integration into the economic structure will be relatively easy after a brief period of adjustment post-migration, coupled with hard work and resilience. However, the economy's performance during an immigrant's arrival period and arrival circumstances significantly influence their integration prospects (Hum & Simpson, 2004). Their integration experience is largely determined by their overall employment (see Phythian et al., 2009; Arthur & Flynn, 2011), language capacity (Adamuti-Trache, 2013), social integration opportunities (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014; Creese, 2011) and housing options available to them (Teixeira & Drolet, 2018; Brown, 2016). In addition to this, newcomers who Canada from Africa may struggle to integrate into Canadian society due to unfamiliarity with North America's intricate historical and social nuances. This is complicated by preconceived notions and stereotypes about being both Black and an immigrant (Creese, 2011; Creese & Wiebe, 2012). This is particularly important because most immigrant identity formation affects their integration into host societies. African immigrants have a double consciousness and a double identity— the identity in the host country and their new identity in the new country influence their integration (Mensah & Williams, 2015).

Newfoundland and Labrador is facing demographic challenges, including an aging population and low birth rates, projected to reduce the working-age population by 10% by 2025. This decline would impact economic growth and tax revenue. Therefore, immigration is a key solution, bringing skilled workers who contribute to the economy and establish businesses (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2022). Based on these projections, the province has, over the years, been actively working towards attracting immigrants, particularly Asians, Africans and Latin Americans, through programs such as the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) and Atlantic Immigration Program (AIP) even before

the pandemic providing supports required for them to settle (Bumsted, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2016). The Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, along with The College of the North Atlantic, have contributed to an increase in the number of immigrants through their international student enrollment. This increase has significantly contributed to the province's population growth, with many international students staying here after graduation (The Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2020; College of the North Atlantic, 2020). Also, they have been working with the provincial government to support international students. This includes extending Medical Care Plan (MCP) coverage for international students to 90 days post-graduation, enhancing support through the Retaining Global Talent project, expanding the Professional Skills Development Program, and funding intercultural training sessions for newcomers. These efforts aim to facilitate employment opportunities and integrate international graduates into the local workforce, supporting the province's immigration goals (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2021).

These efforts to attract and become a welcoming location have earned the province the tag "aspiring gateways," as described by Pottie-Sherman & Graham (2021, pg 288). This concept refers to aspiring gateways as places somewhat isolated from international migration but seeking to attract newcomers through incentives. These incentives aim to encourage economic participation and broader engagement in society. However, settling in Newfoundland and Labrador can be particularly challenging because of the historical divisions between "come from away" and "Newfoundlanders" that establish societal niches, making integration and retention difficult (Baker, 2017, p. 2; Lepawsky et al., 2010). Also, immigrants face challenges such as a lack of job opportunities, unacknowledged foreign credentials, and economic struggles in Newfoundland and Labrador (Coombs-Thorne & Warren, 2007; Gien & Law, 2009).

Despite the unique integration challenges typically faced by immigrants in Newfoundland and Labrador, the emergence of a highly contagious acute respiratory virus, COVID-19, originated in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The primary symptoms of COVID-19, caused by SARS-CoV-2, differ from those of the flu caused by influenza viruses. These symptoms can range from mild to severe and typically appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. They include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea. It's important to note that the symptoms vary from person to person. The virus got transmitted from person to person through physical contact; thus, the two-meter standing distance to reduce the spread was introduced (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). The World Health Organization quickly declared it a pandemic, marking it as a global health crisis and sustaining this classification for three years (see The Associated Press, 2023). Canada implemented nationwide lockdowns in March of 2020. Subsequent waves, such as the Beta, Gamma, Delta, and Omicron variants, followed between 2020 and 2022. The pandemic impacted public safety and social cohesion, with over 33,000 COVID-19-related deaths in Canada and inflation reaching a 30-year high (COVID-19 in Canada, 2022; Amoako & MacEachen, 2021). The pandemic exacerbated pre-existing social and economic problems both in Canada and globally, as it was not only a health crisis but also a social and economic crisis (Nicola et al., 2020; Lee & Johnstone, 2021).

In Newfoundland and Labrador, several policies were implemented to combat the spread of COVID-19. These included mandatory 14-day quarantine for travellers entering the province (with few exceptions), restrictions on non-essential travel (especially from outside Atlantic Canada), social distancing protocols in public spaces, workplaces, and schools, limits on the size of gatherings and events, mandatory mask mandates in indoor public spaces, regular updates and communications from health officials to inform the public about the virus, preventive measures and policy changes, campaigns

to promote hygiene, mask-wearing, and vaccination, as well as financial assistance and support

programs for individuals, businesses, and industries affected by COVID-19 restrictions. These policies

and measures aimed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, protect public health, and support the

community during the pandemic in Newfoundland and Labrador (Government of Newfoundland,

2022)[2345] (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2021)[6] [7] (Government of Newfoundland and

Labrador, 2020)[891011]

At intervals, there was the "double bubble," which allowed residents to expand their household

bubbles during the COVID-19 pandemic (CBC News, 2020) and the "travel bubble," which allowed

residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island to

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[2] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2022, March 14). Repeal of all special measures orders. Retrieved from https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Repeal-of-all-Special-Measures-Orders-March-14-2022.pdf

[3] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2022, February 28). Special measures order: Activities and gatherings restrictions. Retrieved from https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Special-Measures-Order-Activities-and-Gatherings-Restrictions-%E2%80%93-Updated-February-28-2022-February-28-2022.pdf

[4] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2022, February 7). Special measures order: Modified alert level 3. Retrieved from https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Special-Measures-Order-Modified-Alert-Level-3-February-7-2022.pdf

[5] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2022, January 4). Special measures order: Province-wide alert level 4. Retrieved from https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Special-Measures-Order-Province-Wide-Alert-Level-4-January-4-2022.pdf

[6] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2021, December 22). Special measures order: Province-wide alert level 3. Retrieved from https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Special-Measures-Order-Province-Wide-Alert-Level-3-December-22-2021.pdf

[7] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2021, December 18). Special measures order: Modified alert level 2. Retrieved from https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Special-Measures-Order-Modified-Alert-Level-2-December-18-2021.pdf

[8] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2020, December 9). Special measures order:

[9] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2020). Special measures order: Metro. Retrieved from https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/SMO-Metro-Feb10.pdf

[10] Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2020, June 8). Special measures order: General alert level 3. Retrieved from https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Special-Measures-Order-General-Alert-Level-3-June-8-2020.pdf

[11] General alert level 2. Retrieved from https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/SMO-General-Alert-Level-2-Updated-December-9-2020.pdf

travel freely between each province without needing to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival. This stimulated the regional economy and boosted morale, requiring residents to show ID proving residency in an Atlantic province (MacGregor, 2020). However, this would not result in more opportunities for social connections for newcomers, as most of the household extensions were made to people with whom they already had relationships. Developing social networks requires a certain community level (Weerasinghe et al., 2017; Li, 2004).

The COVID-19 experience has showcased how society is interconnected and has underscored the idea of functionalism, which views society as a complex system where different parts work together to promote solidarity and stability (Naiman, 2020; Calhoun et al., 2022). What began as a health crisis soon developed into an economic, political, and gendered crisis, exposing societal inequality. This signifies how disruptions in one societal system can lead to dysfunction in others (Amoako & MacEachen, 2021; Porta, 2020; Walby, 2021) and shows that societal crises are not isolated but can affect different sectors of society. Also, immigrants who migrate during turbulent times face crises in their everyday lives, giving insights into alternative futures (Kazemipur, 2008; Jakobson et al., 2023). The contextual background of a crisis needs to be evaluated to fully understand it, as the consequences may extend beyond the crisis itself (Walby, 2015). Furthermore, COVID-19 created new social meanings and strengthened counter-hegemonic forces. The lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic extends beyond its health effects, significantly impacting various aspects of life for Canadians and immigrants. Hence, to develop a sustainable COVID-19 recovery plan projected by Esses et al. (2021), we need to explore the challenges through the interpretation of those with lived experiences.

The study aims to offer new insights into immigrant integration and emphasize how the timing of migration can affect the integration process. It also aims to add to the limited body of research on immigrants' experiences in Newfoundland and Labrador by expanding on previous works (Baker, 2017;

Pottie-Sherman & Graham, 2020; Sano et al., 2017; Li et al., 2017). Moreover, this study will provide a foundation for future economic, social, and housing developments in Newfoundland and Labrador. The knowledge obtained from the study will help improve efforts to attract and retain immigrants in the region. These insights will play a significant role in shaping the future of immigration in Newfoundland and Labrador. This study investigates how the timing of integration during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the experiences of African newcomers in St. John's, NL from 2020 to 2022, specifically focusing on individuals who self-identify as Black and are from Sub-Saharan Africa. This is significant because crises can present opportunities for systemic renewal. The influence of a crisis on society is multifaceted and wide-ranging, extending beyond a single event (Walby, 2015).

This study adopts a symbolic interactionism framework, which enables me to examine how African newcomers perceive and attribute meaning to social interactions. This approach requires me to acknowledge the importance of my positionality and how it influences the research process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2017). Thus, I want to share my personal experience in this regard. In December of 2021, I relocated to Canada as an international graduate student during the COVID-19 Omicron wave/variant. My visa application process took eight months, considerably longer than the 9-11 weeks processing time listed on the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) website. Following approval, flight bans from Nigeria were imposed due to the emergence of the Omicron variant. In response, I opted to fly to Ghana and self-isolate for two weeks before continuing my journey. While in Ghana, I was separated from everything familiar. I was alone. Upon arriving in St. John's, I had to undergo a mandatory 5-day isolation period at the Super 8 hotel following the provincial government's COVID-19- protocols. Throughout this time, I underwent nine COVID-19 tests. I sometimes questioned whether the move was worth the challenges and strict procedures I encountered. Still, the thought of Canada as a haven with a perfect educational system, an equitable society, and a land of opportunities

immediately overshadowed my reservations. Post-isolation, I constantly experienced the Instagram phrase "what I ordered versus what I got," especially when looking for a place to live, a part-time job, or to socialize. This discrepancy between my pre-migration expectations and my post-migration experiences and those of other Africans in St. John's prompted me to conduct this research. In addition to my own experience, I examined studies on newcomers' integration conducted in the province to understand the literature gaps. Interestingly, I discovered a gap in research on how immigrant integration is affected by racial status, as well as a complete absence of studies on how the timing of migration impacts immigrants' integration experiences in the province.

Thesis structure

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the study. The second chapter draws on integration literature specific to Canada. It analyzes the existing literature, identifying gaps and critically discussing how the pandemic may have altered immigrants' integration experiences. Throughout my exploration of the integration literature, I emphasize immigrants' experiences regarding employment, social connections, psychological well-being, and housing.

The third chapter describes and justifies the research methods, ethical procedures, data sources, and analysis. I used snowball sampling techniques in this study and conducted 17 semi-structured interviews. I transcribed interview data verbatim and analyzed it using thematic analysis. I sought and received ethical approval was sought and received from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University of Newfoundland (20231337-AR).

The fourth chapter examines the socioeconomic integration challenges, their interpretation of them, and how they exercised agency while coping with the challenges employed by African newcomer immigrants during the pandemic. I explored the social processes through which immigrants explain these changes in employment, housing, and social connections.

The fifth chapter highlights African newcomers' integration challenges, how they interpreted them, and how they exercised agency and meaning-making while coping amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The final fifth chapter summarizes and discusses how the findings overlap with existing studies and makes recommendations for policy implementation and further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the literature on integration, examines the experiences of immigrants before the pandemic, and considers how the pandemic may have affected African immigrants. In conducting my review, I focused on existing studies in Canada. I adopted Todd's (2016) approach of citational rebellion, which enables me to cite the important work of scholars who are often marginalized and underrepresented in the literature while also highlighting the contributions of well-cited scholars. Through this mixed approach, I analyze the ongoing conversations within the literature. I then discuss my theoretical framework.

2.2 Integration

Integration encompasses several concepts that will be further explained in the following section. It refers to social inclusion and involves both newcomers and community members. It is a gradual, multilayered, and uneven process that requires resilience from individual newcomers in Canada and institutional resilience from organizations, communities, and government systems. These systems can either support these processes or fail to do so (Bushell, Riley, and John Shields, 2018; Akbar, 2017). Ultimately, integration is the ideal goal for any society to ensure its members are actively involved and feel like they belong. The integration process is often seen as the best way to help newcomers settle into a new country and is the basis for many government policies on settlement and integration. Throughout this process, both the newcomers and the host society change due to their interactions. This mutual

change is beneficial as immigrants adapt to fit in, and the host society evolves due to including

newcomers (Wilkinson, 2013). According to the Migration Policy Institute (n.d.), immigrant integration

refers to achieving economic mobility and social inclusion for newcomers and their children. This

involves the institutions and mechanisms that support growth and development within society, such as

early childhood care, elementary, postsecondary, and adult education systems, workforce development,

healthcare, and provision of government services to communities with linguistic diversity, among

others.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (n.d.) defines integration as promoting

social inclusion and positive relationships among diverse groups, contributing to diverse yet cohesive

societies. The IOM recognizes that successful integration is a dynamic and multi-directional process,

where migrants and the host society adapt to each other guided by principles of protecting fundamental

rights, respect, tolerance, and non-discrimination. The definition also acknowledges that integration is a

complex issue covering various aspects such as economic, psychological, social, linguistic, navigational,

and civic inclusion of migrants and involves empowering host communities and local actors to receive

and engage with migrants. The community plays a role in linking pre-departure and post-arrival

activities to promote inclusion and social coordination.

According to Kyeremeh et al. (2021), integrating immigrants into a new society is an ongoing

process. It requires a supportive environment that allows immigrants to achieve their pre-migration goals

and gives room for personal growth. Integration is a two-way process involving both the host

community and the immigrants. Biles (2008) defines integration as a complex concept that includes

social, economic, political, cultural, and identity factors. Esses et al. (2010) and Kazemipur and Nakhaie

(2014) emphasize that successful integration is attained in a welcoming community that meets

immigrants' basic needs. Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2018) argue that integration can only be achieved by

mobilizing agencies focused on women and recognizing the influence of African cultural knowledge and roots on post-migration experience because African women play a central role in post-migration integration and are often victims of social justice issues.

Also, Jakobson et al. (2023) note that psychological experiences are an important aspect of integration, as emotions are central to the migration and integration of immigrants. Mabi (2020) and Creese (2011) suggest that building social connections and interacting with people in the host society is an important integration aspect. Meanwhile, scholars such as Gien & Law (2009), Hira-Friesen (2018), Robichaud et al. (2022), and Creese & Wiebe (2012) argue that economic participation in the host society is a major aspect of integration, as most immigrants migrate with economic intentions. Finally, scholars including Teixeira (2008), Brown (2016), Teixeira & Murdie (2003), and Simone & Newbold (2014) emphasize that housing is a determinant of well-being and a right in Canada, making it a critical aspect of integration. Beyond this scholarship that individually identifies housing, psychological, social, and economic aspects as crucial aspects of integration, Ager and Strang (2008) identify employment, housing, education, and social connections as the key domains of integration. Other scholars (Chai et al., 2018; Raza et al., 2012; Nakhaire & Kazemipur, 2012; Roth et al., 2011; Valade, 2021; Daould et al., 2016) have examined the interconnection between these elements. Their findings highlight the need to study immigrants' integration experience holistically.

The existing literature has extensively covered the various integration aspects, including social, economic, psychological, and housing. The social aspect of integration centers around the ability of immigrants to establish social ties with individuals who can assist them in integrating into their new community and achieving their post-migration objectives (Roth et al., 2011; Creese, 2011). Scholars have highlighted the importance of social integration in facilitating immigrants' navigation of the host society's complex mainstream and social landscape (Gien & Law, 2009; Illingworth, 2012; Wilson-

Forsberg, 2012). They also note that it influences their sense of belonging and decision to settle or depart from their arrival destination. Social integration has been viewed through the lens of social capital, with scholars distinguishing between bonding and bridging forms of social capital. Putnam (2000) explains that bonding involves networking within the family and ethnic community while bridging involves cultivating relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds outside those groups.

According to researchers Esses & Carter (2019) and Hira-Friesen (2018), economic integration is the process by which immigrants actively participate and succeed in the economic life of their host nation. Mackay-Brown & Ashton (2021) and Hande et al. (2020) suggest that an immigrant's economic integration experiences can impact their perception of Canada and their decision to stay or leave in the future. Also, Brown (2016) and Teixeira (2014) add that an immigrant's housing experience can affect their perception of the city, and poor housing quality can impede integration. As defined by scholars Esses et al. (2010) and Mohit & Raja (2014), housing integration is the satisfaction of having suitable housing that meets one's needs and the requirement for adequate housing conditions in Canada. Psychological aspects of integration include the emotional and stressful elements related to feelings and pressures during integration. Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019) state that immigrants frequently face stressors from life circumstances before, during, and after migration. Scholars (Kogan et al., 2022; Rachman, 2004; Lee et al., 2022) identified the emotional elements, including anxiety and loneliness, as integral to the psychological reactions to integration. I argue that a sociological rather than a psychological lens can help us understand meaning-making processes and uncover group patterns and experiences. This idea is rooted in my interpretation of integration as creating, coordinating, or blending into a cohesive entity. It encompasses eliminating segregation and equally including individuals from diverse groups into society

or an institution. This process involves adjusting to new information or circumstances while aligning

with preexisting knowledge, often leading to the loss of uniformity and conformity.

2.2.1 Pre-pandemic Integration Experience in Canada

Holistically, immigrants' integration experience in Canada pre-pandemic is shaped by group-based and location-based/context-based factors. The individual factors include the sociodemographic characteristics (Fuller & Martin, 2012; Guo, 2013; Oreopoulos, 2011; Crea-Arsenio et al., 2022) and ideologies and expectations (Mabi, 2020; Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Zaami & Madibbo, 2021; Ferrer et al., 2020; Hira-Friesen, 2018; Premiji et al., 2014; Guo, 2015; Hande et al., 2020; Robichaud et al., 2022; Kazemipur, 2008). In comparison, the location-based or context-based factors refer to the integration experiences associated with the location or place immigrants choose to settle (Guo, 2015; Kazemipur, 2008; Jakobson et al., 2023; Porta, 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2019).

2.2.1.2 Sociodemographic characteristics

Firstly, the integration experience of immigrants is significantly influenced by their racial and ethnic background. According to Zaami and Madibbo (2021), African immigrant youth in Calgary often face exclusion in the labour market due to their race and skin colour. Most potential employers believe they are unqualified or lack the experience to excel in the workplace based on their skin colour. Teixeira (2008) observes that discrimination is not limited to the job market; Black-skinned immigrants also encounter bias and racism in housing rental markets when compared to other immigrant groups. This consistent discrimination and racial microaggressions contribute to a high prevalence of anxiety symptoms related to racial discrimination among Black people in Canada, as highlighted by Kogan et al. (2022). Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019) complement this by arguing that although discrimination is a significant factor, African immigrant newcomer women experience stressful situations in their migration and often lack community support when integrating, which often results in both mental/emotional and

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parenting issues. Haan (2012) adds that Africans and Middle Eastern immigrants face the greatest affordability constraints, and housing is a medium socioeconomic stratification in immigrants' experiences.

An immigrant's arrival timing is a key factor in their integration process. Akbari et al. (2007) show that younger immigrants view migration and integration as a long-term investment, which can foster stronger bonds with their host community, while reducing emotional ties to their country of origin. Wu et al. (2012) add that younger migrants are also more likely to build social capital and engage with diverse cultures and ethnicities, as they view relocation as an opportunity for a fresh start. Additionally, age and education level can impact an immigrant's participation in the labour market and career choices. Older immigrants who have resided in Canada for longer periods are more likely to be self-employed (Akbar, 2019). However, older new immigrants may face challenges with social isolation due to slow adjustment to post-migration life and loss of social roles and ties (Wang et al., 2023).

The generational status of immigrants—whether first, second, or third generation—plays a significant role in shaping their ability to integrate and form social connections. First-generation immigrants encounter greater difficulty feeling at home; they struggle when interacting with other Canadians and adapting to Canadian social life. Research findings indicate that immigrants become more comfortable across generations. First-generation immigrants tend to foster relationships with co-ethnics, while second-generation immigrants are more comfortable and integrate better than first-generation immigrants (Wu et al., 2012).

Skilled immigrants face challenges in integrating into the Canadian labour market due to the preference for Canadian education and experience, as Oreopoulos (2011) notes. The integration rate is higher for individuals with both education and experience, emphasizing Canadian experience over education. While Canadian credentials may be important when transitioning between immigration

categories based on the points system, they may also reduce employment opportunities for overqualified immigrants limited to survival jobs (Nakhaie & Kazemipur, 2012). Raza et al. (2013) support this by highlighting that a foreign degree may be an earning disadvantage. However, Zaami and Madibbo (2021) argue that this is not true for African immigrant youth with Canadian education and work experience. In terms of jobs that require low education, there is usually an easy substitution between immigrants and Canadian workers for jobs (Akbari & Aydede, 2013). However, the higher the educational requirement for a job, the lower the likelihood of substitution. Furthermore, the place of education plays a significant role in immigrants' integration into the Canadian labour market. Immigrants with STEM degrees from countries in the global North, such as the UK, USA, and Canada, have higher job prospects than those with the same degree from countries in the global South (Boyd & Tian, 2017). Adsera and Ferrer (2016) indicate that education acts as a powerful force for many female immigrants, particularly those with a university degree, leading to an increased likelihood of skill enhancement and career advancement.

In the process of integration, gender plays a critical role. According to Hira-Friesen, in 2018, women were more likely to face precarious employment than men. Additionally, immigrant women are often unable to participate in paid labour due to family obligations such as child-rearing (Akbar, 2019; Walsh et al., 2015). Such responsibilities can lead to stress, particularly when gender roles shift and the family's economic situation fluctuates, as observed by Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019). According to a study by Creese and Wiebe (2012), the economic integration of educated men and women from sub-Saharan Africa who migrate to Canada is determined by gendered processes. Women face limits in accessing employment, and programs aimed to help them integrate are tailored towards survival employment. Additionally, the labour market's gendered nature exacerbates the deskilling and marginalization of Black/African immigrants as unskilled labour.

Also, the integration process for immigrants relies on individual factors, including occupational and social status. Those with higher occupational status or professional jobs are more likely to build diverse social networks. Conversely, immigrants who move down social classes face difficulties generating social networks and may experience isolation, as stated by Akkaymak (2016). As one's social class changes, trust and building social networks that facilitate integration become essential, as Raza et al. (2013) noted. Interestingly, high-status job seekers among immigrants experience slower job match rates than those seeking lower-status positions, according to Frank (2013). Additionally, visible minority immigrants tend to have lower occupational status than their White counterparts, as found by Nakhaie and Kazemipur (2012). It is noteworthy that male ethnic minority immigrants generally have lower occupational status than their female counterparts. Finally, Shier et al. (2014) observed that low occupational-status immigrants have lower housing satisfaction.

An individual's migration status can impact their integration experience in various ways. For example, international students often encounter exploitation and discrimination from landlords while searching for housing, as noted by Pottie-Sherman et al. (2023). Similarly, Graham and Pottie-Sherman's (2020) study on the experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs in St. John's revealed a lack of in-person support, inadequate information about available resources, and a glass ceiling when attempting to expand their businesses. According to Walsh et al. (2015), women who immigrate as dependents on primary applicants are more likely to experience housing instability compared to other immigrant women. Skilled workers and business immigrants tend to have higher homeownership rates than other groups, according to Hiebert (2010). Generally, family and economic class immigrants experience a progressive housing trajectory and have the highest homeownership rates. However, Teixeira and Drolet (2018) observed that newcomers' lack of knowledge about the Canadian housing system makes finding a home challenging, prompting many to rely on family or friends for assistance. Hira-Friesen (2018)

found that newcomer immigrants are more likely to be precariously employed. According to Teixeira (2014), recent poor immigrants with temporary migration status often spend over fifty percent of their income on rent for substandard and crowded housing, leaving them highly vulnerable to homelessness. Haan's (2012) research on the housing integration of older and recent immigrants discovered that integration varies based on admission category, with older immigrants experiencing more housing integration. Housing affordability and low earnings create a double burden for newcomers, exacerbating the housing crisis.

Finally, the language abilities of immigrants play a crucial role in their integration into society. Studies have shown that language barriers can lead to exclusion in social integration, housing, and the labour market. Creese (2011), while documenting the experiences of immigrants from countries in sub-Saharan Africa, found the language a medium of exclusion in social integration, housing, and the labour market. Creese demonstrates that it is not just the absence of English for those whose first language is not English, but others who speak English with an accent are also impacted. Creese asserts that these newcomers are stripped of linguistic capital. Fuller and Martin (2012) note that language influences new immigrants' employment trajectory and educational upgrade opportunities over the first four years post-migration. Zaami and Madibbo (2021) point out that language impacts immigrants' labour outcomes and subsequent integration experience for African immigrant youth. According to a study by Noh et al. (2012), language proficiency plays a crucial role in Korean entrepreneurs' social integration and economic returns. The research suggests that Korean entrepreneurs who lack language skills may encounter limitations in securing high-paying business opportunities. However, Creese and Wiebe (2012) argue that it is not the inadequate knowledge of English but rather the discrimination against those who speak English with an African accent.

In conclusion, the review found that several sociodemographic factors significantly affected the integration of immigrants before the pandemic. The review highlighted the importance of a person's racial and ethnic background, age at the time of arrival in Canada, generational status, whether as a first or second-generation immigrant, as well as their gender, social and economic status, and language proficiency. These factors are vital in influencing an immigrant's integration into Canadian society. Therefore, evaluating the immigrant integration experience through these lenses is necessary.

Despite these sociodemographic integration challenges ethnic groups and religious affiliations often served as a source of belongingness among many migrants before the pandemic (Zaami, 2020). Others cope by foregoing making some cultural dishes, moving into shelters owned by government-sponsored organizations or local communities, relying on family and friends, couch surfing, and opting for low-quality housing (Teixeira & Drolet, 2018; Teixeira, 2011; Teixeira, 2014). While delaying the emotions that ensue from integration, immigrants increase religious involvement and practices, develop internal psychological resources, and rely on external social or systemic supports (Gagnon & Stewart, 2014; Dombou et al., 2023; Kuan et al., 2022; Cénat et al., 2023; Kim & Iwasaki, 2016; Wijekoon et al., 2022; Kuo, 2016).

2.2.1.3 Context-based Challenges

Various factors, such as place of residence and social environment, can influence the successful integration of migrants (Akkaymak, 2016). The province in which immigrants settle can affect the recognition of their credentials and opportunities for employment (Wilkinson et al., 2016). Interestingly, those who settle in less populated areas may have an advantage in having their credentials approved for use in the Canadian workforce (Wilkinson et al., 2016). For instance, immigrants with postgraduate degrees or foreign credentials residing in Atlantic Canada get their certificates approved more easily and earn more than their counterparts in larger Canadian cities (Akbari, 2011). Furthermore, studies suggest

that immigrants residing in medium-sized cities exhibit higher levels of integration and greater satisfaction with their housing than those living in major Canadian cities like Montreal, Toronto, or Vancouver (Simone & Newbold, 2014). Thus, moving to smaller cities can improve housing conditions due to lower living costs and population density (Brown, 2016).

Studies conducted by Kazemipur (2008) and Jakobson et al. (2023) highlighted that the timing of migration plays a pivotal role in determining an immigrant's ability to integrate and establish social connections in the host country. Immigrants who arrive during economic booms are more likely to feel connected to the new community and form meaningful social ties. On the other hand, those who arrive after a period of conflict or war in the host country often struggle to trust and build relationships with individuals outside their ethnic group. Additionally, immigrants who migrate during turbulent times, such as economic recession or political upheaval, face multiple crises, further complicating their social experiences upon arrival. Therefore, the initial social experiences of immigrants are crucial in shaping their ability to form connections and establish a sense of belonging in the host country.

According to Guo (2013), pre-existing societal structures can influence immigrant integration. Immigrants in the labour market experience deskilling and devaluation of their prior learning or work experience as they suffer intense unemployment and underemployment. This can be attributed to what is known as the "triple class effect": the glass gate, door, and ceiling. The glass gate denies immigrants entrance to some professional communities. The glass door blocks their access to professional employment at high-wage organizations. The glass ceiling prevents them from moving up the management ladder (positions). Additionally, Graham and Pottie-Sherman (2020) found that immigrant entrepreneurs may experience a similar phenomenon, encountering a glass ceiling while expanding their businesses and lacking the necessary support tailored to their unique needs.

The successful integration of immigrants centers on their pre-migration expectations and experiences. In the Canadian context, African immigrants have reported feeling disheartened by their current housing situation, which falls short of their hopes for adequate, affordable, and high-quality accommodations post-migration (Teixeira, 2008). This contradiction between prior housing experiences and present anticipations has been noted by Drolet and Teixeira (2019) and Brown (2016). Meanwhile, Creese (2011) argues that pre-migration beliefs can impede successful integration, particularly regarding changes in gender roles, family structures, and social networks. Hande et al. (2020) point out that poor working conditions and unemployment can also negatively impact immigrant workers' perceptions of Canada and their integration experience as a whole. Similarly, Kyeremeh et al. (2021) and Creese (2011) highlight the challenges faced by French-speaking immigrants who expect easy assimilation due to the official status of their language. However, discrimination based on their perceived lack of English proficiency quickly shatters these expectations. Beyond this expectation-reality gap, Kaushik and Drolet (2018) have investigated skilled immigrants' social and economic integration experience. They found their support falls short of meeting their diverse language, culture, health, and well-being needs. Teixeira (2011) further notes that only a handful of NGOs specialize in providing housing-related services to newcomer immigrants.

This review indicates successful integration of migrants into Canadian society is influenced by both pre-existing societal structures and post-migration experiences. The study notes that the province of settlement plays a crucial role in credential recognition and employment opportunities, the timing of migration, and the dissonance between pre-migration expectations and post-migration realities as prospects that significantly impact integration outcomes. Although the review sought to evaluate studies on how immigrants coped with context-based integration challenges, a dearth of studies noted this. However, while looking closely at the reviewed literature on challenges, I noticed that Ramos &

Yoshida's (2011) and Coombs-Thorne & Warren's (2007) conclusions suggest that immigrants cope by leaving mid-sized cities for larger cities.

2.2.2 During the pandemic

In the preceding section, I discussed immigrants' challenges during their integration process. In this section, we will explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these challenges. The pandemic has brought about significant changes that could render previous literature inadequate in explaining the experiences of immigrants during these unprecedented times. Firstly, the economic fallout of the pandemic has resulted in a shift from physical to virtual work, leading to high rates of unemployment and reduced working hours for many people in Canada. While some essential jobs were created in the service, health, and tech sectors, the Canadian government also implemented the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), which provided financial aid to those who lost their jobs during the pandemic (Kelly, 2020; Nova, 2020; Shields & Alrob, 2023). However, despite these efforts, scholars have noted significant changes in the labour market experiences of immigrants (Desmarais, 2020; Brockbank, 2020; Mensah & Williams, 2022). Studies have shown that these changes have brought about various employment challenges, with structural inequalities continuing to persist for low-wage and high-wage workers, as well as racialized and non-racialized groups. The delay and interruption of career trajectories due to layoffs, decreased job opportunities, and increased domestic burdens were the primary factors affecting the circumstances of many immigrants (Nardon et al., 2020).

Furthermore, studies have shown that international students, who are already vulnerable due to their temporary immigration status, have experienced significant psychological and financial difficulties amid the pandemic. These recent studies highlight the significant impact COVID-19 had on the labour outcomes and work experiences of newcomer immigrants and emphasize the need for further studies (Firang & Mensah, 2022). Meanwhile, Lamb et al. (2022) explored the effects of COVID-19 on

immigrant and non-immigrant employment and wage gaps. They discovered that employed immigrant men during the pandemic had small but statistically significant premium earnings. However, this boost did not reduce the wage gap between immigrants and non-immigrants.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted integration experiences, especially compared to pre-pandemic times. In Creese's (2011) research, physical spaces played an important role in connecting individuals through social gatherings and work. I find that the pandemic has resulted in the closure of social spaces like churches, community centers, and farmers' markets, limiting opportunities for social connections. Additionally, many employees now work remotely or in scattered shifts to maintain social distancing, making it harder to build connections with colleagues of various ethnicities. The global changes brought on by the pandemic have led to reduced human contact, which may contribute to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Abel & McQueen, 2020). As such, immigrants integrating during the pandemic may have a different experience than those who migrated before or after the pandemic (Kazemipur, 2008; Jakobson et al., 2023).

Despite a global decrease in housing prices due to the pandemic, Canada's urban housing markets experienced a surge in housing costs throughout and after the pandemic. This increase is attributed to the pandemic's impact on the importance of homes as multifunctional spaces, as noted by Verma and Husain (2020) and CMHC (2020). Unfortunately, this surge in housing prices disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, including people of colour, low-income individuals, and international students who previously lived in precarious situations. Pre-existing housing challenges, such as affordability issues, discrimination, and exploitation, were amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic. This highlights a significant difference in housing integration struggles before and during the pandemic, with housing prices rising and exacerbating pre-pandemic issues (Béland et al., 2021; Benfer, 2021; Pottie-Sherman, 2023).

Migration is a complex experience that can elicit a range of emotions, including nostalgia, hope, guilt, ambition, affection, and anxiety, as noted by Boccagni and Baldassar (2015). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has added a layer of complexity to the challenges immigrants face. Various emotional responses have emerged based on the socially constructed meanings attached to the pandemic among different categories of immigrants, including worry, loneliness, depression, and anxiety. These emotions have been shaped by the existing structural oppression intensified by exposure to violence and financial burdens, navigating study permit restrictions (Shields & Alrob, 2023), adhering to physical distancing measures (Campbell, 2020), experiencing a pervasive sense of grief (Lee et al., 2022), and striving to excel in a highly competitive academic environment (Sidani et al., 2022). Before the pandemic, loneliness and anxiety among immigrants were commonly linked to factors such as age at migration, racism, environmental factors, societal interpretations, and the disparity between desired and actual social engagement. However, as evidenced by the studies cited above, the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new realities that have exacerbated or transformed these challenges.

This research acknowledges the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable populations and existing social inequalities, as highlighted by scholars (Firang & Mensah, 2022; Mensah & Williams, 2022; Amoako & MacEachen, 2021). To aid in the post-COVID-19 recovery plan, Esses et al. (2021) suggest prioritizing immigrants and their experiences during the pandemic to integrate them into Canadian society better. Crea-Arsenio et al. (2022) recommend shifting integration studies toward provincial and city-level analysis while considering demographic factors. The focus of this study is to uncover the challenges faced by African newcomer immigrants in coping with the pandemic in the mid-sized Canadian city of St. John's, NL. Thereby showcasing the need for a sociological approach that is beyond the variable.

2.2.3 African Newcomers in Canada

This aspect reviews the studies on African immigrants before and during the pandemic.

Canada has been building relationships in Africa for over five decades at the international, regional, and bilateral levels. This is accomplished through providing development assistance, promoting democracy, peace and security, and enhancing commercial and economic ties (Global Affairs Canada, n.d.). Before 1970, only a sprinkling of people from African countries settled in Canada, mainly from Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia (Naidoo, 2020). However, since the introduction of the points system, the number of Africans has drastically increased. Africa is now the second largest source continent of recent immigrants in Canada (Knight, 2023). Africa accounts for about 12% of the immigrant population in Canada (Todd, 2018) due to the high level of education among African immigrants, their age range of 25-44, and their impressive participation rates in the labour force. Scholars (Capps et al., 2012; Zong & Batalova, 2014) predict that this trend will continue into the foreseeable future. Additionally, statistics on Canada's population projections indicate that the Black population will continue to increase and could represent between 5.0% and 5.6% of Canada's population by 2036 (Statistics Canada, 2017). According to the 2021 Census, nearly one-third (32.4%) of the Black population aged 25 to 64 has a bachelor's degree or higher, up from 27.0% in 2016 and 19.9% in 2006. This was similar to the 2021 average for the population aged 25 to 64 (32.9%) (Statistics Canada, 2023).

The population of Black Canadians can be divided into distinct groups. Some can trace their ancestry to enslaved Africans and their descendants, who are known as Black Loyalists. Meanwhile, others are Black immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa (Knight, S. 2023, June 23). In 2016, the top five countries of birth for recent African-born immigrants were Nigeria, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Cameroon (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Based on a study by Creese and Wiebe (2012), the economic integration of educated men and women migrating from sub-Saharan Africa to British Columbia, Canada, is influenced by gender-specific processes. The study highlights that women encounter challenges in securing employment, and the available programs for their integration mainly focus on survival employment. Furthermore, the gendered nature of the labour market contributes to the deskilling and marginalization of Black/African immigrants as unskilled labour. In a separate study, Creese (2011) documented the experiences of immigrants from sub-Saharan African countries who relocated to British Columbia and found that language acts as a barrier to social integration, housing, and the labour market. The study reveals that the issue is not only the absence of English proficiency for those whose first language is not English but also applies to those who speak English with an accent. Creese finds that these newcomers are deprived of linguistic capital.

African immigrants in Ontario often struggle to find housing that can accommodate their large families, gendered spaces, prayer rooms, and traditional cooking methods (Teixeira, 2008). They also face challenges related to their skin tone, language, and discrimination when trying to access housing. Their current housing situations are often worse than what they had before migrating, and their hopes for adequate, affordable, and good-quality housing in Canada have been dashed (Firang, 2019; Mensah & Williams, 2013). Zaami and Madibbo (2021) conducted a study on the factors contributing to microaggressions in Calgary, Alberta, focusing on the experiences of first-generation Black African immigrant youth. The study found that these youth face marginalization during the hiring process due to their language abilities and names, and also experience discrimination in the workplace through interpersonal exclusion. According to the study, African immigrant youth who are Black are often excluded from the labor market because of their skin color, accent, and gender. Potential employers may consider them unqualified for the job or assume they lack the necessary experience to succeed in the

workplace. In Zaami's (2020) article, the author examines the concept of agency and resilience in the context of the inclusion of black African youth in Calgary. The study specifically focuses on the experiences of Sudanese and Ghanaians. It emphasizes the diversity and inclusion strategies employed by these communities through the lens of critical race theory. The study findings indicate that the sense of belonging among these youth is closely tied to their ethnic groups and religious affiliations. Additionally, the research highlights the importance of safe spaces, empowerment programs, and support from social networks in nurturing their sense of belonging and resilience. In their 2019 study on stressors experienced by African women in Alberta, Okeke-Ihejirika, Salami, and Karimi (2019) found that these stressors can be attributed to various factors before, during, and after migration. These stressors significantly affect the daily lives of immigrants and influence their transition and integration within Canadian socio-legal systems. The lack of community support has resulted in a range of mental, emotional, and parenting issues. Additionally, changes in gender roles and economic well-being have also been identified as sources of stress. Mabi (2020) notes that various factors influence employment experiences and information access for African Metro Vancouver immigrants. These factors include racial discrimination, challenges related to having an African name, employer bias against applicants with foreign accents, discrimination from immigrants of other ethnicities, family responsibilities such as caring for a spouse or children, issues related to immigration status, lack of Canadian work experience and education, being overqualified for positions they are interested in, the time required for recertification, and difficulties in securing employment in specific sectors.

The pandemic has highlighted that racism and immigrant status have impacted the ability of black immigrants to access government support. Additionally, black people and other racialized groups faced a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 due to their frontline positions (Mensah & Williams, 2022). Amoako and MacEachen (2021) shows that COVID-19 exposed inequalities in the experiences

of African immigrants. The study indicates that implementing interventions alone will not be sufficient to address the underlying causes of socioeconomic and health inequalities, which are associated with structural discrimination and racism.

In the Atlantic region, NL has a Black population comprising 0.2% of the total population, which accounts for 0.5% of the entire population. Around 61.3% of the Black population are first-generation, and 26% are second-generation (Statistics Canada, 2019). According to population projections from Statistics Canada, the Black population may double from 1.5 million in 2021 to over 3.0 million in 2041. The Black population has consistently grown with each census, with the largest increase (+349,000) reported from 2016 to 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Africans in NL Africans in Newfoundland and Labrador experience discrimination regardless of length of stay. They constantly run into cultural oblivion. This is mostly seen as self-defeating (Caddell. 2019). They are profiled as criminals in the workplace, non-compliant with existing policies, and taking jobs that belong to Newfoundlanders (Baker, 2017). Nderitu (2008) studied women from Kenya living in Newfoundland and Labrador. The study highlighted the challenges faced by newcomers, including racism, sexism, isolation, and discrimination. Giwa et al. (2021) pointed out that the needs of LGBTQ newcomers are not being adequately addressed due to institutional challenges such as lack of funding and insufficient resources. They also mentioned the scarcity of translators and the relatively small size of the LGBTQ newcomer community in NL. Also, there are inadequacies in meeting the settlement needs of racialized LGBTQ newcomers, attributing this to the lack of services and insufficient training, knowledge, and resources among service providers.

There is a lack of research on the experiences of racialized newcomers who live in mid-sized cities. Most studies in Canada that examine newcomers' integration focus on four provinces, Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta, mainly because of the large African population in these areas

(Statistics Canada, 2017). It is important to understand the challenges encountered by this group during the COVID-19 pandemic, as crises often illuminate experiences that may have been overlooked prior to the pandemic (Walby, 2015). It has been determined that COVID-19 has revealed inequalities; thus, simply implementing interventions will not be enough to tackle the root causes of socioeconomic disparities (Amoako & MacEachen, 2021).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This research is founded upon the theoretical principles of symbolic interactionism, a perspective that emphasizes the importance of social interaction in shaping our sense of self. I have set out to explore the experiences of African newcomer immigrants residing in St. John's, NL, by examining how they negotiate their identity in a new cultural context and the narratives they use to make sense of their experiences, given the unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Symbolic interactionism has its roots in the liberal social thought of the Enlightenment, which emphasized the individual as the basis for society. The theory is based on the idea that society exists because of individuals' interactions through language and communication. It suggests that people's understanding of a particular situation determines their actions during social interaction, and the context for those interactions is crucial in understanding the interaction itself (Garner & Hancock, 2014).

Symbolic interactionism, a term coined by Herbert Blumer (1986) to describe the study of human interactions, adopts a micro-sociological approach involving human social development through participation in group life. Symbolic interactionism prioritizes human agency, focuses on how people make sense of their social world and highlights the integral role of social actors in constructing the social world. Symbolic interaction is an interpretive theory which takes an intermediate position between psychological and structuralist reasoning. Also, the theory adopts a bottom-up approach that highlights individuals' agentic, integral roles and pays attention to subjective views and their

interpretation of the social world. It accounts for how to see the social structure (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012; Turner, 2011).

Proponents of the theory argue that humans create their social world using symbols, role-taking, and social interactions. They concern themselves with the actor's point of view and the situation in which collective action is created. It accounts for how actors entering a new group interact and give meaning to interaction by specifying who they are, who others are, and what the situation is (Lal, 1995; Stryker, 2008). They note that an actor's interpretation of any situation is based on the parameters or social contexts in which the action occurs. The interpretations are often based on the actor's experience, goals, interests, and values (Sidi, 2021).

Blumer's (1986) and Cooley's (1964) theoretical orientation greatly influence this study. Blumer's orientation has three main principles: humans act towards things based on preconceived meanings; social interactions determine the meaning attached to things in society; and meanings are labelled and modified through interpretive social interaction. Thus, for him, the individual's/actor's viewpoint needs to be analyzed through a 'sympathetic introspection' methodology, which evaluates the processes and contexts individuals use to interpret their situations and experiences (Carter & Fuller, 2015, p. 4; Salvini, 2019; Fine,1993).

Cooley's concept of the "looking-glass self" explains how individuals see themselves through society's eyes of how they are treated. It posits that our understanding of ourselves is closely connected with our social relationships and feedback from others. In Cooley's view, the self does not originate in isolation but depends on what others think of us. For Cooley, it almost seems we live in the minds of others (Scheff, 2005; Cooley, 1964). The process of the looking-glass self entails three main parts. Firstly, we consider how we appear to others and how they see us in social settings. Secondly, we conceive of other people's judgement or evaluation of us. Lastly, actors develop a sense of themselves

built according to how they perceive others viewing them (Silva & Calheiros, 2022). Family and friends, playgroups, and work groups are primary groups that influence our understanding of ourselves. The social self is a product of reflexiveness, where people learn to adjust their behaviour based on what they believe others think. By adjusting their behaviour, individuals exercise their agency (MacIntyre, 2011).

This study investigates the agency of an African newcomer in a mid-sized Canadian city amidst integration challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Blumer and Cooley's theoretical orientations underscore the significance of individual agency in social processes and interactions. What, then, does agency mean? Burkitt (2016) argues that individual agency is reactant, interdependent, and reflexive and can only be attained through joint actions. Burkitt emphasizes that agency depends on a reflexive definition of choices and emotional relatedness to others as social relations evolve across time and space. According to MacIntyre (2011), the agency is based on how people perceive and evaluate reality. While exercising agency, individuals learn from others how to interpret reality and constantly evaluate their behaviour and the behaviour of others to derive meaning. Similarly, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) contend that agency involves different ways of experiencing the world, and individuals shape their responsiveness to problematic situations. All forms of agency are temporal and embedded in the flow of time as people's interpretation of their past and future connections determine their actions. Different periods and places influence how individuals respond to situations, interpret them, and exercise their agency. Emirbayer and Mische identify three major elements of agency, which they describe as the chordal triad of agency: iterational, projective and practical-evaluative. The iterational element involves the actor's selective reactivation of past patterns of thought and action, incorporating these thoughts into practical activities to sustain identities and institutions over time. The projective element refers to how individuals imagine future action trajectories based on their hopes, fears, and desires, which determine their current agency. The practical-evaluative element implies that actors can make practical and

normative judgments among alternatives or possible actions in response to emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities.

This study focuses on the practical-evaluative aspect of agency to evaluate how African immigrants contextualize social experiences by engaging in dialogue with others or reflecting on their own experiences. I argue that African immigrant newcomers' agency allows them to understand their situation better and make informed choices that may disrupt established behaviour patterns. Though the symbolic interactionist approach has been criticized for being too tailored toward personal bias and researchers having a high risk of becoming too emotionally involved in respondents' lives (Conner, 2021; Keyes, 2021). This theory is important for understanding current social realities, and its methodological approach raises numerous advantages for this study. First, it places human beings at the center of the analysis, enabling exploration of the social construction, social action, and processes involved in meaning-making. The framework provides a broad perspective for examining how African immigrants in St. John's develop and assign shared meanings during a period of significant restriction (Charmaz, 2019; Salvini, 2019). This methodology will allow me to focus on the participants' inner communication processes and highlight their perceptions of meaning concerning their actions as they establish a post-migration sense of self (Salvini, 2019; Sidi, 2021).

Conclusion

This chapter provided an exploration of current dialogues and established a framework for the starting point of my research. The theoretical framework I adopt for this thesis highlights the social processes involved in how African newcomer immigrants make sense of their integration experience in St. John's. It focuses on the meaning-making processes and how their interpretation of their experiences influences their integration.

The literature in this chapter gives a snapshot of immigrants' challenges and coping strategies while integrating. However, for the most part, these studies neglected the influence of migration timing and place on their integration experience. Studies on African immigrants have mostly focused on their integration experiences in larger Canadian cities with a substantial African population. Therefore, their conclusions are insufficient in explaining African newcomer immigrants' integration experiences in St. John's, a mid-sized city with a small African population. This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining the integration experience of African immigrant newcomers within the context of a larger societal crisis – the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also highlights their coping strategies while integrating in a mid-sized Canadian city.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on my research methods by describing the research design, the study area (St. John's, NL), sampling techniques, sample size, data collection procedures, data transcription, coding and analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research design

Based on the symbolic interaction theoretical framework, I used qualitative research design to examine the integration of lived experiences of sub-Saharan African immigrant newcomers in St. John's, NL, during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022). The symbolic interactionist approach helped me create research questions about the social world, gather data, evaluate the relations between categories of data to formulate propositions that can explain such relations, and make conclusions sufficient to explain the social world (Quist-Adabe, 2019; Sandstrom et al., 2021). The approach allowed me to design my questions in such a way that it captured the actors' viewpoints and considered them experts in their experience based on the parameters or social contexts in which the action occurs (Sidi, 2021). My qualitative research design used phenomenology to focus on conscious experience as perceived from a subjective or first-person perspective (Casey, 2000).

I selected this method because it allows me to understand the meaning immigrants attach to different interactions in their host country. It also allows me to extract data from multiple subjective standpoints by focusing on words, texts, and narratives from interview transcripts. This approach ensures an improved understanding of the subject matter of this research, African newcomers, through close evaluation (Valenta, 2009).

Qualitative research design is inductive, enabling me to identify and document essential case features not anticipated before the data collection. It enables the creation of open-ended, guiding research questions. With this approach, I give a thick description of the integration experiences of African newcomers and follow patterns to understand the meaning attached to their experiences (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2017; Aspers & Corte, 2019; Ragin, 1994).

3.2 Study Area

Newfoundland and Labrador is a province in the Atlantic region of Canada. According to Statistics Canada (2024), the province joined Canada in 1949 and has approximately 539,000 total population. Overall, the population is split over two geographical landscapes - Newfoundland (island) and Labrador (central northern region). The province has a land mass of (370,514 km^2) with a relatively small population (519,716 in 2016), of which 39.6% (205,955) is in St. John's. The province's economy thrives on tourism, oil and gas, and taxes. Historically, Newfoundland and Labrador has been a homogenous province in Canada, with mostly White residents and few visible minority immigrants (Summers, 1949; Howley, 1876). In recent times, there has been a demographic shift in the province due to a decrease in the fertility rate, out-migration, and efforts to increase the population through immigration. The province is becoming more diverse with the presence of an Indigenous population and non-white and white Newfoundlanders who were born in the province (Branker, 2017; Schroeter & James, 2015).

The provincial government is actively trying to boost economic development and attract newcomers. The province has been actively attracting immigrants, particularly from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, through programs like the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) and the Atlantic Immigration Program (AIP) (Bumsted, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2016). Additionally, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador and the College of the North Atlantic have increased

immigrant numbers through their international student enrollment. This rise has significantly contributed to the province's population growth, as many international students transition from temporary residents to permanent residents (The Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2020; College of the North Atlantic, 2020). The provincial government supports immigrants through settlement programs, which include language classes, cultural orientations, and other assistance to help newcomers integrate into the local community. Newfoundland and Labrador continue to organize events and encourage cultural diversity through cultural events, festivals, and ethnic or community-based celebrations (Saqlain, 2016; Li et al., 2017; Baker, 2017; Baker, 2019). However, immigrant retention remains a struggle (MacDonald, 2014; Pollock et al., 2021; Reccord et al., 2021). Immigrants tend to leave because of several reasons, which include unemployment, poor public transit systems, weather conditions, lack of a supportive community, the high cost of living, poor recognition of foreign credentials, and a lack of multiculturalism (Kazemipur, 2008; Caddell, 2019; Gien & Law, 2009; Li et al., 2017).

St. John's is the largest city in and capital of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It received its name from the feast of Saint John the Baptist, an Italian explorer, in 1497. St. John's is the easternmost part of North America and is situated in the Avalon peninsula, close to the North Atlantic Ocean. It is one of the oldest cities in North America, known for its harbour, which serves as a transit point between Europe and other parts of North America. The city is known globally for its hospitality and friendly residents. St. John's, the province's capital city, hosts about two-thirds of the province's immigrants (Freshwater et al., 2014; Akbari, 2013) (see Figures 1).

The figure below shows the geographic location of the study participants who reside in the St. John's metro area.
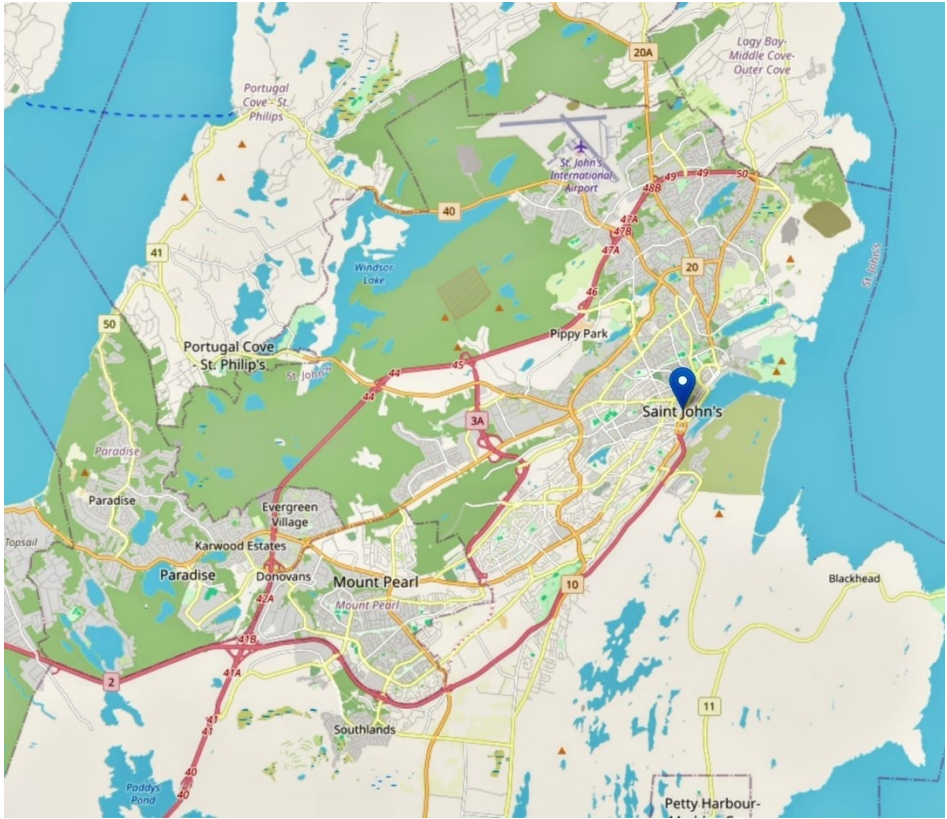
3.3 Data Collection Procedures

3.3.1 Sampling techniques and sample size

This research used community-based and snowball sampling techniques. These sampling techniques

provided African immigrants with different demographic characteristics, immigration status, and

socioeconomic status, but their status as self-identified sub-Saharan African immigrants and their timing

of migration being during or slightly before the pandemic makes their experiences similar (Creese,

2011). Also, despite hailing from different parts of Africa, Africans in Canada build a collective identity

based on similar experiences (Wilkinson et al., 2016; Zaami, 2020; Creese, 2011).

For the snowball sampling, I relied on my connections within the African community and

invitations for participation posted on my social media accounts, specifically Facebook and LinkedIn.

Additionally, the Association of New Canadians, Bethesda Pentecostal and the Internationalization

Office of Memorial University offices were accessed through introduction letters and call-for-

participation adverts. These offices were used for community-based sampling because I identified them as gatekeepers for the African immigrant population. I designed a poster and distributed it to spread awareness about my research (see Appendix 3).

The Association of New Canadians is a non-profit organization that delivers settlement and integration services to immigrants and refugees in Newfoundland by empowering them with skills, knowledge, and information needed to contribute to societal and economic growth. I leveraged my position as an English–as–a–second–language facilitator volunteer to gain access to the gatekeepers. Memorial University's Internationalization Office significantly contributes to international students' relocation and settlement in Newfoundland and Labrador; therefore, it has access to all international students and disseminates information to them through weekly newsletters. Thus, I used my identity as an international student to access the office and participants. Similarly, Bethesda Pentecostal church is a highly diverse worship center in St. John's, with over 600 congregants, and 65% of whom are immigrants. I used my status as a member of the congregation and a volunteer at the English–as–a–second–language Conversation café for new immigrants to access the gatekeepers.

While collecting data for this study, I noticed that some people initially told me about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic while having informal conversations. They became reluctant to speak about their experiences; immediately, I shared details about my study and invited them to participate. Being an African gave me insider status while being a researcher immediately made me an outsider. Comparatively, the snowball sampling technique yielded a larger sample size than the community-based sampling method, with 15 out of the 17 participants obtained from the snowball technique.

I recruited seventeen newcomer immigrants. My participants arrived between 2018 and 2022 as permanent residents, temporary foreign workers, or international students. Even though international

students are not typically classified as immigrants in the traditional sense, they temporarily reside in a foreign country to pursue education and usually hold student visas, which are temporary and non-immigrant. As a result, they are typically not entitled to many public social assistance services. However, international students can transition to immigrant status if they stay in the country after completing their studies, often by obtaining work permits or applying for permanent residency through various immigration programs. Also, international students were allowed to work full-time off campus during the pandemic, and even after the pandemic, were allowed to work full-time to address the labour shortages (Shields & Alrob, 2023). Participants were at least 18 years old, aligning with Canada's legal age of consent (The Daily, 2022).

Despite the initial plan for a sample size of twenty, I began to find data saturation after the twelfth interview (Mensah & Williams, 2022). Most of the codes I used to formulate themes were derived from the first 12 interviews, and subsequent interviews explained the themes that had emerged in the prior interviews (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). This saturation point influenced the decision to stop at the 17th interview. Also, I had two people withdraw their participation because they feared the potential effects of their participation in the study on their immigration trajectory in Canada.

Table 1 below provides the socio-demographic background of the 17 African newcomer immigrants who shared their integration experiences during the pandemic (2020-2022). There were eleven male and six female participants with ages ranging between 20 and 60. Even though my call for participation was for immigrants who migrated between 2017 – 2022. My respondents years of migration ranged from 2018-2022. They originated from six African countries - Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Tanzania. They were temporary residents, international students attending a post-secondary institution in St. John's, or permanent residents on post-graduate work permits. My respondents were self-identified dark-skinned Africans. I had two people withdraw their

participation before the interviews. One of them, an international student, said he is unsure of the ways his participation in the study might affect his immigration status and his ability to renew his study permit.

Table 1: Participants' Socio-Demographic Information

Pseudonym name	Gender	Age	Year of migration	Country	Migration status.
Jude	M	30s	2021	Nigeria	IS
Aduko	M	60s	2019	Nigeria	PR
Anna	F	20s	2019	Tanzania	IS
Benson	M	20s	2019	Nigeria	PGWP
Boss	M	30s	2021	Kenya	IS
Elizabeth	F	30s	2018	Ghana	PR
Emeka	M	20s	2022	Ghana	PR
Innocent	M	40s	2019	Nigeria	PR
Nathan	M	20s	2020	Zimbabwe	IS
Paptio	M	50s	2019	Nigeria	PR
Pauline	F	20s	2019	Nigeria	PGWP
Emerald	F	30s	2018	Ghana	PR
Rodney	M	30s	2022	Ghana	PR
Ruby	F	50s	2019	Kenya	PGWP
Thomas	M	30s	2021	Uganda	PR
Yusuf	M	40s	2022	Nigeria	IS
Unwako	F	20s	2019	Nigeria	PR

Note: PR refers to Permanent Residents, PGWP refers to a Postgraduate Work Permit, and IS refers to International Students.

3.3.2 Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews in person with 17 participants at the participants' preferred locations. I audio recorded on a tape recorder, each time ranging from 45-90 minutes. I chose this data collection method based on the recommendation of Crea-Arsenio et al. (2022), who suggested using qualitative, in-depth methods to explore immigrants' integration experiences from a provincial or city-based perspective after conducting a systematic review of studies on immigrants' integration from 2010-2020. In-depth interviews gave me a comprehensive understanding of lived experiences through issue-oriented conversations involving active listening and meaning-making (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2017).

Before commencing each interview, I introduced myself as an insider and a researcher. As an insider, I shared my positionally as an African newcomer immigrant who migrated and integrated during the pandemic. This approach helped build a rapport with my participants and got them talking even before I asked them any of my interview questions. While asking the questions, I remained reflexive and flexible with the interview guide. I ensured I asked appropriate follow-up questions that would help me better understand my participant's experience.

3.4 Data Transcription, Coding, and Analysis

I transcribed my data after each interview to draw out manifest and latent meanings. I completed a verbatim transcription by listening to the interview recording. Initially, the process was easy because I conducted one interview in two weeks or, at most, two in two weeks, each lasting 30 to 40 minutes. However, the more interviews I conducted, the longer it took to transcribe, and some interviews lasted for 90 minutes. I decided to use an AI transcription tool based on the research of Seyedi et al. (2023) and Wardell et al. (2021). They emphasize the benefits of AI usage, such as reducing the time spent on human transcriptions, providing more timely feedback, and lowering the error margin of existing

transcription systems. The AI tool not only captures what was said, but also how it was said, including punctuation, filler words (e.g., "um" or "like"), and de-identification (e.g., personal names, and addresses), making the transcription process less difficult. Subsequently, I opted for Otter AI transcription. The software was inefficient because most of my respondents had accents; therefore, transcription quality was reduced. Its accuracy was less than 30%, so I had to listen and adjust the sentences to avoid misinterpretation when coding. I used the Otter AI' to transcribe three of my interviews before switching to Descript AI. Descript AI was more beneficial as it had about 75% accuracy. Even though the inaccuracy made the process arduous, it allowed me to become familiar with my data as I listened to the interviews again to correct the transcription errors. Once the transcription was completed, I relistened to my interviews, corrected errors and started memoing. Even though the use of AI transcription tools has created debates, particularly as regards the ethical issues surrounding its use, I reviewed Descript AI and Otter AI's privacy policy (https://www.descript.com/security; https://otter.ai/privacy-security) and was reassured of its adequacy to provide security, privacy and data confidentially. Although transcribing software accelerated my transcription, I double-checked the accuracy of the transcriptions to ensure consistency across narratives.

Next, I started coding. I developed codes through descriptive and categorical coding. I used descriptive codes to generate a set of key concepts inductively. Descriptive codes allowed me to group concepts into a more general category beyond their initial word or concept to form categorical codes. For instance, I categorized words like fear, afraid, scared, dismay, worry, and unease into post-migration anxiety (Hesse-Biber, 2017). I applied some principles of grounded theory by viewing my data reflexively from multiple conceptual lenses, analyzing what codes imply, and how and why my respondents construct them to understand their interpretation better. After line-by-line coding, I developed analytical codes to expand and explore code ideas. While writing my memos, I examined

their ideas and improved the codes by tracing patterns to explain assumptions, doubts, and conjunctures. These codes transitioned to themes (Charmaz, 2015).

I inductively created themes based on repetitive words, similarities, and differences in statements about a topic or question. Themes were examined to establish overarching themes or develop new themes. The patterns in each theme were followed based on existing literature and using description elements. For instance, I analyzed social connections using Putnam's (2000) bridging and bonding approach (Bernard et al., 2016). While conducting my analysis, I reflected on the meaning-making processes and how African newcomer immigrants make sense of their integration experience. I relied on two orientations in the symbolic interactionism (SI) framework: the looking-glass self and the social processes involved in meaning-making. Using this SI approach to data analysis helped me deeply engage with the data, identify patterns and differences, and track variations. During data analysis, I created sensitizing concepts to help me understand the context of the data and to pull out the bigger picture from my data (Salvini, 2019; Sidi, 2021). l looked at how participants exercise their agency and the social processes that inspire my respondents' interpretation of their experiences (Quist-Adade, 2019; Sandstrom et al., 2021).

3.6 Ethical Consideration

I allowed participants to choose their preferred pseudonyms for reporting purposes. I used pseudonyms to report findings and anonymized quotes. I only used other personal information collected in this research, such as gender, age range, and country of origin, for comparative purposes. I will keep data for at least five years, as Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research requires. While reporting in Chapters 4 and 5, I ended quotes with a bracket including pseudonym, age range, gender, and year of migration. This approach allows my readers to know some specifics about the respondent

that might not be highlighted in the analysis, while reducing the tendency of participant identification. I obtained written consent for the study.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented a detailed account of the data collection and analysis methods, including a comprehensive justification for their selection. I reflect on some sampling techniques and transcription hurdles. It provides the study area's historical and pictorial background—St. John's, Newfoundland, and Labrador. This chapter also addressed sample techniques, sample size and data collection procedures, data transcription, coding and analysis, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR

AFRICAN NEWCOMER IMMIGRANTS' SOCIOECONOMIC INTEGRATION

In this chapter, I present the results of semi-structured interviews with 17 African newcomers in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. This study explores their integration experience during the two-year peak (2020-2022) of the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter examines the socioeconomic integration challenges and coping strategies African newcomer immigrants used during the COVID-19 pandemic when integrating into society's housing, economic, and social aspects.

4.1 Social Integration and Agency during the COVID-19 Pandemic

This section discusses the African immigrants' challenges and their interpretation of challenges while building social connections with fellow Africans, long-term residents, and Newfoundlanders in St. John's, NL and how they exercised their agency while coping with the challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has brought about unprecedented changes in people's lives, and one of the most significant impacts is how people interact and socialize. Like any other member of society, immigrants can act independently and make their own choices during social interactions. Their interpretation of their integration experience in St. John's during the COVID-19 pandemic shows their capacity to exercise agency. The paragraphs are structured so that the first aspect introduces the social connections between both categories, followed by the subheading on their experiences while building social connections with fellow Africans and Newfoundlanders.

Some respondents have pointed out that the spatial and temporal impact of the pandemic, which resulted in the closure of places of common interest, made it challenging to establish social connections with fellow Africans, long-term residents, and Newfoundlanders. This is exemplified in the Aduko quote

below as he stated that the closure of places of social gatherings during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for him to connect with people in the host society.

> Before the pandemic, I went out occasionally for events organized by the Nigerian Association in Canada. Attendance was usually low, but it was easier to make friends then. However, during the pandemic, it was hard because there were few gatherings due to the restrictions, and most event centers were closed (Aduko, in his 60s, migrated in 2019).

4.1.1 Interacting with fellow African

Some of the individuals I spoke with initially described their experiences of integrating with fellow Africans and Newfoundlanders during the pandemic in a way that didn't seem directly related to COVID-19. Upon closer analysis, I noticed how the timing of their interactions during the pandemic influenced their perspectives and interpretations of the experience.

In St. John's, African immigrants faced challenges connecting with fellow Africans during COVID-19. They observed that immigrants who had integrated to some extent and had jobs during the pandemic found it particularly challenging to socialize due to their busy schedules. Papito explained that most Africans he meets in St. John's have busy schedules and mostly have little or no time for leisure because they are always working. He emphasized that as an African, surviving in Canada meant earning a living and remitting money to their families back home. Upon initial consideration of the manifest meanings of Papito's comment, it seemed unrelated to the pandemic. However, upon closer reflection, I realized that there was a subtle connection to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was particularly evident because the pandemic created new job opportunities and forms of employment, which resulted in increased employment for new immigrants. Moreover, the usual barriers, such as the requirement for high proficiency in the English language and the need for Canadian work experience, were lessened or eliminated due to persistent labour shortages (Kelly, 2020; Nova, 2020). This led to an increase in Black

immigrants working in frontline positions, as they had limited access to government support and were often in precarious economic situations. Therefore, they require money for daily sustenance (Mensah & Williams, 2022). These economic pressures hampered Africans from forming social connections despite not being explicitly mentioned by the respondent.

> Everyone is busy with their lives and**,** most of the time, preoccupied with their schedules. Making friends here is not easy because most people are on the go. Most people are busy as they juggle many things at the same time. No one has time to start sitting down with you, like back home and talking. Most of my fellow Nigerians are busy. They are caught up with this work thing. Well, one can understand because most of them have home responsibilities that they must attend to. They have bills here and back home in Nigeria (Papito, in his 40s, migrated in 2019).

Emeka pointed out that the society in St. John's, Canada, doesn't prioritize leisure and social connections. Instead, it focuses on money and work, making it hard for people to connect. Emeka suggested that the emphasis on work and production in a capitalist framework leads to busy schedules and alienates individuals from their work. His remarks imply preconceived notions of a typical capitalist society and highlight the ideology of Cooley that people act based on their understanding of a particular situation. Emeka also emphasized how the pandemic highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of existing societal structures (see Bonilla-Silva, 2022).

> It is more about getting your work done, making money, and leaving rather than trying to associate with people. Society is structured so that you work a lot; having to work means you have less time for social life or leisure. So, making friends even with fellow Africans becomes difficult (Emeka, in his 20s, migrated in 2022).

A context of different cultural values, seen as misplaced by Africans, influenced their ability to build social connections with fellow Africans or their country nationals in St. John's. Broadly, I wondered what these cultural values are as the theme emerged. Their comments suggest that cultural

values are displaced when the cultural values of the Africans you meet do not align with the societal norms in Africa or their expectation of what appropriate behaviour should look like. This hinders social cohesion between them and other Africans. While illustrating this, Yusuf said there are changes in the mannerisms of Africans here, which are largely different from how they behave in Africa. He said African cultural values of a communal way of living are lost once Africans relocate to Canada. When I asked him how he arrived at this, Yusuf gave an example of his interaction with a fellow African whom he met at work who was not so welcoming. The misplaced cultural values that my respondents are observing are largely tied to the timing of their interaction. Yusuf's interpretation of the avoidance he experienced during the pandemic was perceived to be a departure from the ideal practices of their home country.

> Things are different from the way they used to be at home. In my home country, you can meet someone, you take them to your house to meet your family members and where you live on the same day. But here you have got to learn a new culture and ways of life. You will think you can easily make friends with fellow Blacks, but even Blacks here have internalized the Canadian culture of living your life alone and individualistic tendencies. For example, I met someone from my ethnicity where I first worked. Who would not speak with me because he realized I was Yoruba. Although he is also Yoruba, he will go the other way to avoid me once I come. That was strange because I thought, okay, you are from the same culture and country. We should be friends (Yusuf, in his 40s, migrated in 2022).

Another respondent, Innocent, added that most Africans he has met here have dual identities as they like to act differently from the predetermined social and moral values/norms in Africa. He said this is because the cultural values in Africa that curtail behavioural excesses, such as respect for adults, are missing in Canada. This shows that despite other similarities during interactions when people do not attach the same meaning to behaviour or perceive reality in the same way, it can result in misunderstanding. Due to the pandemic, many individuals minimized physical contact under provincial

policies. If someone contracted COVID-19, they must contact all their recent contacts and encourage them to isolate for a period. This timing encouraged many people to limit their interactions as much as possible. However, this decreased social interaction was perceived as a departure from Africa's communal way of life.

> I have learned there is so much hypocrisy here. It is sometimes difficult to know the real person is […] because it is like we are now in the world. Unlike back home, where our culture tries to curb some things from our activities and behaviours, culture is no longer strong in this part of the world. You cannot expect the same behaviour as back home, and because of that, I am very cautious (Innocent, in his late 40s, migrated in 2019).

> Also, my respondents mentioned that it is not just the other Africans' busy schedules and

misplaced cultural values that influence their ability to build social connections. They also stated that their personality traits are a factor. By stating their traits as a reason for delayed social connections, they looked inward to interpret their circumstances during the pandemic simply because it was a multifaceted crisis with divergent meanings. For instance, Pauline described herself as an introvert who likes to be alone. She said she met Africans but chose not to socialize or become friends because of her personality traits.

> I have met people but cannot call them my friends. I am an introvert; I like to be indoors, and most people I have met are mostly Nigerians because of the association. They will always have events. The family I stayed with was very active in the association. People always come to the house, but I did not socialize with people (Pauline, in her 20s, migrated in 2019).

Likewise, self-identifying as an ambivert, Benson describes how he picks his moment when interacting with fellow Africans; even though he feels he can easily connect with them, he does not force the relationship.

I could reach out to fellow Africans, but I always feel like I am an introvert. I am an extrovert, so I pick my moment. If I am talking to you and I feel like I am disturbing you, oh my God, I shut the fuck up, and I will never talk to you again. Once, I found that excuse because connecting to everybody is not compulsory. You cannot force relationships (Benson, in his 20s, migrated in 2019).

It is believed that immigrants tend to stay within their ethnic enclaves and make friends faster with people of the same ethnic group. However, this section shows that African newcomers during the pandemic struggled to make friends with other African immigrants because of their personality traits, acculturation, changes in the ways of life of some Africans post-migration, and the shutting down of social gathering spaces. Participants have raised concerns that appear to go beyond the typical challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Their conclusions are influenced by the context and timing of their interaction, which means the COVID-19 environment largely shapes the underlying meaning of these challenges. This aligns with scholarly studies showing that individuals internalize their challenges differently during a social crisis. Crises can profoundly impact individuals physically, emotionally, psychologically, and socially. The impact of the crisis on individuals can strain relationships and lead to changes in social roles (see Gruebner et al., 2012).

4.1.2 Interactions with Newfoundlanders

In comparison, most of my respondents stated cultural differences and reliance on technology when exploring the challenges African newcomers faced when building social connections with Newfoundlanders and how my respondents interpreted the difficulties. They also mentioned a gap between expectation and reality, closed friendship circles, their notion of the existence of dual skepticism, and covert racism as major constraints for building social connections with Newfoundlanders and other White residents. When answering this question, I found it interesting that most of my respondents considered Newfoundlanders and other White residents as a homogenous group

of White people, as opposed to the conventional come-from-away (CFR) and Newfoundlanders categorization in the province. Neither does their response acknowledge or signal the presence of new demographics. The province is becoming more diverse with an Indigenous population and non-white Newfoundlanders born in the province. Most of my respondents perceived St. John's residents to be welcoming and hospitable. They explained that they feel at home in St. John's because they can now understand the weather and socioeconomic landscape. However, this adaptation was not accompanied by increased social connections with White residents during the pandemic.

> I am beginning to feel at home here because I used to see Nigeria as my home. I am adapting to the new environment, yes, being comfortable around it and knowing what you are supposed to do at every point. I understand how the weather goes here (Jude, in his mid-30s, migrated in 2021).

Cultural differences between Africans and Whites were one of the reasons my respondents struggled to build social connections. Different societies have varying mediums of socialization. Because my respondents' primary and secondary socialization was in another country, they said they found it difficult to build social connections with Whites because they do not have common ground that can make conversations linger. Yusuf emphasized that cultural background creates a lens through which people view the world. For him, how he views the world differs from how the Whites in St. John's view the world.

> There are cultural differences that will first prevent you from striking a relationship with Whites. Because you are thinking, all right, these people do not see the world the way I see the world. So, it is difficult for me to say hi; I want to be your friend (Yusuf, in his 40s, migrated in 2022).

Similarly, Jude resolves that the culture of White residents does not emphasize social interaction through face-to-face communication becomes difficult. Jude reflected on his interaction with white residents and

stated it is more oriented towards the increased use of technological devices and social media. This lack of social interaction made it challenging to establish meaningful social connections. The interpretation of Jude as the limited emphasis on communication is largely COVID-19 dependent as most people were trying to keep their distance.

> Making new friends was difficult because most were polite in my department. You try your best to be friends with them more. It is not easy. It is not easy to communicate with them... I would not say it is their fault. It is how they bring up their kids here; the focus is on using technology rather than physical communication, so when it comes to social communication, they are lacking as they are more focused on the technological side of things, the use of computers and social media, which is not good. You will try to engage them in conversations, making it difficult for them to return it. Like us now, you can see we are having a long conversation, right? The conversation is a case of ping pong, but with them, you will play a ball, and it just falls flat (Jude, in his mid-30s, migrated in 2021).

Boss' comments suggest that cultural differences are key to the challenges. However, his comments also highlight the racial stereotypes about African immigrants as poor and uneducated as a part of the cultural differences. When I enquired further about what he meant, Boss noted that the cultural differences make Whites feel superior to Africans. It is believed that as an African, you have migrated from a village where they live with wild animals and had a primitive culture. Beyond the cultural difference, Boss' comment shows St. John's and its peripherality/remoteness or (perceived) lack of global connections as a reason for the difficulties experienced.

> The only thing is that most people, in my view, have not travelled. This is a village. Some of them have lived in this village forever. They do not know better, so you must prove yourself for them to understand you are technologically inclined. It is hard for people here to understand that, so they think they are superior, or you come from the bush and live with wild animals. Especially those that have never attended the university. Yes, but they think they are superior. (Boss, in his early 30s, who migrated in 2021).

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In this comment, Yusuf, Boss, and Jude's comments demonstrate how my respondents imagined how they looked at others and their imagination of how people react to their appearance.

Also, the pandemic marked a time when people were mostly cautious about interacting with others due to social distancing mandates and other measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding this, some of my respondents noted that they felt that Whites had a closed community. Benson, said he perceived Whites as a closed-off group, not seeking new members. When I asked him why he felt this way, he explained that most of them (the longtime residents and Newfoundlanders) have their circle of friends, and breaking into such a circle is difficult. Most of them grew up together, and as an immigrant, you are new, so you cannot just break in.

> Most of these people grew up together. They went to school. This, yeah, they have a community already, and they stick with that. The problem is breaking inside the circle. So, are you coming in now? You want to break inside; it is difficult, and we do not even know how to do it because you do not know, do not, or want to be too pushy (Benson, in his 20s, migrated in 2020).

Despite Benson's notion, Yusuf's statement indicates that the White group is not necessarily closed off but might have an age dimension. Yusuf said White older people initiate conversations and tell you stories about St John's. They seem to be more open to building social connections. Yusuf noted that despite the friendly nature of older White residents, he found it difficult to form friendships with them due to the African tradition of showing respect to elders. He explained that elders are addressed with a title and greeted with a prostration or a kneeling gesture as a sign of respect in his culture. Yusuf noted that people are referred to by their first names regardless of age, and age is not seen as a symbol of respect or status. This cultural difference created a barrier to their friendship.

> I have seen instances at the mall where older adults initiate conversations with you while waiting for the bus. They will start telling you stories of St. John's, Memorial University, and other

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places in the city. The older adults can be so friendly; they do not look at you as a Black person. However, my main issue is that this person is around 60 or 65 or 70-something. This is an elder; I must do some things to show you are a senior. I am a boy. This must show in how I greet you and how we relate, but that is not the case here. I met a man who told me, why can't you call me by name? I told him you know, in my country, that is offensive. I should not be calling you by your name. You are Papa (Yusuf, in his 40s, migrated in 2022).

The notion of dual skepticism affected some of my respondents' ability to build social connections. They referred to having doubts about Whites and believing that Whites had doubts about them. Their excerpts emphasize that their skepticism affected their ability to interact with Whites during the COVID-19 pandemic. My research participants reported that there are reservations between African immigrants and White residents. This attitude seems to be rooted in the historical period of colonial rule when countries were seeking to dominate territories and people globally. Despite happening long ago, recent findings suggest potential links between Newfoundland and Labrador and the Atlantic slave trade. Colonizing nations like France, Portugal, and Spain also staked claims in parts of Newfoundland. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, more than 12 million enslaved Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic (see CBC News, 2021).

In the first place, with the Whites, we are Blacks. You are also a newcomer, so they are skeptical about you, and you are also skeptical about them (Aduko, in his 60s, migrated in 2018).

This idea shows how Black-and-White historical dynamics in North America create a barrier to social connections in St. Johns. Emeka's thoughts reiterate Aduko's comments and give insights into how dual skepticism influenced their ability to build social connections. He revealed that it is difficult to build social connections due to his belief that Whites do not like him or other Black people. This mindset is a product of the historical encounter between the two groups. It also shows a key tenant of symbolic interactionism: people act based on how they see and evaluate reality. Emeka said that the whites he

meets here tend to smile; he is cautious because building social connections with them can be a tricky

path that may lead to unforeseen issues. He explained that it is a Black man's mentality that White

people do not like Black people.

> There are meanings attached to social construction: the Black man and the white man. It is
> complex because, you see here, the mentality is that the people do not like you. Moreover, I am
> sorry I have to say this, but the White people do not like you. This has gotten so into me that I
> take it with a pinch of salt, even when they smile. It is wild. It is a very slippery slope. You must
> navigate it carefully to avoid getting into trouble (Emeka, in his 20s, migrated in 2022).

This echoes Cresse's (2011) notion of learning the dynamics of being Black in North America and

indicates that Black people's historical positioning in North America was still passed on during the

pandemic. This also highlights how individuals act based on the imagination of what is on the mind of

the person they are interacting with, as stated by Cooley (1964). My respondents concluded with dual

skepticism after viewing the skepticism as being a two-way thing.

4.1.3 How did they exercise agency?

African newcomer immigrants exercised agency to cope while grappling with these challenges.

The concept of agency refers to an individual's capacity to act independently and make decisions within

the social structures and limitations surrounding them. This implies that individuals have the power in

limited ways to shape their own lives and the society around them. It recognizes that people are not

passive recipients of social forces but active agents who can make meaningful choices and take

purposeful actions that affect their lives and the broader social order (Mische, 2011; Emirbayer &

Mische, 1998). For my respondents, exercising agency was crucial in their integration experience during

the COVID-19 pandemic in a new environment. Thus, they leveraged existing friendships to cope with

these social integration challenges. They learnt to exist beyond the predetermined labels in how they

interpreted the peculiarities of being a stranger in St. John's and by taking the position of an educator as a medium of addressing discrepancies in cultural knowledge.

Leveraging pre-migration friendships was an avenue through which African immigrants exercised their agency while coping with the challenges of building social connections. Rodney, a respondent from Ghana, said his initial friends in St. John's were people from his pre-migration social circle. Therefore, he was not bothered by his inability to make friends or enlarge his social circle. They were sufficient for him to cope when he felt lonely or bored.

> When I arrived in St. John's, I had a friend here who I knew from Ghana... Though I did not see him on arrival because he was at Corner Brook, he gave me his address. He was staying with another Ghanaian. Those were the only two people I knew. When my friend at Corner Brook came back, he took me to meet another Ghanaian who helped him to settle in when he came here. Fortunately, I knew the person from Ghana. We attended the same university and played tennis together. It was a renewal of friendship. Whenever I think I am bored. I walk from my house to his house. So, knowing them, he and the two people I stay in my house with was just enough (Rodney, in his 30s, migrated in 2022).

However, Innocent emphasizes that it is important to discern between deep and superficial friendships as the first step in building social connections when leveraging existing friendships. He suggests that while deep connections can be a good coping strategy, it is important to choose them wisely because they can be a source of ruin in the host country.

> To cope here, I am intentional about who I choose as my friend. I have some superficial friends whom I say hi to from time to time. Then I have the deeper friends you communicate heart to heart-with. You share your secrets with deeper-level friends, so you must choose your friends wisely, especially in this part of the world where people are hypocrites. They do not practice what they preach. If you do not choose your friends wisely, they can ruin you (Innocent, in his 40s, migrated in 2019).

The historic prejudice about the Black-and-White dynamics gets passed on to new immigrants directly or indirectly. Most new immigrants take on the projected experiences of older immigrants, thereby making it difficult for them to socially integrate/ connect with individuals of different races. My respondents noted that learning to exist beyond the predetermined societal labels is important to overcome this challenge.

Anna explained that she initially struggled to befriend Newfoundlanders and other White ethnicities in St. John's until she looked beyond the predetermined stereotypes and confines. Anna exercised her agency by defining her path, label, and box instead of taking on other people's experiences. Anna's idea of moving beyond the labels coincides with Jude's illustration of how looking beyond the predetermined labels can be beneficial in building social connections.

> It is very easy for people to put us in boxes and attach labels, White people, Black people, whatever, but one thing we tend to forget, especially when we are new, is that people tend to define us. Just because you have a horrible experience does not mean you should project your experiences onto others. Just because you have experienced racism and are stuck on a minimum wage job does not mean every other black person would experience the same. I have learnt to define my path and labels or my box because people here can be nice, open, and welcoming. Anna, in her 20s, migrated in 2019).

Jude told me he met a White Newfoundlander on Facebook. Although initially skeptical based on the perceived White and Black divide, he decided to be open-minded and found the friendship beneficial. Jude's ability to cultivate friendship and build social connections with a White Canadian demonstrates the power of looking beyond racial or cultural labels and their inherent benefits. This also shows his agency in coping with predetermined stereotypes. This highlights the potential for genuine connections when individuals look beyond external appearances, historical dynamics, or predetermined labels.

I met Mr. J [White Canadian] on Facebook. He sent me a request and I accepted it, and then he said hello on Facebook. Initially skeptical, I asked a friend who attended MUN if he knew this person. Then he said yes, he knew him, and that made me comfortable, so I started talking to this person. Because I was shocked about him that way we met. While chatting online, I wondered why this White man liked me and my company. It is probably because I sometimes speak French with him (Jude is in his mid-30s and migrated in 2021).

On the other hand, some respondents like Yusuf find it easier to make friends with older people in St. John's because they are friendly and do not judge him based on his race or nationality. Older people in the city are open to initiating conversations and building social connections with immigrants. Yusuf's explanation demonstrates the potential for genuine connections when individuals see beyond externalities, historical dynamics, or predetermined labels. Excerpts are depicted in the following quotes:

The older adults can be so, so friendly. Hmm. They initiate conversation. They do not look at you as a Black person. They easily interact with you. And they see you as someone that they can be friends with. Moreover, they have never, never, ever seen you as someone from Nigeria or from Africa or whatever (Yusuf, in his 40s, migrated in 2021).

Despite respondents' noting difficulties interacting with people in St. John's. It was largely perceived as a common experience based on human tendencies rather than peculiar to the city. Thus, they cope by normalizing their experiences of discrimination and embracing friendship with older people. They trace social connection's difficulty to human tendency rather than being location-based. For instance, Papito explained this understanding by drawing parallels with experiences in his home country; he said that looking at the challenges as normal instead of viewing them as discrimination or unwelcoming helped him cope.

When you first come in, you know, there are some good people and managers I have worked with. And then there are some very terrible managers, you know, that you know, that this person hates you, from the way they treat you. This is different from when you are back home. You know that it is your country. However, in Nigeria, in my country, you still have discrimination in terms of where you are from and your ethnicity, so you can not be friends with everyone (Papito, in his 50s, migrated in 2019).

Furthermore, some respondents said they sought to exercise agency by understanding the peculiarities of being a stranger in St. John's and not having the expectation of building social connections on arrival. Typically, Newfoundland and Labrador are divided between people not from the province, called Come From Away (CFA) and Newfoundlanders. Emeka and Emerald's comments paint a vivid picture of this statement. Their comments indicate that they were not puzzled by the difficulty of building social connections during the pandemic because their mindset enabled them to confront the difficulties head-on and remain resilient and optimistic. My participants' acceptance of their position as a second-class citizen was a form of their agency, and it implies how it allowed them to cope with the challenges involved in building social connections.

I was not expecting anything short of struggle, anything short of hustle. You always, always be a second-class citizen in somebody else's country. Hmm. Never mind if you have a PR, never mind if you have citizenship. Mm-hmm. One of the colours is Black. Yeah. You will be a second-class citizen. Because, after all, we are all economic immigrants if you put it that way. We are all here for economic reasons. I expected that settling down in such an environment would be extremely difficult partly because of the historical treatment of Blacks and racism (Emeka, in his 20s, migrated in 2022).

I was not expecting anything out of the ordinary, like coming to school. Hopefully, people will be nice to you (Emerald, in her 30s, migrated in 2018).

In addition, my respondent's experience from other unwelcoming communities in which they have lived previously created the optimism and zeal to cope during the pandemic. For instance, Rodney contrasted his experience in St. John's to Korea pre-pandemic. His experience in Korea gave him the optimism required to cope.

> I stayed in Korea before, and if you tried to talk to people on the street there, they would run away from you. So, I did not expect it to be so different here. However, I went grocery shopping shortly after arriving in St. John's. It was raining, and someone stopped to give me a ride. He said it seems like your things are heavy. Can I give you a ride? I quickly jumped in. This would never have happened when I was in Korea. But despite the nice gestures, White people here show it is difficult to make friends with Whites (Rodney, in his 30s, migrated in 2022).

Finally, some respondents stated that when they notice a discrepancy in cultural knowledge, they respond by taking on the position of an educator. One respondent, Boss, said he views cultural gaps as a product of ignorance and limited exposure, which inspires an opportunity for education. He said he does not take offence or hold it against Newfoundlanders or other White residents when they are unable to interact based on cultural gaps.

> They lack exposure and are confused. They do not even have an idea of the currencies and their differences. But I do not hold it against them because they are just like children who do not understand how the world works (Boss, in his early 30s, who migrated in 2021).

To buttress Boss's point, another respondent, Elizabeth, an early childhood educator, explains that most cultural gaps exist due to limited knowledge and exposure, which can be addressed through simple illustrations. Both respondents' positions emphasize their agency in coping with possible discrimination and racism they might have experienced while trying to interact during the COVID-19 pandemic.

> Whenever I interact with the Whites, I perceive cultural differences. I remember the children I work with; they are very curious. They will always ask me, why are you Black? Why are you

brown? They love to ask that question. They want to know why I look Black, so tell them that is my colour and how I was born. And I always use an egg to illustrate what I want to tell them. I say we have brown, and we have White. Even though the outer colour of the egg is different, the inner is the same thing. It is not like they are trying to be mean; they are just curious (Elizabeth is in her late 30s and migrated in 2017).

The challenges African newcomer immigrants face in building social connections in St. John's, NL, are multifaceted, divergent, and deeply rooted in cultural ideologies and historical dynamics. African newcomer immigrants exhibited resilience and agency as they sought to look beyond the predetermined stereotypes, leverage existing friendships, and accept their position as second-class citizens in St. John's.

4.3 Economic Integration and Agency of African Newcomer Immigrants

Canada aims to be a welcoming country with hospitable provinces, territories, and cities. The government is committed to achieving this by providing economic support, reducing employment discrimination, recognizing credentials, implementing bridging programs, and promoting more inclusive workplaces. My respondents are newcomers, and there have been significant improvements in their employment experiences overall. From my data, I noticed unemployment and employment changes for those working during the lockdown in 2020. However, this change was not observed during the other pandemic waves. There were two groups of unemployment. Some of my respondents could not get a job during the pandemic, while others were laid off because of the pandemic. For instance, Aduko and Innocent's statement explains why this group experienced unemployment during the lockdown. Most jobs requiring technical expertise were unavailable due to the employment crunch during the pandemic.

I got my first job last year after submitting my CV to many places in 2019. I am sure many people know my name because of this. I am guessing the pandemic also contributed. It is

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difficult to say why. Because they call you for an interview and will not give you the job. The pandemic came in 2020, and during the pandemic, many offices were closed, and people lost their jobs. There were very few openings for anybody to apply for a job. It played its role and is still playing until now (Aduko, in his 60s, migrated in 2019).

I tried to get a job. It took me a while to get one because I was selective. Most available jobs involve cooking, and I would not say I like cooking. The easiest job to get was in the fast-food industry. Food smells bother me; I usually do not want to be in that environment for long. It took me a while before I could get one. I got one in 2021. I was not expecting it to take that long. I think some factors may have played a part. Shortly after I arrived, COVID started most jobs shifting online, which affected in-person jobs[..]. However, my prior experience was in the health line, and most health-related jobs are highly regulated. That made it difficult for me to go to my health line. Even though I have other skills that can fit into other jobs, the other jobs were unavailable during the pandemic (Innocent, in his 40s, migrated in 2019).

Some respondents who were previously employed before the pandemic were laid off during the pandemic. For example, Unwako, who worked as a customer experience associate in 2019, was laid off during the COVID-19 downsizing.

The COVID-19 lockdown happened. I started working from home, but after a while, I got laid off and had to stay home all day without doing anything (Unwako, in her 20s, migrated in 2018.)

The lockdown and social distancing measures did not stop others from working. However, it changed the mode of employment and the responsibility at work. Papito, an accountant, explains that during the pandemic, offices were closed, so he was working from home.

I think the pandemic changed the way we work. You know, because before that time, we were all working in the office, and nobody had ever thought that the time would come that I would be working from home (Papito, in his 40s, who migrated in 2019).

At the same time, essential workers noted that the pandemic increased their work responsibilities. Anna, who had a job at a convenience store then, stated she had to mediate customer conflicts and enforce social distancing, as most conflicts were caused by inappropriate social distancing. While Aduko, a cleaner in a health facility, notes that employment challenges were not just changes at work but also the changes made to the transit system. He stated that the capacity limit of the metro bus and the bus timing made it difficult for him. This policy made it difficult for him to transit to work daily. He lamented that he usually would have to be at the bus stop for at least thirty minutes or an hour.

> I worked at Marie's convenience store, and we were considered essential workers. People were wearing weird things, fighting, and swearing at each other because the person behind them or before them was too close, so you would have to intervene and mediate between two people. We even had the tape on the line about five feet (Anna, in her mid-20s, migrated in 2019).

> During the pandemic, buses were not operating initially. After a while, the buses started running with only a few people. They were only carrying 19 people at a time. Once the number has been reached, they will pass you at the bus stop. So, you will have to wait for the next bus. Then you will have to take a taxi. Taxis made much money then. The cabs have an unusual charge, so I paid them cash and insisted on using the meter. I already know how much I usually pay. So, I withdrew the money and paid it before we started the trip. I tell them they do not need to put on the meter, and they usually agree. None of the cab drivers ever complained. They also like cash (Aduko, in his 60s, migrated in 2018).

4.3.2 How did they exercise agency?

While evaluating how my respondents exercised agency, I noticed they linked their economic integration challenges to employment and finances. Some respondents noted they had to realign expectations to suit current social realities during the pandemic and adjust their expectations by learning new skills or taking up jobs outside their intended fields. As economic immigrants, finding employment was essential for their integration and survival. The pandemic created an economic surge in the globe,

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and Canada was not excluded. So, my respondents had to acquire new skills or seek work outside major cities to fit into the system. Pauline and Emeka's expectation realignment was vividly captured in the following excerpt. Pauline initially expected the job search to be easy and for her post-migration living conditions to be better than her living conditions pre-migration. However, since she migrated during the pandemic, she had to realign her expectations to quickly cope with the employment challenges. Emeka stated he had to take up a job outside his expected employment category.

> I want people to set realistic expectations, especially if they struggle back home. Do not think you are coming here to relax because the struggle will become ten times greater than what you were doing back home. Nevertheless, the reward would be more than you can imagine. I had this misconception that once I got here, it would be easy, but I soon discovered that when you come here, you will have to work until you have almost passed, but this will get better. It depends on your situation and how easily you can pick up skills and re-align to fit into society. It is better to set realistic expectations (Pauline, in her 20s, migrated in 2021).

> You must fit into the system to get a job and survive. So, you take jobs you would not ordinarily do in your home country. Design a resume with imaginary experience just to fit into the system and find a way to be relevant because you need to survive here (Emeka, in his 20s, migrated in 2022).

In the same light, Ruby had to move from St. John's to Old Pelican, a suburban area, to find work and cope with the unemployment she experienced in the metro area. Although the ways they exercised their agency were different, they all found a medium to cope with the challenges they faced in the economy during the pandemic.

> I went to Old Pelican in June 2020 to work on a fish farm despite my work experience with the UN back home. I needed Canadian experience to get a corporate job, and I had to survive and provide for my children (Ruby, in her 50s, migrated in 2019).

Also, social support from various sources, including government initiatives and institutional aid, played a crucial role in alleviating the economic burdens and a vital coping strategy my respondents used during the pandemic. For example, Benson, despite his temporary status in Canada, benefited from the funds disbursed from the provincial government and Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador during the pandemic.

> MUN gave me some money, I think 2500. Then, about 1700 from the Newfoundland and Labrador government. However, at least I did not have to work for it. And they, and they came at the time I needed the money the most. Also, at work, they were paying us $2 more for working during the COVID-19 lockdown (Benson, in his 20s, migrated in 2019).

Other respondents noted that the biweekly payment system, the effectiveness of the food, and the Canadian government's overall response during the pandemic helped them cope and feel economically integrated; this is observed in Aduko's comments, as he described how the biweekly payments reduced his financial pressure and food banks ensured he was not hungry.

> Here they pay you every two weeks, which is very nice. It helps people to ameliorate their financial problems. Unlike in our country, you are paid at the end of the month. There is a Food Bank, so you can go there even if you need food to survive. The way the government of Canada handled the pandemic was wonderful. During the pandemic, I saw the true manifestation of the government of the people, for and by the people. They handled it well as they reached everybody. Once you call to say that you need food, they will package it and send it to you. It shows that the government puts humans first (Aduko, in his 60s, migrated in 2018).

In summary, the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic reduced the opportunities to find employment for newcomers striving for economic stability and better living conditions. Finding a job was difficult because most service industries were closed, and layoffs were inevitable based on COVID-19-related downsizing. Those who could continue their work during the pandemic had extra

responsibilities added to their job description, and the nature of their work was transformed. They exercised agency, coped with these challenges by realigning expectations to suit current social realities during the pandemic, and relied on social support. This analysis establishes the role of resilience, adaptability, and the critical role of support systems in the face of economic and financial challenges precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.4 Housing Integration and Agency of African Newcomer

Housing plays a critical role in the lives of immigrants and can significantly impact their health. While some of the people I spoke with were hopeful about finding suitable housing, their expectations were dashed due to high rental costs and changes in bureaucracy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before coming to St. John's, I knew it was an island, so I was expecting to be able to rent an entire apartment with a view of the ocean, as portrayed in the movies. But I quickly realized the prices of houses post-migration (Pauline, in her mid-20s, migrated in 2017).

When respondents mentioned their experiences in the housing sector, most respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their current housing situation and the difficulties they faced in finding suitable accommodation. The main areas of concern included overcrowding, unhygienic living conditions, and heating issues within their homes. For instance, Rodney shared his friend's living room for three months when he was unemployed and needed proof of employment to rent a house.

Housing arrangements have not been that easy. When I came, I stayed with my friend in a shared apartment with other people for three months. They had small rooms, so I had to stay in their living room most of the time. After getting my job, I started looking for my own rent; getting accommodation was difficult. Most of the available houses were Airbnb or short stay. Again, the pricing was something else. I had a tight budget and wanted it to fall within. So that kept me for so long. At some point, I got one close to Mount Pearl, and I do not have a car. Suppose I moved to Mount Pearl and returned to St John's daily for work. It would not be helpful. The bus system is poor in the city; everyone must own a car. Eventually, in church, I met one guy who was

moving from his rented apartment house because he had gotten a car and could stay anywhere in Newfoundland, so I rented it (Rodney, in his mid-30s, migrated in 2022).

Similarly, Elizabeth and her family of four had to stay with their in-law until they secured employment and references for a place to live. The bureaucratic processes, such as employment and/ or personal references, proof of employment, and pay stubs, among others, involved in acquiring a house in the rental property, posed challenges for the individuals, making it hard for them to secure housing that met their needs or expectations.

> When we came, we could not get a job, and to get a house, you need to show proof of employment. We had to stay with my brother-in-law, which was terrible. The house was small for his family and mine. I was there with my husband and our three children (Elizabeth, in her late 30s, migrated in 2018).

Some respondents who lived in shared apartments expressed discontent with their housing situation. They discussed their challenges during the lockdown phase, as they had to share washrooms with their roommates who did not maintain cleanliness. For instance, Thomas, who lived with a few people in a shared apartment, felt trapped and exposed. he mentioned that they were forced to stay home for an extended period with their roommates during the lockdown

> My house was a shared apartment for seven people. We shared one washroom. Some of my housemates were dirty. First, they were undergraduate students, so there was a big age difference. The timing was not right because I was reading till late at night, and they were playing video games or having a party. If I complained about such things to them, it seemed like I was bothering them. They were not going anywhere. That was their routine there. Then, the landlord was not very helpful whenever I texted or called. He never responded to emails (Thomas, in his 30s, migrated in 2021).

Whereas Unwako's experience, which involved living in a house with a poor heating system, highlights a significant shift in living conditions upon migrating to Canada. She noted how the absence of control over the temperature added to her discomfort during the compulsory stay-at-home order.

> I came from a very comfortable and sheltered home to my apartment in Canada, but it was an extremely cold basement apartment. We had no heater; the people upstairs controlled the heat. We feel the heat whenever the people upstairs turn up the heater (Unwako, in her mid-30s, migrated in 2018).

4.4.2 How did they exercise agency?

My participants' major strategy for coping with the housing challenges was to depend on their social connections with friends and family. For instance, Unwako could cope with the substandard living conditions because they had housemates to share the experience with, and they found humour in it. While Elizabeth and her family were able to secure housing by utilizing her brother-in-law's network.

> It was a basement apartment, and it was always extremely cold. We had to rely on the heater from upstairs, which was the only reason I could get through it. Because I had my housemates, we would all laugh about it. (Unwako in her mid-30s, migrated in 2018).

> We have not even got any jobs, and my family of four needed somewhere to stay. We were staying with my brother-in-law and his family, which was terrible (Elizabeth, in her late 30s, migrated in 2017).

Dissatisfaction and difficulty in housing searches recurred among respondents as they encountered unsanitary living conditions and heating issues in the housing market. Although the pandemic highlighted the importance of housing, my respondents' housing satisfaction was impacted during the pandemic as they had to spend a longer time staying in their unsatisfactory housing arrangements during the stay-at-home mandates. They leveraged the family and friendship circle to cope.
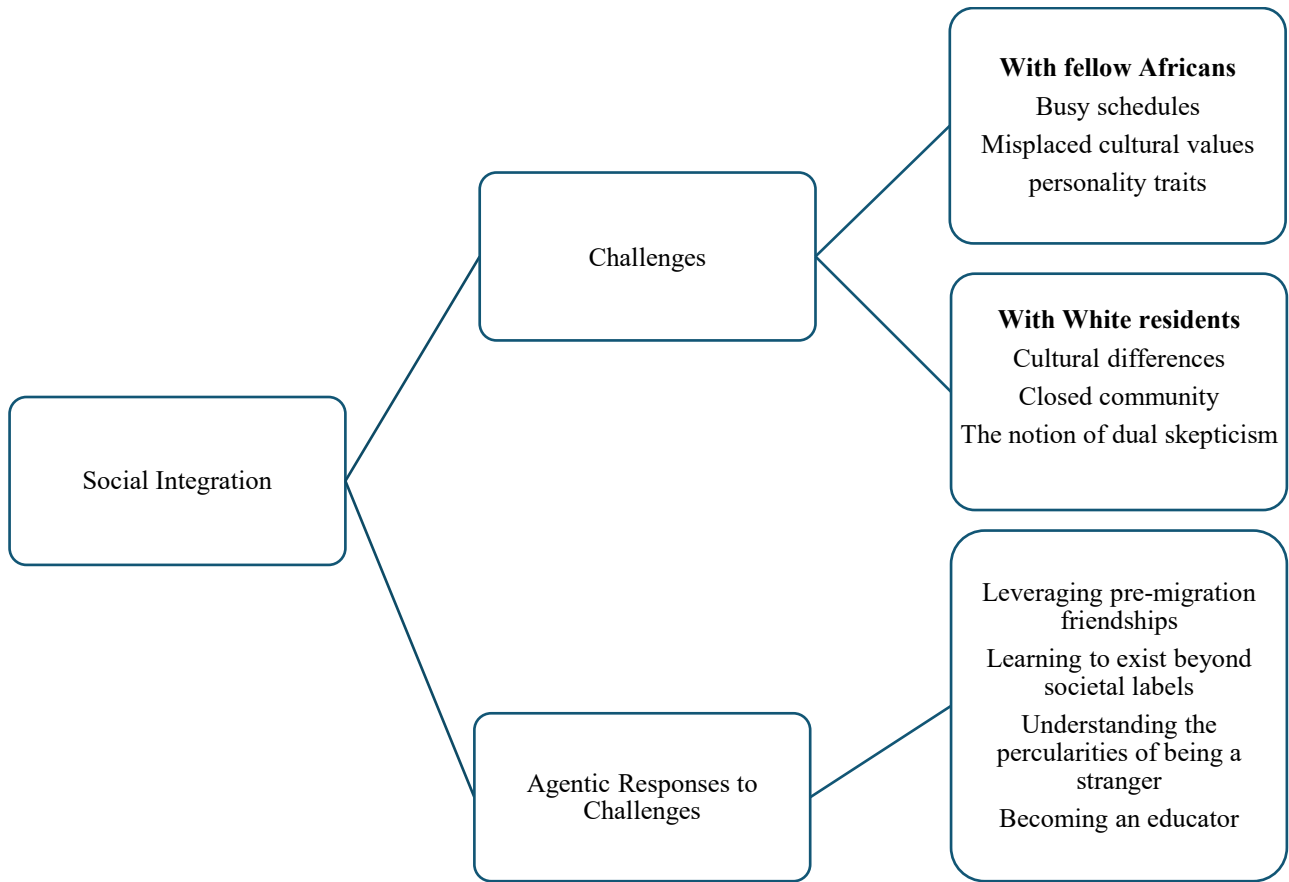
4.5 Conclusion

This chapter shows African newcomer immigrants' integration challenges during the pandemic and highlights their agency. The challenges African immigrants face in building social connections in St. John's, Newfoundland, and Labrador during the COVID-19 pandemic are complex and multifaceted; most are rooted in cultural differences, historical dynamics, individual personality traits, and the limiting social gatherings and interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. To cope with these challenges, immigrants leveraged existing friendships, redefined their expectations, and adopted a resilient mindset. They recognized the intricacies of being newcomers to St. John's and acknowledged their position as second-class citizens. African newcomer immigrants adapted and sought to bridge cultural gaps through education and open-mindedness.

In addition, African newcomer immigrants faced employment challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their experiences include layoffs and difficulties in securing jobs due to pandemic-related closures. The pandemic also led to changes in work dynamics, with some individuals transitioning to remote work while others experienced increased responsibilities, such as enforcing social distancing measures. To cope with these challenges, immigrants had to adjust their expectations, learn new skills, and seek employment outside major cities. Others relied on social support, including government assistance and support from friends and family, which played a crucial role in helping immigrants navigate economic hardships during the pandemic.

African newcomers have been facing challenges finding suitable housing due to the high rental costs and changes in the bureaucracy brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite their hopes of finding appropriate accommodation, many respondents expressed dissatisfaction as they encountered issues such as unhygienic conditions and heating problems in their shared accommodation during the COVID-19 lockdown. This resulted in respondents being forced to endure inadequate living conditions

for extended periods. Their main coping strategy was leveraging personal connections with family and friends, who often provided support.

Figure 2: Social Integration Summary

Social Integration

Challenges

With fellow Africans
Busy schedules
Misplaced cultural values
personality traits

With White residents
Cultural differences
Closed community
The notion of dual skepticism

Agentic Responses to Challenges

Leveraging pre-migration friendships
Learning to exist beyond societal labels
Understanding the percularities of being a stranger
Becoming an educator

Figure 3: Economic Integration Summary

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                          ┌─────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
                          │                 │        │    Unemployment      │
                          │    Challenges   │────────│  Changes in existing │
┌──────────────────┐     │                 │        │      employment      │
│                  │─────┘                 │        └──────────────────────┘
│    Economic      │
│   Integration    │     ┌─────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
│                  │─────│                 │        │ Realign expectations │
└──────────────────┘     │ Agentic Responses to    │  to suit current     │
                          │   Challenges    │────────│   social realities   │
                          │                 │        │ Social support from  │
                          └─────────────────┘        │   various sources    │
                                                      └──────────────────────┘
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Figure 4: Housing Integration Summary

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                          ┌─────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
                          │                 │        │  Unsanitaryconditions│
                          │    Challenges   │────────│    heating issues    │
┌──────────────────┐     │                 │        └──────────────────────┘
│                  │─────┘                 │
│    Housing       │
│   Integration    │     ┌─────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
│                  │─────│                 │        │ Leveraging friendship│
└──────────────────┘     │ Agentic Responses to    │      and family      │
                          │   Challenges    │────────│                      │
                          └─────────────────┘        └──────────────────────┘
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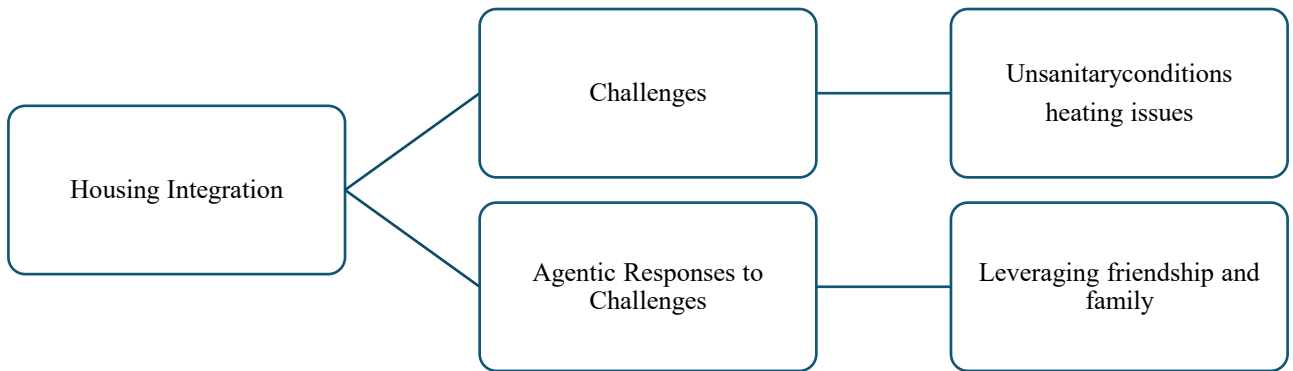
CHAPTER FIVE

AFRICAN IMMIGRANT NEWCOMERS' EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO INTEGRATION CHALLENGES AMIDST THE PANDEMIC

This chapter focuses on the African newcomer immigrant's reactions to integration challenges and how they exercised agency while coping amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. These reactions to integration rose inductively to the top of my analysis. This is not surprising, considering the COVID-19 pandemic was an unsettled time for everyone, especially affecting newcomers and emotions are inevitable in the migration journey. This analysis highlights themes: emotions of anxiety and loneliness. My respondent's narrative underscores the profound impact of the policies targeted at exacerbating the impact of COVID-19 on immigrant integration.

5.1 COVID-19-related Anxiety and Integration

I observed anxiety, as a natural and normal human emotion characterized by feelings of worry, nervousness, or unease about a perceived or anticipated threat or challenge. Experiencing occasional anxiety is a normal part of life for immigrants as they move from the known to the unknown (Rachman, 2004). The COVID-19 pandemic created new sources of anxiety. Some respondents used words that indicate fear, being scared, worried, unsettled, and puzzled, translating to what I call COVID-19-related emotions. Most of their experience of anxiety can be traced to social isolation, family disconnections (loss of a loved one, news from home country), and health-related challenges.

To mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus in St. John's, NL, physical distancing measures were implemented. However, some of my respondents, based on their family orientations and communal ways of living in their home countries, struggled to stay indoors alone or away from family. Unwako and Papito told me that being away from their family made them feel scared and afraid. Their comments highlight the absence of family as a source of anxiety and the role it plays in reducing the anxiety they

experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not surprising since the place of family in Africa is central.

> I wanted to go home that summer but could not because everywhere was shut down. I was so sad and worried; God forbid, I was depressed. Not only that, but I could not be with my family; I had to stay home all day, and I could not work because we were all laid off. Not only that, but I was losing my mind (Unwako, in her 20s, migrated in 2018).

> It was different, and it was scary. I had to stay home, but I was now in Montreal and could not come home to St. John's to see my family. Previously, I came once a month to see the family, but because of the COVID restrictions, I could not travel again (Papito, in his 40s, migrated in 2019).

Also, Innocent's comments add a layer to the role of family by explaining how the loss of a family member to the COVID-19 virus influenced his anxiety. Innocent stated that he was scared and acted cautiously during the pandemic because he lost a loved one to COVID-19. The death of this family member made him wonder if the world would return to the way it was pre-pandemic. The grief, mixed with isolation, was a source of anxiety for him. Therefore, family absence combined with isolation was a reason for the anxiety they experienced while integrating during the pandemic.

> COVID-19 has come and gone. People benefitted, while some were hit hard. Some lost loved ones due to COVID-19. I lost a loved one during the pandemic. The good thing is that now there is a vaccine, and the level of infection has been reduced. Even though I was initially wondering if this world will return to the way it was before the pandemic. I never had COVID-19, but in everything I do, I act cautiously, observe a lot, and try to keep myself away and observe. I try not to be impulsive. I took my time so I could make informed decisions (Innocent, in his late 40s, migrated in 2019).

> I also noticed another form of anxiety caused by the varying responses to the pandemic. In Newfoundland and Labrador, strict policies were in place at various pandemic stages. First was the total

shutdown of social gathering places; then there was the double bubble when two households could see each other. This was followed by the bubble that included a maximum of six people who would be close contacts. By Newfoundland's definition, close contact would be someone you spend more than 15 minutes with at closer than a six-foot distance (Maher, 2020; CBC News, 2020). The measures taken to curtail the virus spread in the province created anxiety based on the varying observations of lockdowns versus a lack of lockdowns in participants' home countries. Anna, an international student whose parents, siblings, and grandparents were still in her home country. She felt anxious. I traced her anxiety to the news from her home country (Tanzania). The president's attitude, and the lifestyle of people in her home country. She stated that in Tanzania, there were neither lockdown measures nor masking mandates: people were living in a state of oblivion in the face of COVID-19 deaths around the world. When people got sick with COVID-19, it was traced to something else instead of the virus. This attitude affected her greatly, even though she was in St. John's, NL. Anna engaged in a process of meaning-making, which enabled her to compare and interpret her experience in the NL with what exists in Africa. However, this interpretation led to feelings of anxiety as she saw COVID-19 as a severe issue that required urgent attention, just like it was being treated in St. John's. Using this same understanding, she assessed the COVID-19 situation in her home country and noticed some usual trends.

> I think the only thing that was scary for me was that here, we were very informed that we had the case numbers and the deaths, and many people were hospitalized. However, when you spoke to people back home, I remember specifically for Tanzania. The president at the time was Marco, and he said there was no COVID in Tanzania. So, while there was a lockdown in the entire world, Tanzania, I would see my friends partying. He said he could not shut down the economy because he did not have a budget, so everything was going on as normal because he said there was no COVID in the country. If you die from COVID-19, the hospital will record it as something else. People were getting sick, and people were dying, and I was worried whenever I heard a friend or family was sick (Anna, in her mid-20s, migrated in 2018).

Health requirements were a source of anxiety for African newcomer immigrants. Immediately I observed this, and I thought it would be because of the high rate of COVID-19 infection and the pressure on the health system. However, my respondents mentioned the absence of health coverage and mandatory vaccination. Ruby, a former international student who graduated in 2020, could not get health coverage because her post-graduate work permit was delayed. At the time, she was working as a cashier and had a high chance of contracting the virus. She was worried, scared and stressed because she had two children who did not have medical coverage as well.

> As an international student, you know that your medical cover (MCP) ends immediately after your studies. I finished it during the pandemic. I was here with two children with no health coverage. This was a very scary, isolating, lonely moment, even though I was not alone because I was with my children. However, if my children get sick, I take them to the hospital. It is so expensive to pay for medical care from my pocket. Remember, I was a cashier selling and attending to many people to sustain the family, and I was also coming out from not having a job for so long. I was very exposed and worried (Ruby, in her early 50s, migrated in 2019).

Likewise, the compulsory vaccination rule at this time made some of my respondents uncomfortable and afraid. Papito, a permanent resident who worked with the government, was uncomfortable taking the vaccine but could not avoid it because it was mandatory. The vaccination was not a guarantee that you would not get the virus. People who got the vaccination were still getting sick. His conclusion signals the influence of misinformation on the experience of anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

> The only issue was that it was mandatory to take the COVID-19 vaccine, and because I was working with the government, I had to take it. I would not say I liked that because I was supposed to be free to decide whether I wanted to take it. I was not comfortable taking the vaccine because people who took it were still getting sick. Then, a study from the UK on the vaccine, which established that people who took the vaccine were sicker and hospitalized longer

than those who did not take it, made me skeptical and afraid (Papito, in his 40s, migrated in 2019).

Most students worldwide underwent a transition to online classes, and Canadian students were no exception. This sudden shift from traditional, in-person learning to virtual classes presented more challenges for international students integrating into a changing system. In addition to the common struggles faced by most respondents while studying remotely, Jude was a self-assigned African ambassador for the African community within his academic circles. Jude expressed that he felt a sense of responsibility to represent his continent in a positive light, which added an emotional layer of anxiety to his academic challenges. As the only African student in his graduate class, he consistently felt the need to showcase a positive image to his peers and professors, which proved to be a significant source of anxiety for him.

> As the only African student in my department, you are an ambassador. This is how I saw myself: If I do badly or well, I represent Africans. Yeah, yeah. Whatever you do, will have a ripple effect on the ones that are coming after you. This means you must try to put yourself and your other people [Africans] in a good light. So, on all these things, my mind must do all these things. This results in expectation and anxiety (Jude, in his 30s, migrated in 2021).

5.1.2 How did they exercise agency?

While coping with COVID-19 anxiety, some respondents suggest that they exercised agency through what I call "introspection." Introspection, in this context, refers to an inward-looking self-evaluation that entails self-advocacy, self-awareness, and reflection. One individual, Ruby, provides an example of this approach as she had to contend with delayed immigration documentation and the resultant impact on her health insurance. Ruby informed me that she had to advocate for herself as she believed that without her intervention, nothing would change. During her advocacy efforts, she corresponded with the provincial Medical Coverage Plan (MCP) committee, the health minister, the

health CEO, and CBC News. As a result of her efforts, she was granted an interview with CBC News, which subsequently caught the attention of the governing body of the MCP. Ruby received a response from the MCP governing body acknowledging her efforts and informing her that coverage could be obtained if she worked for a minimum of 30 hours. Self-advocacy helped her cope with COVID-19 anxiety, and her actions during pandemic-induced delays not only earned her and her family health coverage but also created a positive change in the provincial health system during the unprecedented time.

> I had to advocate for myself about MCP because COVID-19 delayed my immigration document. I wrote to the MCP office, health minister, internationalization office, and alums office stating my predicament. I also sent a direct message to the CEO of health. I was stressed. The CEO of health asked if I could interview with CBC. I agreed I did that FaceTime interview. Yeah. Moreover, my story was shown on, on me, on, on the television. During my interview, I mentioned my situation. Then the MCP office said, if you do 30 hours and your manager can write for you, we can offer coverage. My manager wrote for me how I got coverage (Ruby, in her early 50s, migrated in 2019).

While reflecting on the spread and infection rate of the virus, Aduko said he downplayed its impact by equating it to pneumonia or malaria in Africa. In doing this, Aduko labelled the virus as something familiar, thereby reducing this anxiety.

> Well, my fear got better when I started viewing COVID-19, like Pneumonia or Malaria, which is prevalent in Africa. I know steaming with hot water, menthol, and boiling spices would work for it. I remember combating worse things in Nigeria, so it is not a big deal (Aduko, in his 60s, migrated in 2019).

Also, the thought of home in Africa and the prospects of Canada being a future home was a mental haven for my respondents. They viewed home as a place where they felt welcomed and accepted. Ideally, a mental haven typically refers to a physical location, such as one's home, or a peaceful natural

setting where individuals feel safe, secure, and comfortable. My respondents mentioned home as a place of refuge from the anxiety and emotional uprising that came with the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Yusuf's thought of home as a haven helped him cope while integrating. When I probed further, he stated "home" as his home country. The psychological haven for my respondents was achieved through a mental or emotional state that required self-reflection and engaging in certain activities.

> Home is where your peace is. Home is where you can go and not have any fear. You know, you are accepted, and everything is there for you. So, you can live here, aspire and be where you want to be. This is my understanding of home from an African perspective, which keeps me going here (Yusuf, in his 40s, migrated in 2022).

This was shown in Jude's account. He said he constantly reminded himself of the motive behind his migration to Canada from his home country and watched movies that portrayed his home. His strategy helped him overcome anxiety during the complexities of his new reality. The mindset about my respondent's home country created a source of strength and resilience regardless of the current reality in the host country. The thought of home was a source of strength and agency that allowed them to cope during the pandemic.

> I think it is a case of me reminding myself because you can easily be overwhelmed here. After all, when you look back home and observe people struggling, you feel privileged. However, at the same time, you should not allow that to get into your head. So, I remind myself that I am here for a reason: to learn to relax and take it a day at a time. I usually watched Yoruba Movies on African magic then to relax (Jude, in his 30s, migrated in 2021).

In addition to the thought of home in their home country, some respondents stated that the thoughts of the future integration opportunities in Canada helped them cope. In Canada, international students contribute to economic growth through their enormous tuition fees and tax remittance from on and off-campus jobs. Post-graduation, international students can get a post-study work permit, apply for

permanent residence, and become citizens. This migration future and the perception of Canada becoming home soon helped them cope. This is evident in Boss's comment as he suggests that the thought of St. John's being a future home created the avenue to cope with the challenges experienced during the pandemic. This is interesting, considering only 3 in 10 international students achieved landed immigrant status after a decade. This varies considerably by the level of study (Choi et al., 2021).

> Despite the rigour involved in settling here, I knew I would be better off with time as I could work, and my family could be comfortable. Here, there is no gun violence. Violence and crime are low here compared to the US. The police will not just stop you, like in my home country or the US (Boss, in his 30s, migrated in 2021).

Similarly, Pauline's excerpts show that immigrants' integration prospects gave them hope that there was light at the end of the tunnel and helped them exercise their agency as they sought to interpret their integration experiences.

> If you look at these three countries, the UK, the US, and Canada, the Canadian immigration process has certain perks that you would enjoy, as opposed to the UK and the US. For example, you would get your work permits in Canada after graduation. I do not know what it is like in the UK. I heard that you go back or something. However, the immigration process is not straightforward—the same thing as the US. In Canada, it is easy to follow the rules and the guidelines; there is a straight path to citizenship. I know that. Yes, it is getting hard, but compared to those other countries. It is easier (Pauline, in her 20s, migrated in 2019).

The acceptance of being a second-class citizen and embracing the racial dynamics was a shield against potential disappointments and a coping strategy. Emeka shares his experience of accepting his status as a second-class citizen in a foreign land. He explains that for him, embracing the racial dynamics and not expecting to be loved was a coping strategy that shielded him against potential disappointments.

I am in a different man's country. Once you are not in your own country, do not expect to be loved. They cannot love you more than their people. So that has been my shield, or my buffer or the cushion. You will always be a second-class citizen in somebody else's country, even if you are a permanent resident or become a citizen. So far, your colour is Black. You will be a second-class citizen. Because, after all, we are all economic immigrants if you put it that way. We are all here for economic reasons. If you come here to school, you want to settle here after school, so it is for economic reasons. Settling down and building connections is affected by the historical treatment of Black people here. So, always expect racism even though they claim racism no longer exists or it is a historical thing. However, it is happening practically happening here. So, I do not expect an easy entry. I did not expect to be loved (Emeka, in his 20s, migrated in 2022).

According to Emeka, when you are not in your home country, you cannot expect to be treated equally, especially in a country where you are not an actual resident. By this statement, Emeka suggests that he has internalized the realities of being a visible minority in a predominantly White place. He further explains that you are not an actual resident, regardless of your migration status. This shows his weak sense of belonging while integrating during the pandemic. Emeka exercised his agency through this mindset, which he notes served as a cushion and buffer to navigate the complexities of living as a minority in a foreign land and allowed him to cope with the challenges he experienced while building social connections with Newfoundlanders and people of other White ethnicities in St. John's, NL.

The educational framework appeared distinct to most of my international student participants, who relied on their resilience and religious beliefs to overcome the challenges they encountered. Within my study, religion acted as opium to these individuals as they navigated the difficulties of schooling online during the pandemic and integrating into a changing social system. For example, Jude found strength in being resilient and trusting God when faced with anxiety and the fear of academic setbacks.

I aimed to improve my writing, which my lecturers complained about. I had to ensure I had the best attitude so they would see that this guy tried when they collated the results at the end of the

day. Even though I do not score A or B, they can see my intentions and effort. I was saying to God, you brought me here for this master, oh. I will try and do everything I can to convince these people. God, the rest is left to you. I am going to do my best. I will attend classes despite all of this, my assignments I will make sure I do them. However, the rest is left to you to see me through this. It was unbelievable. I had to deal with that expectation and anxiety. I kept encouraging myself because there was no one to talk to about this (Jude, in his 30s, migrated in 2021).

This section analyzed the various aspects of anxiety experienced by African newcomer immigrants in St. John's, NL, during the COVID-19 pandemic. It notes that they faced anxiety due to social isolation, family disconnections, health-related challenges, and differences in pandemic responses between Canada and their countries of origin. Family was a central element in many immigrants' experiences, as separation from loved ones and the loss of family members to COVID-19 significantly contributed to their anxiety. Health-related anxieties were also prevalent, transition to online learning posed challenges for international students, who felt pressure to represent their home countries positively. Coping mechanisms varied, with some individuals relying on introspection, advocacy, and religious faith to navigate their anxieties.

5.2 COVID-19-related Loneliness and Integration

The stay-at-home and social distancing mandates during the lockdown in March 2020 created the feeling of loneliness for some of my respondents. Everybody had to be indoors, but this was not easy for newcomer immigrants since the initial migration phase is usually challenging. My respondents were moving from the known to the unknown. Based on the isolation and masking mandates, people could not interact physically during the lockdown. Their challenges with loneliness ranged from being alone in isolation to feeling isolated due to the absence of Black people in their geographic location. They could not see similar others, given that they were relegated to their domestic, indoor life. Jude expressed his feelings of loneliness during his isolation. However, even after the isolation ended, he continued to

struggle with feelings of loneliness. His inability to interact with fellow Black people or other residents of St. John's perpetuated his sense of isolation and loneliness.

> Loneliness was a big issue. Having to stay in quarantine for over two weeks was tough. Everywhere was deserted. I struggled with the fact that I could not see people. Then, we could not even see anybody outside. Also, not seeing other Black people. It is not easy (Jude, in his mid-30s, migrated in 2021).

Thomas stated similar sentiments, noting that the absence of physical interaction significantly contributed to his loneliness. Their comments suggest they felt trapped backstage because the isolation protocols and the masking mandates while in the community made it impossible to interact using the front stage. His comments also reiterate how interactions with people on the periphery of our social networks or host society can influence our feelings of loneliness. It also supports Sandstrom and Dunn's (2014) argument that there is a close connection between interactions with weak ties related to our subjective well-being and feelings of belonging.

> It was a very lonely experience being an international student in a new place. Your family is far from you; it was quite a lonely experience. There was a new variant … I was not working. I had decided to stay home, so technically, I was not seeing anyone physically. If I needed to see people, I went to the community, especially Walmart, but everyone wore a mask. You cannot see or see any faces, which made it even more difficult (Thomas, in his 30s, migrated in 2021).

Likewise, the suspended time in loneliness increased the feeling of being trapped backstage. Also, interactions with people who are not necessarily close to us, known as weak ties, have been found to contribute significantly to our social and emotional well-being. Although they may not play a vital role in our daily experiences, the absence of these interactions can make our day feel incomplete. Therefore, interacting with individuals on the periphery of our social networks can positively impact our social and emotional well-being (Gillian & Dunn, 2014; Sprecher, 2022). Unwako's narrative illustrates how

monotonous routines intensify feelings of isolation and the significance of mundane routines, like grocery shopping, as essential avenues for connecting with others and mitigating loneliness. Unwako explained that school ended early, and she had to stay home. The lockdown lasted longer than expected, and she was idle. The experience made her feel isolated, sad, and unhappy, and all the days of the week were just the same: there was no school, no work, no cars on the streets, and no pedestrians. Although her mum and siblings were checking in with her, she still felt isolated, sad, and idle. The feeling of loneliness preceded the pandemic, and the social isolation and distancing measures just intensified pre-existing loneliness.

> School ended early, and I was unemployed. I was not able to do anything. My siblings were with my parents. They will call and make jokes. They seemed happy while I was here, sad and doing nothing. Every day was the same… I could not even go grocery shopping; stores had a capacity limit. I get angry whenever I look outside; no one is on the street. No cars passing the lockdown was strange (Unwako, in her 20s, migrated in 2018).

Emerald, who migrated two years before the pandemic, provided a broader view by stating that although the pandemic stirred up loneliness for immigrants, loneliness did not start during the pandemic. Still, immediately after emigration, the lockdown and social distancing amounted to the same thing. In her comment, Emerald shows that immigrants experience some form of social exclusion and tend to spend time alone.

> You could not go to some places during that time, but I am here alone. So, the pandemic and keeping me at home are like the lifestyle you would have had before the pandemic because it is not like I have family living in Canada. It is almost like you are always alone. Mm-hmm. So, when the time comes for you to be more alone, it is the same (Emerald, in her 30s, migrated in 2017).

5.2.2 How did they exercise agency?

To cope with this intense loneliness, community support and friends aided my participants in their attempt to overcome loneliness. The lockdown created an avenue to rekindle existing friendships by exploring creative ways to connect. This is exemplified in Anna's comment about how the lockdown inspired her and her friends to find creative ways of spending time together. Anna highlights friendship as a coping mechanism.

> You know, quarantine and everything we used to stay that the entire house was just friends, us girls. So, you know, it gave us even more time to bond and because things were shut down, there is nowhere else to go. I found creative ways of spending time together. We were mostly Africans in the house (Anna, in her mid-20s, migrated in 2018).

> Social media platforms served as lifelines for my participants, who relied on Discord, Facebook connections, and other virtual brackets to interact in isolation or quarantine during the pandemic. Nathan coped with loneliness with the support from his virtual gatherings/events facilitated by school advisors. Thomas also leveraged the Discord platform of his school and Facebook groups created for the university community to overcome his loneliness.

> At that time, they were student advisors who would help you understand the norms of university life and life outside school and help with social insurance numbers. If you have any questions, you can ask. Sometimes, we even have our entertaining virtual event where people meet and interact, stir conversations, and exchange numbers (Nathan, in his 20s, migrated in 2021).

> Right. It is quite hard. However, there are Facebook groups. Okay. Where we communicate, and you get to know some people virtually, at least through Facebook and Discord. There is also a Discord group. So, for my house, my classmates, and the university community, it is mainly through these online platforms (Thomas, in his 40s, migrated in 2021).

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The lockdown measures implemented in March 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, led to significant feelings of loneliness among African immigrants in St. John's, NL. The isolation and social distancing mandates intensified pre-existing loneliness, especially for those struggling to adjust to their new environment. To cope with loneliness, immigrants relied on community support and friendships, finding creative ways to connect with others despite the restrictions. Social media platforms, such as Discord and Facebook, played a crucial role in facilitating virtual interactions and gatherings, providing a lifeline for individuals experiencing loneliness.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented results on the multifaceted integration challenges experienced by African newcomer immigrants in St. John's, NL, during an unprecedented global crisis - the COVID-19 pandemic. In recognition of the diverse experiences of newcomers during this period are crucial for shaping responsive policies and support systems. The narratives presented in this chapter contribute to a broader understanding of social interactions African newcomer immigrants face in an aspiring gateway and a mid-sized city (St. John's). This chapter highlights the resilience and adaptability virtues of African Newcomer immigrants in St. John's, NL, amid the COVID-19 pandemic emotional realities. It illustrates how African newcomers' anxiety and loneliness were contested through introspection, religion, self-advocacy, self-awareness, and reflection, focusing on the idea of home in Africa as a haven and relying on social media platforms and virtual brackets.

Figure 4: Emotional reactions to integration experience summary
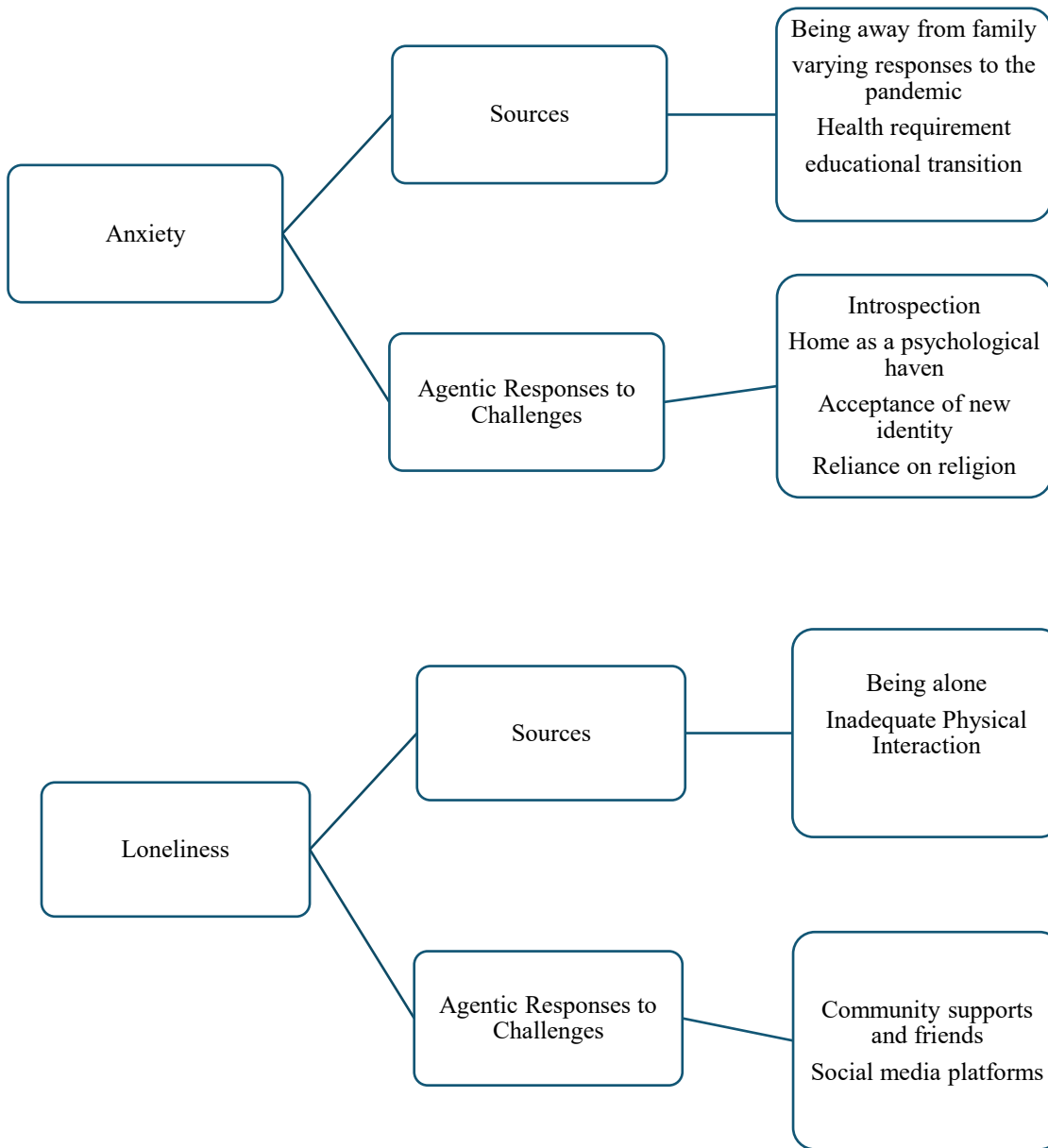
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This research presents the lived experiences of African newcomer immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study uses 17 semi-structured interviews with African newcomer immigrants in St. John's, Newfoundland, and Labrador, who migrated between 2018 and 2022. The study explores What the integration process was like for African immigrants in St. John's during the COVID-19 pandemic (between 2020 and 2022), emphasizing the difficulties and their interpretation of the difficulties. How did they exercise their agency while navigating this experience? Overall African immigrant newcomers faced considerable challenges while trying to integrate into society and the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, I assert that they had strong emotional responses to their integration experience during the pandemic in St. John's, NL. They had varied interpretations of their experiences, and while they were coping, they demonstrated agency.

This chapter comprises two parts: the discussion and the conclusion. Before exploring these aspects, I will outline the key findings from the study in the upcoming paragraphs. First, in building social connections generally in St. John's, the closedown of social gathering places affected African newcomer immigrants' ability to build social connections. In building social connections with fellow Africans (bonding), findings establish busy schedules, misplaced cultural values, and personality traits as the major reason for the challenges experienced during the pandemic. To cope with these challenges related to building social connections with fellow Africans, they exercised agency by trying to understand the different friendship categories abroad.

On the other hand, in building social connections with Newfoundlanders and other White residents (bridging), cultural differences, the notion of dual skepticism and the presence of close-knit friendship circles were the major challenges they faced. To overcome these challenges, African

newcomer immigrants learned to exist beyond the predetermined labels by understanding and accepting their new status as a stranger and second-class citizens and by taking the educator role.

The study also identifies employment-related challenges tied to the lockdown era of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also identifies integration challenges experienced by African newcomers, including unemployment and changes in their work while integrating during the pandemic. To overcome these challenges, African newcomers realigned expectations to suit current social realities and sought support from family, friends, and government sources.

The study notes challenges in securing suitable housing amidst soaring rental prices and bureaucratic shifts triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite their initial optimism about housing integration prospects, many respondents expressed disappointment as they faced challenges like unsanitary conditions and heating issues in shared accommodations during lockdowns. The lockdown period largely forced them to endure substandard living conditions. To overcome this, they relied on personal connections with family and friends for support to cope.

Reactions to the challenges experienced during the pandemic included feelings of loneliness and anxiety. Although both reactions have been noted to be synonymous with migration, this study identifies sources quite different from pre-pandemic studies. The experience of anxiety noted in this study is traced to being away from family during a crisis, varying responses to the pandemic, health requirements and educational transition. To cope with these challenges, my participants exercised agency while coping with anxiety through introspection and viewing home in Africa as a mental haven. The thought of Canada becoming a future home also helped them cope. Likewise, they embraced the racial dynamics, accepted their new identity as second-class citizens, and relied on religious beliefs to overcome these challenges. In contrast, loneliness was due to limited opportunities to interact with others based on the social distancing orders during the lockdown. African newcomer immigrants relied

on community support, friends, and social media platforms to cope with these challenges and exercise their agency.

Discussion

These findings are consistent with studies on African immigrants in Canada, which show the impacts of COVID-19 created a different form of challenges for sub–Saharan Africans due to the intersecting systems of race, gender, and class marginalization (Amoako & MacEachen, 2021; Firang & Mensah, 2022; Jakobson et al., 2023; Mensah & Williams, 2022; Lamb et al., 2022; Nardon et al., 2020). Likewise, it supports their conclusion that COVID-19 exposed inequalities in employment conditions. My findings coincide with the ideology that crisis cascades from one sector of society to another (Walby, 2015; Porta, 2020; Walby, 2021), the time of migration impacts immigrants' integration experience (Kazemipur, 2008; Jakobson et al., 2023; Bonilla- Silva 2019) and the pandemic created high levels of loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Sidani et al., 2022; Campbell, 2020).

Also, the findings on the coping ability of African newcomer immigrants correspond with Kuo (2016), who establishes religious involvement as a coping technique adopted by older immigrants to cope with limitations, losses, and the inherent difficulty in post-migration integration. The findings support scholars' argument that ethno-racial origin serves as a potential barrier to social integration (Nakhaie & Kazemipur, 2012; Wu et al., 2012; Colbert, 2013; Chai et al., 2018; Kazemipur, 2008; Enns et al., 2013). In addition, looking closely at studies focused on Newfoundland and Labrador and St. John's, the findings support the conclusion that immigrants struggle to integrate into existing structures in housing, transportation, education, and economy (Coombs-Thorne & Warren, 2007; Siddiq et al., 2012; Gien & Law, 2009; Li et al., 2017; Pottie-Sherman, 2024).

Despite the overlap with existing studies, these research findings contribute to race studies and integration literature. They illustrate the difficulties experienced by individuals, their interpretation of

these difficulties, and how they exercised agency while coping with the challenges during the pandemic. The study suggests that the gap between long-term residents and immigrants in St. John's is no longer too wide to be bridged, as documented by Kazemipur (2008). It found that African immigrants in St. John's had opportunities to interact with older residents even during the COVID-19 restrictions. Despite high levels of unemployment and underemployment, as noted in pre-pandemic studies (Crea-Arsenio et al., 2022; Oreopoulos, 2011), the study shows that the challenges related to changes in the mode of employment and job description continued during the pandemic. It also highlights how individuals overcame these challenges by adjusting their employment expectations and relying on social support systems during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The timing of integration plays a crucial role in the housing experience of individuals. This expands upon the findings of previous scholars (Walsh et al., 2015; Teixeria, 2014; Simmone & Newbold, 2014; Brown, 2016) who identified discrimination, poor transportation, and affordability issues as reasons for housing dissatisfaction before the pandemic. The study also highlights unsanitary conditions and heating issues as additional reasons for housing dissatisfaction. This study extends the research of Pottie-Sherman et al. (2024), showing that newcomers in St. John's, NL, faced housing discrimination, affordability challenges, intersectional prejudice, and exploitation by landlords amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, the findings add insights into the emotional reactions accompanying integrating post-migration. They agree that newcomer international students struggle with financial burdens, navigating study permit restrictions, and excelling in a competitive university (Dombou et al., 2023). However, they extend our knowledge by establishing how learning online while integrating into a changing system during a highly restricted time adds several layers to the educational struggles experienced globally during the pandemic.

The study likewise demonstrates that sources of emotions such as anxiety and loneliness for newcomers go beyond being an older immigrant, having a medical condition, or experiencing intimate partner violence (Sidani et al., 2022; Gagnon & Stewart, 2014; Lee et al., 2022; Kogan et al., 2022; Dombou et al., 2023). The absence or little proxy of fellow Black people in the physical space, news from home country, loss, and health coverage concerns were sources of emotional reactions to integration challenges. However, the study uncovers additional sources of psychological reactions to integration challenges, which include the absence or scarcity of fellow Black individuals in their physical surroundings, updates from their home country, grief, and concerns about health coverage. Notably, these sources of emotional reactions go beyond age, medical conditions, and intimate partner violence identified by prior studies. The study goes further by detailing that newcomer international students who were learning online while adapting to a rapidly changing system during a time of high restrictions had emotional reactions of anxiety as they took on the role of self-conferred ambassador.

This adds to Dombou et al. (2023) argument that international students often struggle with financial difficulties, navigating study permit restrictions, and excelling in a competitive university. Additionally, a recent study (Wijekoon et al., 2022) found that religion serves as a coping mechanism for late-life immigrants, supporting the notion that it is the opium of immigrants. However, this study further suggests that participants did not solely rely on religion during the pandemic due to age. International students navigating changing educational policies also turned to religion for comfort. The study also reveals that immigrants' coping strategies go beyond the psychological and medical sources identified by Kuo (2016). These strategies include self-advocacy, engaging in indoor relaxing activities, reconnecting with old friends, thinking of home in Africa, virtual gatherings, accepting their status as second-class citizens in Canada, lowering job expectations, moving out of the city for employment, seeking support from friends and family, learning to exist beyond labels, developing a self-sufficient

mindset, befriending older individuals, understanding the different friendship categories abroad, and accepting and normalizing experiences of racism as coping strategies employed by African immigrants.

This research was guided by the symbolic interaction theory (Blumer, 1986; Cooley, 1964). The study's conclusions can be linked to symbolic interactionism, highlighting the personal experiences and significance that African immigrants associate with their integration challenges. Symbolic interactionism suggests that individuals construct meanings through interactions with others and their surroundings. In this study, the lack of presence of fellow Black individuals in physical spaces, updates from their home country, loss, and concerns about healthcare coverage are identified as significant triggers of emotional responses. By centering on the personal meanings and interactions that shape the experiences of African immigrants, this study adds to a deeper comprehension of their overall integration journey.

Conclusion

The study examines the integration experience of African newcomers in St. John's, NL, focusing on their challenges, their interpretation of these challenges, and how they exercised agency in overcoming them, their agency in overcoming them. It sheds light on the experiences of an emerging racial group whose voices have historically received limited attention, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. By highlighting the experiences of racial minorities in a mid-sized context, the study provides valuable insights that can inform future newcomer integration strategies. This research could help shape policies to support the effective integration of African newcomers and guide the allocation of program-related funding. Moreover, organizations focused on serving newcomers in St. John's, NL, could benefit from these findings to assess the alignment of their services with the needs of African newcomers, potentially leading to policy and service delivery improvements.

This is one of a few studies that examine the African newcomer immigrants' integration experience in a mid-sized Canadian city, St. John's, and how the pandemic shaped the integration experience of African newcomers. Nevertheless, like all research, this study is limited in some ways. First, the study includes only Africans who migrated from an African country to Canada between 2018 and 2022, excluding other Africans who migrated from another Western society to St. John's, whose experiences might be similar to my respondents'. The study participants were all self-identified Africans with dark-skinned tones. Therefore, the findings exclude the lived experiences of White South Africans and other biracial Africans. Also, the study only focuses on St. John's, a capital city; interactions in the major city usually differ from what exists in suburban or rural spaces; thus, it will be beneficial to consider how different parts of Newfoundland and Labrador affect people's ability to build social connections. However, enlarging the sample size can be beneficial. I achieved data saturation was achieved with a sample size of 17. There was a large presentation of the experiences of the Nigerian participants because Nigerian participants accounted for 47% of my respondent population. This could not be avoided as the participants were admitted based on their interest in being involved in the study. Also, the study did not consider the distinctions among newcomers, distinctions between new residents as permanent residents, temporary foreign workers, and international students affect their integration in Newfoundland and Labrador. The findings did not consider if these experiences are gendered.

Future studies can endeavour to understand how the post-pandemic era influences African newcomers' integration in St. John's, considering the pandemic created a housing and economic crunch. The challenges African newcomer immigrants face in developing social connections with other immigrants from other non-White ethnic backgrounds in St. John's can be explored in future studies. Also, it would be interesting to examine how the integration experiences of recent cohorts of African immigrants in St. John's differ from those of earlier cohorts. Although the study provides an in-depth

analysis of how migration timing determines integration, a comparative analysis across the growing ethnocultural group of newcomers would give more insight into their integration challenges during the pandemic. It would be worthwhile to consider how the differences between newcomers as permanent residents, temporary foreign workers, and international students hinder or foster their integration in Newfoundland and Labrador.

This study highlights the experiences of African newcomers with the hope that the findings will inform positive changes in the province. Given these findings, I establish that African newcomers in St. John's had trouble integrating during the COVID-19 pandemic but were resilient. Also, I resolve that the needs of immigrants are diverse and change over time. There is a constant need to reevaluate the experiences of African newcomers in the province to ensure they feel welcomed. I emphasize the importance of social connections and a sense of belonging to successful integration in the early stages of this study. Thus, providing host families as initial contacts might benefit permanent residents, economic immigrants and international students.

Certainly, conducting a study with African newcomer immigrants during the pandemic is crucial for several reasons. The ongoing global health crisis has exacerbated existing inequalities for African newcomer immigrants and their unique challenges. Also, different urban environments create distinct challenges for newcomers. Studying their experiences in an "aspiring gateway" (Pottie-Sherman & Graham, 2023, p. 288) and a welcoming mid-sized city can inform policymakers, community organizations, and service providers on ways to develop vital post-COVID-19 recovery and provincial development plans to enhance the overall experience within the city.

In this study, I sought to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic shaped the integration experience of African newcomer immigrants, focusing on the challenges they experienced and coping strategies employed. This analysis was completed from a symbolic interaction perspective; specifically,

I focused on how African immigrants develop and assign shared meanings and the social processes that influence their interpretation. I also introduced 'dual skepticism' to describe African newcomer immigrants' mindset about making friends with White people in St. John's. I explained that African immigrants perceive that Whites and Blacks in the city have reservations about each other. These reservations, especially for African newcomers immigrants, determine their perception and willingness to build social connections with Newfoundlanders and other White residents. I analyzed the challenges of making friends using Putnam's (2000) bridging and bonding approach to social capital. Also, the Canadian educational system is a complex and demanding system for immigrants, and the unforeseen challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic made it even more difficult for newcomers. Thus, an all-encompassing approach that includes academic support, mental health resources, and community-building initiatives must be available to African newcomers.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of collective efforts in overcoming challenges and building a more inclusive future. It highlights the role of the timing of integration and how identity shapes immigrant experiences post-migration. I argue that these gaps can be bridged by creating a more inclusive and interconnected social fabric. However, it must be a shared responsibility involving immigrants and the broader society. The city and province need to recognize cultural diversity and dismantle stereotypes to facilitate social connections between ethnicities as St. John's grows. Newfoundland and Labrador can only reaffirm its role as an aspiring gateway and a welcoming city by providing housing options, encouraging the employment of newcomers without Canadian experience, promoting cultural diversity, and creating social engagement opportunities for social connections. It is crucial to have policies in place that promote the attainment of the labour market potential and performance of immigrants in the province, as this directly affects the growth and development of the economy.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

The interview guide will be as follows:

1. Please tell me about your first week in St. John's.

a. Prompt: how did you feel on arrival?

b. Prompt: were there any surprises?

2. How will you describe your experience after the first month?

Appendix 2: Ethics Approval

ICEHR Number:	**20231337-AR**
Approval Period:	February 27, 2023 – February 29, 2024
Funding Source:	
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Lisa-Jo van den Scott Department of Sociology
Title of Project:	*Post-migration and Integration experiences during COVID-19 pandemic in Canada: A case study of African newcomer immigrants in St. John's, NL*
Amendment #:	*01*

March 22, 2023

Ms. Atinuke Tiamiyu
Department of Sociology
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Memorial University

Dear Ms. Tiamiyu:

The Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) has reviewed the proposed revisions for the above referenced project, as outlined in your amendment request dated March 17, 2023. We are pleased to give approval to the revised inclusion criteria, as described in your request, provided all other previously approved protocols are followed.

The *TCPS2* **requires** that you **strictly adhere to the protocol and documents as last reviewed** by ICEHR. If you need to make any other additions and/or modifications during the conduct of the research, you must submit an Amendment Request with a description of these changes, for the Committee's review of potential ethical issues, before they may be implemented. Submit a Personnel Change Form to add or remove project team members and/or research staff. Also, to inform ICEHR of any unanticipated occurrences, an Adverse Event Report must be submitted with an indication of how the unexpected event may affect the continuation of the project.

Your ethics clearance for this project expires **February 29, 2024**, before which time you must submit an Annual Update to ICEHR, as required by the *TCPS2*. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance, and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer requires contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you need to provide an annual update with a brief final summary, and your file will be closed.

All post-approval ICEHR event forms noted above must be submitted by selecting the *Applications: Post-Review* link on your Researcher Portal homepage.

The Committee would like to thank you for the update on your proposal and we wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely,

James R Drover

James Drover, Ph.D.
Vice-Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research

JD/bc
cc: Supervisor – Dr. Lisa-Jo van den Scott, Department of Sociology

Appendix 3: Recruitment Poster

Are you an African?
Did you migrate to St. John's NL between 2017 and 2022?
I would love to talk with you

I am Atinuke Tiamiyu, an MA sociology student at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) interested in examining African immigrants' experiences in Canada.

Study title: Post-migration and Integration experiences during COVID-19 pandemic in Canada: A case study of African newcomer immigrants in St. John's, NL.

Who can participate:
Africans;
- who are 18years and above
- who are either temporary foreign workers, international students or permanent residents.
- who migrated to St.John's NL between 2017-2022 from an African country

How to participate
- Send an email to aotiamiyu@mun.ca to signify your interest.

What's Involved:
- an opportunity to share your experiences with a fellow African
- 45minutes audio recorded interview
- in-person meeting at your preferred location

Participation in this research is voluntary and is not a requirement of the institutions sending this on my behalf.
The proposal for the research is in compliance with memorial Univeristy's ethics policy. For more information contact the chairperson ICEHR at icehr.chair@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861

Appendix 4: TCPS 2: CORE 2022 Certificate

PANEL ON
RESEARCH ETHICS
Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE 2022

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Atinuke Tiamiyu

successfully completed the Course on Research Ethics based on
the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research
Involving Humans (TCPS 2: CORE 2022)

Certificate # 0000827034   **15 December, 2022**

Appendix 5: Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Post-migration and Integration Experiences during COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada: a case study of African newcomer immigrants in St. John's, NL.

Principal Investigator: Atinuke Tiamiyu. Graduate Student, Department of Sociology, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. Phone number 709-730-8940. Email address: aotiamiyu@mun.ca

Thesis Supervisors: Dr Daniel Kudla. Department of Sociology, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. Phone number 709-864-7584. Email address: dkudla@mun.ca.   Dr Lisa-jo van den Scott. Department of Sociology, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. Phone number 709-864-8677. Email address: lvandenscott@mun.ca

Purpose of the study: There is an increase in the number of immigrants in Newfoundland and Labrador owing to the shrinking workforce and implementation of various immigrant attraction schemes. These immigrants migrate with expectations of improving their living conditions and socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, on arrival, immigrants struggle to be integrated into the existing economic, housing, education, social structures and other aspects of life based on their skin colour and accent. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the landscape of employment from physical to virtual, reduced social gatherings to the barest in Newfoundland and Labrador and highlighted the importance of suitable housing based on the stay-at-home mandates. Hence, the research aims to understand how the pandemic shaped African immigrants' ability to secure employment, build social connections with fellow Africans, long-term residents, and Newfoundlanders and access satisfactory housing in St. John's NL. This research will contribute to the limited literature on the experiences of African newcomer immigrants' post-migration and integration experience in St. John's NL.

Invitation to participate: You are invited to participate in this study. Choosing to participate is entirely voluntary (your choice). If you decide not to participate, there are no short-term or long-term negative impacts. Participation in this study is not a requirement of the institutions that sent out the recruitment posters, neither does your decision to participate or not affect your relationship with the institution. The information provided in this form explains what participation involves. Please read this form carefully, and do not hesitate to ask any arising questions. Also, note that consent is an ongoing process during the research, and you can withdraw your participation at any stage.

What does it entail?

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be required to have an hour-long audio-recorded interview with the researcher (Atinuke Tiamiyu) at your preferred location. The interview will include basic conversations about your experiences in St. John's NL - how you were able to make friends, secure housing, gain employment and how the pandemic affected you as an African immigrant in St. John's NL.

Who can take part in the research study?

To be involved in this study you must be an African immigrant who migrated to St. John's between 2018-2022 from an African country as a permanent resident, temporary foreign worker or international student and be at least 18 years old. I am looking to recruit 25 participants in total.

Possible risks and benefits:

Risks: The interview involves your experience as an immigrant in St. John's NL so it might raise some pleasant and unpleasant feelings/memories. If this happens and you need counselling support in dealing with arising emotions, kindly contact the Student and Wellness Counselling Center (709-864-8500, option #3) if you are a Memorial University Student or Bridge the GAPP (709-729-3658) if you are a permanent resident or a temporary foreign worker. If during the interview, you find a question

uncomfortable you can skip/ignore the question. You have the right to withdraw your participation in the project at any time.

Benefits: There are no direct or instant benefits from participating in the study. However, your participation will avail you the opportunity to share your experiences and contribute to the limited knowledge about the African immigrants' experience in Newfoundland & Labrador and Canada.

Privacy and confidentiality

All recordings from the interview and transcribed data will be saved using codes on the researcher's passworded laptop. Pseudo-names will be assigned when reporting findings. Other personal information such as gender, age range, and country of origin collected in this research will only be used for comparative purposes. If you mention your name during the interview, it will be removed after verbatim transcription. Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research.

Limits to confidentiality

There is a possibility that some of the direct quotes used in the report may be identifiable, due to the relatively small study sample.

Compensation

There will be a draw for five Tim Hortons $10 gift cards to show you for your time and participation in the study. The draw will be completed once all the interviews have been conducted and winners will be selected at random from the list of all participants. Please note, that the appreciation draw is only for participants who complete an interview session with the researcher (Atinuke Tiamiyu). This implies that if you consent to participate, but change your mind before coming to the session, you will not be eligible for the draw. However, if you consent to participate but change your mind during the session you will be eligible for the draw.

Reporting of results

Research products will include academic articles in journals, book chapters, a report for Op-ed, academic conferences, and non-academic presentations. The thesis will be publicly available via Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II Library online thesis collection at http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses. Participants will not be identifiable as pseudo names will be assigned and quotes will be anonymized. A summary of the research will be sent to participants' email addresses based on individual preferences as indicated on the signature page.

Withdrawing from the study

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you initially decide to participate but change your mind later, feel free to withdraw your participation. Your withdrawal does not have any consequence for you or for your relationship with the institution that sent out the recruitment poster on my behalf. Your decision to withdraw will not affect any other benefits accrued to you as an international student permanent resident or temporary foreign worker. If you choose to withdraw during the interview, the recordings will be terminated, and data will be removed from the research recordings. If you withdraw after the session, the recording will be deleted. However, if you withdraw after May 31, 2023, it is impossible to remove your responses as data analysis would commence on June 1, 2023.

Questions and contact information.

The proposal for this research was reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) and found to follow Memorial University's ethics policy.

 If you have any questions about the study or would like more information, please contact Atinuke Tiamiyu. Email address: aotiamiyu@mun.ca

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or ethical concerns about the research, you may contact:

The Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Signature Page

Project Title: Post-migration and Integration Experiences during COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada: a case study of African newcomer immigrants in St. John's, NL.

Principal Investigator: Atinuke Tiamiyu. Department of Sociology, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. Phone number 709-730-8940. Email address: aotiamiyu@mun.ca

Participants' signature and consent:

By signing this form, you are agreeing that you have read and understood what the study participation entails, and agree that:

- I understand the possible risks and benefits involved in the research.

- I reserve the right to participate as my participation is voluntary.

- My personal information will be protected.

- I can answer or skip questions based on my preference.

- I may withdraw participation before June 1, 2023.

- I can ask about the study at any time from either the researcher, thesis supervisors or ethics committee.

- I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.

- Quotes will be anonymized.

- The interview will be audio recorded.

    Name (First and last)   Signature   Date

Please provide an email address below for a summary of the study report.

Email address:

Signature of the person obtaining consent:

By signing this form, I attest that:

- I have explained what the study requires, and ensured the participant understands the consent form and agrees to participate before proceeding with the interview.

- I have answered all arising questions and provided the participant a copy of this consent form.

       Name (First and last)   Signature   Date

Appendix 6: Letter of Introduction to the Association of New Canadians in St. John's NL.

Tiamiyu Atinuke Olamide

Department of Sociology, Arts and Administration building, A1B 3X9.

Memorial University of Newfoundland.

E-mail: aotiamiyu@mun.ca

March 22, 2023.

Association of New Canadians,

144 Military Road, A1C 2E6.

Dear Administrative Officer,

Letter of Introduction

I am Tiamiyu Atinuke, a Master of Arts in Sociology student at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. I am an international student from Nigeria (Africa). I volunteer with the Association of New Canadians as a conversation circle ESL facilitator. I am writing to seek your help in circulating my recruitment poster to African immigrants either temporary foreign workers or permanent residents or international students in your network.

The poster is for my research titled **Post-migration and Integration Experiences during COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada: A Case Study of African Newcomer Immigrants in St. John's, NL**. The research aims to understand how the pandemic shaped the experiences of African newcomer immigrants who migrated from an African country between 2017-2022 to St. John's, NL. The research will contribute to the limited scholarship on African immigrants' lived experience in St. John's and will have policy implications in the current drive for immigrants' attraction and retention in the province.

I have attached a copy of my recruitment poster which can be circulated to all at arm's length based on your perusal and approval. I look forward to your favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Atinuke Tiamiyu.

Appendix 7: Letter of Introduction to Bethesda

Tiamiyu Atinuke Olamide

Department of Sociology, Arts and Administration building, A1B 3X9.

The Memorial University of Newfoundland.

E-mail: aotiamiyu@mun.ca

March 22, 2023.

Bethesda Pentecostal Church,

1 Escasoni Place, A1A 0K7.

Dear Administrative Officer,

Letter of Introduction

I am Tiamiyu Atinuke, a Master of Arts in Sociology student at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. I am an international student from Nigeria (Africa). I attend Bethesda and volunteer as an ESL facilitator for The Conversation café which is held every Wednesday. I am writing to seek your help in circulating my recruitment poster for African immigrants who attend Bethesda.

The poster is for my research titled **Post-migration and Integration Experiences during COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada: A Case Study of African Newcomer Immigrants in St. John's, NL**. The research aims to understand how the pandemic shaped the experiences of African newcomer immigrants who migrated from an African country between 2017-2022 to St. John's NL. The research will contribute to the limited scholarship on African immigrants lived experience in St. John's and will have policy implications in the current drive for immigrants' attraction and retention in the province.

Please find attached a copy of my recruitment poster which can be circulated to all at arm's length based on your perusal and approval. I look forward to your favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Atinuke Tiamiyu.

Appendix 8: Introduction Letter for Memorial University's Internationalization Office

Tiamiyu Atinuke Olamide

Department of Sociology, Arts and Administration building, A1B 3X9.

Memorial University of Newfoundland.

E-mail: aotiamiyu@mun.ca

March 22, 2023.

Internationalization Office,

Memorial University of Newfoundland,

Global Learning Centre, Room CA-2004,

57 Allandale Road (Burton's Pond), A1B 3S7.

Dear Administrative Officer,

Letter of Introduction

I am Tiamiyu Atinuke, a Master of Arts in Sociology student at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. I am an international student from Nigeria (Africa). I am seeking your help circulating my recruitment poster for international students and immigrants in your network.

The poster is for my research titled **Post-migration and Integration Experiences during COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada: A Case Study of African Newcomer Immigrants in St. John's, NL**. The research aims to understand how the pandemic shaped the experiences of Newcomer African immigrants who migrated from an African country between 2018-2022 to St. John's NL. The research will contribute to the limited scholarship on African immigrants' lived experience in St. John's and will have policy implications in the current drive for immigrants' attraction and retention in the province.

I have attached a copy of my recruitment poster which can be circulated to all at arm's length based on your perusal and approval. I look forward to your favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Atinuke Tiamiyu.