

**‘In between spaces’: experiences of asylum seekers in the
‘direct provision’ system in Ireland**

Zoë O’Reilly

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Departments of Geography and Media, Faculty of Social Sciences,
National University of Ireland (NUI) Maynooth

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Head of Department (Geography):
Dr. Jan Rigby

Supervisors:
Dr. Mary Gilmartin (NUIM)
Dr. Gavan Titley (NUIM)
Dr. Anthony Haughey (DIT)

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Summary:

People seeking protection in European countries, and elsewhere, are detained, dispersed and deported, their lives treated as ‘waste’ or ‘reject’. As part of the increasing politics of exclusion in countries of immigration, there is an increasing number of spaces, between and within borders, in which such people are detained or forced to wait, often in inhumane conditions, and often for years at a time. The Irish ‘direct provision’ system is part of this increasing network of ‘in between or ‘liminal’ spaces. This research is an interrogation and analysis of the lived experiences of asylum seekers living in the direct provision system in Ireland.

Through a participatory photography project with a group of people seeking asylum and living in the direct provision system in 2010, a body of work was gradually created, consisting of images, texts and stories, based on everyday subjective experiences of living in this system. Working through a participatory visual methodology allowed for a processual approach to the research, in which the visual became a tool for dialogue, for co-creation, for the exploration of experience and for the representation of that experience beyond the research space. Both through the material outcomes, as well as through the processes and lived experiences of this collaborative project, the research is an exploration and analysis of living within the liminal space of direct provision, and the ‘microphysics of power’ that this entails. The images, text and stories created during the research project, both in themselves as well as through the processes of their creation and representation, provide a means to examine not only experiences of living in direct provision, but also the power relations which surround the asylum system.

A collectively edited selection of the images, texts and stories created during the project was exhibited with the participants in 2010, and later brought together as a book in 2012, entitled *New Bridges: experiences of seeking asylum in Ireland*. Through the book, the work aims to represent the experiences of the participants and to create ‘counter-narratives’ to mainstream or stereotypical representations of asylum seekers, opening a space for the voices of those involved to be heard in the public realm.

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INTRODUCTION

Asylum and direct provision in Ireland

There are around five thousand people living in accommodation centres all over Ireland – former hotels, hostels and army barracks – waiting for their claims for asylum to be processed. Many of these people have escaped torture and persecution, or have run from life threatening situations in order to attempt to create better lives for themselves and their families. Over half of them have been waiting for over three years, and many for longer: seven eight, nine years for some¹. Reduced to ‘sixty nine numbers’² instead of names, they wait in an institutional limbo for a final decision on their claims. Fed and housed through the ‘direct provision’ system, these people are kept on the margins of society, unable to access employment or education, and forced to live a ‘life without choice’ (Nic Giolla Choille 2010). They are simultaneously inside and outside: inside a system which controls their everyday life and decisions, and yet kept outside of mainstream society, prevented from integrating through a series of deliberate measures. A weekly allowance of €19.10 per adult ensures that for most people, informal integration in terms of ‘normal’ social activities with local communities is limited and difficult.

Many people living in the direct provision system are consumed by the uncertainty and boredom of this in between existence, and for many, this is coupled with loss, trauma and the sense of dislocation and confusion that accompanies being uprooted suddenly from one’s place and life and being flung headlong into an alien world, as evoked by John Berger’s description of the experience of migration:

Emigrer signifie toujours démanteler le centre du monde, et l’aménager dans un monde confus, désorganise et fragmentaire (Berger 1985: unpaginated).

[To migrate always means always to dismantle the centre of the world and to recreate it in a confusing, disorganized and fragmented world – *my translation*]

Mental illness and depression are rife (see Chineyre 2011, FLAC 2003, 2009, NASC 2008), the uncertainty exasperated by shared and often cramped living accommodation, often with strangers, being unable to cook or to choose when to eat

¹ According to the RIA’s monthly report in August 2012 (page 20), 2970 of a total of 4869 residents of direct provision had been living in the system for over 36 months.

² On application for asylum in Ireland, applicants are provided with a reference number in the format 69/---/---. These are often referred to as ‘69 numbers’.

and being unable to make the choices and decisions that most of us take for granted. Long periods of waiting for claims to be processed lead not only to an agonizing and wasted existence for those waiting, but to enormous costs for the Irish state, who pay private companies to accommodate and cater for these people, at large profit (the state spent €69.5 million housing and caring for asylum seekers in 2011, with the majority of funding used to pay for commercially owned housing (Gallagher 2012).

Direct provision is the main system in Ireland which accommodates asylum seekers awaiting claims for refugee status. Established in 2000 as an ‘emergency measure’ to deal with the increasing numbers of people seeking asylum at this time, the system was originally designed to accommodate people for up to six months while their claims were being processed. Twelve years later, it is still the main system in place, and, as mentioned above, over half of its residents have been living within it for over three years (RIA monthly statistics report, August 2012:20). The direct provision policy was accompanied by a separate dispersal policy, whereby accommodation was obtained in different areas of the country to ensure more equal distribution of asylum seekers throughout Ireland (FLAC 2009:13).

Direct provision centres have been called Ireland’s ‘hidden villages’ (Holland 2005), with asylum seekers very often geographically distanced and excluded from mainstream society, as well as socially, culturally and economically. It has been found in several studies (see for example Haynes 2009) that the mainstream media in Ireland, one of the main means for the general population to find out about and understand social issues, has failed to explain the complexities of the situation around asylum seekers in Ireland, and perhaps consequently, many people are unaware of the existence of direct provision centres in the area where they live, and the reasons why people may be staying in them for long periods of time. Representations of asylum seekers in mainstream media fluctuate between invisibility, not representing these people sufficiently or at all, and ‘hypervisibility’ (Tyler 2006), disproportionate emphasis on asylum seekers, representing them as either victim or threat, and often using alarmist or sensationalist language.³ The

³ See Chapter One for a general discussion of the representation of asylum seekers, and Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion in the Irish context.

voices of asylum seekers themselves are still rarely heard in mainstream media in Ireland.

Working with asylum seekers through participatory photography

My own experience of the asylum system in Ireland began when I worked as a translator and interpreter in the early 2000s, a time when the numbers of people seeking asylum in Ireland were increasing significantly. I was struck in particular by the stories of the people I was working with, which I was required to convey word for word to the authorities I was employed by, and by the often dismissive way in which these stories, and consequently those who were telling them, were treated. In 2006, after a Masters degree in Social Anthropology of Development, with an increasing interest in visual anthropology, studies in documentary photography and a period working with the organization PhotoVoice⁴ in London, I began to work with various groups in Ireland using participatory photography. Participatory photography is a method which places cameras into the hands of participants in order that they can document their own lives, opinions and experiences. Working under the name of *Súil Eile* ('Another View' in Irish) over the following three years, I ran several participatory photography projects in conjunction with community and refugee organizations, working predominantly with refugees and asylum seekers to document their lives and experiences, and to communicate these to various audiences. In a project with young people in Dublin city centre, which began as a six-week project and continued in various forms over two years, we used participatory photography and digital storytelling⁵ as a means to create intercultural dialogue between 'separated minor' asylum seekers⁶ living in the area and their young Dublin counterparts, with the aim of reducing the tensions which were perceived to be growing between them. Another project worked with a group of adult refugees and asylum seekers in collaboration with Spirasi, a Dublin-based organization working

⁴ PhotoVoice, a London based charity co-founded in 2003 by Anna Blackman and Tiffany Fairey, has been a major proponent of participatory photography as a means of advocacy and campaigning for vulnerable groups, facilitating and supporting projects world wide (www.photovoice.org).

⁵ Digital storytelling is the practice of using computer-based tools to tell stories. Digital stories usually entail some combination of image, text or recorded narrated audio to tell a story or impart a particular point of view.

⁶ 'Separated minor' is the term used to describe a person under the age of eighteen who is seeking asylum without parents or guardian.

with refugees and asylum seekers, as a means of exploring their experiences in Ireland and of navigating the asylum system.

Through these projects, I saw how the images which were created became vehicles for discussion within the groups and a means of expression and storytelling, both in narrative and more abstract ways. I also became aware of how discussing the images highlighted the subjective and everyday experiences of the people I was working with, and contextualized their thoughts and opinions on various issues. For the participants, the processes of photography seemed to provide a platform for discussion around issues concerning them, and a means to bring those issues to the attention of broader audiences through exhibiting the work in various formats. Through my involvement in this work, I became interested in the potential of working with people through participatory visual and creative processes to better understand and represent the subjective experiences of migration in general and more specifically, the effects at a grassroots and personal level of Irish asylum policies on those who were arriving to seek protection in this country.

Aims of the research

Emerging directly from this work, the aims of this particular research project, begun in 2008 through a structured PhD programme run by NIRSA and the Irish Social Sciences Platform (ISSP) at the National University of Ireland (NUI) Maynooth were, firstly, to work collaboratively with people seeking asylum to explore the everyday subjective experiences of living within the direct provision system in Ireland, using the method of participatory photography, and secondly, to try to use the work created through this collaborative process to represent these experiences in ways which might challenge dominant representations and stereotypes, and to contribute to bringing alternative voices on issues around the asylum system into the public realm. Through working directly and collaboratively with asylum seekers living in the 'direct provision' system, I hoped to create better understandings of the experiences of living in the 'semi-permanent temporariness' (Bailey et al. 2002:125) that this system has come to entail, and of the experiences of living with uncertainty on an everyday basis. The project also aimed to create narratives and representations

alongside the people involved in the project which could act as ‘counter-narratives’ to mainstream or stereotypical representations, opening a space for the voices of those involved to be heard in the public realm and for the subjects of the research to become participants. The work expands existing literature which explores the everyday lives and experiences of people living in the in between, or ‘liminal’, spaces created through policies and politics of exclusion, deepening and making more complex understandings of those experiences and of the concept of liminality. By working with asylum seekers in Ireland in a participatory and transparent way and finding ways to communicate their experiences to broader audiences, both visually and verbally, the work sought to expose the everyday lived realities of the contradictory and non-transparent processes which keep people who have a legal right to seek protection in this country in a state of limbo and economic, cultural and geographical exclusion for long periods of time.

This project sought to explore the experiences of asylum seekers in a way that would look behind or beyond the imposed label or category. Rather than simply examining the category of ‘asylum seeker’ and the issues related to it, writing for or about asylum seekers, the project sought to look behind the ‘convenient images’ (Wood 1985, cited in Zetter 1991:44) that a label creates. Working collaboratively and in a participatory way may help to counter the non-participatory (Zetter 1991) and imposed nature of labels. By working collaboratively with asylum seekers, exploring their subjective experiences and multiple identities beyond the reductive category or identity of ‘asylum seeker’, the project sought to create alternative images and understandings, with an agenda defined as far as possible by the participants of the project themselves.

Central to this work is the importance of exploring the micrology of lived subjective experience and everyday life in order to better understand how approaches to keeping out the ‘other’ are manifested and experienced on the ground and in specific places and contexts. With a similar approach, Maggie O’Neill (2010b:22) states that:

Recovering and re-telling people’s subjectivities, lives and experiences are central to attempts to better understand our social worlds with a view to transforming these worlds. Such work reveals the daily struggles, resistances, strengths and humour of

people seeking asylum, the importance of intersubjective social relations and sociality, as well as knowledge and better understanding of the legitimations and rationalization of power, domination and oppression (O'Neill 2010b:22).

Simplistic or homogenizing representations can ignore the complexity of individual lives and subjectivities, as well as differences in culture, background and education. Even if they are refugee-centred in their approach, such representations may serve to create more emphasis on the label of asylum seeker, stripping asylum seekers of individual identities and complexities of experience, as well as the ways in which people seeking asylum negotiate imposed labels. As anthropologist Michael Jackson asks:

To what extent do we, in the countries of immigration, unwittingly reduce refugees to objects, ciphers and categories in the way we talk and write about them, in roughly the same way that indifferent bureaucracies and institutional forces strip away the rights of refugees to speak and act in worlds of their own making? (2002:80)

While it is important to remain aware that the act of focusing a study on asylum seekers and the issues concerning them does to a certain extent place focus on the category or label and perhaps through this reinforce it, by focusing on everyday subjective experience and the micro-geographies of asylum, this study sought as far as possible to look behind that label to opinions and experiences of asylum seekers themselves, and to the micrology, the 'stuff of everyday life' (Mahler 1999:713) and experience, in order to move away from homogenizing and categorizing representations and labels. Working with the voices of asylum seekers themselves, and focusing on lived experience, can challenge not only widely held stereotypes, but also the political category of 'asylum seeker' in itself, exposing it as simply that: a political category rather than a 'type' of person.

Carrying out the collaborative project

Between March and July 2010, I coordinated a participatory photography project with a group of ten people seeking asylum and living in a direct provision centre in Ireland. The aim of this project then was to create a space, through the medium of photography, to collaboratively and creatively explore some of the everyday experiences of the participants of living in the direct provision system and negotiating the asylum system in Ireland. The participants at the time of the project were living in a direct provision centre in a medium sized town in Ireland⁷. They were ‘refugees-in-waiting’, that is they had placed claims for asylum with the Minister for Justice and Equality and were waiting for a final answer on those claims, or on appeals against the rejection of those claims, which would either give them the necessary papers to stay in Ireland as official refugees, giving them access to employment, education and social welfare and certain of the same rights as citizens of Ireland, or would declare them not eligible for refugee status, giving them, in basic terms, a choice of voluntary return to their country of origin, or deportation⁸.

The original ten participants were from Iraq (Rajo⁹), Kenya (Elizabeth and Benjamin), Somalia (Janaan), Nigeria (Ade and Abiye), Liberia (Iswat), Uganda (Mary), Malawi (Brian) and Zimbabwe (Emmanuelle) and had been living in Ireland and in this particular centre for varying amounts of time, ranging from several years to just a couple of months. During the course of the project, due to various reasons, three participants, Elizabeth, Benjamin and Rajo, dropped out, and we were joined by a further participant from Cameroon (Alice). The five men and five women ranged in age from approximately twenty five to sixty five years old. They encompassed varying educational, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Their levels of English ranged from native speakers to those still in the process of learning and gaining confidence in the language. All had good levels of spoken communication however. For approximately four months, we worked together to create a body of work consisting of images, texts, and digital stories, stemming from their experiences of living in the direct provision system, but encompassing beyond this, their daily

⁷ For confidentiality purposes, the name of the town, as well as the name of the direct provision centre itself, are not used throughout this thesis.

⁸ The different stages of the process of seeking asylum in Ireland, along with the various options for those whose claim is rejected at first instance, are dealt with in detail in Chapter Two.

⁹ I use pseudonyms for all participants throughout the thesis, in order to protect their identities.

lives, experiences of being in Ireland, thoughts, opinions, dreams and impressions. A selection of this work, collectively edited, was eventually shown in NUI Maynooth in November 2010.



Figure 1: Poster for the exhibition entitled ‘New Bridges’ in November 2010 (designed by Abiye, project participant)

The collaborative project finished with the completion of a book in 2012 (see Appendix One), entitled *New Bridges: experiences of seeking asylum in Ireland*, which contains the images and texts chosen by the participants for the original exhibition. The selection of images was edited/censored by participants themselves, but nonetheless, these were the images they chose individually and collectively, to represent themselves and the work we had been doing to the public, and provides a certain insight into the life worlds of the participants and their experiences of being in Ireland and living in the direct provision system.

The texts which appeared in the exhibition, and consequently in the book, often differ from the texts accompanying the same images in the body of this thesis, as the original texts or captions were collectively edited and adapted for the purposes of the exhibition. Similarly, the names of the photographers also differ between the main body of the thesis and the book. The issue of naming and anonymity was broached again when preparing the book in 2012, and each participant was asked

how they wanted their names to appear. Some wanted pseudonyms, some wished to use their real names and some wished to remain anonymous. Thus, the names in the book in many cases differ from those used in the thesis in order to comply with these wishes and to maintain a sense of confidentiality.

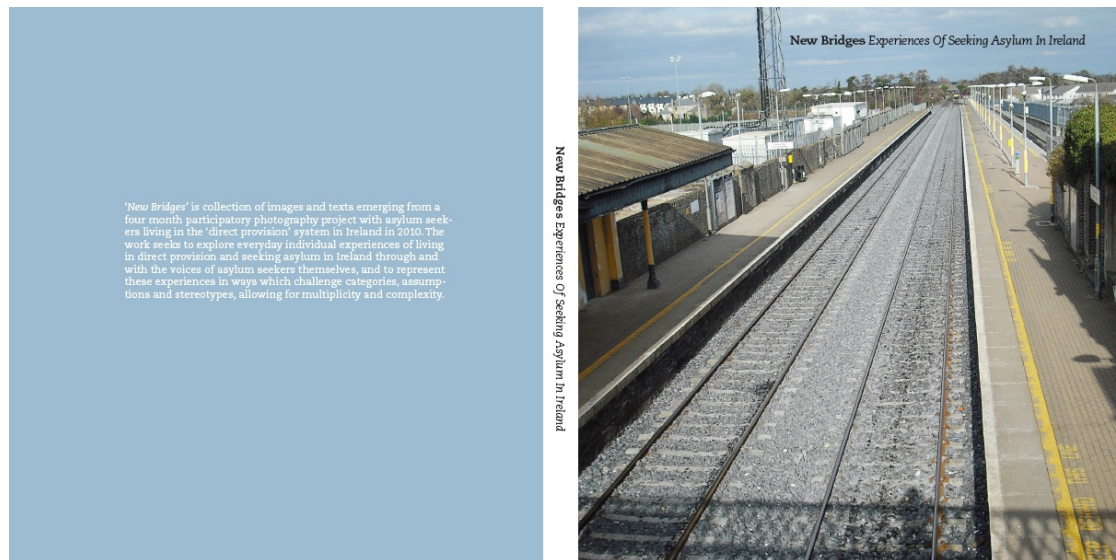


Figure 2: Cover of book entitled *New Bridges: experiences of seeking asylum in Ireland*, self published in 2012.

Both the ‘outcomes’ of the collaborative project, in terms of the images, texts and stories, and the consequent exhibition and book, and the processes of creating these ‘outcomes’ and representing them in the public realm, reveal various aspects of the experiences of the participants of the direct provision system. They also reveal how the ‘politics of exclusion’ is lived, experienced and negotiated on an everyday basis by a particular group of people in a specific place and context.

Writing and the politics of research

The work was collaborative and process-based. While I began the project with some clear approaches regarding method, I wanted the work to be as collaborative as possible, allowing the processes to emerge from the *encounter* between researcher and participants. The fieldwork was often messy, with unexpected events, some small, some more significant. The original aims of the project were constantly challenged and made ambiguous throughout the course of the project, leading me to

question and re-think my approaches, both methodological and theoretical. Anthropologist James Clifford asks of ethnographic research ‘How is unruly experience transformed into an authoritative written account?’ (1988:25). I expand on Clifford’s question in this case by asking how can the ‘unruly experiences’ of the collaborative research process be transformed into an account which is authoritative and in line with the academic requirements of a doctoral thesis, but which at the same time reflects and is true to the processual, and often messy, nature of both the collaborative project and the theorization of the research, without trying to write this as clean and tidy when it wasn’t? ‘Unruly experience’ can also correspond here to the everyday lived experiences of the participants. I ask also then how the complex and often contradictory nature of these experiences, as they emerged through the collaborative project, can be ‘written up’ and theorized in a coherent and authoritative way without sanitizing or categorizing them? This raises significant questions that shaped both the practice and the representation of this research project. How to ‘write up’ work which was based on a collaborative process? How to represent my voice and the voices of participants side by side? How to represent the processual and collaborative nature of the research, as well as the complexity of the experiences of both the research process and the experiences of the participants in a thesis format which requires one voice and authoritative arguments? The work therefore is not only an interrogation and analysis of the lived experiences of the direct provision system, but also a study of the politics of research and of representation: the ways in which the processes of creation and representation of the images, texts and stories were tied in with the wider cultural and political environment, and the nature of collaborative research. Tying together the politics of representation and of research are the challenges of rendering the complexities of both collaborative creative research and of experience into a coherent narrative. In this section, I look at these challenges, and at the ways in which I have brought these issues together in the narrative format of the thesis. I then look more closely at the way in which the narrative is structured and where certain conceptual and political discussions, as well as treatment of methodological and ethical issues, take place in order to contextualize the ongoing experiences of the participants, and the ways in which the five chapters reflect and develop these.

The realization for me during the collaborative project that the processes themselves, and the lived experiences of the project itself, were as important as the material outcomes (photographs, texts, stories) was an important step in making sense of the work we were doing. This also became important retrospectively in the process of attempting to understand the experiences of the participants of living in direct provision and to narrate and (re)present these experiences here. This realization was influenced by writings on participatory research and collaborative art approaches such as dialogical and relational art, which focus on ‘collaborative encounters and conversations’ (Kester 2004:1) rather than solely on the outcomes of the research or the object of art.

In order to show the processual approach of the work within the written thesis, as well as the importance of this approach, I *expose* the processes as far as possible, revealing the processes and the messiness of these, rather than hiding them to create a sanitized ‘tidy’ account. Through revealing the processes of research, I can explore what they in turn reveal about the experiences of participants and the politics of research itself. Rather than seeing the often difficult processes and ‘events’ which occurred throughout the project as the failure of the research to go smoothly, I instead explore what these events in fact reveal about the ongoing experiences of the participants, and use them to contextualize these in a very real and immediate way. Exploring and revealing the processes of research also reveals a ‘fluidity’ in the meaning of the images created. Rather than being fixed, meaning instead was liable to change for the participants according to situation, context and potential audience. Again, rather than seeing the lack of fixed meaning as an obstacle to the research, I instead make this an integral part of the research outcomes. I look at the role of audience and potential audiences and how this can affect meaning, and thus research and the knowledge which is created from research.

I also engage with the collaborative nature of the research in the writing by foregrounding the multiplicity of voices that were present. Aware that the nature of writing a PhD thesis is a solitary one, in contrast to the collaborative nature of this research process, I incorporate the voices of participants as far as possible, exposing the tensions between multiple realities and understandings which exist simultaneously. While the voices of the participants predominate in Chapter Four, in

Chapter Five I try to provide a sense of the polyphonic nature of collaborative research by placing the participants' words and images alongside my own narrative and analysis so that these are read simultaneously, revealing the tensions between different views and understandings of reality. I also use excerpts throughout the thesis of my fieldwork diary, in order to convey a sense of the immediacy of the research as well as its processual nature.

The theorization of the work, similarly, was processual and emergent. Another challenge in how to turn the research into a coherent account was the question of how to theorize and create a coherent account of the complexity of experience of participants without being reductive or imposing meaning from the outside. Alongside a methodology which was based on meaning *emerging* from the encounter, similarly, conceptualising the work emerged as a gradual process, taking place both during and after the collaborative part of the project. In writing the 'story' of the project, I attempt to show the emergent nature of this theorization. A series of paradoxes or 'in-betweens' began to emerge through the processes of the project and the work created with the participants. Their experiences, and the direct provision system itself, seemed to be located somewhere between inside and outside, between citizenship and non-citizenship, between hospitality and hostility, between place and non-place. A gradual sense of the 'in between-ness' of direct provision, and the experiences of this, and of how to conceptualise these in-betweens, emerged during working in the direct provision centre with the participants and being in the centre, while creating the body of image-text with participants, developing themes to work with, and describing and creating meaning from the images, as well as from exploring the work we created in my own time. Exploring the concept of 'liminality' (Turner 1967), and in particular developing the idea of 'ontological liminality', helped to bring these various 'in between' together, expanding the idea of the in between-ness of direct provision, and the in between existence of those who live within this system. Exploring the intertwined nature of liminality and the 'microphysics of power' (Foucault 1979) allowed for a deeper understanding of how architectures of power play out in everyday lives, bodies and existence in this context. Conceptualising the work thus emerged from both the material and the processes of the project. I attempt to show the processes of creating meaning, and how meaning can be fluid and subjective rather than fixed. I allow the fluidity of the

meaning and the various factors which affect meaning to become part of the thesis and part of conceptualising the work.

The narrative of the project, from accessing participants to collaboratively representing the work with them, became the framework through which to weave the photographs, texts and stories which emerged from the collaborative encounter, as well as conceptual and political discussions which help to contextualise the ongoing experiences of the participants. In attempting to make sense of, and present, what emerged from this work, I weave into the writing both the processes and the lived experiences of the project, and the voices of the participants in the form of the images, texts, stories, discussions and comments which emerged. The narrative therefore is both a framework for, and a part of, the interrogation and analysis of the everyday lived experiences of liminality. I look at how the processes of carrying out the project, from finding a centre to work in, to accessing participants, co-creating the work and in particular the processes of representing the work we created, revealed and highlighted aspects of the asylum system in Ireland as well as aspects of the experiences and life worlds of the participants in a more real, tangible (and often disturbing) way than any 'data' could show. The lived experience of the project meant that I too experienced (albeit from a very different position) the control and surveillance inherent in the system, and the daily fear and angst of living within it. Simultaneously, the images, texts and stories which gradually emerged through the project also express aspects of the experiences and life worlds of the participants as they wait for their cases to be processed in a space between an often traumatic past and an uncertain and un-plannable future.

The work straddles the border between academia and activism, a publicly engaged piece of research. Like Brambilla (2012), whose paper 'Constructing a Relational Space between 'Theory' and 'Activism', or (Re)thinking Borders' explores the porous, or potentially porous, nature of the border between theory and activism, my decision to write this PhD can be seen as a kind of 'border crossing' between these two worlds. I felt that studying and writing in this way could be an intellectual tool, reinforcing this and other activist or awareness oriented projects. I came to the project with certain biases and pre-conceived ideas. I wanted to work directly with people seeking asylum and living in the direct provision system, and to find, with

them, alternative ways to have their voices heard and to contribute towards dispelling the myths around them through alternative representations. My position from the start has been one of deliberately attempting to counter a ‘narrative of negativity’ (Rotas 2006:51) around refugees and asylum seekers as ‘bogus’, and burdens on society. Having worked previously on projects using the method of participatory photography for awareness or campaigning purposes, I was aware from the start of the potential role of this project in the lives or the situation of the participants and of the possibilities of using the research to ameliorate or create awareness around their situation. During the writing process, one way of crossing the border between academia and activism for me was through structuring the writing in order to represent the collaborative nature of the research, to question and expose the nature of the research process and provide space for the voices of the participants to come through as far as possible. The way and the extent in which the work enters the public sphere is also part of bridging this gap, or crossing the border, between activism and academia, and it is important that the work in its various forms is seen and read by a broad public.

I am a situated observer, no matter how participatory this research has been in its approach. While the photographs and the texts are created by the people involved, they are still mediated by me: I present them in the thesis, and I frame them. I need to be constantly aware then of my authorial voice, my ‘situatedness’, throughout the process of framing this work. However, this awareness of my own voice and situatedness should not take over the voices of those I am working with. This is where the ‘modest witness’ is important, in Haraway’s terms:

...about telling the truth, giving reliable testimony, guaranteeing important things, providing good enough grounding – while eschewing the addictive narcotic of transcendental foundations – to enable compelling belief and collective action (Haraway 1997:22).

Despite the collaborative nature of the work, in its processes of creation, as well as in the public representations of the work, and the focus on foregrounding the voices and images of the participants, it is important to acknowledge that the presentation of the work in these pages is mine, a certain version of reality. As French judge and

sociologist Smaïn Laacher remarked in a dialogue around art and judging asylum cases:

...the dialogue between the different practices and the world of artists and the world of social scientists is very, very important and very interesting. I always say to my students and to other sociologists that it's very important to go and see artists, to go into the literature and see how, basically, what we're all doing is grabbing reality and putting it back together again. In other words, mobilizing mechanisms for grabbing a part of reality, re-arranging it and putting it on show. And quite obviously, there's absolutely no connection between what we've grabbed and what we show (Laacher 2006:191).

Laacher's comment highlights not only the importance of dialogue between art practices and social research, and the commonalities between the two, also important for this thesis, but also the situatedness and the essentially 'fictive' nature of presenting a certain version of reality, and thus of a piece of writing. The nature of writing a doctoral thesis, even one emerging from collaborative, practice-based research, is a solitary one. The picture I give of the asylum system is the one that I have experienced, albeit seen largely through the eyes of the people I have worked with, one reality among many, pieced together here in a particular way. As Rotas (2006:29) states, regarding her own writing in her doctoral thesis:

It is a personal piece of writing, something that I have made up, not because it is the opposite of the truth but because its limitations, its partiality, its exclusions, restrictions of length and indeed of style all conspire to make it, at best an economy of truth, a 'true fiction'.

The ways in which the participants have presented their worlds to me has been influenced by the ways in which I have interacted with them, and the ways in which I have directed conversations and themes, making me a mediator in the participatory process. However, by constantly questioning and exposing my own role in this process, and by incorporating the voices of the participants as far as possible, I attempt to acknowledge and expose the performative nature of method, and co-existence of different versions of reality and possible tensions between these, thus drawing attention to the politics of research.

The writing is an exploration of a journey to try to understand the experiences of living in the asylum system and to communicate that understanding beyond myself and those I have worked with. In some areas, people seeking asylum in Ireland can be seen as voiceless. Asylum seekers are actively hidden from mainstream society through policies and architectures of exclusion. This exclusion creates myths which are not dispelled for the most part by those in authority or by mainstream media, and which are often expanded by the lack of contact those believing or spreading the myths have with people seeking asylum. This serves to further exclude asylum seekers, and further diminish possibilities for meaningful engagement and integration. But it is also important to acknowledge that many asylum seekers are also far from voiceless, and would not see themselves as so, and do find ways to have their voices heard.

Structure and outline of chapters

I now look more closely at the way in which the narrative is structured, and how each of the five chapters develop different areas of the narrative, as well as focus on the various political, conceptual and methodological discussions needed to contextualize both the unfolding of the research project itself, and the ongoing experiences of the participants.

The first chapter discusses the broader human and political context of seeking asylum, and the increasing mechanisms of exclusion used by governments today, leading to people's lives being led in liminal places and situations. From the beginning, I see direct provision as part of a larger network of exclusion or distancing mechanisms of people who are seen as 'other'. Three main areas are developed here which permeate the thesis: seeking asylum in Europe, the development of 'Fortress Europe' and the politics of exclusion and mechanisms which enforce this; the increasing liminal spaces between or within borders which emerge from this politics of exclusion and in which asylum seekers are detained or forced to wait; and the representation of asylum seekers and the ways in which their voices are silenced, which on the one hand justifies their exclusion by 'othering' them, and on the other creates various stereotypes which further silence them. An

understanding and outline of these three areas is crucial for understanding my motivation in this research, aiming to understand experience and represent these experiences, in order to overcome such stereotypes which homogenize and lead to othering, and to understand better how these liminal spaces function and how they are experienced by those living within them. The work also aims to look at how power and policy created from above with a homogenized group in mind directly affect individual lives on an everyday basis.

The second chapter brings the lens closer to the context, looking at asylum in Ireland, with particular focus on the direct provision system. This chapter describes the processes of accessing the ‘space for research’: bringing the reader closer to the space of research, both in terms of the specific context of research, and in terms of how the space was accessed both practically and theoretically. Leading on from the themes developed in Chapter One, this chapter brings these themes to the Irish context: how the politics of exclusion functions at a national level: how the asylum system functions in Ireland, with particular emphasis on the direct provision system, and how asylum seekers have been gradually excluded from mainstream society over the past decade; how asylum seekers have been represented in the Irish media and how these representations impact on how they are treated; and how the development of liminal spaces where asylum seekers are forced to wait has manifested in the Irish context, in the form of the ‘direct provision system.’ I also begin to develop ways of conceptualizing direct provision, within this framework of exclusion: how to understand this type of ‘in between space’, this space of ‘inclusive exclusion’, which is part of a broader network of liminal spaces where asylum seekers wait? I suggest that using and expanding the concept of ‘liminality’ (Turner 1967) can help to frame and illuminate the experiences of asylum seekers within these spaces.

Chapter Three looks in more detail at the methodology used, the ways in which photography was used here to create a collaborative, creative and processual space for research. I look at participatory photography as a means to access subjective experience, and to create image-text understandings and representations of experience. Working through participatory photography and the creation of image-text allows for understandings which are based not only on verbal representations but also the visual, allowing for sense based understandings and representations. I

describe the processes of working collaboratively and processually with participants, of creating and being in a 'potential' and 'dialogic' space for research and the issues which emerged from this space and from working in this way. I describe the 'encounter' between researcher, research participants and photography and what emerged from this. I also explore some of the issues relating to this research and to participatory research in general, such as ethics and power relations and the nature of participation.

In Chapter Four, I look more specifically at the material which emerged from the processes of co-creation: images, texts, stories. I look at these from a perspective of the experiences of living in an in-between or liminal space. I explore various aspects of liminality and how these emerged through the image-texts, discussions and processes of the project. I also develop the idea of 'ontological liminality', a concept which emerged from the work and which I use to describe the ways in which a liminal existence can be internalized and lived at an intimate level. I then look at ways in which liminality is negotiated through everyday practice, and made more complex through various attachments and belongings, by those living in the direct provision system.

In Chapter Five, I focus on the processes of the project, in particular the processes of representing the work to public audiences. As one of the aims of the project was to disseminate the work in the public realm in order to represent experiences of direct provision and to challenge mainstream homogenizing representations, this was an important part of the work. These processes revealed important aspects of the experiences of asylum seekers in direct provision, which I experienced alongside the participants, giving me an insight into everyday life in the system as a lived experience. This chapter takes a different format to previous chapters, providing a polyphonic representation of the research process, in order to incorporate the voices of participants and to bring the reader into the immediacy of the collaborative research process.

Alongside the main body of text are included two documents, which should be looked at alongside the written text and the image-text which is incorporated in this, and viewed as an integral part of the overall work. The first is a disc with digital

stories produced by five of the participants and exhibited alongside the twenty one images and their accompanying texts. The second is the book of these photographs and texts produced and self-published with the participants of the project, entitled *New Bridges: experiences of seeking asylum in Ireland*. This book is an essential outcome of the collaborative process and the primary means through which the work emerging from this process will enter the public realm.

This thesis is based on interdisciplinary, ethnographic, practice-based research, documenting my attempt to explore, and to contribute towards creating better understandings of, the experiences of asylum seekers in Ireland, as well as to find ways to communicate these understandings through working collaboratively with people seeking asylum through a collaborative, photography-based project. The work seeks to add to literature around the subjective experiences of migration, expanding in particular understandings of the liminal spaces created through the politics of exclusion and how these spaces are experienced, lived and negotiated on an everyday basis by those waiting within them. Methodologically, the work adds to the small but growing body of literature in the social sciences around participatory visual methodologies. Through a critical interrogation of the methodology used here, I seek to expand understandings of how creative and visual methodologies can be used as a means of working collaboratively with research subjects in order to provide insight and understanding into subjective experience and into the nature of research itself. In addition to this, the work seeks to challenge narrow representations of asylum seekers by creating alternative representations alongside asylum seekers themselves, and thus bring alternative voices and representations into the public realm. The following chapters document the journey of this research project.

CHAPTER ONE:
Seeking asylum: political and human context

Introduction

The policies of direct provision and dispersal in Ireland are part of a broader movement towards what has been named as ‘Fortress Europe’, with security organizations such as Frontex established in 2004, guarding periphery areas and keeping people out. Responsibilities of states towards people seeking protection are shirked, skirted around and denied through restrictive policies and ever narrower interpretations of the 1951 Geneva Convention, a recent trend in asylum and migration policies ‘characterized by the regression of fundamental protections and the progression of tools and practices of deportation and prevention of access to EU territory’ (Dikec 2009:186).

Over the last three decades, asylum has become an issue which is increasingly high up on states’ agendas, and a key policy and political issue in Europe as a result of increased numbers of asylum claims (Kobelinsky 2008a). As Casas-Cortes and Cobarrubias point out in the text accompanying their mapping work entitled ‘Drawing Escape Tunnels through Borders: Cartographic Research Experiments by European Social Movements’, ‘border and migration policy has always been one of the biggest questions with regards to the political construction of the EU, and has intensified exponentially in recent years’ (2010:unpaginated).

In this chapter, I look at the political and human context of seeking asylum in Europe in terms of the mechanisms of exclusion used to limit and control numbers entering Europe. I look at the increased use of practices which would once have been considered exceptional, and the subsequent increase in liminal spaces and sites between states used to detain or immobilize people on the move. I then look at various forms of labelling and representation of people seeking protection which are used as a means of distancing and ‘othering’, thus helping to justify exclusion, exceptional practices and the creation of liminal spaces and prolonged periods of waiting.

The twentieth century has been described by Adelman as the ‘century of refugees’ (1999), ‘not because it was extraordinary in forcing people to flee, but because of the division of the globe into nation-states in which states were assigned the role of protectors of rights, but also exclusive protectors of their own citizens, including the

role of gatekeeper to determine who could become new citizens' (Adelman 1999:90). Adelman argues that refugees are the 'products of modernity' (1999:83), with their plight becoming acute 'when the processes of modernity became globalized' (ibid). Adelman argues that three phases, or 'regimes', for dealing with the issue of refugees emerged in the twentieth century, revealing different modes of 'coping with the contradictions within the nation-state' (1999:91). A brief exploration of each of these 'regimes' provides a sense of how current restrictive policies and attitudes towards refugees developed over the last century.

The first regime refers to the period between the two world wars, when refugees were people 'expelled by one country to cleanse that country of an alien nationality' and when 'population exchange and, to some degree, border adjustments became the major model for dealing with a refugee population' (Adelman 1990:90), as with for example, the Greek-Turkish population exchanges in 1922-23, and India and Pakistan in 1948. As Adelman points out, this period in effect 'endorsed the right of nation states to exclude those attempting to enter their states as they fled persecution' (Adelman 1990: 91), failing those, such as the Jews, who did not have a 'territorial base to which they could return' (ibid).

The new international system which emerged after World War II depended not on population exchanges and border adjustments for its security, but on 'the sanctity of borders and a new international system for people who were forced to flee regimes which failed to provide for their protection' (Adelman 1999:93). This was an attempt to develop what Adelman calls an international 'global and political humanitarian regime' (1999:98). This regime was made of two systems of protection: 'obligatory', for any state that signed the conventions, and 'voluntary', for dealing with large numbers fleeing for reasons other than individual persecution (O'Neill 2010b:44). The 'obligatory' system focused on the rights of individuals within the context of a universal system of law (ie. The Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol).

The Geneva Convention was established to deal with the mass movement of people within Europe in the aftermath of World War II, and was signed by over one hundred countries (including Ireland). With the implementation of the Convention came a shift from a determination guided by national/territorial criteria to an individual

determination based on the notion of persecution for specific reasons (Joly 1996:6). According to the Convention, a refugee is defined as follows:

Any person who owing to a well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (Geneva Convention Article 1A(2)).

Despite the limitations of this definition for dealing with other reasons for fleeing one's homeland, which have become more pertinent in recent years, such as gender, civil war and environmental catastrophe (Wyndham-Smith 2002) as well as the issue of group persecution, the 1951 Convention continues today to be the main international legal instrument to deal with refugees, with the ultimate decision of who is eligible at the discretion of individual governments.

Since the 1951 Convention, the scale of refugee movement has increased. With the rebuilding of post-war Europe in the 1950s and the economic boom of the 1960s, there was a need for foreign workers, and asylum seekers could enter Europe as economic migrants. For those claiming asylum, the wording of the Convention was interpreted liberally. Turkish and Kurdish refugees entered Germany as 'guestworkers' at this time, and many Punjabis fleeing persecution came to Britain as workers or dependents. The 1967 Resolution of the Council of Europe on Asylum to Persons in Danger of Persecution stated that governments should 'act in a particularly liberal and humanitarian spirit in relation to persons who seek asylum on their territory' (Hayter 2000:67).

This tolerant and liberal attitude began to change in the 1970s in the wake of the oil shocks. Economic recession in Europe led to high unemployment rates and a decrease in the need for foreign labour. At the same time, the number of asylum seekers was increasing for several reasons. As Adelman highlights, this second regime began to founder in the 1980s when the number of refugees began to rise due to 'too many people' and 'too many wars' (1999:94), creating a contradiction between universal human rights and restrictionist and protective state policies. An escalation of war and conflict in the world and a time of oppressive political

dictatorships caused significant movement towards Europe. In the mid 1980s, a movement began between Western European governments towards the harmonization of asylum policy, precipitated by the Single European Act (1986) and by the dramatic increase of asylum seekers at a time when economic recession made newcomers 'unwelcome' (Joly 1996). The political changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s led to a further surge of movement towards Western Europe. Ironically, having urged Eastern bloc governments for years to ease their travel restrictions, Western governments were now faced with the dilemma of a sudden influx of people. The resurgence of ethnic conflict in the republics of the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and the consequent movement of people began to put pressure on the governments of the strengthening European Union. The number of applications for asylum in Britain, for example, rose from 5,150 in 1987 to 44,840 in 1992 (Ferris 1993:247; Hayter 2000:70). For Western European governments, the arrival of so many refugees and migrants, accompanied by fears that even more would arrive in the future, created many tensions and contradictions (Ferris 1993:254).

Adelman's third regime, an era of 'regional solutions' emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, characterized by a focus on 'ensuring that a country's own people can stay or return home' (1999:99), and seeking to deal with refugee issues through 'much greater reliance on the initiatives of refugees and their home and host countries...and less reliance on the initiatives and organizing capacity of the international system' (Adelman 1999:100). This meant direct conflict with the nation state, which had become weakened by globalization. Adelman argues that the abstract universal principle of the protection of the rights of the individual will be used by very few, and that 'pressures will increasingly be brought to bear on states to ensure that they assume proper responsibility for the rights of their own members, including the right to return and live free from fear of persecution' (1999:104).

Despite a commitment by European countries to human rights after the Second World War, particularly in the form of the European Convention on Human Rights, which was drafted in 1950 by the newly formed Council of Europe and entered into force in 1953, security and control have come to take precedence over the provision

of protection. As journalist Rebecca Omonira-Oyekanmi asks on World Refugee Day 2012, ‘Where are the human rights in Europe?’ She expands on this, saying:

Shortly after the Second World War, all of Europe promised ‘never again’. The opening preamble to the European Convention on Human Rights was drawn up to reaffirm the continent’s “profound belief in those fundamental freedoms which are the foundation of justice and peace in the world ... best maintained ... by a common understanding and observance of the human rights upon which they depend.” So why, little more than 60 years after Europe promised, are refugees being racially abused in Greece, living in destitution in Italy, assaulted by the police in France and imprisoned in the UK? The European Union’s common asylum and immigration system espouses the importance of humanitarian protection, but its member states systematically flout the rules’ (Omonira-Oyekanmi 2012).

The increasing relationship between security, immigration and integration at EU level (see Maguire 2010, Maguire and Titley 2010) has led to practices which would once have been considered exceptional, for use during times of extreme crisis, becoming the norm: detention, incarceration, marginalization, deportation and dispersal of people seeking protection, as well as keeping people waiting for long periods of time in liminal and precarious circumstances for decisions on claims for asylum and protection (see Schuster 2004, Bloch and Schuster 2005, Tyler 2006). Philosopher Giorgio Agamben has written of the tendency in Western democracies to gradually replace the declaration of the ‘state of exception’ with ‘an unprecedented generalization of the paradigm of security as the normal technique of government (2005:14). Minca (2005:406) similarly speaks of the ‘increasing penetration of the logic of emergency (read: exception) into the international as well as domestic politics of many western nations’. This increasing shift towards the normalization of ‘states of exception’ leads to the temporary or permanent marginalization or exclusion of groups of people from society. Although the number of people seeking asylum in Europe is decreasing¹⁰, due in part to restrictive policies by European governments (see below for a more detailed discussion of this), asylum policy, as Schuster (2011:401) points out, continues to be driven by a fear of potential increase,

¹⁰ According to UNHCR 2010 statistics, there has been a dramatic decrease in the numbers of people seeking asylum in the industrialized world in the last ten years. 2010 figures were five per cent less than 2009 and almost half the number of applications filed in 2001 (UNHCR 2011).

leading to a ‘perpetuation of repressive asylum policies’ (Darling 2009:660), characterized by the deployment of ‘mechanisms of exclusion’ (Schuster 2004:1), such as deportation, detention and dispersal, which have shifted from ‘exceptional’ to ‘normal’ in the field of asylum and immigration in recent years. Central also to this punitive shift has been a racializing and problematizing shift in the public representation of asylum seekers. I look in more detail at these ‘mechanisms of exclusion’ in the following section.

Mechanisms and modalities of exclusion

International law and UN conventions determine the category of the refugee, but neither has any control over the outcome of the asylum process itself. Human rights law guarantees only a refugee’s right to seek asylum, not to protective hospitality within a state. Asylum is a state’s right to grant or refuse asylum. In all contexts, there is a negotiation between humanitarian concerns and national interests (Khanna 2006:472).

As highlighted by Adelman’s three ‘regimes’, asylum seekers and refugees are intrinsically linked to the state, being, as Agamben said of refugees, ‘nothing less than a border concept that radically calls into question the principles of the nation-state’ (Agamben 1995:117). As stated above, the ultimate discretion of who is eligible for protection under the Geneva Convention lies with individual governments. Therefore analyses and critiques of state policies of asylum, and of the ‘vexed’ (Koser 2007:234) relationship between refugees/asylum seekers and the state, have been and are important in order to understand their positions, in general and in relation to particular nation states, to interrogate exclusive policies and decisions which may appear as natural or ‘common sense’ (Schuster 2003) through the construction of the figure of the asylum seeker (see also Tyler 2006)¹¹, or to highlight what is often simply hidden from view (as many asylum seekers are).

Important work has been done in the past decade in documenting not only European policies of asylum (for example see *Journal of Refugee Studies*, special issue 2000;

¹¹ See Crowley et al. (2006) on the Irish government’s framing and construction of the 2004 Citizenship Referendum around the concept of ‘common sense citizenship’.

Schuster 2000), but also the increasingly widespread ‘mechanisms of exclusion’ used by governments to deter and control ‘irregular’ immigration, in particular detention, deportation and dispersal (Makaremi and Kobelinsky 2008; Schuster 2004, 2005; Bloch and Schuster 2005; Tyler 2006) and welfare rights of asylum seekers, across Europe (Bloch and Schuster 2002, Cohen 2002, Düvell and Jordan 2002) and in specific member states (Jubany-Baucells 2002, Liedtke 2002, Sales 2002, Sitaropoulos 2002). Schuster (2004, 2005) and Bloch and Schuster (2005) discuss the mechanisms of exclusion practiced by European states, in particular deportation, detention and dispersal, and the gradual shift of these practices from ‘exceptional’ to ‘normal’, which occurred as a response to the series of events at the end of the 1980s and 1990s which increased the movement of people towards Western Europe, creating a sense of an asylum crisis.

Other ‘modalities of exclusion’ (Schuster 2003) include practices of discrimination, racism and unequal treatment by governments towards asylum seekers (Schuster 2003, Lentin 2003) and various forms of labelling (Zetter 1991, 2007) and representation of asylum seekers which ‘other’ people seeking protection and serve to justify the use of exceptional practices. Schuster (2003) interrogates some of the underlying assumptions of asylum policies in the UK in particular, but also with reference to other European states, arguing that ‘common sense assertions of the ‘need for control’ (see also Koser 2007:234), which underlie the differential treatment of asylum seekers in particular, are expressions of a racism at the heart of European states’ (Schuster 2003:233).

The new restrictive policies introduced in Western Europe in the 1990s were aimed at combating illegal immigration and abuse by asylum seekers, leading to a blurring of the boundaries between refugee protection and immigration control. The Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) signalled the beginning of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), leading to the ‘communitarisation’ of immigration policy (Geddes 2000, Samers 2004). The combination of the strengthening of European border controls and policies towards greater freedom of movement within these boundaries

led to use of the term ‘Fortress Europe’¹². The UNHCR delineates four types of measures taken to tackle the flows of migrants and refugees into Europe: ‘non-arrival’ policies, ‘diversion’ policies, more conservative interpretations of the Geneva Convention, and finally ‘deterrent’ measures (UNHCR 2000). These are looked at individually in the following paragraphs.

The first type of measure is a series of ‘non-arrival’ policies, including visa requirements, heightened border control and ‘carrier sanctions’ against transport companies, aimed at preventing ‘improperly documented aliens’ from reaching Europe. This also includes containment of refugees within European borders in safety zones (Schuster 2000). Samers highlights the ‘virtualism’ inherent in the relationship between restrictive visa policies and illegal migration (Samers 2004). The more that restrictive policies are created for particular countries (through ‘risk assessment’ of that country’s potential for mass migration), the more there develops a market for smuggling and trafficking from these countries. Heightened border control is seen as compensatory for increased freedom of movement within these borders, such as is facilitated through the Schengen Agreement. Samers points out that ‘border policy, like visa policy, is one of the most highly developed policy domains in the EU’ (Samers 2004:34) and looks at the development of such ‘non-arrival’ policies as a ‘rescaling of decision making to a more European level’, or a ‘communitarisation’ of immigration policy (Samers 2004).

The second set of policies consists of ‘diversion’ policies and the ‘re-scaling of control’ (Samers 2004). Diversion policies are those policies which shift responsibility for assessment and protection either to other countries within Europe, or to countries outside Europe which are seen as ‘sources’ of migrants, through agreements such as the Dublin Convention. The Dublin Convention, originally formed in 1990 and revised in 2003 in the form of ‘Dublin II’, ultimately determines which member state is responsible for processing claims. This convention facilitates the creation of a list of ‘safe third countries’, places through which refugees have

¹² A description of the use of this term on ‘Plain language guide to Eurojargon’ page of the official website of the European Union (europa.eu) appears as follows: *‘This expression is often used to mean an attitude that wants to defend Europe from outside influences, especially cultural influences. The term ‘Fortress Europe’ often appears in discussions about asylum and immigration regulations’* (European Union: year unavailable).

travelled and to which they could be sent back. Samers describes the ‘re-scaling of control’ here as ‘a spatial extension of control far from the EU’s existing external borders’:

This is not simply a case of placing police and customs officials in third country airports...but rather the gradual implementation of a system of migration management aligned with development assistance in third countries (Samers 2004:43).

Policies of ‘remote control’ (Zolberg 2002, cited in Samers 2004:29) move control outside Europe by placing customs agents in migrant-producing countries in order to stop them at the source from even reaching European borders. Such policies of ‘passing the buck’ have been questioned for human rights reasons among others, in that they possibly shift the ‘less palatable (and less easily legitimated) dimensions of border and visa control onto the candidate countries and far-flung third states where legitimacy may be less of an issue’ (Samers 2004:42), with Greece and Malta as current acute examples of this.

The third means of tackling the flows of migrants into Europe has been through more conservative interpretations of the 1951 Geneva Convention by governments, thus reducing the number of successful applications for asylum. One means of doing this has been the approach by several European states of lessening protection to temporary forms, granting various forms of temporary asylum or protection, and thus removing large numbers of migrants from the asylum process (Schuster 2000). This practice has been particularly used in times of mass movement due to civil unrest, such as in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. Temporary protection has been defended by certain governments, such as Italy and the Netherlands (see Schuster 2000) as ‘a means of getting vulnerable people out of dangerous situations as a prelude to offering them permanent protection’ (Schuster 2000:125; see also Dona and Voutira 2007), however other governments have been criticised for using it as a means of ‘further hollowing out the 1951 Convention’ (Schuster 2000:125).

The fourth approach named by the UNHCR is a series of ‘deterrent’ measures, including detention and deportation of asylum seekers, denial of social welfare and restriction of access to employment. There is still disparity across Europe in the

provisions for asylum seekers (Schuster 2000), however the argument that welfare benefits are a magnet for economic migrants (cf. Schuster 2000) does not seem to hold when examining the numbers arriving in certain states in relation to changes in the welfare policies of those states. Schuster cites the example of the UK, where numbers entering rose in the years following the withdrawal of many benefits. Several countries (for example Germany, Netherlands, UK and Ireland) now provide benefits in kind rather than the welfare payments in cash received by nationals. The 1998 white paper in the UK included provisions to deny welfare benefits to all asylum seekers rather than to some of them and for one 'no choice' offer of accommodation, as well as other measures to toughen procedures (Hayter 2000:78). In Ireland, the policy of 'direct provision' was introduced in 2000, curtailing social welfare entitlements of asylum seekers (see Breen 2008) and shifting them from mainstream welfare rights to a separate system (see Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of the direct provision system in Ireland). In addition to this is the increasing designation of 'safe areas of return' within dangerous states, legitimising deportation of asylum seekers back to those states.

Immobility, liminality and sites between states

Some of the direct consequences of the securitization of migration (see Maguire 2010, Maguire and Titley 2010) through stringent immigration policies and various mechanisms and modalities of exclusion are, among other issues, the human cost of immigration, those people literally dying to gain entry to Europe (Back 2003, Spijkerboer 2007, Dikec 2009)¹³; the link between policies of deterrence and human trafficking, and consequently the increased vulnerability of people seeking asylum (see in particular Koser 2000 on the link between asylum policies, trafficking and vulnerability; also Koser 2001, Nadig 2002 and Samers 2004); the outsourcing of asylum responsibilities (see Mountz 2010, Samers 2004) in the form of the re-scaling of control to third countries, as discussed above, and the consequent questions around the treatment and human rights of those concerned; and the criminalization of

¹³ Between 1993 and 2006, more than 7000 migrants and asylum seekers died while attempting to reach EU territory (half of them between 2003 and 2006). This is only the documented number of deaths (Dikec 2009:184).

asylum seekers and refugees¹⁴. The increase in irregular entry channels to the EU due to more restrictive policies¹⁵, and the banning of failed asylum seekers to EU territory, lead to further criminalization of asylum seekers, as well as increased risks in efforts to cross boundaries (Dikec 2009:186) and the human cost associated with this. All these issues point to questionable treatment of human beings and basic human rights issues. An additional consequence of restrictive policies and the politics of exclusion has been the resulting increase in liminal spaces (Samers 2010), both between and within states, in which people seeking protection wait or are detained. The accompanying dehumanizing conditions of these spaces (Koser 2007:235) point to a frightening ease in which people's lives can be treated as waste or reject (see Bauman 2004). As Kobelinsky points out, '*le droit d'asile est devenu une machine à produire des rejetés*' (the right to asylum has become a reject-producing machine – *my translation*) (Kobelinsky 2010:49). It is these spaces which are created through the politics of exclusion which interest me for the purposes of this particular study, spaces in which people on the move are forced to wait, mobility stalled before they are accepted or rejected from the host state.

The recent 'mobilities turn' in social science has led to an awareness of mobility as 'crucial to understanding contemporary global societies' (Conlon 2011:354). However, as Skeggs points out, 'mobility and control over mobility both reflect and reinforce power. Mobility is a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship' (Skeggs 2004:49 cited in Sheller and Urry 2006:211). In the context of globalization and 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2000), asylum seekers highlight the immobility and stasis inherent in mobility, and the unequal relationship of different categories of people to mobility. Asylum seekers are often housed or detained for varying lengths of time while they await their claims for refugee status. As Mountz states:

Thousands of asylum-seekers find themselves between states, paradoxically contained and dispersed, simultaneously hypervisible to local populations and hidden from

¹⁴ Zygmunt Bauman has written extensively on the criminalization of refugees. See Barmaki (2009) for an overview of Bauman's work on this, and on the social processes that he believes create and sustain it.

¹⁵ Oxfam (2005:iii) estimate that ninety per cent of asylum seekers are forced to enter the EU irregularly.

mainland publics at national and global scales. There, they wait, their displacement prolonged (Mountz 2011a:385).

Liminality (Turner 1967)¹⁶, or ‘in between-ness’, of various sorts is inherent to the experience of being an asylum seeker, both in terms of time (waiting, limbo or suspension), space (liminality, exception and threshold) (see Mountz 2011a) and political or legal status (see Zylinska 2004). Asylum seekers find themselves quite often in spaces which are ‘neither here nor there’ (Mountz 2010:138), spatial manifestations of asylum law and policy: holding centres in airports, detention centres on islands and in remote places, accommodation centres which function as ‘open prisons’. States manipulate geographies and borders with ‘creative geographies of exclusion’ (Mountz 2010:124), ensuring that asylum seekers are kept outside¹⁷.

There is increasing interest in these liminal spaces, or ‘sites between states’ (Mountz 2011a) and in what they highlight about states, borders, sovereignty, nation and the ‘architecture of exclusionary enforcement practices’ (Mountz 2011:381), as well as in the experiences of being in such spaces. Mountz (2010, 2011a), for example, focuses on some of these liminal sites, or ‘non-places’ (Augé 1995): airports, tunnels, detention centres and islands, places where ‘time-space trajectories are altered in myriad ways’ (Mountz 2011a:381). As ‘mechanisms of exclusion’ shift from exceptional to normal, there is an increasing interest in the subjective experiences and effects of being in liminal spaces, spatial, temporal and political/legal: of waiting, liminality, uncertainty, statelessness, marginalization. The negative effects of exclusion, uncertainty and detention on the mental health and well being of asylum seekers have been documented, mainly by scholars in medicine, psychiatry and psychology (Silove et al 1997; Silove et al. 2000; Steel and Silove 2001; Sultan and O’Sullivan 2001; Summerfield 2001). However, the everyday lived experiences, both negative and positive, of people who find themselves in such spaces for prolonged amounts of time have been less explored. As Bissell (2007:277) points out, ‘waiting through spaces of mobility is an often inevitable and frequent experience woven through the fabric of the mobile everyday; yet it is strangely absent from the current and burgeoning mobilities literature’. In order to contribute

¹⁶ See Chapters Two and Four for more expanded discussions of the concept of liminality.

¹⁷ See Mountz’ ‘tunnel thesis’ (2010) for examples of such ‘creative geographies of exclusion’.

to filling this gap, *Gender, Place and Culture* recently brought out a special issue (2011) around the theme of ‘waiting’ in which contributors explore various aspects of waiting, as well as the spaces in which people wait. Schuster (2011) focuses on the waiting of young Afghan men in Paris, illustrating the suffering and frustration caused on a daily basis by being subjected to the Dublin II regulation (see above, page 35) and Eurodac system¹⁸. The focus on the experiences of a particular group of men waiting in a particular place in Paris provides the framework for a discussion of these policies and their direct consequences for the individuals affected by them. The Dublin II regulation is based on the premise that conditions for asylum and acceptance rates of asylum seekers are the same throughout European member states. The article however highlights the discrepancies in these areas between EU member states, causing many of the Afghans referred to in this article to be stuck in between states, waiting for the next move or in many cases ‘swell[ing] the ranks of the *sans papiers*’ (Schuster 2011:412). Hyndman and Giles, in the same issue, bring the experience of waiting to refugee camps in the global south, where, they argue, refugees who wait are depicted as immobile and passive, feminized and therefore seen as ‘real refugees’; in contrast, refugees ‘on the move to seek asylum in the global North are perceived as threats and coded as part of a masculinist geopolitical agenda that controls and securitizes their movement’ (Hyndman and Giles 2011:361). Waiting is perhaps what asylum seekers have to do to prove they are genuine. Other recent work around asylum seekers’ and refugees’ experiences of waiting include Kobelinsky’s *L’accueil des demandeurs d’asile. Une ethnographie de l’attente* (2010), which explores the nature of ‘CADA’¹⁹ accommodation centres for asylum seekers in France and the treatment of asylum seekers living in them through their experiences of waiting. Through an ethnographic approach, Kobelinsky explores the everyday experiences of living in the precarious form of stability that these accommodation centres provide. She states that ‘*l’attente est incontestablement imposée aux demandeurs d’asile, elle est une réalité quotidienne et une expérience complexe*’ (waiting is without question imposed on asylum seekers, it is a daily

¹⁸ Dublin II and Eurodac policies are intended, as Schuster (2011:404) explains, to prevent asylum applicants testing their chances in different EU member states, or the state of their choice. The Eurodac system supports this by entering fingerprints, taken on first encounter with authorities, into a central system.

¹⁹ *Centres d’accueil pour demandeurs d’asile* – accommodation centres in France for asylum seekers awaiting decisions on claims.

reality and a complex experience – *my translation*) (2010:244). However her sense is that the ‘alienation of time’ experienced by residents of CADA centres is more a consequence of bureaucracy than a political aim in itself (ie. as a deterrent method) (*‘L’aliénation du temps est plus un effet des bureaucraties qu’une orientation des politiques’* (2010:244). Jan-Paul Brekke (2004) explores the experiences of waiting of asylum seekers in Sweden in a report entitled *While we are waiting: uncertainty and empowerment among asylum seekers in Sweden*. He talks about ‘day-to-day lives dominated by reflection, passivity and waiting’ (2004:26) and the difficulty in particular for his respondents of dealing with the open ended nature of how long they would have to wait for the result of their cases (2004:22). Craig Jeffrey speaks of ‘chronic waiting’ related to an intertwined set of global changes: a ‘growing number of situations where people wait for years or whole lifetimes’ (2008: 954). Melanie Friend in her audio-visual work *Border Country* (2007, 2010) explores the experiences and stories of asylum seekers awaiting deportation in detention centres in the UK through combining recorded voices with photographs of empty waiting rooms, thus highlighting the institutionalized nature of waiting and the spaces created by the politics of exclusion, and the very human experiences which lie behind these.

Stasis and immobility highlight the importance of place and of specific contexts. Looking at those who are rendered immobile returns studies of migration and mobility back to specific locations, specific contexts and experiences, place and rootedness. Scholars of migration geography, and feminist scholars in particular, have called for a ‘ground[ing] of meta-narratives of globalisation and mobility within the physical locales, material objects and social and spatial practices where the daily lives of migrants actually unfold’ (Conlon 2011a:714). The work of feminist transnational scholars for example (see Katz 2001, Pratt and Yeoh 2003) has sought to pay empirical attention to the everyday lives of migrants in order to understand and make visible processes of mobility and immobility. Exploring the lived experiences, ‘the stuff of everyday life’ (Mahler 1999, cited in Pratt and Yeoh 2003:160), of those who are rendered immobile within their direct environments, and in relation to the specific social, political and legal contexts is important in contributing to a clearer picture of asylum systems and policies in host countries, and how they directly affect those who are subjected to them. As Conlon (2011b:354) points out, while feminist scholars in particular have demonstrated the ‘complex and

intimate relations between mobility and immobility', with stasis and immobility framed as 'mobility's twin' (Hanson 2010 cited in Conlon 2011b:354), there is, she considers, 'much work to be done in developing more considered and multidimensional analyses of stasis [sic] and/or immobility' (Conlon 2011b:355).

I would argue that further development of the concepts of liminality and in between-ness is important for 'developing more considered and multidimensional analyses' (ibid) of stasis and immobility, with insight into the experiences of being in liminal spaces leading to a deeper understanding of the experiences of seeking asylum. Much of the work on liminal spaces has been influenced by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, whose work on thresholds and camps (1997, 1998, 2005) as central to understanding sovereign power, is often used to theorize and provide conceptual tools for understanding liminal zones of exception and to make sense of 'exclusionary geographies and exceptional spaces' (Mountz 2011:385; see also Darling 2009, Ek 2006). In fact it has been argued that writing about the spaces of exception today means inevitably engaging with Agamben's work (Minca 2005:406). For Agamben, the refugee camp is the ultimate 'site of inclusive exclusion' (Darling 2009:649), with the figure of the asylum seeker similar to the Roman law of the *homo sacer* (see Agamben 1998). The *homo sacer* is 'a subject in Roman law who has committed a particular crime that renders him or her outside of the rule of law that has been defined for citizens' (Darling 2009:435). Neither 'exiled nor assimilatable' (Darling 2009:649), this figure becomes suspended from all rights, possessing only the fact that he is human, his 'bare life' (*zoe*). Agamben connects the refugee to the *homo sacer*, a figure who 'having lost every quality and every specific relation except for the pure fact of being human' is now in limbo (Agamben 1998:160-161). By its very nature, the figure of the *homo sacer* is homogenized rather than individualized. The refugee camp is the site of this limbo, a 'state of exception', 'outside of the reach of national law, even when it is located inside a nation's territory' (Darling 2009:435).

Despite the importance of Agamben's work for theorizing spaces of exception, asylum and the exclusionary geographies which accompany it, his work however has been criticized for its lack of empirical grounding (see Mountz 2010), in particular

by feminist transnational geographers. Mountz argues that this lack serves to further homogenize not only the spaces of exception he discusses, but also those excluded:

In spite of his frequent textual visits to the geographical margins, however, Agamben fails to empirically ground exceptionalism – to visit the very marginal sites he harkens. This shortcoming renders locations and processes of exclusion homogenous and similarly homogenizes those excluded, reinforcing their sameness as an abstract concept of excluded, noncitizen outsider, or “bare life” (Mountz 2010:xxix).

Mountz’s critique highlights the importance of exploring the experiences of such spaces of exclusion in order to counter further homogenizing and essentialising of refugees and asylum seekers. She argues that the ‘intimacy of exclusion requires analytical tools beyond those available in Agamben’s writing’ (Mountz 2011a:382). While remaining aware of the importance of and making use of Agamben’s theorizations around the camp and spaces of exception in order to better understand asylum and direct provision in Ireland, I seek in this work to expand on these theoretical insights as well as on the critiques by feminist scholars such as Mountz by drawing the lens much closer in order to look at the micro effects and experiences of spaces and cultures of exclusion, alongside asylum seekers themselves.

Labelling and representation of asylum seekers

Mechanisms of exclusion, including the creation of liminal spaces where people seeking asylum are forced to wait, come to seem legitimate and even natural through the various ways in which refugees and asylum seekers are labelled and represented in public discourse. Various forms of labelling and representation of asylum seekers are used as, or become, another means of ‘othering’ and distancing people seeking protection and thus justifying various forms of exclusion.

Increased labelling and fragmentation of existing labels (Zetter 2007) place people in bureaucratic categories which decrease their chances for protection, for starting new lives or even for survival. The term ‘asylum seeker’, which thirty years ago was not in use in the public realm (Kobelinsky 2008b), has now become a mainstream category in European countries, and designates a person who has officially applied

for protection through refugee status and is awaiting determination of this status. Kobelinsky (2008b) traces the trajectory of the schism between ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’ which exists since the beginning of the 1990s, as well as the emergence of associated terms such as ‘false refugees’, and even ‘false asylum seekers’ (2008:115/6). She speaks of a ‘*glissement sémantique*’ (semantic slippage) over the past three decades around the naming of people in search of asylum, which has accompanied changes in the way in which hospitality towards such people has been conceived and practiced (2010:49). Zetter describes this ‘marked proliferation of new labels’ (Zetter 2007:176) as a key defining characteristic of the present era, ‘at best nuance[ing] interpretation, at worst discriminate[ing] and detach[ing] claimants from the core attribute of being a refugee – international protection’ (Zetter 2007:176). In fact, as Dona and Voutira point out, ‘refugees are becoming an ‘endangered species’, with fewer individuals being officially recognized under the 1951 Refugee Convention and permanent protection being replaced by temporary protection’ (Dona and Voutira 2007:163). In being identified as ‘asylum seekers’, as Tyler (2006) points out, these people are recognized as ‘not-refugees’ – bogus, illegals, the unwelcome’ (2006:190).

Through frequent and uncritical use, in the media or through government discourse, creating familiarity, terms and labels give the illusion of being natural or neutral. Such labels become ‘sticky’ (Ahmed 2004) through repetitive use, allowing for the figure of the asylum seeker to be produced (see expanded discussion of this in Chapter Three, page 110/111). Zetter states that ‘the process of labelling, by its very familiarity and ubiquitousness in bureaucratic activity, may almost go unnoticed or unquestioned’ (Zetter 1991:45). Ronit Lentin (2003) for example discusses the Irish state’s construction of new classifications to refer to immigrants, such as ‘non-national’, a term which is now used frequently and for the most part unquestioned in the public realm. She argues that such new ‘classificatory schemata’ are about ‘the insistence on order in the face of disorder’ (Lentin 2003:302), and that social researchers and their subjects may have a role in interrupting this order:

Social researchers and their subjects may have a role in interrupting the order of Irish late modernity, which keeps constructing new classificatory schemata—including

euphemisms such as ‘nationals’ versus ‘non-nationals’—that are about the insistence on order in the face of disorder (Lentin 2003:302).

The acceptance of labels as natural can result in lesser rights for certain labelled people also being regarded as natural, as Bryan Fanning observes:

In recent years the category of asylum seeker has become a vilified one in many Western countries. Laws have been passed in various countries that removed various rights from people so administratively categorized. As a result it has recently become natural that asylum seekers have lesser welfare and education rights or that they be excluded from the remit of policies aimed at addressing poverty and disadvantage (Fanning 2007:11).

Labelling people into convenient categories not only serves political purposes, but ultimately misses out on the complexities of people’s lives, experiences and multiple identities beyond that designated by the label, and allows for stereotypes to be created. The label of asylum seeker, or refugee, like any label, creates an illusion of a homogenous identity, hiding individual stories and complexities of experience and creating an illusion that an asylum seeker is a ‘type’ of person with a particular experience which is different to any other category of migrant. As Mountz states, ‘refugee’ refers to a heterogenous set of people, yet is a term that ‘others’, discursively, materially and legally’ (Mountz 2011b:256). Similarly, Rotas notes, ‘like “black”, the term “refugee” smoothes over difference within the group it designates at the same time as reifying the boundary that defines its otherness and the notions that constitute that boundary’ (Rotas 2004:52). Schuster (2003) argues that states penalize those who exercise the right to claim asylum from persecution by ‘stripping them of all other identities save that of ‘asylum seeker’, someone without rights, someone to be excluded’ (Schuster 2003:246), reducing them in Agambennian terms to ‘bare life’ (1998). Just as negative discourses about groups of people ‘produce identities that accompany exclusionary geographies’ (Mountz 2010:xvii), the process of stripping away all other identities may in fact transform the identities of those subjected to it: ‘the need to conform to an institutionally imposed stereotype can both reinforce control and transform an identity’ (Zetter 1991:45).

As well as hiding individual stories and experiences, the homogenizing effect of labels also hides potential commonalities with other migrants, and indeed with resident populations, which may be over simplistic in a globalizing world. As with 'refugee', or any other similarly designated term, the term 'asylum seeker' does not designate a type of person but is a label which is imposed on a person in a particular context, and should be understood as a discursive figure rather than as an individual subject (Jackson 2002:81). As Malkki says:

The term refugee has analytical usefulness not as a label for a special, generalizable "kind" or "type" of person or situation, but only as a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of socio-economic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations (Malkki 1995:496).

O'Neill and Spybey (2003:8) speak about the power and complexity of the 'refugee' label, 'both in its use to define human experience and a category of people, but also in terms of the identity and subjectivity of those who bear the label'. Mountz points out that 'assumptions of homogeneity correspond with the generalized, anti-asylum stance of states stopping all asylum seekers en route' (Mountz 2011a:392), contradicting the principles of asylum which are centred around 'the right to have claims heard and contextualized in relation to histories of conflict' (ibid).

Through a combination of bureaucratic labelling and practices and policies of marginalization and exclusion, refugees and asylum seekers become physically and psychologically 'distanced' (Lentin 2003), made invisible, allowing for the creation and retaining of the illusion of homogeneity, and allowing for stereotypes of this label to be formed and circulated, and thus contributing to their exclusion. This invisibility, or distancing, is combined, or juxtaposed, with a 'hypervisibility' (Tyler 2006) in media and government discourse. The visibility of asylum seekers in terms of exposure in media and government discourse in many European countries has often far outweighed their numbers in relation to other migrant groups²⁰. 'Asylum seeker' has become a term which is thrown around the public realm with so many

²⁰ See for example MacÉinri (2000) who notes in the Irish media, 'a marked, indeed disproportionate, emphasis on asylum seekers and refugees, as opposed to immigration, especially labour immigration' (2001: unpaginated). See also Chapter Two for further discussion of this.

connotations that it is difficult to believe that it barely existed until about thirty years ago.

In addition, and closely bound up with the practice of ‘othering’ through various forms of labelling, representations of asylum seekers in the public realm tend to centre around a victim/threat binary (see Tyler 2006, Dona 2007), or other similar binaries, such as victim/survivor, resilient/vulnerable, bogus/genuine, regular/irregular (Dona 2007:221), or good deserving/bad undeserving (Brandi 2007). Harindranath and O’Neill (2006:41) raise two important concerns around the representation of asylum seekers:

Firstly, the continual use of terms such as “illegal” and “bogus” entrenches them as part of the popular media discourse on asylum seekers, thus contributing to the stereotyping referred to in the Article 19 report²¹...Secondly, the nearly complete absence – apart from a few exemplary reports and television documentaries – of an alternative voice from the perspective of the refugee or asylum seeker raises important ethico political issues relating to the politics of representation, democracy, and immigration.

Razack (1999) talks about a binary discourse of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migrants, with refugee status also discursively linked to this. A passive, victim quality is often linked to being seen as genuine, whereas to be more active or activist is linked to being ‘bogus’ (see Schuster 2011, Hyndman and Giles 2011). Similarly a ‘real’ refugee is expected to ‘show signs of distress’ and ‘behave like a victim’ (Kobelinsky 2010:115; see also Malkki 1996). This type of binary discourse may be seen in Kobelinsky’s terms as the figure of the ‘hero’ versus that of the ‘imposter’ (see Kobelinsky 2010). Darling (2009) states that ‘in contemporary Britain, the asylum seeker has taken on an almost paradigmatic status as the outsider par excellence - the rightless, speechless emissary of political and ethical demands upon the nation’ (Darling 2009:649; see also Malkki 1996) and that ‘such a position has long been connected to categories of fear, anxiety and repression, yet has also been linked to a perceived need for compassion and humanitarian response’ (Darling

²¹ ‘Article 19 report’ here refers to: Article 19 (2004) *What’s the Story? Results from Research into Media Coverage of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK*. London.

2009:649). The ‘bogus asylum seeker’, burden on the welfare system, threat to national identity and perpetrator of violent crime is placed in juxtaposition with the ‘genuine refugee’, one who is ‘genuinely’ fleeing persecution in line with the 1951 Geneva Convention definition.

The ‘continual staging’ (Tyler 2006) of the asylum seeker as threat or ‘deviant other’ (O’Neill 2010a:17) occurs through government discourse and media representation of asylum seekers, through language, labelling and classification and laws and policies surrounding asylum seekers and related issues. Tyler argues that ‘it is through the production of the imaginary figure of the asylum-seeker as an ‘illegal’ threat to ‘our’ sense of national belonging that ‘we’ learn to desire and demand ‘their’ exclusion’ (Tyler 2006:190/1). It has been pointed out that media images of the bogus refugee are central to the project of constructing statehood (see Mountz 2010). The result of these types of continuous negative and ‘dehumanizing’ (Tyler 2006) representations through government discourse and media representation, and the increasing criminalization of refugees and asylum seekers (see Barmaki 2009), is the way in which the figure of the asylum seeker is often seen. Schuster (2003) points out that the construction of the asylum seeker, firstly as a legal category and then beyond this through what the term is now associated with has led to its use as a stereotype:

‘Asylum-seeker’ is now a term that is used unambiguously, and immediately conjures up cheat, liar, criminal, sponger—someone deserving of hostility by virtue not of any misdemeanour, but simply because he or she is an ‘asylum-seeker’—a figure that has by now become a caricature, a stereotype, in the way that ‘Blacks’, ‘Jews’ and ‘Gypsies’ have been and still are (Schuster 2003:244).

Negative discourses work to convey ‘a sense of alarm and suspicion towards asylum seekers’ (Conlon 2010:103; see also O’Neill 2010b:123-142, Tyler 2006), thus justifying or ‘naturalising’ reduced rights or exclusion of those so labelled (see Fanning 2007:11). As Back puts it, ‘the mud of criminalization sticks to all those seeking refuge’ (Back 2003:343).

Homogenizing or stereotyping of asylum seekers and refugees also takes place as part of humanitarian discourse, and may be equally damaging as discourses which seek to exclude or 'other'. Malkki (1996) discusses the tendency amongst development workers in refugee camps for Hutu refugees from Burundi living in Tanzania to try to 'identify and fix the 'real' refugee on extra legal grounds', in particular through the visual image of the refugee: 'making it possible to claim that people were not 'real' refugees because they did not look (or conduct themselves) like real refugees' (Malkki 1996:384). She describes how the legal status of refugee was continually destabilized through everyday language and practices through the 'barely noticeable but nevertheless powerful constitution of the real or true refugee – an ideal figure of which any actual refugees were always imperfect instantiations' (1996:385). Similar to this description of the ways in which everyday language and practices of humanitarian administrators 'destabilize the solidity' (Malkki 1996: 385) of the legal category of refugee, the distinction in popular and government discourse in European host countries around 'real' and 'genuine' asylum seekers serves to destabilize the solidity of the legal category of 'asylum seeker', a term denoting someone who has placed a legal claim for refugee status and who has the right to remain in the country of application while that claim is being processed. Just as the 'fragmentation' (Zetter 2007) of labels which occurs from above is translated into legal terms, this destabilizing may equally be translated into legal terms through who is seen to be deserving of refugee status or not.

Such discourses of the 'real' or 'archetypical' (Malkki 1996:385) refugee or asylum seeker are also used, as Malkki points out, at the more general level of humanitarian policy discourse. Such discourses may also serve to reinforce homogenous and stereotyped identities of refugees and asylum seekers through presenting them as voiceless victims in order to invoke compassionate responses. Malkki talks about the 'transnational commonalities in both the textual and the visual representations of refugees' (Malkki 1996:386) which emerged in the post World War Two period and which have made their way into journalism and media. One of the most significant consequences of this, she argues, has been the silencing of the voices of those people who find themselves classified as refugees:

One of the most far-reaching, important consequences of these established representational practices is the systematic, even if unintended, silencing of persons who find themselves in the classificatory space of “refugee”. That is, refugees suffer from a peculiar kind of speechlessness in the face of the national and international organizations whose object of care and control they are (Malkki 1996:386).

Similarly Maguire and Murphy point out that ‘all too often, asylum seekers and other migrants have been presented in still images or as voiceless victims; too often their words have peppered journalism and official reports in disembodied and lifeless forms’ (2011:14). Harindranath and O’Neill write that:

Much of the knowledge generated by advocacy groups, organisations, self organised groups and services supporting asylum seekers and refugees provides much needed alternative voices, dispelling myths, and promoting better understanding and knowledge. The knowledge generated is also subject to media representation and this tends not to be constituted by the voices of refugees and asylum seekers. Thus asylum seekers and refugees are represented by others, such as NGOs, advocacy and support groups (Harindranath and O’Neill 2006:41).

Representations which speak for refugees and asylum seekers may provoke compassion but may fail to show the human life which is at stake, real people with real lives and relationships and often embedded in communities, and may ultimately be damaging to lives on the ground.

Understanding and representing the lived experiences of asylum seekers

As pointed out above, policies, labels and practices of discrimination and exclusion, as well as representations of asylum seekers and refugees as a threat to society or as voiceless victims, are not abstract; they have direct effects on people’s everyday lives, well being and even survival. Similarly, liminality and in between-ness are not simply abstract concepts, but encompass a set of very real experiences in the everyday lives of real people. Broad understandings and analyses of issues surrounding asylum, and interrogations of particular policies, need to be looked at in tandem with their effects on the ground, through the experiences of those subjected to them and the everyday lives and spaces which are created and affected by them.

Much of the literature on refugee and asylum issues, while maintaining a state centred perspective, in terms of its subject of analysis, is also simultaneously refugee/asylum-seeker centred and/or advocacy oriented, calling for more just or human approaches to asylum, criticizing state policies which exclude or marginalize. Dona and Voutira (2007) in fact note that three key methodological features of refugee research intrinsic to the field of refugee studies have been interdisciplinarity, bottom-up approaches and the relation between advocacy and scholarship. Literature which is coming from a more state-centred perspective (Dona and Voutira 2007:166) (ie. focusing on regimes and state perspectives), as discussed above, has done much to highlight the plight of people seeking protection, the role of the nation state in relation to refugees and asylum seekers, and the various ways in which states exclude, geographically, culturally and socially. However, in a review of fifty years of refugee studies, Black (2001) points out that the dependence of refugee studies on policy definitions and concerns may be one of its principal weaknesses (Black 2001:58). While in the intervening years, there has certainly been a relative increase in more ‘refugee-centric’ (Dona and Voutira 2007:166) literature looking at effects of asylum policies on the ground, and important issues of service needs, housing, education, health (FLAC 2009, Akidwa 2010), mental health of asylum seekers (Silove et al 1997; Silove et al. 2000; Steel and Stilove 2001; Sultan and O’Sullivan 2001; Summerfield 2001, Wilson and Drozdek 2004) issues of identity, belonging, representation, particular stories and experiences of asylum seekers in host countries and in liminal spaces still remain less explored.

Despite an increasing interest in the spaces of asylum and the experiences of living in these spaces, there is still a lack of literature which looks at experiences in specific contexts and from the perspectives of asylum seekers themselves. While much of the literature on asylum is refugee/asylum seeker-centred, working or speaking *for* people seeking asylum, there are still relatively few studies which work *with* or alongside the voices of refugees and asylum seekers themselves, highlighting their voices and creating with them narratives which explore the complexities behind the label of ‘asylum seeker’ and the multiple other identities which go alongside this one, and run counter to stereotypes and victim/threat binaries. The lack of this type of work may inadvertently contribute to the homogenization of asylum seekers, and

further emphasise an identity which is centred around being an asylum seeker, ignoring all other identities.

Despite an increase in studies which focus on the everyday lived experiences of asylum seekers (Conlon 2011a, Eastmond 2007, O'Neill 2006, for example) and the importance of creating better understandings of lived experience in order to create better understanding of asylum, Harindranath still points to an 'acute lack of an engagement, particularly in official and government discourse, but also in academic research, with the everyday experience of refugee communities' (2007:138). Maggie O'Neill states that better 'understanding' of the lived experiences, lived cultures of exile, displacement and belonging feeds into cultural politics and praxis, and may help processes of integration and social justice (O'Neill 2006:41). There is a growing interest in stories and narrative as a way of understanding experience (Eastmond 2007, O'Neill 2006, see also Dona 2007). O'Neill, after Horrocks et al. (2003), tells us that 'there is an acceptance of the need to look at how people actually live and make sense of their lives' (O'Neill 2006:42). In 'The Art of Listening' (2007), Back emphasizes the importance of listening to and recuperating stories of the everyday and the seemingly unimportant details, as well as the stories of those that often remain nameless. The experience of seeking asylum in a foreign country can be confusing, frustrating, and damaging to mental and physical health. The small details, or 'micrology' (O'Neill 2008), of everyday lived experience, both negative and positive, told from the perspective of those living them and placed in their social, political and cultural contexts, can contribute to a fuller understanding of asylum, and of the societies and places we live in.

Working with and alongside the voices of people seeking asylum is an important part not only of highlighting how state policies of fragmentation of labels and bureaucratization of the refugee experience, as well as policies of marginalization, dispersal, detention, incarceration manifest on the ground and are experienced by those subjected to them; but also of 'rehumanising' people seeking asylum, moving away from mass narratives which distance and homogenize and seeking to understand the complexities and individual people and experiences which lie behind them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss the political and human context of seeking asylum in Europe today, with particular focus on the increasing ‘mechanisms of exclusion’ used by governments to deter and control ‘irregular’ immigration and the shift of practices which would once have been considered ‘exceptional’ to ‘normal’: detention, incarceration, marginalization, deportation and dispersal of people seeking protection, as well as keeping people waiting for long periods of time in liminal and precarious circumstances for decisions on claims for asylum and protection. I then discuss the ways in which the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers is made to seem ‘natural’ or neutral through the use of labeling and various forms of representation which distance or ‘other’ refugees and asylum seekers through negative or homogenizing and stereotyping representations or silence them by speaking for rather than alongside them. I argue that in order to create a fuller understanding of asylum and of the societies in which asylum seekers are hosted, it is necessary, on the one hand, to focus on the everyday lived experiences of people seeking asylum, and on the other, to work with those people themselves to create alternative representations to those that dominate the public realm, speaking *with* rather than *for* people seeking asylum.

The following chapter looks at the context of this study in more detail, grounding this discussion of the human and political context of seeking asylum, and the liminal spaces created by a politics of exclusion, into a particular context. I look at how asylum seekers are dealt with in Ireland, with particular focus on the ‘direct provision’ system and the gradual exclusion of asylum seekers from mainstream society. I explore the processes of practically accessing a space for research in a direct provision centre in Ireland, and what these processes revealed about the system of direct provision. I then look at the ways in which I began to access this space theoretically, in order to create a space for research into the experiences of seeking asylum and living in the direct provision system in Ireland.

CHAPTER TWO:
Accessing the (in between) space

The place is a bit bleak on first approach. Off the motorway and straight into countryside. On the approach up the drive through playing fields, you see security fencing surrounding rows of kind of caravan chalets. Security greet you at the door, fences and alarms.

My contact at the refugee network centre warned me that things weren't looking good. This centre has been 'stung' before with negative portrayals and they are not up for having it done again.

The place I walked into was warm, but kind of dark and empty. The manager of the centre came to meet me. Reticent, not excited to see me. We went into a meeting room. I explained a little about the project. He said immediately that it was unlikely they would accept it. I talked a little more about the project, focusing more on issues of identity, belonging, home, than on experiences of direct provision. I spoke about the planned content and form of the project, the reasons behind it, and tried to talk to some of the issues he may have around negativity for the centre and so on. He said that the only reason he was even entertaining talking to me was because I came through the refugee network centre and that he regards them very highly for the work they do at the centre.

[Excerpt from my personal diary, 19 January 2010. Written in my car in the car park of direct provision centre]

Introduction

My aim with this project was to work within a direct provision centre and to create a space to explore the experiences of living in direct provision. The place and space in which a collaborative creative project, or indeed any research or art project, occurs will ultimately affect the processes and outcomes of that project. The choice to work within a direct provision centre rather than outside in a more neutral and less charged space was by no means the simpler option. Firstly, access to direct provision centres in Ireland as I discovered, is highly restricted. Secondly, it may be argued that working within a direct provision centre rather than in a neutral space outside would restrict what participants felt they could say or do, and therefore would lead to limited insights into their experiences. However, the decision to work within a direct provision centre, if I could find a way to do this, was based on several reasons, both methodological and practical.

With this project, I wished to create a space within a space: the space created by the collaborative project would take place within the space of the direct provision centre so that there would be a reciprocal relationship between the two, the 'everyday' processes of the project taking place within and alongside the everyday of living in the centre. The ethnographic element to the project meant that, as a researcher, I felt it was important to be a part of the space of the centre for the duration of the project, to take part in everyday events and activities as far as possible, and to allow me and the project to become part of that everyday for a period of time. While I was aware that the decision to hold the project within the space of the centre would to a certain extent direct or restrict what participants felt they could say or do as part of the project, I hoped that creating a reflective, collaborative, creative space within the restricted space of the centre would generate its own insights and events, and that the two spaces would feed off and reflect each other for the duration of the project. From a practical perspective, I felt that the decision to hold the project in the centre itself would make the project more accessible for participants. Without funding to rent an alternative space, or to transport participants to that space, working within the centre also felt like a viable and practical option. The project therefore could be accessible for those with mobility issues, for example, or those who could not leave the centre for long periods of time due to childcare or other issues, thereby reducing the limitations of who could take part. Working within the centre, as opposed to in an outside space, would also I felt, make the project less intimidating to those who were feeling less adventurous or strong. With these thoughts in mind, it was very important to me that the project should be run within a direct provision centre.

Before I could begin this project, I had to gain access to a direct provision centre and residents of a centre who would be willing to take part in the project. From the time I began to research the locations of direct provision centres in Ireland to starting the project took about three and a half months of phone calls, online research, emails, driving around to different centres to meet various players in the asylum system, hitting brick walls and finding ways around them. The process of gaining access to a centre and to people who might take part in the project brought me into direct contact with direct provision in Ireland, and the bureaucratic and often non-transparent nature of this system.

This chapter is about accessing the space for research. I look at three forms of accessing the space here: accessing the space of direct provision in Ireland through understanding its structures and how it functions; accessing the space practically, that is, finding a centre and participants who would be willing to be involved in the project; and accessing it theoretically, conceptually. This chapter brings the more general discussion in Chapter One around seeking asylum into more specific context, introducing some of the main aspects of the direct provision system in Ireland, and expanding on the themes I focused on in Chapter One within this context: the politics of exclusion and the liminal spaces created by this, as well as the labelling and representation of asylum seekers. This chapter also looks at the processes of accessing the space for research, both practically and theoretically. It describes the period which led to beginning the project and the processes of gaining access to one specific centre and to participants to take part in the project. I look at what these processes of gaining access to the space for research reveal about the asylum system in Ireland. I then discuss different ways in which I began to conceptualise direct provision, emerging both from the processes of accessing the space for research as well as from the material and processes which came from working with participants at the centre.

Asylum and direct provision in Ireland

Asylum seekers are persons who seek to be recognized as refugees in accordance with the terms of the United Nations Geneva Convention (1951). An asylum seeker has a legal right to seek refuge in Ireland under the terms of this convention. In the mid to late 1990s, alongside the rise of the ‘Celtic Tiger’, Ireland shifted from being a country of emigration to one of immigration, with a rapid growth (4.1%) (see Samers 2010: 22) of migrants in proportion to its overall population between 1996 and 2005. This ‘unprecedented and sustained period of inward migration’ (Conlon 2010:95) to Ireland can be partly attributed to rapid economic growth, demand for labour, relatively liberal immigration policies during that period, and general integration into Europe’s wider migration system (Samers 2010:25). Previous to the 1990s, Ireland had very little experience of dealing with refugees and asylum seekers (see Thornton 2007 for a historical analysis of reception conditions in Ireland). Ireland signed the Refugee Convention in 1956 and the Protocol in 1967. After

signing the Convention, the country accepted various groups of refugees fleeing conflict: 539 Hungarian refugees in 1956, a small group of Chilean refugees between 1973 and 1974, and 212 Vietnamese refugees in 1979. These groups were for the most part taken care of by voluntary and religious or charitable groups. The first refugee programme set up, run and funded by the State appeared between 1992 and 1998, when the country took in 455 Bosnian refugees (Thornton 2007:88).

Fitting in with broader patterns in Europe at this time of creating stricter barriers to entry and attempts to resolve refugee issues in home and host countries (in line with Adelman's third 'refugee regime'), the 'direct provision' system was established in Ireland in 2000 in order to deal with the rising number of asylum applications. In 1992, there were just thirty nine applications for refugee status to ORAC (Office of Refugee Applications Commission); in 1996, there were 1179 applications; by 1999, this had jumped to 7724 (ORAC 2001:8) with numbers peaking at 11634 in 2002. While these numbers have been in steady decline since 2002, with applications in 2010, the year I was carrying out fieldwork for this research, at 1939, and in 2011 at 1290 (RIA monthly statistics report Dec 2011:2), in 2000, the number of asylum applications had increased by more than forty one per cent to 10,938 over the previous year (FLAC 2009:13) (see figure 3).

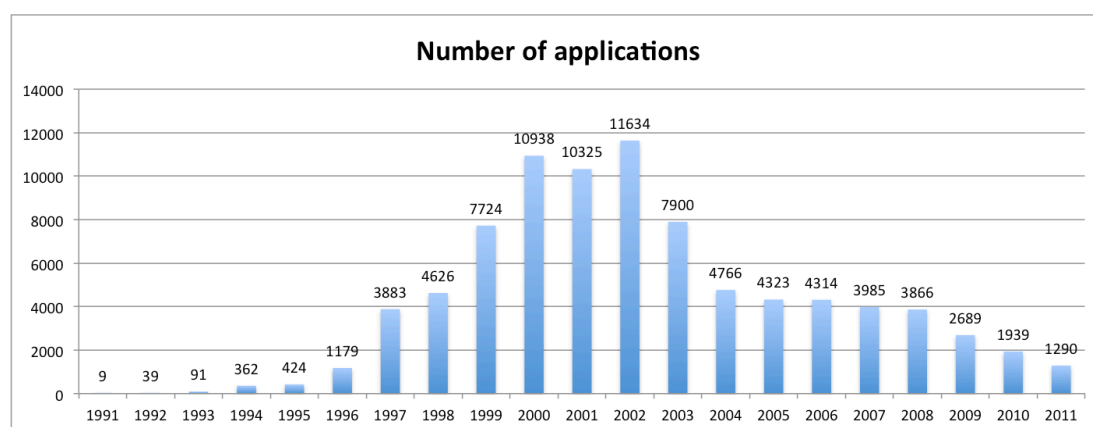


Figure 3: Number of applications for refugee status to the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) per year from 1992 to 2011

Source: RIA monthly report, December 2011: page 2

The Irish asylum system, like its welfare system, is strongly influenced by the British system. Irish immigration and asylum policies differ significantly to other EU member states, being influenced more strongly by the Common Travel Area with the United Kingdom than by European legislation. Under the Protocol on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland annexed to the Treaty of the European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Union by the Treaty of Amsterdam, Ireland has the facility to opt out of proposed measures pursuant to Title IV of the EC Treaty, which is the article under which most immigration and asylum measures fall. While Ireland can opt into measures undertaken at a European level at a later date, it has undertaken not to opt into measures which will compromise the Common Travel Area with the UK. Due to these conditions, Ireland's immigration and asylum policies have been more influenced by the existence of the Common Travel Area with the UK than by European measures (Quinn and Kingston 2012:19). Despite this, EU legislation has had a significant impact on Ireland's asylum policy. Irish asylum law is currently based on the Refugee Act 1996 as amended, and S.I. No. 518 of 2006, which seeks to implement the 'Qualification Directive' (EU Directive 2004/83/EC). Other EU instruments with impact on Irish asylum law are the 'Asylum Procedures Directive' (Council Directive 2005/85/EC), the 'Temporary Protection Directive' (Directive 2001/55/EC), the 'Dublin Regulation' (Regulation (EC) No. 343/2003), the 'Procedures Directive' (Directive 2005/85/EC) and EURODAC (Regulation (EC) no. 2725/2000) (for a detailed discussion, see Quinn and Kingston 2012).

The relatively new trend of immigration in Ireland, as Quinn and Kingston point out (2012:v), is reflected in the 'still disparate nature of our immigration policy'. Asylum and immigration systems were initially created on an administrative rather than legislative basis with legislation following later (Quinn and Kingston 2012:26). The direct provision system was originally set up as an emergency measure to accommodate the increasing numbers of people seeking asylum at this time (Smyth 2010g). Previous to this, asylum seekers arriving in Ireland could access the mainstream social welfare system; entitlement was based on need and lack of Irish nationality did not affect the payment of means-tested social assistance payments (see Breen 2008). The direct provision system essentially removed asylum seekers from mainstream social welfare, providing them directly with full board and

accommodation and, theoretically, with all basic needs. The direct provision policy was accompanied by a separate dispersal policy, whereby accommodation was obtained in different areas of the country to ensure more equal distribution of asylum seekers throughout the country (FLAC 2009:13). These ‘twinned’ policies followed closely on the heels of the introduction of similar programmes in the UK (Conlon 2010:101), as well as the more restrictive asylum policies introduced across the EU in the 1990s, as discussed in more detail in Chapter One.

At the time of fieldwork in 2010, there were forty six direct provision centres in Ireland, spread throughout the country (see figures 4 and 5). These centres are coordinated by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), a unit of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), which is in turn a division of the Department of Justice and Equality²². The RIA was established in 2000 at the same time as the direct provision system, taking the place of the Directorate of Asylum Seeker Support and the Refugee Agency (Breen 2008:612). The responsibilities of the RIA were originally to coordinate the provision of services to asylum seekers and refugees, to coordinate the implementation of integration policy for all refugees and those granted leave to remain, and to respond to crisis situations resulting in relatively large numbers of refugees arriving in Ireland at the same time (FLAC 2009:14). The role of the RIA was amended in 2007 with the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Integration and is now principally concerned with reception only²³, rather than integration (FLAC 2009:15).

After asylum seekers make their application for asylum in the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) they are offered accommodation in a ‘reception centre’ in Dublin for a period of approximately ten to fourteen days before being dispersed to one of forty six direct provision centres across the country, including the Dublin area. These centres consist of a ‘hodge-podge of accommodations’ (Conlon

²² The Department of Justice and Equality was previously known as the ‘Department for Justice, Equality and Law Reform’ and changed its title in 2010.

²³ The responsibilities of the RIA as published in Department of Justice publication *Freedom of Information Section 15 Reference Book (2008 edition)* are: ‘planning and coordinating the provision of services to asylum seekers; the accommodation of asylum seekers through the Direct Provision system; assisting in the voluntary repatriation of destitute nationals from the twelve states which joined the EU in May 2004 and January 2007’ (FLAC 2009:15).

2010:101), including hotels, former nursing homes, former army barracks and holiday villages. The RIA website describes accommodation arrangements as follows:

Accommodation in reception and accommodation centres is provided on a full board basis which includes the provision of a bed and three meals per day. Residents are not allowed to cook their own food while living in an accommodation centre. They may be required to share their bedroom and bathroom facilities with other residents. There is a set of house rules which all residents must comply with. A formal complaints procedure is available for residents in the event of a dispute or grievance (RIA 2010a).

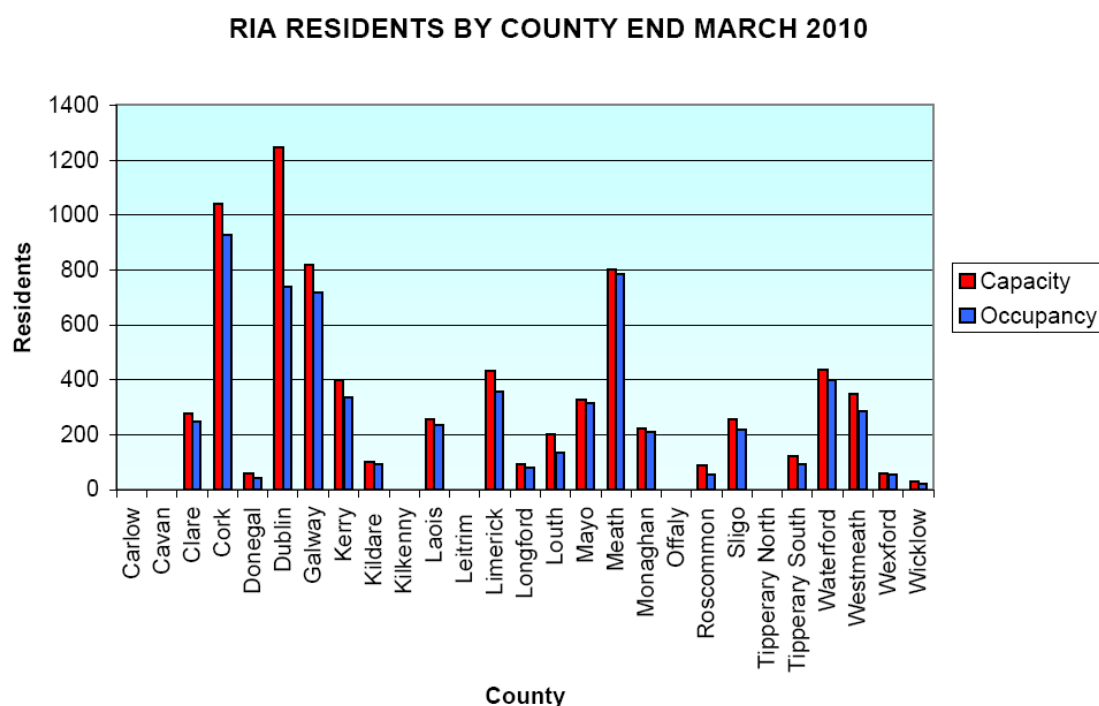


Figure 4: RIA residents by county

Source: RIA Monthly Statistics Report, March 2010: page 10



Figure 5: Breakdown of direct provision centres and reception centres, 2011

Source: RIA monthly statistics report December 2011: page 14

In addition to full board and accommodation, asylum seekers are provided with a weekly payment of €19.10 per week per adult and €9.60 per dependent child. This

amount was calculated from deducting the estimated cost of accommodating someone in direct provision from the basic standard Supplementary Welfare Allowance at the time, and remains unchanged since 2000, despite substantial increases in welfare payments since then.²⁴ This is the only social welfare payment never to have increased (Brady 2010). In addition to this, an exceptional needs payment may be granted, at the discretion of the community welfare officer. In practice, direct provision residents receive two payments per year to cover clothing expenses: €300 per annum per adult and €150 per annum per child (FLAC 2009:47).

If a person's application for asylum is rejected at first instance by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC), he or she has several choices. Applicants who receive a negative recommendation following interview are entitled to appeal to the Refugee Appeals Tribunal. The normal procedure is that an appeal must be made within fifteen working days of the sending of the negative decision and the applicant is entitled to request an oral hearing for their appeal. If the result of the appeal is negative, applicants may submit to a deportation order requiring them to leave the state. Alternatively they may apply for Subsidiary Protection and/or Leave to Remain in the state on humanitarian grounds. Subsidiary Protection was introduced in Ireland in 2006 as part of the 2004 Qualification Directive and can be available to a person who does not qualify as a refugee but who, if returned to his or her country of origin, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm as defined for the purpose of the Directive (Department of Justice and Equality 2006). The Qualification Directive (Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004) provides a definitive status for the beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. The Directive's definition of a 'person eligible for subsidiary protection' is stated in Article 2(e) as:

a third country national or stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person concerned, if returned to his or her country of origin, or in the case of a stateless person, to his or her country of former habitual residence, would face a real risk of

²⁴ At the time of calculation, the allowance of €19.10 was equivalent to slightly less than twenty per cent of the Supplementary Welfare payment. However, increases in this payment mean that in 2009, this allowance was equivalent to less than ten per cent of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance payment.

suffering serious harm as defined in Article 15, and to whom Article 17(1) and (2) do not apply, and is unable, or, owing to such risk, unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country (European Union 2004).

Leave to Remain is a status that is granted at the discretion of the Minister for Justice and Equality to people who have been refused refugee status and are not eligible for subsidiary protection, but who are not returned home for humanitarian or other ‘compelling reasons’ (Citizens Information 2011). Persons with Humanitarian Leave to Remain receive a residence permit which is renewable every year, pending an improvement in the situation in their country of origin. After five years, they can apply for citizenship (NCCRI 2008).

Policy of rejection at first instance, waiting and the distancing of protection from the State

The Irish asylum and protection system is marked by long delays, leading for many to years of living in uncertainty. In March 2010, when research with participants began, there were a total of 6349 people living in forty six direct provision centres across Ireland. 2333 of these (over 36%²⁵) had been residing in the direct provision system for over thirty six months, awaiting final decision of their refugee status and 1173 (over eighteen per cent) for between twenty four and thirty six months (RIA monthly statistics report March 2010: page 20) (see figure six).

²⁵ This figure has risen to over half in 2012.

Duration of Stay by Applicants in Direct Provision

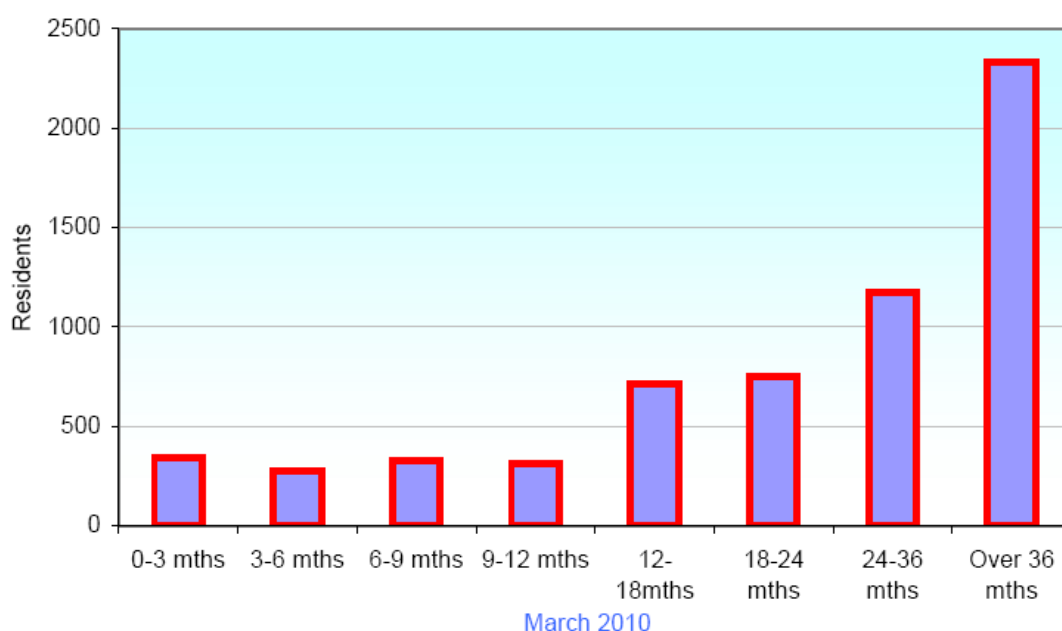


Figure 6: Duration of stay by applicants of direct provision in March 2010

Source: RIA Monthly Statistics Report, March 2010: page 20

While the RIA provides the number of people living in direct provision for over thirty six months in its monthly statistics reports, it does not break this number down further, masking the number of people living for six, seven, eight years in a state of uncertainty and suspense. According to the Irish Refugee Council's (IRC) Roadmap for Asylum Reform (2011), one of the main reasons for this delay in the Irish system is the lack of a single protection procedure. While primary decisions are made relatively rapidly by the ORAC - an average of six to seven weeks for prioritized applications or nine weeks for non prioritized applications, according to information provided by Minister for Justice Alan Shatter to the IRC (IRC 2011:2) - in 2010, only 1.1% of applicants were granted refugee status through this route. An appeal of ORAC's decision is taken through the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) with an average of thirty three weeks processing time for substantive cases involving an oral hearing, and nine weeks for accelerated appeals without oral hearing (again information provided by Alan Shatter to IRC). However, in 2010, the RAT affirmed 94% of substantive decisions of ORAC and 99% of decisions subject to the accelerated procedure (IRC 2011:2). After a refusal by the RAT, people seeking

asylum may either be subjected to deportation, or may challenge RAT's decision through Judicial Review in the High Court. This is a lengthy and costly procedure for the State, with average waiting times of twenty seven months for a pre-leave hearing and an additional four months for a full hearing. Upon an unsuccessful judicial review, the applicant may leave the State before the Minister makes a deportation order, consent to a deportation order or apply for Subsidiary Protection and/or Humanitarian Leave to Remain in the State. The average processing time for Subsidiary Protection is two years. In 2010, five people were granted Subsidiary Protection (IRC 2011:2). This system has led to people waiting in direct provision for years at a time, causing misery to applicants and unnecessary cost to the Irish State.

While the number of applications for asylum has decreased significantly since its peak in 2002, the number of asylum seekers granted refugee status by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner has also declined considerably in recent years, falling to below 1.5% in 2010 from almost 10% in 2007. As stated above, in 2010, only 1.1% of applicants were granted refugee status by ORAC (IRC 2011:2), significantly below the average EU recognition rate of 27% (Smyth 2011c). This meant that in the same year, Ireland was ranked at the bottom of the EU league for granting protection to asylum seekers. According to the EU statistics agency Eurostat, the Irish Government 'rejected nearly ninety nine per cent of asylum claims at first instance in the third quarter of 2010. Between July and September, the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner rejected 370 of 375 claims and granted five' (Smyth 2011b). These numbers reflect the 'culture of disbelief' (IRC 2011:3) inherent in the Irish asylum system.

This policy in Ireland of rejection of asylum seekers at first instance has led to an invoking of civil and humanitarian rights, in the form of Subsidiary Protection and Humanitarian Leave to Remain, in order to gain protection when this is not granted by the host state. As discussed in Chapter One, one set of measures taken by European governments to tackle immigration into Europe has been more conservative interpretations of the Geneva Convention, replacing conventional protection as envisaged by the Convention with more precarious and temporary

forms, subject to reevaluation. This allows governments to skirt international engagements while at the same time offering some form of protection. Saskia Sassen discusses this issue in terms of the changing nature of citizenship, a concept which traditionally defines the legal relationship between the individual and the 'polity', the polity originally referring to the city, and in more recent times associated with the nation state (Sassen 2002:278). Sassen discusses how, in different ways, both globalization and the human rights regime 'have contributed to destabilizing existing political hierarchies of legitimate power and allegiance over the last decade' (2002:288). The state shifts responsibility for protection onto international and humanitarian legal regimes. The consequent necessary and increasing recourse to human rights law by asylum seekers in need of protection challenges the role of the nation state, serving to further destabilize its role and create 'a lengthening distance between the formal apparatus of the state and the institution of citizenship' (2002: 287).

Gradual exclusion of asylum seekers from mainstream society

This 'lengthening distance' between the state and the institution of citizenship through the high rate of rejection or exclusion of people seeking asylum has also been mirrored in policies concerning asylum seekers in Ireland established over the last decade, demonstrating their gradual and increased exclusion from mainstream Irish society since their arrival in significant numbers since the mid 1990s. Lentin (2003) argues that the response of the Irish State to the increase in asylum applications has been a gradual process of distancing:

beginning with psychological distancing (calling asylum seekers 'bogus refugees', 'illegal immigrants' and/or 'economic migrants' and thus discrediting them), going on to physical distancing (dispersing asylum seekers to direct provision hostels), and finally to the last stage, when asylum seekers are psychologically and physically distanced, namely deportation (2003:305).

Similarly Thornton (2007:86) points out that:

the hallmark feature of the Irish reception system for asylum seekers has been the continual withdrawal and diminution of social rights on the grounds of preserving the integrity of immigration controls and protection of the welfare state from those who are viewed as not having a definitive right to be within the country.

Some of the key means through which exclusion of asylum seekers from mainstream society in Ireland has occurred are the creation of a separate welfare system, in the form of direct provision, enforced dispersal around the country and the denial of access to employment and education. This exclusion has been further compounded, as Lentin points out, by ‘psychological distancing’ (ibid) through media representation and government discourse.

The shifting of asylum seekers from the mainstream welfare system to ‘direct provision’ in 2000, which may be seen as a ‘deterrent measure’, as discussed in Chapter One (see page 36), implied that the welfare needs of asylum seekers were fundamentally different from those of Irish citizens. This exclusion from mainstream welfare was further compounded by the introduction of the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC), which came into effect in 2003 and was further clarified in 2007. Social welfare payments such as jobseekers’ allowance, non contributory pension, one parent family payment, disability allowance and child benefit are now subject to the Habitual Residence Condition, meaning that those not seen as ‘habitually resident’ are no longer entitled to them. Section 246 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 provides that:

It shall be presumed, until the contrary is shown, that a person is not habitually resident in the State at the date of the making of the application concerned unless he has been present in the State or any other part of the Common Travel Area for a continuous period of 2 years ending on that date (Department of Social Protection 2012).

The same section states that asylum seekers (no matter how long they have been residing in Ireland) are not regarded as being habitually resident. The difficulty of accessing payments which require ‘habitual residence’ ensures, as Thornton points

out, that ‘asylum seekers are wholly excluded from mainstream social welfare. Instead, asylum seekers are catered for within an ‘exclusive and excluding direct provision system’ (Thornton 2007:90).

The policy of dispersal, established alongside that of direct provision, while seeking to distribute asylum seekers more evenly throughout the country, thereby reducing demands on accommodation primarily in the Dublin area, is a form of exclusion, often leaving asylum seekers marginalized and socially excluded (Bloch and Schuster 2005). The RIA states that:

A key determinant in providing accommodation for asylum seekers is maintaining in as much as possible a sensitive, balanced and proportional approach nationwide. The distribution of asylum seekers in direct provision across Health Services Executive (HSE) areas indicate that in no case do the numbers exceed one third of 1% of the population of a HSE area (RIA 2010a).

Lentin and McVeigh note that ‘there is clearly no question of integrating [residents within local communities, instead these centres] result in asylum seekers feeling segregated and dehumanised’ (2006:47). Dispersal takes away asylum seekers’ freedom to choose where they settle, removing them, as Bloch and Schuster point out, ‘from kinship and other social networks as well as community organizations that are known to be crucial in the early stages of settlement’ (2005:493). Zetter (2007) points out that:

A ‘dispersed asylum seeker’ in the UK and Ireland, for example, is more than a bureaucratic category. It is a transformative process which is imposed not chosen, which excludes not incorporates. It marginalizes the refugee from his/her social and cultural milieu, alienates him/her from local hosts who understandably resent impoverished migrants forcibly dispersed into their already deprived communities, and compels the claimants to live in controlled poverty (Zetter 2007:182).

The practice of moving people between direct provision centres, often at short notice, can be extremely traumatic and disruptive to people trying to rebuild their lives. In June 2010, for example, residents of a direct provision centre at Mosney, Co. Meath

were issued with letters requiring them to transfer to another direct provision centre. Residents, many of whom had made Mosney home for a number of years, were given one week to prepare themselves for departure (see IRC 2010 for full report).

Physical and geographical exclusion of asylum seekers through the direct provision system is compounded by the denial of employment and education. Asylum seekers in Ireland are not allowed to work while waiting for claims to be processed, even if these claims take several years. As stated on the RIA website, ‘Asylum seekers are not entitled to work. It is an offence under the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) for an asylum seeker to work’ (RIA 2010a). Ireland and Denmark are the only countries of the twenty seven EU member states which did not sign the European ‘Reception Directive’ (Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003), which lays down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers, and which allows for a government to grant the right to work to asylum seekers after a period of time decided by each state (FLAC 2009:118). It was felt by the government that signing this Directive could create ‘an economic pull factor for economic migrants using the asylum system to enter the State’ (Dowling 2009 in Ní Shé et al. 2007:100). However as FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres²⁶) points out in its 2009 report, one of the principles behind the Directive is to ‘limit the secondary movements of asylum seekers influenced by the variety of conditions for their reception’, which seems to contradict the Irish government’s reasoning behind not signing (FLAC 2009:118). The FLAC report points out that the denial of the right to work for asylum seekers is both the denial of a fundamental human right, making Ireland out of step with its European colleagues, and an economic cost to the Irish State (FLAC 2009:120). As Summerfield (2001) points out, work is not only a fundamental means of securing financial stability but it ‘has always been central to the way that refugees resumed the everyday rhythms of life and re-established a viable social and family identity’ (Summerfield 2001:162).

Asylum seeking children of school-going age have the right to education. Adult asylum seekers however, as stated on the RIA website, are not entitled to further or third level education until they obtain refugee status. As stated on the RIA website:

²⁶ FLAC is an independent Irish-based human rights organisation ‘dedicated to the realisation of equal access to justice for all’ (<http://www.flac.ie/about/>).

Asylum seekers are not entitled to further or third level education until they obtain refugee status. Refugees have the same entitlements to further and third level education as Irish citizens. However, if they wish to avail of free third level education under the Free Fees Initiative they must have attained refugee status at least three years prior to the commencement of the course (RIA 2010b).

Under the 'free fees initiative', most undergraduate students attending publicly funded third-level courses do not have to pay tuition fees. Under the terms of the Free Fees Initiative, the Department of Education and Skills pays the fees to the colleges instead. In order to qualify for free fees, the person must have been living in an EEA member state or Switzerland for at least three of the five years before starting a course (Citizens Information 2012):

People who have been granted refugee status have the right to access education and training in the like manner and to the like extent in all respects as an Irish citizen. While it is not set out in legislation, people given humanitarian leave to remain in the state are normally conferred with most of the same rights and privileges, including the right to education, as those conferred on refugees. Refugees and those with humanitarian leave to remain are entitled to free third-level (university or college) education if they have been living in Ireland for 3 years or more. They also may be entitled to third level maintenance grants (Citizens Information 2010).

Those awaiting application for refugee status or request for Humanitarian Leave to Remain are not eligible for educational grants or financial support, or free fees initiatives and would be liable to pay non-EU fees, which are significantly higher. While adults seeking asylum have access to English language classes and FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) courses, educational opportunities are limited. The often long periods of time which people spend in direct provision awaiting processing of their claims mean that people who arrive with skills and qualifications from their countries of origin gradually become 'deskilled' the longer they spend without being able to access employment or education. As one participant commented:

You know, when you get somebody who comes in as a medical doctor and leave him in the system for five or six years, then all of a sudden you let him have the papers,

would you employ someone who has been out of work for six years? ...that's why you find most people, even with these qualifications, they end up in Tesco's, Dunnes Stores, without ever working in their profession, because they have been made redundant, deskilled...that's the word I like using... (Abiye)

While many asylum seekers find ways to circumvent the denial of the right to work and train in order to integrate into and become involved in the communities they live in as far as possible through voluntary work, accessible training programmes and forms of 'informal citizenship'²⁷ (Sassen 2003), the denial of employment and third level education means that involvement is limited. This, in combination with living in 'controlled poverty' (Zetter 2007:182), prevents asylum seekers from taking part in normal social activities and seriously excludes them from Irish society. A report by the National Economic and Social Council (2006) states that 'international experience shows that where migrants are denied access to work, or where they are segmented to particular (often vulnerable) sectors, they can fail to integrate, with negative consequences for both themselves and the host society in the long term' (2006:111). However, it is clear that asylum seekers are not intended to integrate into Irish society. Irish integration policies and initiatives deliberately and explicitly exclude asylum seekers. In June 2010, the then Minister of State for Equality, Integration and Human Rights issued an 'invitation for expressions of interest from migrants for appointment to a ministerial council on integration'. The call for applicants, however, explicitly states that 'applicants for asylum or subsidiary protection will not be eligible to apply' (Department of Justice and Equality/ Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration 2010). The explicit exclusion of asylum seekers from the council on integration further compounds their exclusion from and invisibility in Irish society, and highlights the position of asylum seeker as 'homo sacer', one that is 'neither exiled nor assimilatable' (Darling 2009:649), suspended from all rights and possessing only the fact that he is human, his 'bare life'. Ironically however, in applying for Subsidiary Protection and Leave to Remain in the State on humanitarian grounds, personal references and evidence of integration and involvement in the community go towards making the application (Ní Shé et al. 2007: 21).

²⁷ See Chapter 4 (page 203) for a more detailed discussion of this concept.

‘A life without choice’: recent critiques of the direct provision system

Living in direct provision has been described as ‘a life without choice’ (Nic Giolla Choille 2010) or, frequently by participants in the project, as living in an ‘open prison’. Single residents share rooms, often with four or five to a room. Whole families are also often accommodated in a single room, which can cause difficulties as children grow or the size of the family increases (see FLAC 2009:83). While food is provided, residents have no choice around what to eat, or flexibility around mealtimes, and children grow up without ever seeing their parents cook or work. The adverse effects of living in direct provision for long periods of time on both physical and mental health have been highlighted in recent years (Casey 2008, Reilly 2009, FLAC 2009, Akidwa 2010), and in 2011, it was reported that forty-nine asylum seekers had taken their own lives while living in direct provision over the past decade (Cullen 2011).

The direct provision system in Ireland has come under recent criticism from various organizations. At a press conference launching the FLAC report in February 2010, chief executive of the Irish Refugee Council Sue Conlan claimed that:

What may have been suitable 10 years ago as a short-term, temporary measure has become the norm to the extent that a whole group of people are excluded from any meaningful participation in Irish society. This is not only to their own detriment but equally to the disadvantage of the communities in which they live (Press Association 2010).

As early as 2001, one year after the direct provision system was established, Mullally’s review of the Irish asylum process found an emphasis on security, control and prevention of abuse of the immigration system, rather than on protection and human rights (Mullally 2001, Foreman 2009:69):

Concern has been expressed also at the diminution of procedural safeguards afforded to asylum seekers. It is clear from our research that the use of accelerated procedures for “manifestly unfounded” claims in Ireland has extended far beyond the limited exceptions permitted by international law (Mullally 2001:15).

In 2003, a report published by FLAC, entitled *Direct Discrimination* concluded that the direct provision system ‘is gravely detrimental to the human rights of a group of people lawfully present in the country and to whom the government has moral and legal obligations under national and international law’ (FLAC 2003:41) and recommended that the scheme of direct provision be abandoned immediately. This is also echoed in NASC’s 2008 report, of which the key recommendation is ‘the complete abandonment of the Direct Provision System and its replacement with a system which delivers a greater degree of dignity and autonomy’ (NASC 2008:38). Chineyre’s (2011) study on the experiences of Nigerian asylum seekers in direct provision recommends that:

The policy of DP [direct provision] should be abolished. Asylum seekers should be allowed to move into a private rented accommodation soon after their claims are made. The scheme has a damaging effect on the well-being as well as the social, psychological and physical health of asylum seekers in the Irish State. The policy institutionalizes and excludes asylum seekers from the wider Irish society (Chineyre 2011:13).

There are also a number of recent articles and reports which assess the direct provision system in Ireland from a legal and/or human rights perspective, and which conclude that the system is fundamentally flawed and that it violates the human rights of asylum seekers in several ways. The United Nations Committee Against Torture has recently (Smyth 2011c) expressed serious concerns about the State’s asylum policy, particularly the rapidly declining recognition rates for refugees. The committee reported that Ireland currently rejects about 98.5% of applications for refugee status. Committee members also raised concerns about the four-to-five-year (and over) delays asylum seekers can face before getting a decision. Claire Breen, in her analysis of direct provision with specific emphasis on adequate standards of housing (2008), concludes that the policy of direct provision in Ireland violates asylum seekers’ rights to an adequate standard of living, as laid out in the United Nations and European legal frameworks, thus in turn violating other rights, such as ‘the right to be treated with dignity, the right to equality and non-discrimination, the right to respect for private and family life, to adequate food, and to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health’ (Breen 2008:636). The policy of

direct provision thus undermines, she argues, the fundamental principles of equality and human dignity.

Two recent reports, *One Size Doesn't Fit All* (FLAC 2009) and *Am Only Saying It Now* (Akidwa 2010) outline the discrimination faced by asylum seekers living in the direct provision system, and the implications of the policy for those affected by it on a day to day basis. *One Size Doesn't Fit All*, issued almost ten years after the establishment of the direct provision system, and six years after FLAC's previous report (*Direct Discrimination* 2003), provides a detailed analysis of the system, 'in the context of Irish law and government policy and the State's obligations to individuals who flee persecution or danger and seek protection and recognition of their status, as is their right under the 1951 Convention' (FLAC 2009:11). The introduction states explicitly that 'FLAC views the direct provision system as a system which tends to dehumanize people and operates as an industry rather than a means by which the government is fulfilling its human rights commitments' (FLAC 2009:11). While the report provides a series of overarching and specific recommendations regarding the direct provision, these are preceded by the statement: 'Ten years after its introduction, direct provision has failed to adequately protect the rights of those seeking asylum and protection in Ireland. Given that failure, it should be abolished as a system' (FLAC 2009:137). Akidwa, a minority ethnic-led national network of African and migrant women living in Ireland, issued a report in March 2010 examining the specific experiences of women seeking asylum in Ireland. The final recommendation of fourteen which conclude the report states that 'the current reception policy of direct provision and dispersal should be abolished as it has failed to adequately provide for and protect the rights of individuals seeking asylum and protection in Ireland' (Akidwa 2010:29). Echoing these, one of the recommendations which conclude Moreo and Lentin's (2010) report on the experiences of Somali refugees in Ireland is to 'abolish direct provision and dispersal, having failed to meet human rights standards as set out in Irish and EU law and international human rights treaties' (Moreo and Lentin 2010:58).

Despite these reports, the system remains in place.

Media coverage as a contributing factor in the distancing and exclusion of asylum seekers

Exclusion through policy has developed side by side with media representation of asylum seekers in Ireland, which has arguably led to negative stereotyping and further exclusion of asylum seekers from mainstream society. I expand the discussion on the labelling and representation of refugees and asylum seekers in Chapter One by briefly looking here at how this has played out in the Irish context. Since the 1990s, when asylum seekers began arriving in Ireland in significant numbers, much media coverage has served to distance and exclude by portraying immigrants in general, but particularly asylum seekers, in negative ways. Several studies have explored how media in Ireland has dealt with immigration in general, and more specifically asylum seekers and refugees (see Haynes et al, 2004, 2009, MacÉinri 2001, Titley et al. 2010).

In an article written in 2001 on media coverage of immigration in Ireland, MacÉinri states that ‘mass media influence the way social phenomena are viewed and are in turn influenced by popular public and political perceptions of those phenomena’ (MacÉinri 2001:unpaginated). In 2009, Haynes et al. published a study of media coverage of immigrants in Ireland, with emphasis on coverage of asylum seekers, and the extent to which this shapes public understanding. Similarly to MacÉinri, they conclude that the mass media play a ‘pivotal role in informing the general public about immigration’ and also that the Irish mass media has played ‘a very limited public sphere role’ in explaining the complexities of this phenomenon to the general public (2009:11). They argue that the media do hold influence over public perceptions of and attitudes towards immigration, and that ‘media content which problematises immigrants can contribute to negative attitudes’ (2009:4). O’Neill and Harindranath (2006) suggest that people come to understand the lived experience of ‘asylum’ and migration through the mediated images and narratives of mass media institutions as well as advocacy groups, networks and academic research. Their research on the media representation of asylum seekers and refugees illustrates ‘the relentless repetition and overemphasis of precisely those images that reinforce particular stereotypes and a failure to source more diverse images to illustrate the many other aspects of the asylum issue’ (O’Neill and Harindranath 2006:40). Similarly, Titley et al. remark that:

In societies where mediated knowledge is fully integrated into social experience, media representations of migration, migrant lives and migration societies are widely regarded as consequential – how people who migrate are framed in news and current affairs; how the complexities of their experiences are adapted and linked to social issues and social contests in drama; how they are deemed to be represented by organizations and spokespeople in public debate; the ways in which their experiences are accurately portrayed or reductively communicated by dedicated multicultural and intercultural formats (Titley et al. 2010:23).

In 2001, MacÉinri noted that there had been a disproportionate emphasis on asylum seekers and refugees in the Irish media the previous year, thus arguably turning this group of people into a disproportionately significant issue in public consciousness:

A marked, indeed disproportionate, emphasis on asylum seekers and refugees, as opposed to immigration, especially labour immigration, is to be noted. This is in spite of the fact that the numbers of EU immigrants and non-EEA labour immigrants consistently exceeded the numbers of asylum seekers by a wide margin (gross immigration for 2000 is estimated at approximately 44,000, while the number of asylum seekers was just under 11,000) (MacÉinri 2001: unpaginated).

In 2003, the NCCRI and Equality Authority Ireland carried out an analysis of media coverage of asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland between 1997 and 2002, dividing this time into three separate periods. During the first period, 1997/8, they identified two significant sets of labelling which emerged in media coverage of asylum seekers and refugees. The first was ‘alarmist’ and sensationalist reporting of the increased numbers of asylum seekers arriving in Ireland, using metaphors such as ‘tides’ and ‘floods’ (2003:15), and ‘including extreme comment that sometimes bordered on hysteria’ (2003:14). The second was the association of asylum seekers with ‘begging, petty theft and crime’ (2003:15). In 1997, steps were taken by bodies such as the National Coordinating Committee for European Year against Racism to highlight irresponsible journalism, and initiatives were taken to address this. Consequently, media coverage improved significantly after this, particularly in national newspapers. Regional and tabloid papers were slower to follow suit, and continued to publish alarmist or dehumanizing headlines about asylum seekers. While improved coverage in general was sustained in the period 2001/2, the NCCRI reports that the period also saw ‘the emergence of new forms of labelling and or variations on older themes’

(2003:17), with coverage seeking to portray asylum seekers as a ‘burden on the State’ (2003:18), ‘with no or else little real attempt to provide other perspectives’ (2003:18).

In their 2009 article, Haynes et al. state that earlier studies carried out by them had found extensive negative representations of asylum seekers and refugees in Irish print media content:

Within negative representations, asylum seekers and refugees were variously depicted as a, threat to public services and welfare, safety and cultural dominance of the majority population, constructing the perception of resource competition, identified as a factor in negative attitude formation (Haynes et al. 2009:4).

More specifically, in 2004, in an analysis of Irish print media’s coverage of asylum seekers and refugees, Haynes et al. identify five negative ‘frames’, the common characteristic of which is their construction of asylum seekers and refugees as ‘other’ (Haynes et al. 2004: unpaginated). These frames are: the illegitimacy of asylum seekers and seeking, threat to national or local integrity, social deviancy, asylum seekers as a criminal element, and asylum seekers as an economic threat. In 2009, they found that media content in Ireland reflects a focus on majority concerns, failing consequently to provide its audience with ‘significant detailed information regarding new inward migrants, including the context(s) of their emigration’ (2009:2).

It is through media representation, as Titley et al. argue, that a media audience construct a sense of who ‘*we* are in relation to who *we* are not’ (Titley et al. 2011:24; see also Tyler 2006, and the discussion in Chapter One on labelling and representation). As the NCCRI comment, ‘irresponsible reporting can directly fuel racism and can contribute to creating the conditions that make racism more likely to occur’ (NCCRI/Equality Authority Ireland NFP 2003:5). The constant ‘drip-drip’ of negative coverage, and ‘repeated patterns of representation’ (Hargreaves 2001, cited in Haynes et al. 2009:4) contribute to attitude formation and feed into a ‘common sense racism’ (Lentin 2004; see also Schuster 2003), with direct negative impacts for individuals, and contributing to their distancing from mainstream Irish society:

Calling immigrants and asylum seekers progressively ‘bogus’, ‘illegal’, and ‘economic’ discredits them, and via the media, feeds into common sense racism, which manifests in everyday incidents of racial harassment and institutional racial discrimination’ (Lentin 2004:7).

Accessing the direct provision system

Having outlined the main structures of asylum and the direct provision system in Ireland, and the key factors which have led and continue to lead to the distancing and exclusion of asylum seekers from mainstream society in Ireland, including media representation, I look now at my own processes of accessing the system, both practical and theoretical, in order to create the space for research, and the ways in which these processes provided further insight into the direct provision system. Having obtained a list of direct provision centres in Ireland from the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), I noted those that were within practical reach of the geographical area where I was living and working and began the process of trying to set up the project. While several people that I spoke to in refugee support agencies were interested in and supportive of the project, they were not optimistic about my potential for accessing and working in a direct provision centre.

My first application was at the largest direct provision centre in Ireland, located about an hour outside Dublin, with just over 800 residents at the time of applying for access. This centre, referred to in the opening quote of this chapter, has a particular resonance for Irish people, as previous to being taken over by the Department of Justice as a direct provision centre in 2000, it was a popular holiday village. Several months after my application, in July 2010, this centre became the focus of media attention when residents protested at being told they had to transfer to another direct provision centre in Dublin as part of cost cutting measures by the government. The events surrounding this are outlined in ‘Without Rights or Recognition’, a report published in 2010 by the Irish Refugee Council.

In late 2009, I spoke to and arranged a meeting with a representative of the adult education department at this centre. She seemed interested in the project and suggested meeting on site so that she could introduce me to relevant staff and

residents who may be interested in taking part. However, when I rang to confirm the meeting a couple of days beforehand, she said that it was no longer a suitable time, and that I should apply for permission to run the project through the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) and come back to her when this had been confirmed. While looking into what was necessary to apply through the RIA, I simultaneously explored other options for access, in the knowledge that the RIA could make access difficult. While the RIA requires that anyone conducting research in a direct provision centre goes through their system of application, I had been warned unofficially that it was most likely that they would refuse my proposal to work directly with residents and in the way that I wanted to, a particular issue perhaps being the use of photography. Accessing residents of the direct provision system directly and being able to work with them in a way that was as uncensored, informal and open as possible was an important part of the project. The project was designed to be collaborative so that the voices of participants could come to the fore in whatever way they emerged. As the project involved exploring participants' experiences of living in direct provision, both positive and negative, I felt that the involvement of the RIA in the project may have a restrictive or censoring effect on the work and on the residents.

In January 2010, I secured a meeting through contacts at a Dublin based refugee network, with the director of the direct provision centre discussed above. He agreed to meet me, he said, only as he had been requested to do so by staff of the refugee network I had contacted him through, with whom staff at this centre maintain close connections. I was warned in advance by the contact who set up the meeting that direct provision centres are primarily businesses, and any activity which may potentially result in negative portrayals of how those businesses are run would be rejected. Through the RIA, the Department of Justice and Equality contracts proprietors of hostels, hotels and guesthouses across the country to provide full board and accommodation for asylum seekers, contracts which, as Breen (2008) points out, make no mention of asylum seekers' rights. Direct provision in Ireland has thus become an 'industry' (FLAC 2009:26) whereby private profit making companies tender for a direct provision contract. As Smyth points out (2010h), the financial accounts of the four biggest private companies providing direct provision accommodation - Mosney, East Coast Catering Ireland Limited, Millstreet

Equestrian Services and Bridgestock - demonstrate that housing some of the poorest people in society has proved a very lucrative business for some entrepreneurs. Accounts filed in 2010 for Bridgestock, which operates four accommodation centres in Mayo, Galway, Sligo and Athlone, show gross profits of €1.67 million in the eighteen months to the end of 2009 (Smyth 2011a). As reported in *The Irish Times* newspaper:

The provision of asylum seeker and refugee hostel accommodation has proved a cash cow for private businesses. Since 2001, the Government has spent in excess of €750 million housing asylum seekers through its direct provision system, with private firms winning most of the contracts (Madden 2011).

I presented the manager of the centre with a proposal for the project, and discussed with him my intentions for working with residents through participatory photography as part of a doctoral research project. In 2008, a documentary was made of this particular direct provision centre, showing some of the realities of everyday life in the centre. It is significant that this documentary had, the week before my meeting, been shown on Irish television for the first time. The manager informed me that it was extremely unlikely that they would accept my proposal, and warned that I would have difficulty accessing any other direct provision centres in Ireland, as they are now 'closed' to researchers and journalists. Journalist Jamie Smyth highlights this point in an article in 2010 when he points out that 'journalists are generally refused admittance to the centres' (Smyth 2010g)²⁸. The manager telephoned me several days later to say my proposal had been refused.

At this point, I realized that the only way to access centres was at a human, unofficial level, and by directly obtaining the consent of the adults who would be involved in the project rather than attempting to obtain this consent through an official government level. I drove to another centre one weekday morning, a former hotel on

²⁸ A recent campaign (2012) to challenge the hidden nature of detention centres in Europe by attempting to access a number of these centres found, similarly, that access by journalists and members of civil society was denied. The aim was to test the possibility of civil society and the media accessing these centres, as well as to gather information on the ways in which they function and whether people inside can exercise their rights. Information on this campaign can be found at www.openaccessnow.eu

the main street of a town about an hour outside Dublin. The hotel has been under contract with the RIA since April 2003 with a contracted capacity of one hundred residents. At the time of the project, the hotel was housing ninety asylum seekers, consisting of families and single people of both sexes. I walked in off the street to a foyer filled with children playing and presented myself at the reception, thinking how different this entry was to the previous highly regulated one. I explained the project briefly, and asked if there may be residents interested in taking part. The manager of the hostel was friendly and interested, and said that the residents were badly in need of more activities, beyond English language and computer classes, and that she thought it would be interesting and beneficial for some of them. She suggested coming in and introducing the project directly to the residents and taking a list of names from there.

The introductory talk ten days later had a larger turn out than I expected: eleven people in the room and one more person interested who was sick that day. My first impression was that many of these were educated, confident and engaged people. They ranged from approximately twenty five to sixty five years old, a roughly equal distribution of men and women. Several of them had cameras and laptops with them. I explained my ideas for the project and my interest in the stories of people seeking asylum in Ireland. I spoke about my interest in working with people over a prolonged period of time in a visual and artistic way and the possibilities of photography for exploring and communicating stories and ideas. I also introduced my understanding of research as a two way process, that it should be interesting and beneficial for all involved, and a chance to learn new skills. A few people seemed particularly interested in digital photography and questions tended to be more around this rather than about the research. It seemed important to make clear at this point that although the project was based around photography, that taking part would not result in a specific qualification. Several members of the group were keen to give me their email addresses and to communicate with me directly from the start, rather than through the hostel management. We made a plan to meet on Monday mornings, a time that seemed to suit everyone, and agreed to start three weeks later.

Conceptualising direct provision/accessing the space theoretically

The direct provision centre where the project took place is located, as described above, in a former hotel on the main street of a town, with easy access to shops, schools, churches and other facilities. Due to the policy of dispersal, many such centres in Ireland are located in much more marginalized settings, on the edges, or even far outside of towns or rural villages, with residents geographically, as well as culturally and socially, excluded and hidden from mainstream society.

The direct provision centre is a very specific sort of place. It is inside yet outside mainstream society, as illustrated in the above discussion. Although residents are free to come and go, their movements and daily activities are monitored to varying extents, usually through some system of ‘signing in’, and through a regime of control of everyday functions. In this particular centre, residents did not have to sign each time they wanted to go in and out, but if a resident is gone for more than three days without explicit permission, they risk losing their bed in the centre. Mealtimes are at set hours in a communal dining room. As Conlon (2010:102) points out in her study of the direct provision system, ‘cultural differences and variations in domestic habits or food preferences are minimized in the interest of efficiency’. Where and how residents live is highly regulated, with the threat of being moved to another centre constantly hanging over them. While being a highly regulated and monitored space, the direct provision centre simultaneously remains outside, excluded, distanced. As explored in more detail above, policies of exclusion ensure that residents of direct provision are kept outside mainstream society as far as possible: through controlled poverty, lack of access to education and employment and the denial of the right to a ‘normal’ life, family or otherwise. Intended barriers to integration ensure that asylum seekers are kept outside, in limbo. There is a hidden, non-transparent nature to the direct provision system which further exacerbates the exclusion of asylum seekers. The reticence of the RIA and some individual managements of centres to allow researchers, journalists and photographers, among other people, into the centres seems less about protecting the residents of these centres than protecting the business interests of those running them.

Direct provision centres are one example of the ‘liminal’ spaces created through the increasing politics of exclusion and exception. Despite the fact that direct provision

centres in Ireland are located geographically within national territory, and not between borders or off shore as many liminal spaces where asylum seekers are forced to wait often are (see Mountz 2010, 2011a, for example), or closed off from society as with the ‘camps’ described by Agamben (1997, 1998), I would still argue that these centres are liminal spaces. Kobelinsky, similarly trying to make sense of the ‘ambiguous spaces’ (2010:240) of CADA accommodation centres in France, asks:

Comment comprendre l’ambiguïté des CADA qui sont des espaces à la fois d’assistance et de contrôle? Comment s’explique cette sorte de captivité bienveillante des demandeurs d’asile qui décident d’accéder à cette forme de confinement? (Kobelinsky 2010:21)

[How to understand the ambiguity of the CADA centres, which are spaces simultaneously of assistance and control? How to explain this type of benevolent captivity of asylum seekers who decide to access this form of confinement? - *my translation*]

Throughout the processes of the project, a series of paradoxes began to emerge, with direct provision itself, and the experiences of living within it, seeming to fluctuate between various positions, or lie in a space somewhere between the two: between hospitality and hostility, between inclusion and exclusion, between place and non-place, between citizenship and non-citizenship. In order to help conceptualize the ‘in between ness’ of direct provision, and to create a framework in order to better understand the experiences of living in this in between space, I draw on Derrida’s work on hospitality, and in particular his concept of ‘hostipitality’ (2000). I also draw on Agamben’s ‘state of exception’ (1998), a space which is simultaneously included and excluded in the juridical order. I refer to Marc Augé’s concept of ‘non-place’ (1995) as a characteristic of ‘supermodernity’, as well as Sassen’s (2003) concept of ‘informal citizenship’ as a way of illustrating the paradoxical space between citizenship and non-citizenship in which many asylum seekers find themselves. It was useful for me, later in the project and when writing up, to draw together these ‘in betweens’ through Turner’s concept of ‘liminality’ (1967). This provided a further means to make sense of the experiences of the participants as they emerged in various ways through the collaborative project and to look at the ways in which

asylum seekers are excluded through the architecture of the direct provision system. This also led to the development of the idea of ‘ontological liminality’, a means to conceptualise the ways in which imposed liminality is internalized and reaches the intimacies of everyday life, identity, the self and the body.

A hotel implies a place of hospitality, with both words emerging from a single Latin root, *hospes*, which emerged in French as *hôte*, meaning ‘guest’ as well as ‘host’. Indeed a place which provides food and accommodation to people who are in need of it is a form of hospitality. However, if we look at hospitality through Derrida’s deconstruction of the term, we can see that hospitality is always conditional, a site of power relations between guest and host. According to Derrida, there is no culture or social bond without a principle of hospitality (Derrida 2005:6). While all ethics of hospitality are not the same, all societies at some point confront the issue of the place of the stranger, the foreigner. While in principle, hospitality is absolute, in practice it is always conditional:

This principle demands, it even creates the desire for, a welcome without reserve and without calculation, an exposure without limit to whoever arrives. Yet a cultural or linguistic community, a family, a nation, cannot not suspend, at the least, even betray this principle of absolute hospitality: to protect a ‘home’, without doubt, by guaranteeing property and what is ‘proper’ to itself against the unlimited arrival of the other; but also to attempt to render the welcome effective, determined, concrete, to put it into practice (Derrida 2005:6).

The *law* of hospitality, which is absolute, is therefore put into practice by the *laws* of hospitality, which are conditional. Therein lies the contradiction, the ‘aporia’ (Dufourmantelle 2000:26, Westmoreland 2008:3): for the host to receive the foreigner unconditionally while at the same time protecting his home, family, property. Absolute hospitality is without conditions. If there is imposition, of laws, duties, questions, restrictions, then it is no longer absolute. ‘Hospitality is never fully open; there is always some violence’ (Westmoreland 2008:3). As Rotas points out, ‘despite the presence of laws governing the offering and receiving of hospitality, if hospitality is reduced to a duty it is, in the process, destroyed’ (2006:252).

Derrida also points out the proximity of ‘hospitality’ with ‘hostility’, the words again emerging from the same root:

The word for ‘hospitality’ is...a word of Latin origin, of a troubled and troubling origin, a word which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it, a Latin word which allows itself to be parasitized by its opposite, ‘hostility, the undesirable guest’ [*hôte*] which it harbors as the self-contradiction in its own body (Derrida 2000:3).

Derrida uses the notion of ‘hostipitality’ (2000), a combination of the two words, to show how closely hospitality is intertwined with hostility. Because of this interconnection, it is perhaps easy to treat guests as enemies. The term is helpful in describing the direct provision system, in which asylum seekers are accommodated, in this case in a hotel, a place of hospitality, and yet are simultaneously excluded from mainstream society, legally, socially, culturally and often geographically. They are received with a hospitality which is lined with barely concealed hostility, ‘undesirable guests’, exposing ‘the potential hostility of the state at the moment at which it seems to offer protective hospitality’ (Khanna 2006:476). The irony of living in a hotel was not lost on residents:

But you know, if you tell someone that you are living in a hotel, they think you have got money, you know, because people living in a hotel they’ve got money. If you tell them how long you have been there, I’ve been there two years, two years in a hotel! You’ve got lots of money! Some people never ask how long, or they ask how long but then if you tell them, I think you can see the look in their face, but they’ll never say that, where are you working? ...you now, asking because a person who lives in a hotel is a person who’s got money, because again, the person who lives in a hotel, you can’t live in a hotel forever, you just live for maybe one week or two weeks that’s it, go back home (Emmanuelle).

One lady, one day she was driving past, she opened the window actually to look. I think it was so surprising for her...I think people...some people do wonder what is going on, some people maybe they do understand that there are asylum seekers there, but what they don’t understand, how does it mix with a hotel and asylum seeker? (Emmanuelle)

Direct provision centres are sites of active exclusion, inside the state and yet marginalized from mainstream society and services as far as possible, hospitable and yet hostile, between inclusion and exclusion. Asylum seekers in Ireland have been gradually excluded from mainstream welfare and society in the last decade, as we have seen above. And yet direct provision centres are highly controlled spaces, the everyday lives and activities of those living within them monitored by the state. Direct provision is an example of where ‘the state of exception...is given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order’ (Agamben 1998:168/9), an exceptional state engendered by crisis that ultimately becomes normalized. The asylum seeker becomes *homo sacer*, neither ‘exiled nor assimilatable’ (Darling 2009:649) (see discussion above, page 42).

Direct provision centres, embodied in hotels, camps and mobile homes among other places, are places of transience, in many ways reminiscent of the ‘non-places’ conceptualized by anthropologist Marc Augé (1995). The shared characteristics of ‘anthropological places’, as they are referred to by Augé, are identity, relations and history:

The place held in common by the ethnologist and those he talks about is simply a place: the one occupied by the indigenous inhabitants who live in it, cultivate it, defend it, mark its strong points and keep its frontiers under surveillance, but who also detect in it the traces of chthonian or celestial powers, ancestors or spirits which populate and animate its private geography... (Augé 1995:42).

For Augé, we are living in a ‘supermodernity’, where ‘transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions’ (1995:78). The transit spaces which characterize ‘supermodernity’, motorways, shopping malls, airports, refugee camps, are non-places, ephemeral, abstract, transitory spaces devoid of identity, relations and history, ‘spaces formed in relation to certain ends’ (1995:94). In some ways, direct provision centres can be seen as ‘non-places’. They are places of transit, limbo, no one knowing how long they will be there, and so existing in a state of eternal present: the non-place has no room for history, ‘what reigns there is actuality, the urgency of the present moment’ (Augé 1995:104). ‘A person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants’ (Augé

1995:103). Rooms in the direct provision centre are numbered, and residents are known to the authorities not by name but by a '69 number'. Personal history is erased in favour of a homogenous identity, that of 'asylum seeker'. This is reminiscent of the figure of *homo sacer*, and the Agambennian idea of the asylum seeker possessing only his 'bare life'. 'The space of non-place', Augé explains, creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude' (1995:103). For asylum seekers living in this space, transience transforms into a 'transient permanence' (Dilken 2004:94), a kind of 'permanent temporariness' (Bailey et al. 2002:125).

And yet in the 'non-place', the 'limbo', the 'transient permanence' (Dilken 2004:94), of the direct provision centre, everyday life occurs. While direct provision centres have characteristics in common with Augé's 'non-places', and while looking at them in such terms is useful for seeing these centres as part of the network of transient, or indeed liminal, spaces which are increasingly part of the global cultural and spatial landscape, they are also very much places, places where people on the move invent for themselves a daily life while they wait. Tomlinson, in his book *Globalization and Culture* (1999), argues that the 'alienating, individualizing, contractual aspect of non-places' (1999:111) must be looked at in tandem with the different experience of these places for those who live and work in them or regularly pass through them. For such people, these places do become 'real' places. 'The designation of places as non-places', he argues, 'is clearly not an absolute, but one that depends crucially on *perspective*' (Tomlinson 1999:112, italics in original). This implies, he says, that non-places 'can be places where social relations can be re-embedded' (ibid). The transience becomes, for many people, semi-permanent, and everyday lives are lived, identities formed and reformed, communities, however ad hoc, are created. In this space of precarious stability, children are born and grow, friendships are made, fears, hopes and dreams continue. As Mountz points out in a discussion about the various 'zones of exception' used to enforce immigration legislation, these sites 'come into being in historically significant and strategic ways to intervene in transnational mobility' (2010:129). It is, she argues, essential to understand where and how these places come into being, who ends up there, and why. Despite the transient, forced and institutional nature of direct provision centres, their 'non-place'-ness in many ways, these centres are still places of sorts and are also often located in or close to

places, many of their residents in different ways becoming part of the places and communities in which they find themselves.

From an overview of the direct provision system in Ireland, located within a broader European approach to asylum, I suggest that the policies that create direct provision have located it in an 'in between space', between inclusion and exclusion, between hospitality and hostility, between citizenship and non-citizenship and between place and non-place. In order to find a way to draw together these various 'in between' and to try to better understand the *experiences* of living in this in between space, I suggest that Turner's concept of 'liminality' (1967), a state of 'in-between-ness', a being on the threshold, may be useful. As I pointed out in Chapter One, stasis is an important and understudied part of mobility. When mobility is stopped or held up by borders and control of immigration, liminal spaces are created where people seeking asylum are forced to wait, often for long periods of time. The micro-geographies of the asylum experience become a study, an ethnography, of liminality, of living in in between spaces, in an between existence, being 'neither here nor there' (Mountz 2011a:383):

Neither here nor there, sites in between signal movement and stagnation, transgression and disruption and ambiguous forms of belonging that map onto partial forms of citizenship and statelessness (Mountz 2011a:383).

In Chapter Four, I look at the concept of liminality in more detail and explore how a deeper understanding of this concept may help to create richer understandings of the experiences of living in the in between spaces created by asylum and immigration policies. I look at how experiences of living in various forms of in-between emerged through the material and processes of the project, and were negotiated by participants. Creating a better understanding of the experiences of everyday life in these transient yet semi-permanent contradictory places and in between spaces is important for richer overall understandings of the recent trend for the securitization and detainment of asylum seekers in western countries, its effects on those subjected to it, and on the communities in which they find themselves.

Conclusion

This thesis attempts to document the experiences of living in the direct provision system in collaboration with those people whose everyday lives are currently taking place within it. This chapter contextualizes this study within the asylum system in Ireland, with particular emphasis on direct provision and the gradual processes of exclusion of asylum seekers from mainstream society. I describe my own experiences of accessing the space of direct provision as a researcher, and how this process revealed or highlighted certain aspects of this system, namely the closed and often non-transparent nature of the asylum and direct provision systems in Ireland, and the emphasis on business interests rather than on the protection and human rights of people seeking asylum in this country. I then look at the ways in which I began to access direct provision theoretically, the ways in which direct provision may be conceptualised as an ‘in between space’, despite being located geographically within national borders, drawing on the work of Derrida, Agamben and Augé, and suggesting that these may be brought together through the concept of ‘liminality’ (Turner 1967).

Having found a means to access a direct provision centre, and participants who would take part in the research project, the following chapter describes the processes of creating a collaborative and creative space for research along with a group of residents of the direct provision centre: a space for experiences to emerge, and in which dialogue and co-creation of narrative and images around these experiences could take place.

CHAPTER THREE:
Creating the space for research

Introduction

I am interested in the potential of creative approaches to explore the in between spaces created by the securitization of borders and the increasing culture of exclusion: spaces between two or more places, between citizenship and non-citizenship, between loss and hope, knowing and not knowing, between hospitality and hostility. I am interested in finding alternative ways to explore, express and communicate the 'in between spaces' or 'interstices' (Bhabha 1994:2) of migration and displacement and the experiences of these, through and with the voices of migrants themselves. The aim of this research project was to explore the subjective experiences of living in the direct provision system, to attempt to better understand the everyday realities and experiences of living in a liminal space, a state of limbo, in 'permanent temporariness' (Bailey et al. 2002:125). Rather than assuming or predefining the parameters of what these experiences may consist of, and aware that experiences would certainly differ for different people, I aimed to create a collaborative and creative space through the medium of participatory photography where, through the processes of co-creation, experiences, stories and opinions could emerge in a way that was personal and within a framework that was not pre-defined by the researcher. I also wanted to explore how the experiences which emerged from this space could be communicated, in order to create images, stories, narratives and understandings which may run counter to homogenizing, essentialising or stereotyped representations dominant in mainstream media or government discourses. This chapter describes the methodological background and the processes of creating the space for research in a direct provision centre, alongside people seeking asylum and living in that centre.

Approaches to the research/methodology

In order to explore the 'in between spaces' of asylum and the experiences of these, my study, and consequently my methodology, has been informed by three broad and interwoven approaches. The first approach draws inspiration from work which seeks to explore or blur the lines between scholarship and activism, basing research on experiences on the ground and aiming to flatten hierarchies of knowledge by privileging experience. There is a growing interest in critical geography in exploring or traversing the lines between scholarship and activism, with scholars increasingly

inhabiting both worlds (see for example Piven 2010, Brambilla 2012, Kramsch 2012, Lafazani 2012). The work consciously straddles the border between theory/academia and activism, drawing inspiration from work which seeks to inhabit both these worlds, allowing them to feed into and nourish each other. Feminist research, in particular, has been influential in blurring these boundaries and bringing context based research to the fore (see for example the work of Pratt 2002, 2009; Katz 2001). My approach draws inspiration in particular from feminist activist approaches to research which seek to locate knowledge and power in a specific time and place, to reduce the gap between researcher and researched, flattening hierarchies between academics and the subject-participants of their research, and to pay attention to the performative nature of research methods, as well as a feminist approach to ethics, favouring culturally feminine approaches to moral reasoning over more abstract ‘masculine’ approaches. Feminist approaches in the social sciences are praxis oriented, dedicated to producing knowledge that promotes social change (Blunt and Wills 2000). Feminist praxis concerns not only studying but also challenging unequal power relations, as well as maintaining an awareness of the situated nature of knowledge production, posing serious challenges to ‘traditional conceptions of research as objective, value-free and impassionate’ (Fuller and Kitchin 2004:3). For Donna Haraway, objectivity in research is not about neutrality or distance, but rather proximity, context and taking responsibility:

Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see (Haraway 1988:583).

Feminist research, then, is inherently linked to action (O’Neill 2007). Method is understood as performative, not only describing the world, but influencing, producing and interfering with it (see Law and Urry 2004). As researchers then, we are, in Haraway’s terms, ‘non-innocent’ (1997): if method is performative, not only describing the world, but influencing, producing and interfering with it, then it is necessary to consider what type of reality we wish to create or in which ways we wish to create changes. How we go about gathering data affects not only the outcome but also, especially in the social sciences, the participants in the research, and society itself. We cannot know how large or small or far reaching those consequences may

be. This view thus shifts the emphasis of method from the outcome to the process, or at least gives equal emphasis to the latter. The ‘encounter’ between researcher and researched becomes significant, as well as the many factors which influence this. Following this approach, in working with marginalized groups, such as asylum seekers, it is necessary to consider the ways in which the research might benefit its subject-participants, and may look towards creating a shift away from that marginalization.

In order to locate knowledge and power in a specific time and place, it is necessary to look at everyday experience and events as they play out in specific contexts. By exploring everyday experience and perspectives on their situation by asylum seekers living in the direct provision system, we can attempt to gain better understanding of the asylum system in Ireland, as it is situated in broader trends throughout Europe and other ‘western’ countries. Pratt and Yeoh call for the importance of paying ‘much closer attention to the particular and concrete specificity of daily experience’ (Pratt and Yeoh 2003:160). O’Neill (2007:217) argues that ‘focusing on the small scale, the minutiae of life can often surprise, inspire and throw light on broader social structures and processes’. Feminist research has been influential in highlighting not only the importance of research which is activist in nature and which pays attention to the ways in which it may affect the subjects of the research, but also the importance of lived experience and the everyday as a rich realm for attempting to understand lives and the ‘bigger picture’. As artist Martha Rosler states:

It was feminism that underlined for me that it is life on the ground, in its quotidian, thoroughly familiar details, that makes up life as lived and understood, but that bears deeper scrutiny (Rosler 2004:ix).

Through working in one specific direct provision centre with a small group of residents, exploring with them their everyday experiences of living in the centre and seeking asylum in Ireland, we may gain greater understanding of the bigger picture, and of the ‘microphysics of power’²⁹ (Foucault 1979) which are inherent in the asylum system.

²⁹ I discuss Foucault’s concept of the ‘microphysics of power’ in more detail below (see Chapter Four, page 166).

From activist and feminist (and feminist activist) approaches to research emerges the issue of representation, and from this, the importance of collaboration and participation, blurring the boundaries, as mentioned above, between researcher and researched. Who is representing who, and how? (See Monk et al. 2003 as an example of feminist perspectives on collaborative research and action). A collaborative approach, the second broad approach I discuss here and one in which the researcher attempts to speak *with* rather than *for* the ‘researched’, was an important part of this research from the start. Jackson (2002:80) asks us:

Given the plethora of academic essays, white papers, and compendious monographs devoted to refugee issues, why are there so few studies that give voice to and work from the lived experience of refugees themselves?

The lack of alternative voices around asylum issues in the public forum, in particular the voices of asylum seekers themselves, is also pointed out by O’Neill (2008:10):

Overall in the mainstream media, asylum seekers and refugees tend to be represented by others, such as NGOs, advocacy and support groups. It is important that asylum seekers have the right to represent themselves and are given the space to do so.

Sara Ahmed speaks of the absolutes of the ‘universalism’ of speaking for the other (2000:166): a tendency to either remain silent, neglecting to get close enough to the other, or to inhabit the place of the other and speak for them. Spivak, in her influential essay *Can the Subaltern speak?* (1988), advocates a ‘speaking to’ rather than speaking for or about the subaltern (see also discussion in Chapter Five on this). Speaking *for* a silenced or marginalized group, however positive the intentions, may serve only to reinforce stereotypes, and ultimately further silence the voices of that group:

Though the speaker may be trying to materially improve the situation of some lesser-privileged group, the effects of her discourse is to reinforce racist, imperialist conceptions and perhaps also to further silence the lesser-privileged group’s own ability to speak and be heard (Alcoff 1991:26).

Rather, Alcoff suggests, after Spivak's essay, that 'we should strive to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others' (1991:23):

If the dangers of speaking for others result from the possibility of misrepresentation, expanding one's own authority and privilege, and a generally imperialist speaking ritual, then speaking with and to can lessen the dangers' (Alcoff 1991:23).

Working collaboratively with people seeking asylum also allows for the possibility of looking behind one dimensional or stereotyped representations of asylum seekers and refugees, creating a shift from 'essentializing and binary categorizations towards multiplicity, transformative practices and negotiations' (Dona 2007:222). As photographer Fiona Yaron-Field remarks:

Stereotypes, which can be either positive or negative, are one dimensional. They dismiss the complexity and depth that people experience both with themselves and in relationship to others. They deny the person any 'real' identity' (Yaron-Field 2012: unpaginated).

Through a methodological approach which aimed to include the subjects of research as co-collaborators, participants in the process as far as possible, I sought in this research project to work directly with, from and alongside, their voices, and to attempt to foreground these voices and to create alternative representations which may challenge the ultimately damaging 'convenient images' (Wood 1985, cited in Zetter 2007) in much mainstream media.

The third approach motivating this study has been an interest and belief in the power and importance of artistic and creative methods, with particular emphasis on the visual, as a means of exploring and better understanding subjectivity and lived experience. I am drawn towards the aesthetic, and the processes of co-creation, as a means to explore and communicate the subjective. I am interested in the power of the aesthetic to tap into the more sensuous elements of experience, its ability to move beyond the conscious layers towards that which is not always articulate-able in verbal form. Work which has an aesthetic element lends itself to the subjective, to

the sensuous, the embodied. It lends itself to attempts to understand personal experience, to listening, looking and feeling in ways that allow for a different type of understanding. Anthropologist Paul Stoller draws our attention to the importance of the senses in research in his work *Sensuous Scholarship*. He explains that:

Sensuous Scholarship is an attempt to reawaken profoundly the scholar's body by demonstrating how the fusion of the intelligible and the sensible can be applied to scholarly practices and representations (Stoller 1997:xv),

and that 'to accept sensuousness in scholarship is to eject the conceit of control in which mind and body, self and other are considered separate' (ibid:xvii). Geographer Nigel Thrift similarly talks of a 'residual cultural Cartesianism' (2004:57) which keeps emotion out of place within academic research, and following this, Thien discusses the recent 'affective turn' in social and critical thought, including geography, which is challenging this division (Thien 2005:450). Non-representational theory, as developed primarily through the work of Thrift, is one way in which the sensuous, the affective is being incorporated into academic research, and seeks to look at 'life and thought as practiced', exploring everyday practices and seeking to 'overcome epistemological models of geographical inquiry which maintain dualisms between theory and practice and thought and action' (Cadman 2009:1). Other work is emerging in geography, and in the social sciences more generally, around affect and emotion. Thien (2005) gives a useful overview of some of this work. Creative methods, including the visual, are tools with which people can work together, a means to mediate an 'encounter' between researchers and their subjects and to move beyond surface, or even conscious levels of communication, towards the sensuous, the embodied. Through participatory action research with sex workers in which life stories were represented in creative or artistic forms, O'Neill et al. (2002) hoped to open spaces to think and feel critically, to work through the unsayable, the outside of language, the sensual, the nonconceptual (2002:78). Working with migrants collaboratively and creatively allows for co-exploration of experiences of the 'interstices', or 'in between spaces' created by migration and dislocation. In the introduction to their edited collection *Projecting Migration*, Grossman and O'Brien ask:

What intersubjective relationships are possible when image makers, exploring the temporal and spatial coordinates of migration across varied locations and public spheres, initiate different modes of collaborative production and fieldwork practices in their research imaginaries? (Grossman and O'Brien 2008:3)

An aesthetic work can communicate with audiences at the level of affect (for further work on the concept of affect, see Thrift 2004; also Thien 2005), and has the potential for multiple interpretations depending on viewer and on context. The visual, aesthetic or creative may also hold the potential, I felt, for a more direct, less mediated form of communication with a broader audience. (In fact, as later became clear, all work which is shown in the public realm is mediated in some form, and place, space and context of representation all play important roles in this process of mediation).

Creating the space for research

This project then is situated at the intersection of activist approaches to research and to knowledge production, attempts to challenge or at least maintain awareness of issues of power and representation through participatory/collaborative approaches, and visual and creative approaches to understanding subjective experience. These three approaches are linked here by participatory photography as a research method. In order to better understand the experiences of people seeking asylum in Ireland and issues of power and representation inherent in these experiences, I wished to work collaboratively with a small group of people living in the direct provision system, creating a space where experiences as far as possible could emerge without being anticipated or limited by frameworks or boundaries set by the research or researcher. Based on the approaches discussed above, this meant to me creating a space which was firstly participatory, working collaboratively with participants in the research in order to produce knowledge based on their experiences, secondly, creative, and thirdly, processual, allowing the process to emerge through the encounter between researcher, participants and participatory photography, focusing as much on process as outcome. I hoped that through this process, we could collaboratively create work which could become a 'dialogic text', as conceptualized by literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981): a means of creating dialogue with broader audiences in order to

communicate, create awareness, challenge identity thinking and stereotypes surrounding asylum seekers and work towards creating alternative representations and understandings.

Collaborative or participatory practice entails a shift away from the end product towards the processes of research/creation and the kinds of knowledge that these processes can produce. Participatory or collaborative research entails an openness in its format. Space for negotiation, for defining or redefining aims, and for ‘events’ or issues which arise during a participatory project are important. This focus on process through various forms of participation and collaboration has seen increased interest both in the social sciences and in the arts. A shift away from a physical object as the main focus of meaning in participatory work leads to an emphasis on process. Where traditional social science approaches focus on the result, or the outcome of the study, a participatory approach shifts this focus to the process, necessitating an awareness that how the research project is carried out and what happens during it will affect the overall findings. Grant Kester, in his book *Conversation Pieces: community and communication in modern art*, discusses art projects and collectives which explore the ‘relationship between art and the broader social and political world’ and the ‘kinds of knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of producing’ (Kester 2004:9). His interest lies in the ‘collaborative encounters and conversations’ (2004:1) that the processes of creating artworks can produce, and which reach beyond traditional object based art. Where modernist art is ‘primarily concerned with the formal appearance of physical objects, which are understood to possess an immanent meaning’, ‘dialogical art’, as Kester describes it, is ‘a process as well as a physical product and specifically a process rooted in a discursively mediated encounter’ (Kester 2000:3).

When I speak about creating a ‘space’, I refer to something which is produced through a set of activities and practices. Through a collaborative creative practice, combining a set of tools or practices with a group of people using them, a space is created in which experiences and ideas may emerge, and art or knowledge may be created, produced. Maggie O’Neill (2008) refers to the space of the collaborative art or research project as a ‘potential space’; Tolia-Kelly (2007) refers to ‘dialogic space’. Alcoff emphasizes the importance of creating spaces for dialogue, for

‘speaking with and to rather than speaking for others’ (1991:22), as mentioned above. She emphasizes the importance of transforming spaces in order to make dialogic encounters possible:

Spaces in which it may seem as if it is impossible to engage in dialogic encounters need to be transformed in order to do so – spaces such as classrooms, hospitals, workplaces, welfare agencies, universities, institutions for international development and aid, and governments (1991:23).

Through the processes of co-creation, I aimed to create a space which was creative, dialogic and potential, allowing the encounter between researcher, participants and the tools of participatory photography to create knowledge specific to the moment and the context³⁰.

As discussed in the previous chapter, it was important that the space of the project be situated or created within the direct provision centre itself where participants were residing. Apart from the practical and ethical reasons for this discussed in Chapter Two, working within the centre was important for an approach which aims to ground experiences of migration, liminality and the asylum system in specific places and contexts. While migration implies and entails movement, it also entails stasis and waiting which take place. The ‘concrete specificity of daily experience’ (Pratt and Yeoh 2003:160) unfolds in particular places. In order to understand everyday experience, it is necessary to ground this experience in the contexts in which it takes place. In their edited collection *Migratory Settings*, Ayedemir and Rotas (2008) explore the importance of place, setting or context for understandings of experiences of migration. Place affects experiences and likewise, the experiences of migration

³⁰ The space I describe here may be related, in its performative, creative and transparent nature, to a ‘smooth’ space in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) terms, allowing for participation and freedom of thought, expression and dialogue, the direction of the project led by the encounters which occur in its process. This smooth space contrasts with the closed, hierarchical, restricted and non-participatory nature of the asylum system, a ‘striated’ space in Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology:

Smooth space is filled by events or haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is haptic rather than optical perception. Whereas in striated forms organize a matter, in the smooth materials signal forces and serve as symptoms for them. It is an intensive rather than extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties. Intense Spatium instead of Extensio. A Body without Organs instead of an organism and organization. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 479)

A ‘smooth’ space is therefore more conducive to sensual responses than the more rational and planned trajectory of a ‘striated’ space.

have effects on the places in which they unfold. Through the experiences of migration, place becomes ‘thickened’, becoming the ‘setting of the variegated memories, imaginations, dreams, fantasies, nightmares, anticipations, and idealizations’ (Ayedemir and Rotas 2008:7). By carrying out this fieldwork project in the place where participants were residing as they waited for their claims to be processed, I felt that the space of the project would be close to the everyday life and rhythms of that place, that the work we created may become imbued with the resonances of the place and that these resonances would affect the processes and outcomes of the project. I hoped that working within the direct provision centre and close to the everyday places of the participants and grounding the project in a specific context would allow for a richer, ‘thicker’ (Geertz 1973) understanding of the experiences of asylum.

Participatory photography as a research method

The participatory photography project began in March 2010, with a group of ten participants: five men and five women between the ages of twenty five and sixty five. Funding from the South Dublin County Council Individual Artist award covered the cost of purchasing of twelve digital cameras (Fujifilm Finepix J30), as well as additional material expenses to get the project off the ground. Participatory photography is a method which puts cameras into the hands of participants in order that they document their own lives and experiences, and then uses the resulting images to articulate and communicate those experiences in various ways. Through my own experience of working with refugees and asylum seekers through participatory photography previous to beginning this research project, as I discussed in the introduction, I became aware during this time of how discussing the images became a way to collaboratively and dialogically explore the everyday experiences of participants. By exhibiting the work in public fora and providing alternative images and understandings, we were able to bring the discussions to a broader audience in order to raise issues concerning participants and encourage dialogue which might help to challenge assumptions and stereotypes.

The origins of participatory photography lie at the intersection between participatory approaches to communication and community development developed in the 1970s,

Freirean dialogic pedagogy, feminist approaches to research and documentary photography (Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001, Singhal et al. 2007). Shifts towards more participatory approaches and communication strategies gained momentum in the 1970s, particularly in the area of rural community development, where methods such as ‘participatory rural appraisal’ (PRA) (Chambers 1994) were developed for the inclusion of local populations in needs analysis and policy development. Also influencing these shifts, both in community development work and social science research, were the work of Orlando Fals-Borda and the development of participatory action research (PAR) (Fals-Borda 1996) and Paulo Freire’s dialogic pedagogy, developed in his seminal book *Paedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1970). Dialogic pedagogy provided a radical alternative to traditional presentational modes of teaching. Significantly, Freire believed in the importance of visualization to engage participants in their own learning, and to stimulate reflection, discussion and action (Freire 1970)³¹. Participatory approaches have in common the desire to include the traditional subjects of research as active participants in the research process, to explore directly issues concerning them, and to work with them towards positive change. The increased interest in participatory approaches to community work also influenced social science research. The term ‘participatory research’ now covers a range of approaches in which the subjects of the research are included to varying degrees in its processes, a ‘set of methodologies and epistemologies that aim to effect change for and with research participants’ (Pain and Francis 2003:46), or aiming to achieve ‘social change from below’ (Dona 2007:214).

Feminist critiques of conventional research, both inside and outside the academy, which since the 1980s have explored reciprocity and questioned who benefits from research (Pain 2004), have also influenced movements towards more participatory and activist work since the mid 1990s (Fuller and Kitchin 2004). Such approaches to research challenge traditional hierarchies between researcher and researched, moving away from researcher-subject, or subject-object relations towards subject-subject relations (O’Neill 2008:41). They shift the role of the researcher to enabler or facilitator, and the role of participant to co-researcher or co-activist (Fuller and Kitchin 2004), allowing for research which is ‘more reflexive, reciprocal and

³¹ See also Carlson et al. 2006 and Singhal et al. 2007 for further discussions on dialogic pedagogy and its relationship to participatory photography.

representative' (Fuller and Kitchin 2004:4). Participatory and activist approaches to research are often associated with feminism, seen as 'consistent with long-standing feminist goals of challenging hierarchical relationships and of conducting research that is directed toward changing society' (Monk et al. 2003:92). With its ability, or potential, to 'forefront the perspectives of marginalized groups and actively challenge social exclusion with them' (Pain 2004:654), participatory approaches to research can offer 'one means to a practical feminist politics' (Kesby 2005:2037). In addition to its participatory element, participatory photography as a method fits with feminist research principles of discovery through shared experience (Strack et al. 2004), challenging power relations between researcher and those traditionally researched, the validity of lived experience as knowledge and the concept of producing knowledge which can be used towards creating positive change.

Such shifts in the social sciences towards participatory methods which challenge hierarchies and seek to include the subjects of research in its processes centre around questions of power and representation, asking for example who is representing whom, and to whose benefit? The relationship of participatory photography to its parent, documentary photography, is based on similar issues. Social documentary photographers and photojournalists working in a humanitarian and liberal tradition have traditionally used their cameras to document the plight of marginalized and persecuted groups around the world and publicise their stories to international audiences. Documentary photography has tended to represent the relatively powerless to the relatively powerful (Rose 2007, Rosler 1981)³². Despite the often positive motivations behind this, this raises issues of power, representation and voice. Similar to critiques of conventional research in the 1970s and 1980s, documentary photography also began to be challenged at this time. The idea that acts of looking and recording could be neutral, disinterested or innocent began to be rejected, and instead described in terms of the relations of power and control that they contained (Price 1996:103). Documentary photography could be seen to be reinforcing patriarchal values, with predominantly privileged male photographers pointing their cameras downwards towards working class and impoverished subjects,

³² In her essay 'In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)', Martha Rosler states that 'documentary, as we know it, carries (old) information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful' (Rosler 1981:179).

reinforcing a hegemonic imperialist power/powerless nexus and ‘complicit in the discourses which function to exert social control’ (Price 1996:105; see also Tagg 1988). It has been argued that documentary photographs are usually taken from the photographer’s outside perspective, and can thus fail to capture an insider perspective (Strack et al. 2004; Wang and Burris, 1994, 1997). More recently, alternatives have been sought to traditional documentary photography in which unequal power relations and issues of representation are addressed. As pointed out on the PhotoVoice³³ website:

This has led many photographers to work with participatory and collaborative methods where they develop a more involved relationship with their subject; sometimes working with them to create images, sometimes handing over the camera and supporting participants to create their own images (PhotoVoice 2012).

While participatory photography certainly doesn’t eliminate issues around power relations and representation, it does offer one means to explore, express and represent issues from an insider perspective.

Participatory photography, or photovoice, has been used both within and outside academic research in a range of different contexts, with different groups, and for different aims, although its use is still far from widespread. Along with other image based approaches to qualitative research, participatory photography gained credibility in the social sciences in the early 1990s (Kaplan et al. 2011). Participatory photography, or ‘photovoice’ was first developed and applied by Caroline Wang and colleagues as part of participatory needs assessment with women in a health context in Yunnan, China (Wang et al. 1996), and has since been used by them for health promotion and participatory needs assessment in various contexts in China and the USA, including with women’s groups (Wang 1999, Wang et al. 1996) and homeless people (Wang et al. 2000). They have written extensively on the theoretical underpinnings of the method, as well as its practical applications in various contexts (Wang 1999, Wang and Burris 1994, Wang et al. 1996, 1998). In addition to Caroline Wang and colleagues’ use of photovoice for participatory needs

³³ PhotoVoice here refers to the London based organization, found at www.photovoice.org. This differs from ‘photovoice’ as a term referring to this type of methodology.

assessments in health promotion (Wang 1999, 2003; Wang and Burris 1994; Wang et al. 1996, 1998), the method has been used, for example, as a tool for education (Kaplan et al. 2011) and children's literacy projects (Ewald and Lightfoot 2001), with youth groups (Wilson et al. 2007, Strack et al. 2004, Streng et al. 2004, Green and Kloos 2009) and women's groups (Wang 1999, Wang et al. 1996, McIntyre 2003). A documentary entitled *Born into Brothels* (2004) was made of Zana Briski's participatory photography project with the children of sex workers in Calcutta, India. Several other examples and literature of work using participatory photography can also be found on the PhotoVoice website (PhotoVoice 2012).

As well as the positive applications of participatory photography or 'photovoice' methods, there are also critiques of working in this way, and questions it is necessary to be aware of. Giving participants cameras does not automatically overcome power issues between researcher and researched, or artist and participants, or issues of representation. There are questions around the benefits for participants of such projects, and the sustainability of those benefits. Words such as 'empowerment', 'transformation' and 'positive change' are often used around participatory photography projects, as well as participatory projects more generally, which may lean towards patronizing, as well as be unrealistic. In terms of the public representation of the collaborative work, Ballerini argues that the messages that are conveyed from the work can tend to 'reinforce the status quo rather than question it' (1997:169). She also points out the 'complicity of photography in the processes of objectification and subjection' (1997:175), or as a tool for voyeurism or surveillance. In relation to these questions or critiques, there is also the question of whether this type of work can cause more harm than good to participants or communities. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, in relation to events occurring within this research project itself. Despite these important questions and critiques, I chose to work with participatory photography due to its power as a vehicle for discussion, for working collaboratively and creatively, and its potential to represent the issues being dealt with in an immediate and compelling way.

Visual methods in the social sciences and researching migration through collaborative photographic methods

This work is located, on the one hand, within the broad field of ‘visual methods’ in the social sciences. On the other hand, I locate it within the small but growing body of work which uses visual, or other creative or sense based approaches, to explore the experiences of and the spaces created by forced migration.

‘Visual methods’ in social science research refers to a range of methods and practices that involve the use of visual media and technologies at all stages of research (Pink 2004:1185. See also Banks 2001, Rose 2007). The usage and validation of visual methods as part of social science research methods has become more widespread since the 1990s. Pink (2004) points out two reasons for this: firstly a series of theoretical shifts which led to the recognition that the visual is not necessarily more subjective than verbal or written data; and secondly, the increased availability and accessibility of visual technologies. Visual methods are becoming increasingly popular in social science research. The ways in which they are used and understood, however, differs across the social sciences, informed by the theoretical and methodological priorities of each discipline.

The term ‘visual research’ or ‘visual methods’ covers a wide range of activities, categorized by Pink into the following: analysis of the content, process of production or use of existing visual images; production of visual images as part of a research project, either in collaboration with informants or not; use of images, either produced by informants or not, in interviewing to elicit responses from informants (often called ‘photo elicitation’ or ‘photo interviewing’); and visual observation of events and activities. The methodology used in this particular research falls into the broad second category of production of images as part of the research process, in collaboration with participants, ‘participatory visual research’. While the approach used here in part uses images to elicit responses from participants, it is different from ‘photo elicitation’ (see Harper 2002 for example) or ‘participatory photo interviewing’ (Kolb 2008, Hurworth 2003), in that it sought to use images as a means to *collaborate* with participants as far as possible, in all stages of the research. Rather than simply ‘eliciting’ responses from participants around a single image, or series of images, the project sought to use the visual, and more specifically photography, to

engage participants in collaborative creation of images and long term critical dialogue around these images.

As stated above, as well as locating this work within the broad field of ‘visual methods’, and more specifically as ‘participatory visual research’, I also locate it within the body of work which seeks to explore experiences of forced migration and the spaces it creates through the visual and creative, as well as to challenge essentialising or stereotyping representations around asylum seekers and refugees by creating alternative representations and narratives. In 1975, John Berger and John Mohr published ‘A Seventh Man’, a study of migrant workers in Europe, through a combination of photography and text. This was an attempt to bring the experience of the migrant worker closer to the reader. More recently, photography combined with different forms and degrees of participation or collaboration has been used to explore and challenge issues relating to migration, and the experiences of being a migrant.

As Jackson (2002) and Malkki (1996), among others, have pointed out, representations of refugees and asylum seekers, both visual and verbal, by others are far more common than words or images created by themselves:

The first thing to be noted about the mutual relationship between image and narrative, spectacle and self-representation, is that photographs and other visual representations of refugees are far more common than is the reproduction in print of what particular refugees have said (Malkki 1996:386).

Artistic and collaborative methods, such as participatory photography, provide a means to work directly with refugees and asylum seekers, creating spaces to explore and listen to their experiences and finding ways to foreground their voices, stories and opinions. Practitioners and researchers who work in this way attempt to counter the exclusion and stereotyping which many asylum seekers and refugees experience, and attempt to understand their experiences from their perspectives. Maggie O’Neill (2002, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010) uses a combination of ethnographic, narrative and artistic methods to explore complex issues around asylum and migration. This approach, which she calls ‘ethno-mimesis’ seeks to ‘privilege the voices of those

involved' and 'represent and imagine lived experience through 'feeling forms'' (O'Neill 2006:46). Photographer Melanie Friend, in her work 'Border Country' (2007, 2010) creates a dialectic of still photographs and recorded voices to document the invisible. Her haunting photographs of empty institutional waiting rooms in deportation centres in the UK serve as the backdrop to recorded testimonies of experience, excerpts of the conversations, stories and oral testimonies she recorded while spending time with residents of these centres; images of empty inhuman spaces juxtaposed with the intensely human recorded narratives of detainees. PhotoVoice have run several projects with newly arrived young asylum seekers and refugees in London (see Orton 2009) and Green and Kloos (2009) have worked through participatory photography methods with young people in Northern Uganda in a context of forced migration.

In the Irish context, Darcy Alexandra (2008a, 2008b, 2009) uses digital storytelling, a method which centres the voice of the storyteller and utilises both moving and still images to visually accompany the spoken word, in order to document the experiences and stories of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants in Ireland. For her, individually selecting a story and collaboratively producing the audiovisual expression of that tale presents new possibilities concerning the politics and ethics of storytelling (2008:101). Anthony Haughey (2009, 2010) has worked collaboratively with refugees and asylum seekers through various methods in Malta and Ireland to engage in a dialogical and transformative process, co-producing work that might communicate and transform. White et al. (2010) have used participatory photography combined with other visual methods to explore the social worlds of migrant children in Ireland. The work of FOMACS aims to 'amplify voices and personal/collective stories previously sensitized or marginalized in Irish dominant media representations of immigration' and to 'depict through audio, visual, print and online media the identity formations and social, cultural and political networks forged by economic migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and their families' (Grossman and O'Brien 2011:40). Grossman and O'Brien's edited collection 'Projecting Migration' (2007) brings to light work in which various media practitioners work collaboratively and creatively with research subjects to explore the everyday complexities of transnational migration.

Exploring, as well as (re)presenting, migration through visual, creative or artistic methods allows for a focus on the sensory and the subjective, and allows for the complexity and non linearity of the experiences of displacement and liminality. There is a need in geography, as well as across the social sciences, for methods which access the realms of subjective experience, and for more cross over with artistic approaches, as reflected in the literature. Law and Urry argue that social science methods

have difficulty in dealing with the *sensory* – that which is subject to vision, sound, taste, smell; with the *emotional* – time-space compressed outbursts of anger, pain, rage, pleasure, desire, or the spiritual; and the *kinaesthetic* – the pleasures and pains that follow the movement and displacement of people, objects, information and ideas’ (Law and Urry 2004:403).

In the ‘Art of Listening’, Back argues for an ‘imaginative engagement with the social world, utilizing a range of media, verbal and non-verbal forms of representation’ (Back 2007:7). In terms of exploring issues pertaining to refugees, O’Neill argues that ‘we need innovative methodologies to analyse the new governance, the dynamics of forced migration, humiliation, and processes of exile, displacement and belonging’ (O’Neill 2008:15). Levitt et al. state that ‘the memories, stories and artistic creations that are harnessed to express transnational membership ought not to be overlooked, even if they fall outside the purview of traditional research methods’ (Levitt et al. 2003:571), and in another paper, Levitt and Jaworsky state that ‘the power of art and culture allows migrants to express, create, remember and recreate identity, whether individually or collectively, whether national or hybrid’ (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:140).

Creative approaches allow for a shift away from dominantly linguistic frameworks, which may limit the expression of sensory experiences. In this research, I seek to move beyond verbal testimony, the means by which asylum seekers are asked on arrival in the ‘host’ country to ‘prove’ that they are ‘genuine refugees’ and by which they are more often than not refused protection. The move away from dependency on language is important in a multicultural setting and allows participants to explore the issues to be dealt with within the research project through visual and other sensory

methods developed over an expanded time frame, and to have the possibility of responding outside the linguistic framework of the researcher. I seek to move towards a more embodied and sensuous research, or a 'sensuous scholarship' (Stoller 1997), using participatory photography as a 'passageway to processes of subjectivisation' (Pollock 2008:255), exploring everyday life and subjective experience. In defense of an aesthetic approach to researching subjective experience, I cite Félix Guattari: 'Our intentions need to consist of conveying the human sciences and the social sciences from scientific paradigms to ethical-aesthetic paradigms' (Guattari cited in Bourriaud 2002:96).

As well as seeking to explore the everyday subjective experiences which lie behind the label or 'convenient images' (Wood 1985, cited in Zetter 1991:44) of 'asylum seeker' through the creation of images and text, the project aimed to work towards creating alternative understandings and images to dominant essentialising understandings which could be disseminated among broader or targeted audiences. The constant feeding of convenient or stereotyped representations of asylum seekers through words or images in media or government discourse not only create the illusion that such labels are neutral or natural, as discussed in Chapter One, but also create negative affect in those exposed to it. The concept of 'affect' allows us to explore and better understand how perception of asylum seekers is formed through the 'drip-drip-drip of negative stories and alarmist headlines' (O'Neill 2010b:132). Affect is that which is felt before it is thought; it has a visceral impact on the body before it is given subjective or emotive meaning (Hickey Moody et al 2007:8). Hickey-Moody et al tell us that:

The production of affect has both ethical and political opinions because affect determines the way in which a subject is approached. It provides, for example, the unconscious set of assumptions that motivate an embodied response to a woman in a hijab, or a person with a disability (Hickey-Moody et al 2007:8).

Tyler, following Ahmed, looks at the way signs become 'sticky' with repetitive use, allowing us to see 'how the figure of the asylum-seeker takes shape through the stickiness of signs used to produce them as a figure' (Tyler 2006:191). In being produced in a particular way, the figure of the asylum seeker has become 'sticky

with grotesque qualities; qualities that invoke fear, anger and disgust amongst 'native' communities. It is the repetition of these imagined qualities that shapes public perceptions of asylum-seekers' (Tyler 2006:191).

With the 'unique communicative and social power that the arts can exert within the public sphere' (Cieri 2004:2, cited in Pain 2004:655), the creation of words and images by asylum seekers themselves and exposed to local audiences may help to counter or challenge negative affect. Following Deleuze, Hickey-Moody et al. tell us that 'art provides one of the most important sites for revolutionary affect' (Hickey-Moody et al 2007:9).

The power of art lies in its capacity to produce 'blocs of sensation' that operate differently to the organized world of political opinion, identity as reason. In the same way that the 'grotesque qualities' which may be associated with asylum seekers through the 'drip drip' effect of negative representation are often beyond reason, art and the visual has the potential to create positive affect in its viewers, through communicating at a level which is embodied and sensuous (appealing to the senses), potentially creating new associations and new organized patterns of affect amongst its viewers (Hickey-Moody et al. 2007:9).

Participatory photography is one means of moving towards a more democratic means of representation, creating visual representations *by* refugees, alongside their words and voices. By working collaboratively with asylum seekers through artistic and creative methods, we can create 'dialogic texts' (Bakhtin 1981), a means of creating dialogue with broader audiences in order to communicate, create awareness, challenge 'identity thinking' (O'Neill 2008, 2010b:144) and stereotypes surrounding asylum seekers and work towards creating alternative representations.

Planning and structuring the collaborative project

The project was planned with an attempt to strike a balance between structure and space for open-ness, negotiation and joint planning. Two elements of the project required that there was a certain amount of clear structure. Firstly, the time frame for the 'fieldwork' part of project, at approximately four months, was very short. I was

very aware of the amount of work that had to be fitted into this short period. The importance of sufficient time is often referred to in projects of a collaborative or participatory nature, with lack of funding and the time pressure associated with research projects hindering this (see for example Kesby 2005, Mackenzie et al. 2007). As Pain states, the defining characteristic of participatory research is ‘not so much the methods and techniques employed, but the degree of engagement of participants within and beyond the research encounter’ (Pain and Francis 2003:46). This degree of engagement often depends on issues related to available funding and time. In a discussion around the conditions for collaborative art projects, Kester states that:

Discourse, and the trust necessary for discursive interaction and identification, grow out of a sustained relationship in time and space, the co-participation in specific material conditions of existence (Kester 2000:5).

The limited time period for this project meant maintaining an awareness of this while making the most productive use of the time available. Secondly, the project contained the element of developing basic skills in photography. An important aspect of the project from the beginning was the sharing of knowledge and the opportunity for participants to develop skills in photography and visual awareness. In order to carry this out, a clear structure was needed, which could be flexible enough to add or remove elements as the project progressed.

The broad structure which I used for this project is based on my own development and adaptation of participatory photography projects with migrant groups since 2006, and on the experiences and guidelines of PhotoVoice through working and training with them, and as outlined in their practical manual (2007). The details of the structure are adapted for the specific project. PhotoVoice (2007:76) sets out four strands of workshop content: establishing group dynamic and goals, introduction to photography, ‘speaking out’ through photography and strengthening and personalizing the message. Based on and incorporating these strands, I have based the structure of my own projects on four main overlapping stages. The first stage consists of setting up a safe space in which to work with the group and establishing a group dynamic. A ‘safe space’ is a space in which participants feel comfortable, and

feel as if they can speak freely without being judged by any other member of the group. This includes clear explanations about the aims of the project and the intended and potential uses of any outcomes of the project, as well as distribution of a camera to each participant which they ‘own’ for the duration of the project. Issues of consent, as well as responsibilities and rights are dealt with here. In order for successful collaboration and co-creation, participants must be able to work together and feel comfortable in each other’s presence. The first stages of a group dynamic can be put into place early on in the project, but this is also something which develops as the project progresses. A ‘safe space’ and group dynamic are created here partly using methods based on Boal’s ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ (Boal 1979)³⁴, which include theatre and movement, as well as the use of photographs and other visual material to stimulate discussion. As part of this process, a ‘contract’ is created, in which participants suggest guidelines which they think would help the group to work better together. This is a tool also used in Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed methodology (Boal 1979).

The second stage focuses on the development of visual awareness through the use of visual materials and an introduction to basic techniques of photography. Simultaneously, themes relating to the overall issue or focus of the project are discussed, allowing for conversations and stories to emerge and develop. The third stage, which occurs simultaneously with the second stage, both being ongoing throughout the process, focuses on the creation of images inspired by the stories, discussions and themes emerging in workshops. Participants take a specified number of photographs each week, or in between sessions, in their own time, related to the theme or themes discussed in the session of that week. In the following session, participants choose the images which they feel best represent what they wish to say, thereby owning the editorial process, and subsequently narrate or create text around these images. The participants thus gradually build up a body of work consisting of images and text around the issues and themes discussed. Through the editing process, as well as through discussing or writing about their work, the individual voice of

³⁴ Theatre of the Oppressed is a series of theatrical methods and critique developed in Brazil by practitioner Augusto Boal, and described in his 1979 book *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Boal was influenced by the work of Paulo Freire and used theatre as a tool for social and political change. Theatre of the Oppressed is based on dialogue and interaction between audience and performer(s), using a dialectic rather than didactic approach to promote change.

each participant in relation to their work is strengthened. The final stage consists of the exhibition or dissemination of the body of work created by participants, thus communicating the issues raised through the project to a broader audience. The location, framing and form of the exhibition or dissemination depend entirely on the context and aims of the specific project.

As I have said above, the approach was designed to be as dialogical and collaborative as possible, allowing for the process and its outcomes to emerge from the encounter between researcher and participants, and between the participants themselves. In helping to make sense of the dialogical and processual nature of this work, as well as the processes of framing and creating meaning from it, Grant Kester's work on 'dialogical aesthetics' (2000, 2004) was useful, both during and after the collaborative project. Dialogical aesthetics, as conceptualized by Kester, refers to art which is based around and created by conversational exchange, whether this is focused around, or mediated by, the creation of a physical object or not. The concept of dialogical art practice stems from the work of literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), who argued that the work of art or the text can be seen as a kind of conversation, a locus of different meanings, interpretations and points of view. In 'dialogical art', the work is created through dialogue, on the one hand between participants or between the practitioner and participants, and on the other with the broader structures, discourses and issues which surround the work, i.e. through constant dialogue with the social, cultural and political contexts of the project. While the focus is on the creation of an art work, it is these various dialogues and processes which create the work, and which are therefore inherent within it: the art work is, as Kester states, 'a process as well as a physical product and specifically a process rooted in a discursively mediated encounter' (Kester 2000:3). Dialogical aesthetics aims to provide a critical framework for art which is centred around exchange or dialogue, or for activist and community-based art for which conversational exchange is an important element; work which is contextualized and socially engaged. Dialogical aesthetics describes works which are context driven, socially engaged and dialogue based, challenging fixed categorical systems and instrumentalizing modes of thought (2004:90) through the aesthetic, and understanding the work of art as a process of communicative exchange rather than solely a physical object (2004:90).

For Kester, dialogical art works between institutions and between discourses, operating outside of both the discursive presuppositions and the institutional sites of the 'art world' and art audiences. In the same way as dialogical art operates between institutions, usually outside of traditional art institutions and audiences, participatory and creative research operates outside, as well as inside, the realms of academic institutions, and thus often disseminates the knowledge to broader audiences. An awareness of Kester's work helped to create the links in this research project between collaborative work which is creative in nature and social science research through focusing on the processual dialogical nature of the work, as well as the processes of creating meaning from work which is both process oriented and produces material outcomes.

Running the project/being in the space

With this need for balance between structure and openness in mind in order to allow the process and its outcomes emerge from the 'encounter', the first eight sessions of the project, meeting on a weekly basis for approximately three hours, consisted of a combination of exploring basic photographic skills, the development of visual awareness through looking at and describing images, and the discussion of specific themes for participants to work with during the week. Development of group dynamics and space for feedback and discussion around the project itself were also incorporated.

As two key aspects of the project were communication through photographs and the use of photographs as vehicles for dialogue, development of visual awareness and the ability to articulate around images were an important part of the project. In order to develop this dialogue through and with photographs, we began by looking at photographs taken by other photographers, firstly discussing what could be seen in the image, and then discussing what was being communicated, or what one might feel or think about by looking at and exploring the image. By looking at a single photograph collectively, participants could explore how one image can speak differently to different people, and how we impose our own understandings onto an image, depending on our cultural backgrounds, education, gender, age or subjective experience of that photograph. This was an important step in beginning to think

about how photographs created during the project may be interpreted differently by different audiences or in different contexts at a later stage.

The plan for exploring photographic and camera skills was based on structures I have developed and adapted for previous participatory photography projects, influenced by the work of PhotoVoice and other participatory photography practitioners (see for example Ewald and Lightfoot 2001). The structure was adapted for this specific project. This included basic tools of composition, lighting and use of the camera itself, as well as techniques for photographing people, objects and landscapes. As participants began to take photographs themselves, these photographs were used as the basis for further discussion, the exploration and analysis of images shifting to these, rather than being based on the work of other photographers. Through the images, we were able to comment on technical errors, explore how to improve images, and discuss each other's work. This allowed for the development of individual style and a reduction of the imposition of the cultural visual norms of the researcher.

Throughout the four months, a double trajectory was traced; the gradual development of visual awareness as well as technical knowledge and practice of photography, was combined with discussions around various themes and issues: identity, belonging and the daily experiences of being in Ireland as an asylum seeker, living in the direct provision system and navigating the asylum system. As I have discussed above, exploring and understanding individual, subjective and everyday experiences is one means of stepping behind the label of 'asylum seeker', which essentialises, homogenizes and stereotypes a very diverse group of people. The aim was that during each session a theme would be discussed by the group, which participants would then have time to think about and develop during the week and photograph in whatever way made sense to them. I developed a number of broad themes or topics in order to begin the process. I hoped that these themes could stimulate interest and kick-start discussions, which would in turn lead to further themes and topics decided on a collaborative basis or emerging from the preliminary ones. I was also aware that from these broader themes, sub-themes or more specific ones may begin to emerge. I began with suggesting that participants take ten photographs documenting their 'typical day'. The second theme consisted of taking photographs of things

participants liked and things they disliked about where they lived. These themes began the processes of documenting and exploring everyday experiences and immediate environments, and expressing opinions and feelings through the images and the subsequent description of these images. The sessions became a 'dialogic space' (Tolia-Kelly 2007): exchange of ideas and experiences through exploration and critique of the photographs which began to emerge, as well as the storytelling, debate and discussions which led from these.

In each session, time was made for each participant to discuss their photographs, or a selection of these, with the group. Photographs were projected on to the wall, and each photographer described the background to the photograph, its meaning to him or her, and why he had taken it in relation to the particular theme or discussion that week. Others then commented on and critiqued the photograph, both in terms of content and technique. This also served to develop the dynamics of the group, and to gradually create trust and rapport between its members. All sessions were audio recorded and later transcribed. By the fourth session, one participant had commented on how the images were starting to speak to her, that the process of having to speak to and about her own images and listening to others speaking about theirs was making the photographs come alive for her. This emphasized the importance of making time to look through all photos during the sessions, and having people listen to each other's stories and opinions.

Descriptions of each image by the photographers became the captions that went alongside the images, gradually creating a body of image-text as the project progressed. Captions, or accompanying texts, are important for this type of work for several reasons, at the point of collaboratively producing the work and during the processes of co-creating meaning from the work which is created, as well as for communicating the intentions of the photographer to broader audiences at a later stage. The processes of describing photographs, and explaining their meaning by the photographer him or herself, allows participants to focus on what they are photographing, and understand better how to communicate meaning and intention. The importance of captions is described in the PhotoVoice manual:

The power of an image can be dramatically increased by a strong caption. Captions may include details about where and when the picture was taken and of whom – the subject's name may give additional strength and intimacy to a photograph and can be used if appropriate. However, captions can do more than simply explain non-visual elements of the picture. Strong captions tell the viewer something about the photographer's intentions or what a photograph means to them, and enable the audience to empathise (PhotoVoice 2007:95).

In addition to this, captions can be important where political advocacy is concerned, helping an audience to understand the photographer's intentions more clearly, and putting culturally specific visual references into context (see PhotoVoice 2007:94).

As the project progressed, the themes did emerge from the 'dialogic space' of the workshops, through discussions, previous photographs, or direct suggestions by participants of what they felt they wanted to explore and discuss. The themes were not designed to limit or categorise the photographs, but were rather catalysts for discussions and further themes to arise. More conceptual themes were mixed in with practical topics, such as photographing people and issues of consent and ethics that are part of this, photographing movement, and various aspects of composition. Other topics included exploring aspects of identity, self portraits and representing the self through photography, portraits of other people, community, the future, and finding ways to photograph senses and emotions. As mentioned above, these themes served as catalysts for discussion, and lenses through which subjective experiences of everyday life and place could be explored. Some topics were easier to discuss than others, and some yielded more photographs or more lively discussions afterwards than others. Others needed to be broken down, unpacked in more detail beforehand. The project gradually emerged from itself, constantly having to be reviewed and re-structured as ideas emerged and changed, and different needs were addressed.

About half way through the project, I introduced the idea of storytelling and narrative through photographs, as well as the idea of working on a personal 'project'. Through a series of games and exercises, working alone and in groups, participants looked at how photographs can be used in a sequence in order to create a thread or a narrative.

This began the process of each person creating their own narrative on a topic that interested them, going a bit more deeply into a subject of their own choice, and also to use their voices to record narrations of these stories. This process also provided the framework for a different way of using images and of describing them. I wanted this process to be very personal, and for participants not to feel that they were obliged to focus solely on their experiences of migration or of asylum, as I felt that this would limit how they worked, and could lead to a reiteration of the label of ‘asylum seeker’ and the essentialising and homogenizing effects of this. I also wanted this process to be enjoyable for the participants, and for it to lead them down a personal track. Jackson (2002:39/40) argues that stories are crucial to the process of re-empowerment, and that ‘by enabling dialogues that encompass different points of view the act of sharing stories helps us create a world that is more than the sum of its individual parts’. The idea was to develop these stories over a period of a few weeks, basing the ideas on a single photograph that they had already taken, and that particularly ‘spoke’ to them, and developing from there. The process of beginning the stories marked, for me, a change in the momentum of the project, as if the project was taken out of my hands at that moment and shifted into those of the participants. The more outspoken of the group tended towards more ‘political’ stories: experiences and rights of asylum seekers, problems with direct provision, experiences of migration. The surprising ones were the quieter, less confident people who shared detailed vignettes reflecting experiences of migration and their lives in Ireland in personal and perhaps more hidden ways (see digital stories contained in Appendix Two).

The process of creating stories was different for each person according to their skills, needs and abilities, and not everyone ended up completing the process. Some wrote a ‘script’ or narrative first and then took photographs to illustrate it. For some the photographs were directly related to the words, for others it was more abstract. For one participant, due to a lack of confidence with her written English, we needed to write the script together, a short piece of writing based on her ideas. I wrote it as she spoke, trying to keep as close to how she expressed things as possible. We read it together and she changed parts or added other bits. She initially said she wouldn’t speak the story and preferred to have a written version rather than a voice recording. Once the piece of writing was done, however, she began to feel more confident and

asked if she could try to record, just to see what it felt like. She practiced the piece a few times and then recorded it. She was happy when it was done, and it felt like real progress to her (see digital stories contained in Appendix Two).

As the project developed, its boundaries moved beyond the Monday morning 'sessions'. I began to spend more time in the centre, often staying to eat lunch with the residents in the dining room after the sessions, and chatting to people into the afternoon. As people began to work on their individual stories and projects, I spent time with them individually, answering questions, helping them to choose photographs and develop ideas, and eventually to record their voices narrating their stories. My access to the centre became somewhat unlimited as residents and staff became used to my presence, and my relationship with participants gradually became easy and informal, with a certain sense of trust developing over time, as I became more aware and involved in the daily life of the centre and as we discussed and shared information and experiences beyond the scope of the project as such. The informal conversations with participants, and sometimes other residents, were an important part of helping me to understand their experiences, as well as of developing this sense of trust. For the most part, these were not recorded due to their informal and spontaneous nature, and so I noted down what I retained when I left them in a 'field diary'.

Participation, power and ethics

The issue of ethics was an important part of this project, as it is of any research which includes working directly with people, in particular people in vulnerable or marginalized situations. An ethical approach implies a certain reflexivity on the part of the researcher, a:

careful and consistent awareness of what the researcher is doing, why, and with what possible consequences in terms of the power relations between researcher and researched (Rose 2007:253).

This awareness begins in the planning stages of the project, in the processes of applying for ethical approval and accessing the participants and the space for

research, and then at the point of beginning the project, making the rights and responsibilities of participants clear, and clear to them. It is inherent throughout the research process, in each decision that is made, and in the acknowledgement of power relations between researcher and participants, and the ways in which knowledge is created and used. And it continues into the way the material is framed and used at a later stage. There are also particular ethical issues relative to working visually, and working through the method of participatory photography.

My decision to attempt to access a direct provision centre directly, rather than through the RIA, came under scrutiny when applying for ethical consent from the university ethics committee. The aim of ethical consent in a situation where research concerns working directly with people is to protect those people from exploitation or harm³⁵. The committee stated in an email to me that:

The committee has learned, and wants to make sure that the researcher is aware, that any research carried out in an asylum seeker accommodation site should have the permission of the Reception and Integration Agency (<http://www.ria.gov.ie/>). This is because the persons in the asylum determinations process are under the ad hoc protection of the RIA, so it is an issue of security. Accommodation sites are often semi-private (private contractors), or locally managed; however, the responsibility for audit-level management and for security rests with the Reception and Integration Agency, so permission from the hostel manager would not be authoritative (*email 19 April 2010, NUIM ethics committee*).

The ‘functions and responsibilities’ section of the RIA website does not state anything around protection and security of individuals living in the direct provision system (RIA 2010c). And while the RIA provides accommodation and food to asylum seekers in Ireland, it does not have the right to determine the activities that individuals living in this system take part in. The informed consent of individual adults should be sufficient to take part in a participatory research project. It is moreover extremely important that individuals seeking asylum have access to the

³⁵ The Social Research Ethics Sub-Committee reviews research projects that involve human participants and personally-identifiable information about human beings in order to determine if the proposed research is ethically sound and does not present any risk of harm to research participants (<http://research.nuim.ie/support-services/research-ethics/SSRESC>).

right to speak out and have their voices heard as individuals without that access being controlled by the RIA or any other body. As Article 10 of the European Convention of Human rights (European Court of Human Rights/Council of Europe 1950/2010) states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive or impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

While workshops for the participatory research project could have taken place outside the direct provision centre in order to circumvent the stipulations of the RIA regarding research in direct provision centres, not only would this have changed the nature of the project, but it may also have severely limited who could take part, as I discussed in Chapter Two. I felt that the permission of hostel management for the researcher's presence at the direct provision centre should be sufficient to carry out the project within a space provided by the direct provision centre. Having expressed these issues to the ethics committee, ethical consent was eventually granted for the project to go ahead.

The rights and responsibilities of participants in the project were dealt with primarily through informed consent, in the form of an information sheet and form to be read and signed by participants on commencing the project, during the period of the creating a 'safe space'. This form was based on ethical protocols developed by the university ethics committee, and adapted for the participatory photography project. The information sheet/consent form (see Appendix Three) contained: 1) aims of the project, 2) affiliation of project to the university and the fact that it was part of doctoral research, 3) plan for the project, duration and broad outline of content for workshops, 4) potential or hoped for benefits of project for participants, 5) rights and responsibilities of participants, including the voluntary nature of participation in the project and the freedom to withdraw at any point, 6) potential uses of images, rights of participants to withdraw images at any point and to retain copies of all images, and anonymity and confidentiality 7) information regarding audio recording of

sessions and storage of data, 8) names and contact details of researcher, research supervisor and university ethics committee. This information and form were read through and explained thoroughly to participants during the first session, after which forms were signed. It was not necessary to translate it as all participants had a sufficiently high level of understanding of English. However, certain concepts had to be explained in more detail to ensure that everyone felt they had understood everything.

‘Image ethics’ (Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001), or the moral rights of subjects, is an important area when working visually. Wang and Redwood Jones state that a hallmark of photovoice training is to provide a workshop, before introducing participants to camera instruction, that begins with group discussion on the use of cameras, power, and ethics (2001:569). Certain ethical issues are context based, referring specifically to the particular project in question. Clark et al. (2010) refer to this as a ‘situated’ approach to ethics. However, there are basic moral ethics around photographing people which were discussed throughout the project (see PhotoVoice 2007:85 on dealing with this issue), in particular respecting people’s right to privacy, and issues around photographing children (see Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001 for a comprehensive discussion of ethical issues arising in photovoice work, also Prins 2010, Kaplan et al. 2011).

Feminist approaches to research are strongly based on a feminist approach to ethics. Feminist approaches to ethics challenge culturally masculine traits and male ways of moral reasoning, such as rules, rights, justice, universality and impartiality, favoured by traditional ethics, and are based around more feminine cultural traits, such as interdependence, community, process, connection, and feminine ways of moral reasoning, such as relationships, responsibility and particularity (see Jaggar 2000). Feminist ethics rethink the ontological and epistemological assumptions on which traditional ethics are based, and focus on improving conditions for women, and other vulnerable, marginalized or oppressed groups in society. Emerging from and influenced by feminist ethics is feminist care ethics (Gilligan 1982, Noddings 1984), a moral perspective arising from women’s experience of caring for others. Rather than being based on abstract concepts such as justice and benevolence, the values

central to feminist care ethics are responsibility, relationships, context and particularity:

Care ethics begin with a social ontology of connection: foregrounding social relationships of mutuality and trust (rather than dependence). Care ethics understands all social relations as contextual, partial, attentive, responsive, and responsible (Lawson 2007:3).

An understanding of care ethics brings moral and ethical understandings from the universal or abstract to the specific.

Attention to care ethics, rather than simply continuing our focus on justice prompts us to extend our work beyond the theoretically and politically important notions of justice as a universal right. This extension involves understanding that care ethics cannot be practiced or theorized in the abstract, rather care ethics looks at the specific sites and social relationships that produce the need for care and that frame the specific content of care ethics (Lawson 2007:3).

At the same time, an ethics of care can be seen to move beyond the environments and spaces of caregiving to an ethical standpoint and theoretical perspective:

From this perspective, care is more than simply a social relation with moral or ethical dimensions; it can also be the basis for an alternative ethical standpoint, with implications for how we view traditional notions of citizenship and politics (Popke 2006:506).

Caring in this sense, Popke continues, is ‘not so much an activity as an attitude or orientation, a way of relating to to others characterized by values of compassion and a ‘normative concern for inclusion’ (Staeheli and Brown 2003:773)’ (Popke 2006:506). In a special issue around geographies of care and welfare, Staeheli and Brown highlight and bring together work originating from a feminist ethic which ‘refuses to partition care from justice or rationality’ (2003:773). The ‘normative concern for inclusion’ which feminist ethics are based around leads, they argue, to an ‘enlarged landscape of moral concern and care’ (ibid). Fisher and Tronto (1990:40) have described care in this broad sense as ‘a species activity that includes everything

that we do to maintain, continue and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible’. An exploration of care ethics in this sense allows for a deeper understanding of the approach to this work and the ways in which decisions during this particular project were framed and made.

The most important aspects of an ethical approach in this particular situation were, for me, firstly, protecting participants from being harmed or made vulnerable in any way as a result of the research, and secondly, maintaining an awareness of, and working with, power relations between the researcher and the participants. The first, while being an important part of decision making from the planning stages of the project onward, particularly emerged when it came to representing the work we had created to public audiences, and continues to do so as we continue to look at how we can use this material. (This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter Five.)

Critiques of the ethics of care, as Darling (2011:414) points out, ‘centre upon the willingness, and crucially the ability, to give to others as an assertion of power and control’. While care ethics centre around connection and a mutual trust, rather than dependence, as Lawson points out (above), it is also necessary to be aware of potential asymmetries of power when some members of this relationship are in a vulnerable situation. Protection, vulnerability and power relations are inextricably linked. In the context of an ethnographic study of a drop in centre for asylum seekers in the UK, Darling challenges the ‘uncritical affirmation of care and generosity as a response to asylum’ (2011:409), pointing out that generosity and care were structured in relationships which centred on a particular image of the asylum seeker, that of the ‘vulnerable, dependent and rightless victim of the state’ (2011:414). While the approach to the project described in this thesis centred around participation, collaboration and processes of co-creation, rather than care in the immediate sense (as in the drop in centre described by Darling), an exploration of literature, as well as critiques, around care ethics, has helped to make sense of the overall approach to ethics here and why decisions were made in a certain way, as well as why such decisions and discussions around them at times felt difficult. With this in mind, I look in more detail at the issue of power relations, in particular in relation to participatory work, in some more detail here.

While at times I use ‘participation’ and ‘collaboration’ interchangeably, the focus of this work is more on collaboration; for me, while participation means including the participants in the research processes, collaboration implies a form of ‘complicit action’ (Haughey 2010:8) in which participants and researcher are involved in a process of dialogue and the co-creation of knowledge towards positive change. For Rose (2007:252), collaborative research means:

doing research *with* your respondents or informants, rather than *on* them. It means acknowledging their own skills and understandings and being open to those skills and understandings mediating and altering your own.

The concept of ‘complicit action’ brings another layer into the meaning of collaboration. For me, a collaborative approach in this sense was extremely important in a research project which sought to explore and attempt to better understand the experiences of asylum seekers living in the direct provision system from their own perspectives, to critically explore and challenge stereotyping, marginalisation and inequality and through this, to create representations of asylum seekers which might challenge those which currently dominate. As Rose also points out, ‘clearly the process of collaboration has to extend beyond the site and moment of producing an image, to the sites of its content and audiencing as well’ (2007:252). (See Chapter Five for discussions on representation and audiencing in relation to collaborative work).

The participatory and collaborative nature of the photography project attempts to act in opposition to the non-participatory nature of the asylum system and of the processes of labelling and homogenization and the intricate power relations inherent in this system. During the project, and while writing about it, it has been important to counter the lack of transparency around power relations inherent in the asylum system with transparency around those inherent in the research process. In line with feminist activist approaches to research, I used a participatory methodology, with focus on process rather than outcome, in order to challenge unequal power relations in the research process and flatten the hierarchy between researcher and researched, remaining aware of the ‘non-innocent’ and performative nature of research. Despite this, no method is without its power relations. Underpinning all discussions around

participatory approaches, and connecting the various ways in which participation is understood is the concept of power (Dona 2007). Despite the positive aspects of research which is more participatory and less hierarchical in its approach, there is also critique around participatory approaches and their apparent emancipatory benefits, particularly from post structural writers among others (see Kesby 2005) and in particular around claims that participation overcomes power issues (Kesby 2007). Rather than assuming that a participatory approach will overcome the power imbalances between researcher and researched, it is perhaps more useful to take a post structural approach which understands 'participation as enmeshed in power, rather than free from it' (Kesby 2007:2827), and to remain aware of this and to explore it, rather than to assume that power issues have been overcome simply through the use of a participatory approach. Cahill similarly sees an interrogation of power as 'central to a participatory practice concerned with social change' and the space of participatory research as a 'contact zone' (Pratt 1992, cited in Cahill 2007:275): 'a space of encounter where differently situated people 'meet, clash and grapple with each other' (ibid) across their varying relationships to power' (Cahill 2007:275).

One means of acknowledging power relations inherent in the research process is to remain transparent about one's own position as researcher and facilitator of this process, of the situated and privileged nature of this role. For Spivak (1990:9), an ethical relation between a privileged individual intending to represent a subaltern or marginalized subject involves an 'unlearning' of one's privileges, a process of interrogation of one's prejudices and blindspots and recognition of self-imposed limitations in order to overcome them and to be open to the 'Other' (Landry and MacLean 1996:2):

To unlearn our privileges means, on the one hand, to do our homework, to work hard at gaining some knowledge of the others who occupy those spaces most closed to our privileged view. On the other hand, it means attempting to speak to those others in such a way that they might take us seriously and, most important of all, be able to answer back (Landry and Maclean 1996:4/5).

While a collaborative approach was an important part of this project, it was also necessary to remain aware of the power dynamics inherent in the different positions of researcher and participants, as well as the fact that the writing up of the research would ultimately not be a collaborative process. In the context of collaborative art, Kester explains that the failure of the artist to engage in critical self reflection regarding her own ideology and situatedness in working particularly with marginalized groups, combined with ‘the perceived authority to heedlessly transgress boundaries of class, race and privilege’ (Kester 2000:5), can lead to a situation of speaking for others, engaging in discursive acts ‘on behalf of’ any number of disenfranchised ‘others’ (Kester 2000:5). As researchers or artists, we must be aware of tendencies to attempt to speak for or represent a specific community, however positive the intentions. Bourdieu (1991:215) similarly warns of the problem of delegation, where an artist or researcher adopts the role of representing a specific community. This may lead either to a ‘salvage paradigm’ (Kester 2000:7) where ‘the artist takes on the task of ‘improving’ the implicitly flawed subject’ (ibid) or to what Maggie O’Neill calls an ‘aesthetics of injury’ (O’Neill 2010c) whereby the artist or researcher causes more damage than good to the participants. Dialogic encounter can at least try to problematise and challenge the problems of representation and counter the power dynamics inherent in this through a collaborative and transparent approach, as well as to directly challenge, or at least expose, contradictory and illusory ‘democratic’ processes within civic society which exclude participation and create situations of ‘inclusive exclusion’.

One means of remaining aware of and interrogating my own role, as well as my own prejudices and blindspots in the collaborative process was by keeping a personal diary. This was a space where I could reflect on what was happening as the project developed and express doubts, emotions and issues or events which occurred. The main purposes of this diary were, on the one hand, to document the process as I went along, to take note of small details before they were forgotten in the ‘bigger picture’; and, on the other hand, to maintain an awareness of my own subjectivity, my own part in the project and the processes which were occurring within me as the project developed. I wanted to record my own reactions and try to maintain awareness of how they were affecting the project. While I wrote this diary in a mainly unstructured

way in order for thoughts to flow freely, I drew at times on Darren Newbury's 'Diaries and Fieldnotes in the Research Process' (2001). One strategy for diary organization that Newbury outlines is that of Schatzman and Strauss (1973) who advocate an approach which 'packages' material into three categories: observational, theoretical and methodological notes, encouraging interplay between theoretical concepts, field observations and subjective experience. This helped to differentiate between different types of notes or thoughts I was recording, and to explore as I went along how they may relate to each other, or contradict each other. In the following two chapters, I include several small excerpts from this diary. Often these are notes taken after conversations with participants which were not recorded, but in which comments by them are made (and later noted by me), or in which I have made a particular observations, which I feel are important to include. Sometimes excerpts from the diary are included alongside comments by participants which were recorded, in order to give a sense of the multiple simultaneous versions of reality, and to attempt to provide a polyphonic version of the 'story'.

The second major way in which I was forced to remain aware of and interrogate my own role was through the processes of continuous dialogic encounter which occurred throughout the project. My own ideas, suggestions and preconceptions not only of the work we were creating visually and verbally together and of the aims of the project itself, but also of the asylum system and experiences of this were continuously challenged, and I was forced to be aware of my own conditionings and preconceptions, as well as my condition of privilege, and be willing to adapt them. I worked through these challenges on the one hand through my personal fieldwork diary, and on the other hand, by adapting the structure of the project, as well as my preconceptions of it, continuously to the needs and questions which were emerging.

No matter how much unequal power relations are addressed through the collaborative approach and the use of participatory photography during the processes of research or creation, it is also necessary to be aware that these may remain or be reimposed at a later stage when the work moves outside the boundaries of the project space, to contexts of reception by various audiences or analysis. Referring to the shift in power relations from documentary photography to forms of participatory

photography, in her essay 'Post-documentary, post-photography?', artist Martha Rosler points out that 'with work that circulates publicly, relying on giving the camera to the subjects underestimates the shaping effect of institutions and the context of reception, which are likely to reimpose the unequal power relationship banished from the photographic transaction' (Rosler 2004:228). She also points out that while having the potential to 'project a powerful idea of the subject's desired self-image', such methods may have positivistic tendencies, by obtaining testimony but only limited analysis (2004:228). She further explains this by saying that:

This is not to suggest that people are unequipped to describe or understand their own situations, but only a reminder that there is a dimension of one's own situation and behaviour that is not available to consciousness, not to mention the comparative knowledge that others may bring to a situation (Rosler 2004:243).

This points to the importance of being aware of audience, or potential audience, in work that will enter the public realm, and the ways in which different audiences might react to, or even affect, the work. Rose (2007) points out that while much attention has been paid to the site of production of images/photographs in critical visual methodologies, little has been paid to the site of audiencing:

Although great care is often taken in terms of how the research informants relate to photos, the other audience for the photos – the audience when the research is presented – is rarely considered in this work (Rose 2007:256).

Again, Kester's work on dialogical art has been useful in highlighting the importance of audience, and the ways in which audience may be incorporated into the overall meaning of the work. The process of dialogical art (see Kester 2000, 2004) considers audiences as an inherent part of the work, either directly or indirectly, with the audience, or potential audience, affecting its creation, development and meaning. A dialogical aesthetic approach allows for the reactions or potential reactions of the audience to be incorporated into the overall work. This is an important aspect of work which seeks to challenge dominant or stereotyped views of marginalized or silenced groups, and emerged during this project particularly at the point of preparing

work for public exhibition (see Chapter Five for more detailed discussion on this in relation to the collaborative project).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on the process of creating the space for research, and the theoretical and epistemological background to my approach to creating this space. I have attempted to situate my use of participatory photography as a research method within broader shifts in the social sciences towards participatory and collaborative methods on the one hand, and an increase in visual and creative methods on the other. I have described the methods I used to create the space for research with the participants in the research process, and the process of creating a space which was creative and dialogic, a 'potential space'. I explore some of the ethical issues which arose during the process of creating this space for research, and discuss the overall ethical approach, looking in particular at literature around feminist care ethics. I point to the power relations inherent in all research methods, including participatory methods. An important element of this research process was an interrogation and an awareness of power relations, in opposition to the imbalanced power relations experienced by those living in the direct provision system. From the point of view of the researcher, this entailed critical self reflection, consistent interrogation of my own role in power relations and of my own prejudices and blindspots, and attempting to balance these through a dialogical approach with the participants. I also point towards the importance of being aware of audience with work that will circulate in the public realm, and the possibility of the reimposition of power relations when co-created material moves outside the project space.

In the following chapter, I look at the body of work which emerged from this dialogic and potential space, in terms of the images, texts and stories which were created, and how this material reflected the everyday experiences of living in and negotiating the liminal space of direct provision. The processes of creating a body of image-text over the time period of the collaborative project allowed us to create dialogue with broader social structures and processes within and surrounding the asylum system. I look at how this space reflected surrounding spaces, how what

occurred in the ‘dialogic space’ (Tolia Kelly 2007:4) reflected what went on outside that space, and the everyday experiences of living in the direct provision system, as participants reflected on and photographed themes and topics we discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR:
Imaging ‘in between-ness’

Introduction

The project thus had two elements, two aims. The first was to explore, alongside asylum seekers themselves, the liminal spaces of asylum and the subjective experiences of living in such spaces. The second was to move towards creating counter narratives to dominant, hegemonic representations of asylum seekers through the creation of a series of images and accompanying texts.

As the project progressed, with participants taking time to reflect on emerging themes and topics, and to photograph, write and discuss around these themes, the bounded space we created within the workshops began to expand out to incorporate other spaces – the spaces photographed and discussed by participants. The sessions and the project itself became more and more a ‘dialogic space’ (Tolia Kelly 2007), with dialogue occurring between participants and researcher and between participants themselves, as well as dialogue with the images and with the issues, structures and discourses evoked through the images and the discussions around them. As discussed in Chapter Three, the emphasis of the project was as much on the processes which unfolded as on the outcomes. The photographs were vehicles for discussion, a means of mediating the various encounters and triggering conversations, as well as outcomes of the project in themselves. The processes, lived experiences and ‘events’ of the project therefore become as much part of the outcome as the images, texts and stories themselves. In this chapter and the following chapter, I look at what the processes of co-creation and of representing the work reveal about micro-geographies of asylum and in between-ness, and how the everyday experiences of the participants emerged through the processes of the project.

Creating meaning from visual materials and the relationship between image and text

In this chapter, I look more closely at the body of image-text and stories which emerged through the project, and how these reflect some of the everyday experiences of the participants of living in the direct provision system. In Chapter Five, I focus on the processes of representing the work and what in turn they reveal or highlight about the experiences of seeking asylum.

Following a processual approach, in which the images were vehicles for discussion which were returned to and re-discussed at different times during the project, the meaning of the images is not so much inherent within them, but rather is based on how they are interpreted by different people and at different times throughout the project. Rather than imposing analysis on each image here, the images are placed within the contexts of the meanings given to them by the photographer and the discussions which surrounded them. Meaning is created in relation to the accompanying text, or description given to it by the photographer, focusing on images here as tools of mediation or dialogue between the researcher and the participants, between participants, and between participants and various audiences, rather than through a systematic analysis of the images themselves, using one or a combination of approaches to visual analysis, such as semiotics, psychoanalysis or content analysis, for example. Semiotic and psychoanalytical approaches to visual analysis are concerned mainly with the social effects of visual materials which already exist, either found or already in the public realm. Semiotics is less concerned with the act of taking the photo and by extension the intention or subjectivity of the photographer and more with the act of looking (Wells 2004:31) and with the target of the photograph. Content analysis, which is useful for handling large numbers of images with some degree of consistency, due to its concern with 'replicability and validity' (Rose 2007:60) focuses mainly on the compositional modality of the images itself, with little interest in the production or audiencing of images (Rose 2007:61) (see Rose 2007 for detailed discussions on various approaches to visual analysis). While each of these methods is appropriate for certain areas of visual analysis, I would argue that systematic forms of analysis such as these are unsuitable for work which is created collaboratively, and concerned with the dialogue that the image is capable of creating, the ways in which an image reflects the life world of the photographer, and the social and political context of its production. Rather than analysing the image as a stand-alone object, meaning here is created through the symbiotic relationship and interplay between image and accompanying text, story or description. Maguire and Murphy point out that one important level to ethnographic writing is attention to the ways in which people craft their self-identities and represent what is important and meaningful to them, while paying attention to the 'context and meaning of their voices' (2011:6). The images here are placed alongside

the voices which accompanied them and in the context of their meaning at a particular time.

When trying to make sense of this idea of creating meaning through the context surrounding the photograph, that is the descriptions or discussions triggered by an image, and by the processes surrounding its creation or presentation, I found it helpful again to look at Kester's work on dialogical art (2000, 2004). Rather than possessing a formal immanence, that is the meaning of the work being 'centred in the physical locus of the object, or in the imaginative capacity of the single viewer' (Kester 2000:4), dialogical work produces 'multiple levels of information at a given time and space as it interacts with a myriad of other discursive systems (existing belief systems, ideologies and the psychological make up of particular viewers or participants)' (Kester 2000:4). Despite the possible existence of a physical object or objects which make up part of the work or outcome of the project, it is not these in themselves which make up the 'work' as a whole. Kester explains that 'the 'work' is constituted as an ensemble of effects and forces which operate in numerous registers of signification and discursive interaction' (Kester 2000:4). This does not mean however that meaning is indeterminate; it can be analysed at different points, for example at various points of the collaborative process, as well as at points of bringing the work to a broader audience. For Kester, this capacity to ascertain meaning at various points is an important part of dialogical 'feedback' (Kester 2000:4).

During the project, the meaning of the image for the photographer him or herself was liable to change according to when she was speaking about the image and to whom. This became more apparent in the later stages of the project when we began to think about representing the work to broader audiences (discussed in Chapter Five). While the physical objects created during the project, that is the photographs and texts, had one set of meanings within the 'safe space' of the project, or at a specific moment within the project, the same objects potentially acquired very different meanings or connotations, for the photographers themselves, and for other people viewing the work, when they began to leave that space and move into the public realm, interacting with, in Kester's words, 'a myriad of other discursive systems' (Kester 2000:4). Meaning therefore is intrinsically linked to the sometimes singular, and

sometimes multiple, descriptions of the image by the photographer, as well as to the broader discussions which surrounded and emerged from an image or collection of images. Meaning was created collaboratively, dialogically, as part of the process of creation. The process of creating the work was a constant dialectic between image and language, constantly moving between the two, the one triggering the other, the conversations around the images giving them meaning and *context*.

Creating meaning with and through accompanying language or text allows for a foregrounding of the subjectivity of the photographer herself, and how the photograph was understood by her at the time of taking it, and how this in turn relates to a social/cultural/political context. For work which is collaborative and processual, it is appropriate to use a subjective approach which allows for meaning to emerge from the work in its context (situated, context based, subjective) rather than imposing it from outside with a system that aims for 'replicability and validity' (Rose 2007:60). This approach to the material is in line with a participatory approach, minimizing the imposition of analysis by the researcher and allowing meaning to emerge from dialogue, as well as with feminist approaches to research, allowing for multiple realities which are situated, contextualized and based on experience.

As Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) point out, photovoice methods tend to place less importance on the composition of the photographs than on the stories they reveal. Consequently these methods usually use some combination of image and text (see Wang et al. 2000; Ewald 2001; Wilson et al. 2007, for example). Where the method is used for advocacy purposes, the use of captions for example, as discussed in Chapter Three, can be particularly important in 'anchoring' the meaning, in Barthes' terms (1977), making the message or the particular meaning intended by the photographer clear, and clarifying particular cultural signs or symbols.

The combination of the image with text does not diminish, or put into question, the power of the image to convey meaning in a different way, or to convey different meaning to the verbal or written. The image has the power to convey to the reader something which may not be able to be expressed or conveyed by the verbal or written, as McDougall says:

Visual knowledge (as well as other forms of sensory knowledge) provides one of our primary means of comprehending the experience of other people. Unlike the knowledge communicated by words, what we show in images has no transparency or volition – it is a different knowledge, stubborn and opaque, but with a capacity for the finest detail. (MacDougall 2006:5-6).

The image allows for a different sort of communication, sense based and subconscious, and yet it needs here to be contextualized by words, so that the intentions, thoughts and life worlds of the photographers are communicated. For Rose, there is a certain paradox in the interdependency of image and text in methods which create images as part of research:

This interdependency points to a certain paradox at the heart of this body of work, though, which is that while it advocates the unique abilities of visual materials to convey information or affect in ways that words find hard or impossible, those visual materials still need some written context to make their effects evident (Rose 2007:255).

However the text and image work symbiotically here, in a non-hierarchical relationship, to convey a meaning which is based on the subjectivity of the photographer at a particular time. While there is interdependency between the image and the text, there is also interplay, each providing a different form of understanding as well as complementing the other.

The relationship between image and text or language has been much explored (see for example Barthes 1977a, 1977b; Hutcheon 2002; Mitchell 1994), asking for example what the relationship is between the linguistic and the visual, looking at the different ways in which image and language or text are juxtaposed, and how this in turn influences the meaning of each, and how overall meaning is interpreted. It is argued that it is in fact difficult to find images without text. In his essay 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1977), Roland Barthes says that 'in order to find images given without words, it is doubtless necessary to go back to partially illiterate societies, to a sort of pictographic state of the image' (Barthes 1977:38). Photographer and photographic theorist Victor Burgin argues that 'we rarely see a photograph in use which is not accompanied by language' (Burgin 1986:51). This is reiterated by Warren, who

argues that ‘the linguistic means by which thought (and memory) is formed is inextricably entwined with the act of seeing’ (Warren 2002:236), and that therefore ‘language (text) and image (photograph) are not separate in the lived experience of seeing’ (ibid). The relationship between image and text in this research is perhaps best described by Mitchell’s (1994) concept of *image-text*, one of three different kinds of relationship he delineates between image and text. Warren (2002) discusses Mitchell’s work on image/language in relation to a project which utilizes photo elicitation to look at ‘organizational aesthetics’. The first of Mitchell’s relationships between image and text is named *image/text*. This is where either images or text take precedence, either one or the other containing the main narrative, the other ‘anchoring’ the meaning, in Barthes’ terms (1977a). In the combination *imagetext*, images and text are synthesized, such as in certain types of postmodern photography, as described by Hutcheon (2002) for example, which ‘[investigate] the borders along which each can be opened, subverted, altered by the other in new ways’ (Hutcheon 2002:114). The third relationship described by Mitchell is *image-text*, where ‘words and pictures are juxtaposed without either being reduced to or being placed as superior over the other’ (Warren 2002:238). It is this third relationship which Warren focuses on in her work, and which best describes the relationship between image and text both in creating and representing the material emerging through this research project.

Summing up, in exploring the images after the collaborative part of the project, I have been disinclined to extract singular meanings from the images, or impose analysis on individual images, but rather have looked at the work (image, text and processes of creation) in terms of what it reveals about the experiences of liminality in the asylum system in Ireland. The shift away from more traditional forms of research and academic writing, in which the researcher provides an analysis of a set of data, towards one which reflects the collaborative and processual nature of the research has posed several challenges, particularly in decisions of how to frame and represent the various forms of material which emerged from the research. In a diary entry during the period following the collaborative part of the project, I expressed some of these challenges:

How much do I want to analyse the work, and how much do I want it to speak for itself? If the idea is to let the work speak for itself as far as possible, for the voices of the photographers to emerge, how much will my analysis, discussion and categorizing compromise this? Whose is the work really? (Diary, February 11, 2011).

Despite the collaborative nature of the research, I was aware that writing about the research was a solitary affair, and also that it was necessary to create a framework within which to represent the work. By looking at the images in relation to the often changing meanings given to them by the participants, as well as incorporating the processes and ‘events’ of the collaborative project into the overall ‘outcomes’, I hoped to reflect the collaborative and processual nature of the work, bring the voices of the participants to the fore, and demonstrate my understanding that my narrative voice and my understanding of the realities of the collaborative project were one among several which co-existed simultaneously.

The words of participants used throughout the thesis sometimes emerged from describing particular images; some are also the result of group or individual discussions surrounding a particular image or particular theme. They also may be taken from more informal discussions with individuals or groups of participants. I have also, in some cases, cited words which describe a particular image but have not shown the image itself. This is done only where I have felt that the image may expose or identify particular people or places and have chosen to exclude it due to this.

In this chapter, therefore, I look at how the collaborative creative methodology used here provides insight into the micro-geographies of the liminal spaces of asylum and the experiences of these spaces, in a way that allows for complexity and moves away from essentialising and homogenizing representations. As Nel Glass (2008:2) points out, aesthetic approaches can offer ‘alternative means to the achievement of one main purpose in qualitative research, that being getting closer to the lives of the people being studied’. The collaborative creative approach, using the tools of participatory photography, offers a means of accessing and better understanding the micro-geographies of asylum, liminal spaces in which asylum seekers wait and the everyday subjective experiences of these spaces. Exploring the everyday experiences

of the liminality of the asylum system, and the ways in which power operates at levels of the everyday, the subjective, the body, may also offer insight into the ‘macro geographies’ and broader questions surrounding asylum.

Making sense of experiences of in between-ness through the concept of liminality

So how did the collaborative creative project shed light on the micro geographies of asylum, on the liminal space of direct provision and the experiences of living within this space? The dialogic space of the weekly workshops led into reflective spaces in the days between, in which participants would reflect on discussions and themes raised during the workshops and photograph, and sometimes note down, their thoughts, opinions and reflections.

In Chapter Two, I suggested from an overview of the direct provision system in Ireland, located within a broader European approach to asylum, that direct provision can be seen as part of a broader network of liminal spaces created through the politics of exclusion. The policies that structure direct provision have located it in an ‘in between space’, between inclusion and exclusion, between hospitality and hostility, between citizenship and non-citizenship and between place and non-place. I suggested that a deeper understanding of the concept of liminality may provide a means to draw together these various ‘in between spaces’ and to better understand the *experiences* of living in this in between space. I explore the concept of liminality here in more detail. I then continue by looking at the ways in which the images, texts and stories, through reflecting some of the everyday experiences of living in direct provision, both illustrate and make more complex the concept of liminality and of living in a liminal/ in between space. I look at the different ways in which aspects of liminality emerged, and in which the concept was made more complex, through the images, discussions and processes of the collaborative project created through the potential and dialogic space of the workshops.

Liminality is a term that was coined by Arnold van Gennep (1909) and developed by cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, primarily in his seminal essay ‘Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*’ (1967). The term comes from the

Latin 'limen', meaning a threshold. Von Gennep discusses the three-part structure of rites of passage: separation, liminal period, reassimilation. Turner focuses on the second one, liminality, the time of transition, process, 'in between-ness', in which the liminal person, or the neophyte in terms of rites of passage, is 'neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony' (Turner 1969:95). The concept of liminality is useful for understanding the in between space in which asylum seekers find themselves, not only in terms of the subjective experiences of these spaces, but also in order to better understand the different forms of exclusion and distancing experienced by asylum seekers.

The liminal person is excluded as he is 'neither one thing nor the other', and yet through this act of exclusion, he is simultaneously both inside and outside the system to which the ritual belongs. In this way, the liminal person carries echoes of Agamben's *homo sacer* (1998) who, by his exclusion, is simultaneously inside and outside the juridical order, marginalised from it, yet controlled by it. As I discussed in Chapter One, for the *homo sacer*, normal law is suspended in a 'state of exception' (2005), and the 'camp' for Agamben is the modern example *par excellence* of this state of exception. However, as Mountz (2011b:267) points out, 'conditions of exclusion need not be as violent or as obvious as the suspension of the law or the isolation of the camp, but can be more insidious, pervasive, subtle, yet ultimately equally alienating.' Stewart points out that 'employing the concept of 'homo sacer' suggests that an asylum-seeker's liminality is not only defined by their temporary immigration status but may also be indicative of a daily, lived experience that is 'outside the law' (2005:501). These conditions can manifest in subtle ways, as was reflected through the processes of creating the images, texts and stories, throughout this material itself, as well as the processes of representation of the work. Exclusion and liminality may be marked by gradual processes of distancing of asylum seekers, as Lentin (2003:305) has pointed out in reference to the Irish State (see Chapter Two, page 67).

The supposed hospitality of the state, in the form of protection through asylum, becomes marked by hostility, direct provision and the asylum system as an example

of Derrida's concept of 'hostipitality' (2000)³⁶. Echoes of this type of duality can be found in discussions by Ticktin (2006) and Malkki (1996) of the paradox of humanitarian ethics and politics as an increasing means of distancing the 'other', both geographically through detention and encampment, and through dehumanization of the asylum seeker, or production of the asylum seeker as victim. The act of distancing or exclusion runs alongside a system of control and surveillance, part of a 'culture of control' (Thornton 2009, after Garland 2001) which together serve to keep asylum seekers marginalized, yet connected to and monitored by the system, simultaneously outside yet inside the juridical order. Asylum in Ireland can be seen as a form of 'spatial and temporal limbo' (Khanna 2006:475; see also Kits 2005, Mountz 2011a, Mountz et al. 2002, O'Mahony 2003), the lives of those that live within this system marked by waiting and uncertainty.

[limbo *noun*

2 a place of oblivion or neglect. **3.** prison. **in limbo** in a state of uncertainty or waiting.

14c from Latin *in limbo* on the border (from Chambers 21st century dictionary)]

Direct provision centres can be seen as an embodiment of this limbo, the liminality of uncertain or in between political and legal status embodied in liminal spaces, spaces of permanent temporariness where people wait for extended periods of time to move into the next stage of their lives, between inclusion and exclusion, between hospitality and hostility, between citizenship and non-citizenship. Liminality also provides a means of understanding how power structures play out in everyday lives in this context. I would argue that a deliberate condition of liminality is created through policy and maintained through control and surveillance, the whole point of this system being to keep people apart, marginalized from mainstream society. The concept of liminality as employed here clearly has a very different sense from its use in situations of ritual as discussed by Turner. The threshold, the 'limen', in a ritual context has transformative qualities, the period of liminality as a stepping stone into

³⁶ Examples of this 'hostipitality' may also be found in the complicity of the media with government policy of exclusion, as well as the ways in which asylum seekers have been framed at various times, implying that certain people are deserving of Ireland's hospitality and others not. Crowley et al. (2006), in a discussion of the framing of the 2004 citizenship referendum, argue that the concept of 'commonsense citizenship', which was used by the government, was 'employed in such a way as to fix and essentialise Irishness, thus highlighting the threatening other, and to construct immigrants as suspect, untrustworthy and deserving of Ireland's hospitality only in limited, prescribed ways, or not at all' (Crowley et al. 2006:2).

a new and definite phase, a new status in society. Liminality in the context of long periods of waiting in the direct provision system is more destructive than transformative, the exclusion and invisibility of the liminal person designed more to weaken than transform in any positive way, the next phase unknown. However, employing this concept evokes the apart-ness, the invisibility, the sense of being neither one thing nor the other, of being in an abyss, of holding one's breath that characterizes the experience of many people living in direct provision.

In moving towards understanding how this liminality is experienced and lived on an everyday basis by asylum seekers, we can explore the spatial and temporal aspects, as suggested by Khanna (2006) and Mountz (2011a): the experience of living in a space of permanent temporariness, the architecture of which is created through control and surveillance; and the temporality of this, where suspense and uncertainty overrule. For asylum seekers, liminality can be experienced as both temporal and spatial: manifested spatially, in the spaces in which they are forced to wait, and temporally, through waiting, uncertainty, suspense. For Mountz (2011a), the temporality of asylum seekers in the form of waiting, limbo or suspension, can be mapped onto corresponding spatial ambiguities of liminality, exception and threshold, addressing the 'architecture of exclusionary enforcement practices' (Mountz 2011a:381). As Kobelinsky points out in her study of asylum seekers in the CADA system in France, everyday life is characterized by an 'expansion of time and a shrinking of space' (*'une dilation du temps et une retraction de l'espace'*) (Kobelinsky 2010:7). I would add to this that liminality may also be experienced ontologically, an internalization or 'living-out' of a liminal situation, the experience of feeling like and being perceived as a liminal being, of being aware of one's position as an asylum seeker, of existing in a state of 'in between-ness'. Liminal beings are excluded due to being 'neither one thing nor another...neither here nor there' (Turner 1967:97). In 'Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*' (1967), Turner refers to anthropologist Mary Douglas' work *Purity and Danger* (1966), in which she explains that that which is unclear, or liminal, is unclean. Transitional or liminal beings have nothing, 'no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows' (Turner 1967:98/9). Not only are these liminal beings dangerous and polluting because 'neither one thing nor another...neither here nor there' (Turner

1967:97), but they are also seen as homogenous, undifferentiated from each other, their differing statuses and backgrounds eradicated in their liminality. Similarly, Zylinska (2004) argues that it is precisely through their liminal status that asylum seekers are defined, constituted as ‘threshold political beings’:

...even though they are outside it [the law], they are supposedly subject to its power. Constituted as threshold political beings, migrants and ‘asylum seekers’ are defined precisely through their liminal status that places them on the outskirts of the community (Zylinska 2004:530).

The concept of liminality thus helps to tie together a range of experiences: temporal, spatial and subjective or ontological, precarious relationships to place and experiences of exclusion, as well as a lens for looking at the politics or ‘architecture’ (Mountz 2011a) of liminality and exclusion, and the attitudes which allow for asylum seekers to be homogenized and stereotyped.

Liminality is created for asylum seekers through an imposed situation of precarious stability (or ‘hostipitality’), in which they wait for long and uncertain periods of time, belonging neither to the society they have come from, nor to the one in which they find themselves. Asylum seekers are essentially prevented from integrating or becoming part of Irish society through a series of deliberate and distancing measures, as discussed in Chapter Two, including prohibition from taking up employment or third level education, a weekly stipend of €19.10 which ensures that they cannot take part in normal social activities, and deliberate exclusion from measures taken to encourage the integration of immigrants into Irish society (as demonstrated for example by the explicit exclusion of asylum seekers in call for applicants for a ministerial council on integration - see Chapter Two, page 72).

And yet, alongside and within this liminality, everyday life is lived and negotiated; life occurs through it, despite it and alongside it. Alongside the expressions of distance, exclusion, ‘in between-ness’ and lack of autonomy over everyday life, emerge expressions of connectedness, belonging and attachment to place, environment, community. This is an aspect of experience which is less expressed in the literature around the liminal existences and experiences of asylum seekers. While

connectedness can also be seen in terms of inclusion in a restrictive system, and the monitoring and surveillance which goes hand in hand with this, there are also other, more positive aspects of connectedness which emerge through the work, however tenuous or precarious these may be. Direct provision is not entirely closed like prisons or detention centres, or like the camps Agamben describes. Therefore distance and exclusion can be more ambiguous, more subtle, as Mountz (2011b:267) points out, crossing over at times with belongings and attachments of various sorts. These are the complexities of everyday experience, of negotiating an in-between/liminal existence. Looking at everyday experience as it emerges through the images, texts and stories, as well as the processes of creation of these, adds complexity to understandings of the liminal spaces experienced through asylum. While this is explored in the context of this particular research, it also holds implications for broader understandings of the architectures of liminality and exclusion into which asylum seekers are placed by states and immigration policy. Despite the in between-ness of direct provision, people still make connections, attachments and belongings, however tenuous or ambiguous (Mountz 2011a:383); experience is still grounded in specific places and contexts. By looking at the tensions between different elements of experience, as they emerge through the material and processes of the project, we can look beyond simplistic understandings of asylum seekers and of the experiences of seeking asylum towards more complex, multiple understandings.

Exploring liminality and in between-ness through the images, texts and stories

In this chapter, I explore experiences of ‘in between-ness’, of the liminality and ‘permanent temporariness’ of living in the direct provision system, as they emerged and were expressed through the processes of creation and the material which emerged from the project: images, texts and stories. I explore the spatial and temporal manifestations of liminality as they are experienced and expressed through these forms. I also look at the ways in which imposed liminality is part of the architecture of control and surveillance of asylum seekers. Distancing, marginalisation and surveillance and control over everyday rhythms, activities and spaces touch every part of everyday life in the direct provision system. I also look at a third form of liminality which emerged through this material, what I call

‘ontological liminality’, the sense of internalising a prolonged liminal situation or temporary permanence, leading to a sense of being a liminal being, ‘other’, everyday insecurity coupled with an awareness of outside perceptions of asylum seekers. I then look at the ways in which those living in the direct provision system negotiate this liminality through their everyday practices, as these emerged through the material, living in a state of ‘in between-ness’ and yet simultaneously creating connections, attachments and belongings in various ways.

Spatial liminality

Direct provision is part of an architecture of control, part of the ‘architecture of exclusionary enforcement practices’ (Mountz 2011a:381) of asylum seekers. Liminality is created through policy and practice – deliberate policies of exclusion and enforced extended periods of waiting, uncertainty – and is maintained through control over the most basic aspects of everyday life. As Maguire and Murphy point out, ‘exercises of government power are important parts of everyday lifeworlds’ (Maguire and Murphy 2011:9). Mountz states that ‘exclusionary state practices reverberate through the daily lives of migrants (Mountz 2010:145)³⁷. This is experienced in a heightened way by those living in the direct provision system. Thornton (2009), after Garland (2001), describes the asylum system in Ireland as part of a ‘culture of control’. In this in between space, where people are simultaneously inside the juridical system and yet marginalised from it, as in Agamben’s ‘state of exception’, between citizenship and non citizenship, ‘neither one thing nor the other’, trapped in the space between hospitality and hostility, control and power play out and are experienced in multiple subtle and not so subtle ways. As Agamben states:

In the camp, the state of exception...is now given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order’ (Agamben 1997:108).

People living in direct provision have little to no control over the conditions and rhythms of daily life, effectively imprisoned by a regime of control over everyday functions. The lack of autonomy over their everyday lives, and a sense of being

³⁷ See also Schuster (2011) on how the European policies of Dublin II and Eurodac affect the everyday lives and rhythms of a group of people seeking asylum in Paris.

watched leaked out through much of the work created by the participants throughout the project, as well as through conversations and discussions.

Direct provision centres spatially embody the liminality of asylum. They are spaces where people reside for often long periods of time, in a state of ‘permanent temporariness’. The hotel, this particular direct provision centre, and the spaces within it came up often through the photographs and surrounding discussions, expressions of how liminality and ‘in between-ness’ are experienced in spatial terms, how the spatiality of asylum is lived and experienced on an everyday basis. Living in a hotel emphasized the sense of the ‘permanent temporariness’ of their situation for participants. The fact that this particular centre was a hotel seemed to highlight the anomaly of this liminal existence – a hotel is a place where you stay temporarily, not where you live.



Figure 7

When people read that...that writing outside, they think that this is a hotel. Because a hotel is a place when you go to another country to visit, you go into the hotel because you don't have family to go to. So now, people from outside they just see it as a hotel, but for me I don't see it as a hotel, I see it as a prison. Because I'm closed in there. If I tell a friend – because I've got lots of Irish friends – they ask me, are you living in X

Hotel? I say yes, even if you go to the bank, if they ask you, you living in X Hotel? They ask you, how can you open an account if you are living in a hotel? Because they know that you're just visiting, you're gone. They ask you, how many years have you been there? Two years? It's a funny hotel, a really funny hotel... (Emmanuelle)



Figure 8

For Mary, it was the number of the hotel room which emphasized the temporary nature of the space³⁸ (see figure 8):

It just shows me...it reminds me of when you are at school, or when you are just travelling, passing by in a hotel, you stay in such a room where by they have to know your room number...This one, when I remember my home, I had no number, but this reminds me that I am in a temporary place because where... they know me by this number. It's like a hostel...I mean, when we were at school we used to stay in such...places where they know you by room number and even if you are travelling in a hotel you stay in such a place, but if it is your permanent home, you don't need room numbers, so anything happens, I say...anyway... it is a temporary home. (Mary)

³⁸ See section on 'ontological liminality' below (page 183) for further discussion on the significance of numbers, and the sense of feeling like a number.

The paradox of living in a ‘permanent temporary’ space was reflected in conflicting feelings of whether the hotel represented ‘home’ or not. Relationships to the ‘permanent temporary’ space of the direct provision centre were mixed. The hotel itself and the spaces within it often represented or embodied the uncertainty, angst and powerlessness or lack of control that accompany this existence on a daily basis, the textures of the spaces themselves a daily reminder of an in between existence. On the other hand, the hotel and the spaces within it were familiar due to the long periods of time spent in them by many of the participants, and therefore for some, and at different times, represented home, safety and a certain sense of belonging. These feelings could change depending on how the participant was feeling at the time, even when describing the same photo, or, as is highlighted in the next chapter, on who the audience or potential audience for the photograph was. For example, Emmanuelle described her photo of the front of the hotel (figure 7) early on in the project as above, saying *‘I don’t see it as a hotel, I see it as a prison’*. Later on in the project, she described the same photograph as follows: *‘X Hotel reminds me, it is my home, wherever, I can go to Dublin, I can go anywhere, I can go for shopping, but at the end of the day I will come back to X.’*

In a discussion of ‘home’ and what that meant to participants, the temporary nature of the hotel was emphasized:

X Hotel is not home to me! It is temporary (Ade).

As far as I am concerned, this is just a house, it is a sleeping place, a roof, not a home (Abiye).

At the end we find that Ireland is a good country...I can really, you know, do my business in Ireland, and I can live in Ireland, I’ve got everything...not in X hotel, no, X is just temporary because we are here temporary, when you get out of here... (Emmanuelle).

Ireland is not home, Nigeria is home to me. X is not home at all....my own definition of home is somewhere that is permanent (Ade).

And yet, for others, or at different times, the hotel did represent a form of safety, some sort of security in an otherwise insecure world:

Actually, to be honest with you, the way we are now here, our home is X, agree with me, that when you go round, you do your own things, you find your legs bring you back and then tomorrow you wake up you go. Even if you go to Dublin, you find yourself stepping the bus coming back to (name of town), so I think even as he said, home is where you find these good things (Brian).

Because now we have got a shelter, we are protected, we are provided, this is our home! Although it is temporary, it is our home, at the moment, we are not homeless... (Mary).

If I go outside and I say, ah I want to go home, it is home in this hostel, I miss my home. I don't want to sleep over, sleep to my friends, no, ah no, I want to go home. This is my home, please... (Janaan).

In a review of academic literature on the home, one category identified by Mallett (2004) is 'home as haven'. Within this type of literature, she points out, home is related to freedom and control, and understood as removed from public scrutiny or surveillance:

Related to this view of home, as a refuge is the idea that it is a private, often familial realm clearly differentiated from public space and removed from public scrutiny and surveillance. The public sphere is associated with work and political engagements and non-kin relationships. In contrast, the private realm of the home is typically understood as a space that offers freedom and control (Darke 1994), security (Doverly 1985) and scope for creativity and regeneration (Allan and Crow 1989, Bachelard 1969, Korosec-Serfaty 1984, Cooper 1976, Finighan 1980) (Mallett 2004: 71).

This description of home resonates with participants' discussions around home as somewhere permanent and secure and the feelings of lack of freedom, lack of control around everyday life and practices and the sense of being watched, controlled which also emerged through the project (discussed in more detail below).

Feelings of being trapped, confined by the asylum system, symbolized by the hotel and the spaces within it, or an awareness of the temporary nature of living in the hotel, contrast with the hotel representing home and a form of safety, a familiar place after a long period of time for many of the participants. Feelings of being trapped or

confined by the space and by the asylum system emerged often and in different ways or resounded through the images and words. Participants often expressed feeling trapped, controlled, imprisoned, 'bound', caught in 'a cage', in 'a bottle', 'in an open prison', governed by external forces. *'We are more or less like prisoners, because you cannot do what you like'* (Mary). The hotel is described as a *'prison'* (Emmanuelle), or an *'open prison'* (Elizabeth), or like *'living in a bottle; I can't move, I can't do whatever I want to do'* (Emmanuelle). Mary described it as *'like we are in a cage, we want to go out'*. These feelings are expressed in various ways through the images and descriptions. For Rajo, for example, being in asylum was like being *'inside a box'* (see figure 9):



Figure 9

I was looking for a plain box, not advertising something. We just found it me and Brian in the playroom. It is like everyone's life in asylum, inside a box. We are stuck inside a box, we can't do much. If you move around the box is gonna be break (Rajo).



Figure 10

It's not that I don't like the picture of the girls, what I don't like is the system they are in. They are so happy, they don't know anything, but the problem is they've got friends from outside of their hostel, they can't invite them. Even if they want to invite their friends from outside, they are not allowed to do that. Unless if you go downstairs in the bar, you can invite maybe friends, and again they got certain time that at this time, the friends will be gone. But if these girls they come up here because it's nice and warm, they want to invite their friends from outside, they are not allowed to. It's a sad story for them. Maybe for them it's happy because they've got birthday but for the parents, you think that these kids they are just bound, they are just you know like they are put in a bottle, they can't even move. So I really don't like it. (Emmanuelle)

Feelings of being trapped (such as in figures 9 and 10) were expressed alongside contrasting feelings of being free or yearnings for freedom, as in Abiye's photograph of his bedroom window (figure 11), below, and his photograph of a sunset sky

(figure 12). Similarly, Iswat's photograph of birds on the roof (figure 13) for her is symbolic of a freedom she is lacking.



Figure 11

The view...the first thing that we see every morning...this view is...like...to me sometimes it seems like someone behind the bars of a prison looking out into what it is to be free, it goes on to infinity, on and on, you can see freedom, you can smell freedom, you can smell the fresh air, but there are still huge limitations inside of it... it's actually, it's a great view to look at if you look at it from a different place. You can imagine someone living in that house and looking out from the window, it's also a similar view but from a better place, you know, so... I look forward to when I can have a look in a better...not from a direct provision centre, in a proper house, when I can enjoy the view, enjoy the fresh air. (Abiye)



Figure 12

This is at first sight, this is actually a picture of what the sky looks like one of the days from the N7. And it's so huge, it's free, I think it's a free community, nobody quarrels up there, nobody...the birds move around freely, there's so much freedom up there. So it's a free community to me, it's a place where there is freedom, the most imaginable way available, but when we come down to the earth, on the ground, that's where the problems are. I always look up because that's the community where...it's so free... (Abiye)



Figure 13

Freedom is so good, hmmm...there is nothing like freedom. What freedom means to me is there is no boundaries in your life, no demarcates, you do what you want with yourself, you eat what you want, not what you see, you don't share your things with someone. Freedom...when you have freedom you can work, you have your cool job, you have your personal car, you can travel anywhere you like. Freedom is so good, without freedom, you are just...you are just...when you don't have freedom you cannot do anything, you share your things with someone... When I came to Ireland, it makes me realize that freedom is so special in your life, there is nothing like freedom. It remind me the birds, the birds they will came, they will eat, after they eat, they flew, because they have freedom. (Iswat)

The everyday spaces of the hotel reflect not only the relationship to the hotel itself, but to the system that the hotel and its internal spaces represent on a daily basis. For Abiye, it was the stairs which represented his daily frustrations with living in the hostel (see figure 14):



Figure 14

Abiye: It's just the stairs from upstairs going down and see it's feeding out at the bottom. I've given this title 'daily ordeal' what gives me concern each time I have to get bread, I have to get milk, I have to get this, it's the stairs that comes to my head, oh my God! And when I'm coming back with the family, and we have to go to the room, I'm thinking, ahh the stairs again, especially when you go for vigil, and you have two of the kids sleeping, and one half way asleep, with two bags, and a wife – I don't have to carry my wife though (laughter – just checking!) it's just the daily ordeal, this is big ordeal for me every day, having to come down, go up...

Other: But you don't have to carry everything at the same time? You can just leave them and get them

Abiye: It's still the ordeal

Other: But still, if he was in a house, he'd just open the door, and be inside, now he has to go...

Abiye: Even if I decide to rent a house which is three bedrooms, three floors, you know it's your problem, but not when you are forced to stay on the top floor

Other: If there was a functioning lift, it would make life easier

Abiye: Don't even go there...

Other: That's another story!

Abiye: Even if the lift would be working I think the stairs would be safer!

The hotel corridors held a particular resonance for each participant, everyone photographing and speaking about the corridors at some point throughout the project. The corridors seemed to represent what being in the asylum system, and in a direct provision centre, meant for so many people: lack of control, confinement, sadness. The many doors of the corridors seemed to represent stasis, blocked opportunities, feeling trapped (see figures 15-19).



Figure 15

Even when we have arguments, we keep our voices down so that the corridor remains calm and quiet. I think most people will do that. (Abiye)

It looks calm, it looks quiet, it looks deserted, but definitely a lot going on in the rooms, a lot of pain, a lot of trouble, a lot of crises, going on in the rooms certainly, but everybody comes out, you wipe your face off, pretend as if everything is fine, walk the corridors... (Abiye)



Figure 16

There is no way you can go to your room unless through that corridor. It's always there, when you come back. The kids, they like to play in that corridor. Sometimes you find them with all the doors open, all the doors up to the end. You can see them racing their bicycles, it's nice for the kids because they don't have any ground to race their bicycles, this is the racing course for them. It's so nice when you find kids playing, very happy, and they don't have any idea what's going on. (Emmanuelle)



Figure 17

Now to show you about things I, not really hate or anything, but it's things that I have no control over, I may not even like or anything, but this is our hostel, this is...it goes to show you have no control over so many things, such things, is a corridor, you're sharing with people, they might leave it dirty, they might...basically it's like a street, you've got no control over it, people might leave it dirty, might leave it clean, that's the way it goes...(Benjamin)



Figure 18

For Iswat, the corridor represented sadness (see figure 18):

Sadness. Sadness I can show it...every day you see many doors before you go to your room, for me its sad...especially this corridor, this one!It's not waking up early in the morning, seeing all that, it's not good. It's not good. There are doors but they don't lead outside, they lead inside anytime, coming from outside, ten or six doors. (Iswat)



Figure 19

For Elizabeth, the corridor represented feeling trapped in the asylum system, the doors representing the barriers in her life (see figure 19):

And then there is that that I don't like. Everyday I don't like. Because when I'm walking towards my room, there's a wall with a door that's not a door and that's how I feel every time I'm in here. I have a door but it's not a door. Cos I can go into my room but I can't go past that, yet there's a door in front of me, so that's to me a representation of my life. There is a door, but it's not a door. So that reminds me of that so I don't like it, but again, remember you also have to be thankful for what you have. (Elizabeth)

Brian's description of the corridor, however, reflected an attempt to give a more positive outlook on his situation, focusing more on the light at the end than the darkness of the corridor itself, the doors representing openings rather than barriers (figure 20):



Figure 20

So your success is due to another door of success. So whenever I see this corridor, it reminds me that that door is not permanently closed because it is not a wall, those two metal things you can push them, same thing in life...you can push the doors for success, a little bit of push and you go the other side and find a whole world on the other side of success. And actually the light is showing you that there is a way, because it's not dark, life is not dark. (Brian)

Emmanuelle similarly at a certain point during the project described her photograph of the corridor (figure 16) in a positive way, describing it as a place that was part of her sense of home, a sense of acceptance around her situation:

Sometimes life can change, it changes all the time. It's like the tradition changes all the time, you leave your own tradition, you go to someone's tradition, and it's always changing. Every time, every year it changes...so it's like this corridor, it changed my life, every time now this is my home...when I reach here, I know I have to turn that way to get to my room...(laughs)

Throughout the project, looking at the positive was a conscious decision for several participants, finding ways to not focus on negativity and complaining, but rather to look at how to make the best of a difficult situation:

Like I said before I want a situation where I am focusing on the positive aspects of everything, that's the reason why, honestly I did not see any particular thing I did not like that's worth mentioning. I decided to focus on the positive aspects of it. (Ade)

When putting together these images and words around corridors at a later stage for the exhibition, as this was one subject that everyone had photographed at some point throughout the project, we ended up placing the 'corridor images' into a singular tiled mosaic style image. On looking at this, it is strangely reminiscent of images from a CCTV camera, an eerie reminder perhaps of the sense of control and surveillance that emerged through various images and discussions throughout the project (see figure 21).

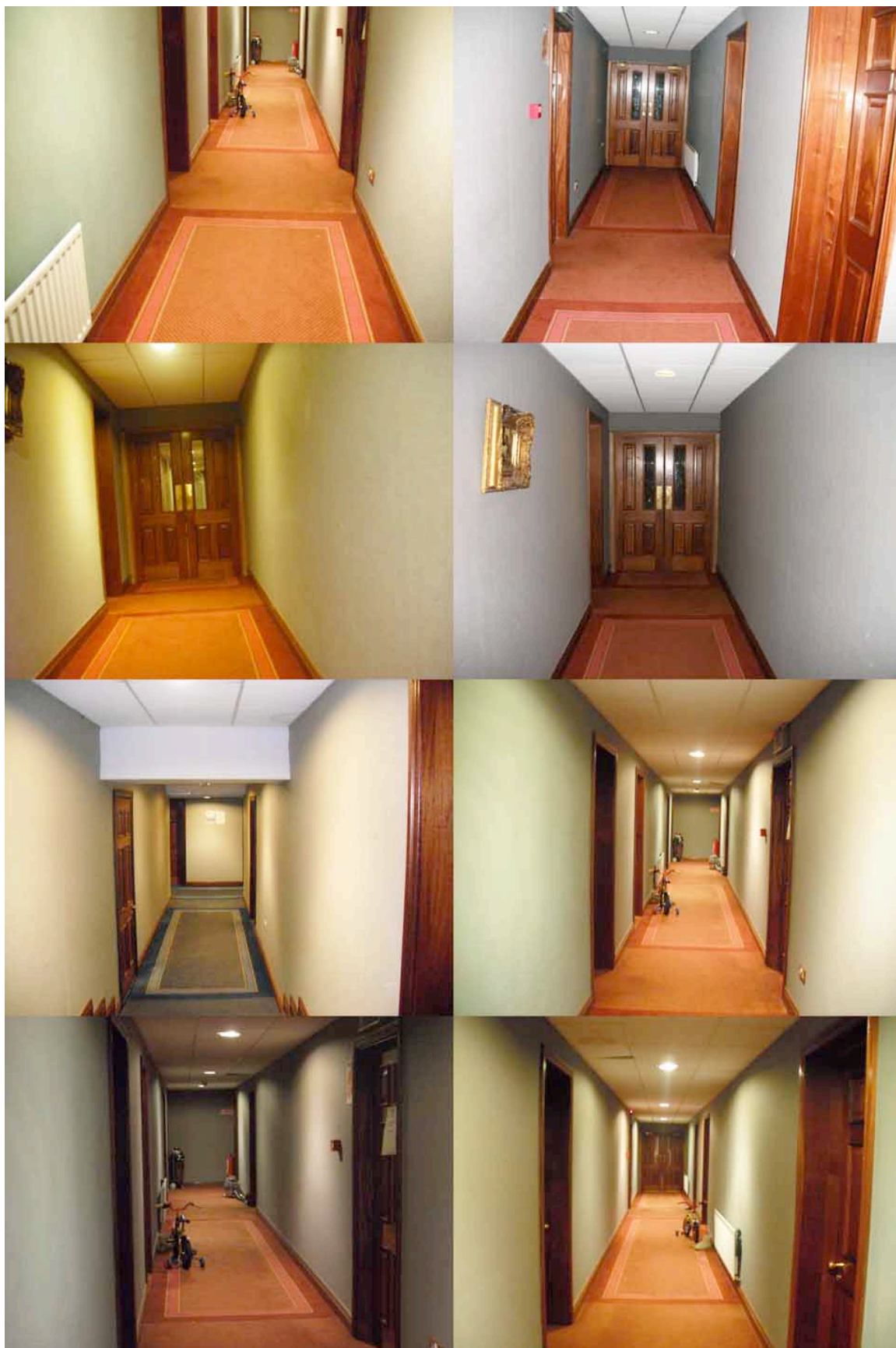


Figure 21: ‘Corridor’

The ‘microphysics of power’: liminality created through policy and maintained through control

Experiences of surveillance, though read off the flesh, do not leave unmarked the soul that inhabits the body (Mountz 2010:151).

The direct provision centre is a highly controlled and monitored space, experienced by residents in the sense of being watched, monitored, as well as through a sense of a lack of autonomy over living spaces and living arrangements, as reflected in Benjamin’s description of the corridor above (figure 17): *‘basically it’s like a street, you’ve got no control over it, people might leave it dirty, might leave it clean, that’s the way it goes’*. Paradoxically, the state of in between-ness, disconnection and exclusion, is maintained through a form of inclusion. Like Agamben’s *homo sacer*, the liminal persona is included through the very fact of his exclusion, or is excluded through inclusion in the system. Similarly, the asylum seeker is marginalised from society though control, monitoring, through a connectedness to the asylum system, connected by being a number, by living in a highly monitored and controlled space, by being trapped in the time frames and spaces of the system.

A sense of frustration, and at times anger, came through for participants over the lack of autonomy over everyday life and routines. Lack of control over communal spaces and lack of space or overcrowding were constant reminders of ‘in between-ness’, of not owning one’s own life. A sense of being under constant surveillance emerged through the photographs and discussions, as well as later in a more immediate way through the exhibition process (as discussed in more detail in Chapter Five). Brian’s description of his photograph of a CCTV camera on the street near the hostel, clearly not only meant for residents of the direct provision centre, reflects this sense of feeling monitored (figure 22):



Figure 22

This one, these are the things which I have never seen before, but I think everyone can see. Just here (looking out window) – it's just here, just by the junction. But what I don't like with it is that someone is sitting somewhere watching everyone move so I don't like to be watched. I'm not doing anything bad but I don't like to be monitored because sometimes you don't have privacy. (Brian)

Similarly, a photo of the local Garda (police) Station (figure 23) represents control, lack of freedom when seen through the eyes of someone living in direct provision:



Figure 23

And of course another thing I don't like, the guards. Because I don't like what they represent. Because where I come from, I still feel, there is, I still kind of get that same feeling that people get because what garda means here means 'the protector of the people'. Us, we don't call them guards, we call them the police. The police to us is AK-47 and they're the ones who shoot you... so for me I can't like the guards. It may look like a nice building and I can't feel free as they expect me to feel free and sadly I haven't had a very good experience with the guards, in [name of town] or anywhere else. (Elizabeth)

The condition of direct provision is akin to what Michel Foucault (1979) called a diffuse and pervasive 'microphysics of power'. By this, Foucault saw power as a network of strategies which penetrate intimate and daily life as far as the body itself, something that is 'exercised rather than possessed' (Foucault 1979:26):

Now, the study of this microphysics presupposes that the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy; that its effects of domination are attributed not to "appropriation", but to disciplines, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques,

functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege one might possess; that one should take it as its model a perpetual battle, rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. In short, this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the “privilege” acquired or preserved of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated (Foucault 1979:26).

As Foucault explains, this type of power which penetrates everyday and intimate life may be extended by those who are dominated by it, with they themselves beginning to police each other and even themselves. This was reflected somewhat by frustration with other residents’ habits, the focus of the frustration thus at times transferring from the system itself to the other people trapped within it (see Benjamin’s comments for example on the images shown in figures 17 and 24). The sense of self-policing, or self-censoring, also emerged later during the processes of representing the work publicly, as discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

Whilst the residents are free to come and go on an everyday basis, they are effectively imprisoned by a regime of control of everyday functions, with a lack of freedom and autonomy over basic and intimate details of everyday life. Autonomy over everyday activities is limited by communal living and routines dictated by external rules and regulations, as Mary’s quote implies:

We are more or less like prisoners, because you cannot do what you like. They look at your movements...you know, sometimes when you sit down and think about the situation you are in, it...makes you...because we are mature people and we are free. We had our own families, whereby you have got your own government, and now you come in a (inaudible) whereby you cannot do your free things... ahh, sometimes it makes me...ahhh....those thoughts they make us run... (Mary)

Residents of direct provision are connected to the centre through varying levels of control, and must inform management of their whereabouts.

And for me, maybe one month two weeks no come here nobody will be worried, but if I do they will call Department of Justice for me. (Iswat)

Shared living spaces and overcrowding in the bedrooms seemed to highlight the lack of freedom and autonomy over basic and intimate details of everyday life. Benjamin again considered the frustrations of not being able to control the state of where he was living, and the difficulties of sharing these spaces with so many other people:



Figure 24

Our eating area, our food and eating area, it's a common area, communal area, also its...the problem with that is some people leave it dirty, some people just don't care, they just leave used cups and spoons, whatever it may be, they don't think about the other person, they don't think that we are all living in the same house, not house, hostel, but they don't really think about the other people, this wasn't a good photo, there are times when it does get really bad, and this goes to show untidiness, that's one thing I really don't like, just dirt and untidiness, and I've got no control over where I live and what I do... (Benjamin)

Overcrowding and sharing small spaces with other people for long periods of time was also reflected in photos of rooms and spaces in the hotel: bedrooms with suitcases piled up, bathrooms stuffed with boxes, beds lined up beside each other. Several participants expressed the difficulties of sharing a room for a long period of time, having different routines, not being able to sleep properly, noise issues.

FLAC's 2009 report on experiences of direct provision states that space is a recurring theme in consultations with direct provision residents (2009:89). It also states that 'inadequate or restricted space and overcrowding may be expected where more than two people not only sleep in a standard sized double bedroom, but also carry on most of their daily activity there as well' (2009:92), which was the case for many residents of this hostel (see figure 25).



Figure 25

Sadness. I can show it, sharing the room. You can see the two beds and the space in between. For me, anytime, any day I woke up like this, sharing the room, the toilet, no privacy, you understand, it's sad for me. (Iswat)

The lack of control over the spaces of the hostel, beyond frustration, also manifested in a fear for safety for residents, not being able to control who is in their living spaces. The following excerpt from my fieldwork diary was noted after an informal conversation with one of the participants:

Abiye spoke about the craziness of putting such a heterogenous group to live in a small space together, with no training of staff for this. He spoke about his suspicion of the people there, that you can never know what type of people they are. He said that

asylum seekers are not only the victims of violence or abuse, but also the torturers who have had to flee. He said he is afraid to let his kids wander around the hostel, or play on the stairs alone as he doesn't know who may be around. This is something we perhaps don't often think about with asylum seekers, that there are both sides of the story in this way. (Diary excerpt, 19 June 2010)

Lack of control over food and eating times was an issue. Food and eating are central to the concept of 'home', and frustration with the lack of freedom and control over this fundamental aspect of everyday life often emerged throughout the project. Iswat compared her life in direct provision to that of the birds she photographed on the roof (see figure 13), who could eat when and where they wanted:

Can you see these birds? They live free life. Not like us that are here, when you eat you have to stay here. But these birds they are free, they have sweet life, when they eat they are free to go anywhere, not like us... (Iswat)

Often participants complained of having the same food over and over again (see figures 26a and 26b):



Figure 26a and 26b

It shows you cannot cook what you like for yourself. This is what they cook for us....same old same old! (Iswat)

Abiye mentioned how the food would suddenly get better when an inspection was due:

...you can tell the difference. You can see the food goes better immediately. You can tell someone is coming...they bring out the baskets of fruits and put them on the table...you know what I mean?! (Abiye)

In a conversation with Brian, he explained that fruit had to be signed for between certain hours in the morning. The number of pieces of fruit was rationed and if this signing was missed, fruit could not be accessed later in the day. Alice spoke about the extreme control over times when residents could eat in the reception centre she had been in previous to coming to this direct provision centre:

Even at night we couldn't take food, even to your room, you must eat in the room there. Even one time, I was taking some drug at ten o'clock, but before that you have to eat food first, and I have to wait, the man who was working there said I should not take the food...only just bread, he say no, I say but I am taking medicine I am waiting for that time, he said no and I had to dump it in the bin, he prefer that. Even after I explained to him that I am taking some medicines, and at this time I will take it and then I will eat something. (Alice)

For Alice then, 'home' meant somewhere where one has a sense of control over the small everyday details of one's own life (see figure 27):



Figure 27

That one it's a house you know, having a home where you yourself you can decide what to do, you know, like you have your room all alone, you want to put your radio on, you put, you want to put anything on, or if you want to listen to news, nobody will say oh you are disturbing me. What we are passing through, you know...a home for your own self at least is good, yeah. (Alice)

Temporal Liminality

Mapped onto the spatial experiences of liminality are the temporal experiences of this in between existence, particularly resonant in the case of those participants who had been waiting for several years without knowing the outcome of their case. Time was an important factor in the way participants experienced waiting and 'permanent temporariness', from the ways they expressed the amount of time they had been in Ireland to the different ways in which time emerged and was expressed during the project. During the first session, we spent some time introducing ourselves, each person saying a little about themselves. Most people mentioned how long they had been in Ireland for: Benjamin had been in Ireland for '*two years and one month*'; Brian for '*just two months*'; Iswat had '*been here for three years and three months now in Ireland*'; Ade had '*been in Ireland for close to...more than four years now*'; Janaan had been here for '*two years now*'; Emmanuelle '*for a few years*'; Rajo had been '*living in Ireland for three years, four months now, two days and one hour maybe!*' Time came up constantly during the project: how long different people had been waiting, how fast or slow time was passing. On comparing two photographs of the same child, Iswat showed me that:

Time is going, see the baby here she is one year old, look at the baby now, she is grown, you understand? The time...time is going, now I am spending four years...that is why I show the baby. Then she was one, look at her now she is five years...time is going... time is going. I can tell you there is a lady here, she will be six years in this centre, and yet she is still...you have to do something... time is going, time is going! (Iswat)

Children are growing up in direct provision, the only home many of them have ever known³⁹, as Iswat demonstrates (see figure 28):

³⁹ Since the 2004 citizenship referendum, these children who are born and grow up in Ireland no longer have automatic rights to citizenship. See Crowley et al. (2006) for a discussion on this referendum:



Figure 28

This was the birthday of my friend's daughter. She is seven. She came here to this hostel when she was just almost a year. Since 2004. She is grown up now. (Iswat)

Waiting, suspense and uncertainty are manifestations of the temporal experience of liminality. To seek asylum in another country implies waiting for verification or refusal of refugee status. The intervening time is a form of temporal liminality, a space of uncertainty, of waiting and for many of a sense of powerlessness. (Although even liminality, in the context of ritual, would have a defined end point. Perhaps the temporal liminality here should be thought of as closer to the idea of 'limbo' as defined above). Participants often commented that it was the uncertainty of time that they found difficult, the not knowing, that even in prison, at least you know how long you have to wait:

And sometimes I tend to think justice is not done because you cannot be seated in one place, you know like even people in prison, you know that after ten years you are

'Prior to the referendum, any child born on the island of Ireland had an automatic right to Irish citizenship – this right was enshrined in the Irish Constitution. As a consequence of the referendum, the right to citizenship by birth was removed from the Constitution, and Irish citizenship is now primarily defined by blood ties' (Crowley et al. 2006:3).

coming out but when you are here, psychologically you don't even know what is happening tomorrow and then you get traumatized. (Brian)

Brekke (2004) similarly discusses the difficulty for his respondents of time being open ended, of living with the uncertainty of how long they would have to wait (2004:22). One of his respondents ('unaccompanied Afghan, 17 years old, after 10 months in Sweden') comments:

Even in prison they operate with a time limit! "This is when you are going to be free", they'll tell you. But here they only tell you to wait, just wait (Brekke 2004:21).

In an editorial entitled 'Waiting' (2008), Jeffrey identifies four main types of prolonged or chronic waiting: surplus time, heightened suspense, lost time, and panic and inertia. Where the future becomes abstract and at a remove from daily life, a feeling of 'surplus time' may occur, he argues:

When people are catapulted out of their daily lives, or when quotidian life radically alters for the worse, the sense of being caught up in a predictable and engaging set of activities that produce known forth-comings can break down and the present can come to weigh on the minds of the individual subject as a type of 'curse' or 'burden' (2008:955).

For Kobelinsky, the act of waiting actually translates and orders the temporal experiences of those who find themselves in CADA accommodation; it is a way of giving meaning to the past, present and future (2010:146).

It seems important to consider the intimate effects of the experience of waiting, or as Bissell puts it, to think through 'the event of waiting from the perspective of the embodied corporeal experience' (Bissell 2007:278). Conlon urges us to become more 'attuned to waiting as a distinct spatial and temporal dimension of stasis for migrants' (Conlon 2011b:355)⁴⁰. It has been relatively well documented at this stage that the uncertainty of not knowing, of endless waiting for years at a time, has profoundly negative effects on the health of asylum seekers (Silove et al. 1997; Silove et al.

⁴⁰ See discussion in the Introduction (page 39-41) on waiting, and the literature around this. See also Bailey et al. 2002, Brekke 2004, Mountz et al. 2002, Mountz 2011a on asylum seekers' experiences of waiting; also Bissell 2007 and Jeffrey 2008 on waiting more generally in a context of mobility.

2000; Steel and Stilove 2001; Sultan and O'Sullivan 2001; Summerfield 2001, Wilson and Droždek 2004). The FLAC (2009) report states that:

A number of factors contribute to the mental health difficulties experienced by asylum seekers living in direct provision. Often the feelings of isolation and loneliness caused by forced migration are compounded by social exclusion, the long periods of time spent in the direct provision system, the uncertainty of their status in the country and the loss of autonomy (2009:109)

and that

the uncertain nature of their status to remain in Ireland, coupled with the conditions in which they are living, cause direct provision residents to become depressed (2009:110).

Waiting and uncertainty over long periods of time affect every part of the being, as Brian expressed:

Me I do a lot of things to keep myself busy, but my wife, because of these things, she is getting sick every month. I try to make her strong but she keep on thinking, every day she is asking about her daughter, what is happening, where is she? I also get worried and concerned, but you cannot be seated there with the wife saying where is our daughter, where is our daughter, there is nothing we can do about it. you only need to put everything in God's hands. So trauma is actually real, it is one's life experience, in the body...even me most of the time, I even take the food, but I only eat one or two pieces, I don't have the appetite to eat, then at night is when I'm very hungry. I come downstairs to just take bread, but even when you eat the food, you find the food is not tasteful. it is just trying to be strong, but inside you are going a lot of things, but you cannot just be seated here, you know mourning yourself. (Brian)

Brekke, in his study on asylum seekers in Sweden, similarly talks about the physical and mental problems related to their strenuous situation among his informants, in particular difficulties sleeping (2004:27), something that emerged often amongst the participants of this project.

The time of waiting for the results of asylum claims can vary enormously in the Irish asylum system, from several months to several years, leading for most to a state of

‘permanent temporariness’ (Bailey et al. 2002:125), in which waiting and uncertainty become part of everyday life. At the time of beginning the project, the participants had been living in direct provision in Ireland for periods of between two months and more than four years, with over one third of all asylum seekers at this time in direct provision for over three years. The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) publish monthly reports which include figures of how long people have been living in direct provision. However, while it gives a percentage of people living in the system for over three years, it does not break this down any further. This, as I argued in Chapter Two (see page 65) masks the numbers of people who have been waiting for six, seven, eight or in some cases more years. A case was recently reported of one man waiting in the asylum system in Ireland for fourteen years for a decision on his deportation order (Hough 2011). Kobelinsky (2010) speaks of the close relationship between waiting and the exercise of power (*‘la relation étroite entre l’expérience de l’attente et l’exercice du pouvoir’* (2010:22), defined as the ‘politics of waiting’. Schuster argues that waiting has become one of the ‘weapons in the battle to deter’ asylum seekers on the move (2011:411).

Liminality and its temporal manifestations of waiting, and exclusion, are tightly bound up in the micro-geographies of asylum, threads of an undervalued existence. Attempts at belonging and ‘informal citizenship’ as Sassen (2003:50) describes it, for the lucky few do lead to a new life, but for most are tenuous and fragile, only to be broken at the point of deportation to the place of origin or elsewhere or removal to another part of the country. For Maguire and Murphy, the experience of direct provision, as experienced through the lens of the documentary *Seaview* is described as ‘lives lived in a space characterised by deadened time’ (forthcoming: 3). They describe how

time has a disturbed quality: people sometimes remain there for several years, yet at any moment their world might be shattered by an official letter announcing a future of integration in Ireland or deportation overseas’ (ibid).

Ade’s description of his photograph of ‘darkness and light’ reflects a similar view (see figure 29):



Figure 29

Like I was trying to explain earlier about the wall that I took, this side of the wall represents the present for the asylum seekers, why this dark aspect represent the future? Because you don't know what the future holds for you. You might get a letter tomorrow that say you have been given the leave to remain, fine, and at the end of the day they might say after what we heard...I heard the case of someone that spent like seven, more than seven years here and that was deported back to our country without having the opportunity of taking any of that, that was a very sad situation. (Ade)

(It seems poignant on reading this now that not long after the project finished, Ade and his family were deported back to Nigeria.)

Related to the sense of time passing for the participants, and the amount of time people had been waiting was the constant sense of suspense and uncertainty that this brought, with the main focus of this suspense being hearing whether or not they had 'got their papers' (i.e. been granted refugee status). The second of Jeffrey's four types of chronic waiting is what he calls 'heightened suspense', in which an object of fear or longing (in this case, 'waiting for papers') may erode a sense of the present (2008:956).

Packed bags in the bedrooms (see figure 30) symbolised the ‘permanent temporariness’ (Bailey et al. 2002:125) of the situation, showing on the one hand the lack of space and overcrowding and, on the other, the sense of never really unpacking, of being ready to leave at any moment, to a new place or to be deported.



Figure 30

This one takes me back to my home, whereby I used to stay planning, thinking for tomorrow. When the year starts you start planning for this year. But now we are staying without any plan because every time we are thinking about being taken back to our home and we are in suspense, we are staying in suspense because it is a limbo, it is a detention. (Mary)

The suitcase has often been a symbol of displacement and of the tension between mobility and stasis. Looking at examples of this idea of ‘heightened suspense’, Jeffrey discusses research by Uehling (2002) with Crimean Tatars living in Uzbekistan, in which they describe having ‘suitcase moods’: ‘Pining for home, but unsure about the possibility and sense of returning, these women sometimes entered a type of reverie in which they sat on their suitcases and ignored daily chores’ (Jeffrey 2008:956). In her book *Terra Infirma: geography’s visual culture*, Irit Rogoff discusses the role of the suitcase as a symbol. She states that:

Like many other important terms such as ‘exile’, ‘diaspora’, ‘migration’ or ‘hybridity’, the suitcase has become the signifier of mobility, displacement, duality and the overwrought emotional climates in which these circulate’ (Rogoff 2000:37).

Packed suitcases and boxes in the rooms of the direct provision centre were a bone of contention, something residents wished to hide from view as they were supposed to be locked away in a storage room due to their potential fire hazard in the rooms. However, most rooms seemed to be crowded with packed suitcases and boxes, storing goods which would be used in a life after leaving the centre.

The sense of suspense was symbolized by one participant by the postman, as people constantly waited for news, from home and from the Department of Justice regarding their case (see figure 31):



Figure 31

This man means something for everyone in here! This man can bring you negative, from Justice, this man can bring you positive. (Rajo)

The waiting and uncertainty, while sometimes manifested in a sense of panic or sadness at time passing, like in Iswat’s description above (*‘time is going, time is going!’*), also manifested in a sense of boredom or lethargy, tangible in the daily

rhythms of the hostel. One of the first most notable aspects on walking into the centre where the project took place was the amount of people around during the day, waiting. People could be found sleeping in the bedrooms at all hours of the day. Brekke (2004:28) talks about 'directionless time'. Unable to work or to access most forms of education, direct provision becomes for many people a 'limbo', an in between space, inside Ireland but outside of Irish society, included and yet excluded in Agambennian terms. The television, 'companion of boredom' (Kobelinsky 2010:158) was always on throughout the day and quite often people walked around in nightwear. As Brian said:

There is a lot of boredom here...most of the people who are seated here, they are just seated in the TV, watching TV, and on the internet, chatting with friends on Facebook, by the end of the day, there is nothing you are going to change, only (inaudible) but most of them they are just...others they are just sleeping, just sleeping, there is nothing they are doing. (Brian)

For Brian, as for Abiye and for some of the other participants, there was the sense that this had to be avoided at all costs, to not fall into this pattern:

But if I could just be seated in the hostel...like these people are just seated here watching television, I would have not got all these opportunities...but if you get your papers tomorrow, where are you going to begin? We need to go there to just go there, do something in the society... (Brian)

The experience of temporal liminality was also expressed through the worry of wasting time, a kind of 'temporal angst' in the words of Stepputat (1992, cited in Jeffrey 2008:955), years passing without being able to do anything: '*....time is going, now I am spending four years*' (Iswat). This fits with Jeffrey's third type of prolonged waiting, 'lost time', where suspense becomes exacerbated or replaced by a sense of losing time, of being 'left behind' (2008:956). Ade and Abiye spoke about how people become 'deskilled' through the process of waiting, unable to do anything for years at a time. Qualifications valid on arrival into the asylum process become useless after several years of not being able to develop them, as Ade pointed out:

Will they be able to practice after six years of not doing anything? You have to go back and sit the exams again. (Ade)

as did Abiye in a separate conversation:

Abiye: When you get somebody who comes in as a medical doctor and leave him in the system for five or six years, then all of a sudden you let him have the papers, would you employ someone who has been out of work for six years?

Zoë: Hmmm sitting around for five or six years...

Abiye: Even if he is a medical doctor... so how does he account for the six years? Would you employ somebody like that? No. He's a medical doctor, fine; he's an accountant, oh yes, but sitting around for six years doing nothing...so how do you expect him straight away to get a job? So he needs to go back...

Zoë: Start again...

Abiye: That's right...that's why you find most people, even with these qualifications, they end up in Tesco's, Dunnes Stores...without ever working in their profession, because they have been made redundant, deskilled...that's the word I like using..

Zoë: Deskilled

Abiye: Deskilled, yeah, they lose what they have, they get replaced with FETAC⁴¹ level four (laughs)

Brian expressed the importance of keeping occupied and of learning new skills during the waiting process, so that when the waiting is over, he would be able to work:

If I get papers in this country, I don't want to be on social, I don't want to get anything for free, I want to work with my hands because you use the brain and you work with your hands and you be successful, rather than just sitting down and waiting for everything for free. (Brian)

Ontological liminality

The realities of being in a prolonged liminal or transitional situation, in between a previous life and an uncertain future, with limited control over the present and over plans for the future, play out for asylum seekers in their sense of self and identity. Despite ways of negotiating liminality through everyday practices, and the many positive connections to place and community, discussed further below, there was a

⁴¹ Further Education and Training Awards Council

profound awareness among the participants of their position as ‘liminal personae’, on the one hand of the precarity of being in between with a sense of little control over either present or future, and on the other of what it means to be an asylum seeker in this country, and how that term is interpreted and perceived by other people. A sense of having lost their individuality, their status as independent adults, and become a number in a system, invisible as a person, emerged throughout the project and through discussions with participants as well as through the images, texts and stories. During a group activity which involved exploring the meanings and emotions evoked by different colours in photographs, one participant said the following:

And this one depicts how much how much the expectation is when coming, when leaving the country, for example, they are so huge, so massive. You expect you are going to a perfect world, a safe world, so huge what expectations are - the different colours show the expectations, you expect to be safe, you expect to be comfortable, you expect not to be marginalized, you expect no discrimination, all the things that you left behind, you expect no traces of them... (Ade)

This quotation highlights the hiatus between how the speaker expected to feel when coming to Ireland, and how he actually felt being here. Alongside the temporal and spatial aspects of liminality, mentioned by Mountz (2011a), I add a further category of ‘ontological liminality’, the internalized sense of being a liminal being, the ways in which an existence which is ‘in between’ becomes part of one’s identity and self and therefore lived on a everyday basis. I use the term ‘ontological liminality’ as a way of expressing the ways in which this liminal existence, and the sense of being a ‘liminal persona’ are internalized, as they emerged throughout the project through the words and images of the participants.

In one sense ontological liminality could refer to the opposite of Giddens’ concept of ‘ontological security’ (1984), referring to the importance of predictability and having some control over the future, as Brekke (2004) discusses in his report on asylum seekers’ experiences of waiting:

To Giddens this is one important component of a very basic existentialist experience of feeling safe in the everyday situation. Having some idea of what and where one will be in the near future is essential to the experience of the present' (Brekke 2004:19/20).

'Ontological liminality' here therefore refers to a situation where there is no sense of security for or control over the future. The other sense of ontological liminality as I use it refers to how asylum seekers are perceived or represented as liminal beings, and thus feared, 'othered', homogenized and stereotyped, and thus how they perceive themselves, becoming in a way the label they are given. As I pointed out in Chapter One in a discussion around the labelling and representation of asylum seekers, just as negative discourses about groups of people 'produce identities that accompany exclusionary geographies' (Mountz 2010:xvii), the process of stripping away all other identities may in fact transform the identities of those subjected to it: 'the need to conform to an institutionally imposed stereotype can both reinforce control and transform an identity' (Zetter 1991:45). Similarly O'Neill and Spybey (2003:8) talk about the power and complexity of the 'refugee' label, in terms of the identity and subjectivity of those who bear the label. The internalized sense of liminality by people seeking asylum may be seen as a means in which control and power reach the intimate levels of the being, part of a 'microphysics of power' in Foucault's terms, which may extend to a form of self-policing, reinforcing control, as Zetter puts it.

Turner talks about the invisibility of liminal personae, homogenous and undifferentiated from each other in their liminal state. Like Agamben's *homo sacer*, the liminal person is by its very nature homogenized rather than individualized. There was a sense from participants that their voices had become weak, and that challenging the system in any way was futile, thus increasing their sense of invisibility and of liminality. This emerged through discussions around everyday issues throughout the project. It also emerged in a very immediate and real way through the events surrounding the exhibition of the collaborative work (see Chapter Five). A sense of voice being weak against the architecture of this system often emerged through the work and discussions with participants, as well as a fear of speaking out. Complaining about everyday details was seen as futile, or even as doing more harm than good, and as an independent complaints system for direct

provision is still not in place, complaints are made directly to the management of centres or to the RIA. As the FLAC report points out:

An impartial and independent complaints mechanism is necessary to ensure that residents have complete confidence in the direct provision system and will raise issues of concern with both management and the RIA (FLAC 2009:40).

The report also finds that ‘residents do not have faith in a system where they have to make a complaint about a particular service to the people who are responsible for providing that service’ (2009:41). For Abiye, years of living in the direct provision system had taught him that complaining does not change anything:

In the past you know, I remember initially people would queue up, they say oh this is wrong, oh we are five of us in a room, I am tired, oh the food is bad, oh this that, people used to do that but you learn along the line, you learn...it makes no sense, it doesn’t make a difference. (Abiye)

Instead he explained how if you speak out about one thing, you tend to lose another, and that complaining generally leads to more trouble. He had resigned himself to the futility of it, instead trying to put things in perspective:

I used to bother myself about it, but it’s too little, it’s too small out of the big picture, to go on the news and say we only have one washing machine. Some homes don’t have a washing machine at all, that’s what they tell you. You have people, hundreds of them, who say look well I don’t have a washing machine in my home, so you have one and you make... (inaudible) I don’t have a dryer in my home and then you are talking about not having a dryer - did you have dryer in Africa?! It’s the truth, it’s the truth... (Abiye)

The text and images of Ade’s digital story (see Ade’s story, Appendix Two) reflects how weak he felt his voice had become, again reflecting the futility of making complaints against a system he felt he could not change:

I am not writing to condemn the direct provision system, as I am not qualified to do so, and I am not advocating for it to be abolished because my voice has become so weak

from various previous complaints, and most importantly mine is one of the voices those in authority would prefer not to hear. We will leave that to those who are eminently qualified to do so and who have been doing so despite the lack of political will on the part of the powers that be to effect any significant change. I know I would only invite the wrath of the state by such a call and they would stop at nothing towards unleashing all the powers of the state on tiny me (Ade).

Fear of being moved with very little notice to another hostel was prevalent, and one participant explained that people felt that if they spoke out, they could be moved for no apparent reason as a form of ‘punishment’, as they had seen happening before. This is also reflected in the FLAC report in a section on complaints:

Despite the reassurance given in the House Rules booklet to the contrary, many residents believe that any attempt to bring grievances to the attention of those in charge may result in a negative decision on their asylum application or some other form of punitive measure such as transfer to another centre (FLAC 2009:40).

Again this type of punitive approach may be seen as leading to a form of self regulation, forcing residents to stay quiet for fear of what speaking out might lead to. Rather, participants expressed feeling like merely a number, not a human being with a voice that would be listened to, as Abiye expressed (see also figure 32):

You know you hear all these things, nobody cares, we are just reference numbers, you know, 69 numbers...if you go to them all they want is your 69 number....if you call them on the phone all they want is your 69 number... (Abiye)



Figure 32

It just shows me...it reminds me of when you are at school, or when you are just traveling, passing by in a hotel, you stay in such a room where by they have to know your room number.....(interruption)....This one, when I remember my home, I had no number, but this reminds me that I am in a temporary place because where... they know me by this number. (Mary)

There was a sense, gathered from outside perceptions that to be an asylum seeker was a low status in a hierarchical society, and one they often wanted to hide from people they knew outside the hostel. Asylum seekers consist of many different types of people from different backgrounds, and yet are seen homogenously as one type or group of 'other'. As Mountz points out, 'refugee' refers to a heterogenous set of people, yet is a term that others, discursively, materially and legally' (Mountz 2011b:256). The participants seemed to be painfully aware of this outside perception, and of the perceived low status of this position. I noted in my fieldwork diary:

I remember Iswat saying last week that asylum seekers are the lowest of the low, even among their own people here. She says that when someone gets their papers, they are congratulated, admitted into the group almost. She said she feels low, 'like dirt' (excerpt from fieldwork diary, April 29, 2010).

Another excerpt from my diary comments on a conversation with Abiye and Ade regarding perceptions of asylum seekers:

Abiye and Ade also talk about the image of asylum seekers as destitute, poor and they explain that many aren't poor at all. Abiye pointed to a picture of himself at his church in a suit, and said, do I look like an asylum seeker to you? (Diary, 19 June 2010)

The corresponding conversation from my transcriptions went as follows:

Abiye: ...and there, what do I look like? Do I look like an asylum seeker?! (laughs)

Zoë: Very smart! You look like a serious official!

Abiye: Yeah! Nobody would think...nobody in the world would see me as an asylum seeker!

Zoë: Yeah, this is the idea...should an asylum seeker look different?

My diary excerpt continues:

What should an asylum seeker look like? Can we use the exhibition to begin to challenge or change that assumption? He [Abiye] also said that when residents of [the centre] are giving their address, they always give 'X' and not 'X Hotel' as they are ashamed of it. He said that if people he knows knew the conditions he was living in, they would be shocked.' (Diary, 19 June 2010)

This links in with earlier discussions in Chapter One on the representation of refugees and asylum seekers, and the often binary discourses around this: genuine versus bogus, good deserving versus bad undeserving, and so on. Malkki (1996) talks about the visual image of the refugee and the ways in which this could affect decisions around who deserved to get refugee status or not: 'making it possible to claim that given people were not real refugees because they did not look (or conduct themselves) like real refugees' (1996:384). (See also Kobelinksy's figures of the 'hero' versus the 'imposter' (2010) and Hyndman and Giles' (2011) discussion of the passive feminized refugee).

Regarding the various representations of asylum seekers, there was also a sense among participants that they needed to fight against perceptions of asylum seekers as ‘illegal’ or as spongers from the government, by clarifying their legal position, by working on a voluntary basis or creating a role for themselves, or by making clear that they did not want to be dependent on the government for their needs, but that given the chance, they would be supporting themselves and their families. As Brian said:

If I get papers in this country, I don’t want to be on social, I don’t want to get anything for free, I want to work with my hands because you use the brain and you work with your hands and you be successful, rather than just sitting down and waiting for everything for free. But in the meantime I am here, there is nothing I can do because I have to wait for the state to consider my case. (Brian)

This sense of outside perceptions came through very strongly during the process of creating an exhibition of the work, and discussing how the work, and asylum seekers, should be represented to a broader audience (see Chapter Five). Participants were highly aware of the connotations of different labels, and how a person could be perceived, and therefore treated, very differently depending on what label was placed on them. Zetter (2007) talks of the ‘fragmentation’ of labels and how this allows governments a means to refuse or mistreat those in need of protection. In a discussion around a collaborative art project with asylum seekers in Ireland, Anthony Haughey points out that:

Naming is aligned with identity, self-esteem and recognition. Naming conventions are culturally negotiated and are therefore subject to transformative processes. A major question was how to resist and counteract dehumanising classifications such as ‘illegal alien,’ and ‘undocumented immigrant’; even relatively benign taxonomic descriptions have attained negative connotations, names such as ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘refugee’ have been used erroneously by the media often adding to inflammatory myths surrounding migrants (Haughey 2009:57).

Labels therefore are treated seriously by those in precarious and liminal legal positions, as emerged in the following conversation after watching a series of digital stories made by ‘undocumented migrants’:

Zoë: The last one was from a series, it was a workshop done in Ireland, working with undocumented migrants to look at their stories, but they all told different types of stories. The others were from different types of projects, not necessarily about migrants or undocumented....

Ade: Can I ask, the last, the undocumented migrants, was the person an asylum seeker? I wanted to say that if he was an asylum seeker, he was not undocumented...calling asylum seekers illegal immigrants.

Rajo: The last one yes, he was asylum seeker.

Abiye: I think rather than looking too much into...for the storyteller, being undocumented is not having regular papers, the essence of being undocumented is...

Ade: The real sense of it, its like calling us...for me, I don't like being called 'illegal immigrant'; the fact that I wanted to be legal, that's what made me go to the Department of Justice and declare my presence in Ireland. So its wrong for anyone to call me 'undocumented' or 'illegal', I feel very strong about it.

Rajo: We are no illegal immigrant, we are asylum seeker. If I get a deportation...

Benjamin: But we are not illegal, we are not undocumented. Justice knows we're here.

Abiye: I think it's more about telling the story in whatever way. I think there's a bit of liberty in how you choose to... I think at that point, being asylum seeker and saying undocumented is not right. Undocumented are for those people who have no record whatsoever in the country.

Benjamin: But my question is, did he say that now his job is chef? So that means that maybe he's not in the system, he's actually undocumented, he's an illegal immigrant. Because he's not even able to travel back home for the first six years

Rajo: He's a chef, but he's not allowed to work.

Benjamin: He's not allowed to work, but he's working, so that means he is undocumented.

Rajo: He's an asylum seeker.

Benjamin: He's not an asylum seeker. An asylum seeker is not undocumented. He is undocumented because he is working and he's not an asylum seeker. He's not even able to go back home.

Elizabeth: Why are we focusing on this guy? Does anyone actually know him?

In another manifestation of the internalization of liminality, the sense of being without a role, without the independence and freedom to make plans, was expressed by Mary in a description of her photograph of piled up suitcases (see figure 30), where she says:

This one takes me back to my home, whereby I used to stay planning, thinking for tomorrow, when the year starts you start planning for this year. But now we are staying without any plan because every time we are thinking about being taken back to our home and we are in suspense, we are staying in suspense because it is a limbo, it is a detention.

This prolonged liminal situation, or ‘temporary permanence’ then heightens this sense of ‘ontological liminality’ lived everyday by those in the direct provision system. The lack of a role in society, coupled with insecurity regarding the future and an awareness of perceptions and status of asylum seekers from outside were internalized by participants, directly affecting identity and sense of self, and therefore everyday existence.

Negotiating liminality

As we can see from the material above, asylum seekers are placed into a deliberate situation of liminality, essentially keeping them in a transitional, in between phase for long periods of time, and preventing them from becoming part of Irish society. This liminality is experienced in various ways by those living in the direct provision system, as emerged through the project, looked at here through the lens of its spatial and temporal manifestations, as well as how it affects the identity and subjectivity of those who live in this liminal situation on a permanent temporary basis.

Despite the imposition of a liminal existence, an enforced state of ‘in between-ness’, people seeking asylum negotiate this existence in various ways through their everyday lives and practices. Looking at the actual experiences of liminality and exclusion, the ‘intimacies of exclusion’ (Mountz 2011a:382), in liminal sites also reveals various forms of belonging, involvement and connection with places and people in the locations where asylum seekers find themselves. While these may certainly be tenuous, in that they are tainted with uncertainty and could be torn away at any moment, what Mountz describes as ‘ambiguous forms of belonging that map onto partial forms of citizenship and statelessness’ (Mountz 2011a:383), these belongings and attachments are important and perhaps overlooked in attempts to understand liminality and exclusion. In her 2003 paper, ‘The Repositioning of

Citizenship', Saskia Sassen refers to these ambiguous or partial forms of citizenship as 'informal citizenship' (2003:50), increasing forms of social contracts or belongings within the community which are not necessarily linked to formal state authorized citizenship and which are formed through medium or long term residency within a community. Sassen discusses the changing nature of citizenship in relation to the state, various 'denationalized forms of citizenship' (2003:42). One of these forms refers to the informal citizenship practices of those who are not formally citizens, in particular referring to undocumented migrants. While asylum seekers are not the same as undocumented migrants, the concept is similar in this case:

Undocumented migrants who are long-term residents engage in practices that are the same as those of formally defined citizens in the routines of daily life: this produces an informal social contract between these undocumented immigrants and the community (2003:43).

This may be seen as another conceptualisation of being simultaneously inside and outside, how asylum seekers become part of the communities they live in, even while remaining in the space between citizenship and non-citizenship. Experiences of liminality and exclusion from the society in which the participants found themselves were lived alongside connections, belongings and involvements through social interactions and friendships, religious involvements and voluntary work. Despite the policies of exclusion and distancing that asylum seekers in Ireland are subjected to, relationship to the local town and community emerged through the project quite often as positive and strong. As well as this, a strong sense of attachment to place emerged through the images, texts and conversations with participants, as well as through the processes of the project, for many a sense of belonging and often pride in a town where many of them had lived for several years. These various attachments and belongings add complexity to the concept of liminality, which is often used to refer to sites between states and borders where asylum seekers wait or are detained, and which thus may be associated with a sense of placelessness (see for example Mountz 2010, 2011a).

Many of the images and discussions around them portray a strong interest in and attachment to the town on many levels, from pride, to involvement in different ways to relationships with various places in the town. Relationship to the town and

environs came in various forms: relationship to actual places in the town, aesthetically or the feelings evoked by those places, or particular features, such as statues or places of natural beauty; relationship to the town through involvement or experiences, positive or negative, with people in the town; and involvement in activities in the town: school, education, church, volunteering. There was a sense from several of the participants that their imposed liminality, exclusion and lack of autonomy needed to be fought through involvement in whichever ways were possible. In this section, I look at the main ways in which this imposed liminality was negotiated on an everyday basis, as they emerged through the images and words of the participants. I look firstly at attachment to place, in particular to the town itself. I then look at the various ways in which the participants involved themselves in the community, in particular through work and education, and through religious activities. I then look at ways in which attachments or connections to Ireland and Irishness emerged throughout the project.

Attachment to place

Various relationships to the town in which the direct provision centre was located emerged throughout the project. As well as incorporating a sense of the transitional or in between nature of space and place as explored above, spatial liminality is also both experienced and negotiated through various attachments and belongings to place, and practiced on an everyday basis through relationship to place, thus further complicating the idea of spatial liminality. A sense of pride, and perhaps ownership, in the town often emerged through the images. Participants photographed areas or features of the town that they particularly liked and were keen to discuss and describe them. However, a sense of ownership and belonging also came alongside a sense of exclusion, a feeling that the walls of the hotel acted as a barrier between the residents of the hotel and those of the town, highlighting the constant tension between belonging and not belonging, inclusion and exclusion. Despite being penetrable, there was a sense that the walls were hiding residents of the hotel inside, that they were locked in and that people outside did not know much about the people inside. This came through particularly strongly when we were later discussing possible venues for exhibiting the work (see Chapter Five), and some participants suggested using the hotel itself as a venue in order to begin to break down some of these barriers.

Emmanuelle's photograph of the bridge (figure 33) brought out her own and other people's interest and pride in the bridge as a feature of the town:



Figure 33

Emmanuelle: I like this picture. I like the bridge, because it represents the 'new bridge'. When you are in Dublin, if they ask me, where do you live? I live in [name of town], I mean that bridge there, so I like that bridge, it's very nice. At night, it's very very nice, the lights are everywhere. You can even see the church behind there, it shows the lights. So at night this bridge is very very nice, it's got lights both sides

Ade: Sorry can I say something about this? There's another thing: not all the towns and counties in Ireland have the privilege of being able to live up to their name. But [name of town], when they say [name of town] at the entrance to the town, you see – I think I took that kind of a picture also- I've been to many places, I think I have been to almost all the counties in Ireland, that's one of the positive aspects of being in the asylum system, we are enjoying the holiday of a lifetime! (laughter) So I've been to all the counties in Ireland, and not all of them are able to live up their name [name of town], it's a very very good bridge! I love it, I have that picture too.

Emmanuelle: I think that's the bridge they built that was new, to come into [name of town], so it represents the whole of [name of town], so if you say in Dublin, where do you live? I live in [name of town], you mean that bridge. (laughter)

Brian: Can you go back to the picture? What I also like is the reflection of the light by the bridge and the silverness of the bridge. When you look this side you see a river, there is also a good reflection of the river in the glass, the other side. Look at these two things here, they look goldish, it looks very nice, quite beautiful.

Ade's photograph of the same bridge (figure 34), from a different angle, despite also highlighting a sense of fear and threat in the street at 3am, instead focuses on this sense of pride and ownership that the bridge evokes:

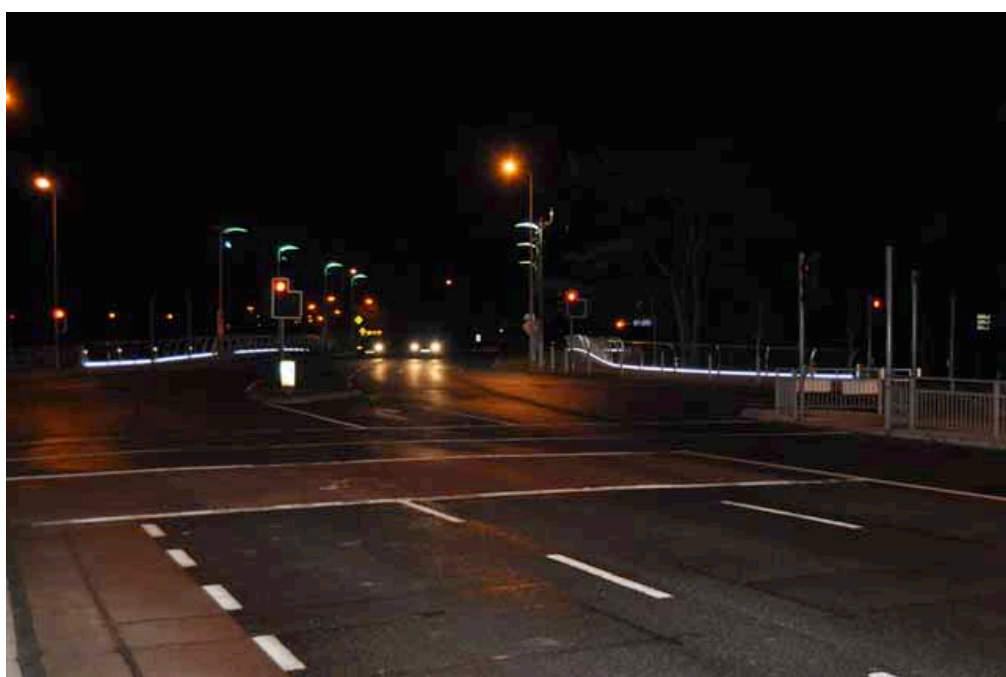


Figure 34

I took the picture of the bridge in a hurry. Unfortunately I took the picture at around 3 o'clock in the morning and the pub had closed and I saw about four guys coming towards me and that's why I took the picture in a hurry. I didn't know their intention, I thought they might be coming to snatch the camera, I didn't know their intention and the security was standing very far from me. I intended going very close to have a very nice view of the bridge but unfortunately I only managed to get this. As I said before, very few towns have the privilege of living up to their name. We live in [name of town], and when you come to [name of town] the first thing you see is a brand new

bridge. No matter what time of the year you come, the bridge always looks new, every time. It means the county council is taking very good care of it, looking after the bridge. (Ade)

Through a photograph of the town's most famous landmark (figure 35), Ade expressed a sense that if the town did well economically, then *'they will not be hostile to immigrants'*, making a direct link between the landmarks of the town and his own welfare as a newcomer.



Figure 35

This is the picture of [name of landmark]. Last year I think the place brought in more visitors, tourists to [name of town] than any other company or building in Ireland, in [name of town] last year. So because of the economic importance of the [name of landmark] in [name of town], so that I why I chose it as one of the best things I love in Ireland, because they are able to bring in more visitors to [name of town], definitely those visitors will spend money in [name of town] and economically [name of town] will be buoyant and if they are buoyant, they will not be hostile to immigrants. Because they won't see as all immigrants taking the jobs away—this place if it opens every day and they have jobs to give to the locals, the locals will be friendly to us, they

won't think they are just feeding on us, the immigrants are not taking the jobs from us, that's one of the reasons I chose this, for economic reasons. (Ade)

Conversely, there was also an awareness that economic hardship would bring fear of and hostility towards immigrants:

Of course...especially now when the recession is beating them this hard, because I do understand, I do understand the situation they are in, you will never want someone to come and live in your house where you don't even know you don't have food to feed your kids, you don't even know where you are going to get the...the money to pay the house, maybe you also will be on the street, it's scary, it's very scary, people are frightened, then again if it is happening like this, they will always blame the people coming in, they will think that, if these people aren't coming in maybe it wouldn't be happening, even if it would happen...(Emmanuelle)

This comment is in fact very evocative of Derrida's discussions on the nature of hospitality (Derrida 2000, 2005; Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000): the theoretical or abstract *law* of hospitality, which is unconditional, versus the *laws* of hospitality, the conditions which come into play in practice, and the close relations between hospitality and hostility, leading Derrida to coin the word 'hostipitality' (Derrida 2000).

Several participants photographed statues and historical features of the town throughout the project. For some, this was for aesthetic reasons and an interest in and pride of the environment around them, such as Emmanuelle's photograph of the new swan statue (see figures 36a and 36b); for others, such as for Mary (see figure 37, also Mary's story, Appendix Two), and for Brian (see figure 38), it was a means of learning about and better understanding the history of the town, and of Ireland and Irish culture.



Figure 36a and 36b

This picture, I like it. This thing is new there. It was not there before. I just went out and I saw it, I said oh my goodness, look at this, it's so lovely. It's right there by the river. When I went there I was thinking that maybe, because this was the other side of it, this was the other side of it, (shows second photo)... when I saw it I said, this thing came out from the water. (Emmanuelle)



Figure 37

This photo is part of my story about statues. I decided to talk about statues because they remind the young generation about things which happened in the past, they can see them in reality. This man was one of the heroes of Ireland, I took this picture reminding me of one of them who fought for the people of Ireland. His name is Jim Larkin. (Mary)



Figure 38

When I go across the bridge, there's a building, and this building looks as if it was built yesterday, but it's a very very old building. And it actually tells me, from 18th century, 19th century, up to 20th century, and this school started 1914 but the building was built 1808. So what gives me a very good clue is that when you have a good foundation of something you want in life, it can last from century to century. So it's always very good in life to have a good foundation in whatever you are doing, if it's building, if it's yourself, a lot of things which need a good foundation. And at the same time beside the school, there is also the church, which I think it was for the first missionaries who established Christianity, it's just on the same compound. It also tells me that religion started long time ago and is still up to date. So that's one thing I like in [name of town], to see some buildings which are from 18th century, which is quite long time ago, to 20th century, 2010. (Brian)

Some photos showed a sense of peace or calm brought by the places of natural beauty in the town, an enjoyment of being in the town, such as Brian's photo of the river (figure 39).



Figure 39

Nature, my favourite place, I always like visiting is to go and see nature. I love nature, and I love being in the riverbank or in the beaches. I love the water and when I sit down reading my book or trying to remember the past so that I make my present better for tomorrow's sake, I try to see nature and the water going down and give me peace and it makes me to long for good things in life. (Brian)

Similar to Vanderhurst's (2007) findings from ethnographic research with asylum seekers in Clifden, Co. Galway, several participants expressed their desire to live locally if and when their papers came through, although for some, the lack of services in the area and community of the same religious or ethnic background meant that they would prefer to move closer to Dublin, as reflected in the following excerpt from a conversation with Janaan:

Zoë: Do you think lots of people who came to [name of town] to live in [name of hotel], do you think they stayed in [name of town]? Like these people, they stayed in a house close by?

Janaan: Yes, after they get paper they just like...even me, I will never move, I will find here a house, because it is a nice place. Although the problem is no mosque and no halal, no halal shop, this is the problem with [name of town].

Informal citizenship: belonging through social relationships, work, education and religion

Various forms of involvement in the town and the community were important for most of the participants, whether through social relationships, voluntary work, education or training courses or religious activities. These were ways of filling otherwise directionless time, as well as of negotiating exclusion and the sense perhaps of ontological liminality.

Social relationships and friendships, both within the direct provision centre, and with people living in the town, built up over years for some, were an important means of connection and belonging, as reflected in the following comments by Emmanuelle and Alice:

To me now [it feels like home], because I'm used to it now, and I am used to the people, you know. I've got really friends, Irish friends, they are very good. I have never been anywhere else, I have been somewhere to another hostel, but it was just a reception, never stayed there for a long time, but from...till I came to live here now I've got so many friends, so many people know me now, you know, because of the things that we do sometimes, we meet in voluntary, sometimes we meet in the garden, sometimes we meet if there's a barbecue, because the asylum support they always make barbecue and they invite everybody, some new people come, and now I am known in [name of town]. You can go together, you can see someone Irish they say hi Emmanuelle! So... it's very nice, in [name of town] you know, we've got so many friends it is looks like really home. (Emmanuelle)

When I came here first of all, you know if you are not known in a place, if you are new in a place, you find that it is so difficult, you will never think that maybe you will make friends one day. And you never think that maybe anybody can welcome you, until you find one person, hi how are you, where are you coming from? And you tell

the story. That person maybe...some they don't know my country, some they do. They see my country in the internet, the telly, some they tell, oh! yeah...they will even say, are you coming from Nigeria? No! Because Nigeria, that's always what people ask, that's what they know, if they see you they always think that you are a Nigerian but even if you are not. So I mean...for the first time, I was very lonely, I was very lonely until I go out there, and if there was any activity to go and went and do, that's why I met lots of people, that's where I started to realize that you know, people are not that bad, people are not that bad, some people they are very good, not all of them are bad now, but some of them are very very good, very good people. (Emmanuelle)

...and even a friend I have in Dublin now, a lady of seventy seven, a widow too, that is where she saw me, and saw me weeping and she came forward, and she's wonderful, she's an angel...she even given me a room in her house, each time I go to Dublin I am free to go there... she's so prayerful, she is twenty four hours in prayer, so she keeps my spirit right up, honestly, and she comforts me. Even the day I went to the appeal, she came there with me, she stood there for me. I call her my mum. I used to cry, oh my mum is not there, I don't have anybody for me, what am I going to do? But God answered me, that is where I see that God is still working. I will show you her picture, her photograph are here. (Alice)

Despite the fact that asylum seekers are prevented from seeking employment or enrolling in third level education, many of them get involved in voluntary work, as well as the limited education courses that they are permitted to take part in, for example English language classes and FETAC courses. The majority of the participants were involved in some regular volunteering work in the town, and some were managing to create connections and further opportunities for themselves through this work. These forms of work and education are important means of occupying the mind during long and undefined periods of waiting, as well as preventing 'deskilling'. They are also loopholes to integration and belonging in a system which seems to discourage both. All these were also reasons for taking part in this particular project. The following three photographs (figures 40 and 41) and comments illustrate the various involvements of the participants, and the importance of these to them:



Figure 40

...having fun with kids...after I finished my training of youth leadership and child protection, at least I am able to advance some techniques to the kids around....they have a very innocent mind, they don't know anything about tomorrow, they know only about today...we had fun, I was teaching them a game of swapping their shoes very fast and then after that, I say, tell me what you have done, my daughter knows it is called 'banana shoes', and the others they say 'banana, it's banana shoe!' it s a good way.. and different kinds of cultures, this girl is from Georgia, this one is from Nigeria, this is Malawi and I think this is Zimbabwe, so it's a multicultural photo as well of kids. The children here they really love one another.... (Brian)



Figure 41

Well, one of the things which I have come to like in this country is a different culture. And I see my future very good in this country, because once there is the integration with the Irish farmers, there are a lot of photos which I had taken when we were doing some farming. I think to me that is one of the very very important things which I like when I go to a foreign land, to get to know the culture of people, so that I'll be able to fit in the society. When you interact with the locals, you are able to know more about the country and the people and at the same time, these farmers have got big big branches of land where they are doing farming, and however small I might be there, maybe one day I'll be a big farmer in this country! So I think this photo is very good to me. It opens up a way for me, integrating with the Irish farmers and the Irish society and culture, at the same time making my future more bright. (Brian)

...like now we have a place on Saturdays we go, Saturdays, you know the garden? We went to the garden and harvested fresh carrots, wash them and eat them, yes it was nice! And have another place there in the handicapped place where we go and help, you know if I go there and help them, I can go and do that, if I am fully well, you have to give in some energy, I go and work there I feel delighted...I go there, go to help. Even in the church, I go to cleaning the church and do some work, busy, keep yourself busy. (Alice)

Religion was another form of involvement in the community, of belonging. It was also a strong and important source of comfort for several participants, a means of making sense of their lives and the situations they were in. Religion also emerges as an important source of strength or comfort in Brekke's (2004) study of asylum seekers in Sweden: 'I live as if I was in the darkness. What gives me hope is God's will...' (2004:26). Maguire and Murphy (2012) point out the importance of religion for understanding in particular Africans' involvements and daily lives in Ireland. While this was not a prominent topic during the project, it emerged, leaking through other themes and topics as an important element in the daily lives of several participants. For Alice, it was what got her through the first months in Ireland, when her 'life almost went' (see figure 42):



Figure 42

When I first came, with the problems I brought, I was really...my life almost went, but when I discovered, asked the church and they told me, I started going there, you know the preaching, the words comforting, I got peace in me, honestly, I am not worried now, I have left everything in God's hands, because at that time, I was worried, I was confused, living a new life, this matter of filling forms, this form, that form, and I

didn't know what was going to happen...so much to read, all those questions, you have to do it yourself, I was not sleeping. (Alice)

For Abiye, the bible was a source of comfort, a reassurance that people from times before had found themselves in similar situations to the one he was in, and had found a way out (see figure 43).

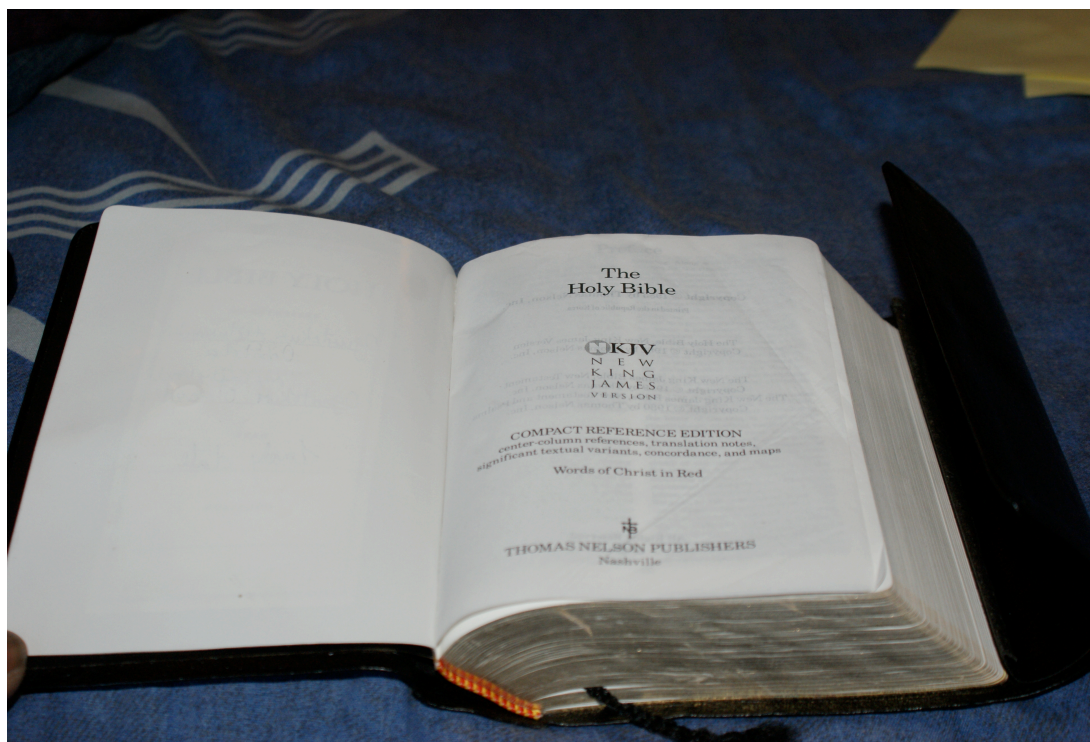


Figure 43

Each time we are disturbed, each time we are thinking about being in captivity and all that, we think about how the Israelites were in captivity in Egypt and how pharaoh did so much to (condemn??)...the Israelites, and in Egypt and when God decided it was time for them to free, he sent, he rose up Moses, he raised, he trained Moses, he empowered Moses to be able to lead them out of captivity and at that time, when it was time for them, nothing could stop them, so I believe so much, even though we may be in our captivity of...cos its like captivity you know, I believe strongly that it...when the time is right, nothing can stop it, nothing can stop the liberty, so this is where I find refuge, it's a huge community of events, and in the church as a whole. (Abiye)

This sense of community provided by the church, or mosque, was also important for several participants. The church for some of them was an important regular involvement in a community (see figure 44). In some cases, the church also provided transnational links, and membership of this international community seemed to provide a means of over riding the limiting status of asylum seeker. Abiye commented that people would be amazed in his church if they knew the conditions he lived in, or that he was even an asylum seeker.

Because the redeemed all over the world, is just like typing rccg in google, imagine what you have all over the world! All over the world! It's amazing, that's national, Ireland, somewhere, somewhere, Scandinavia.... everywhere...for some reason if I needed to go to the US and I needed to link up with somewhere, the first thing I would look for is a redeemed church and meet with the pastor...I have a card, an official card which says who I am...(Abiye)



Figure 44: 'Community' (*Iswat*)

Attachment to Ireland and Irishness

As I have discussed above, in particular in Chapter Two, Irish asylum policy takes deliberate measures to prevent asylum seekers from integrating into Irish society. Direct provision as a system keeps asylum seekers as excluded and distanced as possible from local communities and Irish society through prevention of working and taking up third level education, through suspense and uncertainty and through ensuring that they do not have enough money to take part in normal social activities. As Lentin and McVeigh point out:

There is clearly no question of integrating [residents within local communities, instead these centres] result in asylum seekers feeling segregated and dehumanised' (Lentin and McVeigh 2006:47).

This was particularly illustrated through the explicit exclusion of asylum seekers from the call for applications for a ministerial council on integration, as discussed above (see Chapter Two, page 72). Despite the blatant and deliberate exclusion from Irish society experienced by asylum seekers, various attachments to Ireland and to Irishness emerged through discussions, images and texts throughout the project. Brian for example felt very strongly that Ireland was his home, and that of his daughter. This was a way of leaving the past behind and creating a new and better life:

I want my daughter to be Irish. I don't want her to be both. She should be proud of being an Irish, not an African. I am not proud at all, at all, I am not proud at all of my country, because my home is demolished, I don't have peace, I don't have peace, everyday you have to cry over your home....me, I'm from [name of county]! (Brian)

Saint Patrick's Day for many people brought a sense of enjoyment and identification with Irishness, a sense of being part of a community. People dressed in green and took part in local celebrations, which they were keen to photograph (see figure 45).



Figure 45

This was St Patrick's Day, it was so beautiful. I love the way they were dressed, and the colours, the colours of the flowers and the kids from different places. (Emmanuelle)

For one participant, her aspirations towards becoming Irish were more complex, inspired by the connections with America which emerged through the Saint Patrick's celebrations (see figure 46):



Figure 46

Elizabeth: I like everything American. I like their flag, I like their food, I like their clothes, I like everything, and of course I like their president! For me the fact that I saw the American I felt really nice so that was the one thing I liked.

Other: But that is not in [name of town]

Elizabeth: No it was in [name of town] because these are the Boston police, but they are actually Irish, based in America. So hopefully one day I will get to that point where I can go as an Irish person to Boston and come back to [name of town] as an American (laughter) – you know that kind of thing? That’s what I am looking for. Inshallah!

Other: Go as an Irish person to America and come back to Ireland as an American?

Elizabeth: As an Irish American! Because they’re Irish Americans. I can’t have dual citizenship in my country but here I can get it, especially with the American one, so that’s the...anyway in short I like everything American. And of course there is the Obama link with me involved if you know what I mean.

Other: Two times you have to apply for your green card, one in Ireland, then in America!

Elizabeth: No it’s easier...

Other: First get your green card in here!

Elizabeth: That’s what I’m hoping! That’s what I’m saying, if things go the way...hopefully! You have to think ahead! I’m not limiting my thinking!

However, Saint Patrick's Day was not all about inclusion, but also highlighted the barriers between those living in direct provision and residents of the town, the position of asylum seekers between inclusion and exclusion and perceptions of their position in Ireland by members of 'mainstream society', as illustrated in Emmanuelle's anecdote from the day:

On that Saint Patrick's Day, when we were standing here along the road, there was one lady, she was selling balloons, but I don't think she's an Irish. I don't think she is, she was selling balloons, I don't think I have...I have never seen an Irish person selling balloons...So she approached my friend and she said to my friend, I am selling balloons, and my friend said, how much? And then I don't know what she said, she said four euro, and my friend said four euro! For a balloon! Four euro? And then you know what she said to my friend, on that day I really went very very angry...I thought it was rude! She said...yeah, you don't have money to buy, you sit here, you eat free food, you get nineteen euro, but you don't have money to buy a balloon! (Emmanuelle)

Photographs of statues, or of historical buildings, as well as showing an interest and pride in the town and surrounding area, also showed an interest in Ireland and Irish culture. One participant, Mary, chose to focus specifically on photographing statues in Dublin and Kildare, explaining the importance particularly for young people, in her opinion, of understanding the history and culture of the country they live in (see figure 37; see also Mary's story, Appendix Two).

There was a sense that an understanding and knowledge of the history and culture of where one lives creates a sense of belonging to that place, a certain ownership over it and rootedness within it.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore, alongside asylum seekers themselves, their experiences of living in and negotiating the liminal space of asylum and direct provision, through working creatively and collaboratively through participatory photography. This chapter explores the images, texts and stories which emerged from the creative dialogic space, and the ways in which these reflect the participants' experiences of the direct provision system and of living in and negotiating this liminal existence.

Liminality is a useful lens through which to look at stasis as an important component of mobility for many migrants, as well as for bringing together the different forms of 'in between' which emerged throughout the project and which I described in Chapter Two. Liminality as a concept is particularly apt for the asylum experience, where waiting in an in between space – between inclusion and exclusion, citizenship and non citizenship, hospitality and hostility, and place and non-place – becomes part of everyday life, often for years at a time. A deeper understanding and exploration of this concept provides a means in which to frame and better understand the experiences of the participants in direct provision.

Liminality can be experienced in different ways by people waiting in the asylum process, as shown through the material. Following Mountz and Khanna, I look at the spatial and temporal aspects of liminality as they emerged through the project: the spaces of the direct provision hostel and its surroundings serve as daily reminders of a life that is regulated and controlled by policy, an existence over which those who live it have limited control and autonomy; liminality is experienced temporally through waiting, uncertainty and suspense, being unable to make plans and having little control over what happens next and when it might happen. To these two aspects of liminality, I add the concept of 'ontological liminality' to describe a set of experiences which also emerged throughout the project: the sense of lack of control over one's future, combined with the sense as an asylum seeker of being a 'liminal persona', perceived in a certain way by the 'outside world', no longer seen as an individual, but as part of a homogenous group, invisible as a person and reduced to the single identity of 'asylum seeker'.

Side by side with the experiences of liminality which clearly emerge through the material in various forms, there also emerge various attachments and belongings, however tenuous or 'ambiguous' (Mountz 2011a:383), attachments to people and place, forms of 'informal citizenship' (Sassen 2003) in the town and surrounding areas, as well as attachments to Ireland and Irishness. The material which emerged points to the ways in which asylum seekers negotiate the architecture of liminality (simultaneously belonging while not belonging, being included through exclusion, being a form of citizen but not one) which is designed for them and imposed on them, and find ways around this deeply limiting and controlling system. While policy and structures are imposed on asylum seekers in order to stop them from integrating and belonging in Irish society, many people seeking asylum negotiate these structures and create their own 'informal citizenships' (Sassen 2003) despite this. Looking at the various forms of connectedness shifts understanding away from images of asylum seekers solely as victims of a limiting and controlling system, towards a more complex human image of people who, despite this, connect, engage and affect and are affected by the places and people around them. Through looking at the images, texts, stories and conversations which emerged from the 'potential space' created, shared and worked in with the participants, this chapter expands understandings of liminality. It simultaneously makes more complex these understandings, through looking closely at 'the intimacies of exclusion' (Mountz 2011a:382), subjective and lived experience in a specific context and the various ways in which liminality is lived and negotiated on an everyday basis.

In the following chapter, I focus on the processes of preparing and presenting the work created during the collaborative project, and what these processes of shifting the work into the public realm revealed about the asylum system and the everyday experiences of living in this system.

CHAPTER FIVE:
Representation

[A NOTE ON THE FORMAT OF THIS CHAPTER]:

This chapter takes a slightly different form to previous chapters. Alongside my own discussion, narrative and excerpts from my fieldwork diary, are words and photographs of the participants, and transcripts of discussions which took place during the workshops, which are relevant to, or which inform, my discussion in various ways. By doing this, I aim on one hand to give depth to my discussions and descriptions, allowing the voices and images of participants to enrich and/or give a different take on what I am saying. On the other hand, this is a means of foregrounding the voices of those involved, of representing them not only through the lens of my discussion, and hence my understanding, but on their own merit. This highlights the fact that my telling of the ‘story’ is one version among many possible versions, my vision of the reality of the project one among multiple realities. The voices of the other people involved I hope will provide a depth which goes beyond the single reality that I present in my narrative, and allow for the tensions between these realities to co-exist in some way.

As a collaborative work, this project aimed to be based around various forms of dialogue, foregrounding process rather than focusing solely on outcomes. While I am acutely aware of the non-participatory nature of the PhD process, which stands in opposition to the collaborative and participatory nature of this fieldwork process, presenting and drawing the reader’s attention to the existence and tensions between multiple realities and experiences is one way of attempting to counteract, or at least, highlight this difficulty.

Placing the participants’ words alongside my narrative and analysis, as well as including excerpts from my diary within my own narrative, also brings the reader to the present and the immediacy of the fieldwork process, in a way that a single voiced ‘write up’ after the event can often lose. In describing the particular events which this chapter focuses on, this felt particularly important here. The words are not meant to be read as ‘disembodied quotations’ (Back 2007:17), expected to simply stand alone and speak for themselves, but rather should be seen as a means of enriching, or problematising, my discussion, by being read alongside it. While the work we did together was as collaborative as possible, I am aware that it is my voice, my perspective, telling a story which is not only mine. This method I hope is a means of

making space for, and working from, the voices, opinions and images of the participants.

The right hand side of the page throughout the chapter is my narrative and discussion. The left hand side carries images and words of the participants, or transcripts of discussions which took place during the fieldwork period. The two sides of the page should be viewed side by side, the continuous narrative on the right hand side read alongside the material which appears on the left hand side, where relevant, throughout the chapter.

Introduction: speaking, voice, representation, audience

An important part of this work was about speaking and being listened to, not only to explore and speak about the everyday experiences of asylum but also to find ways with the participants for what we spoke about to be heard. The work was based on using participatory photography as a tool to speak, in terms of expression, and to speak out, to represent, to challenge or change how asylum seekers are perceived. The (potential) audience was implicated from the beginning, in that from the start of the project, I emphasized photography as a tool for expression, for speaking and being heard, and as a means of changing or affecting how people think about and understand certain issues. At the same time, while this was an important aspect of the work for me, it was necessary also to be aware of the reasons why participants were taking part, and their own interests and aims in the project, and the fact that these did not always coincide with my aims.

From my experiences of working with participatory photography, I have a strong sense of the power of the still image, accompanied by the written or recorded thoughts and intentions of the photographer, to convey an insight into experience, to draw the viewer into the ordinary, the everyday of the photographer, to perhaps create a connection. For Kester, the concept of ‘empathy’ plays a role here in understanding another’s world view. PhotoVoice highlight the importance of the captions which accompany images in participatory photography to evoke the empathy and understanding of viewers (PhotoVoice 2007:95, see quotation above, page 118). Empathy is described by Kester as:

a relationship to others that at least potentially allows us to experience the world not as a transcendent eyeball searching out aesthetic stimulation, but as a discursively integrated subject willing to sacrifice some sense of autonomy in order to imaginatively inhabit, learn from (and be transformed by) another subject's condition and world view (Kester 2000:4).

Empathy can form a basis of communication and a potential means of transformation:

We can never claim to fully inhabit the other's subject position; but we can imagine it, and this imagination, this approximation, can radically alter our sense of who we are. It can become the basis for communication and understanding across differences of race, sexuality, ethnicity, and so on (Kester 2004:115).

At the same time, the viewer carries her own conditionings and background to what she sees, seeing what she sees through the lens of these conditionings. Martha Rosler (2004) questions the power of identification of the still photograph, wondering 'what role images can really play in promoting identification and acceptance through familiarizing viewers with physical appearances (and identities) with which they have had little real-life experience' (2004:209)⁴². I would argue however that still images and text created through the participatory photography process can create 'dialogic texts' (Bakhtin 1981), allowing for potential shifts in opinion and understanding. Just as through the co-creation of the work with participants, a 'dialogic space' (Tolia-Kelly 2007) is made, the act of (re)presenting the work allows for the creation of new 'dialogic spaces' in which the work can engage and be engaged with. From the point of view of research and the role of the researcher, the processes of showing the work provide a means of speaking *with* rather than *for* or *about* the participants, an attempt 'to create...the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others' (Alcoff 1991:23).

⁴² Despite the growing uncertainty of the status of documentary photography, which Rosler discusses in her 2004 essay 'Post-Documentary, post photography?' (and which is also discussed by Ballerini 1997) she still defends it as an important and enduring form of social analysis:

So why continue to defend documentary? The short answer is, because we need it, and because it likely will continue, with or without art-world theorizing. As the division widens between rich and poor (and as art practices are institutionalized and academicized), there is less and less serious analysis of the lives of those on the wrong side of that great divide (Rosler 2004:240).

What does it mean to speak out, to represent oneself? It is not only to speak, but that the words one speaks are heard, have a power of some sort. For Das, voicelessness is not that one does not have words, but that these words become ‘frozen, numb, without life’ (2007:8). For Spivak (1988), the speech act consists of both speaking and being heard, therefore if one’s voice is not heard, one cannot speak. Spivak’s discussion, in her essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, of the practice of widow-sacrifice (*sati*) in India problematises both colonial and ‘native’ representations, arguing that in neither version is the voice of the widow herself heard. In the case of the widow, the attempts to represent her are either ‘speaking for’ her or ‘speaking about’ her, in the sense of portraying her; neither actually represent her in her own terms. Similarly, asylum seekers tend to be mostly spoken *for* or *about*, rather than *with*, or *alongside*, or in their own terms (see Jackson 2002, Malkki 1996). Their voices are rarely heard in public fora in their own terms. By speaking for the subaltern, the voice of the subaltern becomes silenced. Similarly, as discussed in Chapter Three (page 128), speaking for the ‘Other’, as a researcher or artist for example, however positive the intentions, can lead to more damage than good.

For dialogical art and relational art, two ‘mobilisations of the concept of participation and democracy through art’ (Bennett 2012: unpaginated), the audience is integral to the art, influencing its creation and becoming an inherent part of the work itself. The meaning of the work is created through interaction and dialogue with its audience, just as the speech act is given meaning through its reception, through being heard. For Bakhtin, the work of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation, ‘a locus of differing meanings, interpretations and points of view’ (Kester 2004:10). There is a complex dialogue going on, from the time of creating the work, with potential audiences. This dialogue continues every time the work is seen and reacted to, and meaning is constantly created or adapted, rather than being static or inherent in the work. It is through this ‘open ended process of dialogical engagement’ that ‘new and unanticipated forms of collaborative knowledge’ are produced (Kester 2000:4). When creating work which will circulate in the public realm, and which seeks to influence or create awareness among various audiences, it is important to pay close attention to the processes of representation and to the ‘site of audiencing’. As Rose (2007:256) points out, while much attention has been paid to the site of production of

images/photographs in critical visual methodologies, little has been paid to the site of audiencing (see page 130).

In an essay entitled 'Refugee Communities and the Politics of Cultural Identity', Harindranath points to an 'acute lack of an engagement, particularly in official and government discourse, but also in academic research, with the everyday experience of refugee communities' (2007:138). Like Spivak and Alcoff, he emphasizes the importance of dialogue, arguing that dialogue between generators of dominant discourse and refugee representations is crucial. The process of representing the work created through the participatory photography project here can be seen as a form of 'performative contradiction' in Judith Butler's terms (1990, cited in Harindranath 2007:138), in which, as Harindranath explains, 'the potential for emancipation is realized through the subaltern finding a voice that both challenges dominant representation and provides an alternative world view' (Harindranath 2007:138). While I am wary of claims for 'emancipation' through representing collaborative work, by exposing everyday experience and textures of everyday life, through a combination of image and words as 'dialogical text', the work aims to both challenge dominant representations of asylum seekers and create alternative understandings.

While I was aware of bringing the issues of dialogue, representation and voice into the project from the beginning, and picking up on them when they emerged, these issues came to the fore from the moment we started, as a group, to think about exhibiting the work, when audiences other than ourselves began to be strongly or more clearly implicated. Exhibiting the work produced through this research project was an integral part of the project itself, both in terms of completing the speech act at a very immediate level, having voices directly heard, as well as involving the processes of representation, and the reactions and involvement of audience directly into the work itself. This chapter focuses on the processes of exhibiting the work created through the project. I explore here what the processes of exhibiting the work reveal about the micro geographies of asylum: the politics of asylum and how these are manifested on the ground, in the everyday. I also look at what the process reveals about the politics of research, representation, participation and audiencing.

Zoë: And do you think people in the town...does everybody in the town know that it's not a hotel anymore?

Emmanuelle: I think lots of people, if you tell them that you live in X (*name of hotel*) they know, they know...most of the people that I meet, some they know, some they don't know, but most of them they know, it's just maybe a few people don't know, but lots of them know...

Zoë: And do you think people here understand why asylum seekers are here or do they get confused, do you think?

Emmanuelle: I think some of them get confused, because you can see some of them the look that they give you, even if they go past and they see people sitting in the bar, they won't understand. Some they will stand and look and stare, some they will be driving around, and you know driving past and look, and you know, think...you will see what they think when they are just waiting for the bank to open, thinking what are these people doing here? What is going on? So there's no answer. One lady one day she was driving past, she opened the window actually to look. I think it was so surprising for her...I think people...some people do wonder what is going on, some people maybe they do understand that there are asylum seekers there, but what they don't understand, how does it mix with a hotel and asylum seeker?

One day, on that Saint Patrick's Day, when we were standing here along the road, there was one lady, she was selling balloons, but I don't think she's an Irish. I don't think she is, she was selling balloons, I don't think I have...I have never seen an Irish person selling balloons. So my friend, she approached my friend, this lady, she was going with two kids, one was about fifteen, another was a little boy maybe of about ten, something like that. So she approached my friend and she said to my friend, I am selling balloons, and my friend said, how much? and then I don't know what she said, she said four euro, and my friend said four euro! For a balloon! Four euro? And then you know what she said to my friend, on that day I really went very very angry...I thought it was rude! She said...yeah, you don't have money to buy, you sit here, you eat free food, you get nineteen euro, but you don't have money to buy a balloon! (*Emmanuelle*)

Exhibition process

Choosing a venue

In May 2010, we began to think about preparing for an exhibition. In planning the project I felt that it would be important to exhibit the work as close to the end of the project as possible. It was important due to the participatory and dialogical nature of the project that all the participants should be part of organizing and being present for the exhibition process. Due to the precarious and temporary nature of their living arrangements, it was likely that some of the group might disperse after the completion of the project. The first matter to arrange was the location of the exhibition, as this would have to be organized as much in advance as possible. When conceiving the project, I felt that it would be important for the work to be exhibited in the community where the participants and the direct provision centre were located in order to create a genuinely dialogic space and to challenge everyday understandings of asylum seekers in the place where they were living. As Maguire and Murphy point out, ‘the nature of the direct provision system is not well understood by the general public, and into this knowledge gap rumours have flooded’ (2011:64), particularly around healthcare or welfare benefits. As the project progressed, issues emerged regarding feelings of separation by residents of direct provision from the town and local community, misconceptions around asylum seekers, as well as a feeling by participants that people in the town often didn’t seem to understand why they were in Ireland, and why they were living in a hotel. While these feelings were by no means the only ways in which relationships to the local town and community were expressed, as shown in Chapter Four, particularly in the section on ‘Negotiating Liminality’, the potential importance of creating dialogue with the immediate place, environment and community was reinforced through these feelings of isolation, exclusion or misconception.

We discussed possibilities of opening dialogue with audiences through the images, texts and stories, and working towards creating an alternative view or understanding of the experiences of asylum seekers. As well as thinking about an exhibition in the town itself, we also considered the possibility of holding an exhibition in the university at Maynooth. I suggested that we look firstly at the options of holding it locally, and see if there was a location that we felt was suitable, and secondly at

Ade: I think that the [name of art centre] is better, for publicity's sake

Zoë: There are pros and cons with both, but I want everyone to be happy with the space.

Rajo: do you want to say anything?

Rajo: Publicity in the [name of art centre] is better, that is true, but if it's the [name of art centre], I'm not going to do anything in there.

Zoë: It's important that the others know that too

Rajo: If it's the [name of art centre], I'm not going to do anything in there

Zoë: Why?

Rajo: Just me, I don't want to do anything there

Ade: But you used to go there before

Rajo: Now it has changed. That is me, I'm not saying don't do it

Brian: The thing is, he will not be there but he is part of the class so we will be missing one out...we have to...

Ade: [Name of art centre] is better for the exhibition than that place, Rajo is just one person. At the end of the day, Rajo might not decide to write any story, so he will stop us from using a venue that is good for us

Zoë: This is why I want to make it a group decision, it is not my...I'm not the one making the ultimate decision, we are a group working together, so I put myself as one of the group as well, it is fully a group decision.

Others: Rajo, why don't you want to go there?

Rajo: It is personal reasons

Brian: Let me ask him in another professional way. Where would you like us to go? You don't want to go there but you want to be in the group. Do you want us to go there or to go to [name of alternative venue]?

Rajo: I don't mind, I'm not choosing as a group to say we have to go there, I'm saying for me

Brian: Yeah, for yourself...

Rajo: Ade says we should go there because of publicity, that's good, that is Ade, for me I say I don't want to go there. So what do you think yourselves?

Others: Are you comfortable with this other place?

Rajo: Yeah, for me much better.

Emmanuelle: Maybe Rajo has an aspect because he knows these things, I don't know

Rajo: I may be right, I may be wrong, I don't know, for me I feel good there

Janaan: But as a group we can go together, let's go all together there

Zoë: I do think it's important we are a group. We started together...

Ade: For me I'm not going there because Rajo doesn't want to go there. I don't mind going there if we all decide ok let's go there, I go there. But I'm telling you, this is where I prefer, it's not about Rajo, it's about all of us, so if we can all decide this is where we go, I don't mind

Iswat: We don't want any one of us to miss this...we all know that this place is...exposed

Ade: We didn't even say anything about the second option last Monday, so I don't know why you decided to consider the second option

Zoë: We did speak about it

Ade: It was not an option before

Iswat: As I was saying, because we don't want him to miss from the class, let us just go to where he can go

Rajo: Don't think like that

Ade: Don't take a decision because of Rajo, let's take a decision because of everyone of us here. What I am saying is at the end of the day, Rajo may not write any story, he might not display any pictures, so you will go there you won't see his pictures or any story, and my story will be there, whereas I prefer my story to be here, so its about not only Rajo, that's what I am saying

Rajo: It's about everyone

Brian: We are looking at factors to the exhibition, so let her finish up

Zoë: Let me put forward the pros and cons of both places, as I understand. This is also me as a newcomer to [name of town], right, this is completely me coming in with an outside view

Ade: Let me suggest, after today's class, we go and visit these places.

venues in the university. We created a list of locations in the town where an exhibition might be held, and discussed the different audiences that different venues might attract and how this might affect reactions to and impact on an exhibition. The first choice of venue was an art centre with a gallery located very close to the direct provision centre. We decided to approach the management with a proposal.

The gallery was predictably booked out for the next year for full length exhibitions, but after discussing the project in some more depth, the management, who were interested in the participatory and ‘community’ nature of the project, agreed to provide us with gallery space for one week in early July. During the next session with the group, Rajo said he refused to take part in the exhibition if it was taking place there, for personal reasons. He suggested however holding it in a venue with which he was involved through voluntary work, also close to the centre. There were reservations over this venue by some members of the group, causing a division in opinions. A couple of people said they wanted to stick together as a group no matter what, so if Rajo couldn’t work in the first choice of venue, they would all exhibit in the second. I felt at this point that the ultimate decision had to be put into the hands of the group. Discussions were heated. On visiting both spaces, the decision seemed to be unanimous in favour of the original gallery space. The professional space of the gallery appealed to several people, and there was a sense of excitement around the work and the exhibition as they visualized it in the space. The conflict and discussion around the issue, despite the difficulties involved, brought another level of involvement in and ownership of the process. Everyone had an opinion on the issue and ultimately the decision was made very consciously by the group. However, the decision they made meant that we lost one member of the group at this point, as he felt he should no longer continue with the project if he was not going to take part in the exhibition, despite suggestions of other solutions.

Mary: In my view, migration maybe should not be mentioned because some, most of the people around in Ireland they are sick of migrants. Don't you think so? Maybe they will not turn up.

Zoë: What do other people think?

Ade: Me, I have no problem with migration, the word migration. They might be sick of it, but it's just a reality.

Brian: The photos and images of - that's what she is saying, narratives – the photos and images of people coming to Ireland, so it's good, at least the society should know, have a clear picture of the migration

Ade: I understand what she is saying...me I wouldn't want any topic that would have 'asylum seekers' boldly written. I don't want anybody to be sympathetic with me. Immediately they know I am asylum seeker they have kind of ways of...I don't want anybody to pity me, to be sympathetic with me, just treat me like you don't know me, like a normal person you meet on the way. Some people will look at it the other way, they are living on the state, they are not working, they are getting everything for free. So I don't want, don't be sympathetic with me, and don't look at me as someone who is....

Mary: They have got the impression that we are sucking their finances...

Ade: So me, I wouldn't be confident with the word 'asylum' written in bold. It might be there, but not in bold.

Framing the exhibition

Throughout the following weeks, alongside continuing to take photographs, discuss themes and develop personal stories and projects, we began to think and talk about the exhibition in more detail: what sort of photographs should we show? What sort of message did we want to send out through the exhibition? What sort of format might we use in order to best make use of the gallery space we had? The processes of preparing for the exhibition sparked discussions on representation, and how we wanted to represent the work to an outside audience. The implications of what the photographs were saying and how they were saying it began to become more apparent. These processes began to reveal fears around speaking out, and around how participants felt others perceived them, as well as the relationship with the imposed identity of ‘asylum seeker’.

Preliminary framing of the exhibition sets the overall tone, as well as paving the way for the individual themes and threads which will form its content. We began to speak as a group about what we wanted to say with the exhibition, and in what type of language we wanted to express it. This opened the way to thinking about what sort of messages we wanted to send out.

We looked at the topics we had discussed and photographed throughout the sessions, and some of the themes which had emerged through these: conditions of the asylum system and of direct provision, good and bad experiences in Ireland, the importance of placing the positive aspect forward rather than focusing on the negative, volunteering and integration in the local community, cultural differences, waiting and suspense, hopes for the future, family, education and the importance of learning, at both adult and child levels, religion and belief. We decided to come up with a working title and theme which we could build from and work around. When discussing how we could frame the exhibition, we returned to the initial title which I had given to the project when I began working with the participants: ‘narratives of migration’. Is this what it is about? What has happened since we began the project? What themes have emerged? We had spoken about so many things. Mary said, *‘If we put migration in the title, no one will come. People are sick of migrants’*. She felt that

Brian: I think personally, living in [name of town] and seeking asylum in Ireland is quite ok, but if we could put 'living in Ireland and seeking asylum', then in quotes 'protection' in Ireland is a good idea, living in Ireland, in quotes 'seeking protection' in Ireland...I don't know what you think, just rule it out if you like, I don't mind!

Zoë: Why do you think that?

Brian: Ehhm for people to have more understanding, because I think people have been having a misunderstanding of seeking asylum; people have been thinking a lot of things. Like the other day, I had some people downstairs when I was just walking along, they said, there are people living here in a very expensive hotel, they are getting a lot of money from the government

Mary: Yes, that's the impression

Brian: You know, that thing, I just heard them talking because they were smoking on the corner, they probably just came from the pubs or around, but they stated, they said, there are people living here, black people, and they are living in a hotel and they are getting a lot of money from the government. I think that one has a misunderstanding in the society, people they don't really know how we are suffering and what we are up to here, but if you are...maybe they say, oh there are people living next door and they are seeking protection from the government. Now when you are seeking protection from the government, that is to say you are given everything which you deserve, but seeking asylum, people have been thinking that you are just coming to leak the government...

people see asylum seekers as taking the State's money and giving nothing back. The others generally felt that it was okay to include something around migration and asylum but felt also that they needed to speak about it a bit more. Ade said, *'I don't mind 'asylum seeker' put in somewhere, but not in big words, not the main thing'*.

On the one hand here was the sense that people wanted to remain invisible, not to bring visibility or attention to themselves as asylum seekers. On the other hand, participants felt that what they had produced was in fact beyond their identities as asylum seekers, that although this had been the basis or beginning of the project, that there was somehow more to it than this. Schuster (2003) argues that states penalize those who exercise the right to claim asylum from persecution by 'stripping them of all other identities save that of 'asylum seeker', someone without rights, someone to be excluded' (Schuster 2003:246), and Zetter (1991:45), as cited above, states that 'the need to conform to an institutionally imposed stereotype can both reinforce control and transform an identity'. Participants wanted to represent themselves as 'normal' people interested in photography, rather than as asylum seekers only.

Participants were also keen not to portray themselves, and asylum seekers in general, in a negative light. As pointed out in Chapter Three, Julia Ballerini (1997:169) has criticized well-intentioned photography projects that send messages 'that tend to reinforce the status quo rather than question it'. It was important to think about this in preparing the exhibition. Participants were very clear that they didn't want to come across as spongers, or for people to feel sorry for them: *'The important thing is that people don't come and pity us, or see us as spongers. We need to focus on the positive'* (Ade). Rather they wanted to shift the emphasis away from themselves as refugees or asylum seekers towards other identities – such as 'normal people' or photographers – away from the victim/threat binary of perceptions of asylum seekers. Similar to Vanderhurst's (2007) findings where asylum seekers tended to reject the label of refugee as integral to their identity, the participants were keen to focus on their identities as individual people. This contrasts with examples of how the refugee label is embraced at times for political leverage, such as Zetter describes in a paper entitled 'Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity' (1991). Zetter's study illustrates how the identity of refugee or asylum seeker is 'dynamic', affected by and

dependent on the perceptions of that identity by the society which surrounds them. As Mountz (2010:153) points out, ‘immigrants...construct identities discursively, making themselves more or less visible in different contexts’.

I suggested that maybe we should use this occasion of showing the work in public to try to change negative opinions about asylum seekers in the local town and perhaps further afield, to show that asylum seekers are people in a temporary situation rather than a certain ‘type’ of person, and that asylum seekers are people who, despite the specific types of issues they are dealing with, have similar concerns to other people, and who want to contribute and be a part of the societies they live in. The conversations around this were difficult and I felt were touching on something quite fundamental around how participants felt others perceived them as asylum seekers, and their relationship to this imposed identity. One participant suggested that I should create a basic text framing the work which they could then critique and adapt. While most of the participants had strong opinions around this whole process, they felt that I was the ‘expert’, that they weren’t qualified to make these sorts of decisions. Above all, they wanted the exhibition and any writing associated with it to look ‘professional’.

Alongside these discussions around representation and ways in which we might frame an exhibition, we were looking through material we had already created and discussing it, as well as continuing to create new material and discuss new themes. An excerpt from my field diary captures the dynamism of these interwoven processes:

We spoke about the idea of home. Where is home? What does it mean? What happens when you lose it? How does losing a home affect the sense of self, and how do you recreate yourself? Mary described running from a burning home, her children running beside her in the dark, not knowing where they were going, hearing the gunshots behind them. Emmanuelle then commented on the Irish people losing their homes in the recession, that perhaps there was something in common? What emerged from conversations about themes and representing the self, the images, the narratives was the constant juxtaposition between instability and hope in changing circumstances, and everything in between that carries us through each day and from day to day. We spoke of making links and bridging gaps in order to move forward. Mary takes

We should come up with a theme which people in the society will understand and not misinterpret what we want to say. And in the long run we end up not having anyone coming to see our project. I think we should look at something which is an open mind with the whole society, with a curiosity to know what is really happening there and what is it all about the exhibition. *(Brian)*

That's why I like your idea of the bridge, because it's something which connects people or something....so now these people they bomb the bridge from this inland to the other inland, in between is a river, a very big river, they demolish the bridge. They are so stupid, how are they going to go to the other side? They need to go to the other side, so you see a bridge connects people, so when there is disconnection, the bridge is demolished there is no connection of people, so I like the idea of the bridge. *(Brian)*

pictures of statues that help her to ‘understand Ireland’ and see where the Irish experience overlaps with that of Uganda: colonialism and the history of the missionaries who went between the two. Emmanuelle links pieces of material, sewing scraps of material towards her dream to be a dress maker. She photographs the material; she recreates a patchwork skirt that she had in Zimbabwe and photographs it in different ways. Ade photographs shadows and light: the darkness of the not knowing and the waiting for an answer of whether he will be allowed to stay, the darkness of an uncertain future. Brian photographs the constant attempt to move forward, make progress, and his process of integration, ‘mixing with the locals’, involving himself in the community. The photographs are beginning to show the style and approach of each individual photographer, and the ways in which they describe their photographs becomes more detailed, more fluid. Stories emerge bit by bit, aided by the images. Comments from the other participants spark discussions, which we record and turn into more images. (Excerpt from fieldwork diary, May 2010).

How to thread together such a disparate, in many ways, collection of work? How to frame the work so that it creates a common ground, a basis for a shared community, a shared humanity, and yet allows for a conversation about the obstacles and difficulties faced by those arriving in Ireland seeking asylum: legal obstacles, cultural and social obstacles as well as humour, loss and the ‘productive dimension of rewriting the self’ (O’Neill and Harindranath 2006:50)? How to create a platform which would allow for the importance of place, the town itself (as the exhibition would take place in the town) and the pride that goes with being part of this place, as well as acknowledging the difficulties that go with the attempts to be part of this place when living in a liminal situation, citizenship-less and without permission to work?

The short text I wrote in order to begin to create a framework for the exhibition, using the ideas generated in discussions around this, attempted to shift the focus away from ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘direct provision’ towards something more human, shared. The theme of the exhibition became that of identity, of bridging the gaps, the cracks, in order to create a whole coherent self. We called the exhibition ‘New Bridges’, acknowledging the attempts to move forward and create new links, to create a life that makes sense:

Mary: And this is just a suggestion – what about taking us out for a study tour, at least?...to take us to one place for study

Zoë: You mean like an exhibition? Yes, if people are still interested I would like to do that.

Mary: You know we are still stressed here, when we go out we are like a dog which you keep on a chain! When you let it go!!

Mary: Another thing, when we are having a trip, you don't please limit for only your class. Everybody would like to go out. Like we are in a cage, we want to go out...

We are fragmented beings who cement ourselves together, but there are always cracks (Husvedt 2008). It is through exploring the cracks that we get a deeper sense of the self, and begin to form bridges connecting the places, people and experiences which make up our identities, as well as hopes, dreams, desires for the future and the myriad of possible 'becomings'. Identity is always changing, affected by new experiences, new connections, loss and hope. It is through bridging the cracks that we can begin to move forward and create a better life, finding new places and ways of being, while acknowledging our roots and past experiences.

The images, words and stories in this exhibition are an acknowledgement of the attempt to bridge the cracks, both within the self and between the self and others, between people and places, between communities, between understandings, between loss and hope.

Lodged in the work is an inherent awareness of both instability and hope in changing circumstances.

The reaction to this theme, and the description of the exhibition, was very positive, and gave new energy and interest to the process.

Visiting other exhibitions

During this process of exploring themes and formats for the exhibition, and discussing what we would like to say with our exhibition, and how we might say it, it was suggested by some of the group that we should look at other exhibitions, and that we should leave the space of the centre and go somewhere which might provide inspiration and new ideas. On a Thursday morning in June, we travelled together to Dublin by minibus to see two exhibitions: 'A Sikh Face in Ireland' at the Chester Beatty Library, and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) final year photographic exhibition in the Gallery of Photography and the Photographic Archive. I chose these particular exhibitions as I thought they may be good exposure to different types of photography. The Sikh exhibition consisted of professional portraits, with people's stories, thoughts and opinions alongside them. The DIT exhibition was the work of

ten photographers, with different styles, different approaches, different techniques. I asked the participants during the Sikh exhibition to think technically about the photographs, from the point of view of the photographer: light, angles, techniques, and to look at the layout of the exhibition and the types of messages they thought it was trying to get across to the viewers. With the other exhibition, I asked them to also to think about composition, and the relationship of the photographer to the photographed subject. I also asked them to look technically and critically at the images, as well as to see which styles they were most attracted to. These processes produced lively and interested discussion. The general feeling among the participants was that they had made progress in ‘understanding’ photography, and that they were now able to analyse, critique and discuss the images, analyse the message or sense of a collection or sequence of images, and take away ideas to use in their own work, both technical and more conceptual. Through seeing and discussing the images, the reality of what creating an exhibition of photographs meant became clearer, and there was fresh motivation to work on our own exhibition.

Choosing images and texts for exhibition

While there was now some excitement about the exhibition, participants began to be aware of what they might be showing to audiences, and the various implications of this. Preparing to represent the work to an outside audience was quite a different experience to working within the intimate space of the workshops. The idea of exhibiting the work in public and in the community among people they may know was beginning to affect or hinder, I felt, what people felt they could say. Before an audience even exists, it is affecting the work that is created, and the meaning of this work. Looking at this process through the lens of dialogical art, dialogue with the audience or potential audience, then, is from early on an integral part of the work, and becomes incorporated into the art piece as a whole. Before the audiences even existed, dialogue with them was affecting how the work was formed, already creating ‘new and unanticipated forms of knowledge’ (Kester 2000:4), in the form of the participants’ perceptions or experiences of how they were perceived by the local community and by Irish society.

‘I want to ask question – with this story now, is it not going to put me in trouble?’
Iswat



Figure 47

This one, these are the things which I have never seen before, but I think everyone can see. Just here (looking out window) – its just here, just be the junction. But what I don't like with it is that someone is sitting somewhere watching everyone move so I don't like to be watched. I'm not doing anything bad but I don't like to be monitored because sometimes you don't have privacy
(*Brian - Session three of the project, March 2010*)

It is very good [CCTV] because this country is a foreign country and we are just in the society. There are a lot of people passing by. There are people who have got good attitudes, good mind to each other, people who have that aspect of hatred you know really. Because of the way we live here, people see X Hotel and they know it's a very expensive hotel, so they have in mind that the people living here, the asylum seekers, are receiving a lot of money. So people outside there who are jobless, and who are different people with different mind, they could be thinking "these people are far much better than we, the habitants"...I feel very secure here because whenever I go out I see the CCTVs around and I know the police are ever there, they are watching. So even if someone is following, police will be saying, this person is at risk, person has been following, so that you are safe. It gives you a feeling of safety.

(*Brian - preparing exhibition, June 2010*)

People who had been outspoken before about the ‘direct provision’ system were now toning down their outspoken opinions, knowing that the photographs and words would be seen by outside audiences. Even descriptions of specific photographs which once had a negative connotation earlier on in the project were now being described in positive ways. Photographs which showed the asylum system in a negative light were often put to one side by the participants, and more positive ones chosen as part of the edit. Iswat wanted to change her photo story entitled ‘Freedom’ from one describing the sense of imprisonment of living in direct provision to one talking about the freedom of being in Europe compared to living in Africa. She kept the title of the story and the same set of photographs, but imposed very different descriptions onto the photographs. This illustrated in a very immediate way the fluid nature of the meaning of images, and the ways in which an accompanying text can influence how an image is read, or change its meaning entirely. It emerged that this need to change the meaning had come from a conversation with a fellow resident who said she shouldn’t speak about freedom or show photos of the hostel as she could get into trouble. On discussing this with her, and the fear she had of saying too much, we decided together not to use the story at all, but rather to present a single photograph with a more abstract description of her idea of freedom.

Brian’s description of a photograph of a CCTV camera outside the hostel shifted from seeing it early in the project as threatening, giving him a feeling of being watched all the time, to seeing it several weeks later as we prepared for the exhibition as something which made him feel safe, ensuring his security. A photo of the façade of the hotel where the participants live, which was earlier in the project something disliked by Emmanuelle, representing temporary-ness and the precarity of her situation (a ‘prison’, a place where: *‘when I come inside I’m like in a bottle. I can’t move I can’t do whatever I want to do’*), was described at this point as something positive, a home. Natasha Petkovic-Jeremic highlights similar issues around concerns with reception in her own work with refugees in New Zealand:

My research (interviews) showed that the ethnic communities did not want to highlight their negative experience (to talk about it in a public arena) for a variety of reasons such as fear of not being accepted, being seen as ungrateful for what NZ offers to migrants and pressure to assimilate (Petkovic-Jeremic 2007, unpublished paper cited in Goodnow 2010:xxxvi).



Figure 48

Emmanuelle: This is X Hotel – I don't like. Because when people read that...that writing outside, they think that this is a hotel. Because a hotel is a place when you go to another country to visit, you go into the hotel because you don't have family to go to. So now, people from outside they just see it as a hotel, but for me I don't see it as a hotel, I see it as a prison. Because I'm closed in there. If I tell a friend – because I've got lots of Irish friends – they ask me, are you living in X Hotel? I say yes, even if you go to the bank. If they ask you, you living in X Hotel? They ask you, how can you open an account if you are living in a hotel? Because they know that you're just visiting, you're gone. They ask you, how many years have you been there? Two years? It's a funny hotel – a really funny hotel

Other: They think you are rich then

Emmanuelle: Yes, they think you have lots of money, that's why you are living in a hotel, so...for me, this image is not good for me. Because when I go inside the hotel outside but when I come inside I'm like in a bottle. I can't I can't move I can't do whatever I want to do.

(Session four of project, March 2010)

X [*name of hotel*] reminds me, it is my home, wherever, I can go to Dublin, I can go anywhere, I can go for shopping, but at the end of the day I will come back to X. If I see this, I like the colour of the X.

(Emmanuelle - Preparation for exhibition, June 2010)

Of course, descriptions of a photograph could also change depending on the feeling of the photographer at the time of describing it, not always linked to audience or to fear of speaking out, but showing again that the meaning of the images was dependent on time and context, and not immanent in the image itself.

While I was involved in the editing process, selecting images that I felt were suitable or had a strong message or fitted well with the overall theme, each participant had the final say in which of their photographs they would show, and how they wanted to describe these photographs (which often differed drastically from the way they had first been described). Sometimes the photographs participants chose were not the ones I would have chosen. While I influenced decisions, at times picking out photographs I thought were particularly striking, either visually or because of the story they told, the participant-photographer had the final decision. Like Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001), I emphasized the importance of the story or message of the image rather than the aesthetic quality, discussing with participants what sort of message we wanted to send out through our exhibition. However, images were also selected for the visual power or potential affect.

Although we had emphasized that the stories behind the pictures were more important than the aesthetics of the pictures, some pictures were chosen because the image was visually powerful or depicted an issue that struck a chord with the group members or the planning team (Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001:568).

At times it was difficult to balance my own desire to influence decisions around images towards ones which I felt had a strong message about the asylum system or direct provision, with the needs, fears and interests of participants, and their desire to represent themselves in a particular way. In a similar situation, Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001:568) ask, 'How does one balance the needs of the community with the needs of the researcher or planning agency?' I was very aware of wanting to help protect the participants from any difficulty or breach of privacy through presenting their images in public.

As well as the group sessions, I worked individually with participants at this point, recording sessions, and transcribing their descriptions of the images. I then edited

[Article from local newspaper, July 2010]

Asylum seekers build a new bridge in *[name of town]*

ASYLUM-seekers living in *[name of town]* have been demonstrating their artistic skills as part of a collaborative project hosted by the *[name of art centre]*.

The project, resulting in an exhibition called A New Bridge, to be staged at the centre from 12-16 July, was spearheaded by Zoë O'Reilly, as part of doctoral research which she is undertaking at NUI Maynooth.

A New Bridge is basically a collection of images and digital stories exploring experiences of migration to Ireland and the process of seeking asylum.

The photographs and stories in this exhibition are the result of a four-month collaboration between Ms O'Reilly and a group of eight individuals from different corners of the world, all of whom now live in *[name of town]* and are seeking asylum in this country.

Throughout the four-month project, participants have developed photographic and visual awareness skills, photographing their views and experiences around various topics related to migrating, arriving and living in Ireland.

The photographs have become vehicles for discussion during workshops, opening a path for sharing ideas and experiences.

For some, photography and using a camera has been a new experience. For others, the project meant using existing skills in new ways. Most of the photographs were taken in *[name of town]* and surrounding areas, including Dublin.

According to Zoë O'Reilly, using the "bridge" theme has been important, not just in the context of location, but in terms of the project as an attempt to "bridge the cracks".

"People who become asylum seekers have often undergone very difficult experiences. This is a means of bridging the cracks within the individual and between the self and others, between people and places, between communities, between understandings, between loss and hope."

From the perspective of the spectator, she added: "It is hoped that the exhibition may create a dialogue with its audience, sharing insights and experiences and opening up a platform for discussion."

The *[name of art centre]* exhibition opens on Monday 12 July at 6pm with some light entertainment and food. This is a free event to which all are welcome. A New Bridge will be on display at the *[name of art centre]* until 16 July.

these descriptions into smaller pieces of writing which could be displayed alongside the images to create a body of image-text. As a group, we then went through the selection of images and texts, further editing it, removing certain images that the group felt were not appropriate, and editing or adapting the texts if necessary. In addition to this were the five digital stories, consisting of a series of images with recorded narration, completed by five members of the group (see Appendix Two).

Cancellation of the exhibition

The press releases for the exhibition, released by the art gallery in early July 2010, coincided with a week of intense media coverage of protests by asylum seekers at the direct provision centre at Mosney, Co. Meath, and attention on asylum seekers and on the 'direct provision' system in general. As part of cost cutting measures by the state, residents of the direct provision centre had received notification that they would be moved to another centre, at very short notice, and for many after years of living in this particular centre and becoming part of the local community (see Maguire and Murphy 2011:25; Smyth 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, 2010f). The protests by asylum seekers drew attention, among other issues, to the amount of time people had been waiting. In some ways, it may in fact have been a very good time to hold the exhibition, while public attention was on the issue. However asylum seekers were also very afraid at this time that the changes occurring at Mosney would also happen in other hostels, and that they too may be told to move at short notice. Within this context of heightened media attention around asylum seekers and direct provision, the newspaper articles which emerged from the press release highlighted very clearly the fact that the photographers were 'asylum seekers' living in this particular town. One paper also published a photograph with the name of the photographer alongside the text. Names had been provided at this point with the permission of participants, as I, and the group, felt that the work should be attributed to its creators. Rather than evoking pride in the exhibition and the photographs however, the press releases caused a wave of concern and agitation among the participants of the project, as well as other residents of the hostel and the manager of the hostel. The participant who had been named felt particularly vulnerable at this point with so much attention and fear felt by other residents and I

‘This is nothing new. It is like this for us everyday’. *Ade*

felt personally extremely responsible for this. The feeling was that the residents were trying to ‘live quietly’ and that media attention at this moment may cause attention and possibly interventions that they did not need. Again I think of Alison Mountz’ comment on how immigrants make themselves more or less visible depending on context (2010:153). There seemed to be a strong collective desire to remain invisible at this point.

The day before the exhibition was due to be installed in the gallery, we held an ‘emergency’ meeting with the participants and the management of the hostel to discuss all possible options. Based on suggestions by the participants, the manager and myself, we came up with three options: to exhibit the photographs alone without the text; to ‘adapt’ the text and stories, removing any sections which could be potentially seen as provocative or critical of the asylum system; or to postpone the exhibition altogether and regroup at another time. It was felt by most people, including myself, that removing or changing the text would diminish the power of the work as a whole, and that exhibiting the work in the context of the current heightened media attention and feelings of anxiety among participants and other residents was not appropriate or advisable. The decision was made collectively to postpone the exhibition. Tyler (2006) discusses how the ‘hypervisibility’ of asylum seekers in the media and in government discourse can lead to their further invisibility. The hypervisibility of the figure of the asylum seeker, she explains, ‘works to screen asylum seekers from view’ (2006:193). Similarly, the hypervisibility of asylum seekers in the media that particular week led to asylum seekers themselves further screening themselves from view, in the effort to ‘lead a quiet life’ and just ‘get on with it’.

In a final session a few days later to ‘close’ this phase of the project, we discussed what had arisen around the exhibition process, in particular fears around speaking out, and feelings of being controlled and having to hide away. The participants expressed a combination of anger at having to keep secret, keep quiet, be always ‘hiding underneath’, and fear of the implications of being seen to be speaking out against the system or complaining about it in any way. The atmosphere was calmer since the decision to postpone the exhibition, and we were all able to reflect on the ‘event’ in a more measured way. Ade said, *‘This is nothing new. It is like this for us*



Figure 49

My dream is to have my own little shop. I would like to have my own label. In my shop I will be doing tailoring, mending, designing different styles, African styles and European styles. I did a sewing course arranged by the asylum support group. I was helping the lady who was the tutor there. She was so impressed by my work. I don't know what the future holds for me, but I know there is light at the end of the tunnel. *Emmanuelle*

everyday'. The participant whose name had been published felt now that she had been afraid only because everyone else was, and now felt somewhat proud that her photograph had been published and people she knew in the town could see it.

We had a 'viewing' of the prints which I had collected from the printer only a couple of days before, enlarged photographic prints, mounted on foam board, and invited the manager of the hostel to come and look at them with us. The participants were happy to see their photographs printed in large format and high quality, and the visual effect when we displayed them together was powerful. The pride around their work which should have been felt at the exhibition was felt now, and there was a sense that all was not lost. I announced at this point that all participants would be able to keep their cameras. This was an important step to ensure, for some participants in particular, that the skills they had developed during the project would not be lost at this point. This was received with great enthusiasm. After sharing a meal together, we decided to meet again in early September to discuss what way we should continue.

The dominant conversations around this time and the decision to postpone the exhibition were based around the idea of it being better not to speak out. It is better to work around the system than to be seen to work against it. The issues of fear of speaking out, and of voicelessness, had emerged previously, during the processes of preparing the work for public exhibition, as well as through the images and discussions, as explored in Chapter Four (see in particular the section on 'ontological liminality'). Fear around the implications of speaking out, in any form, were not only discussed, but were palpable among the participants and other residents, not only during the period of postponing the exhibition, but during the processes of preparing and editing images and texts for public viewing. It was also expressed by the manager who had received a call from the Department of Justice to say that they had seen the press releases for the exhibition and would be sending someone to view the exhibition. A certain discourse of fear, secrecy and lack of transparency surrounds the asylum system. On looking at the photographs and stories, the manager of the hostel pointed out ones which may possibly be construed as 'whining' or criticizing the direct provision system in any way. Even photographs and narratives which presented hopes for the future were labelled as being potentially seen as complaining.



Figure 50

Freedom

Freedom is so good...there is nothing like freedom. What freedom means to me is that there is no boundaries in your life, no demarcations, you do what you want with yourself, you eat what you want, not what you see, you don't share your things with someone. Freedom...when you have freedom you can work, you have your job, you have your personal car, you can travel anywhere you like. Freedom is so good, when you don't have freedom you can't do anything. When I came to Ireland, I came to realize that freedom is so special in your life, there is nothing like freedom. It reminds me of the birds: the birds they will come and eat, after they eat, they fly away, because they have freedom. *Iswat*

Emmanuelle's self portrait (with her identity hidden) told the story in the accompanying narrative of her hope to be a dress maker and to have her own shop. *'I don't know what the future holds, but I know there is light at the end of the tunnel'*. The doubt about the future contained in this statement could be seen as critical of the 'system'. The participants expressed a combination of anger at having to keep secret, keep quiet, be always 'hiding underneath', and fear of the implications of being seen to be speaking out against the system or complaining about it in any way.

Caitlin Cahill (2010) makes the point that in current discourses of fear, it is the fears of dominant communities which are apparent, never those of immigrant communities. Echoing this, in the Irish context, Haynes et al. (2009:2) found that 'Irish media content reflects a focus on majority concerns, on their perspective, their understandings, their fears, and their experiences regarding inward migration'. Similarly Pain (2009:473) states that 'fear is the prerogative of the privileged'. Fears for the future of those seeking asylum, as well as their fears of speaking out are unarticulated in the public realm. One participant told me that people are constantly afraid of being moved to another hostel. He said if they (RIA) suspect that you are 'causing trouble' they will move you, with very little notice. They will not tell you why, they say it is to do with 'space'. A discourse of fear pervades the lives of those living in direct provision, heightened by rumours of what happens to those who speak out. This fear was confirmed in discussions with the manager of the hostel, who told me and the participants in a discussion about the exhibition that 'sometimes it is better to keep quiet'. Looking at Iswat's photograph entitled 'Freedom', and the accompanying text, she expressed the irony of this participant in fact not being free at all to speak out. In the same way that the fears of immigrants are not articulated, Cahill points out that the 'hopes, dreams and aspirations of undocumented communities are unarticulated in public debates' (Cahill 2010:157). When the aspirations of these people coincide with the fears of the 'system' or of the dominant community, they have even less chance of being heard. Pain (2009) points out that in current (increasing) geographical literature around the politics of fear, there is little or no reference to the feelings, perceptions, views, subjectivities or bodies of those who are supposed to be fearful (2009:471); she calls for an attempt to understand fear through more attention to what is happening on the ground (2009:467). The

experiences of this project, and the processes of collaboratively exhibiting co-created work with people seeking asylum highlighted the prevalence of fear for them in everyday life and its power over their speech and actions. A web begins to become apparent, tracing lines between the lack of voice of asylum seekers in general, the sense of censorship and the self censorship which follows, and the lack of a coherent and independent complaints system in the asylum system (see Chapter Four, page 186). This reciprocal network of control and power, fear and self censorship which pervades the direct provision system is reminiscent of Foucault's 'microphysics of power' (1979), with the self censorship which takes place echoing Foucault's discussion of Bentham's 'panopticon' (1979). The major effect of Bentham's architectural design for prisons, in which inmates can be seen at all times from a central viewing point, but cannot see out themselves, is to induce a form of constant self policing, so that in fact the policing from outside no longer needs to happen:

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers (Foucault 1979:201).

The decision to postpone the exhibition was a collective one. From my perspective, it came mainly from a concern that participants should not under any circumstances be put in a situation where they felt more vulnerable than they already were. Despite the need to 'create spaces for the voices and images of the subaltern – refugees and asylum seekers' in order to 'raise awareness, challenge stereotypes and hegemonic practices' (O'Neill and Harindranath 2006:45), it is important that individuals are not made to speak out at their own personal risk. Wright et al., in their analysis of participatory photography with marginalized youth, state that 'researchers must ensure that an already marginalized group is not pushed into further realms of discriminatory surveillance and control' (2010:554). Although it is important to hear

voices which are marginalized, it is important that the individuals whose voices are concerned are protected. Do they want their voices to be heard, or do they want to just stay quiet, work within and around the system in the best possible way for the protection and well being of themselves and their families?

Participatory research, according to Rachel Pain, has the ‘ability to forefront the perspectives of marginalized groups and actively challenge social exclusion with them’ (Pain 2004:654). It is this sense of ‘actively challenging’ which must be dealt with with awareness and sensitivity. While participatory work is an important means of working with subaltern or marginalized groups or communities, allowing for a shift in traditional power dynamics between researcher and researched, and allowing for the articulation of voices which too often are not heard, it is also important to be aware of the potential damage this kind of work can have. As researchers, we need to be aware of an ‘aesthetics of injury’ (Salverson 2001:123, cited in O’Neill 2010b:135), the possibility of doing more damage than good when intervening in a community, or of ‘perpetuating injustice in representations of the suffering of asylum seekers’ (O’Neill 2010b:135). Pain, in her 2004 paper on participatory research, as well as looking at the positive contributions of participatory research in social geography in particular, also looks at the growing critical literature around this type of work, especially in the areas of power dynamics, ethics and representation. There is huge importance in ‘filling the gaps’ in the voices which are heard, or allowed to be heard, in the public realm, allowing for marginalized voices – and fears – to be articulated. However, it is equally important, especially when using participatory forms of research, to take into account the context in which these voices will be heard, geographical, political, social, and the implications of this for the participants themselves.

Exhibiting the work...eventually

Things had calmed by September, and the group was keen to go ahead with exhibiting the work. It was decided quickly that the exhibition should take place in a more ‘neutral’ venue, away from where the participants were living. In this way, the exhibition could be entirely anonymous, with no implications on their lives in the

town, or on the hostel itself. The decision to keep the work anonymous changes somewhat the form of representation. Not being able to put one's name to one's own work changes how one speaks out and is heard. In reference to ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) principles of ethical research, one of which states that 'all informants [should be] guaranteed anonymity', Rose points to cases where 'the empowerment felt by the individuals participating might well be decreased if they had to adopt pseudonyms in order to have their anonymity guaranteed' (Rose 2007:251). However, it was felt by the group at this point that keeping the work anonymous was the best way forward. At a later stage, when preparing the same material for the book project, several participants felt strongly that they wished to use their own names, while others were still more comfortable with using a pseudonym.

The university campus at Maynooth was the most popular, as well as the most straightforward to organize, venue for the exhibition. One of the participants also requested whether we could exhibit the photographs at a 'family fun day' he was organizing in the town, as a simple photography exhibition without the text. The photographs were mounted in a community hall in early November by two of the participants. This received a lot of positive attention by attendees: fellow asylum seekers and members of the local community in the town. Representatives of the asylum support group in the town said they felt that it would be important to show the exhibition in the town. I was aware that this particular audience was viewing the images without their accompanying texts, and that the texts would change somewhat how the photographs were viewed and understood.

An opening of the full exhibition of twenty one images and their accompanying texts, as well as five digital stories playing in a continuous loop on two screens, took place in the foyer of the Iontas building in NUI Maynooth on the second of November 2010. There was a positive turn out of members of the academic community in the university, and residents of the direct provision hostel. The majority of the participants were present. There was a sense of pride in the event by participants, and a sense, I think, that this was their process. The 'official' nature of the university surroundings and the welcome by university staff gave the event a certain validity and sense of recognition that I think was important after what had gone before. The exhibition remained available for viewing in the space for three

days. The framing of the exhibition and the images and captions that were selected were done so with an exhibition in a gallery space in the town where participants were living in mind. The exhibition was designed for a specific sort of space and a specific target audience. The participants were representing their work and opinions with quite a specific audience in mind, and with an awareness that the work would not be anonymous.

With this exhibition in mind, there was, as we have seen, on the one hand, a certain amount of self censorship, of not wanting to say anything too negative by several members of the group, for fear of being seen as complaining, or of creating further animosity towards asylum seekers than they felt already existed. The original location of the exhibition within the local community also influenced the content of the images that were chosen: it made sense to choose images that local people could identify with, in particular views of the town and the surrounding area, to share opinions and views on these places, often to show their attachment to or pride in these places, and to stimulate discussion around shared places or issues. It is necessary to keep in mind that if the exhibition had been planned to take place in a more neutral venue, and completely anonymously, as it turned out, perhaps overall tone of the exhibition and its content may have been quite different, and perhaps more outspoken in its opinions.

Dialogue with audiences through the images and texts

Dialogue with the audience of the exhibition was encouraged by ensuring that there was time and an atmosphere at the opening to informally discuss the material. A sense of dialogue with audience members during the opening and throughout the days afterwards was aided by the use of a 'visitor's book' which was positioned in the exhibition space. For different people, the material of the exhibition, as well as the exhibition event itself, meant different things. For the participants themselves, there was a sense of pride at the exhibition, at viewing their own work, and at the turnout and interest in the work. Alice said 'you are raising our dignity'. Ade said he was 'proud'. For asylum seekers who had not been part of the project, the exhibition triggered thoughts and concerns about their own situations. For one resident of the direct provision centre, being at the exhibition made her vocalize her own need to

‘This work is very expressive. It makes me feel sad as an asylum seeker. It tells the truth about my own life’.

(Comment in exhibition visitor's book)

speak out and to be heard. She spoke about being a trained doctor, and the frustration of not being listened to and not allowed to have an opinion because she is an asylum seeker. She felt that she is never seen in terms of what she once was or what she has done, but only in terms of what she is now – poor, dependent and without papers. For another asylum seeker, fellow resident of the participants and recently arrived in Ireland one month previously, the exhibition made him feel, he said, that he wasn't alone in what he was feeling and thinking. He said that the photographs and words made him understand that other people were having the same thoughts and going through the same suffering as him. Despite living with these people, he was unable to discuss these issues with anyone in the hostel, and felt an intense loneliness in the sense that he was the only one thinking as he was. Similarly, Melanie Friend in her work with detained asylum seekers in the UK notes that 'several detainees told me that they did not talk about their own predicament with other detainees' (Friend 2010: paragraph 34). The sense of aloneness experienced by some asylum seekers or detainees points to the 'non-placeness' of such centres: as Augé explains, 'the space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude' (1995:103). Sharing these experiences for some may be a means of creating a sense of place, however temporary or transient.

For other audience members who spoke about their reactions, the work seemed to provide an insight on a more emotional or sensual level to the experiences of the participants, and to life in direct provision. One man said he was extremely aware of a sense of constraint in the words, even in those which on the surface seemed more positive. He felt like the speakers of the words were trying to make themselves fit in, trying to make everything ok in the face of a 'hellish situation'. One woman commented on the embodied nature of the work. She spoke specifically of the photographs of the corridor, that after reading the words and looking at the photographs again, she could actually hear the voices, see the children playing in the corridors. She felt unable to exactly describe this sensation, but she said she felt it, sensed it, in a way that was coming neither from just the image or just the text. She felt on seeing the photograph of the birthday cake how long seven years is for a child, how long it is to be living in that hostel. Maggie O'Neill makes the point that renewed methodologies for social research 'make visible emotional structures and

inner experiences (Kuzmics 1997) which may ‘move’ the audience through what can be described as ‘sensuous knowing’ or mimesis (Taussig 1993)’ (O’Neill 2002:71). The work is given further meaning here through dialogue with audiences who see the work. Meaning is different for different viewers, and in a constant state of flux for the photographers themselves, depending on who the audience, or potential audience, is and their reactions, or potential reactions, to the work.

Conclusion

This chapter traces the processes of attempting to collaboratively represent the work from the participatory photography project with the participants to a broader audience through exhibition. The conversations, dialogues and events which occurred as part of this project highlight the fact that the ‘data’ from this project extends beyond the material outcomes, the photographs, texts and stories. These processes of the creating and representing the work created reveal or highlight important issues concerning the politics and processes of representation, and through these processes, reveal aspects of the experiences of asylum seekers in the direct provision system.

What does it mean to represent, and what is the potential damage of doing this? The experiences of exhibiting the work raise issues around participation, participatory research and participatory art, vulnerability, and the potential of an ‘aesthetics of injury’ (Salverson 2001:123) that can occur from this. As researchers and facilitators, it is necessary to be extremely aware of the potential effects our work with vulnerable or marginalized people may have. The processes of showing the work to outside audiences highlighted the fear around speaking out that asylum seekers live under on an everyday basis, as well as the constant awareness of the perceptions of Irish society towards them. Repression of the voices of asylum seekers occurs on several levels, some more subtle than others, and it is clear that, as Ade said, theirs are the voices that those in authority would prefer not to hear.

The meaning of the work in this case must be understood in the context of the processes of creating and exhibiting it, and the constant changes and shifts that

occurred throughout these processes. In a similar way to dialogical art works, where meaning of the work is not immanent in the objects themselves, but is created through dialogue with the various people involved, including the audience, the processes and ‘events’ of the project are as much part of the ‘data’, and of the overall meaning of the work, as the photographs and texts created by the participants.

CONCLUSION

We live in a world where mechanisms to exclude people seen as ‘other’ which were once considered ‘exceptional’ have now become ‘normal’. People seeking protection in European countries, and elsewhere, are detained, dispersed and deported, their lives treated as ‘waste’ or ‘reject’. As part of this politics of exclusion, there is an increasing number of liminal spaces, between and within borders, in which such people are detained or forced to wait, kept waiting in often inhumane conditions, and often for years at a time. The Irish ‘direct provision’ system is part of this increasing network of liminal spaces. The increasing ‘fragmentation’ of labels used to designate refugees and asylum seekers and the often negative representation in mainstream media and government discourse, and the ‘othering’ and stereotyping that this creates, serve to justify various mechanisms of exclusion and to further exclude those people. Stereotyped representation of refugees and asylum seekers is further compounded by the distinct lack of the voices of these people in the public realm. This is the context for this research project, which began with two aims. The first aim was to work directly with asylum seekers living in the direct provision system in Ireland, through the method of participatory photography, in order to explore how living in the direct provision system is experienced on an everyday basis. The second aim was to find ways, along with the participants, to represent these experiences to a broader public in a way that might challenge dominant and stereotyped representations.

In this final section, I look at the ways in which the original aims of the research were challenged, questioned and made ambiguous through the processes of the research. I also look at what both the co-created work, as well as the processes of creation and representation of this work, revealed about the experiences of the participants of living in the direct provision system. I look at the implications of this research, both theoretically and methodologically, and for knowledge and understanding of society more generally.

Exploring and representing experiences of the direct provision system

Working through a participatory visual methodology allowed for a processual approach to the research, in which the visual became a tool for dialogue, for co-creation, for the exploration of experience and for the representation of that

experience beyond the research space. Both through the material outcomes as well as through the lived experience of this collaborative project, the research is an exploration and analysis of living within the 'liminal' space of direct provision, and the 'microphysics of power' that this entails. The images, text and stories created during the research project provide a means to examine not only experiences of living in direct provision, but also the power relations which surround the asylum system, both in themselves as well as through the processes of their creation and representation.

The images, texts and stories created through this project bring alive the textures of the experiences of living in this space, the daily paradoxes of being in between: marginalized yet controlled, outside and yet somehow belonging, in a place between citizenship and non-citizenship. They reveal a constant in between-ness of these states, or a fluctuation at times from one to the other, and the position of direct provision as a place of 'hostipitality' (Derrida 2000), a paradoxical combination of hospitality and hostility. They show the lack of control of residents over their own lives, the powerlessness of an in between existence, and the internalization of the imposed label of 'asylum seeker', which leads at times to an ontological sense of being in between, an 'ontological liminality', manifested through powerlessness, depression, feeling like a number and the fear of speaking out. However the material emerging from the project also strongly reveals the power and agency of people to negotiate this liminality and find ways of belonging, to create lives for themselves through various kinds of 'informal citizenship' (Sassen 2003) and 'ambiguous belongings' (Mountz 2011a), and the attachments to place and community that are formed as the liminality for many people becomes semi-permanent.

Several aspects of the processes of the project and of representing the work to a broader public were important in further revealing or reiterating aspects of the direct provision system and the experiences of the participants in this system. The non fixity of the meanings of images for participants during the project highlighted how subjective data can be, its meaning relevant to a particular moment in time, or in relation to a particular audience or potential audience. The fact also that the participants tended to change the meanings of images or stories when this material was potentially entering the public realm revealed a fear in speaking out in any way

negatively against the system they found themselves in, emphasizing again the sense of ‘ontological liminality’. A self censorship, reminiscent of Foucault’s (1979) discussion of Bentham’s ‘panopticon’, began to become apparent, with participants aware of the potential implications of what images and texts were saying. A sense of feeling under constant surveillance, and the lack of freedom that this entails, were strongly apparent here, along with a fear of the implications of their words on their cases for asylum, as well as on their well being in the centre.

The cancellation of the first exhibition reiterated this fear in a very powerful and immediate way. The power of the media to whip up this fear was apparent with the combination of media attention around the protests at Mosney direct provision centre, the press releases for the exhibition in local newspapers, and the reactions not only of the participants but of other residents of the hostel towards these. There seemed to be a fear not only of damaging one’s case for asylum by speaking out, but also a constant fear of being moved with little notice to another hostel as a form of ‘punishment’. As Ade disturbingly but revealingly commented around this sense of fear and surveillance, ‘it is like this for us everyday’. The reactions of the manager of the hostel towards the exhibition and the press release revealed the difficulty of her own position, stuck between working for the direct provision system and her compassion for residents, many of whom she had clearly come to know on a personal basis. She too felt that any kind of speaking out, however abstract, could be seen as complaining and could be damaging to the residents. This again highlighted the tensions between hospitality and hostility, and between control and agency. Kobelinsky similarly found of the system of CADA accommodation centres in France:

‘La politique mise en place est marquée par l’oscillation permanente entre assistance et contrôle, compassion et suspicion, respect des conventions en matière d’asile et mise à l’écart des étrangers’ (Kobelinsky 2010:6/7)

[The policy here is marked by a constant fluctuation between assistance and control, compassion and suspicion, respect for the asylum conventions and the exclusion of foreigners – *my translation*].

My own experiences of the project, from accessing the participants to creating the material alongside them to the processes of representing this material to the public, drew me closer to their experience, albeit from a very different position and perspective. As regards my own fears around the work, I was extremely concerned, especially during the processes of representation and the 'events' surrounding the cancellation of the first exhibition, that this project would place participants into a more vulnerable and difficult position than they were already in, and was angry to see the extent to which they were unable to speak freely about issues concerning them.

Through the processes of the project, the original aims were constantly challenged and made ambiguous, forcing me to look at the ways in which I was working and the implications of these ways of working. Looking back to the original thoughts around collaboration, representation and the visual, and the importance of working with the participants to create their own representations of their experiences, what I thought would be an unmediated form of communication in fact became a complex series of negotiations on my part between participants and audiences on many levels. I had felt initially that through collaboration, as well as through the use of images, the work would speak more directly to audiences than many representations of asylum seekers, creating a sense of dialogue between audience and creator. Despite creating a body of work, images, texts and stories, which I think can and does in many ways speak very directly of experiences of direct provision, far from the work being unmediated, I was actually involved in a complex series of negotiations and mediations between participants and various audiences. As Anthony Luvera points out:

When a practice incorporating other people's photographs is disseminated publicly, outside the context of the group of people who created the material, it must be viewed foremost as a practice of representation, which is framed, contained or mediated in some way by the facilitating artist or organization, not simply as the display of amateur photographs of an 'unmediated' reality, or a presentation from an arts participation exercise. With projects that facilitate the production of images by children or other 'spoken for' or disempowered individuals, consideration of issues around intention, context and representation become particularly heightened (Luvera 2008:unpaginated).

This opens up questions and discussions on collaborative practice, power and representation. Collaborative work, as Luvera points out, or indeed visual work or research in general, is always framed and represented in certain ways. My own thoughts around the unmediated nature of visual and collaborative work, and around the power or potential of this type of work to challenge stereotypes or dominant representations, were challenged by the developments of the project. Work such as this highlights the importance of critical approaches to visual participatory methodologies, making clear links between the claims made by participatory practices around empowerment and change for example, and what actually happens in practice. Awareness of the different positions of those involved, and the relations of power between them, is imperative, as well as viewing power relations as enmeshed in participatory approaches, rather than assuming that they will be overcome by such approaches. Such awareness may help to avoid either a 'salvage paradigm' (Kester 2000:7), in which the artist or researcher attempts to improve the 'implicitly flawed subject', or an 'aesthetics of injury' (Salverson 2001:123), where the well meaning artist or researcher creates more damage than good. No method, including those which are collaborative or participatory, is without its power relations. However, an awareness of power relations on the part of the researcher, and of how these play out in the particular research context, can reveal 'new and unanticipated forms of collaborative knowledge', as Kester says of dialogical processes (Kester 2000:4). By showing the 'unruly' processes and the playing out of power relations within the research as an implicit part of this research, rather than masking them to present a 'clean' and authoritative account, I explore what they further reveal about the ongoing experiences of the participants in the direct provision system.

The creation of the body of work with participants and the processes and events surrounding the project bring up questions around audience also. Any simplistic notions around the message or the audience at the start of the project were challenged through the events surrounding it. Different audiences, or potential audiences, can change the 'meaning' of the work significantly. We cannot assume the presence of one single 'audience' who will take from the work a single message, but rather different audiences react in different ways, and give different meanings to the work itself. The potential audience when preparing material for the exhibition gave the

work different meanings to those it had had with just myself and the participants as the audience, with the participant-photographers changing meanings in accordance with this. The manager of the hostel as audience, and the Department of Justice as a potential audience gave new meanings and understandings again to the work, as their reactions were either gauged or anticipated. The audience which would have seen the work at the art gallery in the town where the hostel was located may have had different reactions to the predominantly academic audience at the eventual exhibition in the university. Literature around ‘dialogical aesthetics’ and relational art was important in looking at how the (potential or anticipated) audience can affect and influence the creation and meaning of the work itself.

The visual methodology and the processes of the collaborative project also allowed for the creation of an autonomous book project: a means of giving integrity to the voices of the participants, creating a stand alone document with a life beyond the research project and the thesis. With the idea of audience in mind, and the communication of alternative representations, we created a book resulting from the project, entitled *New Bridges: experiences of seeking asylum in Ireland*. The book can be seen as a combination, or culmination, of the material outcomes of the project as well as the processes and events, in that it shows the images that were chosen by the participants and the accompanying texts which were often edited or changed in various ways by them. The book here should be seen both as a stand alone document, and as a representation for the reader of the thesis of the images and texts which appeared in the original exhibition. The book accompanies this thesis, as a hard copy (Appendix One) and as a PDF version (Appendix Two), and should be seen as an integral part of the work as a whole. Through the book, this work has the potential to reach broader audiences than the more limited ones which this thesis, or further physical exhibitions, can reach.

The original aims of the project - to explore the experiences of asylum seekers living in the direct provision system through the method of participatory photography, and to represent those experiences in the public realm - were thus expanded and challenged through the processes of the research project, bringing up theoretical, methodological and ethical questions and challenges, and forcing me to examine both my ways of working and my role as a researcher. Despite the challenges of

working in this way, both the work that was created alongside participants during the collaborative project, in the form of images, texts, and stories, and the processes of creating and representing this work provide insight into the everyday lived and subjective experiences of living in the direct provision system.

Contributions to knowledge

The processes of addressing these aims through the research project, and the ways in which these aims were challenged and made ambiguous through these processes, have allowed me to contribute to knowledge in three broad ways, empirically, theoretically and methodologically, as well as to discussions around ethics and the politics of research.

The research firstly expands empirical understandings of the experiences of asylum seekers living in the direct provision system in Ireland, in the ways discussed above. While this study focuses on one group of people living in one direct provision centre, their experiences shed light on how the politics of exclusion, in the form of the direct provision system, plays out in the everyday lives of individuals. The work also reveals the ‘microphysics of power’ through which the system operates, the ways in which different aspects of power and control, and consequently fear, seep into the very intimacies of everyday life. I return to Maggie O’Neill’s comment, cited in the introduction, in order to highlight the importance of understanding individual lives and experiences, the ‘micrology’ of experience, in order to better understand the ‘bigger picture’:

Recovering and re-telling people’s subjectivities, lives and experiences are central to attempts to better understand our social worlds with a view to transforming these worlds. Such work reveals the daily struggles, resistances, strengths and humour of people seeking asylum, the importance of intersubjective social relations and sociality, as well as knowledge and better understanding of the legitimations and rationalization of power, domination and oppression (O’Neill 2010b:22).

Through finding ways to conceptualise the experiences of the people I was working with, I worked with the concept of ‘liminality’, as conceptualized by anthropologist

Victor Turner (1967). It is primarily through exploring this concept in relation to the context of direct provision, and developing the idea of ‘ontological liminality’ and its relationship with Foucault’s ‘microphysics of power’, that this work contributes theoretically to knowledge. By working with participants living in the direct provision system in Ireland, I look at how the liminal spaces created by the politics of exclusion are experienced by those living within them in a particular place and context. Through looking at the complex and often contradictory nature of experience in these spaces, I develop and expand understandings of the concept of liminality.

A series of paradoxes, or ‘in between’, emerged throughout the project when looking at the direct provision system and at the experiences and situations of those living within it. I saw direct provision as a space of inclusive exclusion, as in the ‘camps’ discussed by Agamben (1997, 1998, 2005), and a space which highlights the paradoxical proximity between hospitality and hostility, as evoked by Derrida’s term ‘hostipitality’ (2000). The centre itself fluctuated between place and ‘non-place’, to use Augé’s (1995) term, and the situation of those living within it seemed to lie somewhere between citizenship and non-citizenship. I use the concept of liminality to draw together these ‘in between’ and to create deeper understandings of the realities of living within them. I expand on the literature around the liminal spaces created by asylum and immigration policy, and the increasing politics of exclusion, by exploring the experiences of people living in such spaces, alongside those people themselves.

The work looks at how the concept of liminality has very real implications for everyday lives, not only in spatial and temporal terms, but also in ontological terms. Through exploring how a situation of imposed liminality plays out in people’s daily lives in direct provision, I develop the idea of ‘ontological liminality’, a means of expressing the ways in which experiences of liminality, of feeling like a ‘liminal being’, a number rather than an individual, and the ways in which a chronic sense of fear, insecurity, invisibility and a highly controlled existence are lived and internalized.

There is a close relationship between liminality and power in this context, and making a link between ‘ontological liminality’ and Foucault’s ‘microphysics of power’ provides a way of understanding how control and power reach the intimacies of everyday life and the intimate levels of the being in the context of direct provision. As Mountz (2010:151) points out, ‘experiences of surveillance, though read off the flesh, do not leave unmarked the soul that inhabits the body’. Control in the direct provision system is reinforced through a pervading sense of fear, of one’s voice being weak and powerless and the sense of invisibility, which characterize the experience of long term living in the direct provision system. Weakness and fear lead to various forms of self-censorship and self-regulation, as emerged during the processes of representing the work from this project. In this way, ‘ontological liminality’ may be seen as an instrument of the ‘microphysics of power’, a way in which power seeps into the very intimacies of everyday life, self and identity. Similarly, Zetter points out that ‘the need to conform to an institutionally imposed stereotype can both reinforce control and transform an identity’ (1991:45). This points to the way in which labeling and representation, and the ways in which asylum seekers are represented and perceived, are lived and internalized by asylum seekers themselves, thus reinforcing control, fear and exclusion. The concept of ‘ontological liminality’, and the way in which it is related to the ‘microphysics of power’, may be useful more broadly for creating better understandings of the experiences of those who live for long periods of time in camps or other forms of detention, and the ways in which liminality and the ‘architectures’ of power are lived and internalized at an intimate level.

Liminality and liminal spaces by their nature imply a sense of placelessness and not-belonging. However, despite the precarity of place and attachments for people living in the direct provision system, and the internalization of this precarity, the experiences of the participants, and the ways in which they negotiate imposed liminality through their everyday practices, reveal various attachments and belongings, to place, people and community, and forms of ‘informal citizenship’ (Sassen 2003). Looking at everyday experience as it emerges through the images, texts and stories, as well as the processes of creation of these, adds further complexity to understandings of the liminality experienced through asylum. While this is explored in the context of this particular research, it also holds implications for

broader understandings of the architectures of liminality and exclusion into which asylum seekers are placed by states, and the importance of deeper understandings of the complexity of these experiences.

Through the development and analysis of the methodology used to explore and represent the experiences of people seeking asylum, the work contributes to discussions in the growing field of participatory visual methodologies in social science research and expands understandings of these. It also contributes to the body of work exploring migration through visual and other creative means, and contributes to critical discussions on the nature of research itself. Through development and critical interrogation of the methodology used here, I expand understandings of how creative and visual methodologies can be used as a means of working collaboratively with research subjects in order to provide insight and understanding into subjective experience and into the nature of research itself.

Firstly the methodology has allowed for the deepening of understandings of how we think about the experiences of people seeking asylum. Collaborative creative methodologies allow for access and insight into the subjective experiences and life worlds of participants. Working through the aesthetic gives scope for access into different realms of experience, creating sense based understanding and the expression of ‘textures’ of experience which are often unavailable through solely verbal means. Creative and visual approaches are a powerful means of accessing and communicating experience, both through the work produced with participants as well as through the processes of creating and representing that work. As well as communicating understandings of the experiences of people seeking asylum at the level of intellect, the body of image-text created by the participants also communicates with audiences at the level of affect, allowing for deeper, more sense based understandings of experience. The images and texts work together, complementing each other, each adding different dimensions of understanding. The body of image-text created by the participants expands understandings and representations of asylum seekers and challenges the stereotyped representations which documentary images or representations in mainstream media often present. The image-text seeks to represent everyday experiences of being in the liminal space created by the asylum system and to move beyond statistics, victim/threat binaries

and the imposed identity of ‘asylum seeker’ towards a more human representation of the subjective and everyday experiences of living in an in between space. While the written thesis has limited readership as a way of communicating those experiences, the image-text in the form of the exhibition or book has the potential to communicate these experiences to broader audiences in a more immediate way.

Secondly, through a critical analysis of the methodology and how it unfolded in this research project, I add to understandings of participatory visual methodologies and highlight the critical rigour necessary for this type of work. Working through participatory visual methods also exposes the politics of research, highlighting and bringing under scrutiny the various relationships and power relations inherent in the research process. I contribute to deeper understandings of the processes and politics of research by opening up discussions on the role of the researcher, power, audience, ethics, participation and claims for this, and the nature of visual research. The role of the researcher and the relationships between researcher and participants come to the fore in collaborative visual research, as the processes of this type of method are more apparent, dialogue is at the forefront, and the emphasis is on process rather than ‘clean’ outcomes. As Rose points out, the presence of the voices and images of the participants in this type of research also increases scrutiny on the relationship between researcher and participants:

The relationship between the researcher and the participants in collaborative visual research is visible to a more sustained kind of scrutiny than texts authored by the researcher alone because the voices and the images of the research subjects are there to ‘talk back’, as it were, from their photos (Rose 2007:253).

The work highlights the importance of the awareness of power relations as enmeshed in this type of work, rather than an assumption that they will be overcome by it. It draws attention to the mediated nature of participatory visual work, and the potential re-imposition of power dynamics when this type of work enters the public realm. It also draws attention to the potential of increased vulnerability for research subjects already in vulnerable situations through becoming participants in the research, and therefore the need of the researcher for awareness, reflexivity and critical rigour in practice.

Thirdly, the development of this methodology here points to the usefulness of further cross over with artistic methods, practices and literature for social science research. Artistic methods and writings have much to contribute to how we understand experience and society and how we create knowledge. Increased cross over between the social sciences and the visual and creative arts holds the potential for accessing the more hidden realms of human experience. In particular, writing around dialogical and relational art was useful during this research in understanding the processual nature of knowledge creation in collaborative work. Using a participatory visual methodology allowed for the development of a processual approach to the research, in which relationships are developed and knowledge emerges from the encounter between researcher and research subjects. Collaboration and dialogue with the subjects of research can produce, in the words of Grant Kester, ‘new and unanticipated forms of collaborative knowledge’ (Kester 2000:4). In these ways, this research contributes to the development of participatory visual methodologies in the social sciences, and the critical interrogation and understanding of such methods.

A feminist approach to research, and to ethics, underlies this work as a whole. The approach from the beginning emerged from an interest in working collaboratively with research participants, and attempting to create positive change through the research or the processes of the research. The methodology centred around a ‘sensuous’ approach, involving body, emotion, the senses and creativity, and the importance of everyday experience. The ethical approach gave importance to the reflexivity of the researcher, placing responsibility over research outcomes, and context based collaborative decisions over an abstract moral sense of justice or benevolence. Through working in this way, and by clearly adopting an approach which self-consciously exposed the processes of the project and the ethical decisions associated with these processes, I contribute to discussions not only around feminist research in the social sciences, but also to broader discussions and literature around ethics in social science research.

More broadly, the work holds implications for how we view society, for policy around asylum and exclusion of ‘problematic populations’, and for the contested nature of knowledge and the creation of knowledge. Through looking at asylum seekers’ experiences of liminal spaces, and the effects of policies and politics of

exclusion of the everyday lives of individual people, the work sheds light on the increasing politics of exclusion, not only in Irish society, but also more generally in countries of immigration. The way in which a society treats those seeking protection within its borders is a reflection of that society in general. The increasing emphasis on 'security' over protection and human rights has worrying implications for society and the well being of its people. The continued containment and institutional abuse of 'problematic' populations in this country in particular highlights the fact that we have not learned from the past, despite the constant current revelations of the destructive legacy of such practices. Agamben urges us to pay attention to the figure of the refugee and to what it reveals about citizenship and the nation-state: 'inasmuch as the refugee unhinges the old trinity of state/nation/territory, this apparently marginal figure deserves rather to be considered the central figure of our political history' (Agamben 1995). In a supposedly democratic and fair society, understanding and revealing the everyday experiences of those who live within our midst and yet are marginalized from society is extremely important.

In terms of asylum and the direct provision policy in Ireland, there are already several reports which draw attention to the inhumane, illogical and non-transparent nature of the direct provision system in Ireland (see for example Akidwa 2010, FLAC 2009, NASC 2008). By exposing the nature of this system through creating better understandings of the everyday subjective experiences of people who wait within it, I would hope that this work can further contribute towards a serious questioning of the continued viability of this system and its replacement with a system which is logical and sensible and which operates with transparency, efficiency and humanity.

In terms of knowledge production, the work highlights the subjective, contested and situated nature of knowledge and the creation of knowledge, as well as the performative nature of method. Working collaboratively with research subjects highlights the co-existence of multiple realities and the importance of perspective and situatedness, as well as the unanticipated knowledges which can emerge from collaborative work. This highlights the importance of reflexivity on the part of the researcher, an awareness of the often political nature of method and the ways in which research more generally not only observes but intervenes in social realities.

This feels, in many ways, not like a completed piece of work, but like the beginning of further interrogation into, on the one hand, the experiences of those people who are forced to live or are detained in the liminal spaces created through the politics of exclusion, and on the other, models of participatory practice and the further potential of crossover between scholarship, activism and art and representation.

Endnotes

As for the direct provision system and the participants, at the time of writing the system is still in place, and the majority of the participants are still in the hostel, still waiting. They are finding their voices, becoming more fearless, mobilizing against an inhumane system in the best way they can. After a visit to them in May of this year (2012), I wrote the following:

Almost two years after we produced this material, I dropped into the hostel with copies of the completed book which I received a few days ago. Two years later, six of the eight participants who completed the project are still living in the hostel, in the same situation they were in when I met them. Ade was deported with his family to Nigeria after almost six years waiting in the asylum system. Two of his three children were born in Ireland, and two were in school in the local area. I hear from him sometimes, and they are all safe. Janaan, in her sixties, disappeared from the hostel a few months ago. Her whereabouts is kept secret, but I have had word that she is safe. Iswat has been in the system now for six years. Her four daughters are still in Liberia, the youngest now eight years old, and the eldest twelve. I ask her how she is doing and her eyes well up. 'I am sleeping, eating and waiting', she says. She hasn't heard from her solicitor since 2009, three years, no communication has been answered. Abiye has been waiting now for five years. He says things are reaching critical point. He can't go on like this. If it wasn't for his three children, he says, he would have disappeared long ago. They are growing fast, and all they know is life in this hostel, in the one room they have shared for five years. He is always tired, he doesn't really ever sleep more than three hours he says. Brian, endlessly positive, has clearly lost the faith he had in the system when I first met him. His daughter likewise has only known this place, and this system, a system where her parents are treated like children, a system where they have to sign for their daily ration of fruit. After complaints made by the residents last month regarding the poor conditions in the hostel and sent to local politicians and local

media, conditions have improved somewhat. Food is more varied, new furniture was bought to replace torn and dirty furniture in common areas, and fruit is now provided (which residents have to sign for in the mornings). This is done while attention is on the situation, but then it all slowly returns to normal again (31 May 2012).

On completing this research, and writing about the everyday experiences of the participants as they emerged through the collaborative project, I ask, how do we have a system in this country which allows people to live like this? How is it made acceptable through a system to keep people institutionalized, infantilized and marginalized for years at a time, to keep them in controlled poverty in a supposedly modern, democratic society? How is it acceptable, let alone logical, to forbid quite often qualified, healthy people from working, from furthering their education, from contributing to a society that needs them so badly? And how, in a society that is reeling from reports on the Magdalene laundries, the Ryan report, with the horrifying institutional abuse that these have revealed and the disastrous individual and social effects of institutionalizing people in inhumane conditions, be allowing this to happen, not only to grown adults, but to those children many of whom are part of the next generation of Irish citizens? How do we expect these children to react to the Irish State's treatment of them, and how do we expect them to become strong and whole adults who will contribute to Irish society in the future?

I finish with the words of Abiye, who emailed me earlier this year to tell me about a meeting they were organizing with local press and politicians to draw attention to the deteriorating living conditions in the hostel. After five years of living in this way, he is beyond caring about the consequences of speaking out against the system:

'I have gotten to the extent of not minding any kind of consequence. I will like to be remembered as having done or made attempt to do something to fight against the maltreatment of residents of direct provision centre. What kind of system employs these places to provide specific services to asylum seekers and yet never look back to see if the service is being offered to spec. That's the big question. Where do the so called millions go to? I am not a criminal, I am an asylum seeker and that's not a crime'. (Abiye email, dated 14/04/2012)

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Seaview. 2008. [Documentary]. Directed by Nicky Gogan & Paul Rowley. Ireland: Still Films.

APPENDIX 3: Information sheet and consent form

Information sheet for participants:

Narratives and experiences of migration and asylum in Ireland – a doctoral research project

Location: X Hotel, Ireland

Dates: March-May 2010

Researcher/project coordinator: Zoë O'Reilly

You have shown interest in participating in a doctoral research project looking at experiences of migration and asylum in Ireland through participatory photography. The information (images and words) gathered in the process of this photography project will contribute towards the final PhD thesis exploring the experiences and processes of migration and integration in Ireland through the voices of migrants themselves.

This information sheet explains how the photography project will work and how the information will be used afterwards.

You are asked to read all the information carefully – or have someone read it to you. If you are uncomfortable or unsure about anything in this information sheet, please ask any questions by email (zoreilly@hotmail.com) or during the first session on March 11.

About the research

This research project is part of a doctoral research project, based in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. The project aims to use participatory photography to explore experiences of migration to Ireland and living in Ireland, with particular focus on experiences of the asylum process.

How the project will work

You have volunteered, as a resident of X Hotel, to be part of a group of 12 participants working on a participatory photography project over a period of ten weeks as part of this research.

As a participant, you will be provided with a digital camera for the duration of the project. The cameras should be returned at the end of the project.

The group will meet each week with project facilitator(s) for a workshop of approximately two hours at an agreed time.

Workshops will consist of:

- development of visual awareness and photographic skills;
- discussion around topics to photograph, some of which will be suggested by the researcher/facilitator and others which may be suggested by participants;
- discussion of images taken by participants and issues emerging from these;
- editing of images and creating captions and text around chosen images;
- preparation of an exhibition.

By the end of the project, each participant should have created a body of images and text. The researcher/facilitator(s) and participants will then work collectively towards creating an exhibition of images, edited by participants themselves, in an appropriate venue (ie. (name of town), NUI Maynooth).

How will participating in this research project benefit you as a participant?

- Developing skills in photography and visual awareness
- Developing skills in communicating through photographs
- An opportunity to work creatively as a group and exhibit work in public
- An opportunity to speak out about experiences of migration and asylum in Ireland and have your voice heard

What is expected of you as a participant?

- To attend all workshops and sessions as far as possible
- To have an interest in contributing to this research project, exploring and discussing issues and experiences of migration and of living in Ireland

How will the information be used?

- Images and text emerging from the project will be used as part of the doctoral research project.
- Participants are free to withdraw images and text up to the time of publication.
- All information will be anonymous and participants will not be identified in the research in any way.
- Any images for public exhibition will be chosen and edited by participants themselves.
- Participants will retain copies of any photographs/texts created by them.

Workshops will be audio recorded. The information obtained will be stored in a locked cabinet in NUI Maynooth, and will only be accessible only to the researcher. *All information obtained from you during the research will be kept confidential and anonymous. Identifying information about you will not be used in any reports of the research or in any publications that draw on the research.*

Your participation in this research photography project is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. However participants are encouraged, once they begin, to attend all workshops if possible.

You will be asked to sign a copy of the consent form (below) at the end of the first session. There will be opportunity during this session to ask any questions you may have and to withdraw if you feel you need to.

Consent form

Project title: *Narratives and experiences of migration and asylum in Ireland*

Material gathered during this research will be treated as confidential and securely stored in a locked cabinet at NUI Maynooth. Identifying information about you will not be used in any reports of the research or in any publications that draw on the research.

Please answer each statement below concerning the collection of the research data

1	I have read and understood the information sheet	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
2	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and the photography project	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
3	I have had my questions answered satisfactorily	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
4	I understand I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason, up until the research is completed.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
5	I agree to the workshops being audiotaped and to the contents being used for research purposes.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
6	I understand that interviews/classes/facilitation do not constitute any kind of counseling or medical treatment.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Name (printed) _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Please feel free to contact us if you have any further questions.

Zoë O'Reilly Phone: 01-708 6730 Email: zoreilly@hotmail.com
(Researcher)
Dr Mary Gilmartin Phone: 01-708 6617 Email: mary.gilmartin@nuim.ie
(Project supervisor)

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process please inform the management of the X Hotel, or alternatively, contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at pgdean@nuim.ie or at 01 708 6018. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.