



CULTURAL CONFLICT IN PARENTING

Collection of
stories from African
mothers in Ireland

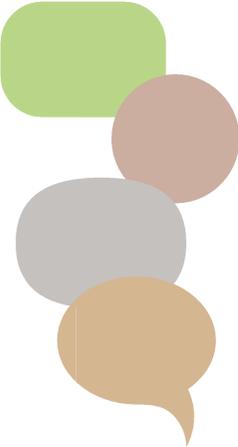




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Published by AkiDwA, The African and Migrant Women's Network
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This publication contains a collection of stories of
African mothers in Ireland about child upbringing.

The stories herein were collected and compiled by
Sharon Etokhana and edited by Hiba Awan.

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Acknowledgements

AkiDwA is most grateful to the strong mothers who told their tales in contribution to this book. To Dr Salome Mbugua, CEO AkiDwA who initiated and designed the project which led to the compiling of this book. The efforts of Sharon Etokhana who coordinated the project and compiled the stories and Hiba Awan who edited them are most appreciated.

AkiDwA would also like to thank the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner for its support in funding this project. The International Decade of People of African Descent in Ireland is duly lauded for their collaboration in this project.

Dedication

This book is also dedicated to the women who have bravely told and retold their experiences for the benefit of others and in the hope of achieving structural change. May the learning that comes from engaging with your stories yield the fruit of systemic change through cultural mediation. In addition, this book is dedicated to migrant parents of African descent who newly come into Ireland. These stories would hopefully provide insights into techniques on parenting and show them that they are not alone in their struggles. It would hopefully give them courage and strength knowing that others have walked the road before them.

Introduction

The history of people of African descent in Ireland can be traced back as late as the 1700s¹. As reported by Deirdre Finnerty of BCC news (December 2020) the mid-20th Century saw thousands of students travelling from African countries to study at Irish universities. Some had children outside of marriage leading to thousands of black and mixed-race children being born in Ireland during the 1950s and 60s. At the time these children were often placed in Ireland's notorious mother and baby homes. Today these children, now adults, are searching for their families. The voices and visibility of mixed-race people of African descent are only recently being uncovered by organisations such as the Association of Mixed-Race Irish.

Ireland in the last 30 years has seen a huge influx of inward migration. According to the last Census conducted in Ireland in 2016, there are 57,850 people living in Ireland that identify as people of African descent (1.4 % of the Irish population²). Some have citizenship while others hold varying immigration statuses which include, refugees, asylum seekers, students, religious, migrant workers, spouses of Irish or EU citizens or victims of trafficking.

People of African descent in Ireland face many challenges. The 2018 Monitoring Report on Integration shows that the employment rate of Africans is only 45% compared to an average of 70% for other minority nationality groups³. The employment of African women is 38%, 17% below the average female employment rate in Ireland⁴. In healthcare, people of African descent experience greater difficulty in accessing appropriate services and have worse health outcomes⁵. For example, women of African descent are more likely to suffer maternal deaths and complications during childbirth⁶. Racism and discrimination are evident at community, professional and institutional levels⁷.

1 W A Hart, "Africans in Eighteenth-Century Ireland" (2002) *Irish Historical Studies* 33(129), 19-32, 19

2 Central Statistics Office, "Census 2016 Summary Results – Part 1" April 2017, p60 Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/newsevents/documents/census2016summaryresultspart1/Census2016Summary-Part1.pdf> Accessed on 12.06.2022

3 Frances McGinnity, Éamonn Fahey, Emma Quinn, Samantha Arnold, Bertrand Maître and Philip O'Connell, "Monitoring Report on Integration 2018" Economic and Social Research Institute; Department of Justice and Equality 2018; p25 Available at: <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/media/file-uploads/2018-11/BKMNEXT364.pdf> Accessed on 12/06/2022

4 *ibid*

5 *ibid*

6 Neil Michael, "Perinatal mortality within African community in Ireland needs 'urgent' investigation", 08 May 2021, The Irish Examiner, Available at: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40283846.html> Accessed: 10.06.2022

7 n 3 Monitoring Report on Integration 2018; 26

A large number of Africans have gone through the Direct Provision system while seeking international protection, spending an average of 24 months, notably some persons have spent even 10 years, in limbo whilst waiting for their applications to be processed⁸. This has shown to have devastating effects on their mental health and wellbeing⁹. Bringing up children in these institutions has the worst effect on African children and families¹⁰.

The particular way in which African parents rear a child ensures that the child will imbibe the cultural values of their native land and also grow to be a responsible adult. This is done through the mother's care, the support of the extended family, traditional rites, attention and love. The substantial involvement of the extended family, and sometimes neighbours, in child-rearing helps to develop a strong sense of social responsibility in the child from their early years and teaches them to be a respectful, responsible and supportive member of the extended family and by extension, of society.

By virtue of their own upbringing and cultural parenting practices, migrant African parents often do not have the parenting skills or resources that are considered in line with the standard set by the Irish legal system. Additionally appearing before the childcare court becomes a new and stressful trend out of their cultural norm. They lack accessible and appropriate information on children and families and are barely aware of the law in Ireland on children and child protection¹¹. Quite often they find themselves in Irish childcare courts without legal representation or the appropriate knowledge on how to navigate the system or access information on the rights of parents in the court system¹². Some encounter challenges in accessing visits to their children who have been taken into care. This leads to a cultural shock which is exacerbated by the lack of an extended family, information, and support structures for these migrant parents.

8 Doras, "Direct Provision" Available at: <http://doras.org/direct-provision/> accessed on 10.06.2022

9 Colletta Dalikeni *Child Protection Social Workers and Asylum-Seeking Families in Ireland: Issues of Culture, Race, Power, Relations and Mistrust* (Peter Lang, Oxford, 2022)

10 *ibid*

11 *ibid*

12 Child Care Law Reporting Project, "Ripe of Reform: An Analytical Review of Three Years of Court Reporting on Child Care Proceedings" October 2021; p56 Available at: <https://www.childlawproject.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CCLRP-Ripe-for-Reform-Report-October-2021.pdf> Accessed on 10.06.2022

AkiDwA Background

Established in 2001, Akina Dada wa Africa – AkiDwA (Swahili for sisterhood) is a national network of African women living in Ireland. AkiDwA originally started as an African women network- the founders wanted to focus on specifically the African continent given size and wide target (big continent with 54 countries different cultures and background ground- to date AkiDwA members and those who mainly engage with our work are largely from the African continent -80%. The organisation’s mission is to promote equality and justice for African women, with a vision for a just society where there is equal opportunity and access to resources in all aspects of society: social, cultural, economic, civic and political. AkiDwA promotes not only the integration of African women in Irish society but also their equality, to live and enjoy a life free of gender and racial stereotyping and applies a holistic approach to integration, promoting a human rights and gender-specific approach to public services, as well as encouraging African women’s access to mainstream services and initiatives. The organisation is a registered charity and is governed by a board of directors with senior management overseeing the day to day running. AkiDwA currently has national membership of over 4,000 members from over 50 countries, different backgrounds, nationality, religious background and immigration status. AkiDwA has a strong reputation amongst the community as a trustworthy, valid, credible and respected organisation. The organisation’s credibility is earned over decades of engagement and leadership that enables the organisation to actively mobilise large numbers of hard to reach and marginalised communities of migrants, thereby providing relevant and insightful evidence-based submissions to government departments.

In the last two decades AkiDwA has been working with African women, providing life skills training, with an aim to build their confidence and self-esteem. AkiDwA’s greatest strength is based on its outreach and networking activities with members in all the twenty-six counties in Ireland. The approach taken in this work has been effective due to the strategy in place of identifying and working with influential African women in each county. For example, the organisation’s work on sexual and reproductive health and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has reached and delivered training to over 3000 women of African descent. Thanks to this experience, AkiDwA is uniquely positioned to address the difficulties faced by African women raising their children in Ireland.

In 2013, Dr. Salome Mbugua, AkiDwA CEO recommended that the state engage in a dialogue with African women and families on the ongoing

challenging issues of children being taken into State care. AkiDwA has advocated for the implementation of the International Decade for people of African descent since 2017 and the organisation has held meetings with relevant government departments seeking for state support and intervention. The International Decade for People of African Descent emerged in 2001 with the third World Conference against Racism, which led to the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. The Durban Declaration, in addition to declaring that the people of Africa had been victimized by slavery and continued to suffer as a result, called for states to adopt specific steps to help combat racism and xenophobia and to protect its victims.

The objectives of the International Decade for People of African Descent are to:

- Promote respect, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by people of African Descent, as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Promote a greater knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture, and contribution of people of African descent to the development of societies.
- Adopt and strengthen national, regional, and international legal frameworks according to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

The Decade require states to implement plan of activities that address three key themes:

- Recognition: The right to equality and non-discrimination
- Justice: facilitating access to justice,
- Development: Right to development and measures against poverty

In 2019, a national steering committee made up of 12 organisations working with people of African descent was set to work with the Irish government towards the implementation of the decade in Ireland and a public consultation meeting organised by the department of Justice and equality was held in March 2019. This project is therefore framed within the International Decade for people of African descent and contribute towards all the three objectives.

The Book

Cultural Conflict in Parenting

This collection of stories is part of a project called “*It Takes a Village to Raise a Child*” in reference to an African proverb, which means that child rearing is a communal effort. The project seeks to address the alarming number of African children taken into state care in Ireland by working with both African women and State actors, including policy makers, frontline services such as police, social workers, and senior personnel from the Department of Children and Youth, the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Foreign Affairs and relevant NGOs. The aim is to create a better understanding of the cultural differences and practices in child rearing, on the one hand, and to raise awareness amongst women of African descent about the Irish Child Act. Additionally, the project includes advocacy work to promote the amendment and development of policies in this area.

This storybook is a unique opportunity to raise awareness about cultural differences in child rearing and to promote positive aspects of the African culture among service providers, frontline services, and decision makers. Each story provides an insight into the experience of a migrant woman as it relates to her parenthood and how she was parented. Each storyteller has been made anonymous for their own privacy; however, all ten stories contained in this book are very much real stories of real women.

The storytelling process was one that gave migrant women a means of effecting change more actively by giving them a platform for their voices to be heard. Most women felt the sessions were quite therapeutic as it enabled them to share their journeys and reflect on parenthood as well as their experiences with the Irish childcare system. In certain stories, the complexities of mothering as an asylum seeker in the setting of Direct Provision brings rich insight that would be useful to policy makers, frontline service providers and the society at large.

NARRATIVES BY AFRICAN WOMEN



Labiba's Story

"In Ireland, it was so difficult that the difficulties took way the joy of parenting my first child"

Labiba, 39 years old

Sudan, my home country is an Afro nation with Islamic culture. I have three boys and one girl and all these children were born in Ireland. I have lived in Ireland for twenty years and I have lived through the challenges of not only parenting young and teenage children as a migrant but also of domestic violence.

Back home, parenting was not such a burden as there was a very open culture around raising a child. Mothers had to care for the children 50% of the time and the other 60% of the time, the child was in the care of other family members, friends and neighbours. There was a rather collective society where grandparents would move in with parents. The girl child was soon introduced to household chores and this was the same for me. I was also made to take care of my parents and grandparents as that was the norm for girl children. Boys on the other hand would be helping outside the house such as on the farm, with shepherd and or merchant jobs from as young as 6 years old. In fact, boys were encouraged to be very industrial and start their own business at a very young age.

The societal expectations in terms of child rearing were that children would have respect for elders, help those in need and be generous. Education was also seen as important, however, female children were only encouraged to study up till secondary school level whilst for the sky was basically the limit for men. It was then up to the a woman's husband to allow her finish her leaving certificate examinations if she got married before completing same. However, educated parents are much more keen for their daughters to finish leaving cert as lack of education leads to increased vulnerability and victimhood of sexual and gender based violence.

I had my first child at the age of 21 and I was very naïve. The workings of marriage were not explained to women in my culture until it was time for her to get married. Men on the other hand got to know about the benefits of

marriages and had a green light around exploring relationships with women from a younger age. Meanwhile girls had to marry a virgin and would be divorced straight away if it was discovered that she was not a virgin at the time of marriage. Accordingly, the first year of marriage is often traumatic for women. I was pregnant with my first child in my first year in Ireland and that came with its own challenges.

In Ireland, it was so difficult that the difficulties took way the joy of parenting my first child

I am currently bringing up my children in a manner that is completely different from how I was brought up. In the early years, this was a huge challenge as it felt as if I was pouring from an empty place. There was no storage of skills and knowledge on how to meet the emotional, physical and psychological needs of children. In my country, providing food was the top priority and meeting the emotional needs of the child is a completely new language and frankly, there is not enough support.

Unfortunately, I grew up when there was a famine in Sudan so there was a lot of emphasis placed on providing basic amenities for children in parenting. My friends who are fellow minority persons are struggling too and are not in a position to assist me in this regard.

It seems the state and your local community do not understand the struggle and give you the sense that you are failing this job of motherhood.

They pity the child and judge you. TUSLA condemns and calls parents 'incapable'. It seems judgemental rather than supportive.

I find it very isolating. I am labelled incapable not because I am unwilling to learn but because I do not know here to start. Who to ask?

A lot of migrant women do not complain because they are afraid that their children might be taken away or they would be deported if they are seen as a burden to the state in any way. I found myself feeling like the weakest link between the authority of my husband, meeting the needs of my children and the authority of TUSLA.

The age when your children can be left alone is another rule in parenting the Irish way that baffles me. From 14, it is acceptable for a child to be left home alone. From 9 years they're allowed to walk home from school. Yet at 11am they refuse to allow mothers leave them at home by themselves for even a trip to the shop? It is impractical to require 24-hour child minding. With over 20 years of experience, it is still a huge responsibility. Here I cannot leave my child with a neighbour as I would be able to do back home. There is the issue of racism as Irish persons do not want to mix with or aid the integration of migrant families. It is also rare to find such a friendly neighbour here as people are very keen of their privacy. Even depending on persons of the same ethnic minority as you is not easy as sometimes, they do not live nearby.



As a parent, I pass on the African values of respecting older people, having empathy, helping when persons need it and being generous to my children. I also pass on the African tradition of discipline as there is no cursing allowed, no violence allowed and no taking advantage of people. I maintain order by keeping a schedule of housekeeping rules. Where someone misbehaves, they have to wash dishes and get extra chores as punishment. I have managed to stay away from any physical chastisement as punishment with chores and communication has proven to be effective.

There is a lack of awareness about the support services available to parents within the ethnic minority communities particularly, the African community. The state needs to do more to raise awareness about this.

Zara's Story

"I am not gonna lie, being a single mom here is really difficult especially going into the DP"

Zara, 22 years old

I am originally from Somalia but my family and I lived in South Africa before I moved to Ireland. My six-year-old daughter was born in South Africa. Growing up in South Africa, there was a very strong communal spirit and communal support provided to the family. Indeed, within the family, there was a lot of support provided by extended family members to nuclear family units. We are religious Muslims and religious doctrines did impact on our familial values. There were rules children had to follow no matter what. Girls were very much shielded and were very continually corrected on the basis of their gender. I often heard the statement "You can't behave like that because you are a girl". However boys were allowed a lot more freedoms. Culturally, men provided and women did not have the capacity to spoil their children with gifts.

Parenting in Ireland was very challenging for me. I had no assistance in terms of parenting. I am not gonna lie, being a single mom here is really difficult especially going into the DP.

My biggest culture shock would be, "you cannot leave your child for even a few minutes".

I have got a few friends that got into trouble because of this mistake at the centre. Another big area is spanking. In fact, one time my friend's daughter got suspended from school and she was afraid to criticise the child as the children often use the law here against their parents. There is no spanking allowed? How can you manage your child? Spanking is wrong but that's what I was raised with and sometimes kids get out of control, even the very good ones like my daughter.

Now you are basically afraid of the government.

Well to punish her, I take away her gadgets and thankfully that is enough. Sometimes I resort to threats, “If you do this, I will do that; If you don’t do this, I will not do that” and that actually gets her to listen. I am honestly just thankful I have a good child that listens but then again she is still young and I hear the teenage years are the worst in terms of rebellion and misbehaviour.

For me, it is very important that she knows who she is and her background, culture and religion remain part of her especially what she wears. I wear a hijab and I dress my daughter in a hijab at the moment and she wears it willingly for now. Honestly it is very difficult.

Though it is a good thing to be influenced by other cultures at the same time it feels like you are losing your culture and identity.

I moved to Ireland 5 years ago and my daughter was about 1-year-old at the time I moved here. Being a migrant parent in the DP is hard. When my child wants a new toy, being a single mother living in direct provision, I am not able to afford it. It is difficult to explain to a 3-year-old about how you cannot afford a toy and you do not have the right to work in these circumstances. Thankfully, we now have the right to work but still the odds are against us in terms of getting a job. I am now able to spoil my daughter a little and be truly independent.

It is important to acknowledge that there parts of parenting in Irish culture that I like and have adopted. In Africa, there really is not enough attention paid to mental illness and there is no openness between parents and children. The African method of parenting is very much one with authority and direction towards the children where parents heavily guide the course of their children’s lives. My mum would often say that girls were like eggs and accordingly, we were cocooned.

I was married at the age of 15 and I honestly would not like my daughter to go through that.

I have found that the freedom granted to children can be quite empowering so long as it is guided. I allow my daughter make a choice and let her voice shine through. There is also a more communicative parenting here and this is something I appreciate as it will enable me and my daughter have an open relationship.

I have also grown to like the “no spanking” culture

This is because spanking is violent and can create fear in a relationship. However, the African value of respect for elders is something I still hold dear. Children must still respect their elders and I do not like that an Irish child can call elders by their first name. It still comes off as disrespectful to me and my daughter will not be allowed to call me by my first name.



As time goes on, I have found that it is easier to parent outside the centres as I can now have rules rather than the rules of the centre governing myself and my daughter. However, in the centre I had more people to help me, now that I have moved out, I have less support. Overall, I love raising my child here as children are actually more protected and have rights that cannot be challenged.

Sarah's Story

"If I was in my country of birth, I would just ask my neighbour to keep an eye on my children as I run to the market, but here in Ireland I would be in trouble, if I leave my children they will be taken away by social services"

Sarah, 45 years old

As a migrant parent I believe parenting challenges need intensified and productive cooperation between migrant families and different parties in host societies to achieve the best interests of migrant children and parents.

Parenting can be challenging yet a rewarding experience. I became a mother for the first time at the age of 20 years. Lucky enough I had my family and whole community to help me with the upbringing of my lovely daughter. Kenya, like any other African country has a strong value of Ubuntu (*I live because you live*). Parenting and disciplining the child is not only left to the maternal parent, rather a child growing up in a rural or urban area is the subject of a greater societal responsibility. Any elder person is required to caution or discipline a child if they find them behaving contrary to societal norms and the child is supposed to show respect, help elders if they need help, neighbours can send children who are not their own to shop, ask them to look after young siblings and would feed them even in their parent's absence.

I was born in a large family of nine children and being the 6th born I did not have to take care of my siblings as such. Instead, my elder sister and brothers had to take care of us – feeding, giving us baths, making my hair and putting us in bed. My sister Anna was only eight when she took the responsibility of caring for me and my little sister. This was a daily routine for her, my mother would be busy and quite often away from home.

Quite often my neighbour threatened to report me to my parent when they found me misbehaving. This is completely normal in an African village. The community take pride in taking care of each other's children and supporting when one needs help. I was a very naughty girl growing up first at the age of

eight my parent gave me to my grandparent, to help take care of my grandfather who had become paralysed after falling from a house while building and could not do anything for himself. At that early age I was providing care work duties to my poor grandfather; my duties included feeding, taking him to bathroom and reading the bible to him. In return I received lifetime wisdom from my grandmother at the many opportunities I got from being sent to the market to shop or sell petty goods. I also gained important skills such as cooking and producing handmade baskets which was one of her many talents.

When I got my daughter at the age of 20 in my country of origin, I was at an advantage having experience of caring for my grandfather together with learned skills from my grandmother. The family played a huge role in the upbringing of my daughter. She was adored and loved by her grandparents and with her good mannerisms she was loved by the whole community. Some community members even fed her before she arrived home from school while my mum and dad spoiled her as she was the only grandchild at home. My daughter was only five years old when I left my home country for studies abroad. My parents, sisters and two young brothers took the responsibility of the caring role. My young brother used to feed, clean and prepare her uniform for school. We relocated to Ireland when my daughter was 7 years old, here I realised I had lost everything I had in terms of support, with no relatives or support network, I was all alone.

First my daughter was the only child of African descent in her school. Many times she faced isolation as well as huge visibility for her singing and African dancing skills which were unique. I was all alone bringing up a child in a fast-growing Ireland, and I was hardly able to cope with requests of sleepovers or going to community supervised discos – my fears for a daughter who was growing in a completely different environment to my usual were extremely evident. My daughter wanted to do everything the friends were doing for her to fit in, but I always reminded her of being the most visible. I remembered one time when there was a play in her school when she was vying for top character role, but she was told she could not have it since the character was known to be white and she was black. We tackled many incidences of racism and misunderstanding of her background, there was assumptions that she is not good enough or she does not understand. I was all on my own to ensure my daughter fit in the community. On the other hand, I wanted her to behave like me while growing up, not to ask for designer shoes and clothes, going for sleepovers or supervised discos. The clash of cultures was

a reality, there was no one to talk to. My fellow African women were experiencing same or worse, some of the African children had already been taken by social services.

At the time, it seemed like all mothers especially African mothers feared coming across social workers.

I found cultural differences and practices, balancing parents' responsibilities inside and outside our house, and the lack of social network to be a huge challenge.

Disciplining children with physical means is very normal in many African families and while I don't agree with this method of chastisement there is no specific law to protect the children from this. Indeed, I see it as abuse. Teachers are heavily attuned to this abuse in Kenyan schools. I was a victim of this when I was in primary school and I recall my parents being summoned by the head teacher because I had refused to be whipped. Some migrant parents have normalised this unfortunate trend and apply this same abuse as a method of disciplining children in Ireland, which is not acceptable, they only get to realise its wrong when they find themselves at the face of social services.

As a first generation of migrant in Ireland and a migrant woman who has both experience of parenting in my home country and here, I must admit there are many challenges which include navigating the system, lack of information and support, racism and discrimination which all affect upbringing of the child. Conflict of culture is also another challenge where the family has its own way of handling situations and on the other hand the societal norms are in contradiction. Up to date, there is no information or support for migrant parent to help them understand the rules, laws and policies in place that protect children in Ireland. Most parents, when they arrive in Ireland, continue to carry on with their way and understanding of parenting from their country of origin even if it's in contradiction to the Irish Law. Disciplinary methods from Ireland which are nonphysical are foreign to many migrant parents and some parents may not find them effective.

The front-line services and especially social workers need to have a greater understanding of different cultures. A mediation party between parents and social workers needs to be established to help with better understanding and as well, addressing biases. Support for migrant parents is needed to ensure

the best interest of the child. Quite often children taken to state care end up facing many further challenges while in foster care especially when they are placed in families whose background are different from those of their own in terms of practices, religious etc.



Frontline service must operate with high level of cultural sensitivity and must be open to learn and listen.

This will be important to recruit foster families of African background and they should be engaged while developing policies. Children should only end up in state care as the last resort.

Naomi's Story

*"Sometimes, if you don't stand up for yourself,
people will treat you very strange"*

Naomi, 50 years old

I moved to Ireland in 2001 with two daughters. My two sons were born here. I moved to this country with my husband who had just gotten a job as a doctor in a hospital in Galway.

I was brought up in communal environment back home. My mum looked after the children as my dad worked long hours. My brothers and sisters all helped each other in school, chores and life in general. A lot of people in Sudan had took education of children as the most important task of the parent. Children had to be disciplined and very good in school with high grades in their assessment results. However, the primary carer was always the mother. As a child, I was raised in a very strict family. We did not go outside too often, we were to be careful about the books we read, the TV we watched and what we said or did. That was similar in most families in my area. Children were highly supervised by parents and teachers and would scold you if you misbehaved. Punishment was often with a stick where you would be hit on your hand. However, my dad never beat the girls, we would only be scolded.

In Ireland now, I am parenting quite differently as I have had to adjust to where I am. One thing I really struggled with was the language barrier. My daughters had no English when they came into this country and they had to be taught how to communicate in English at school. The school was very helpful and they picked up English quick. I have very good memories of my first few months in Ireland which were spent in Galway. I remember thinking

*We look different, we wear different,
we sound different but they treat us very nice.*

Unfortunately our stay in Galway was only for a short 6 months. When we moved from Galway to Limerick, I faced racism for the first time. I and two of my friends were in a shopping centre when we were stopped by a woman who told us to go back to our country. I remember feeling very angry and then sad after.

In terms of parenting my daughter, I tried to create an environment similar to the one I grew up in as a child. I try to pass on similar values instilling the importance of education and reading books is a valuable activity. I also want to pass down the value of being helpful to people and being considerate of others. At the beginning it was very hard; I did not have any family to leave my child with. Here all the responsibility was on me to take the children to school, bring them back, and take care of the home. My husband was only home for about 3 to 4 hours before the children go to sleep in the evening so I had to deal with their needs.

When I first I arrived in Ireland, I was given a book on how the law works around children here. At the time, I felt surprised to receive this book and I felt strange. I wondered why the state cared so much about how I was treating my children.

I felt it was even invasive to be given a book on how to treat my children the way someone else wanted.

Later on, I heard stories of children being taken into care and honestly it was a strange concept to me. Especially in relation to how much control you could have over your children. I wondered why I cannot stop my child from doing something. But I also adjusted. My youngest child is now 18 so I am done with heavy parenting.

The biggest challenge for me was when my children were in secondary school. I wanted to raise my girls as Muslim Sudanese girls but this was a struggle as their friends did not have the same beliefs as them and my daughters wanted to be just like their friends. There was one incident that happened when she was in her second year of secondary school. My daughter has told her friends that she was not going to attend a disco. Her friends went to the teacher to report that I would not let my daughter go for this disco. I got a call from this teacher asking me to come to her office. I immediately went to the school hoping that all was well. On getting there,

the teacher asked if and why I refused to grant her daughter permission to go to the dance in a dismissive tone. I confronted her. I told her that I felt it was inappropriate for a 13 year old girl to go out to a disco in the city centre in the middle of the night. I told her;

You do not have the right to decide for me what to do with my children. It is not your responsibility.

She was very stunned. On my way back home and for several days, I pondered deeply. I felt stereotyped. I was summoned to the school because they assumed I was strict based on my nationality. My daughter had not even asked my permission but probably refused because this kind of behaviour was not in line with her upbringing. Nonetheless, I wondered whether other parents were also called into the teacher's office to explain themselves when they refused to permit their children to go out at extracurricular activities especially a disco. In the media at the time there was a lot of frenzy around "joy rides" and bad children. In fact her neighbours also did not allow their boys and girls to go out for discos.

I felt as though this teacher tried to intimidate me. It is important to know your rights. Sometimes, if you do not stand up for yourself, some people will treat you very strange.

The ages of 14, 15 and 16 are very difficult ages to parent because children at these ages want to start having boyfriends and girls and they are exposed to alcohol even more through their friends. This is such a culture shock to me especially as a Muslim. I mean this is haram! With discipline, however, I found that I have to be flexible in order for my children to understand why they are wrong. I ask them to defend themselves when they have done something wrong so they can reflect on how they erred. In my house the most popular punishments are: no TV, no PlayStation (this is a big punishment), no internet and taking away phones.

One thing I like about Irish parenting culture is that children in their late teens can work during the holidays and learn the value of money. Also in the absence of aunts, uncles and grandparents, the children are a lot more hard working around the house.



I believe a cultural support structure for migrant parents should be established as this would be a good resource for migrant women coming into Ireland and surely experiencing similar shocks like I did years ago.

Agnes's Story

“Racism and discrimination in Irish society makes it even harder to parent as a migrant.”

Agnes, 36 years old

I have a 14 year old daughter and a 13 year old son who were both born in Ireland. Their upbringing in certain ways differs from what I had in Africa. Back home, we (children) were pretty much raised by people around us. I was a rather rowdy child. I was raised by my grandma and I went to boarding school.

I was brought up in a household where drugs and alcohol were very prevalent as we lived right next to a pub. However, my grandma taught us to be very independent and we learnt to work hard as nothing was ever handed to you. High value was ascribed to education and independence. We were taught never to talk back to our elders and try our best at school. In terms of discipline, it often involved being hit with a belt, whip or wooden spoon. However, I never felt anything but love from her grandma and her elders.

I am parenting somewhat differently today with certain key principles. My husband is an Irish man and this means that the conflict of parenting between the Irish and Kenyan culture is very imminent in my parenting journey.

I approach education of children with fluidity as I personally struggled in school as a child so I try to encourage my children to learn through the pattern of their existing talents rather than focus on academics. I try to educate them and encourage them to increase their knowledge of their rights especially in order for them to be aware of racial profiling and be more quipped about their protections against racism.

Racism and discrimination in Irish society makes it even harder to parent as a migrant.

Openness is very important in my household especially around subjects of sex-ed, sexuality and LGBTQ. This is something I never got as a child but is very much encouraged in this country. My son already knows about periods and knows to help with a hot water bottle and mood swings when his sister experiences them. This openness around sexualities and bodies is such a culture clash with African child upbringing. I remember my grandma nearly had a heart attack when I sent my son to buy period sanitary pads from a shop in Kenya in 2020. However, I believe lack of communication leads to misinformation of children.

It is important to me to remove stereotypical gender roles whilst parenting. In fact, my daughter is interested in sports and my son into dancing and music. House chores are also equal. However, when we go visiting family in Africa, this is another challenge for my extended family as my mum still assigns tasks based on gender. She tries to get my daughter into sewing and cooking and this is something my daughter challenges and even argued with her about. However, I know that if she was in Kenya, she would probably have a different mind-set about those kinds of task as my nieces have no problem doing such tasks.

However, African parenting values such as discipline and respect are still important to me as a parent and I try to impact these on them.

*I believe in the biblical teaching that if
you spare the rod, you spoil the child.*

I call the Irish model, the indiscipline model. I find it absolutely flabbergasting that a child in this country beats up and insults their parents. It seems children's bad behaviours are excused. I do not agree with this part of Irish culture of parenting. I occasionally raise my voice at my child still but I try my best to talk them through most things. It is rather ironic that because my partner is about 20 years older than me, he is still old school and would want to discipline the children more harshly than I would and I have told him off in these circumstances.

When I recently gave birth to my baby boy I had post-partum depression. My daughter was jumping on my stomach one day and I started bleeding. I smacked her and told her to get off. I went to the hospital for a check-up as

I was scared I was miscarrying. The nurse noticed that my daughter had a bruise on her. Because of this incident, I nearly lost my daughter for two years. I cried so much in 2007 because of this incident.

I fought tooth and nail to get my daughter back. I was seeing a psychiatrist every week to prove I was not and am not a bad mother.

It hurt so much because I went to the hospital to ask for help and nearly lost my child that way. Regardless of that incident, I still believe it is okay to smack your child but only as a last resort and in light of the severity of their misbehaviour. Communication is very effective as well.



One area of Irish parenting culture that I like and have adopted is in relation to financial empowerment of children. Here, parents make sure that their kids are well sorted by opening bank accounts for their children, setting up family insurance and teaching the children about financial freedom. This is something I have adopted in my own household. Overall, there is indeed a need for a project like this one.

I believe if I had had the help of a community organisation when I was striving to ensure I didn't lose my daughter, things would have been much better.

Amina's Story

“As the only non-Irish person in class, I was worried that my son always wore this hat because he felt different and even worse, if he got teased in school.”

Amina, 44 years old

I moved to Ireland in 2013 with my Bosnian husband who I had met in London and our three sons. I had my last child, my beautiful daughter here. I am originally from Cameroon. I left home in Cameroon at 20 years old in 1997 to study.

I come from a Cameroonian-Muslim background where women looked after the children and men were the bread winners. However, my parents were very liberal and my dad gave the boys and girls equal opportunity. Traditionally, us girls were to stay home whilst the boys were sent to school but my dad ensured we, the daughters went to school. Honestly, this background shaped my experience. I wanted to travel and go as far away from Cameroon as possible. I wanted to escape this environment where women were typically repressed. In terms of parenting, the key values were that children had respect for parents and for elders. This is unlike children here who talk back to their parents. I even experienced that with my children. This was a clash to my cultural values of how good children behaved and is something I struggled with. Discipline was also very important in my upbringing. My dad never beat the girls when we misbehaved but he did beat the boys as they were more stubborn.

There is a huge difference with how I was brought up and how I am now parenting. Then my parents didn't have to talk to me, they would just give me a certain look and us children would know to behave. Here my children gave me attitudes. I drill them that I am their mum and there have to show a lot of respect to me and to other elderly people and they cannot be rude even though their peers might behave differently, the standard in our household was different. In Europe, physical beating is not allowed but I have to threaten to use my whip or even my shoe to beat my children, even though it is only a threat because beating children is the method of discipline we were brought

up with. I know never to cross the line by actually beating them though. I punish my children by taking away their devices, play time and TV time. Sometimes we, my husband and I, would try and make them reflect on what they have done wrong and set out a plan of action of what they are going to do going forward. We try to make them reflect more than anything else now.

In Cameroon, I had a bigger social circle. The whole society raised children not just the nuclear family. I would have the input of my parents and cousins etc. in the upbringing and care of my children. This would have made a big difference in how my children were parented. Here in Ireland, we are cooked up in a house with much less support. The eye of an extended family would have an impact on the child's development and provided better child care. Adults appear to be outnumbered here and it becomes difficult to parent.

*The input from the extended family is important in raising a child.
My mother would have picked up things that I did not.*

Our racial difference has definitely brought its added challenge to parenting. When my oldest son started secondary school, he was always wearing a hat. I wondered whether he did it to try and fit in. As the only non-Irish person in class, I was worried that my son always wore this hat because felt different and even worse, if he got teased in school. I tried to talk to him about it but he never opened up to me about why. I later found out from his siblings that sometimes his friends made silly bets like "Yusuf, if you take off your hat, we would give you some money." He still wouldn't take it off. He didn't behave like this in primary school. Was he ashamed of his afro hair?

*It becomes difficult to parent without tools when you are facing
some form of racial discrimination. How can you shield your children
from racism at school? You feel helpless.*

I became a single parent shortly after I came to Ireland. I tried to find a social support system. I made friends with persons from the East African Country and my sister came to live with me. I would say that I am co-parenting with my sister.

As migrant parents, we have to challenge our children's experience. Our children who are born in the West, stray from their African background. We teach our children about our cultural heritage and our values of respect.

We need to teach them and that's our duty. But its' all too challenging, I wish there was a formula.

Their dad was not supportive during my fourth pregnancy and we split up whilst I was 6 months pregnant and I have had to try to find some support and peace for myself. There has been some hardship in our lives before we got to Ireland. Before focusing on parenting, I needed to focus on finding us a safe place to live. It is only after 3 or 4 years of consistent/stable provision of food and shelter did I start thinking about parenting so deeply. I was constantly being frustrated by their dad as he was their visa sponsor and would refuse to sign the paper work to renew their passport. So I suppose I was parenting as I was striving to provide my children with the covering of legal status in Ireland.

The responsibilities of a migrant parent are much more than an Irish parent in this regard so it is not easy to ensure they are minded all the time and have be in the best mental state to parent most effectively.



Being a single mum is even harder, I feel my children miss the relationship with their father but now they have stopped asking about him.

Ireland has been very welcoming and hospitable to us. A good number of Irish people have gone the extra mile to help me. I would like my children to get those values of being very helpful from Irish people. For the state to recognise the plight of migrant parents and do work to alleviate the pressures would be very great! It would make this country an even better place.

Beauty's Story

"The challenges of being a nursing mother in direct provision are just too much."

Beauty, 44 years old

I have a three year daughter who was born here in Ireland but I grew up in my home country, Kenya. In my home community, the child was not only the parent's responsibility. If a community member found a child misbehaving, they would correct the child and report to their parents. Children were very observed, corrected and monitored. In essence, you couldn't hide and misbehave as someone will see you and report you so children were often well behaved as this was the standard. While physical chastisement was used as a method of discipline, it was rarely used. My family were of the catholic faith and this catholic Christian values as passed through the church as well as customary values and culture shapes their values. There were sexist gender roles, I remember being envious of the boys who were allowed to go cycling and milk cows as girls were only allowed to cook and clean. However, this sexism has changed in Kenyan society today and there is more freedom and development for the girl child.

As migrant parents in Ireland, we have to bring our children up in a way that will fit in and not find themselves isolated socially but also bring them up in line with our values. Discipline is the primary African value that I carried on to date and I pass that on to my daughter. I was not brought up in such a scary way where I was afraid. It was this value of discipline that made me behave how I do today and I am proud of who I am. Physical chastisement is not allowed so there has to much more communication between parents and children. A lot of time is spent talking to a child and helping them understand things. I also want an open line of communication with my child so I want to be her friend so I can better monitor her rather than be shut out.

It is important to me that my child grows up appreciating herself first. She has to know that she cannot compare herself to other people so I make her understand her roots, so that she will not lose her identity but love herself. Racial discrimination and bullying of my child is something I fear will definitely

occur so I try to make appreciate that her black is beautiful. I say to her, "Look at yourself, you are black and beautiful" and she repeats it. I try to prepare my child for navigating the world as much as possible.

Being born in Direct Provision, I have had to teach her to be content with living within her means. I often try to make her understand that at times where I wanted to provide certain things for her as she requested, I could not as I did not have the resources. I also want her to grow up having some Christian faith just like I did but I recognise this is a challenge but I continue to try. For now, I ensure she does not go to sleep without praying.

The challenges of being a nursing mother in Direct Provision are just too much. There is no agency that supports pregnant and nursing women in the direct provision centres specifically. Our challenges are quite different. Before delivery, I informed management when I would be going to the hospital for labour but they said they were unable to provide transportation so I asked to be referred to a taxi company but the staff said they couldn't help with arranging a taxi. At that time, I was fairly new and was not accustomed to the taxi app or anything about taxis. My social worker has advised that a taxi should be booked but the centre staff refused to comply and insisted that I use a bus (public transport) to the hospital. I have never forgotten this incident to date. I had to get a bus to the hospital for my delivery.

Being that my daughter was my first child, I honestly did not know what to expect. Each centre is different. Some centres have cafeterias others have self-service form of eating.

The cafeteria eating structure is quite a challenge because there are set eating times. I found it hard to keep up with the specified hours for feeding due to the exhaustion and sleep deprivation so I would often miss meals and go hungry because I would sleep or be too exhausted to make it to the cafeteria.

And if I am unable to eat well, where would the breast milk come from? I really struggled.

I couldn't take my infant child everywhere with me especially when she is asleep. Some friends would offer to help me watch the child but then again everyone else had their own schedules and tried to go out to work so it was a struggle. I found myself confined to my room more often than I would have preferred. When I had a check-up appointment with my 2 weeks old baby, I

couldn't walk anywhere. The centre was unable to provide transportation and a taxi to and from the hospital would be too expensive given the remote location of the centres. Few centres have their own buses but if approved by management, residents could use a taxi and the bill would be sent to their social worker.



In hostels where you have to do self-service, you have to leave your room to get the food. This was even more challenging as I couldn't leave my child in the room alone and I can't bring my child into the kitchen to cook as children are not allowed in the communal kitchen where everyone was allocated 2 hours to cook. The big challenge was finding someone to watch the baby whilst I cooked. It was really alienating and I felt even worse for being without a co-parent. With the stress on my mental health, I couldn't even get breast milk to feed the baby. I also needed a fridge to store the breast milk when it finally came and I did not want to be storing my breast milk in the public fridge. Again the centre manager refused to provide me with a fridge even though my social worker had recommended this. There was a lot of back and forth between my centre and the social worker over a month. A good Samaritan finally brought a small fridge for me.

*Honestly, I wish I had a way to help nursing women in the DPs.
These women need support.*

I tried to survive and tried to maintain positivity and a position of strength so my baby does not pick up on negative emotions, otherwise, I would have gone mental I tell you. I remember standing in the cold of November with a 2 weeks old baby waiting for a bus that comes every hour and is often late to take my daughter for a check-up. The centre was so far from the hospital and the centre wouldn't call a taxi for me.

In addition, the nutritional value of the food provided is not great and for a nursing mother, it is important for her to eat a very healthy diet. The nurse monitoring my daughter's growth said she was slowing down in her growth and that this was because of dietary issues. My health nurse wrote a letter to the social welfare officer in this regard asking for my allowance to be increased so that I could purchase healthier items but my social welfare officer refused. I just let it go and survived. I moved out of the centres 2 months ago. I am lucky I found some remote work.

There is really a huge gap when it comes to support for parents who are nursing mothers in Direct Provision. I wouldn't want anyone to go through what I went through so I will keep talking about it until I see some change.

Ruth's Story

"It was a norm to be hit with a stick as a form of discipline. It didn't make you resent or hate your parent or teacher and children understood that this was a form of correction."

Ruth, 42 years old

I moved to Ireland with my three children four years ago from Malawi. While I am originally from South Africa, I have lived so long in Malawi that I feel Malawian. Growing up in Malawi, I was raised by my mother and my father worked all the time.

In terms of discipline, we were spoken to at length; beating with sticks was a rare occasion that came when there was great misbehaviour. Discipline was indeed a norm in society. Even in school, it was a norm to be hit with a stick as a form of discipline. It didn't make you resent or hate the parent or teacher and children understood that this was a form of correction. Even my neighbour could discipline us and we never thought they hated us. Education, honesty, respect and independence were key values in my familial household. I was a mechanic back home because my father was a mechanic.

I raise my kids with similar values especially because they were born and brought up in Malawi before we moved here. They understand that I am their parent and have authority over them and do not talk back at me. They show respect for the rules. I have adapted to my environment as I no longer beat my children. Open dialogue is important in my household. I tell stories to my children and read to them as this is something my dad did with me and it inspired me to go back to school even. Being truthful, respectful, educated and empathetic are other key values that I instil in my children. I now discipline my children by communication and by making sure they understand the consequences of their actions, taking away their phones, negotiating birthday presents.

Back home, I would be able to leave my daughter at home and come back but here in Ireland I have to make plans weeks in advance for a minder for my children if I am leaving the house. When I lived in the DP, my daughter who was then 11 years old was sick. My son was 17, in fact in three months'

time he would be 18. I went to SuperValu to buy medication for my daughter who I left in the room with my son of course.

When I got back there was a letter from the centre manager in the door warning me that I would be reported to child protective services. I began to panic.

I went with my children to beg her and explained the situation. The centre manager considered the age of her eldest child and the nature of the trip to SuperValu and said she would not report. I honestly felt they were too harsh in the centres. I had to bring out my receipt from the pharmacy to show the time stamps and that I had indeed left to get medication.



I am happy to adopt certain parts of the Irish parenting culture such as the no beating culture as I have found that talking to children can be a very useful tool, however, I reject this very liberal upbringing model. There must be a distinction between parents and children and their behaviour monitored so they do not end up being problematic in society.

Honestly, I had issues with social welfare in the centres. Because I was working at the time, I was often criticised for seeking transportation supports from an Irish centre manager when I was in Athlone.

I had no assistance with raising my children as I am a widow and a single mother.

The absence of the familial support structure in this new country or even a community made it difficult. I began to engage actively with migrant women groups such as AkiDwA and I have increased my network of persons. I honestly do not feel as isolated anymore.

Mariam's Story

"I had no means to buy a cot and lived in fear that this woman would report me to TUSLA for not having a cot for my daughter."

Mariam, 28 years old

I have lived in Ireland for about two and half years now and my daughter who is nearly two years old was born in Ireland.

I was brought up by my grandmother in Nigeria. There was really no father figure in my life. I did all the house chores as there it was just me and my grandmother. In my culture, the young ones help out the elderly as much as they can. Discipline in my grandma's house was enforced by spanking and other forms of physical chastisement. I was not allowed to swear or curse either. My grandma instilled the value of being hardworking, respectful and independent in me. I grew up outside the typical familial setting without much societal support.

I would like my daughter's upbringing to be different from how I was brought up.

The major parenting values for me as a migrant parent in Ireland are for my daughter to be proud of her culture and identity as well as be truthful.

Also, it is important for my daughter to be well educated and understand the value of being hardworking in school. In terms of discipline, I have spanked my child before because it is honestly difficult to talk to a toddler who is too young to understand things. Raising my voice when I say "No" works well so I do shout at her. Hopefully when she is much older, we would communicate more effectively and I would be able to talk to her as I myself am tired of shouting.

My experience in Ireland has been rather eventful especially being a resident of Direct Provision as a young single mother. I once stayed in an emergency accommodation centre. This is a house where the owner resides in her house

and makes room to accommodate asylum seekers. In my time in that house, I felt I had no power to do anything. The owner constantly threatened to report me to TUSLA for everything I did. She asked me to get a cot for my baby to sleep in and that I should not share a bed with my daughter. I said I had no issue sharing a bed with my baby but she threatened to call TUSLA to take away my child from me if I did not get a cot for my girl. I asked for a cot to be provided to me but none was.

I had no means to buy a cot and lived in fear that this woman would report to TUSLA for not having a cot for my daughter.

The entire fuss around the cot was quite strange to me because I had another daughter in Nigeria who was presently being looked after by my family there. I would often sleep on the same bed with my daughter then and she turned out fine. I felt as though I was being picked on and even bullied because of my situation. Why was this woman imposing her own mothering preferences on me?



I was studying at the time and was also the primary carer of my child. I had some friends that could help but sometimes it was hard to trust people in the centre. I would leave my child for some minutes to go into the kitchen area to pick up food and the owner would leave notes threatening to report me. One day she finally reported me to TUSLA. The social worker from TUSLA called and advised that I ask other people to watch my child where I needed to do anything alone.

To me, it was still impractical because I cannot trust people in the DP centre with my child, It was not a family setting!

I quite like the mindful parenting that is practised in Ireland. The importance of the independence of children is also an interesting parenting practices that I have come to admire and will possibly implement when my child gets a little older. This project is very unique and has the capacity to change the lives of many migrant parents. I also hope that AkiDwA is able to provide a resourceful support system for migrant parents to make the transition to parenting under Irish standards easier.

Leah's Story

"The very first time I got into trouble with TUSLA, was in 2022 and my ex-husband reported me to TUSLA as some sort of power and control move."

Leah, 42 years old

I came into Ireland in 1997 at the age of 17 years and I had all my children in Ireland. I have 3 boys and 1 girl. My ex-husband who is their dad is from Romania.

My parents moved to Portugal when I was about 8 years old but I am originally from Angola. However, we were brought up in line with Angolan culture. The entire family, uncles and aunties who are living with the family would help look after the children. However, when my parents moved it was just the four of us. We, the children were brought up not to challenge the authority of an older person unlike children nowadays who challenge people for reprimanding them.

I would say that I am bringing up my children in a similar way to how I was brought up. However, I give them more information than I did have growing up. When I was younger, my parents would just lay down the law without explaining why the rules existed and I wanted to understand why I was being told I could not do certain things so I grew up with a lot of questions. We had family meetings but they were more of lectures not meetings. With my own children I try to answer the why question and I allow them express themselves more in the family meetings and come up with potential strategies for addressing misbehaviour. I place the ball in their court a bit more. Other than that, the values are very similar, I ensure they uphold Christian values as we are a Christian family and we have a good time as well, travelling and playing together.

As a migrant parent Ireland, it is important for my children to understand that they are African and this is their background regardless of where they are going or where they are born.

My cultural values are not based on tradition but based on what I was taught from my familial household and I would explain cultural/traditional practices as they come up so they are in tune with what the traditional practices are. I find that children want to do things that their friends are doing but I have to remind my children to remember their background.

In terms of discipline, I do chastise my children physically and I have even told this to a social worker before. I tell them, this is what the bible says, once you are not doing it in anger then you are reprimanding your child but once you as a parent are angry, you would not control how you are chastising your child. We had “Mr Right”, a cane which came out when children misbehaved. I would whip the child according to their age on their bum and I will also have a discussion with them. With the more children I had, the younger ones see the way the older ones behave and are generally good because their brother and sister are their peers they behave like them not like their other peers in schools.

The very first time I got into trouble with TUSLA, was in 2022 and my ex-husband reported me to TUSLA as some sort of power and control move. We had just separated and he was indirectly trying to find out where I was. At the time, we had just separated and I guess he was not too happy about it and he called TUSLA and reported me for neglecting the children. When he left, my younger brother came to live with me and was helping me mind my child so his claims were baseless. TUSLA came to my house to investigate, they were quite happy with the conditions. They saw that my children happy and my house were in order.

About six years ago, and this was one of the actions that led to the separation, my ex-husband wanted to beat up one of the twin boys who was 4 years old at the time for breaking his brother’s teeth by throwing a toy at his brother. My ex-husband still came back angry about this and wanted to physically discipline the young boy. But he was so angry, he was fuming. I tried to settle him and let him understand that I had reprimanded the young boy. He refused to calm down and I called the police and social workers were involved.

I think a lot of times, the social workers want you to tell them that the child is having trauma, nightmares and is afraid of the child from the incident but this is not the case.

I told social workers that in my household, physical chastisement occurs and this is how I was brought up and my parents before them and so on and I said to them.

So I explained that I am training my kids to learn that there are consequences to their actions and I told them, if you think you can do a better job than me with my kids to be responsible adults, you come and get them.

There is a cultural understanding that physical chastisement is not a sign of hatred but correction. He is a great dad but that day he was acting out of rage.



In the school, they teach the children about abuse in school and they provide the children with certain words that aggravate circumstances so they can put in the report. So there is a need to create awareness for service providers that they are creating these profiles. As migrants we have to be very careful especially where English is not our first language, they could just be saying yes to everything asked by social workers.

I find that children who have gone into state care before want to return back there because they have access to any gadget and any toy that they want in the fostering setting. The temporary foster parents give them so much and once the temporary care order is up, those facilities are taken away and at home, mum and dad are not able to give them these gadgets so sometimes they will report their parents and exaggerate the occurrences at home. The child care system is flawed as it encourages children to misbehave as foster care is a reward because children do not know what it good for them in the long run as this familial break down would most likely affect them.



COLLECTION OF FOLK TALES

Whilst telling their stories as part of this project, folk tales was repeatedly highlighted by the mothers as an integral part of African upbringing. Many mothers highlighted that their parents used the telling of folk tales as an illustrative and interesting way to impart life lessons, morals and values. We therefore, decided to share some famous African Folk tales in order to illuminate this beautiful part of African parenting culture and celebrate this important part of child upbringing in African culture.

The Dog and the Greedy Tortoise

A West African Folktale



“There was a famine in the animal kingdom. This famine had lasted so long that any existing source of food had been completely depleted. The animals knew they had to do something real quick or they would all die off one by one. They called a meeting where every animal was in attendance and they determined that they had to do something drastic. It was decided that the mothers would be sacrificed to ensure the continuation of the animal races. They would eat their mothers.

The dog was extremely sad because he loved his mother. He thought about this action a great deal and decided he was not going to sacrifice his mother. Instead, he hid her in the sky. Every day, he would go to a particular spot where he sang a song asking his mother to drop a rope. His mother would drop a rope and the dog would climb to the sky where his mother would have a feast waiting for him.

One day, as the dog was singing for his mother to drop the rope, the tortoise was passing by and hid himself to observe what was going on. He heard the song the dog was singing, then he saw a rope being dropped from the sky and with which the dog climbed to the sky.

The following day, the tortoise went to the same spot and, disguising his voice like the dog’s, he sang the song he had heard the dog sing the day before. A rope dropped from the sky and the tortoise began to climb this rope. At this same time, the dog was just approaching the same spot when he saw the tortoise climbing to the sky. The dog immediately started to sing to his mother. This time, he sang that he was not the one climbing the rope and that his mother should cut the rope. Dog’s mother got a pair of scissors and cut the rope, sending the tortoise crashing to the ground.

This caused tortoise’ shell to break into several pieces. He managed to glue these pieces together, but that was how the tortoise ended up with the rough shell we know today¹³.”



13 Anike’s Foundation, “The Dog and the Greedy Tortoise” Available at: <https://anikefoundation.org/african-folktales/the-dog-and-the-greedy-tortoise>
Accessed on 10.06.2022

The Story of the Lightning and the Thunder

A Nigerian Folktale



“In the olden days the thunder and lightning lived on the earth amongst all the other people, but the king made them live at the far end of the town, as far as possible from other people’s houses.

The thunder was an old mother sheep, and the lightning was her son, a ram. Whenever the ram got angry he used to go about and burn houses and knock down trees; he even did damage on the farms, and sometimes killed people. Whenever the lightning did these things, his mother used to call out to him in a very loud voice to stop and not to do any more damage; but the lightning did not care in the least for what his mother said, and when he was in a bad temper used to do a very large amount of damage. At last the people could not stand it any longer, and complained to the king.

So the king made a special order that the sheep (Thunder) and her son, the ram (Lightning), should leave the town and live in the far bush. This did not do much good, as when the ram got angry he still burnt the forest, and the flames sometimes spread to the farms and consumed them.

So the people complained again, and the king banished both the lightning and the thunder from the earth and made them live in the sky, where they could not cause so much destruction. Ever since, when the lightning is angry, he commits damage as before, but you can hear his mother, the thunder, rebuking him and telling him to stop. Sometimes, however, when the mother has gone away some distance from her naughty son, you can still see that he is angry and is doing damage, but his mother’s voice cannot be heard¹⁴.”

14 Elpinstone Dayrell, Folk Stories from Southern Nigeria (Longmans Green and Co., London 1910), Story 19 – The Story of the Lightning and the Thunder, Available at https://www.worldoftales.com/African_folktales/Nigerian_folktale_19.html#gsc.tab=0 accessed on 10.06.2022

The Kites and the Crows

A Tanzanian Folktale

“One day Koongoo’roo, sultan of the crows, sent a letter to Mway’way, sultan of the kites, containing these few words: “I want you folks to be my soldiers.”

To this brief message Mwayway at once wrote this short reply: “I should say not.”

Thereupon, thinking to scare Mwayway, the sultan of the crows sent him word, “If you refuse to obey me I’ll make war upon you.”

To which the sultan of the kites replied, “That suits me; let us fight, and if you beat us we will obey you, but if we are victors you shall be our servants.”

So they gathered their forces and engaged in a great battle, and in a little while it became evident that the crows were being badly beaten.



As it appeared certain that, if something were not done pretty quickly, they would all be killed, one old crow, named Jeeoo’see, suddenly proposed that they should fly away.

Directly the suggestion was made it was acted upon, and the crows left their homes and flew far away, where they set up another town. So, when the kites entered the place, they found no one there, and they took up their residence in Crowtown.

One day, when the crows had gathered in council, Koongooroo stood up and said: "My people, do as I command you, and all will be well. Pluck out some of my feathers and throw me into the town of the kites; then come back and stay here until you hear from me."

Without argument or questioning the crows obeyed their sultan's command.

Koongooroo had lain in the street but a short time, when some passing kites saw him and inquired threateningly, "What are you doing here in our town?"

With many a moan he replied, "My companions have beaten me and turned me out of their town because I advised them to obey Mwayway, sultan of the kites."

When they heard this they picked him up and took him before the sultan, to whom they said, "We found this fellow lying in the street, and he attributes his involuntary presence in our town to so singular a circumstance that we thought you should hear his story."

Koongooroo was then bidden to repeat his statement, which he did, adding the remark that, much as he had suffered, he still held to his opinion that Mwayway was his rightful sultan.

This, of course, made a very favorable impression, and the sultan said, "You have more sense than all the rest of your tribe put together; I guess you can stay here and live with us."

So Koongooroo, expressing much gratitude, settled down, apparently, to spend the remainder of his life with the kites.

One day his neighbors took him to church with them, and when they returned home they asked him, "Who have the best kind of religion, the kites or the crows?"

To which crafty old Koongooroo replied, with great enthusiasm, "Oh, the kites, by long odds!"

This answer tickled the kites like anything, and Koongooroo was looked upon as a bird of remarkable discernment.

When almost another week had passed, the sultan of the crows slipped away in the night, went to his own town, and called his people together.

"To-morrow," said he, "is the great annual religious festival of the kites, and they will all go to church in the morning. Go, now, and get some wood and some fire, and wait near their town until I call you; then come quickly and set fire to the church."

Then he hurried back to Mwayway's town.

The crows were very busy indeed all that night, and by dawn they had an abundance of wood and fire at hand, and were lying in wait near the town of their victorious enemies.

So in the morning every kite went to church. There was not one person left at home except old Koongooroo.

When his neighbors called for him they found him lying down. "Why!" they exclaimed with surprise, "are you not going to church to-day?"

"Oh," said he, "I wish I could; but my stomach aches so badly I can't move!" And he groaned dreadfully.

"Ah, poor fellow!" said they; "you will be better in bed;" and they left him to himself.

As soon as everybody was out of sight he flew swiftly to his soldiers and cried, "Come on; they're all in the church."

Then they all crept quickly but quietly to the church, and while some piled wood about the door, others applied fire.

The wood caught readily, and the fire was burning fiercely before the kites were aware of their danger; but when the church began to fill with smoke, and tongues of flame shot through the cracks, they tried to escape through the windows. The greater part of them, however, were suffocated, or, having their wings singed, could not fly away, and so were burned to death, among them their sultan, Mwayway; and Koongooroo and his crows got their old town back again.

From that day to this the kites fly away from the crows¹⁵."

15 Translated by Goerge W Baterman, Zanzibar Tales (A.C. McClurg & Co., Chicago, 1910); Story 4, The Kites and the Crows, Available at: https://www.worldoftales.com/African_folktales/African_Folktale_42.html#gsc.tab=0 Accessed on 10.06.2022

Why the Hyena is Lame

A South African Folktale



“It was Tante Hyena that Jakhals cheated more than anyone,” said Outa. “She always forgot about the last time he had played a trick on her, so she was quite ready to believe him when he came along with another story. Some people are so, my baasjes. P’raps it’s kindness, p’raps it’s only stupidity; Outa doesn’t know.

“One day Jakhals and Hyena were out walking together when a white cloud came up behind the kopjes and floated over the veld quite close to them. It was a nice thick cloud, just like white fat, and Jakhals climbed on to it and sat looking down over the edge. Then he bit pieces out of it, and ate them.

“‘Arré! but this white fat is nice,’ he said. ‘N-yum, n-yum, n-yum,’ and he chewed round the cloud like a caterpillar chews a leaf.

“Hyena licked her lips and looked up at him.

“‘Throw me down some, please,’ she said.

“‘Ach! my Brown Sister, will I then be so greedy as to throw you down little bits? Wait till I get down, and then I’ll help you up to eat for yourself. But come a little nearer so that you can catch me when I jump.’

“So Hyena stood ready, and Jakhals jumped in such a way that he knocked her into the sand. He fell soft, because he was on top, but foei! poor Hyena had all the breath knocked out of her and she was covered with dust.

“‘Ach! but I am clumsy!’ said Jakhals; ‘but never mind, now I’ll help you.’

“So when she had got up and dusted herself, he helped her to climb on to the cloud. There she sat, biting pieces off and eating them, ‘N-yum, n-yum, n-yum, it’s just like white fat!’

“After a time she called out, ‘Grey Brother, I’ve had enough. I want to come down. Please catch me when I jump.’

“‘Ach, certainly Brown Sister, come on. Just see how nicely I’ll catch you. So-o-o.’

“He held out his arms, but just as Hyena jumped he sprang to one side, calling out, ‘Ola! Ola! a thorn has pricked me. What shall I do? what shall I do?’ and he hopped about holding one leg up.

“‘Woops! Down fell Brown Sister, and as she fell she put out her left leg to save herself, but it doubled up under her and was nearly broken. She lay in a bundle in the sand, crying, ‘My leg is cracked! my leg is cracked!’

“‘Jakhals came along very slowly—jump, jump, on three legs. Surely the thorn, that wasn’t there, was hurting him very much!

“‘Oo! oo!’ cried Hyena, ‘help me up, Grey Brother. My leg is broken.’

“‘And mine has a thorn in it. Foei toch, my poor sister! How can the sick help the sick? The only plan is for us to get home in the best way we can. Good-bye, and I will visit you to-morrow to see if you are all right.’

“And off he went—jump, jump, on three legs—very slowly; but as soon as Old Brown Sister could not see him, he put down the other one and—sh-h-h—he shot over the veld and got home just in time to have a nice supper of young ducks that Mrs. Jakhals and the children had caught at Oubaas van Niekerk’s dam.

“But poor Brown Sister lay in the sand crying over her sore places, and from that day she walks lame, because her left hind foot is smaller than the right one¹⁶.”

16 Sanni Metelerkamp, *Outa Karel's Stories: South African Folk-Lore Tales* (Macmillan and Co. Limited, London, 1914) ;Story 4, *Why the Hyena is Lame*, Available at: https://www.worldoftales.com/African_folktales/African_Folktale_14.html#gsc.tab=0 Accessed on 10.06.2022

Ananse and the Pot of Wisdom

-A Ghanaian Folktale



“Long ago, people knew very little. They knew nothing about farming, tools, or how to weave cloths. Nyame, the God of heaven had all the wisdom. He kept all the wisdom stored up in a clay pot. One day Nyame gave Ananse the spider a special gift; the pot, with all the wisdom in it.

Ananse was excited. Every time he looked in the clay pot, he learned something new. Greedily, he decided to keep the pot away from the world. He did not want to share with anyone else. He tied a rope around his waist so he would be able to climb a tree. Also, he tied the rope around the pot of wisdom and it hung down in front of him. He began to climb the tree.

Ananse tried tying the clay pot full of wisdom to his back, and it really was a lot easier. In no time he reached the top of the tree. But then he stopped and thought. "I'm supposed to be the one with all the wisdom, and here this little kid was smarter than me!" Ananse was so angry about this that he threw the clay pot down out of the tree. It smashed into pieces on the ground. Of course, all the wisdom got out and flew away all over the world. That is how people learned to farm, and to make clothes, and to make iron, and all the other things that people know how to do¹⁷.”

17 Anike Foundation, “Ananse and the Pot of Wisdom” Available at: <https://anikefoundation.org/african-folktales/ananse-and-the-pot-of-wisdom> Accessed on 11.06.2022

How the Hunter Obtained Money from his Friends

A Nigerian Folktale

“Many years ago there was a Calabar hunter called Effiong, who lived in the bush, killed plenty of animals, and made much money. Everyone in the country knew him, and one of his best friends was a man called Okun, who lived near him. But Effiong was very extravagant, and spent much money in eating and drinking with every one, until at last he became quite poor, so he had to go out hunting again; but now his good luck seemed to have deserted him, for although he worked hard, and hunted day and night, he could not succeed in killing anything. One day, as he was very hungry, he went to his friend Okun and borrowed two hundred rods from him, and told him to come to his house on a certain day to get his money, and he told him to bring his gun, loaded, with him.

Now, some time before this Effiong had made friends with a leopard and a bush cat, whom he had met in the forest whilst on one of his hunting expeditions; and he had also made friends with a goat and a cock at a farm where he had stayed for the night. But though Effiong had borrowed the money from Okun, he could not think how he was to repay it on the day he had promised. At last, however, he thought of a plan, and on the next day he went to his friend the leopard, and asked him to lend him two hundred rods, promising to return the amount to him on the same day as he had promised to pay Okun; and he also told the leopard, that if he were absent when he came for his money, he could kill anything he saw in the house and eat it. The leopard was then to wait until the hunter arrived, when he would pay him the money; and to this the leopard agreed. The hunter then went to his friend the goat, and borrowed two hundred rods from him in the same way. Effiong also went to his friends the bush cat and the cock, and borrowed two hundred rods from each of them on the same conditions, and told each one of them that if he were absent when they arrived, they could kill and eat anything they found about the place.

When the appointed day arrived the hunter spread some corn on the ground, and then went away and left the house deserted. Very early in the morning, soon after he had begun to crow, the cock remembered what the hunter had told him, and walked over to the hunter's house, but found no one there. On

looking round, however, he saw some corn on the ground, and, being hungry, he commenced to eat. About this time the bush cat also arrived, and not finding the hunter at home, he, too, looked about, and very soon he espied the cock, who was busy picking up the grains of corn. So the bush cat went up very softly behind and pounced on the cock and killed him at once, and began to eat him.



By this time the goat had come for his money; but not finding his friend, he walked about until he came upon the bush cat, who was so intent upon his meal off the cock, that he did not notice the goat approaching; and the goat, being in rather a bad temper at not getting his money, at once charged at the bush cat and knocked him over, butting him with his horns. The bush cat did not like at all, so, as he was not big enough to fight the goat, he picked up the remains of the cock and ran off with it to the bush, and so lost his money, as he did not await the arrival of the hunter. The goat was thus left master of the situation and started bleating, and this noise attracted the attention of the leopard, who was on his way to receive payment from the hunter. As he got nearer the smell of goat became very strong, and being hungry, for he had not eaten anything for some time, he approached the goat very carefully. Not seeing any one about he stalked the goat and got nearer and nearer, until he was within springing distance. The goat, in the meantime, was grazing quietly, quite unsuspecting of any danger, as he was in his friend the hunter's compound. Now and then he would say Ba!! But most of the time he was busy eating the young grass, and picking up the leaves which had fallen from a tree of which he was very fond. Suddenly the leopard sprang at the goat, and with one crunch at the neck brought him down. The goat was dead almost at once, and the leopard started on his meal.

It was now about eight o'clock in the morning, and Okun, the hunter's friend, having had his early morning meal, went out with his gun to receive payment of the two hundred rods he had lent to the hunter. When he got close to the

house he heard a crunching sound, and, being a hunter himself, he approached very cautiously, and looking over the fence saw the leopard only a few yards off busily engaged eating the goat. He took careful aim at the leopard and fired, whereupon the leopard rolled over dead. The death of the leopard meant that four of the hunter's creditors were now disposed of, as the bush cat had killed the cock, the goat had driven the bush cat away (who thus forfeited his claim), and in his turn the goat had been killed by the leopard, who had just been slain by Okun. This meant a saving of eight hundred rods to Effiong; but he was not content with this, and directly he heard the report of the gun he ran out from where he had been hiding all the time, and found the leopard lying dead with Okun standing over it. Then in very strong language Effiong began to upbraid his friend, and asked him why he had killed his old friend the leopard, that nothing would satisfy him but that he should report the whole matter to the king, who would no doubt deal with him as he thought fit. When Effiong said this Okun was frightened, and begged him not to say anything more about the matter, as the king would be angry; but the hunter was obdurate, and refused to listen to him; and at last Okun said, "If you will allow the whole thing to drop and will say no more about it, I will make you a present of the two hundred rods you borrowed from me." This was just what Effiong wanted, but still he did not give in at once; eventually, however, he agreed, and told Okun he might go, and that he would bury the body of his friend the leopard.

Directly Okun had gone, instead of burying the body Effiong dragged it inside the house and skinned it very carefully. The skin he put out to dry in the sun, and covered it with wood ash, and the body he ate. When the skin was well cured the hunter took it to a distant market, where he sold it for much money. And now, whenever a bush cat sees a cock he always kills it, and does so by right, as he takes the cock in part payment of the two hundred rods which the hunter never paid him.

Moral. Never lend money to people, because if they cannot pay they will try to kill you or get rid of you in some way, either by poison or by setting bad JuJu's for you¹⁸."

18 Dayrell Elphinstone, "How a Hunter obtained Money from his Friends the Leopard, Goat, Bush Cat, and Cock, and how he got out of repaying them" in *Folktales from Southern Nigeria* (Lonmans, Green and Co. London, 1910) Available at: https://www.worldoftales.com/African_folktales/Nigerian_folk-tale_2.html#gsc.tab=0 Accessed on: 10.06.2022



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