

**'SOMETIMES I THINKING ABOUT HOME ... SEEMS LIKE
A MAGIC Y'KNOW'.**

**STORIES FROM THE DISPLACED: STORIES OF IDENTITY,
MEANING AND REAL LEARNING**

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Duncan McKechnie (17 March 1966 – 14 January 2012) has had a major bearing on the research and is present in the following pages.

ABSTRACT

*How can we live without our lives? How will we know it's us without our past? **

History tells us that displacement and migration are part of the human experience. Ireland bears witness to this through the mass emigration of hundreds of thousands of its people in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. And across mainland Europe the devastating effects of two prolonged periods of war in the twentieth century resulted in enormous numbers of people being displaced by May 1945 – the eminent British historian Eric Hobsbawm (1995) quotes one estimate which put the figure at a staggering 40.5million (p. 51).

Undoubtedly then, we know that displacement and migration are historical facts, part of the collective experience of being human. But while we know about these experiences, a legitimate question to ask is the degree to which we *understand* them. We know that displaced individuals, as with people everywhere, get on with the business of their daily lives as best they can, seeking opportunities to develop and improve their situation. But what is happening internally? Just what is it like to be uprooted as a result of war, persecution and/or fear? And what happens to the inner self when a person physically exits their known life, leaving behind their history, family relationships, friendships, connections, simple pleasures, the known self. In such circumstances, what happens to an individual's sense of who they are, their place in the world, their identity? These are the questions which this research seeks to address.

It does so by gathering together four individuals who have been displaced to Ireland, and asking them to share and collectively reflect on their stories of changing identity. The rationale for a group approach is to provide a dialogical space for learning in which the individuals can explore and reconsider their own experiences in light of the experiences and thoughts of others. In this way, the study adopts adult education practices in an attempt to provide an opportunity for real, meaningful learning for everyone involved.

*Steinbeck, J. (1973, p. 82). *The Grapes of Wrath*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd.

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INTRODUCTION

On 23rd April 2010 I entered a room with four other people and we spent the next two hours sharing stories and doing identity work. This research tells the story of the before, the during and the after of that workshop. More of that in a moment, but first to the question driving the investigation, which is this:

For individual refugees what are the impacts of displacement on their sense of identity, and to what extent can adult education play a role in helping such individuals make sense of themselves in their new world?

Esterberg's assertion that 'we are not indifferent to what we study' (2002, p. 11) is affirmed by this research which is born out of personal experience. For nine years I worked closely with adult refugees trying to support them as they attempted to cope with the relentless changes and challenges which affected their everyday lives. This intense period of my professional life informs the research in at least two ways: Firstly, it provides the ontological position that 'migration remains a singular, subjective and unique experience which resists generalisations' (Krzyzanowski and Wodak, 2008, p. 98); and secondly, in encountering individuals in turbulence I began to wonder about the effects it was having on their sense of self. The origins of the research question lie here, and are explored in greater depth in Chapter 1.

Before progressing with the investigation, however, a number of issues had to be addressed, not the least of which was the question of simply getting people to talk about their identities. Much thought was spent on this matter until, quite by accident, a methodology based on narrative inquiry presented itself. This is the focus of Chapter 3 which also comprises the method, or the doing, of the research and a discussion of the ethical considerations underpinning the work.

A second major issue was that of consulting the existing literature in order to provide validation for the inquiry, and also to formulate a theoretical lens through which to examine the data generated in the workshop. The themes of 'loss and regeneration' (Camino and Krulfeld, 1994, p. ix) are prevalent in the literature on the refugee experience; the former inviting questions concerning loss of identity,

the latter speaking directly to notions of becoming which are at the core of key works on identity formation, writings which acknowledge the vital role of social context in shaping an individual sense of self. These concepts are discussed fully in Chapter 2.

Taken together Chapters 1-3 constitute the 'before' element of the research story. Chapter 4 moves to the participants and the stories they told during the workshop, together with the ensuing conversations and comments, are presented here with detailed context. Also presented, in their entirety, are the participants' responses to a reflections form which asked them to appraise the workshop and consider the value of the learning it held for them. The 'after' component of the research is told in Chapters 5 and 6, which are the analysis and conclusions respectively, and also in my personal reflections which comprise the closing chapter of the study.

As suggested by the research question, the investigation examines the effect of displacement on the identity of individual refugees. The stories and observations of the participants, as told in the workshop, relate the profound levels of uncertainty and anxiety they felt at their changing sense of self, particularly in relation to their home countries; and confirm the on-going reformulation of identity as a human endeavour shaped by social context. In keeping with a guiding tenet of narrative inquiry, however, this research does not seek to extrapolate broad, generalised conclusions from the lived experience of four individuals. Indeed, the purpose of the workshop was for *the participants* to re-think and understand their experiences in light of similar experiences (and thoughts) as told by others.

So what is the argument the research will put forward? A key concern running through the study is the role and purpose of adult education in working with refugees. The concern again arises from my teaching experience, and at this point the reader should be aware that mine is not a 'disembodied 'view from nowhere'' (Frazer and Nicholson as cited in Gillies and Alldred, 2002, p. 41). It is a perspective grounded in an educational practice (and tradition) which views learners as concrete individuals and which seeks to foster human agency by helping them to make sense of the world around them. This view forms the key

argument of the work and is at odds with discourses of human capital (see Chapter 1.3.) which now shape educational policy decisions in Ireland.

The research then carries a political edge. But it lets the participants do the talking. Their thoughts and comments about the story-telling workshop inform us, in unequivocal, enthusiastic words, that sharing stories of experience holds real, significant meaning, and are unanimous that there is a place for such learning in adult education settings. For practitioners who see adult education as a human enterprise, these are words that matter.

I end the introduction with a request for the reader's patience, as the finished study is longer than the norm. This is on account of Chapters 1 and 4 both of which are extended on the advice of Michael Murray, my supervisor. Both chapters focus on the experiences (mine and the participants) which lie at the heart of the research.

CHAPTER 1 – ORIGINS

In charting the origins of this study, the introductory chapter affirms Pelias's (2004) assertion that 'All research is a first-person narrative' (p. 7). As will be seen, the research is deeply rooted in, and grew out of, my experience teaching English to adult refugees over a nine-year period. Indeed the idea for the research originated in my identifying and contemplating the turbulence (as I called it) I witnessed, and worked with, in the lives of my participants, and gained traction when I connected this turbulence to Erik Erikson's definition of identity crisis. This is outlined in section 1.2. of the chapter.

And although the notion that the lived experience of refugees could precipitate an identity crisis, or prompt a changing perception of the self, seemed to make sense, it remained nothing more than a frustratingly elusive notion. Until, that is, I noted my response to a newspaper article – see section 1.1. It was the starting point for the investigation.

Although brief, section 1.1. is key for it sets out the ontological position of this investigation, one which I had learned experientially in my teaching practice and which, therefore, is addressed in section 1.2. – the priority of foregrounding the individual. This position is explored further in section 1.3. where the notion of the concrete other, and its importance, is discussed in the context of international events.

Section 1.4. returns to my personal experience taking a 'then-and-now' approach to view developments in adult education; and to contrast present government thinking on the purpose of adult learning with the philosophy underpinning this study – that of practising and promoting human agency through participative learning.

And so to that newspaper article ...

1.1. The research question – don't talk about them, ask them

In his weekly review of Irish radio for *The Irish Times*, Fottrell (2010) reported on a series of debates which followed in the wake of an unprovoked attack on a teenage boy in Tyrrelstown, north County Dublin. The teenager was born in Ireland to Nigerian-born parents and the discussions probed the existence of racial tensions in the area. In his review Fottrell noted the discrepancies in how the victim was being referred to and offered his thoughts on the subject,

To label all first-generation immigrants as Irish is patronising ... and may equally deny the rich reality of a multicultural society. Many Nigerian-born immigrants are surely as proud of their Nigerian heritage as they are of their Irish, and may consider themselves Nigerian, Irish or, indeed, Nigerian-Irish.

Reading these words and, indeed, the tenor of the debate being reported provided justification for the research inquiry I had started six months earlier. Here were professional, well-educated and well-meaning representatives from the majority community, including journalists, a politician, an academic and the chief executive from the Immigrant Council of Ireland, offering thoughts on the terminology *they* would use to talk about a minority group in society. Not one of the contributors, it seemed, made the point that labelling minority groups is a deeply flawed practice which engenders ignorance and social division. Rather than spending time thinking of an 'appropriate' label for those newly arrived in Ireland, it is far more educative, inclusive and valuable, at both personal and society level, to simply ask people how they describe themselves. This is what this research project set out to do.

1.2. The research question – why refugees and why identity

The motivation for undertaking this research project lies in the trajectories of my personal life and professional career. On the personal side I am an immigrant to Ireland, arriving in Dublin on 30th December 1990, where, aside from two spells working in Oman and Spain, I have lived ever since. Dublin is unequivocally home but I am not sure of the exact moment when I relieved my hometown York of its status as 'home' and transferred it to Ireland's capital. And in terms of national identity, I know I am not, and never will be, definitively Irish, but I no longer feel particularly English. There is, therefore, an undoubted personal dimension to the research work and it is one which receives due consideration in Chapter 7, (see

p.78). However, the important clarification must be made that uncertainties about my own identity were not the driving force behind this inquiry. Rather, the origins of the study are to be found in a particularly rich and rewarding period of my career.

In March 1999 I started work at the Refugee Language Support Unit, soon to become Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT). Funded wholly by the then Department of Education and Science, IILT's remit was threefold: To deliver English language courses to adult refugees throughout the state; to provide language and integration supports to teachers in primary and secondary schools; and to provide teaching materials and support to tutors working with refugees and asylum seekers in the then VEC network, and also in voluntary agencies.

In my nine years at IILT (Dublin) I worked in all spheres of its operation, with approximately five and-a-half years as a teacher of English, basic IT skills, and basic literacy skills to individuals with little or no English. It was a twenty-hour teaching week, forty-eight weeks of the year. IILT opened year round, closing only for a week at Christmas. As a teacher, the work was simultaneously challenging but stimulating, energizing but draining, demanding but extremely satisfying. Above all it was characterised by the pulsing hum of constant learning – with participants from 73 countries in 2005 (The Equality Authority, 2006, p. 20), it could hardly be otherwise. Indeed, as the classes focussed on the language skills the participants needed in their everyday encounters with landlords, government officials, doctors, their children's teachers and so on, there were frequent impromptu discussions comparing the established norms of social etiquette, cultural mores and values, and inter-personal communication in Ireland with the participants' own countries. At these times, with the participants wanting to understand the cultural practices of Irish people and how Irish society works, everybody in the room was fully switched on. It was real, meaningful, mutual learning.

So what did I learn? As noted at the start of this chapter I learned not to label people. For a period of three years IILT marked World Refugee Day on 20th June by organising a celebration featuring invited guests (a junior minister in the first year), performances of music and poetry from the participants, as well as mounds

of traditional food which the participants had prepared and brought in on the day. In addition, the walls were covered with posters, displays and articles all designed and produced by the participants. Amidst the celebrations, however, there were voices of dissent. In the days leading up to the event some of the posters and displays were deliberately ripped, while hand-written protests appeared on others. 'I'm not a refugee I'm a person' was one such message, 'I am my name' another. And in advance of 20th June we, that is the teachers, reported that some of our participants conveyed similar sentiments as they explained that they would not be attending. Realising that the celebration was problematic, it was discontinued. The lesson of not attaching labels to people had been learned, and it is one which I have sought to bring to the present research project.

And following on from, or perhaps contained in, the above point is that I re-learned a fundamental principle of all teaching practice – to treat each of the people in the group as a unique individual. In the years prior to joining the teaching staff at IILT I had taught in private language schools in Dublin, and I had become familiar and comfortable with the nationalities which made up the participant cohort – mainly European, as well as participants from Japan, China, and Brazil. I had also developed an understanding of the kinds of activities and language learning approaches which worked (or not) with the various nationality groupings, and had also become attuned to the varying modes of interaction and personal communication which result from cultural and social practices in the different countries. When new participants were assigned to my class I would immediately ask for their nationality, content to make generalisations about their approach to learning and, indeed, their expectations of the learning environment.

Working in IILT quickly dispelled such lazy assumptions. The nationalities of the participants in my first two groups were, for the most part, completely new to me as a teacher. I had never before worked with individuals from Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Romania, Serbia and more. With a group of fourteen comprising individuals of nine or ten nationalities, it was impossible to form any generalisations about learning styles common to individuals from a particular country. But more

than that, I found that the sheer diversity of our participants defied any attempt at national stereotyping. I quickly learned not to assume, for example, that beyond sharing the official language of English, individuals from Nigeria had anything in common; they might not speak the same African languages, they might have a different comportment incorporating varying perceptions of personal space and body contact. Similarly, when commencing with a new group I couldn't predict if the participants from Iran would understand each other's language. And I soon discarded my un-founded assumption that all our participants from North African, Arabic and Persian countries were Muslim.

And there was one other factor which put paid to my un-thinking tendency to assume, or to seek, commonality in people from the same country. During my time teaching in the private language schools I had come to take it for granted that in a group of mixed nationalities, participants from the same country were happy to learn and study together. As noted earlier, however, such an assumption derived from a student cohort I no longer worked with, and during the course of one memorable session with a group in IILT it was one which was permanently banished.

The group were developing their interview skills and I had asked them to prepare to talk about their previous work experience. When it was his turn, a participant from an African country explained that he had never before talked about his working life as he was fearful that people in his own community would find out. After some encouragement, and an undertaking of confidentiality from the rest of the group (none of whom were African), he agreed to partake in the exercise. He described setting up his own security service when younger, only to be threatened by, then press-ganged into, the security team of one of Africa's most ruthless dictators. He was gradually promoted through the ranks, but became aware from associates that those who were elevated to senior positions were destined to be disappeared. Carefully, and under great duress, he arranged his escape, making sure that his wife and children had fled three days earlier. While trying to move his life forward in Ireland, he was afraid that amongst his own community his name would be recognised either by someone who was an ally of the former dictator, or

by someone who might connect him to the brutal regime. He did not associate with anyone he did not know from his country, and said he would have left the group had there been anyone who shared his nationality.

He spoke for about thirty minutes and like the rest of the group I was spellbound. The session was about eighteen months into my time with IILT, and was a pivotal moment; I realised that the experiences of the individuals in the room cut through my assumptions about the homogeneity of people from the same country, and that from this point on my professional practice required that I see and work with the participants as unique individuals. And it is a perspective which forms a key ontological position of this study – that ‘migration remains a singular, subjective and unique experience which resists generalisations’ (Krzyzanowski and Wodak, 2008, p. 98).

The above recollection of a class session becoming something altogether different from that which had been planned reveals another, and perhaps *the* most significant, aspect of my learning in the nine years I worked at IILT – that of gaining an understanding of the lives of refugees. More recently my reading on the subject has encompassed articles such as that of Ryan et al. (2007) who tell us that the stories of forced migrants to Ireland are ‘characterised by major personal loss, including the death of close family members in tragic circumstances, and the loss of family contact and support, a rewarding career, the family home and financial resources’ (p. 127). But during those nine intense years I wasn’t able to envisage, let alone articulate, the experiences of the participants in such concise terms; all I could see, and try to support, were individuals living through varying degrees of what, at the time, I called turbulence.

And as I then perceived it there were, broadly speaking, two different kinds of turbulence: The first was manifestly tangible in the distress of those who were clearly traumatised by the circumstances which had caused them to seek refuge in a foreign country; whilst the second was the ongoing turbulence encountered by individuals as they began the process of starting their lives anew. The former was a constant throughout my time in IILT with individuals struggling to deal with the

lasting trauma of having lived through war zones, torture and/or genocide. There was also, for example, the participant who was still in an acute state of mourning for his wife and two children who had perished three years earlier (he survived) in an incident which has become known as 'The Wexford Container Tragedy' (Murphy, 2001)¹.

And around the same time there was the morning when, during a routine one-to-one conversation, a seemingly straight-forward question prompted a participant, who had hitherto struck me as calm, together and self-assured, to break down inconsolably. Our conversation centred on his future plans and when his responses were somewhat unforthcoming I asked about his line of work in his home country, Albania. It was the trigger for an outpouring of a profound grief for which I was totally unprepared. In the twenty minutes that followed, other than repeatedly apologising, his only words were, 'You don't understand. I lost everything'. It was a painful experience and I felt awful, and guilty, at my role not only in precipitating his collapse but at then not being able to offer any meaningful support. It is an incident which has stayed with me as being emblematic of the latent trauma with which individual refugees live.

In addition to those who were working through feelings of loss, there was the turbulence which continually surfaced as individuals undertook the challenging tasks of rebuilding their lives in an unknown environment with few, if any, supports and / or of pursuing life goals which, without their realising, had slipped into the far distance. For a good number of the participants in IILT, the teachers became a valued support to whom they came with a variety of personal issues. I regularly made phone calls to government departments on behalf of anxious participants either seeking updates on their applications for family reunification, leave to remain or refugee status, or requesting clarification about the laborious and complex application procedure itself. At other times I helped stressed participants draft letters requesting that their local housing authority relocate them as a matter of urgency on account of the intimidation and threats they and their children were being subjected to in their own homes. And there were also, almost as a matter of routine, phone calls to landlords, utility services and the Department of Social

Welfare (as it was then) as our disoriented participants needed help to understand the social practices and workings of their new world.

But perhaps the most important support the teaching staff provided was that of career guidance. Although this aspect of our work had mostly positive outcomes as the participants entered the workforce, moved into further and higher education or accessed mainstream training courses, there were numerous occasions when individuals would be overcome at the realisation that, professionally / vocationally speaking, they could not be in Ireland what they were in their own countries. I found these to be particularly difficult moments: The nurse from Russia who momentarily took my hand before bursting into tears and quickly walking out of the building on hearing that her qualifications were not recognised by the then An Bord Altranais; the vet from Egypt who was utterly crushed when, following a conversation with the head of the School of Veterinary Medicine at University College Dublin, I hesitantly relayed the news that neither his sixteen years of practice nor his qualifications held any currency in Ireland; and above all the journalist from Ukraine who interrupted me as I talked about her options and said matter-of-factly, 'Martin, don't worry about me. My life is finished. Now is for my children'.

At this point it is hoped that the earlier description of my time in IILT as 'challenging but stimulating, energizing but draining' is becoming apparent. My colleagues and I provided levels of support which took us beyond the walls of the classroom and into close proximity with our participants. And as we did so we gained insights into the world of refugees; a world in which individuals had, it seemed, fallen out of their lives. Collectively we wondered about them, talked about them, marvelled at their resilience and ability to cope as all aspects of their lives were in a state of flux. And sometimes after class, after the incidents described above, I would sit quietly trying to comprehend the turbulence, and think about what was happening to my participants internally as they strived to reassemble their lives. Gradually then I was tending to consider the inner worlds of my participants, sensing that the upheavals in their lives were having a significant impact within. I understand now that my interest in a person's sense of their identity started at this time.

Such interest would probably have remained passively undeveloped had I not commenced a Higher Diploma in Adult and Community Education at what was then the National University of Ireland, Maynooth in September 2006. As I look back on the strenuous ten months of full-time teaching and full-time studies which followed, I see a pivotal year in terms of my professional (and personal) development. Of the many aspects of the course which I found stimulating and invigorating, the most exciting was the relevance of the learning to my work. Indeed, I came to value the assignments for the opportunity they provided to apply the thoughts of this or that theorist to my practice, to consider anew the purpose of adult education in contemporary Ireland in the light of different ideological perspectives, and to tease out my position on elements of teaching. In short, the theoretical inputs of the course were the perfect complement to my work as they outlined new ways of thinking about what was happening in the classroom.

And one of those inputs, focusing on the ideas of Erik Erikson, provided the spark of ignition for the present research project. Writing about his patients in a veterans' rehabilitation clinic during the Second World War, Erikson dismissed the idea that they were shell-shocked. Instead he asserted that 'most of our patients ... had through the exigencies of war lost a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity' (1983, p. 17). This was the context in which Erikson initially used the term 'identity crisis' (p. 17), and it spoke immediately to the thoughts on the turbulence of my participants which were constantly in my mind.

It struck me then that, as with direct participation in warfare, the refugee experience involves being subjected to terrifying incidents including life-threatening situations, witnessing death, imprisonment, and torture. And, as I was discovering from my participants, it also encompasses persecution, the confiscation of property, and the removal of rights such as the right to work, to shelter and to access health services. The words of the Albanian participant – 'I lost everything' – continued to reverberate, and they connected urgently with Erikson's thoughts on losing 'a sense of personal sameness'. Given the traumatic events which some of my participants had lived through and the fact that they could not return to their

former homes, their former lives, could it be that they were experiencing an identity crisis as defined by Erikson? On the outside they were trying to reassemble their lives; perhaps on the inside they were trying to reassemble their sense of self.

This then is the origin of the research question. It is rooted in a period of my professional career, a period in which I was deeply immersed in my work. The level of commitment to my then participants, based on a growing awareness of the immense challenges they faced, and the importance I attached to supporting them as best I could, provides an explanation of why this inquiry matters to me. But why should it matter to anyone else? Why should it matter to you, the reader, or to my colleagues in adult education, or to broader Irish society? These are vital questions for any research project, and I will attempt to provide answers in the following sections.

1.3. Refugees as concrete others and why it matters

During the course of 2015, anyone with a passing interest in the news could not but become aware of the mass movement of people into Europe. By November a reported 800,000 had attempted to cross the Mediterranean, from locations in either Turkey or the north coast of Africa, 'in search of safety and security on European shores' (Pollak, 2015). There are many dimensions, particularly humanitarian and social as well as economic and political, to a human event of such magnitude which lie beyond the scope of this short study. There is one aspect, however, which is very pertinent to the focus of the research work – the personal. As 2015 unfolded, with the news of a significant increase in the number of people perishing in ill-equipped, over-crowded boats off the north African coast (1,265 in April alone according to data collected by the Organisation for Migration, as cited in Hartocollis, 2015b) giving way to reports in June and July of hundreds of thousands of individuals on the move through Turkey then, via Greece, into Macedonia and Serbia, the personal experiences of those seeking refuge from violence and (civil) war was headline news for a sustained period of time.

As such, not only were horrific events and shocking images reported, such as the 71 bodies discovered in an abandoned lorry in Austria (Harding, 2015) or the

picture of a drowned three-year-old boy washed up on a beach near the Turkish resort of Bodrum (George-Cosh and Parkinson, 2015), but in-depth coverage allowed the world to hear directly, and possibly for the first time, the individual voices of refugees in flight. There were voices of desperation – a mother who had fled Syria in urgent search of a hospital, any hospital, which could perform the life-saving heart surgery her infant daughter urgently needed (Hartocollis, 2015b); of brutal pragmatism – a Nigerian man reasoning that ‘I’d rather drown in the Mediterranean than go back to my home country’ (Pollak, 2015); and of inhumane treatment on the part of European authorities – three young Syrian men relating how they were taken to a police station in Denmark ‘for processing’ only to be ordered to strip naked and turn around in front of police officers before being put into cells for the night without undertaking any paperwork (Hartocollis, 2015a).

Thus was 2015 the year when the majority of people in Europe came to know more fully the plight and circumstances of asylum seekers and refugees, and in doing so came to understand what researchers such as Rumbaut and Rumbaut (1976), Camino and Krulfeld (1994), Omidian (1994), Obehi Edeko (2004), Yambasu (2004) and Ryan et al. (2007) have long been asserting – that at the heart of refugee lives lie traumatic experiences of profound personal loss (this is explored further in Chapter 2.3. see page 33). But has this knowledge precipitated more compassionate, humane policies to support individuals and families whose formerly peaceful existence has been so violently shattered? Sadly, the answer leans heavily towards the negative.

As the image of the lifeless body of the three-year-old boy (see above) made headlines around the world, the leaders of the 27 EU states agreed to relocate 160,000 refugees across and within the member countries with the German and French heads of state calling for the relocations to be both permanent and compulsory (Nardelli, 2015). One year on, however, and it is clear that European leaders have not only failed to act on their commitment – just under 4,500 individuals, a paltry 2.8% of the pledged total, had been resettled by August 2016 (Mac Cormaic, 2016) – but have deliberately worked against it.

In the intervening twelve months several countries have unilaterally decided to seal their borders, while at the international level the EU concluded a deal with Turkey in March this year² which was ‘predicated on pushing people fleeing [the Syrian] conflict, and others like it, away from Europe and back to Turkey’ (Mailer, 2016). Aside from placing an absolute of international law – the right of individuals to seek protection in another country – in jeopardy, such actions at the political level have had a devastating effect on people’s lives. As of June 2016 there were 40 refugee camps in mainland Greece providing basic temporary shelter to roughly 45,000 refugees (Mailer, 2016), and the seeming indifference of Europe’s leaders to the human misery caused by their reneging on the agreement of the previous September has drawn strong criticism from the executive director of Oxfam International.

It is shameful that so many governments are turning their backs on the suffering of millions of vulnerable people who have fled their homes and are often risking their lives to reach safety. (Byanyima as cited in Westcott, 2016)

At this point the reader might be wondering about the relevance of contemporary migration issues to a small scale research project. If so, can I briefly return to the ontological position which underpins the inquiry – that migration is ‘a singular, subjective and unique experience which resists generalisations’ (Krzyzanowski and Wodak, 2008, p. 98). This viewpoint has not been adapted for the purpose of an academic exercise; rather, as explained in the previous section, it is a deeply-held position formed in the personal experience of working with groups of refugees from whom I re-learned the invaluable lesson of seeing every learner, that is, every person, as uniquely individual.

My position, I now understand, corresponds to the standpoint of the concrete other whereby ‘each and every rational being [is viewed] as an individual with a concrete history, identity and affective-emotional constitution’ (Benhabib, 1997, p. 159). And just as it became the basis of my teaching practice, so it forms an appropriate epistemology for research work which foregrounds personal experience. But more than that, it is a standpoint which shapes how I see people in the world. And it matters. At the person level and, equally, at society level, it matters greatly.

Talking directly for a moment, I suggest that it matters to you, the reader, that your concrete human individuality, your very humanity, is recognised and valued. And I am equally sure that you want the same for your family members and loved ones. And although more difficult at broader society level, it is imperative that we hold to this standpoint and do not allow ourselves to abstract from the human individuality of our fellow men, women and children.

To do so gives rise to a worldview in which unique individuals are neither listened to nor recognised for who they are, but instead are attributed characteristics for the purposes of categorisation. This is a line of thinking in which individuals are seen in generalised terms only, and this, in turn, allows their humanity to be brushed aside by other concerns – witness the reporting of current events which tell us that ‘Syria’s civil war has created a refugee crisis in Europe’ (Lynch, 2014)³. From my ontological position the word ‘crisis’ does not apply to Europe, but to the million plus displaced, fearful people who are so obviously in need of unconditional care and support. That these human capacities are being withheld, at least on the part of European leaders, is to be explained by their abandoning the standpoint of the concrete other. The shameful denial of the humanity of over a million individuals has duly followed.

This research project then speaks directly to the contemporary issue of migration into, and within, Europe. As outlined in section 1.2. above, my personal and professional response to the refugees with whom I worked was to intuitively recognise their concrete human individuality. This study, by asking individual refugees to reflect on their identities in light of their lived experience, is founded on the same ontological position. It stands, therefore, as a direct riposte to the dominant discourse of national and international politicians who willingly overlook the humanity of others. I fail to see how this does not matter.

1.4. Identity work – adult education as a human practice

This section briefly returns to my teaching experience in IILT, and compares this experience to the environment of the adult education service I currently work in. The comparison, somewhat depressingly, sees the human concerns and dynamics

of adult education in retreat; indeed, at a policy level the learners seem to have disappeared from the minds of the decision makers altogether. For those teachers and educators in the field who are committed to working with learners as concrete individuals, I suggest that this is extremely important.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the origin of this inquiry can be traced back to my years working with groups of refugees in IILT. Although funded centrally by the then Department of Education and Science (DES), IILT operated outside the remit of the mainstream educational structures of the time and, as such, had a degree of independence. It did not follow the school year, stayed open during the summer and operated a model of delivery whereby the teaching year was divided into three 'terms' of 16-17 weeks. The weekly provision was 20 hours so that each course ran to 320-340 hours. At the outset of my time with IILT the courses were not accredited and although this changed as time went on, the duration ensured that course content was not constrained by set assessment requirements.

Instead the task of determining course content was given over to the learning group which, supported by the teacher, collectively decided its language needs in relation to areas of daily life such as, health, education, accommodation, work, dealing with officials and so on. Not only did this foster participative, collaborative learning, it also signalled to the participants that they were to assume responsibility for their own learning. This was a crucial aspect of the pedagogical ethos in IILT as the funding provision for each participant permitted one year of classes. The finite timeframe was one which was constantly referenced and was the basis for the development of autonomous learning skills.

With regard to those areas of daily life the learners deemed to be important, their needs were more than just language based – they also needed help to locate, access and engage with service providers. Thus, information officers from a range of organisations including trades unions, refugee services, and educational institutions were invited to provide input sessions to inform the participants of their rights and available services. In addition, time was set aside for visits to places of

interest such as libraries, museums, and the National Gallery, with some of my colleagues organising evening outings to the cinema and theatre.

The structure, ethos and commitment of the teaching work in IILT was very much in tune with the landmark government publication *Learning for life: White paper on adult education* (Department of Education and Science, 2000), which has come to be known simply as The White Paper. In a section entitled 'Adult Education within an overall vision for the society' The White Paper defined the specific roles for the field in the following order: Consciousness raising, citizenship, cohesion, competitiveness, cultural development, and community building (p. 28). With the exception of the fourth point (competitiveness), Hurley (2014) observes that the roles were 'proposed as constituting an overall framework of lifelong learning and could be regarded as a charter for emancipatory adult education' (p. 74). Neither my colleagues (as far as I know) nor I were consciously operating from a pedagogical philosophy, but in retrospect our work adheres closely to such a charter. It is a source of some pride.

In marked contrast I now jump cut to 2016 and a very different educational landscape. I am presently employed by Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB, and am working as a co-ordinator at one of their adult education services. Part of my duties is to co-ordinate the English language (or ESOL) programme. Delivery is structured on the mainstream school calendar with courses commencing in mid-September and finishing in early June giving rise to a 32-week teaching year. The provision of courses on the ESOL programme is entirely part-time with most groups allocated either four or two hours a week. Under this delivery model, therefore, course duration for most of the participants runs to either 64 or 128 hours across the whole year. Funding for the courses is through the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) under which recognised accreditation is a required outcome.

In this new landscape, therefore, it is immediately apparent that the present provision of English language courses is vastly reduced⁴. But what is not apparent are the priorities and over-arching focus which shape the new terrain and which, to my mind, are revealed in recent routine conversations with three different

colleagues. In one a teacher is anxious about the limited timeframe afforded to her group to achieve recognised accreditation; in another my manager observes that, on the contrary, the timeframe exceeds the recommended allocation and worries that this will be noted by senior managers. And at the same time my line manager for the ESOL programme requests data and documents to ensure that the accredited courses comply with our quality assurance agreement.

Missing from these conversations are the participants. There is no talk of, or apparent interest in, their progress or how they might be settling in to the new term; neither is there any discussion of course content or how it is arrived at, nor of the pedagogical ethos which underpins the learning needs of the different participant groupings. The issues of systems compliance (i.e. organisational efficiency) and performance indicators predominate and increasingly I find myself concentrating on the demands to document the same. And as I do so, I notice that the emphasis on performativity has permeated to the teachers whose thoughts about the needs and progress of the participants are framed within, and thus constrained by, the prescribed learning outcomes of the accreditation process.

At this point a step back. The document published by the DES in 2000, *Learning for life: White paper on adult education* named the field in which I was working at the time. At some point in the intervening years the name changed, officially at least, to Further Education and Training (FET) and often appears as 'the FET sector'. The widespread use of the word 'sector' is notable as it speaks to the language of economics, of markets, of commerce. And it is no accident. Hurley (2014) provides a definitive account of the rise to ascendancy of the concept of human capital in formulating adult education policy at EU level and also in the Irish context. It is a notion that views 'useful skills and knowledge ... [as] a form of capital' (Schultz as cited in Hurley, 2014, p. 80), thereby locating adult education within the sphere of economic activity. And as Hurley demonstrates, 'All relevant national documents that emerged [since 2002] have relentlessly promoted this new symbiosis between lifelong learning and human capital development' (2014, p. 90).

As noted earlier, the English language courses which I presently co-ordinate are funded through the Back to Education Initiative, the operational guidelines for which declare

In the current context, the BTEI enables providers to address the skills needs of unemployed people, in particular the priority groups identified in the Government's activation agenda, and to develop part-time education and training opportunities for low-skilled people in employment to gain qualifications. (Department of Education and Skills, 2012, p. 3)

In the new landscape of the Irish Further Education and Training sector then, adult learning courses are a means to serve the economy via two prescribed ends – a job or qualifications. Under the gaze of this employment-orientated perspective, success is 'measured by the achievement of awards and progression to employment or higher education' (Grummell, 2014, p. 122) and, at local level, managers prioritise outcomes and outputs, of both the courses and the organisation, to highlight the 'success' of the service. It is a perspective which, as noted in the conversations above, loses sight of the participants. As Grummell (2014) observes, 'The focus is on the performance and outcomes of education rather than the learner or learning' (p. 130).

Such a viewpoint is the very antithesis of the ontological position of this inquiry which, as outlined earlier, is derived from the experiential practice of recognising concrete human individuality when working with groups of adult learners. This is a position located within a radical tradition of adult education which, amongst other things, encourages human agency by allowing '... for the exploration of 'meaning' and of how people make sense of their lived experience ... and for comparisons to be made with the meanings articulated by others' (Thompson, 2007, p. 31). In gathering together a group of individuals, in this instance adult refugees, to share and collectively reflect on their stories of lived experience, this is a near accurate description of the epistemology underpinning this investigation. And by asking the research participants if the learning generated by such an approach holds real meaning it serves, by its very practice, to challenge the predominant human capital discourse of educational policy-makers in Ireland.

In this chapter I have attempted to set out the origins of this study, and to explain its importance both in terms of its unwavering viewpoint of seeing human individuals as just that, and of the corresponding need to return adult education to a field which prioritises the human, as opposed to capital. Running through the chapter is my own experience and just as experiential knowledge is a cornerstone of practice in adult education so it provides the foundation for this work. There is then, I hope, a consistency in the ontology and epistemology of the work, but that is for the reader to decide.

The immediate question for the reader, however, is where to next. Those interested purely in the workings of research may prefer to skip the next chapter, which tends more to the academic as it reviews the literature on theories of identity, and also of the refugee experience.

Notes on the chapter

1. On 8th December 2001 a freight container was opened in Wexford Industrial Park in Drinagh, County Wexford. Thirteen people were inside, eight of whom were dead. The container had been sealed in northern Italy on 4th December before being transported by train to the Belgian port of Zeebrugge from where a fifty-three hour sailing in rough seas had brought it to Waterford. A delay ensued with the container remaining in Waterford for a further thirty-six hours, and it was then taken to the industrial park in Drinagh. The survivors revealed that they had been told the container's destination was Dover, a journey time of seven hours from Zeebrugge (Murphy, 2001).
2. At the heart of the EU agreement with Turkey was the so-called 'one-for-one deal' (Rankin, 2016). This stipulated that the EU would, from 20th March 2016, return all migrants arriving into Greece back to Turkey; and for each returnee, the EU would accept a Syrian previously registered as a refugee by the Turkish authorities. In addition the EU pledged €6 billion in refugee aid to Turkey, granted free-visa travel in the EU zone to some of its citizens and promised to revive talks on Turkey's accession to the EU (The Economist, 2016).
3. It is important to note that Lynch's article is informed by a clear humanity for the displaced individuals she encountered in the Harmanli refugee centre in Bulgaria. The quote is taken from a sub-heading to promote a series of articles, of which this was the first, and was probably inserted by an editor.
4. IILT was closed by the Department of Education and Skills in August 2008 and its remit transferred to the VEC network. With the then Co. Dublin VEC undertaking a national co-ordinating role, the Adult Refugee Programme (ARP) commenced in February 2009 and, subject to local resources, provided full-time courses (i.e. 16-20 hours a week) structured around the school year. The ARP was brought to an end in October 2012 since when English language provision has operated on a part-time basis.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

For researchers investigating notions of identity and perceptions of the self, a problem presents itself immediately. Quite simply, as Isin and Wood (1999) observe, ‘the literature on identity is vast’ (p. 15). Indeed, such is the depth, breadth and scale of the available reading that it would be futile for a small research project such as this to attempt, as Lemke (2008) puts it, ‘the impossible task of comprehensively reviewing social theories of identity’ (p. 18). It is crucial at the very outset therefore, particularly for readers whose interest in identity has drawn them to this study, to state those aspects of identity which will *not* be addressed in the following pages.

As stated in the introduction one of the explicit aims of the research is to ascertain if individuals who are newly arrived to Ireland perceive a change in how they think (or feel) about their sense of self. Thus, no contribution will be made to theoretical discussions on the usefulness, or otherwise, of the concept of identity as an analytical tool (Hall, 1996; Benhabib 1997; Lemke, 2008), or to debates on the extent to which individuals linguistically transmit their identities through everyday discourse (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998; Coulthard, 2008). And, perhaps more pertinently, neither does this study examine the development of a sense of collective identity amongst minority migrant communities (Camino and Krulfeld, 1994; Isin and Wood, 1999; Castles and Davidson, 2000). This last point is worth noting for although migration is often seen as something which is undertaken collectively (the well-known terms ‘boat people’ and ‘exodus’, for example, both refer to the transnational movement of large numbers of people of the same nationality [in the former instance] and religious belief [in the latter]), Krzyzanowski and Wodak (2008) suggest that ‘migration remains a singular, subjective and unique experience which resists generalisations’ (p. 98).

This observation speaks to my experience of working closely with refugees and, as such, forms the point of departure for the research project itself – to work with individuals who have migrated to Ireland to find out how they understand the

impact of this lived experience in terms of their sense of identity. That the prime concern of the inquiry is to foreground individual reflection on, and understanding of, self, impacts on the inquiry in two significant ways: Firstly, from the research perspective it calls for a carefully considered methodology (see Chapter 3) which facilitates the participants to explore and contemplate their lived experiences of (sometimes forced) migration and resettlement; and secondly, if the theoretical approach is to cohere with the methodology, it guides the literature review towards examining identity formation at the level of the individual.

This is an important point to make for it precludes consideration of more generalised theories of identity formation; theories which, their creators claim, are applicable to all human development. Thus, readers seeking an analysis of Erikson's 'Eight Ages of Man' (1977, p. 232) for example, or Marcia's model of identity statuses (1980) are referred elsewhere. This is not to say, however, that their writings are irrelevant to this study; indeed both feature in the pages ahead, with the thoughts of the former of particular importance. Nevertheless, it is necessary to emphasise that grand theories of identity which are driven, as Tennant observes of Erikson's, by 'a quest to discover universal principles and processes of adult development and change' (2000, p. 88) are of no interest here.

At this point the reader has been informed which aspects of the literature on identity will not be addressed in this chapter. It is an appropriate moment, therefore, to provide a brief outline of those that will. As noted above, the work of Erikson is significant to this study. Indeed, his observation that identity is 'a forever to-be-reviewed sense of reality of the Self' (1983, p. 24) underpins a key theoretical point which this chapter puts forward; that the notion of becoming is a critical component of identity formation and development. This argument, it is suggested, intersects with Freire's thoughts on 'the unfinishedness of our being' (1998, p. 52) and is discussed in depth in section 2.2. *Identity as becoming*.

The notion of identity as becoming, that is of people in a permanent process of becoming, is especially pertinent to this inquiry as it speaks directly to the literature on the refugee experience. Camino and Krulfeld (1994) introduce their broad-

ranging work on refugee identity by stating that ‘The refugee experience is a complex process involving loss and regeneration’ (p. ix), with the regenerative aspect involving the establishment of new identities (p. x). Thus, in section 2.3. *The refugee experience – loss and becoming*, the notion of becoming is presented not as a theoretical abstract, but as a conscious tangible in the lives of individual refugees.

The review begins by locating the concept of identity within ‘*the* [original italics] central sociological problem ... understanding the linkage between “structure and agency”’ (Archer, 1995, p. 1). The intention is to position identity formation as an act of individual human agency which is embedded in and constrained by the complex mesh of societal relationships, values and cultural practices which the individual inhabits and which, crucially, inhabit the individual. Of particular interest here is Bourdieu’s idea of habitus. And the chapter ends with a brief discussion of the role and purpose of adult education in light of the main points raised in the preceding sections.

2.1. Identity – agency in social context

As stated above, this initial section discusses identity in relation to one of the central concerns of sociological theory, that of the relationship between the individual (agency) and society (structure). The purpose is to encourage the reader to see each individual as a ‘social actor’ (Castells, 2010, p. 6) who ‘creates, and is created by, the society in which he or she lives’ (Tennant, 1997, p. 54). In doing so, it is hoped to prepare the ground for the following sections, particularly Section 2.3. on the refugee experience; for once it is established that individual identity is inextricably bound up with, and in, social environment, it follows that people uprooted from the society which has shaped their very personhood to the extent that they are an embodiment of that society, are liable to experience significant internal upheaval of the kind articulated by Eva Hoffman, the opening paragraph of whose memoir (1989) reads, ‘I am thirteen years old and we are emigrating. It’s a notion of such crushing, definitive finality that to me it might as well mean the end of the world’ (p. 3).

Exploration of the refugee experience lies ahead. For now the discussion begins with the foundation on which key writings on identity formation are based – the individual. Erikson, originally published in 1968, asserts that ‘identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation’ (1983, p. 22); Marcia (1980) posits identity as ‘as a self-structure – an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs and individual history’ (p. 159); Giddens (1991) argues that self-identity ‘is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her / his biography’ (p. 35); Mouffe (1995) sees individuals ‘as the articulation of an ensemble of subject positions’ (p. 33); and of the more recent contributors Lemke (2008) states that ‘who we are, who we portray ourselves as being, ... are our constructions’ (p.19), while Castells (2010) observes that ‘Identities are sources of meaning for the actors themselves, and by themselves, constructed through a process of individuation’ (p. 7).

Some of the major contemporary thinkers are, therefore, unified in a viewpoint which tells us that identity formation is the work of human agency. People actively articulate, author, construct, observe and reflect on their identities. The simple irresistible logic here is that although life-shaping events and moments of intimacy are shared with significant others, such formative experiences are apprehended and interpreted in a way which is unique to each individual. It cannot be otherwise and this chapter accordingly supports the view that identities are a product of human agency.

It does so, however, by immediately adding a most significant qualification. As noted, identity is a subjective construct, fashioned by a person and her/his subjective thoughts, attitudes, values, reasoning and so on. And a crucial observation to be made at this juncture is the fact that, as Benhabib (1997) notes, ‘every autonomous being is born of others’ (p. 162). From the moment of birth, therefore, each one of us ‘lives directly the drama of every existent: that of his relation to the Other’ (de Beauvoir, 1993, p. 282).

The point being made is that human life begins, evolves and ends in social context. Each individual is born into a community or society which from the very first minute

of existence impacts on the unique subjective identity of that individual. This impact is powerfully articulated by de Beauvoir,

One is not born but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature. (p. 281)

Thus, as Benhabib (1997) points out, it is not sufficient to claim that 'the identity of any human self can be defined with reference to its capacity for agency alone' (p. 161). To the earlier statement that identity is a work of human agency then, is added the qualification that 'our identities are the product of life in a community' (Lemke, 2008, p. 20) and that, as a result,

... the identity of the self is constituted by a narrative unity, which integrates what "I" can do, have done and will accomplish with what you expect of "me", interpret my acts and intentions to mean, wish for me in the future, etc. (Benhabib, p. 5)

In short, each individual inhabits, and is inhabited by, a social context which provides a framework of values, principles, reasoning, perception, personal and social interaction, codes of behaviour and so on, from which the individual subjectively forms and develops a sense of self *in relation to others*. The explanation of identity formation as constituted from the dynamic interplay between social and individual resources, pulls together what Archer (1995) refers to as 'two divergent social ontologies which ... can be epitomized as the "science of society" versus the "study of wo/man"' (p. 2). She is referring to one of the key theoretical debates in sociological theory, that of the extent to which structure and/or agency determine social organization. While space cannot be afforded to enter this forum, this chapter contends that the thoughts of one of its major contributors strengthen understanding of the deep-rooted attachment between individual identity and the social context from which it develops.

That contributor is Bourdieu whose rejection of the structure-agency binary gave rise to the view that 'the objectivist and the subjectivist, stand in a dialectical relationship' (1989, p. 15). It is a position which lies at the core of his concept of habitus. Starting with the observation that the objective social world is understood via subjective interpretation, Bourdieu proceeds to assert that 'sociology must

include a sociology of the perception of the social world' (p. 18). The apparent emphasis on the role of agency, however, is quickly tempered and the dialectical linkage established when he says, 'no doubt they [agents] do construct their vision of the world. But this construction is carried out under structural constraints' (p. 18). In articulating the constraints, the dialectic is affirmed as follows,

the dispositions of agents, their habitus, that is, the mental structures through which they apprehend the social world, are essentially the product of the internalization of the structures of that world. (p.18)

Bourdieu's concept of habitus coheres with the process of identity formation elaborated above. In both, the social world and its structures (family relationships, schooling, social norms and conduct, values, etc.) provide a framework of perception which, over time, is internalized and provides the raw materials from which the individual produces a unique set of dispositions (the habitus) / constructs a unique sense of self. The word 'internalized' (or 'internalization') is important as it indicates the profound level at which habitus / identity is being formulated. In the case of the former, Bourdieu outlines a compelling logic in which individuals grow into their social environment,

The practical world that is constituted in the relationship with the habitus ... is a world of already realized ends – procedures to follow, paths to take ... This is because the regularities inherent in an arbitrary [social] condition tend to appear as necessary, even natural, since they are the basis of the schemes of perception and appreciation through which they are apprehended. (2005, pp. 53-54)

As children we know no other way of comprehending and acting in the social world other than through the one we reside in and which resides in us. 'Thus, through habitus, we have a world of common sense, a world that seems self-evident' (1989, p. 19). In other words, habitus, operating at a deep-seated level produces in-grained, possibly subconscious, assumptions about the world and interactions within it. And as this last point suggests, these assumptions relate not only to the world but to the self – to the position of self in familial and community contexts, to the relationship of self with (un)important others, to personal freedoms in relation to others, and so on. Habitus then, relates to understanding of self in a social context.

Developed to establish the dialectical relationship between subjectivism and objectivism in social theory, the concept of habitus supports the position of this chapter that the individual, and de facto individual identity, is deeply embedded in social context. It is a position which is reinforced by observing the degree to which habitus speaks directly to the thoughts of the person who is viewed as ‘the starting point for most contemporary identity research’ (Muus, 1996, p. 58). Devoting the greater part of his career to understanding identity formation, Erikson (1983) came to see it as ‘a process “located” *in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of his communal culture* (p. 22, original italics). It is a process ‘by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves’ (p. 22).

The similarity with habitus becomes more striking when Erikson says of identity formation, ‘this process is ... for the most part unconscious ...’ (p. 23). The same sentence continues ‘... except where inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful, or elated, “identity consciousness”’ (p. 23). Operating at the same deep-lying level as habitus, the formulation of self-identity proceeds undetected by awareness until events or changes in personal and/or social circumstances propel it into view. This study (as noted on pp. 9-11 of Chapter 1.2.) asserts that the changes to the life situation of refugees are so dramatically total that the ‘identity consciousness’ it calls forth is profoundly unsettling, a point which is tellingly captured by Hoffman (1989) when recalling an incident not long after her family had arrived in Canada,

Until now, Poland has covered an area in my head coeval with the dimensions of reality ... Now, simultaneously, I see it as my classmates do – a distant spot somewhere on the peripheries of imagination ... The reference points in my head are beginning to do a flickering dance. I suppose this is the most palpable meaning of displacement. I have been dislocated from my own center of the world, and that world has been shifted away from my center. (p. 132)

The above are appropriate words on which to close this section. Appropriate because they underscore, quite vividly, the central argument of this section; that individual subjective identity is created in and by the society in which it develops; and because they simultaneously demonstrate the inner-turbulence which necessarily follows when individuals are evicted and exiled from their social

contexts. This latter point is explored in more depth in section 2.3., while the next section maintains the discussion of identity formation by looking at the notion of becoming.

2.2. Identity as becoming

This section retains the focus on identity formation, but moves away from the real-world dynamic between individual and society to consider what, at first, appears a more abstract notion relative to the development of a sense of self. The notion of becoming, neither explicitly named nor defined, is most definitely present in the respective bodies of work of Erikson and Freire. The former rejected the idea that identity could ever be definitively established (1983, p. 24), while the latter articulated the 'unfinishedness of our being' (1998, p. 52). In establishing the notion of becoming as a point of confluence between the two thinkers, this section argues that it is a point which is pertinent to researchers investigating perceptions of self amongst individual refugees.

These last two words are significant for this inquiry is based on the ontological position that migration is a singular experience unique to each individual. Thus, Erikson's grand theory of human development, founded on an essentialist concept, the epigenetic principle (1983, p. 92), which declares personality development to be predetermined in the human organism (p. 93), holds no ground here. This is an important clarification to make because in claiming his theory to be a universal, Erikson moved away from a conception of the individual as a concrete other. It is a position which formed the bedrock of his earlier work and, as such, it is the thoughts from this part of his career which provide insights relevant to the ontology of this inquiry (see pp. 15-16). Benhabib (1997) asserts that

The standpoint of the concrete other ... requires us to view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity and affective-emotional constituency. In assuming this standpoint ... we seek to comprehend the needs of the other, his or her motivations, what s/he searches for and what s/he desires. (p. 159)

As a psychoanalyst at a rehabilitation clinic during the Second World War, Erikson spent time working closely with war veterans who had been diagnosed as suffering

from shell shock. And it was here, listening attentively to his patients, regarding them as concrete others as required by his professional practice, that he began to formulate ideas on identity development.

One of these initial ideas was that identity is not a state, it is never fixed. Indeed, he was clear that 'identity is never "established" as an "achievement"', rather it is 'a forever to-be-reviewed sense of reality of the Self within social reality' (Erikson, 1983, p. 24). For Erikson therefore, as Muus (1996) notes in his overview of the former's work, 'identity issues remain a lifelong concern' (p. 46). This point was noted by Marcia (1980) who, in expanding on Erikson's ideas, contends that 'the identity structure is dynamic, not static. Elements are continually being added and discarded' (p. 159) and refers to 'the ongoing construction of an identity' (p. 160).

This dynamic aspect of identity, 'continually', 'ongoing' and 'forever', conveys the relentless search for understanding of self through the life course. Implicit in the writings of Erikson and Marcia, and their rejection of the idea that identity can ever be achieved or established, is the belief that individuals, their perceptions and notions of self, are ceaselessly and elusively being formed and re-formed – in other words, becoming. While there would appear to be some correlation between Erikson's thoughts and the educational philosophy developed by Freire, what can be stated unambiguously is that the notion of becoming also underpins the central tenet of the latter's thinking.

In the field of adult education Freire is familiar as the author of a radical pedagogy which derided the established "'banking" concept of education' (1996, p. 53) and castigated its underlying objective 'to adapt the student to what is inevitable, to what cannot be changed' (1998, p. 17). His response was to develop a pedagogy founded 'on the legitimate interests of the human person' (1998, p. 115), which he defined as 'the pedagogy of the oppressed, which is the pedagogy of the people engaged in the fight for their own liberation' (1996, p. 30).

While Freire does not hide the influence of Marx in his work (1996, p. 33 and p. 35; 1998, p. 115), it is important to observe that he does not imbue words such as

'oppressed' and 'liberation' with overtones of class conflict. Rather, their meaning and usage are bound up in the concept of humanization, a concept which emerged from the central concern of his life's work, 'my preoccupation with human nature' (1998, p. 115). Humanization is 'the vocation of becoming more fully human' (1996, p. 26) which is achieved when people come together to act in the world, that is, to change their world. Of crucial importance here is that a course of action is planned so that humanization, based on prior deliberation, discussion and decision-making, is first and foremost an internal process in which individuals learn that that they can create and re-create their world. In simple terms,

I like being human because I know that ...my destiny is not a given but something that needs to be constructed ...because I am involved with others in making history out of possibility. (1998, p. 54)

That humanization is at the core of Freire's philosophy is borne out by the opening line of perhaps his most famous publication, 'While the problem of humanization has always ... been humankind's central problem, it now takes on the character of an inescapable concern' (1996, p. 25). For Freire it was a concern which, as Taylor (1993) details in his extensive study of the former's texts, compelled him to consult a broad array of sources. And one of these sources was 'that outstanding book by Karel Kosik' (Freire as quoted in Taylor, p.43), *Dialectic of the Concrete*. Taylor asserts that 'Freire found in Kosik key points of convergence' (p. 44), identifies the notion of becoming as one of those key points and highlights its core position as a central theme of Kosik's theory,

Nature is that reality which is living, which is not fixed or given but which is in a state of becoming. It can be understood by human beings only to the degree that they fashion it themselves, recreating it in three-dimensional time. This awareness of history as past and future is what distinguishes human beings from animals. (p. 44)

The degree to which Freire absorbed and incorporated the concept of becoming, into his philosophy is strikingly evident in the following,

... this unfinishedness is essential to our human condition. Whenever there is life, there is unfinishedness, though only among women and men is it possible to speak of an awareness of unfinishedness. (1998, p. 52)

The above words also reveal that underlying Freire's concept of humanization is the idea of unfinishedness (i.e. becoming). Being human is to know that there is always something new to achieve, discover, understand and learn, and this knowledge propels the human ontological vocation of making the world. As Freire puts it, 'Among us women and men, we recognize our unfinishedness. And this awareness necessarily implies ... a permanent process of search' (1998, p. 56). And returning to the central point of this section, these words cohere strongly to those of Erikson on identity as 'a forever-to-be reviewed sense of reality of the Self' (1983, p. 24).

Thus, from their respective positions as psychoanalyst and educator / philosopher, the thoughts of Erikson and Freire converge on the notion of people in a permanent process of becoming. Implicit in the works of the former, an underlying component in the philosophy of the latter, it was a notion which was brought to the fore by the eminent cultural theorist Stuart Hall in specific relation to the issue of perceptions of self. Addressing a conference in 1989, Hall argued that 'identities are never completed, never finished [...] identity is always in the process of formation' (1997, p. 47), and went on to suggest that individual and group 'identities are about questions of ... the process of becoming rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we came from", so much as what we might become' (1996, p. 4).

The question of what and, indeed, who we might become is particularly pertinent to the lived experience of refugees who are faced with the 'transition from a more orderly and predictable past to a new and as yet unpredictable future' (Camino & Krulfeld, 1994, p. ix). Indeed, in her extensive research of Italian migrants to the United Kingdom Fortier (2000) views 'narratives of identity as ... constituted by the desire for an identity, rather than surfacing from an already constituted identity' (p. 2) And similarly, Obehi Edeko (2004) observes how African refugees living in Ireland were in the throes of becoming, and admired 'their efforts to invent and reinvent themselves in a world of challenges' (p. 52).

This is an opportune moment to bring this section to a close. The focus has been on observing the significance of the notion of becoming in the ideas about identity formation which emerged in the mid-to-late part of the last century. And as the previous paragraph suggests, the notion of identity as a process of becoming aligns closely to the refugee experience of displacement, unrelenting change, and personal re-creation. This is explored further in the following section.

2.3. The refugee experience – loss and becoming

In the literature on the refugee experience two themes immediately come to the fore; Rumbaut and Rumbaut (1976) refer to them as death and birth, while Camino and Krulfeld (1994) use the terminology of 'loss and regeneration' (p. ix). These themes are the focus of this section with the term 'becoming', rather than 'regeneration', favoured not only because of its significance in theories of the process of identity formation, but also because it speaks directly to individuals living through a period of intense dislocation and personal upheaval.

In terms of loss, the refugee experience is not only all-encompassing, but in many cases is suffused with grief, trauma and distress. Omidian (1994) records the 'enormous losses' (p. 152) of the Afghani refugee community she researched and found the personal testimonies so disturbing (pp. 159-163) that her own mental health began to suffer (p. 172). Similarly, concluding their study of forced migrants seeking asylum in Ireland, Ryan et al. (2007) observe how 'the stories were ... characterised by major personal loss, including the death of close family members in tragic circumstances' (p. 127). The depth and impact of such loss is told by a participant in Obehi Edeko's research on African refugees in Ireland (2004),

A lot of people do not know what refugees go through, psychologically and physically ... you lose all your property, including your documents, your expectations and even people you love. Those who are close to you are killed by a bullet but you survive ... it's hard to sleep in peace after that. (p. 52)

It should be noted that not all refugees are subjected to the truly harrowing experiences described above. The term 'forced migrants' refers to individuals who 'flee to avoid aversive aspects of their home environment' (Ryan et al. p. 113) – that is, some manage to escape without violent incident. However, this is not to say

that they do not experience psychological distress; far from it. One of the aversive aspects which pushes people into flight is that of being 'compelled to confront "otherness" in their own societies ... [as] people whom they regarded as their own turned against them' (Camino & Krulfeld, 1994, p. xi). In terms of personal identity, this is a critical part of the refugee experience: The growing realisation that what was once home is now a place of hostility; that returning is, for an indefinite period, not possible; that exile is either long lasting or permanent. It is a realisation which, although personally felt and negotiated, is a common experience amongst the testimonies of refugees as the following two quotes, separated by a span of 56 years show. In the first, it is the day (in 1959) before Hoffman's family leave Poland and she has been asked by a close family friend what she will miss the most; in the second, it is 2015 and a Syrian refugee who has fled to Germany responds to the question 'What do you miss?'

"Little things, I think", I tell her. "The napoleon pastry from our bakery. Not knowing what's in *Cross Section*". Then, as I let the question sink in, it comes upon me that I'll miss much more than that, and I say, "Everything. Cracow. The school. Basia. You. Everything". ... and from then on I don't talk much because I can't stop myself from crying. (1989, p. 81-82)

I will come across another Syrian, ... The first thing that we go through is what do you miss ... and the answer in simple words, "Life. Everything". We talk about such simple things like having a sandwich here, or listening to something there or sitting at a little café there when life was normal. It was life ... [the] only life we had and [the] only life we knew and we miss everything about that normal life. (Hilde Schramm and the Syrian Refugees, RTE Radio 1, 29.12.2015)

Such words convey a strong sense of mourning for a life that is in the throes of passing, or has already done so. Everything – the familiar, safe, comforting and supportive known, with its taken-for-granted routines, everyday pleasures and loving relationships – no longer exists. And yet, in trying to understand and come to terms with all that is lost, 'replacements for these losses must be created for refugees' lives to continue' (Camino & Krulfeld, 1994, p. x). And it is here that the notion of becoming speaks directly to individuals who, although living through extreme adversity, know that, to paraphrase Freire, while the situation can get worse, they are also able to intervene to improve it (1998, p. 53).

Thus, Yambasu's reflections (2004) on his experience of displacement, 'with most of the old certainties in my life in Sierra Leone gone ... I have had to re-create myself in order to survive in my new home' (p. 34). Similarly Obehi Edeko (2004) notes her research participants' 'willingness to start again' (p. 52) and it is this willingness and determination to rebuild lives in countries which are culturally and linguistically alien, while simultaneously coping with the trauma resulting from the deprivations of flight, temporary relocation and eventual re-settlement, that leads Camino & Krulfeld (1994) to assert that at the heart of the refugee experience lie the elements of loss and regeneration (p. ix).

While the regenerative element is perhaps not as traumatic as that of loss, it is no less challenging for it comprises far more than simply adapting to life in a new environment. Indeed, the word 'adapt', defined in the Oxford Dictionary of English (Soanes & Stevenson, 2006) by the words 'modify', 'adjust' and 'alter' (p. 18), is wholly inadequate to convey the multiple, and profound, changes which displaced individuals contend with. As Obehi Edeko's study (2004) shows, the process of rebuilding lives in unfamiliar and sometimes unwelcoming societies involves refugees in developing new skills, immersion in learning a new embodied form of communication (i.e. a new language), and negotiating different codes of behavioural etiquette and social mores which, in turn, entails understanding and re-assessing ingrained assumptions (p. 53). In short, the regenerative process is transformative encompassing, as the words of Obehi Edeko and Yambasu (above) highlight, the re-invention and re-creation of self. Indeed, it is hard to disagree with Camino and Krulfeld's assertion (1994) that it is a process which calls forth the establishment of 'new identities' (p. ix).

At this point the various key theories examined in the literature thus far can be seen to converge. The notions of habitus, unfinishedness and becoming discussed earlier provide cogent reason to support the view that 'identities are always in some way relational and incomplete, in the process of being formed' (Isin and Wood, 1999, p. 16). For individuals who have been displaced, sometimes forcibly, to new environments it is perhaps the relational aspect which has the most disorienting and unsettling effects on their sense of self. For if, as Lemke (2008)

observes, 'we learn to be the people we are largely by the ways we interact with various members of our community' (p. 37), then it follows that our sense of place in the world, our sense of who we are, dissipates the moment we are cut adrift from our community and cast into a society of which we have no experience, peopled by individuals who we don't understand and who may have preconceptions about us.

Thus, to the various losses which comprise the refugee experience can be added that of identity, as individuals become dislocated from the social contexts which have shaped their selfhood. And, in attempting to engage with and understand their new communities, so the work of reformulating and reconstituting self, the work of becoming, continues. As noted on pp. 9-11 however, this can be a long, challenging and sometimes painful process, one which it is suggested can be supported by adult education.

2.4. Supporting agency – a humanizing adult education

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. (Marx, 1963, p. 15)

The above quote may appear somewhat incongruous in the context of a brief discussion about the role of adult education, but Marx's observation has profound resonance to educators for it reminds us that a fundamental human aspiration (as epitomised by this study for example) is that of contributing to, and possibly changing, society to a greater or lesser degree. And it simultaneously tells us that in order for individuals to take decisive and meaningful actions to affect change in a society, they must first comprehend the functioning and intricate workings of that society. Without such understanding, people's ability to act in the world, that is their agency, is vastly diminished.

Thus, Marx's words not only speak directly to one of the main points contained in the above discussion on identity formation – that it is an act of individual agency bound up in, and limited by, the social context of the individual – they implicitly speak to a philosophy of adult education which fosters and facilitates the

development of agency with the aim of equipping individuals to participate fully in society. This is the humanizing philosophy of adult education proposed by Freire which strives for individuals to become 'more fully human' (1996, p. 26) by enabling them to work together to act in the world, to assert their agency. Such a philosophy is wholly appropriate for individual refugees who, cut adrift from the social context in which their unique identity is embedded, need time and support to understand their new environment (see pp. 10-11) so that they can regain their capacity for agency and in doing so re-work their sense of self.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

At the outset of the chapter a brief recap may be useful. This inquiry set out to work with individual refugees to investigate how they perceive their sense of identity in light of their lived experience of migration to Ireland. Thus, the nature of knowledge being investigated is located in the individual and is sought through inviting individuals to talk about and reflect on their personal experiences. The epistemology promoted and valued by the research then is individual experiential knowledge, and is based on the ontological position that migration is 'a singular, subjective and unique experience' Krzyzanowski and Wodak (2008, p. 98). That this position is itself derived from personal experience, as described in Chapter 1, provides a degree of consistency to the work. If the work is to be considered fully rigorous, however, an appropriate methodology must be formulated, one which allows for the unearthing and uncovering of the knowledge being sought.

This chapter begins by discussing, in section 3.1., the methodological approach which provides the rationale for the research method (or field work) which is subsequently outlined in section 3.2. The final section considers the ethical considerations which were a significant part of the work.

3.1. Towards a narrative approach

In light of the ontological position and epistemology outlined above, it quickly became apparent that an inquiry which investigates individual apprehension of personal experience is best served by a qualitative approach. For one, in their overview of research methodologies Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) inform us that a 'distinguishing feature of qualitative methods is that they start from the perspective and actions of the subjects studied' (pp. 3-4). While Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) state that the central purpose of qualitative research is not to prove an existing theory or verify predetermined thinking, but 'to contribute to a process of revision and enrichment of understanding' (p. 216).

Less apparent, however, was a methodology which facilitates and encourages individuals to talk openly and publicly about their sense of self – that is, to talk about who they are. Indeed, the very first issue was to devise a way for the research participants to simply talk about their identities; a point raised by Lemke (2008) who suggests there is no satisfactory means for people to convey the complexity of their identities when responding to the question, ‘Who are you?’ (p. 38). And because the propensity is to identify and describe ourselves in terms of social groupings of gender, nationality, occupation, class, family relationships, and so on, ‘we tend initially to imagine identity as unitary’ (Lemke, 2008, p. 18). For research work inquiring into changing perceptions of self this was equally problematic.

These issues were only overcome when I was prompted to consider my own evolving sense of self and to write about those moments when I perceived a shift in my identity. With no particular deliberation or planning, these moments emerged as short stories, vignettes describing an everyday conversation or inner thoughts which ushered in a change in how I saw myself in the world. The stories had a powerful impact not least at the personal level where they were the cause which eventually led to my pulling back from the research work (see Chapter 7). In the short term they led to a re-consideration of the concept of identity and its formation. Until that point I had viewed my identity as existing on a vague barometer of nationality with ‘being English’ at one end and ‘not being English’ at the other. The stories, however, spoke of the push and pull exerted by social and personal relationships on identity, suggesting that a sense of self is formed and developed in the everyday world of socio-cultural practices, and so guided me towards the writings of Bourdieu (see Chapter 2.1.). And apart from providing fresh insight into identity formation, the stories also pointed to a working methodology for the research – narrative inquiry.

Happening on narrative as a methodology was entirely apt for as Riessmann (2008) says, ‘there is no single way to do narrative research’ (p. 155). That is, it is not a prescribed method but an approach that ‘begins in experience as expressed in lived and told stories’ (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5). And not only was it apt, it

was extremely fortuitous as it is an approach which coheres strongly to the ontological position and epistemology of the research. Narrative methodologies are not concerned with drawing broad, generalised conclusions about the experience of the participants; instead the focus remains on the local and the singular and, as such, is committed to an 'understanding of the value of a particular experience, in a particular setting, involving particular people' (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007, p. 21). A narrative approach, therefore, strongly connects to the ontology of this research which is grounded in the singular subjective experience of concrete individuals. As Webster and Mertova (2007) observe 'narrative inquiry ... is well suited to addressing the issues of complexity and cultural and human centredness in research' (p.3). And because 'a narrative approach develops understanding from an experiential perspective' (Phillion, 2002, p. 23) it speaks to the epistemology of this project.

And there are other important ways in which a narrative approach can be considered appropriate to this study. To begin with it provided workable, practical solutions to the issues outlined above. A defining aspect of narrative inquiry is, according to Speedy (2008), that it 'attempts to describe the stories of people's lives and how they change over time, according to the spaces and contexts they inhabit' (p. 23). By asking the participants to share stories about moments in the *past* when they perceived a change in their sense of self, an element of then and now, of the temporal notion of identity, was implicitly introduced. Perhaps more significantly, however, was that the device of narratives – that is, stories – provided the participants with a means, a language even, to talk about their identities. Indeed, a crucial, and egalitarian, aspect of the narrative approach to research is that it taps into a fundamental human activity. As Sartre (1965) says,

A man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them, and he tries to live his life as if he were telling a story. (p. 61)

And, as another writer explains, the propensity to story-telling serves an essential purpose; 'As human beings we tell stories about our own lives or those of people we know and that's how we get at the meaning of something' (Eggers as cited in

East, 2010). The meaning-making that underlies the act of story-telling is also noted by Kapuściński (2001) in one of his essays from Africa;

As the stories unfold, people start to remember [...] the community contemplates what it is and whence it came, becomes conscious of its distinctness and otherness, defines its identity. (p. 316)

Although this observation relates the importance of communal story-telling as a method of remembering culture and history in the absence of written documents, it is significant to this particular study because it confirms that as a practice of making meaning, stories and the act of telling them are universal thereby verifying the methodology as applicable to people from non-Western cultures.

Kapuściński's insight speaks of the relevance of a narrative approach to this research. Just as members of a village, tribe or community and, indeed, citizens of a nation employ stories (and myths) to formulate and affirm a sense of communal selfhood (Smith, 1991, pp. 16-17, 77-78, 175-177; Cameron, 1999, pp. 1-6; Kostakopoulou, 2001, pp. 154-158), so individuals use stories to construct a sense of self. Indeed, a noted thinker of narrative inquiry asserts that 'the stories we tell ourselves and each other in our day-to-day exchanges both constitute and are constitutive of our lives' (Speedy, 2008, p. xiv). Stories about the routine everyday are filled with meaning about our personal, social and cultural lives and, as I discovered with my own short stories, are the location of our identities. And this is the very location which narrative inquiry seeks to explore; the approach itself is 'about how people experience their lives, how they interact, how they shape, and are shaped by, the contexts in which they live and work' (Phillion, 2002, p. 23).

A notable aspect of the words of Speedy and Phillion is their strong adherence to Bourdieu's concept of habitus as revealed in the following,

... the dispositions of agents, their habitus, that is, the mental structures through which they apprehend the social world, are essentially the product of the internalization of the structures of that world. (1989, p.18)

Indeed, arising out of the review of the literature on identity formation (see Chapter 2.1.) was the key argument that an individual, as a situated social being, subjectively forms and develops a sense of self in relation to others. And it is

because identities are located in everyday personal and social relationships that narrative inquiry is a wholly appropriate approach for it facilitates researchers, and their participants, to share and discuss stories of the self.

As is required by narrative inquiry, experiential starting points are the basis of this research project. And as outlined above, the methodological approach has been informed by, and is intertwined with, the theoretical literature which speaks of identity as being constructed by the individual in relation to the social world. This suggests correlation and consistency between the ontological position of the project, its epistemology and the methodology. The next task was to devise a research method and this is outlined below.

3.2. The research method

At the heart of the research method was a two-hour workshop in which the participants were invited to share their identity stories. However, to say that the method consisted of the workshop alone would be to simplify a process which comprised a series of carefully considered steps. A number of ethical issues arose during the course of the field work, and it was in addressing and thinking through such concerns that the overall method emerged. The ethical considerations which helped shaped the work are presented in section 3.3. of the chapter, but first to the method.

- a). Initial contact via phone call. The idea of the research project was outlined and the candidate asked to consider taking part. A preliminary meeting was suggested and arranged via text messaging.
- b). Individual meeting. A detailed explanation of the research project, and the level of participation required, was provided via an introductory letter and *Information document* (see Appendices II. and III. on p. 92 and p. 93), which were talked through. Clarification was provided where necessary and questions were encouraged. At the end of the meeting the candidate was given two of my own identity stories (see Appendix IV. on p. 98), an envelope containing a *Consent form* (see Appendix V. on p. 105), and a *Participant profile* form (see Appendix VI. on p. 107). If the candidate wished to take part in the project, s/he was

asked to return the two forms. A stamped addressed envelope was provided for this purpose.

c). The workshop, comprising three distinct stages.

I. Introduction. Using a timeline visual, I presented an outline biography of my life. Important events were marked on the timeline, as were the identity stories which I had given to the participants to read. Materials were provided and the participants invited to produce their own timelines, noting important events in their lives. Each participant then presented her / his biography to the group, who were encouraged to ask questions. The participants also explained their connection to me.

II. Sharing our stories.

III. Post story-sharing. The participants were asked to choose a pseudonym. They were advised that they would receive a transcript of the session and, on reading the same, could withdraw any information they did not want included in the research work. On leaving the session each participant received an envelope bearing the instruction, 'Please don't open until Friday' (the workshop was held on a Sunday). The envelopes contained a *Reflections* form (see Appendix VII. on p. 109) which the participants were asked to return using a stamped addressed envelope provided.

d). Follow up – sending the transcripts. Each participant received a different transcript of the workshop. Thus, the transcript sent to Diana contained only her and my contributions to the session; the copy received by Adam contained only his and my contributions, and so on. Enclosed with each transcript was a letter (see Appendix VIII. on p. 113) and a copy of the signed consent form.

e). Final confirmation. Following on from the letter I contacted each of the participants via text to see if they wanted to withdraw any information from the transcript.

3.3. Ethical considerations

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) assert that 'ethical considerations permeate narrative inquiries from start to finish' (p. 483), and it is certainly the case that such

considerations constantly informed the unfolding method outlined above. In very broad terms the ethical concerns which arose spoke to two fundamentals which, it is suggested, all researchers must attend to – a duty of care to the participants, and the need for clarity. As will be seen, these are not two distinct, separate issues but merge together, each forming and informing the other. Denscombe (2002) tells us that ‘There is a duty on researchers ... to work in a way that minimises the prospect of their research having an adverse effect on those who are involved’ (p. 179), and this is where the section begins.

Following his line of thought above, Denscombe (2002) also calls on researchers ‘to think ahead and foresee any aspects of involvement with the research that could potentially cause mental stress or physical discomfort’ (p. 179). Given that this inquiry originated in the inner turbulence I had observed in refugee lives (see pp. 9-11), I was very much aware that the stories to be shared in the workshop would hold personal and emotional significance. And while the possibility of distress could not be completely removed, decisions were taken to reduce the likelihood of it occurring. The first was to raise the issue directly with the would-be participants at the individual meeting (stage b). in the method outlined above). Addressing and exploring this concern at the earliest possible opportunity ensured that the participants fully understood the personal nature of the research work and could take this aspect into account when considering whether or not to participate.

The second decision related to my own identity stories. I had originally planned to provide each would-be participant with three stories to serve as examples of the kind of occurrence or event I was looking for, but decided to withhold one as it focused on feelings of loss. The two which remained (see Appendix IV. *My stories* on p. 98) centred on the realisation of a changing sense of self and, as such, were lighter in content and tone. Although aware that I was influencing the participants’ choice of stories, and possibly limiting the scope of the research findings, the well-being of the participants took precedence. Indeed, the breakdown of a student as described on p. 10 was a particularly harrowing experience, one which I was actively trying to prevent during the workshop, not least because I do not have the relevant counselling skills to support a person in this situation.

This last point was itself addressed in the *Information document* (see Appendix III. on p. 93) with the very next sentence reading, 'the group meeting will not offer any form of counselling to the participants'. This was a further attempt to steer the participants' stories away from the more emotive and, at the same time, to communicate that while the workshop would explore inner feelings, it was a forum for collective learning rather than personal counselling. As can be seen then, the potential of the research work to arouse profound and powerful emotions was anticipated with decisions taken to decrease the risk of the participants being exposed to the same. In other words, every attempt was made to ensure that the workshop was a safe, trusting space for the sharing of personal stories, thoughts and feelings. Nevertheless, the possibility of distress could not be ruled out entirely and with this in mind the *Information document* contained the phone numbers of two organisations the participants could contact if they found the workshop upsetting.

The second ethical concern underpinning the research method was the need for clarity. The fact that English is not the participants' first language provided an additional reason to pay careful attention to the issue of clarity, one which is closely connected to the question of informed consent. Denscombe (2002), for example, argues that the latter is impossible without the former (p. 188). From an ethical standpoint, therefore, the individual meetings (stage b). of the method) were crucial. Each one lasted more than an hour, the bulk of the time talking through, clarifying and discussing the introductory letter and *Information document*, and answering all questions arising. Had this stage of the research method not been undertaken, the participants could have been unprepared for the task of talking about experiences which have had a profound impact on their inner selves during the workshop session. Thus, addressing issues of clarity in such a thorough way also served to protect the participants from unnecessary harm.

Considerations regarding clarity, however, extend beyond the provision of adequate information at the beginning of research work. As Miller and Bell (2002) observe, 'obtaining 'informed consent' at the start of a project should not mean that

it does not have to be thought about again' (p. 65). This is especially the case in narrative inquiries which require individuals to reflect on the effects of significant personal experiences. As such,

It is clearly impossible for interviewees to give their *fully informed* consent at the outset of an essentially exploratory qualitative interview whose direction and potential revelations cannot be anticipated. (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002, p. 111, original italics)

Taking heed of the above, the participants were invited to review and re-think their continued participation *after* the group workshop. It was to this end that, at stage d), along with a copy of the workshop transcript, the participants also received a photocopy of their signed consent form and a letter (see Appendix VIII. on p. 113) which reinforced a key aspect of their participation – that of the right of withdrawal at any time. Thus, in light of their contribution to, and experience of, the group workshop they were actively encouraged to consider their continued participation. This ensured that informed consent remained a live issue for the duration of the research work.

The commitment to clarity also lay behind one further decision in the method. The fact that the research candidates were all previous students gave rise to a concern that they would feel obliged to take part in the project. There was, therefore, a need not only to emphasise the right to withdraw, but to act on Denscombe's (2002) observation that 'the degree to which people *feel* free to say "no" to participation is important' (p. 187, original italics). Thus, it was decided not to seek the candidates' consent during the individual meeting (stage b.)). Instead each candidate left their respective meeting with the consent form and a request to give thought to becoming involved in the research work. Thereafter it was their prerogative to either sign and return the form or dispose of it. The aim of introducing this step into the method was to remove pressure, or the perception of pressure, as the would-be participants deliberated committing to the research work.

Ethical considerations then were an important factor in the key decisions which shaped and guided the emerging research work. But this is not to suggest that some ethical concerns did not remain, as doubts persist about the lack of selection

criteria for participant eligibility, and also my relationship with those who participated.

The selection of the participants rested on two practical concerns – their level of English and their availability. No attempt was made to target this age cohort or that nationality grouping, and neither was any thought given to the cultural diversity of the group or to striking a gender balance (the fact that this was ‘achieved’ was entirely by accident rather than design). These doubts are partially eased by the fact that no claim is being made that this group is a representative sample of the refugee population in Ireland; and similarly, the methodology of narrative inquiry retains a focus on the local and the singular and does not aim to draw broad sweeping conclusions from the particular. Nevertheless, doubts continue that, from an ethical perspective, due attention should have been paid to the selecting of the participants.

In the event, those who consented to take part in the research were all previous students. That the participants had worked with me before and were willing to do so again in their own time and in a different forum, suggests that a degree of trust had been established in that earlier relationship which, from their view, augured well for their involvement in this study. From my position, however, it led to a questioning of their input during the workshop. Such reservations arose from the thought that in their enthusiasm to help their former teacher they may have (subconsciously) anticipated what I wanted to hear and amended their contributions accordingly. While it is acknowledged that there is no possible way to determine the veracity of the contribution which any participant makes to a research project, it is, I feel, important that the reader is aware of the prior relationship with the participants. They were known to me and this fact may have had a bearing on their input to the workshop session.

The raising of this last question is, perhaps, an opportune moment for this chapter to end. The reader is invited to move to the *Findings* chapter and draw her/his own conclusions.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS

This chapter, together with the one that follows, are in some ways the most important in the study. In this chapter in particular the participants' voices, stories, anecdotes and human individuality are foregrounded. A process of open coding has been employed to identify prominent themes which emerged in the shared stories, and these themes have been categorised into sections.

It will be noted that there is a discrepancy at work here and it must be acknowledged immediately. The participants are being brought to the fore; yet in identifying and categorizing the themes, I am not only interpreting their words but presenting them in a structured way which is entirely of my own making. Having been involved in the co-production of the stories (Birch and Miller, 2002, p. 93) I am now, to draw an analogy, taking on the role of film editor, cutting and splicing all the footage into a cohesive structure. I am compelled to acknowledge, therefore, 'the power of the researcher to produce the final research story' (p. 101). This position of power in the researcher-participant relationship is a source of worry and uncertainty. One way to even out the power imbalance would be for the participants to co-write some, or all, of the finished study but this would require significant time investment. Indeed, when meeting the participants individually to see if they would like to take part in the research, amongst the initial questions they raised was that of the level of commitment. Three of the four participants were entering a period of final exams and viewed the fact that the field work comprised a single session as a positive.

The question of the power of the researcher remains. Although I am uneasy with the position, I am also aware that the alternative of not presenting the participants' stories in a thematically cohesive, and more accessible, structure is to leave the reader to work through the entirety of the transcript of the workshop session. In addition, I would also like to point out that under the watchful gaze of my supervisor, reflexivity and openness have been bywords to the research.

As noted above, the stories are categorised thematically. The order in which the themes are introduced is based on frequency; thus, the theme of ‘Home’ is introduced first as it arose most frequently during the course of the workshop. The stories are presented in the context in which they were told during the session. It is hoped that this facilitates the reader to understand the significance of the stories to the participants. Every attempt has been made to use the words of the participants as much as possible, and this extends to the thematic headings and sub-headings, which are presented in the table below:

<p>Theme 1. Home a). Home is not here b). Something tell me don't go</p>	<p>Theme 4. Papers</p>
<p>Theme 2. They don't understand me a). They made you feel strange b). They were looking at me like stranger</p>	<p>Theme 5. They may say something that hurts me</p>
<p>Theme 3. I feel different / I change a). They was talking different language b). Something move a bit</p>	<p>Other themes a). I was alone here b). Two nationalities – Irish and another</p>

Before proceeding to the findings, however, it is useful to provide some background information on the participants. Simple profiles are included here with the reader encouraged to access the fuller *Participant profiles* in Appendix I. on p. 90. The four participants are referred to by the pseudonym which they chose on the day of the workshop, and are introduced below in alphabetical order.

Adam

Adam is from Sudan. He arrived in Ireland in early 2004 at the age of 24. At the time of the workshop session in April 2010 he was living in south inner-city Dublin and had been granted Irish citizenship. He had not seen anyone in his family since arriving in Ireland.

Diana

Diana is from Moldova. She was 23 when she joined her husband in Dublin in July 2001. At the time of the workshop Diana was living in west Dublin with her husband and two children, and was applying for Irish citizenship.

Ion

Ion is from Moldova. He was 25 when he and his wife arrived in Limerick in January 2003. At the time of the workshop Ion, his wife and their son were living in Dublin 8. They had been granted residency and were applying for an Irish passport.

Susana

Susana is from Romania. She was 24 when she joined her husband in Dublin in February 2002. She was living with her husband and two children in north Dublin in April 2010 and, having been granted residency, was considering applying for Irish citizenship.

And so to the stories which, as noted, are presented thematically.

Theme 1. Home

Of the eight identity stories shared by the participants during the workshop session, four centred on the theme of home. And of the four, three contained narratives about return trips home to visit parents and family. They are presented here in section a). *Home is not here.*

The fourth story was also strongly connected to returning home to see parents and family. An important difference, however, is that the story told of the indecision and uncertainty which has, to date, prevented that journey. This story is set out in section b). *Something tell me don't go.*

a). Home is not here

The three narratives in which the tellers returned to their respective home countries to visit their families were remarkably similar in two ways: Firstly, because in each case it was the first time they had done so since coming to Ireland; and secondly because the stories spoke of a profound personal impact.

For Susana and Diana the return to Romania and Moldova could not come soon enough, and both viewed the going back not as a temporary visit but as a permanent move. Susana had found her initial period in Ireland very difficult, not least because she had left her daughter in the care of her mother in Romania. She felt 'isolated all the time y'know' and continually discussed leaving Ireland with her husband. After eight months they agreed that she would return to visit her family for a one-month period, but Susana was entertaining different thoughts, 'And like I say, in my mind I'm not going to come back here anymore. I will stay at home'.

The firm sense of ending going through Susana's mind was similarly experienced by Diana as the date for her family's first return trip to Moldova neared. For Diana and her husband their time in Ireland was only meant to be temporary and they had originally given themselves a year. As the year ended, however, their circumstances changed – her husband lost his job and it was another ten months before they had enough money to travel to Moldova. For Diana it could not come soon enough, 'I was counting months and days'. On the journey she described her thoughts,

... and I was dreaming ... we were flying ... on my birthday. I was 25 and I was so happy I could not ever tell my husband. He can come back any time ... Me? That's it, I'm coming back home.

For both Susana and Diana then, their time in Ireland was over. They were preparing to return home for good. What happened when they arrived, however, was completely unexpected. Susana continued her story as follows,

I stayed for one or, ... for errr two weeks, for two weeks yeah, I was ok because I saw my daughter and I saw my parents and I was very happy. And then I feel worried and I'm thinking I, what I, my feeling was like "Oh no, I'm not going to be happy if I stay here any more". So ... I said, I feel the, the home is not ... like here y'know.

After answering some questions Susana finished the story by adding,

So this is all, was an impact on me. I couldn't believe, oh my God I cannot stay here (laughs) ... at, at home. I never thought I stay here in Ireland and I said that. [...] I didn't realise that how impact it would have when I go home.

And Diana's story told of a very similar experience,

And when we arrived home ... errr ... a week, and after a week I told my mum, "No mum I have to go back home". And my mother said, "Your home is here". [...] and [my father] said, "What home? Your home is here. You don't have another home". Then I said, "Oh y'know, so ... ". Anyway, I wasn't feeling good and I was thinking what I'm doing here.

The stories of Susana and Diana have been presented together to highlight the closeness of detail. The third narrative about the first return trip was provided by Ion. His story was different in two ways: Firstly, rather than going back to Moldova Ion booked his family and parents into a hotel for a short break in Romania; and secondly, Ion introduced the story by relaying that, after two years, he was feeling good about Ireland. In his own words,

... when my son was born I, Ireland grew on me y'know. It was like something move a bit. ... I I'm just starting to integrate even more, to know people and errr walking around, go to Iris- I Irish people, meet new people and stuff like that.

And during that first meeting with his parents since leaving for Ireland he had a similar experience to both Susana and Diana. He told it as follows

... we had our happy times there and my mother asked me, "Ion when you come home?" and (laughs) I start a discussion with her. I I understood Ireland is home kind of thing y'know. And I didn- I didn't understand the question, wha- (adopts different voice) "But why not finish and come home? No I mean to Moldova. When you come to Moldova, home" (laughs). I was confused, my home is from Moldova y'know ... And errr yeah and I was, since then I wa-, that's changed something with me. That's like ... the, the change happened then whe- when my mum asked, "When you coming home?"

b). Something tell me don't go

The fourth story which focused on the theme of home was noticeably different to the three presented above and, as such, has been accorded its own section. The difference lay in the fact that Adam was the only participant who had not paid a visit to his home country since arriving in Ireland – a period of six years.

Adam's story was the final one of the session and during the previous hour he had listened intently to the other narratives about home. Asked if he would like to share a second story, this is what he said,

Sometimes I thinking about home like y'know ... seems like a magic y'know. I plan to go home but something y'know, tell me don't go y'know. ... every year I plan, think about home y'know ... and I call my mum every week and she tell

me you have to come and blah blah blah and my father he told, my father he's ok now because he sleeps in countryside. He told me you have to stay if you have a opportunity to go to college or study and have a good job and life. You have to stay there and don't have to come. But my mother and my friends and my ... brother they told me "You have to come to see us" and blah blah blah. Sometime I plan I go this year, I go home and ... something y'know, hold me down y'know.

The participants' stories about visiting home (or considering it in one case) provide rich insight into the complex and conflicting emotional currents which run beneath what, from the outside, may appear to be a happy family occasion. And within the stories lie other themes which are presented below.

Theme 2. They don't understand me

As noted earlier, the participants shared eight identity stories during the workshop session. Two of the stories comprised narratives which told of the hostility directed at the participants as a result of an absence of understanding on the part of Irish people. They are presented here in section *a*). *They made you feel strange*.

A variation on this theme emerged in conversations and stories at different times during the session. In these instances the 'they' refers not to Irish people but to the participants' own compatriots and are set out in section *b*). *They were looking at me like stranger*.

a). They made you feel strange

The two stories in which the tellers were subjected to abuse and intimidation were similar in that both incidents occurred soon after they had arrived in Ireland. In Adam's case it was a matter of weeks,

The first time I came here to Ireland, especially for African people is y'know difficult y'know. Is not like England or America y'know. ... They don't know Africa people so when I came here and ... I stay in Dublin here for ... seven days and ... they send me to Longford. Errr Dublin was ok because it's a multiculture y'know like ... but errr Longford is small town so when you walk down street so the people look at you and like ... they, they made you feel strange and, "Those people where they come from" and this kind, it's very difficult y'know ... they didn't understand the people.

Continuing the story, Adam told of another factor which he found difficult.

The only problem here, the first African people is come here, came to Ireland is Nigerian, so sometime I walk in street ... everybody just know Nigerian y- ... Irish they say you, "Are you from Nigeria?" They start y'know boring shit like told you bad things and ... this kind ... and sometime you feel very bad, but sometime ... you saw that people, "You don't understand" ... It's all the time but sometime they don't know where you come from.

Adam was not the only participant whose early experiences in Ireland were negative. Ion's first story told of an incident that took place not long after he and his wife had arrived in Limerick.

... what what's struck me and ... stays with me for a long time it was a fact that it, I was with my wife and at Burger King and errr ... not working just ... for relax I was there ... ok we were sit- sitting on the table and errr few ... guys ... errr start started throwing chips on us y'know and that's that was a shock for us and errr It, it's errr my wife said that sh- she was she was shocked by the time as well and errr ... I took everything personally y'know. It was kind of that, that's me but now I I understand poor people they don't know what they doing and errr ... the economy was growing by the time they needed kind of us. But the poor people didn't understand that. So that's what stood for me for a long time.

b). They were looking at me like stranger

The theme of a lack of understanding also surfaced at different times in the conversations which followed on from the stories. A significant difference, however, was that the absence of understanding came not from Irish people, but from the participants' own kind.

In the conversation which developed after his story on the theme of home (see Theme 1. above), Ion said this,

I don't want to say anything, but I think I will go this year [to Moldova] and not as much anymore. ... I feel I'm different than people just, Moldova they are different with me. If you go home they want your money just ... Y'know they on the street they are very aggressive.

As the discussion continued Diana, unprompted, told a story about going shopping with her children in Moldova. While the narrative told of the shop assistant's alarm caused by the free-spirited behaviour of her kids, the story continued the theme of not being understood,

Our children were like alien in our, and all the time I was "Please we are", when we are going out to eat was going, "Please be quiet" (laughs). And from the

start y'know at the moment all people were looking like "Who are they? What are they doing now?"

In telling this story Diana was returning to a theme which she herself had raised earlier in the session. The stories which she and Susana had told about their first trips home (see Theme 1. above) had given rise to a conversation during which Diana contributed the following,

And [in Moldova] I was going to do my shopping smiling, I was going to ... and people are looking like we're alien and my husband told me, I told you that, "You have to stop doing that [smiling]. People thinking you are getting mad". People doesn't understand you and they were, *weren't* taking me as serious y'know. I was talking to them, they were looking at me like stranger y'know.

The participants' stories and reflections in this section reveal the challenging, and sometimes disturbing, experiences they encountered when no attempt was made to understand them.

Theme 3. I feel different / I change

As noted earlier, layered within the identity stories about home were other important themes. One of these themes was a growing sense of difference and change on the part of the participants. The theme is presented in two sections on account of the participants' choice of words; 'different' is to the fore in the first section, while in the second it is 'change'.

a). They was talking different language

As we have seen, for both Susana and Diana the first return trip to visit their respective families had given rise to unexpected feelings about home. But it was not just the notion of home that was in flux.

Susana perceived a shift almost immediately,

... and when I arrived home I saw all the people different. Everybody they speak different.

It was a perception echoed in uncannily similar terms by Diana,

All my friends they was talking different language like not a language.

Diana continued her story by talking through this 'different language',

I had different problems. My problems were all in Ireland ... all my problems stayed here. I knew I had job, I knew I had college or whatever you know. ... I knew that that day I had to come back to study. My husband has to go there, my child has to go to crèche. They were talking about different problems. They were talking about politics which I don't understand ... I was feeling ... my feelings were ... like I could not understand what they are talking about and they could not understand what I'm talking about, 'cos my problems for them didn't mean anything. [And] ... their problems meant for me nothing.

At this point I interjected with the question, 'There was a gap, yeah?' to which Diana replied,

Yeah. And every time we were meeting people ... errr all discussion finished after five minutes ... and everything was based on the past nothing on present. We could not get on ... y'know.

b). Something move a bit

As with Susana and Diana, Ion's first meeting with his parents since leaving Moldova for Ireland had led to a questioning of the concept of home. And it is in Ion's telling of the story that an undercurrent of change was revealed both before the return trip,

... when my son was born I, Ireland grew on me y'know. It was like something move a bit.

And then during the time with his family

... and I was, since then ... that's changed something with me. That's like ... the, the change happened then whe- when my mum asked, "When you coming home?" That's when I feel this feeling. I errr Ireland is more than a country so ... we're at home very good, my wife was feeling the same y'know. Ireland is more than just a country for her.

While the theme of change was layered into Ion's narrative about returning home, it was at the very centre of the second identity story which Susana told during the workshop session. She prefaced the story by saying,

I remember all the time my mother she said all the time that don't make complain. Do your job and make very nice, very ... everything to be ... do everything you can.

She introduced the story by explaining that on arriving in Ireland she started working in a busy hotel in the centre of Dublin. She noticed that she was being tasked with a heavier workload than her colleagues,

And I said I'm not going to make complain. I leave it like this, I'm foreign, foreigner and maybe it's not good for me to go manager and tell them. And ... one time I said maybe I go to manager and one collea- colleague from, she came to me and she said, "Don't go". And then I was thinking again, I say ok I don't go. ... And ... maybe because my mother all the time she told me, "Do the best and never say complain about" ... maybe had a big a very big impact on me. And errr ... but now I change I'm not going to live like that errr ... if something wrong and if I don't like it I must speak, I don't ... I don't stay quiet. If I want to do something I will do. That was a complete change for me.

With the story finished I asked Susana the following question, 'If you had stayed in Romania do you think that change would have happened?' She responded, 'Maybe, but I don't see it as like I see now'.

The words and stories in this section tell of individuals recalibrating their view of themselves in relation to home, to family, to friends and to deeply held values.

Theme 4. Papers

The word 'papers' is a catch-all phrase used by refugees to denote a range of government-issued documents which grant the holder certain rights in relation to working and/or living in Ireland. These include work visas, work permits, leave to remain, residency visas, refugee status and so on. Although none of the eight identity stories centred on the theme of papers, it emerged as a significant theme throughout the workshop.

Indeed, its importance was revealed during the introductory phase of the session in which each participant used a timeline to present an outline biography of her / his life. One of the important events which Susana wrote onto her timeline was 'get paper to remain in state (because of my child)'. She talked about this event as follows,

Ok in 2003 I had my boy and in 2005 I get the paper to remain inside the state and I could go to work or school or wherever because I have my child here with me ... Because when I had my child I understood nobody will want anything (unintelligible) and then in 2005 I (laughs) was happy. Because this is a ... very

big, very important detail. Because of that (points at the words 'had my boy'), now I'm here.

At this point I interjected with the words, 'So it's that, it's about security', to which Susana replied, 'Yes'.

Susana returned to the theme of papers later in the session. Following her identity story which told of personal change (see Theme 3. above), a conversation developed prompted by my asking, 'Can you remember when it changed? Was there any time when you just thought, "Right. Enough. I'm going to say something"?' Susana replied,

I think after one year when I had my son ... because I felt I don't want to work housekeeping anymore ... And ... if I live here in Ireland, I don't want to continue like this. Learn something good for me and then in 2005, like I said, I got the paper so I said now is the time to do something with me. So I decided to continue the school and ... errr I decided if I have any problems speak, to go to office, knock on the door and say, "This is my problem, I'm (unintelligible)". Tha-maybe errr ... because I didn't have any any, I didn't have errr ... paper, work permit work whatever (unintelligible) and I didn't have right to work or study y'know. And maybe that's why I have ... I didn't want to say anything, to stay quiet and ... After I got the paper I feel different ... I feel like I'm part of here, I don't know how to say it maybe it's not the right words.

At this point Susana conferred momentarily with Diana in her first language and then said, 'Rights'. My understanding was that she was asking Diana to translate a word from Moldovan into English.

The theme of papers was not only important for Susana. As Adam talked the group through his outline biography at the start of the workshop he said, 'I used to live in Longford but when I get my status I came to Dublin'. And as with Susana, Adam raised this theme later in the session. It featured in his first story about Irish people not understanding him (see Theme 2. above) in which he said, 'And ... it's very difficult but when I got my status and come to Dublin ... learn English so I get understand people'. Adam concluded this story by saying,

But now it was ok y'know ... go to learn some ... English and ... know the culture and know the environment understand people y'know.

For Ion too, the issue of a state document held great significance. Towards the end of his second story, which centred on his return visit to his parents, he said this,

Ireland is more than just a country for her [his wife]. And errr the time was flying, we got studying and ... in 2005 we had our Irish passport and then we we felt that that what was missing. So now we feel very good here ... and we are very happy with this yeah.

The thoughts and comments of the participants in this section tell of the powerful impact which the issuing of state papers has on refugee lives.

Theme 5. They may say something that hurts me

The second identity story which Diana shared with the group centred on her uncertainty about how Irish people really see her and, by extension, all those who have recently settled in Ireland.

She prefaced the story by talking about her Irish employer who emigrated to America as a young man and who, as a result,

does understand me 100% because ... he was in a situation as I am ... he will never ever even have the feeling that I'm different y'know. He always treat me as being ... equal.

She began the story by explaining that in her role as an accountant she looks after the wages and PAYE responsibilities of a number of Irish companies which employ non-Irish staff. Difficulties arise when employees in these companies do not have the legal entitlement to work on a PAYE basis and in these situations Diana advises the employer 'to tell the employee he has to ... to do that papers y'know'.

She continued,

I just got few times the reply (adopts different voice), "You know those immigrants ...". And I was like "Oh" y'know. It's, how it was left without any comment y'know because I I *am* one of them y'know. And ... (in different voice) "Oh I didn't meant you, you Jesus! No no no I don't I don't y'know like" (laughs) but it, it was I was struck three times by this question y'know. It, (in different voice) "Y'know ... those Romanians, they always mess around y'know. And ... oh I didn't meant Moldavian y'know" (laughs). Y'know they ask ... such questions but in their eyes they don't see me as part of that.

In response to my query about what she says in these situations, Diana continued

I didn't say anything because I just, I didn't want to continue that conversation [...] I do feel sometimes because y'know people doesn't speak loud about refu- they will not say "We hate immigrants" or something like that. But when they forget who I am they may some- say something that hurts me.

She immediately added, 'And that will never came from the guy that I'm working [for] because he ... had experience as I do'.

As Diana finished her story I put a question to the group, 'How do you ... in terms of being happy here ... or is that a comment you take personally, as in it's against me?' Ion was the first to reply,

I have a friend. He's a friend and I know him very well and a few of them actually y'know, and they they keep joking. And they say it's a joke now all those errr ... (adopts different voice) "eff Moldovans" or "Romanians are mad", and they think it's a joke the laughing matter kind of. But some the errr I think he's he's saying just to express himself. I don't take it personally anymore. I'm just, if if you take everything personally, it's too hard actually and I I try to forget everything and go with my life and ... I know who I am. That's all.

Diana's story and Ion's comments reveal that they continue to experience remarks and 'jokes' which cause them to question the degree to which they are truly accepted in Ireland.

6. Other themes

Two further themes surfaced during the course of the session and are presented below. The heading *Other themes* has been chosen on account of the fact that the two themes were not the focus of any of the identity stories, and also because they came to light in the words of just one or two of the participants. This is not to denigrate the importance of the themes to the individuals who raised them (indeed, the initial idea to call the section *Minor themes* was jettisoned due to the implication of 'lesser' or 'reduced' contained in the word 'minor'); rather it is a simple acknowledgement that the themes were not brought up by a majority of the group.

The first theme, set out in section *a)*. *I was alone here*, is that of loneliness and was embedded in the identity stories which centred on home. The second theme, national identity, is presented in section *b)*. *Two nationalities – Irish and another*.

a). I was alone here

The reader will remember that in her narrative about the first return trip to visit her parents, Susana provided an introduction in which she told of the difficulty of her first months in Ireland. During this period she experienced feelings of loneliness.

So, I remember when I came here ... It was very hard for me because I left my daughter at home with my parents and errr ... I was isolated all the time y'know. ... When the end of the month come, came I said I will go home at the end of this month, I will buy a ticket. And my husband said, "No. If we go home I will feel the same like in ... one year". But I was alone here ...

And in the discussion which followed her narrative about returning to Moldova to visit family and friends, Diana spoke of similar feelings. In fact, so strong were these feelings that she was instrumental in bringing her sister to Ireland.

... I was feeling so, so lonely, so lonely and ... we had a job, like I was errr interested in bringing people to (unintelligible) contracts and she got a ... twelve-month contract. That the first thing I did that my sister because I was feeling lonely and I needed somebody ... the time she came to Ireland, like I would be happiest person in the world because I knew somebody's waiting, somebody understands me y'know.

It is interesting to note that both Susana and Diana speak about experiencing loneliness during a period when they were with their respective husbands.

b). Two nationalities – Irish and another

The theme of national identity was raised by Ion at different times during the session. It was woven into both his identity stories but initially emerged in an exchange with Diana following her story about Moldovan people not understanding her (see Theme 2. section b). *They were looking at me like stranger* above).

Speaking about the impact of such encounters on her daughter, Diana observed

My daughter she feels home, she's Irish ... and all the time I hear her say and everywhere she's writing, "Born In Ireland, Moldavia" ... Happier being Moldavian.

At this point Ion interjected with the comment, 'But you're allowed to have two, two nationalities – Irish and another'.

Shortly after this exchange Ion told his first identity story (see Theme 2. above). As he was setting the scene for the narrative, which happened just after he had

arrived in Ireland, he provided a snapshot of himself at the time part of which was as follows: 'So ... when I came to Ireland, so ... I didn't question myself ... who I am or nationality. I knew I am Moldovan'.

And as Ion told his second story, centring on meeting his parents, the theme of national identity permeated his thoughts. It came to the fore during the introductory part of the story in which he talked about living in Arklow,

So I was very very happy with it there. I met a lot of nice people yeah. And errr ... but still I didn't know where, I knew I was Moldavian yeah and when my son was born I, Ireland grew on me y'know. It was like something move a bit.

It re-surfaced during the main narrative of the story which turned on a conversation with his mother,

That's like ... the, the change happened then whe- when my mum asked, "When you coming home?" That's when I feel this feeling. I errr Ireland is more than a country.

And it emerged again in the conversation which followed the story with Ion observing, 'And so now I feel not just Irish, I I feel Irish and Moldavian so both of them'.

Findings from the *Reflections* form

As outlined in Chapter 3.2., at the end of the workshop session the participants were given a *Reflections* form, which they were asked to take home, fill in and return. The feedback provided by the participants is a critical part of the study and, as such, is a key part of the findings.

The *Reflections* form comprised three sections. The first asked the participants to reflect on their individual identities, the second to reflect on the workshop, and the third on educational services. The questions in each section were a mixture of yes / no and more open-ended questions. As this is a different type of research data to that generated in the workshop, it is presented differently with text boxes used for reasons of clarity and accessibility. The responses to the open-ended questions are presented alphabetically.

Section 1 – About your identity

You have lived in a new country for a number of years now. In this time,

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| a) Do you feel you have changed? | Yes | No |
| b) Do you feel differently about your (national) identity? | Yes | No |

Ion answered yes to both questions, while Diana and Susana answered no to both. Adam did not respond to question a) and answered no to question b).

Because Ion had answered affirmatively to the above questions, he was invited to respond to the following two questions:

In the meeting we told stories about moments when we began to feel differently about ourselves. Did telling your stories help you to understand more clearly the changes you feel about your (national) identity? Yes No

If yes, please explain.

We also listened to the stories of people in the same situation of moving to live in a new country. Did listening to their stories also help you to understand more clearly the changes you feel about your (national) identity? Yes No

If yes, please explain.

Ion answered no to both of the above questions.

Section 2 – About the meeting

What are your thoughts about the meeting?

Adam. Was really good everybody got a chance to talk and listening to different ideas and stories and feeling part of the group.

Diana. I know that people have same feelings as I have, about how do I feel being in Ireland for so long a time.

Ion. The meeting was well organised and everyone was relaxed and happy to share their stories which clearly have an impact on their lives. Moreover,

Continued over

Continued from previous page

Ion. From the start I felt little uncomfortable. However after first ten minutes everything changed. In my opinion the meeting was interesting and educational.

Susana didn't respond to this question.

Was it helpful to tell your experiences as stories? Yes No

All four participants answered yes to this question.

Please add any thoughts.

Adam. Sometime is not easy to talk about your problem but is easy to tell story.

Ion. It help to remember how far we came and how much we changed.

Susana. It was nice to remember some of the most important parts of my life.

Diana didn't add any thoughts.

Section 3 – Thoughts on educational services

The focus of the meeting was you, your stories and your experience of personal change in the time you have lived in Ireland. Is this the first time a person in adult education has asked you to talk about this?

Yes Diana, Susana

No Adam, Ion

Do you think there is a place in adult education courses for this kind of learning?

Yes

No

All four participants answered yes to this question.

Continued over

If yes, please explain.

Adam. I'm not sure but I said yes. That kind of learning can give people opportunity to talk in a group about their experience and give confidence to talk and sharing their ideas.

Diana. This kind of learning will help people to understand that there are other people with same feelings and they are not lonely [alone].

Ion. Definitely an adult education course will have a good outcome in terms understand other persons simply by sharing the stories and listen to other which may have similar issues. Just communicating to each other we can really find out what other people experiencing in a foreign country and most important helps to understand that you are not alone.

Susana. People's stories can sometimes become motivations and support for others.

Please add any further thoughts.

Diana. I have lots of friends that emigrates to different countries. We always discuss and support each other. I think people have to speak about their feelings and that makes life easy.

Ion. Sharing is always a positive thing, it helps to relieve the pain which you may be experienced in the past, as well in the same time you may learn how better to deal with your own life in the future.

Adam and Susana didn't add any further thoughts.

CHAPTER 5 – ANALYSIS

It will be remembered that the research project originated in my experience of working with groups of refugees and observing what I termed the ‘turbulence’ in their lives. Subsequent reading indicated a link between this ‘turbulence’ and theories of identity formation, and investigating that possible link was the impetus for the study. The task of this chapter, therefore, is to examine the findings through the lens of the ideas and theories discussed in Chapter 2. and, indeed, the reader will immediately note that the first two subtitles below align to those in the Literature Review.

It may be useful to provide the reminder that in holding to a narrative inquiry approach, the following analysis does not seek to extract general conclusions or to make broad claims about the work. The priority of the methodology is for the participants to understand and draw meaning from particular personal experience. This adheres closely to adult education approaches to learning, and part of the analysis, therefore, focuses on the reflections of the participants on their learning during the research process.

As can be seen in the previous chapter, the identity stories told by the participants together with the ensuing conversations, touched on many aspects of their lives. Feelings of uncertainty, unease and anxiety were wrapped up in these stories, particularly about how they were seen by others. Although the impact of social context on the participants’ sense of self was notable, their words show that identity formation remains the work of the individual. And it is their words, as contained in their appraisal of the workshop, which suggest that adult education can be the appropriate setting for individuals to share their identity stories as a means to understand themselves in their new situation and thereby regain a sense of agency.

5.1. Refugee lives of uncertainty and becoming

The literature on the refugee experience (see pp. 33-36) tells us that the lives of individuals fleeing persecution, violence and/or war are cast into a state of flux as they try to come to terms with the loss of the safe familiar known while simultaneously undertaking the daunting task of forging a new life in an alien environment. The stories of the research participants and the ensuing reflections and conversations add to that literature by illuminating not only the uncertainty in their lives as they start afresh, but also the pervasiveness of that uncertainty at a profoundly personal level.

That the uncertainty is something they continue to live with on a daily basis is revealed in their on-going negative experiences with Irish people which are a source of unease and anxiety. In Adam's case these were deliberately hostile, 'Irish they say you, "Are you from Nigeria?" They start y'know boring shit like told you bad things'; whereas Ion expressed his discomfort at the conversations of his Irish friends, 'And they say it's a joke now all those errr ... (adopts different voice) "eff Moldovans" or "Romanians are mad", and they think it's a joke'. For Ion though it is clearly not so, 'I don't take it personally anymore ... if you take everything personally, it's too hard actually', while for Adam the impact is understandably difficult to deal with, 'and sometime you feel very bad'. The feelings voiced by Adam and Ion were shared by Diana when, telling of the comments made by her clients on 'You know those immigrants', she observed, 'people ... will not say "We hate immigrants" or something like that. But when they forget who I am they may ... say something that hurts me'.

And while the participants were clearly troubled about how they are seen in Ireland, they were also unsettled about how they are perceived in their respective home countries. Diana raised this issue on two separate occasions, providing short anecdotes about the reactions of Moldovan people to her demeanour in one instance, and to the behaviour of her Irish-raised children in the other. In the former, 'people are looking like we're alien' at her upbeat, friendly manner, 'I was talking to them, they were looking at me like stranger y'know'; while in the latter, 'from the start y'know ... all people were looking like "Who are they? What are they

doing now?” For Ion such incidents, which he talked about in more general terms, have had a profoundly unsettling effect and are a causal factor in his growing detachment from his home country, as the following makes clear,

I think I will go this year [to Moldova] and not as much anymore. ... I feel I'm different than people ... Moldova they are different with me. If you go home they want your money just ... on the street they are very aggressive.

And the feeling that they were viewed differently by their 'own' people, was reinforced by their meetings with friends on returning to their home countries. On this point Susana and Diana had very similar thoughts, with the former saying, 'Everybody they speak different', and the latter observing, 'All my friends they was talking different language like not a language'. When asked to explain Diana did so (see p. 56), continuing with the observation, 'my problems for them didn't mean anything. [And] ... their problems meant for me nothing', before concluding '... all discussion finished after five minutes ... and everything was based on the past nothing on present. We could not get on ...'.

This remark hints at an awareness of a past self who attached personal significance to friendships from which the present self feels distanced. Diana's thoughts suggest a person working through uncertainties about how she is seen by, and relates to, others to evaluate and reformulate her sense of self. In other words, it can be seen as an example of a person negotiating the process of becoming.

The *Findings* chapter contains other, more straightforward, examples of the participants either navigating issues of personal uncertainty (see Adam's story about home on pp. 52-53), or engaging in the activity of becoming (exemplified by Ion's words in theme 6. b). on pp. 61-62). And, as with many of the participants' stories and observations, both of these narratives are imbued with feelings of unease and anxiety.

Implications for theory and educational practice

The degree of uncertainty in the participants' lives is very much in accordance with the literature on the refugee experience (see Chapter 2.3.), but there is perhaps a

crucial difference. Encapsulated by Yambasu's words, 'I have had to re-create myself in order to survive in my new home' (2004, p. 34), the existing literature focuses on the regenerative aspect of refugee lives and selves in relation to the *new* environment. The stories of the participants in this study, however, reveal that their sense of identity has equally been affected by their changing relationships and connections to their former or home 'communities'. That is, while they are uncertain about their identity in the Irish context, they now experience the same uncertainty in their home countries. This observation is reinforced in the following section and, as such, suggests that it is an area which has been overlooked by the literature on refugees. It would be a fascinating area for further narrative-based research.

The above analysis is also instructive for educational practice. The feelings of what here is termed 'uncertainty' speaks directly to the 'turbulence' which was the starting point for this research project. It tells us that, as learners in our adult educational services, these are individuals who need time, support and understanding. It may be the case that classes are missed because there are more immediate concerns in their lives, but recognising their situation demands that space be afforded. And perhaps those concerns should be brought into the safe space of an adult education setting where they can be engaged and talked through in a real and meaningful way. This point is raised again below.

5.2. Identity as agency in social context

Chapter 2.1. discussed identity formation as a process occurring in the interaction of the individual (agent) with the social world (or structures) in which s/he lives. While detailing the uncertainty which the participants were experiencing on a daily basis, the previous section also highlights the impact which the external social world has on the inner world of the individual. This was further born out in those stories and conversations of the participants which touched on the theme of papers (see pp. 57-59).

For Adam and Susana the granting of papers resulted in an increased sense of agency. In his first story (see p. 58) Adam relayed how he had been unhappy in

Longford and on two occasions during the workshop connected the issuing of papers to an important decision, 'when I get my status I came to Dublin'. And similarly for Susana, the Irish state's decision to grant her Leave to Remain was the catalyst for positive action, '... and then in 2005, like I said, I got the paper so I said now is the time to do something with me. So I decided to continue the school'. As part of the same conversation she reflected, 'After I got the paper I feel different ... I feel like I'm part of here'. These words echoed those of Ion who also had a positive reaction to the issuing of a state document, '... in 2005 we had our Irish passport and then we we felt that that what was missing. So now we feel very good here'. The reflections of the participants, therefore, confirms a key point discussed in Chapter 2.1., that 'our identities are the product of life in a community' (Lemke, 2008, p. 20).

The words of the participants above, when added to the analysis of the previous section, suggest that although elements of the social world can usher in changing feelings about a person's sense of self – either affirming as above, or troubling as noted earlier – it was the participants who actively engaged with these feelings, apprehending, re-thinking and reformulating their sense of self. In other words, within any given social context the individual plays the key role in identity formation. This is evident in the words of the participants when relating their stories about returning to their respective home countries for the first time since moving to Ireland. It will be recalled that the stories about home told of a powerful, and unanticipated, effect on all the participants. For Ion and Diana this emerged in conversations with their parents which gave rise to conflicting thoughts and emotions. Ion told it as follows,

I was confused, my home is from Moldova y'know ... the change happened then whe- when my mum asked, "When you coming home?"

And here is how Diana relayed it,

... I told my mum, "No mum I have to go back home". And my mother said, "Your home is here". [...] Then I said, "Oh y'know, so ... ". Anyway, I wasn't feeling good and I was thinking what I'm doing here.

Susana's story on the same theme spoke of similar confusion,

... and I'm thinking I ... like "Oh no, I'm not going to be happy if I stay here any more". So, ... I feel the, the home is not ... like here y'know [...] So this is all, was an impact on me. I couldn't believe, oh my God I cannot stay here (laughs) ... at, at home.

While the words of the three participants convey the dynamic effect the social world has on the individual, it can also be seen that it is the individual who has to reflect and work through feelings caused by changing outer circumstances. That is, it was the participants who had to understand and negotiate confusing feelings around a changing sense of home. In all three cases the ensuing reconfiguring of a sense of self was the work of individual agency.

Implications for theory and educational practice

The stories and reflections of the participants in this (and the previous) section, bear out the dialectical relationship between the individual and the social world as discussed in Chapter 2.1. and confirm identity formation as a process 'by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves' (Erikson, 1983, p. 22). And while corroborating the idea that a sense of self is developed in a social context, the words of the participants, as noted above, inform us that the work which goes into formulating a personal identity is very much an individual endeavour.

The above is extremely informative for educational practice. The capacity for agency, that is to act in a social context, is reduced if a person doesn't understand the context and so doesn't know how to act. And this is the position of refugees whose transition to an unknown situation has induced, to paraphrase the participants, feelings of 'not feeling good' and being 'confused'. A key aspect of adult education, therefore, is to support individual refugees with a fundamental concern – that of understanding and making sense of the complex new world around them. Such support assists in reasserting agency, thereby enabling our learners to act meaningfully in the world by 'making history out of possibility' (Freire, 1998, p. 54). Such practice coheres with Freire's call for adult education to play a key role in facilitating people in 'the vocation of becoming more fully human' (1996, p. 26) – see Chapter 2.2.

5.3. Stories, meaning-making and useful knowledge

It would be an oversight if the effectiveness of story-telling in the research process were not mentioned in an analysis of this study. As discussed in Chapter 3.1., narrative inquiry was considered to be an appropriate methodology for this particular study because the approach itself is 'about how people experience their lives,' (Phillion, 2002, p. 23), and also because story-telling provided an informal means for the participants to talk openly about their experiences and their identities.

That the approach was effective can be seen in the participants' responses to one of the questions on the *Reflections* form. All four answered 'yes' to the question, 'Was it helpful to tell your experiences as stories?' The comments which Ion and Susana added (see p. 65) indicate that the approach yielded a positive experience, but it is Adam's words which are of particular interest to this section – 'Sometime is not easy to talk about your problem but is easy to tell story'.

It is suggested that this observation relates to the identity story he shared with the group which centred on the theme of home which is presented in full on pp. 52-53. He introduced it by saying, 'Sometimes I thinking about home like y'know ... seems like a magic y'know' and what followed was clearly not a remembrance of a past incident or conversation which happened at some point in his life, as had been the case with his first story. Rather, he talked through a present predicament which, to him, remained unresolved – 'My mum ... she tell me you have to come [home to Sudan] ... and my father [...] told me you have to stay if you have a opportunity'. There is no way of knowing if Adam had planned to tell this 'story' to the group or whether, having listened intently to the earlier stories and conversations about return visits home, he chose to bring it into the room because he wanted the guidance of the participants in helping him to make a decision. While acknowledging that it is speculation only, I would suggest it is the latter. What can be said with a degree of confidence though, as his comment on the *Reflections* form shows (see above), is that Adam used the workshop to 'talk about your problem'.

As Adam talked, the other participants listened attentively and on finishing they asked questions and offered supportive comments. In short, they recognised him as a concrete individual and helped him to make meaning of his experiences and situation. Identifying precise moments when individuals 'make meaning' is extremely difficult but Adam's telling of his 'story' and the conversation which followed is a clear manifestation of the process at work. This begs the question of whether (or not) the workshop helped the participants to make meaning of their experiences – that is, if they found it to be a good learning experience. And this brings us to the *Reflections* form.

The responses of the participants to the questions asked in the *Reflections* form can be read in their entirety on pages 63-66 and the reader can, therefore, draw her/his own conclusions. All the participants provided positive thoughts on the learning which took place with a comment by Adam indicating that he found it very valuable, 'Good to know about people and know about me, and also learning from them'. This was a point echoed by Susana, although in more general terms, 'People's stories can sometimes become motivations and support for others'. Perhaps the most significant comments for the research follow the unanimously positive response to the question 'Do you think there is a place in adult education courses for this kind of learning?' (see p. 66). It is here that the participants considered the usefulness of the workshop and it is clear that they all appreciated its value. Sharing and understanding experiences were repeatedly cited as important attributes of learning with Adam noting, 'That kind of learning can give people opportunity to talk in a group about their experience and give confidence to talk'; and Ion saying, 'Just communicating to each other we can really find out what other people experiencing in a foreign country and most important helps to understand that you are not alone'.

Implications for theory and educational practice

In providing their appraisal of the workshop in the *Reflections* form the participants collectively articulated the relevance and meaning which the learning held for them.

An important, if not the most important, element here is the opportunity for learning provided by the group setting or, in Freirean terms, by dialogue. Adam's comment that the workshop 'give confidence to talk' and Ion's words 'Just communicating to each other ...' align closely with Freire's claim of the importance of working with others to name the world as an essential part of humanisation (1996, p. 69).

As noted at the start of this chapter, this research inquiry does *not* seek to make broad claims for the meaning of the work; rather the aim is simply to ask the participants if they found the learning experience to be useful. Their reflections provide clear, unambiguous, evidence that it was. This is highly significant for teachers working with adult refugees who may be disorientated in their new world, for it tells us that such dialogical learning fosters a sense of human agency by facilitating 'the exploration of 'meaning' and of how people make sense of their lived experience' (Thompson, 2007, p. 31).

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS

This research set out to ask individual refugees about their identity in light of their lived experiences of uprooted, turbulent lives. A methodology based on narrative inquiry was devised to facilitate the participants to share stories about moments when they perceived a shift in their sense of self. The participants were also invited to appraise the learning experience of talking collectively about their changing identities, so that a further aim of the study was to look at the implications of the participants' evaluation for adult education providers.

The findings and analysis show the acute awareness of the participants to how they were seen by others, an awareness which gave rise to profound, and sometimes unsettling, feelings of uncertainty and unease about their changing identities. Indeed, the impact of the social world on inner self was evident throughout, and the participants' stories about return visits to their home countries revealed an unanticipated loosening of the ties to family and friends which had a profoundly powerful effect on their perceptions of self. Changing feelings of identity in relation to what was assumed to be 'home' is, perhaps, under-represented in the literature on the refugee experience and is, therefore, fertile ground for further investigation.

For all that their stories told of the influence of the social world in shaping their individual sense of self, the words of the participants highlighted the fact that the on-going negotiation and reformulation of identity is very much an individual enterprise. The confused, troubled feelings of the participants as they tried to reconfigure selfhood in a social context which they didn't comprehend, is an important finding for it raises a crucial question – is there a place for adult education to support individual refugees to understand their new world and thus develop their capacity to act in it? This research asked the participants that very question.

And their responses are a key finding of the study. All four found it helpful to present their experiences as stories and were equally unanimous not only of the

value of the learning involved, but of adult education as the appropriate setting for such learning. Their positive appraisal affirms the vital role of adult education in assisting individual refugees to reassert their agency in new surroundings, and the participants' calls for short courses focusing on stories of lived experience are surely worth consideration.

CHAPTER 7 – REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD

Chapter 1 of this study opens with the assertion that ‘All research is a first-person narrative’ (Pelias, 2004, p. 7), and goes on to outline the personal origins of the inquiry. That the research question, the ontological position, the corresponding epistemology and the methodology of the inquiry are rooted in my experience confirms that I am, unequivocally, the maker of the work. But there is another way to read the above quote, one which understands Pelias as instructing us that all research is a narrative *about* the researcher. If this was the intended meaning, it finds support here. In my conscious thinking this study started out as an investigation into the (possible) changing perceptions of self as experienced by others; subconsciously, however, I now see a motivation to understand my own changing identity. I will return to this point shortly, but first to the learning via a voice from the field.

Of her year conducting anthropological research amongst members of the Afghan refugee community in northern California, Omidian (1994) notes the impact it had on her personally by observing, ‘Field work changes the anthropologist’ (p. 171). I would suggest she’s right. Not that I claim to be an anthropologist, but I do have an understanding of the effects of immersive field work. The kind of ‘field work’ in which, as detailed on pp. 6-11 I spent four hours every working day for sixteen weeks with the same group; in which the group were encouraged and supported to bring their experiences into the room as a source of learning; and in which I gave time to troubled, anguished individuals trying to cope with extraordinary changes in their lives. Submerged in this (field) work I couldn’t but be affected by the participants and I came to contemplate the turbulence they were experiencing and connected it with the idea of identity crisis (see pp. 12-13).

The question of changing identities in refugee lives stayed in my mind and called me to investigate. But how to ask individuals to talk about who they are? My supervisor suggested that there might be some moments in my life when I sensed

a shift in my sense of self and asked me to write about them. Recollections of these moments fizzed to the surface ... and bang! Everything changed.

The learning

As noted on p. 39, what came out of my writing was a series of short stories and I had unexpectedly found a means, a method, to talk about identity. But it was the content of the stories for which I was totally unprepared. Up until that point I had considered identity, my own included, in the abstract context of nationality. This thinking can be seen in the *Information document* given to the candidates at the outset of the research work (see Appendix III. on p. 93) and, indeed, was how I first presented the notion of identity in the individual meetings with the candidates – explaining that after so many years here I felt ‘less English’. But in my stories the notion of nationality was nowhere to be seen; instead the pivotal moments which triggered an uneasy sense that something had changed were rooted in social and personal relationships – perceptions that people viewed me in a certain light, or that I had, imperceptibly, come to understand my place in the world differently. Thus, the research work was transformed from an investigation of identity as being bound up in abstract ideas of nationality into an inquiry of identity as the product of concrete, complex and socially embedded relationships.

And if the research was transformed, so too was the researcher. My stories had unearthed assumptions about my views and relationships which, once they were out of my body and on the page, I knew no longer held. The events of my life had moved me beyond them. And although I duly carried out the field work, the readings on identity were now being filtered through my, and not the participants’ lived experience. In short, I was in the way. Trying to comprehend the personal issues which were now surfacing, and realising that I needed time to attend to them, I called a halt to the work.

A warning

Returning to Pelias, for a time the research truly was ‘a first-person narrative’; I became the focus of my own investigation, all be it unintentionally. I was drawn to investigate an aspect of the social world which I was, through experience,

interested in. But what I didn't know was *why* I was drawn to the idea of a changing sense of self; hindsight, of course, makes it clear that I was using the turbulence of others as a means to understand my own. And this is perhaps a salient point for all first-time researchers to consider at the outset of their work. To paraphrase an insightful observation by one of my peers on the Masters course, 'The area of research needs to be hot enough to light your fire, but take care that it isn't too hot to handle'. I wasn't sufficiently mindful and I got burned.

After six years I can say with certainty that the research has returned to the original point of departure – an investigation into changing perceptions of self on the part of adult refugees. And yet I am compelled to point out that through the roles of investigator, writer, and organiser and interpreter (of data), my subjectivity and concerns are still present. In this sense then, the reader should be aware that I have remained in the picture.

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I. Participant profiles

Adam

Adam is from Sudan. He was 24 when he arrived in Ireland in early 2004. He was the only member of his family who had been accepted as a Programme Refugee by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. The small group of Sudanese Programme Refugees was originally accommodated in Longford but, when his refugee status was confirmed six months later, Adam moved to Dublin.

He attended English classes in IILT in 2005-06 before studying at two colleges of further education where he achieved a number of FETAC Minor Awards at Level 6. Adam was unemployed at the time of the workshop session, although he was doing some casual work with friends, one of whom owned his own business. He was hoping to get more work with the friend with a view to saving money so that he could travel to Sudan and get married.

He was living in south inner-city Dublin in April 2010. By that stage he had been granted Irish citizenship and was beginning the process of applying for family reunification. He had not seen anyone in his family since arriving in Ireland six years earlier.

Diana

Diana is from Moldova and was 23 when she joined her husband in Dublin in July 2001. Two months later she gave birth to their second child.

In 2002 she started working in a hotel restaurant but as she says, 'realised it's not for me and I need English' and so enrolled with IILT. However, there were difficulties in assigning Diana to an appropriate class and it was not until September 2004 that she commenced a foundation English course. Further frustration followed as the MSc she had achieved in Moldova was not recognised in Ireland, and this undermined her application to join a degree course in UCD.

Within two years Diana had re-trained and had qualified as an accountant technician. She had also started working, one day a week, in an accountancy practice. In September 2007 she enrolled in a college of further education with the aim of becoming a fully qualified chartered accountant, but withdrew after one year due to the expense. Undaunted, she pursued her aim on a self-directed basis, while also taking on more hours in the accountancy practice. At the time of the workshop session she was working three days a week and had passed seven of the ten modules required to become a recognised chartered accountant. She was planning to secure the qualification in 2011 and to go full time thereafter.

In April 2010 Diana and her family were living in west Dublin and had applied for Irish citizenship (they had already been granted Irish residency).

Ion

Ion is from Moldova and was 25 when he and his wife arrived in Limerick in January 2003. After a few months they moved to Arklow where Ion, in his own words, 'worked with my hands' and where their child was born.

They moved to Dublin and in January 2005 Ion started English classes in IILT. A successful period of study at two colleges of further education followed before, in September 2008, he and his wife were accepted onto the second year of a degree course in an institute of technology. Throughout his time as a student Ion spent the summers working for two high-profile international companies. The workshop session took place as they were preparing for their finals, which were two weeks away, and were also in the process of applying for jobs. Ion's long term aim was, as he put it, to 'become an entrepreneur'.

In April 2010 Ion and his family were living in Dublin 8. They had Irish residency and Ion was an Irish passport holder.

Susana

Susana is from Romania. In February 2002, at the age of 24, she made the difficult decision to leave her daughter in the care of her parents and to join her husband who had been living in Dublin for just over a year. She immediately started working in a busy city-centre hotel but, with minimal English and apart from her daughter, she felt 'alone here'.

She brought her daughter to Ireland in late 2002 and, after the birth of her second child in 2003, Susana reduced her hours in the hotel to devote more time to raising the family. She started English classes in late 2006 and from September 2008 attended two colleges of further education. At the time of the workshop session she was coming to the end of a FETAC Level 6 course (she had an exam the very next day). A tailor by trade, Susana's qualifications were in healthcare and she was hoping her Level 6 award would secure a place on a degree course.

Her husband was also busy with his studies in this period as he was in the final year of a degree course at an institute of technology. Susana and her family were living in north Dublin in April 2010 and were considering applying for Irish citizenship (they had already been granted Irish residency).

II. Introductory letter to participants

Department of Adult and Community Education
National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Maynooth
Co. Kildare

Email: bezberridge@yahoo.ie
Tel: 086 – 0487 892

2nd April 2010

Dear ,

Thank you very much for agreeing to meet me and for giving me the opportunity to invite you to participate in the study project I am working on.

The study project is a research paper for a masters degree course I am participating in at National University of Ireland, Maynooth. The starting point for my study is my own experiences as a foreign national who came to live here in late 1990. As I adapted to a different way of life in Ireland I began to realise that my (national) identity was changing. I wasn't sure how to understand these changes, but all I knew was that I didn't feel as English as I did before. I also didn't know how to talk about these changes because I wasn't sure if people would understand me if I tried to explain. So for a long time I lived with my changed self and, although I was happy, I always felt there was a part of me that I didn't understand.

Recently I began to write about my experiences as stories and as I wrote the stories (stories from 12-16 years ago) I began to understand more clearly how I feel about my changed sense of (national) identity.

From my own experience comes the belief that there is a lot to be learned from listening to the stories of the lived experiences of Ireland's newcomers, people like yourself. In particular, I consider that, by listening to stories such as yours, adult education organisations can develop and improve their services. I also suggest that the act of telling stories gives people the opportunity to think again about their experiences and achieve a better understanding of how they may have changed. I think, therefore, that the study project offers the opportunity of learning for the participants.

If, after reading and discussing the information document, you decide that you would like to participate in the study project, please sign and return the consent form. Completing the form is important for protecting your interests during the study.

My sincere thanks for your time and for considering this invitation to participate in the project.

Yours sincerely,

Introduction

• **Personal background**

It is now nearly twenty years since I came to Ireland. The funny thing is that when I arrived I didn't plan to stay. However, it's more correct to say that at the age of 25, as I was then, I simply didn't have any plans at all. However, in September 1991 I met an Irish girl, Liz, who is now my wife, and we have lived in the same house in south County Dublin since September 1992.

I think of myself as very happy and content with my / our life in Ireland and I see Dublin as my / our home, both now and in the future. However, although Dublin has been my home for a long time now, I haven't applied for Irish residency and neither have I applied for Irish citizenship. And although I haven't lived in England since December 1989, I am still an English citizen and I still have an English passport. I'm not sure why.

Indeed, I sometimes feel confused when I think about the idea of "home" (Ireland) and the idea of "national identity" (English). I mean I know I am English, it's just that starting in 1994 or 1995 I began to realise that I was changing. From around this time I began to feel not so English. It wasn't something I could measure – I mean, I couldn't say I felt 80% English, 65% English or whatever. I just felt different. Indeed, over the years I have met a number of people who have told me, "You don't seem very English". I never know what to say when people tell me this.

In February 2002 Liz and I got married and, as I have said, I am very happy with how my life has developed. But this confusion has always been at the back of my mind. I know I'm not and can never be Irish (even if I am granted Irish citizenship), but at the same time I don't feel English.

So where does this leave me? How can I describe myself to other people? And how can I understand the changes in how I feel, so that I can describe myself to myself?

• **Professional background**

As you know, I worked as an English language teacher in Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) between 1999 and 2008. During those nine years I worked with people newly arrived in Ireland from a multitude of countries, and I took great interest in their development and progress.

For me the work in the classroom was not only about teaching and learning English. Of course, learning the language was absolutely crucial to the students, but it was also important for them to learn about aspects of everyday life in Ireland – how to open bank accounts, the role of the family doctor (or GP) in the health system, how to access information on jobs and training, understanding the education system and so on.

As the groups looked at the different aspects of life in Ireland, I often thought about how difficult it must be to both understand and change to a completely new way of life. And as I helped some of the students with their applications for Irish residency and Irish citizenship, I wondered if they felt a change in themselves. Perhaps, like me, they didn't feel as close to their nationality as before and they didn't feel as Russian, as Sudanese, as Iraqi, as Congolese as they did when they first arrived in Ireland. Or

maybe the opposite was happening and they felt more Russian, more Sudanese, more Iraqi, more Congolese. And maybe they too noticed these change without really understanding them.

Although I left IILT in February 2008, these thoughts about how people change when they leave their home country and start a new life in a different country have stayed with me – very probably because this was also my experience.

The research project

In September of last year I started a Masters Degree in Adult and Community Education at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM). For the masters degree we (or rather I) must complete a research paper.

• What is a research paper?

A research paper begins with a question which the researcher then investigates.

In the world of adult education the researcher might, for example, have a question about how the voice and opinions of learners can be used to provide more suitable programmes of learning. The researcher then starts the investigation which usually has two distinct steps:

1. The researcher might interview some teachers and learners to get their thoughts and opinions. Or the researcher could prepare a list of questions for the learners to answer.
2. The thoughts and opinions of the teachers and learners (or the answers provided by the learners to the list of questions) are then analysed by the researcher who may then be in a position to make suggestions for future programmes.

• About my research – learning from our stories

When I started the masters degree in September I knew I wanted to learn more about the internal changes which people experience when they move to a new country. However, I didn't know how to talk to people about these changes. My supervisor suggested that it might help to think about my own experiences and changes, and suggested that I write about them. I didn't really know what to write but soon, almost without thinking, I was writing my experiences as stories, or what we call short stories.

The stories were not about "big" events. They were about everyday experiences – for example, a conversation with a friend or neighbour, or about a thought (a new thought) which came suddenly into my mind. But these small moments were very important because they resulted in a change in how I thought and understood myself.

This is perhaps not very clear so perhaps it will help if I give you three of my short stories to read. The first story describes an experience while I was living in Spain, and the other two stories are moments from my life in Ireland. Very briefly they are as follows:

1. In the first story I am daydreaming when a thought comes into my mind.
2. In the second someone I know asks me, "Are you ok?"
3. And the third describes a simple conversation I had at a friend's wedding.

As you can see all three are about everyday moments and don't seem very important. However, when I started to write the stories I realised that the experiences were extremely significant because they helped me to understand the inner changes (especially the changes about my identity), I was experiencing at the time.

But more than that, in writing the stories I began to see that they were important **not** because they happened to me, but because they are connected to themes. In the stories I see themes of:

- Perception (how we see the world)
- Recognition (how people see us)
- Culture
- Exclusion
- Home
- Nationality
- Identity

I would be very interested to see if your stories connect with any of these themes or with other themes.

• **The purpose of the research**

I believe that we can learn a lot from both telling our own stories and also listening to the stories of people who are in a similar situation. From this belief the purpose of the research project is:

- To listen to the stories of people newly arrived in Ireland, and to find out if they have experienced any changes in how they feel about their (national) identity.
- To find out if it is a positive learning experience for the newly arrived to tell their stories about the changes in their feelings of (national) identity.

Following on from the above two points a further aim of the research is to explore how adult education organisations can improve their services to people who have recently moved to Ireland.

Participation in the research project

I am sure you will have a number of questions about the research project. I will now try to answer some of those questions.

• **Who has been invited to participate in the research?**

I have invited four people, including yourself, to participate in the research project. All four of the participants attended English classes in IILT.

• **If I agree to participate, what will I be asked to do?**

After today's meeting there are three steps in the research project:

1. I would like you to think of two stories from your life in Ireland.
Each story should focus on an experience (or moment) which was important because it helped you to understand the changes in how you see and think of yourself.
2. The second step is to attend a group meeting with the other three participants.
I would like this meeting to be very informal and relaxed (more like a chat). At the meeting I would like the participants to share their stories.
3. At the end of the meeting I will give you a form to complete.
The form will ask you for your thoughts about the meeting and your feelings about telling your stories. I would prefer if you take the form away with you and complete it after a week or ten days.

Note. I would like to audio-record the group meeting. I understand that this can only happen if I have your permission.

- **Do I have to participate?**

Participating in the research project is completely your decision. Also, it is no problem if you agree to participate but then change your mind. You can withdraw at any time, and you don't need to give a reason.

Similarly, you may wish to withdraw some of the information you have provided to the research project. Again, this is not a problem and again you don't need to give a reason.

- **What happens to the information I provide?**

This is an extremely important issue, and there are a number of points in connection with this question.

1. After the meeting I will make a **transcript** of the conversation.
A transcript is a written document which contains everything which was said during a conversation. I will then send you the part of the transcript which contains everything which you said. If you want to change the transcript in any way, or withdraw any information which you provided, it is not a problem.
2. The audio-recording and the transcript of the conversation will be saved in two computers. For safety reasons both computers are protected using passwords, and I am the only person who knows the passwords. The information which you provide will **not** be saved in a laptop or a memory stick, as both of these can be lost or stolen very easily.
3. After writing the transcript of the conversation, I will destroy the audio-recording.
4. The final research article will probably contain some general information about you and the other participants (e.g. where you are from, how long you have been in Ireland, if you are married and have a family, and so on).
However, the final article will **not** contain any personal information (such as address, date of birth or phone number) and your name will be changed. In this way it will **not** be possible for anyone reading the article to identify you or the other participants.

- **Who will read the final research article?**

There are two people who will read the final research paper. They are my two supervisors, Mary Ryan and David McCormack (see below for details).

If the final research article is accepted by my supervisors, one copy will be kept in the Education Resource Centre at National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM). It will be possible for future students attending graduate and post-graduate courses run by the Department of Adult and Community Education at NUIM to access this one copy.

- **What happens if I become upset during the meeting?**

I understand that leaving your home country can be a difficult experience. And I also understand that talking about the changes in your life since you came to Ireland may be upsetting for you. If this is the case, you may wish to contact the following organisations:

Cairde (pronounced Kardyá). Tel: 855 2111

Refugee Information Service. Tel: 645 3070 (closed on Fridays)

On this point it is important to make one thing very clear. I am an experienced teacher and teacher educator with a degree of expertise in the field of adult education. However, I have absolutely **no** training or experience in the area of psychological therapy or counselling. As such, the group meeting will **not** offer any form of counselling to the participants.

Further questions

I have tried to think of all the questions you might have about the research project. However, it is very possible that you have more questions. If you do, please contact me at 086 – 0487 892, or via email at bezberidge@yahoo.ie

Alternatively, you can also contact Mary Ryan (my personal supervisor) or David McCormack (my group supervisor) at National University of Ireland, Maynooth. Their contact details are as follows:

Mary Ryan. Tel: 708 3750

David McCormack. Tel: 708 3947

Email: mary.ryan@nuim.ie

Email: david.mccormack@nuim.ie

The conversation

Introduction

When I think of it now it seems strange. There I was in a busy street in Madrid, the capital city of Spain, having a conversation with myself about my national identity. Maybe it wasn't so surprising. I mean, I was born in Cyprus, but grew up in the north of England, I had an Irish partner and so strong attachments with Dublin, and there I was living in Spain. Maybe I needed to have this conversation so I could be clear with myself, and looking back I have to say it was a good thing.

But at the time it didn't feel like a good thing. I wasn't in any way prepared for the conversation and it left me confused, unsure and anxious. To understand how the conversation started I need to explain the context (the time, the place, and what happened before).

The context

On a Sunday evening in March 1994 Liz and I sat down to talk about our plans. We both knew that we had to make a decision. I had avoided this moment for as long as possible, but time was passing and I couldn't delay it any longer. In some ways the decision we had to make wasn't difficult. We weren't talking about anything serious or complicated and we only had two options – to stay in Madrid for another year, or to return to Dublin. It was, in fact, a simple choice. So why was I making things difficult for Liz? Why had this decision become such a big thing in my mind?

The short answer is that I sensed what the outcome was going to be, and it wasn't what I wanted to hear. And sure enough, as I went to bed that night I was feeling disappointed. We had made the decision to return to Dublin. However, while I was disappointed I knew we had made the right decision. Liz's mother had died 20 months earlier and her father was by himself and didn't have any family in Dublin. He was finding things difficult. Really difficult. And as we had talked about it that evening I knew there was only one decision to make. We simply couldn't stay in Madrid for another year knowing that in Dublin Liz's father would be all alone with his unhappiness. And so, as I went to bed that night I was feeling both pleased and sad – pleased because I knew we were doing the right thing; but sad because we were leaving a city both of us loved.

The moment

On the following Tuesday my classes didn't start until 2:30 in the afternoon. In our tiny old apartment in central Madrid Liz was using the table to prepare her classes. So I decided to go for a walk. It was an opportunity to think about our decision and hopefully clear my mind.

It was a bright spring day, warm too. I headed in the direction of El Retiro, a lovely park about a twenty five-minute walk away. Our apartment was in the old part of the city and here the streets were very narrow and usually crowded. I always enjoyed walking around Madrid and watching Spanish people as they went about their daily lives. They always seemed to have so much energy that they used all of their bodies to communicate. And on that Tuesday morning I could feel the enthusiastic energy all around me.

I passed a group of elderly women who were all talking at the same time; they didn't seem to be listening to each other, they were just talking loudly and making dramatic hand gestures. A man in a car was getting angry because he couldn't pass a group of teenagers on the road in front of him. The

teenagers were walking very slowly and were laughing and screaming so loudly that they couldn't hear the car behind. The man in the car was going crazy – waving his hands, beeping his horn, shouting. Even when they were sitting down Spanish people seemed to have so much energy that they had to move. And it was this fantastic energy, an energy which the people of Madrid seemed to express at every opportunity, that Liz and myself had connected with.

As I walked along the busy streets that morning I began to realise that this was exactly the kind of everyday experience I was going to miss when we returned to Dublin. Slowly my mood changed and I couldn't stop myself from feeling sad at the thought of leaving. I also knew that our life in Madrid had been good for us because all our time was for each other and ourselves. We had no family obligations and, apart from our short-term job contract, no commitments. And as nobody, and I mean nobody, had any expectations of us we experienced a level of freedom which had allowed our relationship to develop and grow strong. Sure I was going to miss it.

I thought about this for a while, enjoying some of the memories that came into my mind. And then I started to think about the new future, the future in Dublin. After a short time I remembered that before arriving in Madrid I had been happy in Dublin. Yeah, I was happy in Dublin – I had just forgotten, that's all. So I started to think about my life in Dublin a year previously in March 1993. It didn't take long for happy memories to come back – going to music concerts in *Whelan's*, having a few pints of Guinness with my friend Declan in *The Norseman* on a Friday evening, Sunday evenings in my favourite cinema, *The Lighthouse*. All good memories of home ...

Suddenly I stopped. I was frozen to the spot. And this is when the conversation started.

Although I had stopped physically, my mind was full of intense activity. Seconds before images of Dublin had appeared, but those images had been pushed to one side. Standing dead still in the street, all my focus and mental energy was on the word "home". I was at the top of a street called *Santa Isabel*, directly opposite the indoor market with rows of shops on both sides of the road. All around me people were busy doing their shopping and the street was quite busy. But I wasn't moving.

"Home". My mind seemed to be on an internal search, looking for something.

"Home?" Only a few moments earlier I'd been walking along dreamily thinking of home.

"But it's the wrong home. I'm English. Dublin is not my home ... What's going on here? Think".

But I couldn't think. My mind seemed frozen in its confusion. In this agitated and nervous condition my thoughts were 100% clear.

"Think of York. That's my home. Come on think of York."

But I couldn't bring York, my hometown, into my thoughts. My mind seemed to be working independently, operating outside of my control and asking questions I had never thought of before. Until that March morning my thinking was that York, that safe and familiar town, would always be home. But now And if York was not my home, then what about my nationality, my identity? I felt very uneasy and unsure about myself. Here I was, an English man living very happily in Madrid, thinking of home. But where was home? I tried to tell myself that I was the same person as I had been when I left the apartment only 20 minutes ago.

“That’s right”, I told myself, “I’m the same person”. But after a few seconds came another thought, “But something has changed”.

The learning

This was a very powerful experience for me. At the time I didn’t know how to understand it so I didn’t tell Liz. In fact I didn’t tell anyone until 16 years later when, at the suggestion of my research supervisor, I began to write about the inner changes I experienced when I came to Ireland. This moment jumped out of my mind immediately.

When I told this story I noticed that it’s quite unusual. All my other identity stories are about communication and interaction with people. This is the only experience that happens in my mind. So this is a story about perceptions, about how we see things. And at the centre of this moment is a change in my perception of “home” and the result of that change.

Until that morning in March 1994 “home” was the town, York, where I had grown up. And York was in England. So if I wanted to describe myself, I would say, “I’m English and I’m from York”. I defined myself by talking about nationality and home. It was so simple that I never questioned it.

And then suddenly, in a conversation in my mind, my perception of “home” changed. It was no longer the town of my childhood. And if “home” wasn’t a town in England, could I still describe myself as English? I wasn’t sure. As I say, it was only a change of perception but it was a change which for the first time made me think about and question my definition of myself. And that definition would never be the same again.

I'm grand, Jimmy

Introduction

On the evening of 9th February 1996 a man called Jimmy Power asked me a question. It was a very simple question, one that we hear all the time. Normally, it isn't so important and for everyone else in the room I'm sure that the question had no meaning. But when Jimmy asked me, "Are you ok?" on that evening and in those circumstances the question carried a lot of significance.

To understand why the question was so important I need to explain the context (the time, the place, what happened before, and what happened after). But before I do that I think it's important to talk a little about Irish history, and specifically the IRA.

Background

In September 1994 the Irish Republican Army (IRA) announced that it was stopping its campaign of violence and terror. For over 20 years the IRA had used guns and bomb attacks to try and achieve its aim of ending British rule in Northern Ireland and creating a united Ireland. As I was growing up in the 1970s and 1980s it seemed that the IRA was always in the news, responsible for shooting people one week, a bomb attack the next week and making endless phone calls to British police to say that it had planted a bomb in this or that train station. In total it is estimated that the IRA killed 1,800 people in the period 1971 – 2001.

From our position of safety in 2010, it is difficult to remember the level of fear which was a constant part of life at the time. But the fear was real and I heard it in the anxious, worried voice of my mother when, in September 1990, I told her I was moving to Dublin.

"Dublin? What are you going there for?" she asked. "What about all the bombs?"

So when the IRA announced that from 1st September 1994 it was putting down its weapons, there was hope in ordinary Irish and English people that finally, after 20 plus years, we could live a normal life; a life free from fear. However, the peace talks between the British government on one side and representatives of the IRA on the other soon hit problems. By the end of 1995 the IRA was becoming frustrated with the British government. If the situation continued, it was clear that the IRA would turn again to the gun and to the bomb. The familiar feeling of fear started to return.

The moment

At this point, maybe you're trying to understand the connection between the IRA, Jimmy Power and the question "Are you ok?" Well, this brings me to the story, and the story is this ...

... In 1996 the date of 9th February fell on a Friday. And for a period of my life in the 1990s Friday evening was important for one thing – football. It started some time in 1995 when my friend Colm had invited me to play because a few of the lads were on holiday and they needed extra players. I was invited again the following week, and the week after that, again the week after and so on until I was accepted as one of the regulars.

The lads were all postmen and they worked together in the post office depot in Dun Laoghaire. After the game we always went for a drink and the lads loved telling each other all the stories and gossip about their life in the post office. In some ways I was a bit of an outsider, but it didn't really matter. The lads were good company and the main thing was the football. It was always a good game and we

played each and every week for about 4 years. There was only one time we didn't play and that was on 9th February 1996.

On that evening I arrived a little later than normal. As I entered the hall I was in a good mood. The working week was finished and I was looking forward to the weekend which started there with the usual sounds of laughter, loud talk and bouncing footballs. But when I got to the changing room the lads were all sitting down, staring at the ground. Everything was quiet. I looked around, but nobody moved. Jimmy Power looked up and saw the confusion in my face. He could see that I hadn't heard the news and said simply, "The IRA has blown up Canary Wharf in London. Big bomb apparently. Fucking wrecked the place".

The power in the words pushed me backwards forcing me to sit down. "It went off just after seven", continued Jimmy. "That's all we know".

As I tried to understand what Jimmy was telling me, I fell into silence. My mind started racing and I couldn't control my thoughts. I had a number of good friends in London and my mind seemed to be thinking of reasons why they wouldn't be in London's financial centre at seven o'clock on a Friday evening. And in the stillness, with my head spinning, I could sense the fear in the room. There were ten or eleven of us all sitting there in silence, worrying about the future.

The silence was broken by Big John Nolan. He had been listening to the news on his car radio, and as he entered the changing room he confirmed that the bomb was the work of the IRA and began to tell us what the radio reporters had said. John's arrival changed the energy in the room as the lads broke out of their silence and started to discuss not just the IRA, but the wider questions of Irish-English politics and the possibility of a unified Ireland.

At this point I began to feel somewhat uncomfortable and nervous. I had learned from experience that it wasn't a good idea for me, an English man, to talk about the question of Northern Ireland with Irish people, especially people I didn't know very well. But here I was in a smallish room with eleven lads who were all fully involved in a discussion about the IRA and the political situation. I needed something to do, something to keep me busy so that I wouldn't make eye contact and be brought into the discussion. So, very quietly and very slowly I began to get changed.

I had nearly finished getting changed when I heard John Byrne talk about the British government. "I mean, all this bullshit about not talking to the IRA because it has guns under the table. Does the British government think the IRA is stupid?"

"Oh shit", I thought, "They're going to ask me what I think".

"Yeah", said Jimmy. "It's typical of the fucking Brits. Will they ever learn?"

With these words the room fell quiet and in the seconds that passed, with my back turned to the lads, I could feel that there was some kind of communication going on. And it was then, in that moment, that Jimmy asked me that simple, ordinary, everyday question.

"Are you ok Martin?"

“Yeah, I’m grand Jimmy”, I replied.

“I hope you weren’t upset ... ” Jimmy faltered. “Y’know, I hope you don’t mind ... ”

I knew what Jimmy was trying to say. “Not at all Jimmy”, I said. “I’ve been here long enough to know what ‘fucking Brits’ means”, and gave him a reassuring smile.

“Yeah, I thought so”, said Jimmy smiling back. And he then turned back to John Byrne and they continued talking about the IRA and the political situation, and all the rest of the lads joined in so that the changing room was again filled with the sound of voices.

I finished getting changed, folded my clothes and sat down on the bench. I reached out for a ball and started playing with it between my feet. The lads were still talking politics, and still using the word “Brits”. I knew that it had a negative meaning but I was happy to hear it because it told me the lads were totally relaxed with me in the room. So relaxed that they could talk naturally and freely. And that’s the thing; I knew that they were using that word because they didn’t see me as a “Brit”. I was no longer uncomfortable with my place in the changing room or my place in the group. In fact I felt the warmth that comes when you’re welcomed and accepted by a group of people who could have a reason to keep you on the outside.

As my mind began to turn I realised that this was more than a case of simply being accepted. I wasn’t exactly sure what it was but as I sat in the changing room waiting for a game which never came, I was ok. Yeah, I was grand thanks Jimmy.

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The learning

I told this story for the first time in January 2010. I had thought about it occasionally, but it had stayed inside all this time. Telling the story from the distance of 14 years allowed me to think about the events of the evening from a different position. I began to question the experience and think again about why it was so important.

And as I asked this question I began to see that it was the actions of the other people in the story (the lads) that made this event significant. It was their recognition of how I felt and who I was that really helped me to understand the changes I was experiencing. I’ll try and explain.

By 1996 I sensed that in some way I was changing. I had left England 6 years earlier and was building a future in a new country. I was in the process of moving my life from one country to another. On the occasions I returned to England I didn’t feel that I was really “in” with the people. I felt myself to be apart. And I noticed the changes in my hometown, but I hadn’t experienced those changes. Looking back I see now that I was beginning to experience a separation.

I knew that I was English. But I felt that the word “English” and its connected meanings weren’t enough to explain me, my experiences, my situation. Not any more. And the important thing about that February evening in the changing room was that other people understood how I felt. Here was a group of Irish lads who didn’t see me as being typically English; they saw me as something else, something different. In other words they recognised what I had been feeling about myself.

And it was their recognition of who I was (English but not English / English but more than English) which made a difference. The inner changes I was experiencing were no longer feelings – they were real to other people. And if the inner changes were real to other people then they must be true. This process of change really was happening. It was being recognised. I was being recognised.

Consent form

Learning from stories: The shifting identities of the newly arrived Is there a place in adult education for the newly arrived to tell their identity stories?

Martin Berridge is undertaking a research study, as required for the Masters Degree in Adult and Community Education at National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM). The supervisor of the research study is Mary Ryan of NUIM.

The final research article will be submitted to the Department of Adult and Community Education, NUIM. If it is accepted, one copy will be kept in the Education Resource Centre at NUIM. Future students attending graduate and post-graduate courses run by the Department of Adult and Community Education at NUIM will have access to this one copy.

Please note

No names or personal information will appear in the final research article. It will **not** be possible for readers of the article to identify the participants.

Confirmation

Can you please use a tick to confirm the following points:

_____ I have read and discussed the information document.

_____ I fully understand all the points in the information document.

_____ I know that I have the on-going opportunity to ask questions about the research paper.

_____ I am satisfied that the researcher (Martin Berridge) understands that the information I provide is confidential, will be kept safely, and will not be passed on to other people or organisations.

_____ I understand that I can withdraw my participation at any time (or that I can withdraw some of the information I provide), and I don't need to give a reason.

If you decide to participate in this research project but you feel that the researcher (Martin Berridge) did not follow the information guidelines, or if you are in any way unhappy about the practices or conduct of the researcher, please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie

Your observations and concerns will be received in a sensitive and professional manner.

Declaration

I have read and discussed this consent form. I will allow my stories to be used in this research study.

Signature _____

Date _____

Name _____

If you decide to participate in this research study, please sign and date this consent form, and then return it to me in the stamped-addressed envelope provided.

Many thanks.

VI. Participant profile form

Participant profile

It will greatly help the research project if you could provide some information about yourself by answering the questions in this form.

About you (part 1)

First name _____ Nationality _____

When did you arrive in Ireland (month & year)? _____

Age _____

About you (part 2)

What was your job/profession in your home country?

Please outline what courses of education & training you have done in Ireland (dates, name of course and college, qualifications – e.g. FETAC)

What jobs have you had in Ireland?

What are you doing now?

What are your plans and hopes for the future?

About your family

Are you married? _____

If yes, were you married before you came to Ireland? _____

Do you have any children? _____

If yes,

how many children do you have? _____

were any of your children born in Ireland? _____

Do you have any family members in Ireland (mother/father, sisters/brothers)? _____

If yes, please give details: _____

Final questions

Do you have Irish residency? _____

Do you have Irish citizenship? _____

If no,

have you applied? _____

are you thinking of applying? _____

Reflections

• Introduction

Once again many thanks for your time last Sunday afternoon at the meeting.

This form is the third and final step in the research work. The form asks you to look back at last week's meeting, and write down your thoughts. You will see that:

- Some of the questions ask for a "yes" or a "no" answer. Please use a tick (✓) for your answer.
- After some questions there is space for you to write your thoughts. If you want to write only a few words, that's fine. Or if you want to write a lot and there isn't enough space, you can use another sheet of paper.

• The importance of the form

Completing this form is an extremely important part of the research project.

It is your thoughts about last week's meeting that are the main focus of the project. With your thoughts I will be in a position to make, for example

- Suggestions to adult education organisations.
- Recommendations for future research projects.

• What happens next?

If you have any problems understanding the questions, please text me and I'll call you back.

If I haven't received the form by Wednesday 28th April, I'll call you. If you prefer to tell me your thoughts about the meeting in a phone conversation, that's fine.

• Aims of the project

Before you go to the questions, here is a quick reminder about the aims of the research project. The aims are:

1. To find out if people who are newly arrived in Ireland have experienced any changes in how they feel about their (national) identity.
2. To find out if it is a positive learning experience for the newly arrived to tell identity stories.
3. From the above points a further aim is to consider how adult education organisations can improve their services to people who have recently moved to Ireland.

Section 1 – About your identity (see *Aims of the project point 1*)

You have lived in a new country for a number of years now. In this time,

- c) Do you feel you have changed? Yes No
- d) Do you feel differently about your (national) identity? Yes No

If you answered “no” to question b), please go to section 2 (next page)

If you answered “yes” to the above two questions, please answer the following:

In the meeting we told stories about moments when we began to feel differently about ourselves. Did telling your stories help you to understand more clearly the changes you feel about your (national) identity?

Yes No

If yes, please explain.

We also listened to the stories of people in the same situation of moving to live in a new country. Did listening to their stories also help you to understand more clearly the changes you feel about your (national) identity?

Yes No

If yes, please explain.

Section 2 – About the meeting (see *Aims of the project point 2*)

What are your thoughts about the meeting?

Would you like to attend a short course (e.g. 4 – 6 group sessions) which focuses on understanding the experiences of people who, like yourself, have come to live in Ireland?

Yes No

Please add any thoughts.

Sometimes it is not easy to talk about our personal experiences and feelings. How did you feel talking about your experiences of personal change?

Was it helpful to tell your experiences as stories?

Yes No

Please add any thoughts.

Section 3 – thoughts on educational services (see *Aims of the project point 3*)

The focus of the meeting was you, your stories and your experience of personal change in the time you have lived in Ireland.

Is this the first time a person in adult education has asked you to talk about this?

Yes

No

Do you think there is a place in adult education courses for this kind of learning?

Yes

No

If yes, please explain.

Please add any further thoughts.

Name _____

Date _____

Signature _____

My sincere thanks for your time in thinking about and completing this form, and also for agreeing to participate in the research project.

VIII. Letter with transcript

Department of Adult and Community Education
National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Maynooth
Co. Kildare

Email: bezberidge@yahoo.ie
Tel: 086 – 0487 892

14th May 2010

Hi ,

Many many thanks for participating in my research project – your time and contribution is both highly valued and much appreciated.

Enclosed is your copy of the transcript of the group meeting of Sunday 18th April. My apologies that you are only receiving it now but the process of listening to the conversation word-by-word and writing it down took me much longer than I expected.

About the transcript

I would like to explain a couple of points about the transcript:

- Your copy contains the words spoken at the meeting by you, by my wife Liz and by myself. I have removed the words of the other three participants.
- From time to time you will see “(unintelligible)”. This means that I could not understand from the recording what was said at that particular moment.

Using the transcript in the research process

It is important that you understand how I plan to use the transcript. Or maybe it is more correct to say you need to know how I plan to use your words.

Remember that the research project looks at how people feel about their (changing?) identity when they move to another country. As you read the transcript you will see that there are only a few sentences which focus on this area. These are the sentences that may be used in the final research article.

What am I asking you to do?

Attached to this letter is a copy of the consent form which you signed before the meeting. The fifth point under “Confirmation” reads:

“I understand that I can withdraw my participation at any time (or that I can withdraw some of the information I provide), and I don’t need to give a reason”.

So, can you please read the transcript and look closely at your words and stories. Quite simply, if there is anything you do not want me to include in the final article please let me know.

You can contact me by either phone or email – see number and address above. If you prefer to contact me by phone, send me a text and I'll phone you back. If I don't hear from you by **Monday 24th May**, I'll send you a text to see if you've had an opportunity to read through the transcript.

As always, if there's anything which isn't clear text me and I'll phone you back to explain.

Once again my sincere thanks for your contribution, help and support. I hope that the meeting and your reflections were a positive and useful learning experience, as it was for both Liz and myself.

Best wishes,
Martin

