

**From Oppression to Education: Transgressing to
Freedom?**

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Dedication

To my Mother

The love and care you have wrapped me in as a child have guided me as an adult through the most difficult brushwood of life. Thank you for teaching me to be brave and courageous, to withstand the storms, to fight for my right to be free in the world of oppressive patriarchal structures. You are a Lifegiver!

I love you, Mamusya!

Acknowledgements

To my children

who during writing of this thesis had to listen good night stories of Paulo Freire and bell hooks – never stop learning. Grow through negative experiences and turn them into a positive learning

To my husband

thank you for being there for me always

To my friends and family

who supported this venture financially and emotionally, I could not have done this without you

To my supervisor, Dr. Michael Murray

My sincere thank you for your remarkable support, trust, respect and encouragement
Thank you for believing in me

Abstract

In a period of global crisis, characterised by deepening inequalities, a rise of racism and xenophobia, religious and ethnic cleansing, people run for their lives, escaping conflicts, persecution, tortures and deaths. The phenomenon of migration, apparently, can be traced to the Roman times, yet, in the twenty first century, it is considered acceptable to purposely destitute, diminish and dehumanise those in need of protection in most countries of the Global North. Bringing disruption into the trinity of state-nation-territory and constantly being positioned as a threat, an asylum seeker, as a person who is in the process to be recognised as a refugee, became a scapegoat of political agendas and discourses at the highest levels of the patriarchal structures.

This study seeks to understand an impact of the Direct Provision System on the life of the researcher and attempts to make meaning of her personal experience as an asylum seeker in Ireland. Subjectivity, emotions, self-reflexivity and voice are central to this research.

From Oppression to Education: Transgressing to Freedom? is a narrative inquiry research, an epistolary autoethnography from the daughter to her mother, to elicit a story of powerlessness and oppression and an immense desire for liberation.

The life story, in which reality sometimes sounds like a fiction, draws from day to day personal struggles in the context of the Direct Provision System and touches on the major problems of society: structural injustice and inequality, class division, marginalization and colonization through oppression.

As Richardson ones said, “no one and no people is utterly powerless”. The researcher reflects on her search for freedom through the power of support and solidarity of local community, and through life-changing experience of education and learning.

The implications of this research rely on power of solidarity and hope to engage wider society in conversations on how in spaces, which offer asylum, disempowerment transcends into an unbearable physical feeling of oppression, and how personal experience is always informed by clear political purposes.

List of Abbreviations

AkiDwa	Akina Dada wa Africa (Sisterhood in Swahili)
ASSG	Asylum Seekers Support Group
DPS	Direct Provision System
DP	Direct Provision
GP	General Practitioner
ETB	Educational Training Board
EU	European Union
HSE	Health, Safety and Environment
IN	Integration Network
INIS	Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service
MU	Maynooth University
NGO	Non-Profit Organisation
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
ORAC	Office of Refugee Application Commissioner
PPN	Public Participation Network
Partner TFT	Partners Training for Transformation
RAT	Refugee Appeals Tribunal
RIA	Reception and Integration Agency
UN	United Nations

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Introduction

I always thought that one day I will leave the Direct Provision System and will be free. This thesis reflects on my experience of living in the Direct Provision centre in Ireland as an asylum seeker.

An asylum seeker is an individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualised procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognised as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker (Amnesty International, 2019).

This thesis is not traditional in its form. A love to writing letters created a possibility to tell my story in a unique way, and with the hope to make a meaning of my experience. The process of writing this thesis is an attempt to close a page of the past and to open one to the future. It is an attempt to decolonise my colonised “I”, yet to colonise your attention by deeper meanings that are being unveiled through the process of decolonisation.

As an adult educator, I believe that radical education can transform the world into a more just place. I also believe, that it is important to share stories of struggle and resistance so the voices of the oppressed grow stronger in solidarity.

With the hope that this thesis can contribute to the dialogue about how personal is always political and political is always personal, I invite you on my journey of transgressing to freedom.

Contra Spem Spero!

Гетьте, думи, ви хмари осінні!
То ж тепера весна золота!
Чи то так у жалю, в голосінні
Проминуть молодії літа?

Ні, я хочу крізь сльози сміятись,
Серед лиха співати пісні,
Без надії таки сподіватись,
Жити хочу! Геть, думи сумні!

Я на вбогім сумнім перелозі
Буду сіяць барвисті квітки,
Буду сіяць квітки на морозі,
Буду лить на них сльози гіркі.

І від сліз тих гарячих розтане
Та кора льодовая, міцна,
Може, квіти зйдуть - і настане
Ще й для мене весела весна.

Я на гору круту крем'яную
Буду камінь важкий підіймать
І, несучи вагу ту страшную,
Буду пісню веселу співать. *

В довгу, темную нічку невидну
Не стулю ні на хвильку очей -
Все шукатиму зірку провідну,
Ясну владарку темних ночей. **

Так! я буду крізь сльози сміятись,
Серед лиха співати пісні,
Без надії таки сподіватись,
Буду жити! Геть, думи сумні!

2 травня 1890 р.
(Lesya Ukrainka, 1890)

Contra Spem Spero!

Thoughts away, you heavy clouds of autumn!
For now springtime comes, a gleam with gold!
Shall thus in grief and wailing for ill-fortune
All the tale of my young years be told?

No, I want to smile through tears and weeping,
Sing my songs where evil holds its sway,
Hopeless, a steadfast hope forever keeping,
I want to live! You thoughts of grief, away!

On poor sad fallow land unused to tilling
I'll sow blossoms, brilliant in hue,
I'll sow blossoms where the frost lies, chilling,
I'll pour bitter tears on them as due.

And those burning tears shall melt, dissolving
All that mighty crust of ice away.
Maybe blossoms will come up, unfolding
Singing springtime too for me, some day.

Up the flinty steep and craggy mountain
A weighty ponderous boulder I shall raise,
And bearing this dread burden, a resounding
Song I'll sing, a song of joyous praise.

In the long dark ever-viewless night-time
Not one instant shall I close my eyes,
I'll seek ever for the star to guide me,
She that reigns bright mistress of dark skies.

Yes, I'll smile, indeed, through tears and weeping
Sing my songs where evil holds its sway,
Hopeless, a steadfast hope forever keeping,
I shall live! You thoughts of grief – away!

(Translated by Vera Rich)
(Lesya Ukrainka – Three Poems; 2019)

Chapter 1. Findings

Prologue

Dear Mamusya!

I am going to tell you a story of my life... I have been thinking about it for many years, and it is only timely now, as I feel like I need to close a chapter of my life - called Direct Provision. At this stage I have been almost the same time out as in – 6 years. But that past is still hunting me, it still hunts my family.

We have never spoken about my life in direct provision. You might have seen or heard some snippets when chatting to us on Viber and Skype, but, I believe, you don't have the whole picture, what it was like for me as a young woman, as a mother, as a teacher, as someone, who was forced to flee own country to seek safety, - to come to Ireland, and build my own life here from scratch...

I am well integrated now. I am on the path I want to be... but it didn't come easy. Integration comes with blood and tears. It is a conscious choice to become integrated in the local community, yet, not to assimilate, not to lose oneself...

Mum, I want you to meet me, your daughter, and to get to know me... to learn, how my life experiences have changed me and shaped me into who I am now.

At 38 my head is full of grey hair, my BMI index is over 30, my ovaries have failed prematurely- at 31, and I suffer with anxiety and fibromyalgia... But I keep going... I just have to... because women in our lineage do not give in, we don't surrender in front of storms and tests, that life throws at us... Because we are shrines of our genus... For our children to grow wise and strong, we must support them and teach them to be able to cope with the pressure of society by setting examples, by uniting with them in our struggles, by winning the day...

I didn't have you in my life as long as I wanted for... I always thought, that my children will grow beside you, like I grew up beside Grandma... that you will be the one to tell them fairy tales... to teach them empathy and love... But instead, you didn't get to hold them as babies... You have seen them grow through the Skype, and have met them first, when they were 7 and 5 years old... So many hugs and kisses have been missed... So many birthday cakes haven't been shared and

candles blown... So many cups of tea and coffee haven't been made and talked over... So many tears haven't been dried... The time flew by too fast...

So, I decided to reverse the time... I will tell you about my life in direct provision and out... I will tell you about my losses and victories, about my tears and laughter's... I will tell you about a good and bad people I have met on my path, and how all of them were there to teach me the most significant lessons... I will tell you about hostility and an immense hospitality of Irish people... and about Friends, Sisters and Irish Mothers I have gained here for life! I will tell you how education has saved my life... I will tell you a story of becoming a teacher... I will bring you on a journey with me, Mamusya...

Letter 1. Food

Dear Mamusya!

Just had a lunch at work and thought I will write you a few words.

I miss your cooking so much... Those tasty varenyky, palushky, holubtsi and rabbit stew... I miss the taste of the bread you bake and the buns, fluffy like clouds and so tasty with a cup of warm milk. In fact, I miss us making it together more, than the food itself...

Do you know, when we were in direct provision, we never had a right to cook or bake... it was completely prohibited. It was so tough. At first, when I was pregnant, it was so difficult to cope with all the cravings I had. I wanted to have everything sour and salty with my daughter and sweet - with my son, but the food, which was provided for us wasn't the one I wanted... I wanted to make it myself... I wanted to have a choice... Is it a lot to ask for to be able to choose the food you want to have? Ukrainian proverb says: "Дарованому коню в зуби не заглядають" - "Don't check the teeth of the horse, which was given to you as a gift." Following this suggestion, I should have been just grateful for what I was given...and I was, don't get me wrong, I was and still am... but to me it was a false generosity - to give people safety, but to deny my basic right - to cook my food by myself. I was always wondering - is it a big ask...

Only leaving direct provision I have realised the beauty of being able to do it myself. When I cook, it is not only me, who present in the kitchen. There is you, who stands behind me, and grandma, and great grandma and great great grandma and all the women of our family tree. Not being able to cook in direct provision broke that link between generations, between centuries, between the memories, which should have been passed further... Being able to pass that connection to my daughter from early days was vital.

I'm visiting my friend quite often, who has a three years old daughter. I love to observe the way she plays with utensils in the kitchen, bakes with her mummy some yummy buns, and the joy on her face, the way she is focused and engaged in such a creative process. It makes me understand, how much my own children had lost by

not being able to play with variety of foods, bang some spoons to a cooking pots, observe me cooking and helping me from early days.

Every time, when we were visiting our friends, children were fascinated with their kitchen: opening and closing presses (cupboards), getting storage boxes out and back into the drawers, squishing cooked vegetables with their little hands, seeing how food is made, knowing, how it is made, how much work needs to be put into one dish... I remember, I felt so embarrassed, when they would run and open the drawers, and get everything out... My friend was very understanding though, she would calm me down, and let them play away... I am so grateful for that...

Families usually spend the most of their time in the kitchen, well, mothers with children definitely do. We did not have that privilege. It probably will sound odd, but when I was visiting friends occasionally, I used hand wash their dishes and cutleries. They were mad with me – they had a dishwasher :) But for me it was a privilege, it was giving me a happiness. Back in the hotel my plates and cutleries were stored in the bathroom. It was disgusting, but what options did I have. Storing, cooking or having food in the rooms was prohibited. Sometimes, we would sneak a plate of food to the room - either from the hostel's kitchen or some takeaway for an occasion. I presume, we were very lucky to have a table in our room. I would get out hidden plates and cutleries and serve the table. And we would feel like a family...

We were given a pack of toilet paper every week, I think, for our family we were given two. So, we used it as table tissue or serviettes. I didn't care than, but when we left direct provision, it was a habit, - to use toilet paper for this purpose. I got to laugh. Needed to make conscious decision to buy table tissues to get rid of this habit. Well, someone might say, what is wrong with it – it's a paper anyhow. I suppose, for me it was a reminder of having to hide with my food, and I didn't want to keep that memory...

We had a breakfast, lunch and dinner, just like most people, who were living "normal" lives, outside of the centre. For breakfast we had cereals, and twice per week we could have fried eggs - on Wednesdays and Fridays, if I remember correctly. Going downstairs and line up for breakfast, go back upstairs, go downstairs and line up for lunch... Smell of food. Disgusting. Smell of lamb ribs. Wanting to get sick. Running back upstairs. Tears. Going downstairs for dinner.

Queuing. Chips. Rice from the lunch. Baked potato with black spots... I wonder, is that potato looks similar to the potato Ukrainian and Irish people were trying to survive on during the Famines...

I missed your fluffy mash, Mum, - with butter and milk. So light and soft, like my pillow back home... Why was I never disgusted with the food you have cooked? Maybe, because it was made with love? I bet, there was more love in the food you were making, than the vegetables or meat itself...

Queuing for a desert. Only name from it though. Not sweet, nor sour. Disgust...

Observing the queue. Frustrated, sad, depressed, broken people queuing for a pittance... Me too...When in the queue, I feel under pressure. I need to get that sauce before its gone. Otherwise, there is nothing I would want to have... Someone at the beginning of the queue complaints, the argument gets heated... everyone is upset...

I get to the window. Food looks like scraps, like leftovers, like a pittance, like castoffs...

Observing the queue from the table is strange. I have known everyone for many years now. I know their names. I know what countries they are coming from. I know everyone's faces. But when people are in the queue, they look all the same... the worried, sad faces...the burden on their shoulders...dispirited, dejected looks...The oppression we swallow for breakfast, lunch and dinner makes us feel like prisoners - queuing up in the concentration camp...only lack of mess-tins and robes makes the difference... One-minute past ten - and no breakfast for you today... The chefs are inheriting the roles of authority and mastership from their predecessors, and pass it on to their successors – to keep the ball of oppression rolling... You see, it comes with the roles they play in this machine of oppression called direct provision...

One day I came to have a dinner and the chef-lady at the time proposed some food to me. Mum, I have always kept quiet, you know, for not to look rude, not to be a troublemaker, not to bring any repercussions on my family. I have seen an unequal treatment, I have seen injustice, I have observed racism. But in no case I could have kept quiet when I saw that food. Rice was mixed with potato in some type of sauce. It looked so disgusting - I swallowed a ball of vomit coming up to my throat. The mix

reminded me of how we fed our dogs - mixing all leftovers in their bowls. Tears came to my eyes.

I: How can you serve this? It looks disgusting!

Chef: This is an Indian dish. People like it.

I: We feed dogs in my home country with leftovers - and they look exactly like this dish.

It was beyond my understanding, how a woman can be so cruel. She was looking at me, and I could see, how her eyes were laughing at my face... I went to complain to a management. I knew, they were both in one boat, on the same side of the things, but I had to voice it, because if I didn't, my mind could have blown up from not being able to comprehend this attitude. Just so you know, there were no Indian or people of similar culture at that very time in the hostel. I was deeply deeply offended.

I'm more than sure, that the chef was trying to use leftovers from previous day creatively. This practice was very common. And I would not have anything against it, I do it myself these days. I know, you have been doing it as well - like using mashed potato for making varenyky or palushky or using buckwheat for making holubtsi. But, at least, there should have been a choice for us, - and there was no choice... Breakfasts were the same for the 6 long years, and I am sure, it is still the same while I am writing. Every morning we could get some cereals. Twice per week we could get fried eggs, the rest of the days – cooked, as I mentioned earlier... Somehow, the eggs had stuck in my head the most... Probably, because back home, I could pick the eggs I liked – by the shape, the colour, the size, and I could fry them with green chives, or with sweet peppers, or with tomatoes, or with bread, or with anything else, what could come to mind... But here – those were plain eggs for 6 long years... Plain, like my life in direct provision...

Ones we skipped breakfast, we had to wait until 1 o'clock to get a lunch. Between breakfast and lunch, and lunch and dinner the dining room was locked from inside for almost an hour for cleaning, so, when I needed a hot water or milk, or drink, or access to the dining room to feed my child, or warm the food in the microwave, I had to ask the management or the kitchen workers to open the doors

for me. Sometimes it felt worse than begging... Why, as an adult woman, I had to put myself down and constantly ask for something...

The most difficult thing was to feed children, to make healthy choices for their diet... I believe every child in the world should have a right for healthy food, for nutrition, that is most important in the first years, when the organs and bones grow, when the lining of their stomachs is very gentle and gets affected easily by the wrong foods chosen for certain ages...

Inability to cook food for my children made me feel like I'm failing...everyday... I was failing my children's future... I was failing you, Mum, I was failing grandma, I was failing to be a good parent...

The dinner and lunch almost every day were the same: chips, two types of rice – basmati and some other one; sometimes beef with a sauce, turkey with a sauce or without, chicken wings, African style chicken drums, lamb ribs....

Most of the years that we were in direct provision, there was no salad... We almost never had fresh vegetables and even more rarely fruits... There was time, when the management used to give to 70 people – approximately 50 fruits and people would end up fighting to get a piece of fruit for themselves or for their children...So sad... You know, Mum, I was thinking, how inhumane it was... How artificial that life and treatment was... like a theatre with some puppets...

I remember, when I was about 15, I got a book of Nietzsche. I remember reading and re-reading the sentences of his writings to get the meaning, to understand, what he was writing. **“That which does not kill us, makes us stronger.”**– stayed with me for life. Little did I know, I will be applying this quote to myself. The way we were treated in the system felt like we were tested – how far the oppression, the diminishing, the belittling, the insulting, and I would not be afraid of the word – the abuse we had experienced, - how far it could go.

You know, sometimes, we read these criminal stories, how an abuser controlled their victim through food, and you wonder, how inhumane one can be, and how evil one can be. This is what it felt like in direct provision... Food was a means of control for centuries. And it still is. In direct provision we were being controlled through food, through water and milk, through locked doors to the dining room and kitchen,

through judgemental looks of the chefs, and cleaners, and the management; through the surveillance cameras, through the feeling we should be grateful for what we have...to the point, that we started controlling our behaviour ourselves...we started regulating ourselves and regulating others... I kept regulating my husband: don't do this, don't do that, we will be in trouble...

Do you know, what memories children have about eating in the hostel? You would laugh. Very rarely we had a jollof rice, either cooked by our African women or by one of the chefs. It was yummy. So, for a change, my son, instead of having a plain rice, had jollof. It had a flavour, and taste, and sauce, and colour, and a nice smell. He absolutely loved it. The other day he asked me: "Mum, do you remember that orange rice I loved in the hotel (we always called the hostel – hotel), can you make it for me. I really liked it back then, I want to taste it again". I smiled and promised I will get the recipe from my friends and will cook it. But, in some way, I was sad...Do you know... He hasn't asked me for the baked poppy seeds pie, which Grandma used to bake for us, when we were children, or varenyky, or palushky... nothing of Ukrainian cuisine. I understand, that they (children) couldn't ask, because they weren't familiar with Ukrainian food. They have never tried it. I was not allowed to cook, so where they could taste it... The tradition has been broken... The memories have never been created... The tradition for children to sit in the kitchen while mother cooks and tells them stories of love, and happiness, and dreams, and teaches them to be humans...The tradition to learn about food and customs connected with celebrations like Christmas and Easter...The tradition to grow as a family...

Over the Christmas I have got to cook a lot, and especially traditional food, that we cooked with grandma for the Christmas Eve's supper – kutya, varenyky with wild mushrooms, with cherries, with sour cabbage; lent holubtsi, mushroom sauce, uzvar... It brought a lot of wonderful memories, but a lot of sadness as well. Tasting granny's food was like an explosion of taste in the mouth and the happiness in the heart. And not only because she was a good cook. Its because the food she prepared was shared with sisters and brothers, and cousins, and neighbours. All of us were sitting together at the table, and the food was a symbol of unity of the extended family. It was a symbol of gathering and learning from each other – an intergenerational learning. It was a symbol connecting past and present... It was a

symbol of relationships we had, of the connection we had kept over the years from a mother to a daughter. Mine has been broken...

Growing up, I remember, the food was central to everything. Food in a broad meaning – like planning the sowing and planting, weeding and harvesting of a wheat, potato, fruits and vegetables; cooking some meals for the day and planning for the week; selecting the best vegetables for the next year's seeding; conservation of tomatoes, cucumbers and all varieties of salads for the coming winter; conserving a gooseberry, cherry, strawberry jams and cherry compote for the winter. When the harvest didn't come out as expected, it would bring a lot of worries on how to survive the coming winter... We were taught from the cradle to love and respect BREAD. When a slice of bread had fallen out of your hands, we would pick it and kiss it – that's the respect we were taught to have for our food... Thousands of people had worked to bring that bread to our table, thousands of people have died for a slice of bread like this one, thousands of people don't have a slice of bread to survive on...

I'm not sure, Mum, if I ever told you, that I was attending counselling ... Yeah, there are were times, when I was not able to cope with the reality... and the oppression I felt upon me, so I started attending meetings with a councillor. I had to wait for more than a year to get an appointment, but nevertheless, I got it eventually... During our sessions we talked about different issues and things, that bothered me. I think, central to all those sessions was FOOD... The counsellor noticed it as well...

I thought a lot, why is it so... Then in November, during Holodomor Memorial in Ukraine, I had read an article, which was explaining how experiencing a starvation during the famine is "recorded" by the human genes and passed down to the generations of posteriors... it all came together for me... I remember grandma telling me about famine...she should not have remembered, she was only four years old... but she remembered the feeling of hunger... 1932-1933... 10 million of Ukrainian people perished as victims of death inflicted by starvation under Stalin's regime... people were killed for a tiny seed of wheat...genocide through food...The following years after the Holodomor were tough, and after the Second World War Ukraine was hit yet by another famine 1947-1948...food...was a means of control... means for survival...

I had chosen to survive! To survive and withstand the oppression I had experienced in direct provision through control of the food.

And I cooked. For children... With unofficial allowance from the management and without... 1, 2, 3 and 5 o'clock in the morning... during the weekend, when there was no management... In the toilet, on the window-seal, on the floor... with doors open, and shut...with my hurt jumping to my throat... with trembling hands... with goosebumps from the noise of the opening door... with fear to be caught...to be caught cooking for my children... for them, to survive direct provision... in 21st century...in the heart of the European country... for 6 long years...

I cooked with the help of my friends – I would say more - even allies - who gave me a steamer and a cooking pot, and some fruits, and some vegetables, and porridge, and buckwheat, - and hope...

My friend, who I cannot call less, than my sister, was bringing some food for us every weekend – just like you, Mum, did, when I was a student back in the days, - you used to bring me bags, full of homemade food and baked goodies. Borshch, soup, varenyky, pelmeni... you name it... She was looking after us like after little children, who are not able to look after themselves or like after students, who went to college and don't know, how to prepare food... I was embarrassed and grateful at the same time...and still am – embarrassed and grateful...

Mum, I must run...Please, take care of yourself. I will write to you shortly.

Love you immensely,

Your Daughter

Letter 2. A right to work.

Dear, Mamusya!

How are you today? The spring is full on here! There are so much to do outside, and you are probably very busy these days... Sometimes I feel awful, when I'm thinking of, how much do you need to do every day – at work, at home - around the house, at the front garden and at the patches of land... And I am so far away and cannot help you...I feel like I do nothing compared to you. I wish, I could come over and help you out with planting potatoes and vegetables... I've missed it... Just as we did, when we were children with my sister. As dad was always away, we knew, that we have no choice, but to do everything, what needed to be done: cleaning, washing, cooking, looking after a hens, rabbits and ducks; planting, watering and weeding vegetables and fruits; taking the crop and helping you preserving it. In a mean time, we had to study as well. There never was a question; we knew, everything had to be done... "Hardworking" could have been our second name, couldn't it, Mum?

I remember, how, as small children, all of us cousins used to help our grandparents on the field. We used to pick cherries... Well, I wasn't picking. I was standing under the tree and begging the cousins to drop me a few cherries to taste, as I was too small and could not climb the high trunk of a cherry tree! Yeah, they used to laugh at me from the top! Tell me about bullying!

Grandad used to spend every day with the bees at apiary, and I used to bring him a lunch every day during summer holidays. Do you remember, I was afraid of the bees to death?! But had no choice – as again, it had to be done!

I mean, we were taught from a cradle, that only working hard you could achieve your dreams; only through work you could fulfil yourself; only through work you could become a human... I know, it is a very meritocratic way of thinking, but it is a truthful one as well... I think, Ukrainian proverbs show, how hardworking our people are, and always were. You often said to us: "Хто рано встає тому Бог дає". - God gives to the one, who gets up early. Through my life I have heard many of the proverbs about work. I think, the ones, that have stuck with me:

Куй залізо, поки гаряче. - Smith the iron while its hot!

Зробив діло — гуляй сміло. - Have done the job- enjoy yourself.

Діло майстра величає. - The work of the master makes him famous.

Бджола мала, а й та працює. - The bee is small, but it works.

Без діла слабіє сила. - Without the work, your strength weakens.

Those are the ones I find myself using quite often with my children – well, with the hope, that they will learn them and remember them – record them deeply into their unconscious, so they grow up as good humans...

It is a very different here for us, in Ireland. As we don't own the house we live in, we cannot really do much around the house. A little bit of gardening, and that's it. So, really, the children don't see and don't know, what is a "hard work" ... Well, they help a bit with tidying and cleaning, but really, there not much what they can do... It is different in the countryside, I suppose. Ireland is famous by its farms, so you can imagine, they are a very hardworking people as well... Very much like Ukrainian...

It came as a huge shock to me when I found out that I don't have a right to work while living in direct provision. It was abhorrent! Never in my life I thought that something will stop me from working, from developing, from fulfilling my dreams, Mum... I had a master's degree and five years of hard studies behind my back, and it never crossed my mind that someone could tell me - you cannot use your knowledge, your brain, your critical thinking, your place in the world! When I was thinking of all those years of support you have given me, while I was in college, my heart was bleeding, that I could not use my education! I thought, that having education would be considered as an achievement in any country... You know, something like, - transnational recognition of being educated! And you know, my diploma was recognised, but there was huge but!

Whenever I needed to mention my education, people were surprised I had a master's degree. The reaction was a very surprising and a very upsetting to me at the same time...It was limiting or even prejudiced in so many ways... I felt like people were underestimating me, devaluing me as a human, devaluing my abilities... The surprised look on people's faces was making me feel uncomfortable...feeling like my ability to learn is being questioned every time.

Over the years that I wasn't working, it seems like my education was fading away... I was finding myself in the new reality, thinking... the longer I don't work the less of a chance I'm going to have in the future to get a job...

Do you remember, Mum, we have a 5 years rule in Ukraine – if you haven't worked for 5 years, you will have to prove your diploma by passing a major exam of your subject again! This wasn't the case in Ireland. Nevertheless, how my resume would look after those many years of being out of workforce...

In 2011, just a couple of weeks before I started studying (be mindful, I didn't have a right to study as well), I decided to put my skills into a practice and re-connect with my identity of a teacher, of a worker, of a person, of a human... Well, it might sound too sloganistic, but that's how I felt...

So, in the summer of 2011 I went to local library and explained to the manager, that I would like to facilitate a course in Russian language. There would be more of an interest in Russian language than in Ukrainian, I thought. Now thinking back, I could propose Ukrainian, and there could have been the same interest in Ukrainian as there was in Russian, but nevertheless, I did what I did.

It was my first time to teach in English language, so I didn't know how it is going to work for me and for the group. I didn't have a knowledge of a groupwork yet, but I was working from the knowledge and practice I remembered from my studies. At that stage I wasn't working for 7 years, you know, including years spent in another country, and it was making me absolutely lost and scared.

So, I developed an 8 weeks course – an intermediate level - Russian with Fun – 3 hours per week. I can honestly say, that I had put my heart and soul into this course... The library had advertised the course.

You cannot even imagine, Mum, how I was waiting! I was worried, that no one will sign up and at the same time scared that someone will sign up... Isn't it crazy?! I used to teach, I used to work with people, and all those years of not being allowed to work had knocked out my confidence completely...I was devastated... Angry with myself... Angry with the system of direct provision, which had stripped me of my basic rights, – including a right to work.

13 people attended initially. Due to various reason only 9 people went ahead with the course, but those 9 people attended the full course of eight weeks! It was such an achievement!

I was looking for different methods and creative ways to help participants remembering the Russian alphabet, pronunciation, letter writing etc. I employed all my creativity, which I used for the past years with my children to teach them reading and writing, to help people learning.

The Russian alphabet – Cyrillic, as you know, is a very different to English alphabet, and some letters do not exist in English. To help the participants of the course to learn these letters I used children's Play-Doh! At first, obviously, they were like: “What? Are we going to play with the Play-Doh?” They were all adults and were not expecting anything like that. As time went on, they were happily making letters out of the Play-Doh – the “з”, “у”, “ж”, “ч”, “и”, “ц”, “е”, “г”, “х”, “ф” and so forth. What a fun we had! We used associations to learn the letters they considered hard, such as “ж”, for example, we associated with “a bug”!

I was bringing a laptop with me to each session, so the participants could listen to a live language as well. At the first session I proposed to the group to learn a song over the course. Out of a few I played, they selected a famous “Kalinka” song. Equipped with translation and phonetic transcription of the song to help learning pronunciation and practicing at every session, you should see, how perfectly they were singing away in Russian! I was so proud of them!

At the time of the course there were elections in Russia, and some unrest started happening in the country, so Russian people were on the streets campaigning with posters. How happy I was when my learners came in and shared excitedly that they could read the words on the posters! And consequently, were able to translate the words into English with the help of a dictionary! It was absolutely brilliant to know, that they could do it, because of the knowledge they have gained at the course.

To close the course, after the evaluation, we had a feast in Russian style – with “bliny” and cakes, and tea, sadly, - without a “samovar”. We had a wonderful closure - celebrating learning and our cultures.

The course was my first attempt to fulfil myself through something I love doing the most – teaching. Even though I had taught voluntary and didn't earn any money, in fact, I had earned so much more! The course brought back some of my skills, it gave me a little bit of confidence I had lost along those years in direct provision, - the years, which I will always consider as a false imprisonment.

It was extremely difficult to overcome hesitations I had when planning the course. I had to put my brain into the right place to be able to use it! Yes, Mum, at that stage it felt, like I had a brain freeze... After each session I was deadly tired! I couldn't even speak coming home... I vaguely remember each time entering the room, dropping my bags on the floor, and falling into a bed to sleep. During the two

and a half hours of the contact with the learners I was giving so much of myself, giving away so much energy, that it was draining me away completely... I couldn't do anything to fix it! My head was pumping from thoughts! How did the session go? Have I done my best to support every participant? Was my pronunciation clear? These thoughts were eating me from inside... Only years later I had realised, that it was my low self-esteem communicating its way through the inner voice and the anxiety I had suffered with while in direct provision. But I wasn't going to give up! No, Mum! Giving up means to acknowledge, that the system broke me, but I would not allow anyone or anything to do it to me or my family! I am you Daughter, and Granddaughter of my Granny, and I won't let anything to break me!

But thinking of the hardship I went through, Mum, doesn't it show how these years in direct provision, - at the time it was five years exactly, - have taken away so much from me! Everything I had gained over the years of studies, - my knowledge, my skills, my confidence, my ability to focus, planning, learning, my ability to become someone...Everything was taken away...

I know, it seems impossible, but even being in direct provision I was privileged in many ways... I'm thinking, Mum, despite everything, I was still a very lucky person. I had an education... even though I couldn't use it... How about those people, who did not have an opportunity to study in their home countries? And were denied a right to study while in direct provision? What situation they had been left in and still being left in, almost twenty years, since the system was created?

I have been reading recently a lot about the lives of Irish women and the "culture" of Magdalene laundries - the abuse pregnant unmarried women of Ireland were exposed to. It is a very complex issue in Irish society, which I won't be able to explain you in one letter, but just so you have a picture of it, - the state had its eyes shut on the atrocities the Irish catholic church had imposed on unmarried pregnant women, especially the youngest ones; young children, who lost their parents and didn't have guardians; or any other vulnerable people over decades. When I read the stories of these women, who were treated like slaves, like they were owned by the church, because of their "sins", I have a goosebumps going through my body...It got me thinking, that, for the state or for the government, which treated its own people in such a horrific ways, its own children - the future of their own nation - keeping them in institutions,- direct provision, which keeps asylum seekers institutionalised for many years,- is a part of the culture of silencing vulnerable people, is a part of the

culture, which makes it acceptable to degrade human beings, to strip them of their dignity through taking away their rights... It is a part of the culture of controlling and oppressing, of diminishing, of erasing people's stories from the "book of life" ...

Other systems of oppression come to mind... Gulag camps... Nazis camps... I know, seems incomparable... But essentially, all those systems are the systems of oppression of the person! All systems of control have a hidden agenda - to turn you into a dust... Some - realistically, and some - literally, or better to say, – some - physically, some - emotionally... Have you heard of the detention centres for immigrant children in the United States? I mean, in 2018! How about Human Rights?...

Oh Mum, why there so much injustice in this world? I thought, that totalitarian regime was the worst of treating people... I mean... Do you remember, in 10th class my friend and I as part of a school project interviewed a woman, who was imprisoned by communists and had spent years in Gulag camps... What she told us was incomprehensible... Being hidden away from the wider society... Controlled through food... Total surveillance... Abuse... Work to wear and tear... Hmm... Wait, the only difference with the direct provision – not being allowed to work at all! Not allowed to work, not allowed to study, not allowed to be a human being... Not being killed by work but being killed by a boredom!? How about that? Someone, who haven't experience it would not think it's possible... But it is... When you are not doing anything, like, for 5-6 years... День роком стае! (A day feels like a year!) You lose a hope... You lose your skills... You lose yourself... Boredom – Anxiety – Depression – Oppression... What's next? Suicide?!

You know, Mum, when living in direct provision, I was never thinking, how I experienced it. You know, I remember it being physically unbearable on my shoulders... I remember feeling physically the oppression in my body. It was heavy, - in my head, in my heart, in my soul, on my shoulders. It was unbearable. But I had to keep it safe deep inside, - so my children wouldn't notice... So I wouldn't let it brake me; so, it would not break them too ...

May no one ever feel broken by any system...

May no system exist to dehumanise a human being...

Till the next time, Mummy...

Love you,

Your Daughter

Letter 3. Discrimination

Hi, Mamusya!

How are you today? I am sitting in the coffee shop, where my friend brought me to after that horrific attack in Naas hospital in 2011... I have never told you about it. First of all, because I didn't want you to worry... Secondly, because I couldn't talk about it... I just couldn't. The minute I would start talking about that horrific situation, I would break into tears... An attack is probably a wrong word. I don't even know, how to call it: a neglect... a purposeful neglect... prejudice ... discrimination... My dignity was ripped out of me... my heart was broken... It was a horrific experience I would want to forget... but it keeps coming back...

During my fifth year in direct provision my body wasn't able to cope with stress anymore. My health started deteriorating... My son was two years and few months old... I started going into a menopause... The blood tests kept coming showing a menopause... I was 31...

The oppression I have been experiencing in direct provision was unbearable at that stage... The frustration of everyday struggle was growing... I became depressed... There was no way to change the situation. We had to stay in the system, yet it was squeezing me... squishing me... crushing me like a little ant under the layers and levels of oppression...

I started having some breathing difficulties. I truly and honestly believed, that I am having an asthma... I kept using inhalers prescribed but was getting worse anyways. There were days, when I started thinking of leaving this world in peace, but only love to my children and husband, to my whole family, and I suppose, duty of care for children, - that's what kept me going.

We lived in an extremely hot room - 28-30 degrees Celsius in the summer and a little bit less in the winter. We had spoken to the management and the owner several times, but all we got is a blame for having too much stuff in the room. Well, try to pack 5 years of your life into 3 by 4 meters room – with two adults and two children! But who cared! We were some asylum seekers! That's it! Non-deserving ones! The "other ones" in the country... My friends in direct provision were told in their faces: You are not welcomed here, do not complaint! If you don't like the food, the room, the bed, the

pillow, the person you share your room with, the rules, the “anythingelseyouarenothappywith” – F..k off to your own country!!!

So, who cared, that the hot water pipes were going through one of the walls in the room we lived in, and it was heating our room to the unbearable temperature... Maybe twice - three times we didn't have a water or electricity in the hostel at all, and on those days our room was of a normal temperature... For 4 years we were all walking half naked to be able to cope with the heat... Children grew up thinking you must undress to underwear when coming home – and have tried doing the same when we were invited to visit friends... It was very difficult to explain small children, that you don't undress in people's houses... It would be so funny, if it wasn't so sad, as we say back home...

I started having hot flushes. Yeah, you would understand me, Mum... They were more like electric impulses in my spine... I couldn't cope. They were making me so angry! I wanted to scream! To cry! To howl! With not being able to breath properly, it was worse... It felt like my chest was tied with a cloth... I felt like a puppet... When puppeteer wants to hurt me, he would tighten the cloth up...

In August 2011 I was referred by my GP to Naas hospital with asthma attack. To be precise, on Tuesday 9th August. I arrived to hospital around 2.30 pm and was taken to the E&A ward after three and half hours of waiting. I thought, I will die in the waiting room. At that stage “the cloth” on my chest felt more like an iron cast – heavy and tight, restricting me from breathing. Blood tests were taken, and x-rays were done. I was placed on the trolley in the corridor.

Just so you understand, Mum, that A&E, is a department in hospital, which is aimed to deal with emergency cases. So, it's also a place of assessment. And while the department deals with a number of cases, the rest of people are waiting for their turn. Of course, there is a matter of priority and so on. But while you are being dealt with, you can be placed on the trolley in the corridor of the department. Even though there is a national outcry in the country about the people being keld on corridors like that for the past few years, nothing is really being done about it. So, it is completely different to Ukrainian healthcare system. And even though, Ukrainian system is not perfect either, at least there are enough beds in the hospitals for people to have a privacy and dignity.

By the time all results came back, it was a deep night. The doctors were great and nurses too. Around midnight I had a bowel cleaned in case of a blockage. I was given two pills of "Solpadeine" from a pain on my upper back. The pills didn't work anyways... I expected to be sent home straight away but had spent a long night in the left-wing of the corridor. Around 10 pm my dear friend, who you know well, and who I consider my sister for many years dropped me a few National Geographic magazines to keep me busy instead of staring at the ceiling. She had left me in the safe hands for the night.

I did not sleep all night though... I could not sleep. Every time I was closing my eyes and trying to fall asleep, I felt I was short of breath. I literally couldn't breathe. I had not had food since Monday evening and was starving. Around 5am a doctor came to me, asked me couple of questions about my back pain and problems with breathing. Approximately an hour later he came back and said, that he is going to discharge me with prescription of "Tylex". I still couldn't breathe, still had a pain in my back, but at that stage I felt very tired and wanted to go home. I was hungry and very upset, and all I wanted is to tackle myself into the bed beside children and husband.

However, the doctor wanted to try some painkillers and I was given "Solpadeine" again. I was surprised to be given painkillers on an empty stomach. The nurse knew, that I haven't had a piece of food at that time for about 32 hours.

A few minutes later a staff nurse came to me and we had a little genuine chat. She saw, that I didn't sleep all night, so she asked me how felt, where was I from, do I have kids, who were they staying with etc. You know, just a little talk people often have... When I mentioned that I am an asylum seeker, she said, that she had released it straight away, when she saw my address in the form. She asked me how long I have been living there... When I said - 5 years - she was surprised, as she had never thought or knew, that someone can be spending this length of time in direct provision. Well, this wasn't the most people could spend... How about 10 years, and 13 years!!! How about children growing into adults in the system!!! People don't know...or don't want to know...

As we were chatting, I became upset and tears started run down my face... I felt tired and vulnerable... And you know, Mum, I cannot stand pity or empathy towards myself!!! I can keep going through thick and thin, and not to have a tear in my eye, but when someone starts pitying me, the place can be flooded, I'm telling you... This lady, a night shift nurse, was very kind and asked if she could help me somehow. I knew,

she couldn't... Nobody could. I thanked her, and explained, that everything is fine, and I don't need any help. It was around 7 am Wednesday morning. She said, that I don't have to rush home, that I could stay in the bed till someone will be able to collect me. I was very grateful for that, because all my friends were still asleep, and there was no one to collect me.

While waiting, I was observing what was happening around. I became a witness of a very upsetting situation... An elderly man in his late 80th, probably with prostatitis, was asking for help to take away paper jars with urine from him - for about 40 minutes... but nobody came to help... I have called three different people to help him - a nurse, a doctor, a nurse from, I would recon, a private room and, fair to them, everyone came up to him, asked how they can help, and when he asked for the jars to be emptied, they promised to call someone, who will take it from him... but never did. It was very upsetting... as he couldn't move from the bed, surrounded with three full bottles and with one in his hands... I had offered to the nurse to do it myself, but she said, that I am not allowed... So, he kept holding them until his daughter came to take him home. I mean, Mum, when I leave my father in a hospital, I expect him to be treated with care and dignity. My heart was bleeding for him. How, on the down of his life, he couldn't get a decent care... When I'm thinking of that night, through the madness of my own situation, I can still hear his gentle, elderly, weak voice: "He-elp... Nurse, please, he-elp" ...

As the morning was taking its course, I began feeling unwell. While I was on the bed, some lady approached me and asked my name. She introduced herself as a social worker. She explained me that staff nurse from night shift wanted to help me with my situation and called her. She said that she wasn't in a position to help me, so she called another "medical social worker", who will be here soon. I said that I was fine and didn't need any help from any social workers. She asked me to wait on my bed. I had remained on the bed anyway, while waiting to be collected. Had a small toast with tea for breakfast.

After some time, I started feeling short of breath and had to use "Salbutamol" a few times. Shortly after I felt very sick and got down from bed to get to the toilet but had to lean on a wall to get there. I vomited breakfast and had diarrhea. I felt like I am going to faint... Slowly holding to the walls I went to doctors' isle to ask for help, but nobody was there.

Then I saw a nightshift doctor walking and munching a muffin. I suppose, I asked a very “silly” question as I knew the answer, but being sick I was trying to be polite:

- “I am sorry, are you a doctor?”

- “Nope!” ... I heard... and he walked away without a twinge of his conscience living me in shock with my jaw dropped...

I was shocked. I knew he was a doctor! He was working all night in the ward with patients. He was working with a woman next to me! I don't know, Mum, I mean, where is humanity, if you cannot find it in the hospital ward...

I felt so sick and I needed some help so badly. The ward was full of people on trolleys, and not one doctor or nurse on the horizon. I went to the private room, which was right beside my bed and begged for help.

The nurse assisted me to get into bed. She had checked my blood pressure, put a rail up on the side of the bed and went to her own patients.

I felt sick again and there was nobody to help me. I climbed over the rail and went again to the toilet leaning on the wall. This time I vomited red and white foam of “Solpadeine”. I got sick again and again... I had nothing in my stomach to vomit with, but the reflex kept pushing me inside out... The next time the closest toilet to me was busy, so I walked holding on to the wall to a far one by myself and the other time with the same nurse, that helped me before.

When I went back to bed I felt very tired, sick and upset... Deep down I knew, that I was given too much of medicine and my body was trying to get rid of it... I got poisoned by the medicine in hospital... sounds sick...

Sometime later some woman came over to my bed and introduced herself as a “medical social worker”. Her name I will remember forever. She asked me why I don't want to go home (meaning direct provision center) ... I mean... What!? I have never said I don't want to... I was very surprised to say a less. The only thing I wanted was to be in my bed at home! So, I told her, that I wanted to go home. She explained, that she had understood, that I have a special circumstance at home! She was told, that I am worried about my children, who were staying with my husband. Like, I mean, who said? What said? Why said? Oh, if I only wasn't so sick, as I literally could not respond to her questions, so ill I felt! I've tried to explain her, that the only worry I have to get home as soon as I can, as I miss my children and it is a first time in my life I had left them for such a long time, including overnight! Seems natural feeling to have for a mother with young children!!!! But, apparently, it was not the case with me. I must tell

you, Mum, that I could a very vaguely understand what she wants from me... The next question nearly knocked me of the bed.

"Is your husband working?" – She asked looking straight into my eyes.

"No, we don't have a right to work" ...

"Oh, you all are not working!" – she didn't let me finish...

Now! Now I got her! Now I understood! But I was way too tired and sick... She kept asking stupid questions:

"Is your husband going to see a "social worker"?"

"We don't go to see our "social worker" if there is no reason. My daughter has an appointment with a speech therapist, so he is bringing her to the Medical Centre today".

She carried on, but I felt sick again and couldn't breathe.

I apologized, that I had to disturb our conversation as I got sick. She could see it herself, so she ensured me, she is going to come back to me.

After couple of minutes the first "social worker" came over and brought me a glass of water and some pills. The pills were in black or dark blister. She pressed it off. Two diamond shape pills in white color with letters on both sides of the pill with deep channel in the middle. I was looking at these two pills in her palm:

"What is it?"

"Just swallow those".

"What is the name of the pills?"

I wanted to know what I was being given and that those pills won't affect me! In Coombe hospital, after having my first baby, I was given painkillers, which shouldn't be given to asthmatics! I nearly got an anaphylactic shock! I had a very bad allergy! My face and neck were swollen for couple of days, because a nurse, who gave the medicine to me, didn't read my chart and didn't know I have an asthma!

"Don't worry! It will help." She made me to take those pills, took water away, when I finished and walked away.

I stayed in the bed. The vomiting had stopped, and I thought, I might be able to go home soon. I phoned my friend, who dropped me NatGeo magazines and asked her to come over and bring me home. She said, that she will be in 15-20 minutes. I don't know, what time it was at that stage. I felt dizzy and sick and tired but couldn't wait to get out of the hospital. Mum, I felt sicker, than before I came in to the hospital...

Very soon I started feeling a short of breath again. I needed an air, but I couldn't breathe. I started having pins and needles in my fingers and toes, then they slowly started moving up my body, covering me up completely. I was trying to get as much air as possible into my lungs, but instead of feeling better I was getting worse by a second... I didn't know what was happening to me. I have never experienced anything like that...

It felt like I was dropped into a swamp full of pins... The more I was fighting to get out, the deeper I was being sucked in... The pins and needles feeling have covered my whole body... they came to my face, to my lips... I couldn't move a hand or talk. My fingers became stiff. I felt crippled. My whole body was twisted. Fingers were sticking into different directions... I had no power or will over myself... I felt, that my lips became like a round hole... I couldn't move a muscle. I was very-very scared, Mum! I couldn't call for help. Nobody was on the corridor or passing near me. I was moaning from pain in my body... I couldn't breathe. My brain was pumping with only one thought: I am dying.

I saw someone standing beside a bed next to my bed, and I wanted to call for help, but I couldn't move my tongue. I needed to save myself! I started saying something like help: Hu-up! Hu-up! Only moaning came out of my lips... I had tried to call a few times.

"Stop doing it to yourself! Stop pretending! You are going to die!!!"- The loud voice came over before I could see a woman in blue shirt with fair hair who started screaming at me... I thought this was my end... I'm having a worst asthma attack ever and this lady thinks I am doing it on purpose.

"You are discharged!!! They said - you are going home! If you have some problems at home, it does not mean you will stay here!" - She screamed at me with such an anger... Her eyes were matching her blue shirt, but they were full of hate and judgement, event disgust, - I thought to myself. I was so scared... I started to cry and with my crippled mouth-hole begging her:

"Please, help me, I don't do anything, I don't know what is going on with me."

"Shut up! If you don't stop doing that, you will die!! - She shouted at me, took a hospital screen, which haven't been used whole night and had angrily thrown it over my bed!!!

"This is it! I am going to faint here, and nobody will see me, nobody will help me, and I will die!"- I thought...

Mummy, my dear Mummy, I felt so little and helpless like a tiny baby on that bed... I couldn't speak... I couldn't protect myself... I was in such a pain... I feared for my life... Yes, I did, right in the middle of the hospital... I was scared to deaths. I couldn't breathe. I was crying. I was fighting with stiffness to move my legs and hands and was begging for help! ... It was worst time in my life! I was in the hospital, - and I was treated like I am nothing, like I don't exist... Like human's pain can be covered with a screen and forgotten about...

That woman in the clothes of staff nurse was the cruelest person I have ever met in my life... I have been thinking a lot about that situation, Mum, and I can't understand, why did she have so much hate in her eyes. She had seen me for the first time in her life. I haven't done anything to her or her family... I was, like a little bug, curled up in pain on the bed... All those years I was wondering, was it because I am foreign... or because I am an asylum seeker? Was it because she was told by the "medical social worker" or the first "social worker" that I have a "special circumstances" and don't want to go home, so they have decided there, on the almighty isle, that I am pretending? Did she refuse to see how sick I was blinded by her hate and anger? ... Has she forgotten, that she came to work, and her duty was to help people to stay healthy and alive and not helping them to die?!

Time was going so slow, and I was praying to all Gods I have ever read about for my friend to come as soon as possible. I knew, that only she could help me now! She knew, where my bed was, because she visited me the night before. My mouth was frozen and tingling. It made me feel like my face was covered with tiny red ants which were biting me painfully. Do you remember, Mum, when I was little, I sat down on the top of an anthill which belong to some red ants? Well, I remembered the pain from their bites forever... so, yeah, the feeling was very similar... I wanted to scream for help, but I couldn't... I couldn't move my tongue... While my body was all curled, the mind was working clearly - "I am going to die!"- was pulsating in my head. I couldn't breathe... I was trying so hard, but the more I tried, the tighter my chest was... I was begging for oxygen, but who could hear me... Only "o-u-o-u" was coming out...

I don't know, how long I have been there battling to survive. When my friend's face appeared from the screen, I knew I will be saved. I saw a shock on her face and a huge question mark over her head: "What the hell is going on?" I cried through my mouth-hole:

“They think I’m doing it on purpose! They think I’m pretending! ...” My words, if what I was producing could be called words, drowned in the weird cry which came out of my throat through the mouth-hole... I couldn’t breathe, I couldn’t talk, my body was in pain! But I was trying hard to explain what was happening!

My friend went to call for help and the angry nurse came up to me again. She was shouting to my friend:

“She does it on purpose” She has to stop! She is from the direct provision (she named the center)! She doesn’t want to go back, that’s why she pretends!” When I was trying to say something, to explain myself, she shouted angrily: “Shut up!”

She was arguing with my friend, persuading her I am making a drama! My friend was absolutely shocked! She was trying to explain, that knows me very well, and that I don’t pretend, but the nurse jumped on her with questions: “Who are you? Why are you telling me what to do? Are you a social worker?” “Yes! I am a social worker”- my friend responded.

Nurse didn’t believe and walked away.

I knew, that “angry nurse” won’t listen... I think, she saw, that my friend is foreign as well, and was not taking her seriously...

I trumpeted again through my lips (ants were still there biting my face; whole body was curled into different directions): “Phone our friend” ...

I was begging my friend to call a friend of ours, her co-worker, who was Irish, and held a position of a manager in the organization a very close to hospital. She made a phone call and started “reviving” me. She explained me what to do and started counting: “One - breathe in, two - breathe out, three, four. One - in, two – out, three, four” ... The ants started leaving my face slowly. They didn’t want to go straight away, but counting was helping...

The “angry nurse” came back with changed attitude! (I have to say, Mum, my friend had lied, she wasn’t a social worker as such, but her work was closely connected to social work.) She brought a monitor and checked my blood pressure. Then she checked my temperature. The blood pressure and the temperature were high. Oxygen level was low... Than “angry nurse” started explaining, how I must breathe to stop this attack, that I was hyperventilating and that’s why all of this was happening to me. I mean, since my friend came in, she was trying to bring me back to normal breathing with Buteyko method, and now, suddenly, everything had changed...

You can imagine, Mum, when our Irish friend arrived, the whole A&E was on ears: the manager was called to me, the doctor was called from home (the poor thing probably only got into bed after the night shift), - the “angry nurse”, the social worker and the medical social worker had disappeared... They have never come back to apologise, or explain themselves, or just simply to talk to me...

Do you know, I am writing now and feeling pins and needles in my face... It is, probably, a first time, that I am not crying, when evoking these memories... Only first time in 7 years. That day, the 10th of August 2011, I remembered forever... That was the day I have learnt, what is anxiety attack...

Of course, I was questioning, why did it happen to me? Why would a woman neglect another woman in such a vulnerable position...? Why would a nurse deny someone a help...?

My understanding of the whole situation is, that the night shift nurse was a very kind woman, who felt for me and really wanted to help. She had called a social worker before leaving after the night shift. She might have left a message or something... And then there was some miscommunication or misunderstanding, and the social worker called on the medical social worker, who came “ready” for this arrogant asylum seeker, who didn’t want to go home. I bet, she had influenced the “angry nurse” too, but... but nobody told her to treat me the way she did... I guess so... How could I be administered the medicine by non-medical person, such as social worker? What was I given? Were those pills the cause of the attack? I will never know...

Later in the morning, when the whole situation was being discussed with the management of the A&E, the manager had mentioned, that they would have often some asylum seekers, who are “making a drama” (understand - lying) to bring attention to their cases. It got me thinking...

On that day, in hospital, there was no “me” – the “myself” I feel from inside, - a person, a human, a mother, a teacher, a Ukrainian, a sick person, who needed a help... My name, my being, - everything was diluted by this new name – “an asylum seeker” ... An asylum seeker had overpowered all other “me-s” ... The social worker, the medical social worker, the angry nurse, - they didn’t see me, they saw an asylum seeker, a foreign person, the “other”, who didn’t fit into their frame of mind, who they didn’t want to fit into their society...

But it should not be defining who I am!!! Neither me, nor anyone else who have been deprived of a privilege of being a human; nor anyone, who’s best years have

been stolen by the direct provision system; nor anyone, who was placed into direct provision as a child, and left as an adult; nor anyone, who was born in direct provision, and will never know, what scars it had left on their subconscious; nor anyone, who's mental health deteriorated because of being locked in direct provision for way too long; nor anyone, who was chased for votes during a local council elections, and had never been offered a helping hand after being elected; nor anyone, whom direct provision has stripped of ability to follow their dreams; nor anyone, who dared to speak out against the system, and was promptly deported from the country; nor anyone, who were discriminated against because of their age, gender, self-expression or race while in limbo; nor anyone, who has lost their loved ones back home and was stripped of dignity to say farewell; nor anyone, who became ill, and lost their lives due to cancer or other life threatening illnesses while in the system; nor anyone, who couldn't cope with oppression of direct provision and committed suicides, because the oppression became too much to bare...

Ohh, too hurtful to write...

Love you dearly,

Your Daughter

Letter 4. After the Direct Provision

Dear Mamusya!

Just left a coffee shop, where was meeting my friend for a chat. When I stepped out of the door, a fresh cool air with a smell of the sun and herbs hit my nostrils, making me drunk for a second; cool breeze waved my hair. It spawned some vague memories in my head... Freedom! The air smells like an air of Freedom! I sat into the car and couldn't get enough of breathing in the air... sweet, sun kissed, fresh, warm and cool at the same time... I was immersed into memories with each breath of the air...

...I'm in the paternal grandparents' house where we spent first 7 years of my life and probably about 8 years of yours, Mum. At the end of the yard, there was a huge garden, full of blossoms and flowers in the springs, and richly covered with apples and pears, and plums, and red dogwood berries at the end of the summers and autumns... The garden was a very wide and long, or, better to say, high, as it was going up steeply. I used to think it was a forest! Surely, I was only small! At the beginning of the garden was an apple tree, which created a nest with its three trunks, – it was my throne amongst the tree kingdom! I felt like a heroine of Andersen's "Little Ida's Flowers", sitting at the throne waiting for the flowers to dance...

I was afraid to hike up the garden for a long time, but natural curiosity intrinsic to children takes over, and I am climbing the very steep garden like a mountain, - so steep that I must hold on to a branches and trunks of the trees to finally reach the top of the garden. At the end of the garden a huge boulder appears on my way! So huge, it would need, probably, 5 or 6 adults to link their hands to measure it! It looks ancient! I believe, it's been there since the Ice Age! Covered with a brown, sun-burnt moss and a grass, surrounded with a wild strawberries and herbs... I try to hold on to the boulder, but it has been polished by the winds of the times and dried up with the suns of the centuries, and my little hands are slipping off... Nope, I'm not ready to fall! I struggle, and struggle, - catching to the grass and, finally, on my four, climb up by the side of the boulder. The other half of it is ingrown into a path which runs by the road. On the other side of the road, again steeply, short pines are picking from

behind each other, slowly turning into a pine forest. Even though I'm alone, I am not scared at all! The sun is bathing everything around in its lifegiving rays... There is some sense of peace...

The other side of the boulder is easy to climb. I climb up on it and, suddenly, the world unfolds in front of me - the most magic scenery... I am Mavka – a Spirit of the Forest, a Soul of a Nature... The garden falls under my feet... All possible shades of green which ever existed in the nature... Way down in the slope the little village drowned in willows smiles to me with the white houses... Further uphill on the other side of the stream, there are fields with tiny people-ants working from sunrise till dusk to provide for their families... Blue skyline and golden fields... Ukrainian soul... The air filled with a flavour of dried on the sun herbs and wild berries baked to the taste of the summer; with a sweetness of poppies and knapweeds in full bloom, and songs of partridges and skylarks up high over my head... Warm breeze shakes the grass – waves my hair and kisses my face... A bumble bee “продзижчає” by with “buckets” full of pollen... The life blossoms here... The time stops here... Peace... Tranquillity... This is Freedom... It doesn't have a nationality... It doesn't have boundaries or limitations... It cannot be bought for money... It's what every person feels from within... It what makes me feel myself...

Being surrounded and immersed into the nature, into the world that I have imagined as a child... it was a freedom which I have been carrying in my heart... it was the freedom that I was missing so badly while living in direct provision... The freedom I have desired and repeatedly visited in my dreams - like a mantra...

When I was attending counselling, I was asked about a place I am going to in my dreams to escape reality and oppressive environment of direct provision. This was the place – at the top of the boulder...

Today Freedom means something different to me... First of all, it's my ability to make choices, – you know, choices without anyone's influence, – on my own. Despite my age, gender, ability, family status, culture, religion, self-expression – I want to feel comfortable in my body, in my family, in my place of work and in society. I don't want to feel judged; I don't want to feel othered; I don't want to feel disempowered; I don't want to feel oppressed... I want to have a will over my faith, over my body, over my choices. I want to be able to do whatever I want – obviously,

without any harm to other people or nature... I want to have a right to speak the truth...

Someone might say – everyone has their own truth. And that's ok. We all have our own truth... The policymakers might say, that the direct provision is a great system to manage asylum seekers. I will say, that it is the most dehumanising system nowadays. Freedom means to be able to talk about these things, and to be able to listen to each other, and most important – to hear each other... Only through engaging in dialogues we can find the truth, which has been lost in the layers of power ... I want to be liberated from constraints of society... I don't want to be privileged to be free – I want to have a right to be free along with every person on this planet...

Mum, I have always thought that I will be free when finally leave direct provision... I was waiting for that to happen like a biggest miracle... I remember sitting with my friend and imagining, what the house is going to look like, where I will move after getting my status, what I will cook, what I will do, when gained my freedom...

The first three years out were hell... I didn't understand what it means to be institutionalized... I mean, in theory I knew, but I didn't realise, how it can be experienced... Well, obviously, differently by different people, but, I am sure, there could be some common signs of institutionalisation.

When we were granted our status, the social welfare officer from the unit for asylum seekers told us not to rush with getting a job straight away... I was wondering then, why he would say that... I have realised later – he knew, what we are going to encounter... What my husband and I have experienced was unimaginable...

The first night in the house was very strange. It was a sleepless night in the place we could, probably, call a home... Deadly quiet, absolutely no noises from outside... Only the cracking in the stairs, and the noises of the boiler, and the clicking in radiators from time to time was breaking the night... We were used to a very different... We couldn't embrace the sense of freedom and the sounds of reality... Emotionally and psychologically we were afraid of letting go of the system... We had turned into dependable people! Dependable on the system! The system had turned us into some children, even babies, who couldn't do anything for themselves... almost like the necessary life skills had been taken away from us...

I kept forgetting to cook because everything in direct provision was given to me... How sad it is, isn't it, Mum? I have heard so many times from people, how lucky I am to be in the system, that supports me in every way. Well, I just wish, all of those, who think, that the life in direct provision that great, I wish, they have tried to live there. For one week. Just to try out the greatness of it.

Outside of the direct provision system I didn't have a sense of time... It was very difficult to plan anything... The day was flowing differently in the "free" world, so I needed to learn how to use my time better. I don't think I am any better with time management these days either...

I kept thinking, you know, before direct provision, I lived a normal life, in a beautiful house, I used to study, used to work... How come those 6 years in direct provision had erased the memories of normality of life?! How can it happen? 26 years of normal life plus 6 years of direct provision = loss of life skills, loss of memories, loss of identity, loss of possibilities, loss of abilities, loss of dreams, loss of...

I started developing OCD... Obsessive - Compulsive Disorder. Funny enough, I didn't know, what was happening to me, until I read about OCD while doing a course in equality studies. There was a module on Mental Health, which had a precise description of the disorder. I remember how, while reading, my eyebrows were raising, and eyes were climbing up to my forehead. Everything said in the coursebook was making such a sense... I've realised, that, in fact, OCD have started, when I was placed in direct provision... From the first days I was washing my hands excessively... cleaning everything around me with spirit-based wipes... When children were born, it got worst. Worst to the extent, that my daughter started walking on her bed... I had no problem with her walking in a shopping centre or in the park, anywhere else but in the hostel... Every time we had to leave our room – which was at least 6 times a day, - after coming back to the room I had to wash her hands and face immediately. Sometime later I started changing her clothes as well straight after stepping into the room. I had exactly the same routing with both kids later when my son was born. I did not understand, why I was doing it... I used to bring a cleaning spray with me and clean a playroom, so it would be clean for children to play... I, probably, could not cope with the living in such a crowded place, where I had no privacy, no control over cleanliness of the whole place... to the

extent, that my brain could not cope... I don't know, how am I sane after the 6 years of psychological tortures inflicted upon by the system...

I wonder, the person or persons, who were designing the direct provision system, writing up house rules for the hostels... I mean... did they have families, children? Have they lived in their own private houses? Did they have access to a kitchen and cooked their own breakfasts? Did they have a heart or a soul within them? The cruelty of those, who created direct provision system is beyond my understanding! I'm thinking, what model have they taken as an example to design the system? Was it a prison, or other institutions known in Ireland for oppressing people?...

So, back to the OCD. From the date of moving to the house for about half of year I haven't invited a single person over for a cuppa... I was ashamed, that the house was not perfect: it wasn't the way I want it to be – my ideal home I have created in my dreams... The house was never clean enough to invite people... and I was just caught up cleaning, and cleaning, and stressing, and worrying about it not being clean enough... It wasn't a problem to clean a room we lived in direct provision – 4 by 3 meters – I cleaned it in no time. I had to tidy it up maybe 15 times a day, as kids used to throw all the toys on the floor. They didn't play with toys until I would tidy all of them back into the boxes, so they could throw them on the floor again, just like all kids do. But it was manageable. I couldn't do the same with the house.

The only comfort for me in the house was, that I didn't need to use those stinky hoovers! By the time I would finish hoovering the room and the corridor back in the hostel (I had always hoovered the corridor beside my room as well to keep it clean), the whole room would stink! It was unbearable! Can you imagine, how I felt? You know me. From as early as, probably, eleven years of age I made my duty to clean the whole house we lived in. Every Friday the house was immaculately clean, so after a long week of hard work, you, Mum, didn't have to think of it. You had enough on your shoulders... The years in direct provision seems had deleted, erased all the knowledge and experience of living in normal world I previously had...

I brought with me from the direct provision some stuff in boxes – like children's toys they have grown out of, their clothes, some unused gifts from friends, millions of books – presented to me and bought on sale in the local library. Yes, there was

something healing about the books... Books always had an important place in my life...

I bought my first book in 1989, alone with a special recording journal of a library style. Since then I was dating every book I bought and recording it in the journal. I was only 9 then, wasn't I? I wanted to be a librarian, so I could own and read all the books in the world (the naivety). Every week I was buying a book for my snack pocket money. When the bell was going off and all children ran to a shop to get some "burger in a dough" or a gingerbread or some muffins, I was running to a bookshop across the road to smell new books, and to plan, what book I will buy next. I missed my books in Ireland, but here I couldn't find books in Ukrainian or Russian. I found some books in Polish in the library, but it was very difficult for me to read in Polish at the time, unlike now. The library was just across the road from the hostel, so I pledge to myself to read a whole book in English, no matter how difficult it would be. I think it was in 2008. That first book was Haruki Murakami's "After the Earthquake". I remember, I was looking for Márquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude", but it was borrowed out...

Anyways, all of it, I mean – the boxes, probably, should have been left in the hostel or donated to a local charity, but I didn't want to leave anything behind. I just wanted to take away everything what belong to me and my family! We have a belief, that leaving something behind may bring you back to the place where you left it, - and I didn't want to return to direct provision! I know, seems just a superstition, but meant a lot to me at the time. I had kept those boxes for about two years... Now I know, that I was holding on to my past... I started reading about the philosophy behind the hoarding and it being linked to depression and traumatic experience, and slowly I have brought most of the stuff to local charities and donated to people in direct provision centre. It gave me a sense of relief... a sense of a new beginning... some sense of freedom from the past... from trauma the 6 years of direct provision had left in my life... It gave me the freedom from old me...

In June 2013 in county Kerry a mother and a daughter from Lithuania were killed. The murder became a trigger and my OCD got worse. I had realised that I am no longer safe as I was in direct provision centre... There were many people around us. We had a security, who could protect us... well, saying that... when the fire broke in the centre in May 2011, the fire drill didn't go off and we were lucky to escape

without any consequences... yet being heavily institutionalised, I considered the centre to be a safer place than a house in the middle-class estate.

Anything can happen to us! – only the thought was in my head. I begged my husband to come over to children's bedroom, so I could lock the door and sleep on the floor beside them... and hold their hands, like I used to do back in the hostel... Over time I had stopped sleeping... Every time my eyes would shut, I would try to keep them open – and listen to what is happening outside. I was exhausting myself to sleep... I couldn't function during the day, and not being able to function was making me angry and upset. I was prescribed pills, - many times, but I was afraid to take them, as I wanted to be critically aware of the reality... Yet, the OCD made me afraid of living... I started cello-taping the letterbox. I know, right! How could it have helped me!? It wasn't enough, so I started building up chairs at the back and garden doors... My thinking was, if someone will try to open them, the chairs would fall, and I would know someone is trying to get into the house... And I kept going back to the doors to check, if they are locked! Routinely. Side door - locked, back door - locked, front door – locked; two steps on the stairs to go to bed... No! I need to check the doors! Side door - locked, back door - locked, front door – locked...I can go upstairs now... No!! I need to check the doors! 10 times! 20 times! Countless times!!! It had to stop!!! Do you know, Mum, I was trying to do it discretely, so the children would not see me... I didn't want them to see me suffering... I didn't want them to learn from me... Oh, just sit and cry...

As time was passing by, my health was deteriorating. I couldn't remember, what day was outside, whether I had a food or not, where I was driving, - what was my destination... I was parking in random places trying to think, where I suppose to go. Once, while driving, I thought – just for a split second - I am missing my child!!! And then it came to me, that I just dropped him off to the creche! I mean, I was losing it completely. But in those dark days, children were my light and saviours. Somehow, through the vague blinding cover of anxiety I could take care of them, cook for them every day, help them with homework, read them stories before going back to my routine of checking the doors... They were my rays of sunshine in the darkness of anxiety and depression, just like they were back in the direct provision... They always will be the light of my days and nights.

I kept postponing visit to a doctor. I knew, I needed to do it, but was afraid... I was afraid to be mistreated again, just like I was that time, two years before wards, in 2011...

I had fought an anxiety attack almost for a month. I remember, we were on the way from Enniscorthy after visiting our friends. I knew, it was coming... It was crippling to my mouth... Little ant bites all over the face... I told my husband what to do, in case it happens, while we were hitting the motorway. I focused on breathing... After that one – first and last – attack in the A&E, when my friend was saving me, she taught me Buteyko method of breathing. I was learning it from YouTube to help me cope. And it did for a while... But suddenly, it became unbearable, and one beautiful day, while driving a car, the anxiety attack started... right in the middle of a crossroad. Luckily, I have managed to get to a church yard and to call ambulance, and then to call my friend to collect children from school. This time I had a very different experience in A&E. Everyone was lovely, - the nurses, the doctors. Surely, my address was in one of the best estates in my town. I wonder, how would I be treated, should my address still be a direct provision centre...

I have stayed overnight, had my heart tested as potassium and magnesium have dropped to low... Couldn't get magnesium intravenous as had some electric like reaction to it... Was sent home the next evening with some antidepressants. They worked in hospital, they helped sleep and relax. So, I thought, ok, this is the way to go, it's going to help me. But that night I woke up to go to the toilet, and the world around me was changing dimensions... It reminded me scenes from "Tragedy, Rock Style" and "Requiem for a Dream" ... it was like a parallel reality, - and it was scary... I wasn't ready to live in it...

I started looking for some alternative ways to deal with my anxiety and found an incredible place – The Lifeflow Centre. It is a place, where people genuinely want to help, no matter how much money you have in your pocket... Acupuncture and homeopathy, and the knowledge and experience of the acupuncturist brought me back to life. I am forever grateful, that I have not only started a path to recovery, but also for experiencing support, understanding and humanity from everyone, who worked in the centre.

I started learning how to take care of myself, Mum. I know, sounds crazy. I should have known at my age... But it felt like I am learning to live after the direct provision... again...

I started listening to YouTube recordings of binaural beats and delta waves, which helped me to relax and improve my sleeping. I've made a chart for cooking - eating times and attached to a refrigerator. I've set reminders on my phone to take vitamins... I was learning to function, Mum...

Then over time came fibromyalgia... At first, I didn't know, what was going on with me. I was happy, that the symptoms of anxiety had lessened, I was sighing less and less. But the calmer I was becoming, the more pain I felt in my body... I became chronically tired, fatigued but carried on going despite the pain. I became intolerant to loud noises. Sometimes I isolate myself from people and go into a depressive mode... I have to struggle to keep from withdrawing into myself... My arm and legs are in tingling pain all the time. Sometimes they feel more like electric impulses... Sometimes my collar bones hurt so much, that I just sit and cry... Sometimes pain is in one part of the body, but very intense... There are good day and bad days... Some days I am driving home and crying from not being able to cope with the pain anymore... I come home and go straight to bed, and sleep... It helps a little bit, but not for long... I become depressed... I am broken...

Do you know, Mum, it might be not fibromyalgia... it might be a post- traumatic stress disorder...? Either way – I am suffering... My life is a suffering... I know, not only mine. I have recently met my friend who lived in direct provision a bit longer than me. She was granted her status about a year earlier. She goes through the same... We are all, who have lived in direct provision, carry on with us a trauma of being institutionalised... of being disempowered, diminished, and dehumanised... We all grieve for our lost years... We are trying to fit into the society, even though it looks like we already well integrated... We are struggling... We need help... But there is no help... We need voices, but the voices are too weak... While the country is turning into the realm of homelessness, cartel shootings and corruption, asylum seekers are being scapegoats of all problems... in Ireland... in Europe... in the world...

Who to blame? There is no one to blame... or better to say - too many to blame... The system created to support, in fact damages people's lives...

One of my favourite writers, the creator of Narnia, C.S. Lewis a good deal years ago has written: "The greatest evil is not done now... not even done in concentration camps and labour camps. In those we see its result, but it is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried and minuted) in clear, carpeted, warmed, and well-lighted

offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise voice” ...

At the end of the day, morality is entirely subordinate to those in power... to those, who hold in hand people’s will... I meant to say, the will of citizens... And what is morally not acceptable to do to one human, is, apparently, acceptable to do to another... People forget, that everything in the world is relative... Today you have a power, money status; tomorrow – you are an asylum seeker... because everybody is a potential refugee...

*Love you dearly, Mamusya,
Your Daughter*

Letter 5. The Women

Dear Mamusya!

Just have left my friend's house after a lovely chat about us, and kids, and life... and I thought I will tell you a bit about the wonderful women I have met in Ireland, who "brought me up", supported me and stayed with me in solidarity all those years I had been living in direct provision and beyond.

You might ask, why women? Why not men, as well? Yes, men as well! Supportive, caring, smart men, kind and empathetic; men who stand united with women in their struggles against oppressive patriarchal society, - my husband, my friends, tutors, colleagues, councillors and counsellors, and those, who are engaged in working for social change. They are remarkable.

But women... Women are the heart of community... They are continuers of the lineage and carriers of traditions. No matter what nationality they have... no matter what race they do represent... In fact, what is race? It is a social construct created centuries ago, - well outdated for the days when we have a wealth of knowledge about our ancestors and the diversity we hail from! Race has been created to divide us, so we won't stand united to overturn the oppressive structures...

The strengths, and dignity, and pride, and courage that women possess are enough to stop the rivers and overturn the mountains. In most of the days... And some days women are vulnerable... Trough sweat and tears they are trying to cope with bullying, abuse and oppression of patriarchy... But they are growing stronger... just like you, Mum, - just like me...

Someone said, that women are the wild priestess with a courageous divine feminine heart and the spirit of the wise ancients within... The eternal light that they pass on through generations, - that's what keeps the world going... From Great Grandmother to Grandmother, to Mother, to Daughter, to Granddaughter... From Grandma to you, from you to me, from me to my Daughter...

At the times, when my own light was dimmed by oppressive environment, when I couldn't cope with reality of direct provision into my life came Women, who became my Mothers, my Sisters and my Friends, who, by their spark of love and care, rekindled and inspired flame of life within me, - to grow resilient, to keep the struggle

going, to fight, to withstand, to hope... They have taught me to own my story... to accept the reality, to embrace my vulnerabilities, to discover an infinite power of my own light from within... Because there is no force as powerful as a woman who is determined to rise up... like a Phoenix out of the ashes... like a Bennu... like a Thunderbird... like a Firebird... like a Fèng Huáng... like a Hō-ō... like a Milcham bird... A woman who dies every night and being born every morning... who sacrifices her life, her dreams, her aspirations for her children and her husband or wife, for her family and friends, for society... This is not a meaningless act of self-sacrifice, no, - it is a considered action for building up, for creating the life around her, for raising and lifting up others! It is a selfless act of pausing all her needs and wants until all the problems are tackled, and the meals are cooked, and the washing is done, and the thorn knees are patched up, and the house is shining clean, and everyone is tucked in to sleep...

She juggles life like some juggling balls, so none of them would fall: so, no one would get hurt, sad or upset; so, no one would go hungry; so, no one would fall; so, everyone around her – her children, the people she loves could live their lives to the fullest and follow their wildest dreams... She is a homemaker, a dreamer, a creator, a carer, a daymaker; she is the one, who gives a thread of hope in the labyrinth of life, like Ariadne to Theseus; she is the one who helps to find Chervona Ruta on the Kupala Night; she is the Trypillian Earthy Mother Goddess who is sacredly protecting her loved ones; she is Celtic Caireen – a protector of children; she is Hebe, who serves the nectar of life to the humanity... Women were the architects of the early societies until they were overtaken by the destructive patriarchy... and were turned into servants and slaves...

My sad childhood memories bring me back to the days, when you were treated like a slave... for seven years... I'm sure the Bible says something about seven years of hardship... but I don't know for what sins you had to go through it... I don't know how you were able to cope... You worked from dawn till dusk: carried water, cooked, cleaned, handwashed, - for me and another four adults who, by all means, - were nobody to you, while your husband and my dad was away in the seas... You were planting and growing vegetables, looking after the orchard, preserving the food, looking after the animals in the barn... Where did you get the strengths, Mum? They used you, they gossiped about you, they lied at you, they hated you...

Somehow, in the middle of that toxic environment, you were able to plant love in me... Love to every leaf on every tree; to every drop of dew on grass blades that shone in the morning rays before turning into a lifegiving clouds over our heads; to every pebble in the stream that shimmered like a treasure and made me feel like a princess who owns the treasures of the world; to every animal, and human, to the whole wide world... and even to those people that hated you... But most and foremost, - to learning. You taught me to read and write very early. When children were going to school at 7, I could write to dictation and read at 4... I wonder, was it your way of being resilient to the everyday oppression that you had experienced? I mean, you didn't have to be there, Mum... You could have return to your parents forever, or live with them at least at the times, when dad was away... What was it, that kept you there? Until one winter, when you had enough... the winter of 1987... when a bus stopped brining children to school from the place we lived in and I had to walk through the fields of snow 7 kilometres at the age of 7... These magical number 7... You refused to jeopardise my education, and we moved into an unfinished house, that you and dad were building with the help of Grandad. You refused to be a slave to the dad's family... You refused to be a slave of the traditions... a slave of the situation. I don't think, it was only my education, that helped you to take the ownership of your life. I think, Mum, you had enough! You were ready to reclaim your own life!

I wish one day all women promulgated: "We are ready!" All of them together – as One. Like a Mockingjay, they will grow in resistance and become rebels... The rebellious act of emancipation will change the world as we know it. Because every time a woman stands up, she stands for all women; because every time a woman speaks up, she speaks for all women... Because by standing and speaking for women, she also speaks for her children, mothers and sisters, for her sons, husbands and brothers, and fathers, and men... She stands for love and care, for equality and equity, - against disempowerment, hurt, abuse and oppression! Because she seeks Freedom for everyone; she seeks to create inclusive and just society... and she will be persistent, whatever happens... because behind every woman is a tribe of other women, who have her back...

I was really lucky, Mum, to meet the most incredible women in Ireland, whom I can call indeed my tribe. Some of them you have met, some – not. I don't even

know, if I will ever be able to explain how important these women were in the becoming of who I am now...

So, meet my tribe, Mamusya.

There are women who I call my "Irish Mummies". They have taken the role, that would have been fulfilled by you, Mamusya, if I was living back home. I am very lucky to have them in my life.

Anne and Mary were always there. I don't even remember how we've met... I think it might have been one of the meetings for Newbridge Asylum Seekers Support Group. It was very surprising to me that there were local people who would be so kind and understanding to our hardship in direct provision. They have been there for me for the last thirteen years... A good piece of life... Any time I needed an advice, or a push, or an encouragement, or a rant about life, – they were always there for me. With them I have made my first steps in the community and grew to be a member of many different groups over the years. Many years on at the launch of Kildare Integration Strategy while giving speech, I saw them grow with pride for me... like only people who have nurtured your growth over the years can do. They gave me a pathway to my dreams... and they walked with me holding my hand...

I have met Bernie when came up to the services she worked in to find out about recognition of my qualifications from back home. We had Irish coffee in pubs and restaurants. Bernie taught me Irish culture. She explained to me the nuances of phrases and proverbs, and I told her the matching or similar proverbs in Ukrainian language. We had long chats about similarities of Ukrainian and Irish languages – how picturesque and rich both languages are... We talked about our childhood memories – so different yet so similar... I still can talk to her about anything in the world!

We dreamt my dreams together... about moving out direct provision centre... being free... She gave me a straw to hold on to, when I was drowning...

She drove me with children to Wicklow to see lambs in Springs. She hugged me with all her heart... She gave me Hope...

Over the past thirteen years my "Irish Mummies" have listened, advised, protected, recommended, gave out, hugged, dried my tears, gave a shoulder to lean on, cried and laughed with me, nurtured me, literally "resuscitated" me, treated like

their own daughter ... They taught me by example, lead me up from the back, through dialogues we had, - discussing our lives, the injustice that happens around us, the issues we must tackle as mothers, as women, as human beings... They have changed my views on the world... on motherhood... on womanhood, on position of a woman in the family and society... They have taught me to value myself, to be aware of myself, to be mindful of myself... Through thick and thin - they were always there for me... Not overpowering, non-judgemental, non-imposing... There was always space for my decision, for my last say... I think, that's what I have valued the most in our relationship – a friendship, where age doesn't define the actor of power... I have never felt younger than them, even though they all have daughters of my age... I have always felt equal, respected and valued for who I am...

Also, as someone, who is very trusting in people in general, I have experienced that trust, the believe in me, which I have probably ever had from you only, Mum. It was invaluable at the time of living in direct provision... when everything around felt overpowering and disempowering at the same time... when from day to day over the 6 years I was turning from a human being into a tiny particle of dust on a furniture... when the oppressive structures were growing over me and my family by a day, - minimizing me, devaluing me, dehumanizing me and thousands of others in the direct provision system... Believe me, the trust my "Irish Mummies" had in me have saved my sanity, even my life...

It was so special, Mamusya, when you have met them all Irish Mummies, when visiting for the first time. You said then: "Now I am happy, because am assured that you are surrounded, supported and cared for by such wonderful women".

There are women who are my "Irish Sisters". And "Irish" here doesn't mean nationality, because they come from all parts of the World!

Their friendship is an invaluable treasure I have found on the Emerald Island. Over the years we have talked, we've drunk coffee, and talked and drunk coffee again... Litres and litres of coffee... Probably, litres of tears have been talked through... And an unmeasurable happiness for each other's achievements... and support in the toughest times of our lives... and chats, and conversations, and blah-blahs about everything in the world ... Our friendship has grown into a Sisterhood... I am forever grateful to my Sisters for being there for me... As I have been missing my

sibling Sister and could not see her and you, Mum, for 11 long years I was blessed with the most reliable, loyal and trustworthy friends who showed me and taught me an empathy and compassion, even more – a humanity...

Olya have always been there. Even though she is only one month older than me, I have always felt like her little sister. Olya is a Giver. She has surrounded me and my family with such care, like only a very close person can do. Through the years in direct provision nearly every week she was cooking and bringing food to us with her husband. Borshch, soups, varenyky, mushrooms that she picked herself in the forests of Wexford. Her children were called cousins by our children. Her home became a cultural centre, where we gathered for all traditional Ukrainian celebrations. The tables were always bending under variety of traditional dishes. We sang, we cried, we laughed... We celebrated our Sisterhood...

She taught me kindness... She taught me hospitality... She taught me to give... She gave me Home... She showed me how to be strong and courageous. She taught me how to deal with problems... She continually inspires me to be a better human.

Eliska came to one of the meetings of Asylum Seekers Support Group. I always felt like I have known her all my life... She took me on the journey of education. She always wanted to give me freedom... She encouraged me to do things. She brought loads of sunshine into my life. She taught me to embrace cultural diversity... She has helped me to discover my own creativity... We felted together... We felted our lives... We felted our dreams... with silk and sunshine...

From Eliska I have learnt a very profound thing: you don't necessarily need to return a favour for a random act of kindness, - you must "keep the ball rolling", - just help someone else instead...

They have been there for me always, and I have been there for them. We have been talking for the world, and have been trying to make the world a better place for everyone...

They have accepted me – the imperfect me, the confused me, the anxious me, the depressed me, the broken me, the wrong me!

Over the years they have been supporting me financially, psychologically and emotionally... They have helped me to become who I'm meant to be... They have helped me to write my story...

There are women, who are "my Heroes". We went through the direct provision system together... We were scared... We were belittled... We were diminished... We felt discouraged... We were oppressed...

But we stayed...against all odds of the mastermind who created the direct provision, – hand in hand... shoulder to shoulder... We supported each other... We have shared bread and milk... happiness and sorrow... We resisted... We fought... We cried... We hugged... and weren't letting anyone to break us! We walked the road together... We dragged each other through the sameness of the days and nights... And if there were no strengths in our bodies to walk, we were lifting each other and carrying through...

These women are remarkable! They are exceptional! They are smart, and funny, and incredibly strong! They are fighters! They are fearless! They are survivors! They are tigresses! They have done undoable! They have survived one of the most oppressive systems of "support" ... They have won my heart with their kindness and openness, and trust...

They have educated me! They showed me what is diversity, the wealth of cultures we have in this world! Living with these women as a community gave me an understanding and a privilege to experience their traditions and learn their customs. It gave me an understanding of their lives, and connected my life with theirs, as we have been living through the same struggle...

They have taught me to stand back from my bias and treat people equally, no matter who they are! They have taught me to see a person – holistically – through life experiences which shape and change our characters, change our perception about others, change our relation to other people and how we become who we are...

These women have humanised me...

Precious had lived next door to me. Our girls were born a few months apart. We dressed them up and took pictures of them on a bed wearing beautiful dresses. I

admired her son. He was so lively, and smart, and curious. I thought, if I ever have a son, I want him to be as smart as Precious' son is. He is a wonderful young man now.

Precious was always stronger than me. We talked a lot. I always looked up to her. She gave me a very precious advice on how to change my GP, as we were told, we don't have a right to do so. She lives far now, but I always hold a very fond memories of her in my heart. She was my best neighbour.

Nino grew up in direct provision. She changed from a tiny teen girl into a beautiful woman before my eyes. Both of her girls were born in direct provision... just like my kids... Her daughter didn't sleep at night. I was coming to have tea when my children were asleep... We whispered...

One time we had a women's party. I don't remember, what occasion it was for. We talked and laughed, and drunk vodka with her mum, and our other friends from Belarus and Armenia. I couldn't keep the pace of drinking with Georgian women. They are hell of a strong women! They know how to toast people. That night I was laughing to death, fell under the table and couldn't stand up. I had to lean on the wall to get to my room. We are still laughing at that occasion.

Nino didn't deserve to spend her best years in direct provision. Her dreams were stolen from her. Her teenagerhood was stolen from her. But the system didn't make her an angry person. She is kind, and caring, and true to herself. I believe in her. She is amazing mother! She is a beautiful Human! She didn't let system to break her. She will grow stronger every year! She will do great things in her life!

I have been learning and growing in strengths with these women... We've listened to each other's stories; we've shared our hardships; we've given and asked for advices; we've offered and looked for supports; we educated each other on how to deal with the oppressive reality of direct provision; we've encouraged each other to resist. We have been on the same side of the struggles...

Mamusya, I didn't make it through the years of direct provision on my own... I was able to make it through only because all these women were there for me! They

have helped me to grow through the worst, and through my failures... They stayed with me in solidarity, - inside and outside of the system, but - against the system...

Despite being so far from me all these years, you were always in my tribe, Mamusya... You were with me every single day, - in my thoughts and my prayers, in the stories to my children, in my memories and in my dreams... In the toughest times of my life I have dreamt of your gentle touch, of your encouraging smile, of your everlasting optimism... I cried, thinking, that the only place I want to hide from all the troubles and hardships – is in your hugs... I still do... I wanted to hold on to your skirt, – just like I did, when was a little girl with a heart full of dreams, – so you could guide me... through the thickets of life...

In the best moments of my life I wanted to share with you my happiness... I wanted you to be there, when my children were born... I wanted you to hold them in the tiny little parcel wraps, – just like you held me... I wanted you to be near...

I wanted you to see me and to be proud for the woman I have grown to be... I wanted to see you smile... Miss you so much, Mamusya...

Till the next time...

Love you so much,

Your Daughter

Letter 6. Education Path

Dear, Mamusya!

It has been some time since I have written to you. This letter meant to be written a long time ago, but I was hesitating. I wanted to tell you about the path of my education in Ireland. On your last visit you said, that you are very proud of me, – that you consider it to be a huge achievement being able to study and work in the foreign language. The truth is, I don't consider it to be much of an achievement, as I always think I could have done so much more... It is, probably, a disempowering way of thinking about my own life and achievements... I think, this is what makes me focus more on the things I want to do, and to make small steps – one by one – where my heart brings me... At the same time, it becomes a source of great frustration... Because I never have an opportunity to say to myself: "Well done, You!" ...

I think, I'm just chasing the years I have lost in Direct Provision... You know... What I could have done with that precious time!

I need to learn to let it go somehow though... to forget... to erase it from memory... But it's not that easy... when every day you are striving to give your children a better life, so they would feel included in the society, so they would fit, so they would thrive... Just like you did for us, Mum...

When I was a child, I didn't understand how hard you worked to provide everything you wanted us to have. Some might say, – that's a parent's job. But looking back, I know you did so much more and gave so much more than you needed to. And you did it with so much love. You put your own needs aside to care for me and my sister. Now, that I'm an adult, I understand how you have sacrificed, and I know how lucky I am to have been blessed with such a remarkable Mother. I may not always say the words, but I want you to know that I love dearly and appreciate all that you have done - and all that you continue doing for me, my dear Mummy!

Even though little, I remember, how we came to Grandma and Grandad and stayed overnight. The next day, while I was playing, I was stung by a bee! Do you remember how I was terrified of bees?! I was walking every day to the bee apiary

that Grandad owned to bring him a lunch, and the minute I was walking into the enclosure, I was stopping to breathe. It was a Kingdom of Bees, - and my worst nightmare. So, when stung by the bee, I started running around the yard looking for you, as I needed the sting to be pulled out of my finger. And oh gosh! I couldn't find you! Cousins were in school, Grandad at the apiary and Granny was busy with something. I ran three times around the yard and through the house screaming and crying from pain, but even more from despair of not being able to find you, - and finally landed into Grannies arms for comfort and healing... When back, you told me that you went to sit exam for going back to college. I didn't want you to go... I was about 6 at the time, and wanted to have you around every minute, just like my daughter and son want me to spend with them as much time as I can.

Nevertheless, it so happened, that in the corrupt and on the brink of collapse USSR a certain fee had to be paid in brown envelope to certain people in order to succeed in the exam. You had very strong principles about these things and refused to pay, so also was refused the place in the college. You wanted to study a Childcare...

I didn't know what my paths is going to be like in Ireland. I had an education behind my back – 4 years of BA and 1 year of MA in Ukrainian Philology. I mean, it was some journey! Loads of wonderful memories being a young and care free student, succeeding in studies to the highest marks without a strain, planning on going further in academic studies. The future was bright...

What it unfolded was very hard to compresence... Finding myself in a position of someone who is considered less in Irish society was very disempowering... I'm sorry, if I repeat myself again, but living on the scarce 19.10 euro for an adult and 9.60 for a child per week, – without right to work, – was stripping me of my dignity...

Nevertheless, I remember, when I had introduced solid foods to my baby daughter, and she was not as much dependant on breastmilk, I started attending English courses in the neighbouring town. I think, I told you about it already. It was Cambridge English First course organised by a local Leader Partnership organisation in collaboration with Maynooth University. I enjoyed the learning thoroughly. Languages were of my professional interest, so I was able to apply the frameworks I had learnt in the university back home. Learning English grammar was a lot of fun! I loved observing the tutor - how skilled and experienced he was in

working with the group and admired his proficiency in English, as only teacher of languages can admire... He was amazing. I just wish one day I could meet him to say "thank you" ... His classes had helped me to gain confidence communicating in English correctly, to meet my first friends in Ireland, to start learning about Irish society and culture, and politics, – to start grow...

In 2008 I had passed my Cambridge English First exam, – and started to feel more confident. It was almost like the certificate gave me a right to speak...

I started meeting my friends for coffee occasionally. With one of my friends we created a tradition going to a pub nearby for Irish coffee. It was handy, because we could be nearby the hostel, and I could run home quickly once there was the case, that my husband needed me, if children were too upset on my absence. I mean, sometimes I was getting an angry phone calls after couple of hours, because we were talking for Ireland with my friend!

I couldn't express myself freely, so I used a translator on my phone, if I wanted to use a particular word I didn't know yet, and my friend was translating for me to Irish. We admired each other's languages and were learning about our cultures... We still do though! Which reminds me, we really need to meet for a cuppa soon!

I started attending meetings of the local Asylum Seekers Support Group. It was very empowering to be able to share our grievances with Irish people, who had a genuine interest in our lives, and who were ready to support us. It was really lifechanging. I have never met so dedicated to equality and social justice people. They were trying everything to ease out hardship in direct provision: advocating, standing for our community, organising activities and classes, where possible providing childcare, meeting with politicians, and simply being there for us. I cannot even explain you, how much these people have done for all of us over the years, - for the community of asylum seekers and personally for every one of us in the hostel. I think, it was the first time in my life to see how people can voluntary support others, how empathetic and thoughtful they can be towards people, who feel oppressed and marginalised... who are in limbo... who don't know, what tomorrow may bring... And it warms my heart to know, that my life has been significantly influenced by these people, who are more than friends, - they are family to me. Almost 13 years on I am still a member of the very Asylum Seekers Support Group. An I do my best to support people who are, just like myself and my family 6 years ago, live, and wait,

and resist, and struggle, and dream, and hope... in direct provision. I admire each and every one of them! Their knowledge, their diverse and rich life experiences, their cultures, their unity, their strengths... Every one of them is an encyclopaedia of struggles and resilience! I am so blessed to know these people, to learn from them, to call them my friends...

So, where was I? Oh yes, the English classes. I went on to do the Cambridge English Advanced. I had been attending the classes for a year, but haven't been able to attend the exam, because had my baby boy around the same date, when exam had taken place. I had hoped to sit the exam some time later, but life had gotten way to busy, as you can imagine, Mum! I continued learning English though using the materials from the classes. I started reading papers in English, magazines, books. I even started thinking, that maybe I can study in the future to become a translator or interpreter. Well, I had spoken Ukrainian and Russian fluently, and Polish on advanced level; all I needed to do is to master English, which I had no doubt I would. But then I found out, that I am not allowed to study... Can you imagine, Mum?! I mean, you can lock people into a place, which is very similar to a jail or even a concentration camp; you can strip away their dignity by keeping them there for many years; you can disempower them by controlling through food; you can diminish them by surveillance of their movement in and out of the hostel; you can control and oppress them in every other possible way! But to take away their human right to education, their right to learning, their right to development, their right to progressing in life, to achieving their dreams and desires!!! This was beyond my understanding and comprehension... I mean, even in prisons those who committed crimes are able to study...

So, yes, I started looking for possibilities and loopholes in the regulations... What can you do if you want to learn?! You must find a way!

I found the course online which was run from the UK, but, gosh, it was so expensive! So, I had to park the idea of becoming a translator for a while. But I did interpret, as a volunteer though. The speakers of Russian and Polish, friends and friends of friends, who needed help could always count on me.

Now, when I am thinking back, I understand, that it was not my path to become a translator. Life had different tasks and plans for me.

It's exciting and strange to bring these memories, Mum. There are so much that I want to say, that I afraid there won't be enough paper :).

I had to learn a lot about babies, - naturally, as a mother you need to learn a lot in a very quick pace, because babies are developing and grow very fast, and as a mother, you need to be in tune with each milestone of theirs. A role of a mother involves many professions, - you are a teacher, a nurse, - even a doctor, a psychologist, a cleaner, a cook, a launder, a photographer, a manager, a strategic planner, an accountant, a nutritionist, a hairdresser, – you name it! But most important, you are a carer, a nurturer, a story-teller, a memories-keeper, a hugger, a love-giver, a listener, a healer, a protector, an inventor, an idea-generator, a dreamer, a creator, - a life giver...

So, I had been reading a lot about development of babies and toddlers, and realised, that I don't know, how to teach young children. I needed something interesting and exciting to teach my daughter to write and read. I was very excited to find something very special, - Handwriting Without Tears. The name of the curriculum says it all. I have learnt how to teach my child to write, - to assess when child is ready; to learn through playing with chalk, playdough, shaving gel, paints and other liquid stuff all kids love to play with; with flash cards and songs, and Mat-man, who teaches children about their body parts, and even their belly-button! We loved it! The learning of the letters begins with the simplest one - the "I"! You start writing, where the smiley face indicates, just like this one 😊. You draw on a special rectangular slate chalkboard with a chalk, then you trace it with your finger, and then you trace it with a tiny wet sponge. You make a roll-a-dough letters in a special tray; and make letters out of wooden pieces, and draw them on a magnetic board... I mean, you already can see how much fun it is! So exciting!

Do you know, next time, when we meet, you have to tell me, how you were teaching me to write? I remember, that for some occasion I had handprinted a message for Dad on a card, and we posted it to him. I remember, that I couldn't comprehend in my head, how the card will fly to find him in the middle of the ocean on a ship! Ah, the childhood innocence!

Yes, so, with Handwriting Without Tears both children going to preschool were able to read and write. I think, that's the only positive thing about being in direct provision, - that I had a time to spend with my children. Luckily, I had a knowledge and skills to teach them, and somehow, I was able to turn all my frustration into a positive channel. Yes, children were and are, and always will be the lights of my

days and the stars of my nights. I thank them, for they have created who I am today...

Around the same time, I started attending a Mother and Toddler group in the local Community Development Project. I really enjoyed the time spent chatting with other mothers about common problems and admiring our children playing and sharing, or not sharing their toys. It was a lot of fun.

For number of weeks we had a Mother and Toddler group in the direct provision centre, organised by the Asylum Seekers Support Group. It was good to have it happening in the centre, because there was no need to come out of the shell and pull yourself together to go out into the community. Here we were like a family. We could be ourselves, with our frustrations and depressive moods, with our hopes for the better. We all – mothers – were on the same page of the book, on the same side of life...

When the project ran to the end, a few of us have organised ourselves and started our own Mother and Toddler group. We planned activities for children of two age groups, shared responsibilities in organising play times, facilitating activities, cleaning the playroom before and after the play, making coffees and teas. It was our little world, which was very enjoyable. We were looking forward to those days, hmmm, especially, when it was your turn to sit back and drink coffee. We were supported with the materials and petty cash by the Asylum Seekers Support Group, like, I mean, we could not have done anything without them.

Of course, there were other service providers too. We had different courses facilitated with us – like massage for babies, yoga, mindfulness etc. One of the most significant was Community Education.

I know, that we have some type of community education back home, Mum, – but it's a shame, how little I know about it. I certainly need to do a bit of research. I must tell you, Mum, how important Community Education courses were for me.

My first courses to attend with local Community Education were craft courses. Yes, it was a felting course, which was organised for our community in the hostel (we usually call it a hotel, I mean, the direct provision centre, but it sounds too good to call it a hotel, so I will call it a hostel – seems like more appropriate word). I cannot even describe you how much happiness and purpose felting brought into my life. I remember, the wool was so soft, colourful, and smelled like a sheep on the sun! I know, right, how do sheep smell?! :) I guess like a freedom... because they are free

to roam around... Nevertheless... We were all downstairs in the dining room: the tables pulled together, loads of bubble wrap and soapy water... I had my son with me, and my daughter was probably in the preschool. We laid out the carded wool, sprinkled it with the soapy water and started working the magic! Do you remember that photo, where my son is holding his hands on the table on something covered in soap? Well, he was involved in the creative process, and absolutely loved it! So, we were rolling and rolling, and beating, and throwing, and washing, and a few hours later, - oh goodness, - a flower appeared in my hands! I couldn't believe my eyes! That feeling, that I had, was, probably, a feeling of the God, when he created the World! I was beyond excited to be able create something from literally nothing with my own hands! I had fallen in love with felting! Since then I just wanted to do it non-stop!

Luckily, we had a shop with stuff for felting in the nearby town, so my friend and I went to root through it. We had so much fun felting together!

Oh yes, do you still have those flowers I have felted and sent over for you, Mum? They were my best creation... I think, because I had put in them all the love in the world I have for you...

Sometime later I attended another felting course through Community Education. I had learnt there how to make a note cover and a bag! Then a scarf, and a hat. I've learnt about nuno-felting – felting on silk, – and tried it out. I mean, I was fascinated with it! It felt, like I was imprisoned by it – I just wanted to do it non-stop. Especially, when I was feeling down... You know, Mum, it was helping me to cope with the oppressive environment of direct provision. It felt, like I was escaping into the world of creativity, where I could “live” ... whether in direct provision I was left to “be” ...

Over the years more and more courses I had attended through Community Education: needle felting, painting, photography, Enneagram, jewellery making...

My second passion after felting became jewellery making, can you imagine. I loved playing with beads, putting them together into earrings and necklaces, creating different patterns, using felting in jewellery making. Little did I know, that teaching jewellery making will be my first job after the direct provision... but I will tell you about it later.

Attending all those courses was very enjoyable not only because I was learning the crafts. It was because I was meeting new people and building relationships and making friends. I was learning about people's happiness and hardships, about their

problems and celebrations. As well as that I was learning about myself...how I relate to others in the group, how I communicate, how my life is similar and different at the same time to the lives of others. It was a safe space to be in. It was a space I was seeking to escape the feeling of oppression I had felt in my body... here, just under the neck, just above my spine, somewhere between 5th and 6th vertebra... It felt like a hunchback that I could not get rid of... like a heavy burden unbearable to carry...

The courses were a space of freedom...

At the end of 2011 it was 5 years since my family and I were living in direct provision... What is 5 years in terms of a lifetime? A few wrinkles and a few white hairs... It's a secondary school finished when skipping a transition year... It's a university degree with a master's on the top... It's a possibility to save money for 4 years and probably travel the world for 1... It's a new life and, possibly, a death; it's a cancer treatment and full remission or not... It's one third of a mortgage paid... It's life, its movements, its progression...it's a lot... but not in direct provision...

Two children – 5 and 3 years old, who constantly question, why we cannot have our friends over for a playdate... Two children, who, when leaving the building of the direct provision centre, don't want to go back in, – every day... They don't know why, they cannot explain... but they feel, that it is not home... they feel the oppressive environment... they see us arguing... apart from that, – stillness...

I have cracked up... Everything became unbearable... Life is on the verge of collapse...

To my luck, local Leader Partnership runs a course in collaboration with Maynooth University – Community Development and Leadership course. I am attending the tester. Something changes that day. The word facilitator emerges in my language.

I was astonished with the facilitator's style. Her skills of working with the group, her respect, her ability to include everyone, her listening skills, – everything makes me want to come back! I am fascinated, and I want to learn more! I remember, we were shown as an example of community development a video about Dolphin's Barn housing association fighting for their rights... I never knew something like that could have been happening in Ireland...

Even though I didn't have a right to study as an asylum seeker, the course was free for everyone, who volunteered in the community. So, a few of us from direct

provision were really privileged to attend the full course. Mum, it was a life changing experience!

The whole course was facilitated through participatory activities. We were constantly in movement: talking to each other, discussing, drawing, planning, creating, reflecting, critically analysing and most important – practicing. The learning was immense. Our experiences and knowledge about the local community were considered, and everyone had an opportunity to have their say. The groupwork helped us to bond, and we have developed lifelong friendships.

I don't think, the learning I had gained from the course could have ever been measured by any type of assignments. You know, Mum, through the course, I started seeing life differently. I started seeing the bigger picture. I was thinking, I had sociology back in university, but why I don't know anything? How come I could have forgotten? It was almost like I was learning all over again... Is it what oppressive environment does to us... makes us forget we are human...

Our group had succeeded with the course, and we were given opportunity by the providers to continue with the studies. Next was Adult and Community Education course. It was just amazing journey, which never will be forgotten. It has influenced my life, my values, my career. It was life changing in many ways. But particularly for a few important reasons.

The course was again facilitated in participatory approach, and this was making the learning especially enjoyable.

As part of the course we have learnt a philosophy of adult education. It was amazing, when reflecting on my own learning and the learning of my husband, to be able recognise the theories! During this course I have met three very important people, who have influenced my learning.

First was the tutor of philosophy, who had an amazing ability to explain complex theories in a very simplistic way. Considerate and attentive to every student, while explaining, he treated everyone with respect and dignity. We were all fascinated with his knowledge and facilitative approach. I will tell you, Mum, I wish to know as much as he does!

The second is not exactly a person, but rather a philosophy, which have been an eye opening and life changing in many ways. It has resonated with me very

deeply and gave me a framework to understanding the world. Yeah, I know, it probably sounds very odd, but let me tell you about it.

The philosopher's name is Paulo Freire, and he gave me the language to name my world, to explain how I feel. While leaving in direct provision, I could feel that something is wrong with me, but couldn't say what I have been experiencing, - I did not know the word "oppressed". I had been saying, that I am upset, frustrated, depressed... When I found the word "oppressed" in his book, everything came together. I suddenly started seeing the power structures over me and how direct provision have been squishing the last drops of life out of me, my husband, my little children, who deserved a better childhood; thousands of other asylum seekers. This understanding gave me a missing puzzle of the knowledge I needed so much to make a meaning of my situation. But you know, not only of the situation of asylum seekers, but of all marginalised and oppressed by societal structures people: women in the world ruled by men; Roma and Travellers; gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and gender queer; migrants and immigrants; people with different – diverse abilities and many others. I was reading his writing with fascination and awe. The world needs a revolution, and those who are oppressed should have their say, and overturn the oppressive power. It was my first reading of Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", and it changed my world. Do you know, the book is translated into Ukrainian now! I will get you a copy. I think, you will be interested to read it too.

The third person was a facilitator who was invited to the course to facilitate an Intercultural workshop. She works with organisation "Partner Training for Transformation" who's work is largely influenced by the philosophy of Paulo Freire. I cannot even explain you, Mum, what influence the workshop had on my future.

The workshop was very timely for me. I was going through identity struggle without even realising it. When in the group we started talking about our identities, I understood, how disconnected I was with my old self. How I was missing my culture but was putting on a mask of a brave and strong face and kept going. What other options I had, Mum? I had to be present in the children's and husband's life, and had to show that I'm ok, so they would be fine too. You know, keeping the balance in the family, and all... And the oppressive environment of direct provision was not helping... I didn't have an opportunity to think about my inner self...to question what makes me so anxious... The workshop had created that opportunity.

It was a first time, when I actually had an opportunity to talk about my culture, to share my experience of it, but also to learn from others about their cultures; to name my world and to reflect deeply on my own situation... I was not ready to do anything about it yet... But I wanted to learn more, so I had never stopped there!

I went on to attend “Creative Facilitation” course with Partners.

The course gave me a toolbox of methods how to facilitate groups in Freirean approach, but I was only a beginner and did not see all possible ways of using it.

Then some time later I was invited to participate in “Women Exercising Leadership Within and Across Communities” - a course which empowers women and helps them to find and embrace their own power and leadership skills.

Do you know, what was my biggest learning from this course, Mum? I had realised, that we, unknowingly, are all leaders... but sometimes our leadership is up, and we are able to use it, and sometimes it's somewhere deeply down, and it waits for us to grow stronger...

There also something I have learnt from this course, which I will keep in my memory forever. The facilitators did with us an exercise called “The Great Game of Power.” We had to move around a table and 6 chairs, – and to place one of the chairs into a powerful position – indicating it with the bottle, but with one trick, – in complete silence. We were very enthusiastic and were changing one setting after another. The images of power in society, or better to say, – in institutions were emerging through the furniture: a job interview – three interviewers in the powerful position; a chairperson chairing a meeting; people are kneeling in front of a mighty person; an exam; a business meeting and many more. When we exhausted our ideas, we were asked to vote on the most powerful setting. The person, who created that setting recreated it again, but had to sit on the “powerful” chair herself. We were supposed to think of a way how to shift or take away the power from the person. Someone started it – by standing behind the persons back. Sure, we all feel uncomfortable and in a vulnerable position, if someone is behind us. Then we were asked to take away power from the person at the first person's back and so on. The power was over the person, on the chair besides, on the table, under the table, near the door... If we could, we would have climbed the wall. If someone, who doesn't have a clue about adult education, have had seen us, they would have thought we lost our minds. But, in fact, we were learning.

Do you know, Mum, this activity made me realise a good few things, which I use in the daily life. Power is present in every relationship, whether it's on personal or institutional level... Power is everywhere, it exists all the time, whether we want it or not. The small power we can shift or challenge easily – we can turn around; we can take a pose or stand up; we can explain, raise our voices or keep silence, - yes, it can be powerful too. But the big power, the structural power, is not shifted or challenged, or changed easily. Like power of direct provision. Or power in oppressive societies over women... It is not easy to change. It needs a lot of learning. It needs a lot of people coming together as well – to grow resistant together, and struggle together in solidarity against oppression – to win...

In the process of leaving direct provision we had to do a lot of paperwork and visit different institutions. It was very interesting to observe the power being exercised there, but I had my “learnt toolbox” with me at the ready for those occasions...

There is part of the story, which I don't really like to tell, as I consider it to be the biggest embarrassment of my life, but I know you won't judge me...

After the Adult and Community Education course our group had continued with a course in Equality Studies. The content of the course was very interesting, but there were two problems. The course was online, and after two years of learning in groups I found it very difficult to connect with the material online. The second problem was that the course had fallen for the time when we just moved out of direct provision...

I had done all readings for the modules, and even had written some of the essays, but wasn't able to submit it... just wasn't able for it...

While I was gripping with the new reality and learning to adjust to the living in the “open” society (that's what I thought at the time anyways...), and trying to fit into a new frame of what my life must be like; and to shed the peels and layers, that direct provision has covered me with, – my inner world was falling apart... I was being crushed by the realisation, that the freedom I was dreaming of for so many years while in direct provision, in fact, doesn't exist... Because society is a system which created on the basis of merit... But not the merit that we inherit for generations, you know, – the harder you work – the more you will earn... no... It's

the merit of what class you were born into; it's the merit of who you know; it's the merit of how much money you have... It's the merit by your economic, political and cultural being... And if you don't possess those, you are not accepted... You don't fit into the system... because you are not privileged, hmm, or, rather... you are not privileged, because you don't fit...

I have heard the word – institutionalised – many times and vaguely understood the meaning, but to overcome it was nothing like I could have imagined... I have told you a bit about the hardship of overcoming it in one of my previous letters... I don't want to evoke those memories again... I want to live at present... you know... but sometimes I think, I am still overcoming it... You know, Mum, experience of direct provision sits too deeply inside, – in your bones, under your skin, in your head, in your heart, deeply in your hurt soul... It presses you, squeezes you, oppresses you, bends you, belittles you and finally breaks you...

I am broken... Will I ever recover?...

For a while I thought of myself as a complete failure, and with everything what I was living through, it had taken its toll on me... Only about a year later, when writing a speech for the launch of the Integration Strategy I suddenly realised – It was not failure! Not at all! It was just a part of learning!

Do you remember late Maryan Stanislavovych – my teacher of Ukrainian language and literature back in school? I remember, we were discussing some fictional character in the class, and he asked us, what that character teaches us through his life and his actions. Every person in the class saw something different, and we all had our say. Surely, all of us wanted to be like the positive hero. Then he asked us, what the negative character teaches us, – and we all went silent. We didn't know... we couldn't think of anything. So, he told us, that the negative character teaches us how to be better, how not to be like him...

I remembered this all my life... and learning from failure was a little bit like learning something positive about the negative character... It seems hard to see or hard to find...

When I was writing the speech, I had an opportunity to write my story down, and reflect on what had happened... I realised, that I hadn't failed at all. I did all the readings and had learnt a lot, and I was able to use that knowledge in my daily life –

by not only supporting myself, but also people around me... I did my best at the time when my world was falling apart...

Mum, I think, I have told about my first course I had taught voluntary... I think you surely remember, when I got my first official job in Ireland – as a community tutor for jewellery making. I was delighted! I was proud. I was moving on with my life... But the courses were happening very rarely, maybe twice a year. I enjoyed teaching jewellery making a lot. It was interesting and challenging at the same time. Interesting, because I was always asking the group at the beginning, what they would want to make, so sometimes I needed to learn a very quickly myself to be able to teach them. Challenging, because it is very difficult to help 12 or more people in the group at the same time, so I was trying to facilitate participants of the courses to help each other. Sometimes it was working, and sometimes not, because, you know, each group had a different dynamic, different personalities, different friendships. I was trying to facilitate ice-breakers and closures, so people could get to know each other and develop their friendships, but obviously there was a very little time for that.

I was still battling adjusting to the life outside of direct provision. And I saw only one way to lift myself up – through education. You know, Mum, education gives me sense and purpose... It is not about the certificates... I mean, they are important too. But I enjoy the process the most – the process of learning, the process of sharing and reflecting – personally and as a group. The learning, the knowledge that group creates together is the most powerful learning, which can be created! Imagine, if in the group is 20 learners, and each of the learners is 40 years old, – if we multiply the life experiences they have, there will be 800 years of experiences, learning and knowledge!!! Can you imagine! When the shared knowledge is being created through a dialogue, it feels so exciting and empowering! It gives us power to take control over our lives! I so needed it in my life...

I was looking for a course, which would be facilitated rather than taught. I looked through syllabus of the courses, which had a philosophy of adult learning as part of the curriculum, as it was something I wanted to learn since attending the Adult and Community Education a few years ago.

So, I went on to study toward Higher Diploma in Further Education in Maynooth University. Even though I was qualified teacher back home already, my

qualification was never going to give me a job in Ireland... So, this course was perfect to obtain a professional diploma in teaching.

The course was brilliant. It gave me everything I needed: the knowledge, the practice, the confidence, - you name it. But there is always a catch... because not everything in life comes easy, and definitely nothing comes easy for me...

With the hope, that I will be able to receive a financial support from the state, I went for the course. Apparently, my previous studies back home— bachelor's and master's degrees in philology, – were taken into account and I was not eligible for a grant. I have tried and tried but could not challenge the system. I mean, how it can be justified, that I was locked in direct provision for 6 years – didn't have a right to work to be able to use my education, my knowledge, my skills... And years later, when I have lost my knowledge, my skills, lost myself – because of direct provision – suddenly, my diploma is being accounted for the grant... Anyway, the course had left me with a huge debt, but the hopes for a brighter future kept me going.

That year was in many instances a life changing one. Firstly, because through the course I was able to teach in different educational settings. I have realised, that there are teachers who teach adults in the same way they were taught in school, and teachers who passionately and patiently support each and every student. I have seen, how education can be of a burden and a heavy load, if you are being taught by the first; and how education can be a life changing experience, if you are taught by the second. I started feeling discouraged...

In direct provision I had learnt, that I need to stick to the positive side of things, because it was giving me hope at the time of discouragement. Two important events happened that helped to revive the hope.

First, I started co-facilitating Creative Facilitation courses with Partners Training for Transformation. I was ecstatic, when they invited me to learn from them!

Also, around the same time I started working occasionally with Community Education Wicklow. My role involved meeting groups and, by employing creative processes, to find out where learners' interests lay and what courses they are interested to uptake in their community groups.

So, at the Hdip I was learning very much needed philosophy, sociology and much more; with Partners I was learning frameworks and approaches to facilitation in a practical way; during my teaching practice and the work with Community

Education I was applying all the knowledge I was gaining and exploring my own style.

It was not easy to study and to have a teaching practice, to work and to be a mum, to be a wife and to be involved in the community... That year was absolutely crazy! But it was also a very satisfying year in terms of learning...

After finishing the Hdip, I felt like I lost something... like the year of learning wasn't enough... I wanted to go back to the space, where I could think critically; where I could express myself freely; where I feel supported and understood. This is what it felt like during the Hdip course in the Department of Adult and Community Education. And I wanted more.

I applied for a place at the Master's in Adult and Community Education programme for the next year. Do you remember, Mamusya, how happy I was to have gotten a place! Amazing journey of learning was waiting ahead! And a lot of challenges... I was still owing the university for the Hdip, as couldn't pay, because was working only occasionally. My husband was still in college himself in his final year of BA, so over the last year we were both students. It was extremely difficult financially. And we struggled a lot, but our children had struggled the most. We couldn't pay for any activities outside of school, and because of that children felt isolated and excluded... But hope to get better education and to start earning kept us both going.

I had arranged a payment plan with the university for the previous year and started the master's programme without full registration. I loved the course! It was so meaningful! I was learning so much! But at the beginning of December I was asked to leave, as the debt for the previous year was not allowing me to move forward with the studies. I should have cleared the debt and start paying the current year's fees. But I had no money, so it was impossible...

It was very difficult... It felt, like someone had taken a lifesaving jacket of me and left me drowning... drowning in depression, in inability to cope with reality, in despair of not being able to study...

To be honest, I don't remember much of the time after. I was home trying to find a strength in me to keep going. If my life wasn't on pause for so many years in direct provision, I wouldn't find myself now struggling financially. I know, I would have earned my way out. But the right to work was taken of me and others in direct

provision consciously. That's why we struggle now. That's why it is difficult to reach our full potential. Those 6 years in direct provision will always hold me back...

In order to come back on the master's course, I didn't need to apply again. I could start in September but needed to clear my debt with the university. So, I borrowed money from my friend... I know, Mum, sometimes I do things backwards. I should have probably given myself time, find a job, earn the money, pay the debt, and then, maybe, to come back to the course... But I didn't have time. I had lost 6 years... I had lost the previous year... I needed that lifesaving jacket, because I was drowning...

So, I did borrow a huge amount of money, and went on to study in September. I will be forever grateful to my friends, who trusted me and, the most important, – believed in me... without them it wouldn't have had happened.

I started in September again. Arranged a payment plan with university for the master's programme and started learning.

I mean, how I can even explain what happens in the master's programme. Its like a box that you wear around your head slowly collapses and you start seeing things more clearly. You get to learn and discuss all possible issues in society. Your voice is valued and grows stronger by a day. You start understanding, why society the way it is; why power structures are oppressive; why there is so much injustice; why politics the way they are... But it is not only that... You start understanding every personal story... Why you cannot find a job; why you are depressed and lonely; why your children and people in general behave the way they do; why you feel guilty for the things you haven't done; why you supposedly the one to blame for all your falls and faults... You learn the theory easily, because your own life is its practice... because the people around you experience life painfully and you are aware of it. You learn how personal is political, – and how political is personal. You change. You grow. You understand... At the same time, you are realising, that the world is so complex... and the issues are not easy to tackle because of that complexity. Time is needed for that... But you really want to! You feel like you know – you know, and you can change the world! In a very simple way. As simply as sharing your own story...

So, with encouragement of my lecturers and my colleagues I decide to tell you my story, Mamusya...

I knew, that it is not going to be an easy road... I must travel into the deepest corners of my mind and being to lift and unveil all the hurt and trauma, all the impact, that direct provision had left on me... on us as a family... It's a story that I am trying to forget because I am afraid to remember... But if I forgot, a part of my identity – an asylum seeker – will go... and I don't want that. I need to remember to be able to tell people about this inhuman system. I need to tell about it, so when people get to know, something can be done for the system to exist no more... for the people to struggle no more... for the children to be discriminated no more... We are strong and smart people. We want to fully contribute to society. Don't steel our life in the dark rooms of direct provision. Don't steel our hopes and dreams. We are Humans... Have a closer look. We are more alike than not. We are more connected than not. We all belong to this planet... We have so much to give...

So, I wrote, and wrote, and wrote... Day whined after day... Dropped kids to school and back to writing. From 10 in the morning till 6 in the evening. I felt like a full-time writer... But it was more than that. One memory was evoking another. The thoughts were running ahead of me typing... Smiles on my face were changing with tears; the tears were changing with smiles... The writing was painful and cathartic at the same time... It was hurtful and healing...

Do you know, Mum, while you were visiting last summer, I was writing the letters to you? ... I had so many attempts to tell you about it, but I couldn't... It wasn't the right time... I needed to connect with my past first... When the time is right, we will sit down together, and I will read you all the letters... One by one I will translate them to you, and we will talk... but not now... I still have so much to bring back... so much to connect with...

So, I was writing for about two month – every day. All my thoughts were about the past. I was in a deep reflective mode trying to make sense of the situations that were happening to me, my family and my friends while we lived in direct provision. The words were coming into sentences in my head with a speed of light. It felt like I had already written them some time in my life... I needed to free my brain of them, so I could live again, you know... Just like Ukrainka's Mavka, I wanted to burn the past to take a new, transformed me into the future:

*Ah, for that body do not sigh!
'Tis now infused and glows with fire divine,*

*As clear and bright and glittering as good wine
Whose life in sparkling bubbles mounts on high.*

*Naught but an airy pinch of dust
Remains to mingle with the earth below.
Beside these waters shall a willow grow,
My end give life to something more robust...*

*And then I snapped... I don't remember when exactly...
I think, you had left for home already, Mum... I was warned by my supervisor, that I
may... that if I needed to stop writing, I must stop... that I can attend a counselling in
university... I probably should have, but I didn't... I was trying to work it all out
myself. I know, I am too stubborn... I always do everything my way...*

*One day shopping in local Centra my eyes had caught someone passing by. I
froze for a second: I have seen these eyes before! Blue eyes out of this world... of
the colour of blue summer skies – so deep and endless... I went on with my own
business, and, when leaving the shop, the guy passed by, and I looked again into
the sad deep blue... I jumped into my car and sobbed, and roared, and cried while
memories were pouring out...*

*Dad is back from the sea trip... His mum complaints to him on his brother. He
is angry. He takes out his belt and goes to his brother. He... abuses... him... with...
the... belt... All I can see is the sad... deep... blue... eyes...*

*I was very little at the time... maybe 3 or 4... Uncle passed away long time
ago now... He had mental illness, – so we were told... I have so many questions,
that I want to ask dad...*

Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?

*Who gave you the right? Why your mum gave you the power? Why he never fought
back?...*

*I don't know why those particular memories came back... I don't know... But I
am sure they came back, because I was in the deep process of reflecting when
writing the letters... What else is hidden in the deepest corners of my soul?*

With memories came back anxiety... with anxiety – pain the body... Collar bones burning... hands... arms... it feels like someone beat the s...e out of me... The whole body is sore... I can't even lift my arm... I snapped...

So, you know already, Mamusya, that I haven't finished the masters... I was granted extension... due to the health issues... which the writing and other life matters caused... Do you know, Mamusya, even if I knew beforehand, this is the way it's going to be, I would still do it. No doubt. Being stubborn is a good quality of my character. Sometimes not though...

All this time I couldn't write... Probably because emotionally I have closed the writing for myself... I had many attempts, by all of them were unsuccessful. A few weeks ago, the sentences started coming together again. In my head I started to write letters to you in response to the situations that occur in my life – in family and in the society. I have come to realise, that I always had this internal dialogue with you... as long as I can remember myself in Ireland. Probably I have started doing it when children were born. Maybe it was a way of coping with your absence in my life... Or maybe it started, when I told myself to stop missing you... and my sister... and my home... and my culture... when I committed a cultural suicide...

To be granted an extension for the masters, I had to clear my debt for the last year... which means I had to borrow more money... Because I was not employed full time I couldn't get a loan... I had to ask you and my friends for help... again...

I don't know why I do it to myself... I am in debts up to my ears... This time I had to collect a string by a string from the whole world - 3 муря по нитці - бідному сорочка – Many a little makes a mickle... There were so many of my Friends ready to help... to tears... to know that I am blessed to have such a supportive people in my life...

But, you know, Mum, what I am thinking about... You have refused to pay in a brown envelop to get a place in college... It was, probably, your protest against corruption, maybe, even a protest against societal oppression... But I... I didn't... I mean, I didn't have to pay anyone in an envelope... I had to pay a huge amount to the university for the education... the amount I couldn't afford... But I still did it... Twice... Why? ... Is it because I wanted to find my place in the society I live in, – through education... I couldn't find a job with my first degree; I didn't see a progress moving forward... Or, is it because I had lost 6 years of my life in direct provision,

and I am rushing to catch up with the time... yes, I know, I keep saying that... but this is how I feel... I have been robbed of time to build my future!... Or, is it because I have jumped on the train of meritocracy, and feel, that I must go further; I must progress; I must achieve; I must succeed... because if not, – I am a failure... Maybe I can't withstand the pressure of society to be "a someone" as opposed to "nobody" ... Or, maybe, I am just hooked on Education... maybe, I am addicted to learning... Maybe, a university is a place, where I can exercise my freedom of thought and my critical thinking...It is a place, where I don't feel judged for my accent... where I feel accepted for who I am... where my culture is respected... where my life story is valued... where I can exercise freedom... Or, do I full myself by borrowing money and consciously making myself un-free from debts in order to pay for being in the space of freedom... Darn!!! This is very... depressing... disempowering... But... I don't smoke, don't drink, don't go out, don't go to beauty salons, don't buy expensive clothes, don't buy takeaways, don't do many things that require a lot of spending... Don't get me wrong, I am not judging anyone, who does. Everyone is free to make their own choices. But I don't want to be judged for the choices I make...

Last year at the end of the MA we had evaluation. All the participants had to say one word to summarise the experience of the course. My word was – humanity. Everything, what I associate with this word, what it encompasses for me, I have experienced on the course: understanding, support, acceptance, care, kindness, compassion, consideration, respect, tolerance, dignity, solidarity, freedom...

The lecturers who have worked on the course are real humanists. They trust in their students' abilities of learning. They are learning with us... They believe in our capabilities of changing the world! They use education as a humanising process, and not as a tool of oppression... They are united with us in our struggles, in solidarity... This is the way I want to be as an Educator, as a Facilitator and as a Human... I am on the journey, Mamusya...

Thank you for reading my life!

Miss you immensely...

Till the next time...

Your Daughter

Chapter 2. Research Methodology and Ethical Concerns

Let me tell you what I wish I'd known
When I was young and dreamed of glory
You have no control
Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?

...

I put myself back in the narrative

...

I stop wasting time on tears

...

Will they tell your story?

Time...

Who lives, who dies. Who tells your story?

Time...

Will they tell your story?

Time...

Who lives, who dies

Who tells your story?

(Miranda & McCarter, 2016, p. 280)

This chapter will reflect the research paradigm that informed the study. It will elaborate on the research methodology naming ontological and epistemological stances of the researcher. The chapter will also rationalise the form of the epistolary autoethnography method created to give a reflexive account on the researchers' personal experience and to elicit an evocative life story by placing the researcher at the heart of the research. This chapter will also describe on the process of writing the letter, coding and analysing the data as well as elaborate on the ethical concerns that are intertwined with the subjectivity.

Ontology and Epistemology

Many years ago, when I delved into the critical analysis of Ukrainian literary texts as part of my Philological studies, the life stories of resistance and struggles of women-writers fascinated and inspired me, and stayed with me throughout my life, emerging in memories and, maybe, in some way, influencing the choices and sacrifices I have made for myself and for others. Their writings were full of pain and struggle, their steps were scrutinised, their lives were way too short due to the complexity of politics that produced the oppressive structures.

“The personal is always political” phrase was coined in the second wave of feminism Rampton (2018) suggests. Now this short sentence makes a lot more sense to me, who has a lived experience of how political decisions and societal structures impact life of a person. I have not really questioned what my position in society was and what impact the way society is constructed had on me or others until I found myself in the Direct Provision System (DPS) in Ireland. It is not that I did not have a political opinion until then – because as a woman I had faced a variety of injustices in patriarchal society; it is more likely that I did not have the knowledge or an ability to question what assumptions underpin my position in relation to the world at the time.

The experiences of people are not detached from the context. They are being created in historical context in society that has a political agenda and a power in relation to humanity. Having experienced the life in the Direct Provision (DP) I have come to realise that the life experiences are like funnels which squeeze humans into understanding the world in a particular way. They shape who we are, our relation to the world and to those who share the world with us. The life experiences are important ways of knowing and understanding the world. This epistemological stance is congruent with poststructuralist feminism and forms my ontological position in relation to the world. Ryan (1997) indicates, that “feminist poststructuralists recognise identity difference and power differentials” and along with subjectivity, is concerned with “discourse, difference, deconstruction” (p.10).

Feminist analysis illuminate the importance of subjectivities and the complexities of oppression and its impact on personal experiences. I identify with the critical feminism which concerned not only with women and their struggle for equality but with all who experience inequality, discrimination, racism, abuse, subordination, marginalization and structural injustice, whose voices are subjugated in male-

dominant societies. These experiences should be viewed and understood in the context of intersectionality, because the concept of life cannot be separated into disjoint strands. Brah & Phoenix (2004) point out that intersectionality signifies the

complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts. (p.76)

Viewing human struggle through the lens of the above concept highlights the impacts of oppression and helps to unearth the roots of injustice across all avenues with the hope to eliminate it at the core. The significance of intersectionality for this research cannot be underestimated, particularly when listening to the stories of the women from all walks of life. Despite this research is giving a personal account of oppression in a particular context, understanding the oppression in intersectionality will help to “elucidate current entanglements with similar problematics” (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p.75).

Another concern of critical feminism is language, politics of naming and the gendered embodiment of meanings. Brown emphasis that words are not innocent; they not simply identify or describe –

...they bring subjects into being”. “They prevent others from being legible or intelligible, or imaginable at all. The words can create, and violate, and eliminate, it can make certain things present or absent, normal or deviant. (Brown, 2019)

Naming is never innocent and never free of power. It entails a political act of stipulating, regulating, categorizing, othering and, consequently, – excluding, – as with the social construct of an asylum seeker. Segregated, in the hostels on the outskirts of society, asylum seekers have a very little opportunity to integrate into Irish society and remain in the hegemonised position on its margins. Their voices are “subjugated and marginalised” (Murray, 2018) in purposely unjust situation.

The discourses in the Western World on the topic of asylum seekers, refugees and migration in general are being used in feeding into the hatred and the Far-Right agenda. An observation of the narratives on social media and in public spaces from the same standpoint are deeply concerning with the rise of similar discourses in the country that I call now home (Ceannabháin, 2018; Kenny, 2019; Kinsella, 2019; Kirk, 2019).

Pitsoe and Letseka (2012) define discourse as a social construct which can only be created through communication and power. There is no discourse without power and communication. Foucault (1980) sees production of power only through certain discourses of truth – “we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth” (p.94). It is important to understand who the truth belongs to, who creates the truth and for what purpose. If it is the truth of those in power, it will be used to generate wealth and extend the existing power. If society accepts the truth without discourses, it accepts the power over itself. He emphasises, that discourses are important to determine the understanding of the truth. Pitsoe & Letseka (2012) assert that “discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, and with what authority. They embody meaning and social relationships” (p. 24).

I believe, it is important to communicate the truth of those whose voices are not loud enough. I am going to achieve this through my own reflection on experiencing injustice in the DPS in Ireland with the hope to break the culture of silencing voices of the asylum seekers. Foucault suggests – “we must speak the truth” (p.96) as it is vitally important for marginalized and socially excluded groups and for society as a whole to exercise democracy. Experience becomes a site of meaning and truth and constitutes the politics of representation (Denzin, 2009).

As a feminist, I hope that my story – of a woman an ex-asylum seeker – may enter the realm of discourses to stand off against the system that enforces an unjust treatment, and to inspire other women to share their stories.

We all have a choice “not only about how we perceive reality, but also how we create reality” (hooks, 2010, p.52). By telling our stories we can move the story from being an instrument of power to the realm of creating a power and becoming “a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposition strategy” (Pitsoe, Letseka, p.25). We can create “a feminist theory, a feminist practice, a revolutionary feminist movement that can speak directly to the pain” ... and offer women “healing words, healing strategies, healing theory” (hooks, 2010, p.75). So, it is vitally important, “who tells your story” (Miranda & McCarter, 2016, p.280) in an attempt to reshape the world.

The named above ontological stance and epistemological perspectives are in the heart of this research.

Coming to the research

When thinking of the ways of approaching the research, my initial plan was to work with fellow women asylum seekers who currently live in the DPS. I emphasise word fellow, because, even though I am not anymore in the DPS, I am involved with Asylum Seekers Support Group (ASSG) since I had arrived at the DP centre and for the past seven years after leaving the DP – thirteen years in total. While in the DP, the multiple identities that I felt connected with, such as a woman, a wife, a mother, a teacher, a Ukrainian were overpowered by the one identity constructed by the system of the DP – an asylum seeker. When leaving the DP, I have decided not to distance myself from the experience, that has affected lives of many, including mine: I decided to hold on to the identity of an asylum seeker. As at this moment in time as I am almost seven years out of the DPS, I choose to call myself an Ex-Asylum Seeker.

So, I was thinking of working with women in the DP centres and wanted to use the Training for Transformation approach (Hope & Timmel, 2014) and psycho-social approach used by Partners Training for Transformation (Partners TFT) (Sheehy, 2001; Sheehy, Naughton & O'Regan, 2007) for us to share our experiences. Such a research would have given an opportunity for us to create a shared knowledge on effects of the DPS with the hope that together we were able to make sense of our experiences. While preplanning the process for the research I had taken to account of the ethics of recruitment, implications of the research for the participants, coding and managing “identifiable markers” (Fitzsimons, 2017). Considering my involvement with the ASSG and representation of the group with the local Public Participation Network (PPN) and local Integration Network (IN); being viewed as someone who has access to an information and ultimately – power – it had created a discomfort for me as a researcher and as human being. Thinking of managing power dimensions with vulnerable participants made me feel vulnerable myself. I have also realised, that given the lengths of time I am outside of the Direct Provision, I can be no longer viewed as one of those who live in the DP – I will more likely be viewed as an outsider, the “other” (Agyeman, 2008).

As an asylum seeker I had participated in research many times. After a number of interviews over the years I felt disempowered, presumably, because I was hoping that the research will be able to change something for me, but, obviously, it was not the case. What I felt during the interviews, was, merely, a pity for me and fellow

asylum seekers for the experiences, the conditions and the contexts we were in. It has never gone further. Taking this to consideration I did not want to carry a research which might have been an egoistic act of “self-serving” (Reid and Curry, 2019) for obtaining a degree and not giving back to the participants as such.

After exploring different possibilities, I had realised, that before I can do research with others, it would be as important to understand my own experience of living in the DP and the feelings of ambivalence that I have in relation to this experience. Reflecting on the above, “I made a choice to abandon the writing of ethnography of other women. I choose instead to set out again to know myself as a woman, as a writer” (Denzin, 2014a, p. 6) – and to make a meaning of my own experience: to reflect critically on significant events of my life connected with the Direct Provision which stayed in my memory and affected me the most; to understand how these events have influenced my world view and my ways of knowing – my ontological and epistemological perspectives; to name my world. In the society where I felt oppressed and overpowered I made a decision to find my voice and to make an attempt to reshape the world by telling my story.

Story of the Story-ing

bell hooks (2010) suggested, that the “*stories are the way of knowing*” (p.53). She shares her stories in the class and encourages her students to share theirs. Stories helped her to write feminist theory which could be read “across the boundaries of race, gender, class and educational levels” (p.51). Stories also became for her a way of healing and liberating as she “was taking the broken pieces of psyche and putting them together again, creating in the process new and different stories – liberating tales” (hooks, 2010, p.51).

As an adult educator and through my involvement in local groups and networks I had an opportunity to share my story of living in the DP. It was a fragmented storytelling embedded in the process of facilitating learning with Youth and Community groups and with learning communities in Adult and Higher Education. Storytelling helped me to feel vulnerable and empowered at the same time. Vulnerable – because every time I share my story, I am giving a little bit of myself to the world and it is out of my will what is going to happen with the story I told. Empowered – because more

people could learn about the Direct Provision System and change their understanding and perception about the asylum seekers.

For the purpose of the research, if I were to make meaning of my own experience, the creating of the story had to have a deep reflective element. The method choice or rather invention happened instantly when I posed a question to myself: if I were to give an account of my experience of living in the Direct Provision to a person with whom I could be as honest as with myself, who would I tell the story to? The immediate response in my head was: I am going to tell the story to my mother. I am going to write her letters!

Мамо моя, Мамо моя, Голубко Сива

My Mother, my Mother, a White-Haired Dove...

When born, you instinctively want your mother to be there for you all your life. You hold her hand and not going to let it go until you are ready. Mother is the most important person for a child, but the significance of her role for a family, for community and for society cannot be overestimated or overappreciated.

Piotrowska (2014) suggests, that motherhood should be perceived way broadly than just giving a birth to a child: “it is the task for a woman to introduce new generations to the world, both in the physical, mental and in the spiritual sense” (p.391).

All my life I had a very close relationship with my mother. “The mother-daughter bond is one the earliest, and often the most profound female-female bond for many women” (Brennan, 2008, p.18) – which certainly was the case for me. Partly, because I was brought up observing the bond my mother had with her mother – my grandmother, and, partly, because in our relationship I have always felt valued and respected, despite all of the expectations my mother had of me as a daughter.

I had left home for the first time to live on my own when I was eighteen moving to student accommodation in Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University back in Ukraine for 5 years of studies. One year after finishing studies I fled my home-country for political reasons. Since then I did not see my mother until I met her for the first time in 11 years – in 2014.

According to Brennan (2008, p.2) I had left home-country during the period of life termed by Arnett (2000) as “*emerging adulthood*”, which represents “a distinct period of development that is neither adolescence nor young adulthood”. She suggests that during this time emergent adults are not constrained by traditional roles and expectations and are exploring ideas of independence and life directions. According to Arnett (2004), five main features of *emerging adulthood* include: “identity exploration, instability, self-focus, an age of possibilities, and an age of feeling-in-between” (in Brennan, p.15).

Hammer (1975) and Fischer (1981) (in Brennan, 2008, p.24) reported that the mother-daughter relationship is being renegotiated as the daughter’s role changes from daughter to mother as it gives an increased understanding of her mother, which I can identify with. As this period being characterised by increased contact and mutual support of daughter and mother, due to being almost three and half thousand kilometres away from my mother and having a very little contact with her over the phone or social media, I was deprived of the important process of renegotiation of our relationship as well as learning to be a mother from my mother. I think, the significance of the mother being near daughter-who-became-a-mother during the most challenging first months of accepting the new identity of a mother should be named as one of the most important points for mother-daughter connection. Even though my husband was beside supporting me every step of the way, I dreaded not having my mother to guide me and support me at the beginning of my journey of being a mother. As well as that I was deprived of myriad of feeling and emotions which a daughter can experience with her mother during this period of life, namely: warmth, time together, nurturance, possessiveness, anger and so forth (Brennan, 2008, p. 49), but also love and care. As I can recall that around the time of becoming a mother I started having an internal dialogue with my mother – in my head – as to cope for her absence in my life:

I have come to realise, that I always had this internal dialogue with you... as long as I can remember myself in Ireland. Probably I have started doing it when children were born. Maybe it was a way of coping with your absence in my life... Or maybe it started, when I told myself to stop missing you... and my sister... and my home... and my culture... when I committed a cultural suicide... (Letter “Education Path”)

The mother-daughter relationship becomes a central point for the women of “*young adulthood*” which Arnett (2000) suggests occurs during thirties – forties years of life. Brennan (2008, p.56) emphasizes that for women in particular relational needs are primary at all stages, including during emergent and young adulthood, because a greater emphasis is placed on the role of relationships in development. I would argue against the linear understanding of stages tied to the years. I believe, that the stages can occur earlier depending on personal experience of life for each woman. I think, that life experiences are more complex and have greater impact on the women’s development and maturity. The research that has been carried in this instance assumes that daughters and mothers are close to each other in the sense of distance. Yet, in my case, I was close to my mother in the sense of relationship, but the physical distance and the lack of communication did not allow for our relationship to be explored and developed to the extent as, for example, in my sister’s case, who has developed and remained in a very close relationship with our mother.

During the last few years when I was able to invite my mother to visit my family and I in Ireland, I had noticed that even though we are close, there is so much that remains unsaid and not understood between us. The distance, that remained between us during the past sixteen years; both of us living in different cultural and economically different spaces; six years of living in Direct Provision, which prevented me from moving on with my life or doing things which are expected of me by the society in both, Ireland and Ukraine: having a stable job, buying a house, going regularly on holiday and so forth – all of these factors had an impact on our understanding of each other. The dissimilarities in our perceptions of life, our acceptance and tolerance of differences, our frames of references and our world views have prompted me to address my story to my mother. Furthermore, as I stated above, at the time of approaching a possible research with the women in Direct Provision the ethical questions brought feelings of ambivalence in relation to my own experience of the Direct Provision and as to what I shall do with those feelings. Brennan emphasizes, that during the times of ambivalence “daughters have an opportunity for further exploration leading to greater understanding of herself and of her mother” (Brennan, 2008, p.58).

The self-in-relation theorists (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, and Surrey, 1991 in Brennan, 2008, p.56) describe the mother-daughter relationship as a model that

forms the daughter's evolving relational self, the foundation for a positive mode of development. They believe that a key element of the mutual mother-daughter relationship is to maintain connection. Again, referring to my case, I would hardly name a rear short phone call as a big influence on relationship and connection with my mother while living in the Direct Provision centre. Yet, I cannot agree more with Brennan's conclusion that

the nonlinear process of psychic integration of the mother-daughter bond is never complete as women process their ambivalence and continually re-examine and resynthesize representations of their mothers throughout their lives. (Brennan, 2008, p.58)

This claim is contributing greatly to making sense as why I have decided to tell my story of living in the Direct Provision System to my mother. Re-examining and resynthesizing representation of my mother in my life and to make a meaning of her absence in my life is as equally important to me as to make meaning of the experience of living in the DP.

Epistolary Autoethnography. Situating the Method

When reflecting on the letter-writing method and overall approach employed to the research the following concepts come to mind: performative "I" as a storyteller and a sender of the letter – narrative inquiry, life history, autoethnography; memories and reflexivity (reflecting on experience); my mother as an addressee and the wider audience; inquiry into my mother's experience – dialogical and relational narrative inquiry; generative themes – what is said in the letters and what is purposely omitted; language and punctuation; re-living trauma and embodiment of emotions – subjectivity; the social context of the letters and double narrative – effects of the dominant discourse on my life and resistance to the oppression – the personal and the political.

In this chapter I will try to weave them together to place this methodological emergence in the realm of research methods.

To begin with I should clarify that I understand the method employed for this research in the broad scheme of narrative inquiry which is a qualitative research approach that "brings rigor and depth to the understanding human experience" (Kitchen, 2006, p.1). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) pointed out that

Narrative is the study of how human beings make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future. (p. 24)

Personal experiences are in the heart of the narrative research. Dewey (1926) emphasised “an ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance” (p. 169). As well as theorising experience, stories are carrying inquiry into the history and culture where experience is being created, as well as into the societal discourse and the ideology behind it, namely, marrying personal and political as one.

Letter as a memoir storytelling from the first person about own life experience is an autoethnographic activity. Ellis defines autoethnography as a

research, writing and method that connect the autobiographical, and personal to the cultural and social. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection. (Ellis 2004: xix in Denzin, 2009, p.205)

Autoethnography entails emotionally difficult topics of dealing with injustice and emotional accounts of learning and transformation. As a method, autoethnography is “intimate, and to write autoethnography is to partake in an intimate way of being” (Ceisel & Salvo, 2018, p.1).

This form of research “locates the researcher's deeply personal and emotional experiences as topics in a context related to larger social issues (Denzin, 1997, p. 200 in Olesen, 2005, p. 254). Caisel and Salvo (2018) assert that through its philosophical and narrative orientation, autoethnography “rehumanizes the abstract speaking position of the political subject” (p.1).

Autoethnography is included in the paradigm of phenomenological research methods.

Phenomenology is

the study of phenomena as they are experienced through lived experience through consciousness and a methodological approach that addresses the essence of the phenomena. (Green& Thorogood, 2010, p.186)

Despite criticism of narrative research and, especially, autoethnography, which can be seen as “merely solipsistic” (Patai, 1994 in Olesen, 2005, p. 254), biased, self-indulgent and introspective (Atkinson, 1997; Coffey, 1999), self-serving (Campbell, 2017) and “navel-gazing” (Diversi & Moreira,2016, p.190), it is congruent with my

epistemological and ontological positions as asserted in the previous chapter, particularly in relation to its educational value (Webster & Mertova, 2007) – for the subject of the research and for the wider audience.

Epistolary Epistemology

As a literary genre – the epistolary novel – a novel in letters – was strongly associated with femininity, epistolarity and privacy up to nineteen eighties, and personal letters were viewed as an intimate genre that “did not conform to the demands of rational, public discourse” (Kennedy, 2014, p.17). In the recent decades epistolary form has been explored through its historical and cultural value as the letter has travelled into all realms of society - public, private, literary, digital and an academic realm.

According to Etymological Dictionary (“epistolary”, 2019c) a Latin word *epistola* means “a letter”, “a message”. English adjective *epistolary* – “related or belonging to letters” (epistolary, 2019a); “contained in or carried on by letters (“epistolary”, 2019b) – used in the field of literature and research. The data for this research is created using epistolary autoethnographic approach, - namely reflecting on one’s experience through writing letters.

As a researcher I feel an expectation of justifying my choice of writing the letters as the method and how it enhances the field of the research and contributes to the richness of eliciting the data, namely, eliciting the life story.

To justify use of the letter as the approach I could refer to the near death of letter as a genre (Stanley, 2015) in the light of globalisation due to the enhancement of the reach and the compression of time/space in the new communication technologies. Or, I should have stated that the historical importance of the letters should be determined for the research on all aspects of emigration and immigration, namely, documenting history of migration and mobility through migrant letters, the catalysts of mass migration, experiences of migration, motives of emigration, places of settlement, emotions and intimacy in migrant correspondence, the daily lives of migrants as well as their socio-economic adaptation and so forth (Borges, 2016). Or, I should have analysed the use of the letters in interdisciplinary research (Jolly&

Stanley, 2005) as well as in the fields of critical theory, historical analysis and historical linguistic studies, gender studies and psychology to justify my own use of it.

As letters also travelled into the realm of research for education, I should have mentioned the use of the letter for self-reflexive writing as both research subject and method for eliciting experiences of learning and teaching of six grade teachers (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2011). Or, the Knowles' and Cole's sharing of the "dilemmas, frustration, and joys" (1994, p. 27) during the precarious times of transitioning from doctoral students to academics in the letters which they used later as a resource of making meaning of their experiences.

But this is not why I decided to write the letters. The truth is simple – I love writing letters. My fascination with letters goes back to my graduate studies when I was learning Philology in Yurii Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University back in Ukraine. The letters, addressed by prominent writers and poets – women and men – to their loved ones, which encapsulated personal histories and documented experiences of the political contexts of the epoch have inspired communication with my husband. During the last year of studies, I had narrated my learning, my thoughts and dreams to him in the letters. As post office was near the entrance to the university, for a few months I was posting to my husband a letter every single day. Basically, it was a romance on paper which, partly due to my ability of crafting the letters, transitioned into a marriage.

"My letters are too knowing (stuffed epistles)" (Derrida & Bass, 1995); they are vehicles of histories and archives of feelings, thoughts and dreams, and happiness and sadness. I love everything what is connected with the writing of a letter: the choice of a pen and paper – if the letter is handwritten; the smell of coffee made to go with the writing; the *tabula rasa* (Latin clean *blank, slate*) of the paper and the moments when you stop for a minute and stare into nowhere; the moments you spill the words onto a paper, because your thoughts are racing ahead of your handwriting or typing, and the moments of slowing down when taking a time to develop your thoughts. In that moment of slowing down you imagine your addressee reading the letter, reacting to what is said, asking questions to get to know more. That is the moment of questioning and reflecting – and off you go to pour the words onto a paper again.

On Writing, Memory and Reflexivity

There is a fundamental contradiction between the way we feel the story of our “lived experience” (“ переживаний ”, or “perezhivanie”, the feeling of what happens to you) all over and all at once, with every part of our immediate world seemingly connected to every other part, and the way we must segment and parse that world, one word at a time, like lines of a play or moves of a game (Vygotsky, in Kellog, 2014, p.2) Vygotsky advises.

Or word after word, sentence after sentence – like writing a letter. Through conversational tone of the letter I was able to engage with my inner self, with the voice that lives from within all of us. The voice grew stronger with every word making me realise – I am the voice. It seems that oppressive environment of the Direct Provision broke me into separate fragmented pieces where body became just a mechanical apparatus, an automated shell that needed to survive day after day, and my pre-direct-provision brave soul hid in the depth of ruined spirit and flesh. Writing turned into a thread and a needle to sew it back together and changed the flow of thoughts to opposite direction – refluxing oppression from the system through reflexivity and reflection. Writing became a practice of freedom and “a form of resistance” (McCormack, 2019, p.9) to embodied oppression.

Excavating memories and consciously walking into the space of the past set me onto an emotional rollercoaster yet cathartic in every possible way. Only with these emotions came realisation how deeply and badly experience of living in the DPS affected my life.

Letters unapologetically demanded reflexivity. Reflexivity is “a state of mind where one intentionally turns one’s awareness onto the internal and external experiences of the present moment” (“Methods Map - SAGE Research Methods”, 2019). When writing, you present yourself to yourself – just like looking into a mirror: you access your own experience, your knowledge, your being through the process of reflecting – you become aware of what is going on with you, how did you arrive to this point in space and time to become who you are – you are “developing an awareness of self” (Dowling, 2006, p.8). The continuous active process of reflection becomes reflexivity (Finlay, 2002 in Dowling, 2006), and letters as an autoethnographic form of writing are allowing to explore “several layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural, with varying emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethnos), and on self (auto)”. (Ellis and Bochner 2000 in Dowling, 2006, p.8)

I had many what McCormack (2019) calls moment of epiphany while writing the letters. When I did not have access to my laptop, I was recording my thoughts and memories, that I wanted to communicate, on pieces of paper. To my amazement, I kept finding different pieces of paper with almost the same sentences, – almost like I had learnt those sentences by heart. It just reaffirmed me, that there were some important points in my experience, which I really needed to talk about and reflect on. To mind comes Dewey’s famous quote: “We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience”.

Richardson & St. Pierre (2005) asserted, that critical self-reflection “evokes new question about the self and subject” (p.965). Furthermore, when you place yourself as a subject of the research it “can evoke deeper parts of the self, heal wounds, enhance the sense of self — or even alter one’s sense of identity” (p.965). In the process of writing the line between me as a researcher and me as a subject of the research was wiped away.

Writing the letters brought me into a “direct contact with the complex emotions that give life to research experience” (Pithouse-Morgan, Khau, Masinga & van de Ruit, 2012, p.49). When reflection was bringing back memories connected with the theme of a letter, I was allowing myself to explore the deeper meaning of the memories, what they evoke for me and how they relate to me as the subject of the research as well as to the theme.

It is important to note that for the research I had engaged in the intentional process of retrieving memories. This process evoked experiences which, it became apparent to me, were traumatic. I experienced this journey as a physical act of going back into the past. While evoking the memories, I had experienced the pain and the physical embodiment of oppression which I already experienced in and after the DP as I assert in the letters. With the form of the letter came the physical experience of the past.

Stettbacher (1991) explains, that “memories born of experiences compiled in the organism by numerous biological systems” (p.19). He denotes, that there are two types of memories: *phylogenetic* and *ontogenetic*.

Phylogenetic – the memories arising from man’s collective experience; which originated in the relationship between human as a social being and his environment – also affect evolution of our physical system. Ontogenetic – our

individual memories or “autobiographical memories” (deEnda& Geist-Martin, 2018) – “formed by our physical and emotional experiences”. (Stettbacher, 1991, p.20)

Everything that happens to us will be recorded as memories – but not always consciously. Stettbacher (1991) asserts that even when experience transformed into memories they “make up an integral part of our inner knowledge” (p.20). This process involves “constant reconstructing of body and soul” (p.20). The memories of painful or filled with fear events which we unknowingly experienced and our body has recorded unconsciously causes in us “suffering (neurosis/ psychosis/psychosomatic disorders).

Reflexivity also involves mindfulness. It is a very difficult task to manage to be mindful of yourself, when you are intentionally trying to engage with the process of reflecting on your memories (“Methods Map - SAGE Research Methods”, 2019). I was looking for reconciliation with my feelings and some understanding of my experience. Probably, not sharing the letters with my mother was not a helpful thing to do. Nevertheless, the emotions that I have experienced while re-living the memories were also helping me to evaluate the extent of the effect of the particular events on me and how deeply it is still being held by my body. The writing of the letters came with the connection of the body and soul in the way that never before I had experienced. I have distanced myself from my body over the last years –consciously, feeling oppressed by the image of the body society expects me to have. This contributed greatly to the disconnection of experiences and emotions, and from understanding how past experiences impact our bodies. But the emotions of the past that were evoked through memories were transpiring into the body pain. The letter writing brought the raw feelings and made me vulnerable and unable for simple everyday tasks. I have failed to be mindful of myself.

Nevertheless, letters as a self-reflexive method helped me to become a reflective writer, to encapsulate my experience as well as to see the writing not as means to an end, but as a cathartic process of self-healing. At the beginning writing brought me into “disturbing and disorienting place” (McCormack, 2019), yet it became “a resource in processing and managing complex subjectivity” (Romanyshyn, 2012 in McCormack, 2019, p.10), and turned into “a method of self-care” (p.10). It offered me “a way in which we can engage with our emotional and embodied ways of knowing..., allowing nuanced knowing to emerge from felt and intuited processes” (p.10).

Writing helped me to engage in critical reflection on my experience of living in the DPS and to understand how it seamlessly intertwined with my present through the memories. Evoking memories of living in the DPS was an emotionally challenging experience. As the experiences we live are socially constructed in certain contexts during our lives, memories are equally social constructions. Memories are inseparable from reflexivity. They were the glimpses of the past which contributed to underscoring the importance of emotions, weaved them into the present and cleared a way for the future.

Writing became a process of acquisition of knowledge which enabled me to re-connect with my sense of self and created a fertile ground for the deeper meanings of the experiences to emerge through “reading”, understanding and naming the world. In this sense I have tried to write my way out, to free myself of the impact of the oppressive experiences of the colonising structures of the DPS, which has been in many ways a liberating – an emancipatory process.

Evocative Writing

For the letter to become a connecting point with the wider audience I have used my understanding of how I would want a reader to experience it. When reading a narrative, we can connect to the story through similarities or differences of experiences elicited from the narrative or through similarities or differences of feelings, or emotions, that we embody or distance from our own self. In my understanding, I could achieve this through communicating my emotions by describing them, naming them or using punctuation and pausing to emphasise the mood and expression. Furthermore, I wanted to write a story which will prompt the reader to imagine what they read in images which I have tried to “draw” with the words.

The writing which communicates images, meanings and emotions according to Poulos (2017) is a genre of storytelling called *evocative writing*. It is known to be employed by the writers of autoethnography. It

issues forth images in the richest, most textured sense of that word... calls powerful images into the reader’s consciousness..., The images integral to the scenes show people, places or events “imbued with place and time and action”.
(Poulos, 2017, p.2)

Other points that Poulos (2017) signifies as an important part of evocative writing are meaning and feelings. Embracing author's own vulnerability is central to autoethnographic writing for the meaning to arise. Writing about own experience always places author in a vulnerable position because of the critique the author might receive regarding to the writing style. Writing from the position of experience exposing a powerful oppressive system places a writer in even more vulnerable position. Poulos (2017) emphasis, that vulnerable position of the writer helps "to locate the deeper meanings behind and within the writing" (p.3). While reflecting on the living experience the meanings are being unveiled in the letters firstly, to the writer herself, and then – to the readers.

I would also hope that my language has not failed me to communicate the feelings. I believe there is a lot said in the letters for the reader to feel the story with the heart: my joyous and sad moments. I hope, that the feelings that I communicate will invoke and provoke further thinking on the topic of how lives of people are being affected by the Direct Provision System.

Relational Writing

By moving from personal narrative to my mother's narrative I was trying to build a bridge in experiences and to understand how similar or different they are, to make meaning of them in unity.

Relational narrative is being unveiled through memories and assumptions of responses to my story of the silently present listener – my mother.

Relational knowing is a method and a phenomenon of narrative inquiry used to describe relationship as a critical component for making meaning of the storied lives of teachers and students. (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2011, p.137)

Echoing my experience with my mother's experience moves me to a deeper understanding of my own lived experience through the knowing of my mother's storied life. Despite not having responses, I view this relation in the letter as dialogical one. Her presence, of which I am constantly reminding the reader, prompts me for

questioning of my own assumptions and helps me to go deeper into understanding and revealing the meaning. Despite having the control over this “monological” dialogue I allow my thoughts to bring me further – to question and respond to the questions, to refocus the story onto her experience again and to relate it to mine.

Inquiring into my mother’s experience also helps me to understand her better and connect my story with hers. Through this connection, in some way, I am trying to revive our relationship that has been neglected over the years.

There is another side of the relationship with my mother – appreciation of her as a remarkable woman who personifies in my imagination everything what can be good about motherhood. Love and care, that my mother was able to give me during the toughest time of her life as well as her creativity and ability of, literary, surviving the impacts of the political context in the society – during perestroika and economic instability in Ukrainian Republic of USSR – leave me astonished and spark off an endeavour to be alike. Maybe, because of the admiration that I have for my mother’s strengths, through relational narrative I am trying to find some glimpses of me being a little bit more like her than not.

The question whether my mother will read the letters addressed to her is still an open question to me. My mother doesn’t read or understand English, so the letters must be translated first to Ukrainian for her to be able to read them in privacy. I plan on my mother’s next visit to interpret the letters for her with the hope that it will be a significant point in our relationship to be taken into the future.

Language and Punctuation

Before moving to generative themes, I feel it is important to make a short comment on the language of the letters. McCormack (2019, p.10) emphasizes

Language is a rich resource by which we constitute the world and evocative and imaginative writing offers a rich resource of image, symbol, and metaphor by means of which complex subjectivity can be expressed and considered.

Freire (1996) advises, that “*linguistic universe*” of the people and the way they construct their thoughts should be investigated, because thoughts and language are intimately united and is a critical part for understanding a person.

The language as well as punctuation in this research data are very important and connected with subjectivity of the research. Language in consistence with feminist theory is gendered. The language as well as the whole research carries not only meaning and naming of the words but also the culture of the subject of the research. It also communicates the ontological and epistemological positions of the writer at the time of writing. The writing also carries markers of complex aspects of identities I have embodied as a writer: a Woman, a Ukrainian, a Ukrainian Philologist, an Educator, a Non-Native English Speaker. Each of those identities had an influence on the writing of the story.

The imagined receiver of the letters is my mother. In the letters I refer to her as *Mamusya*. In Ukrainian language word *Mother* spelled in Cyrillic *Мама [mama]*. Word *Мамуся [mamusia]* is rather *diminutive, affectionate form*, which is used to communicate the main meaning of the word with a shade of diminution, affection and feelings of closeness. Ukrainian language is characterised by the widespread use of diminutive forms in folklore and in literature as a means of expressing artistic language, but also very frequently used in everyday life, especially in mother tongue to children or children to parents (Hryhorash, 2014). Diminutives are created with the help of suffixes – same as in other languages.

The use of Ukrainian proverbs is intentional in the letters. I think it was a way to reconnect with my culture but also to communicate it to the world. Quite often, when working with intercultural groups, participants come to realise the similarities of proverbs in different languages, which becomes a point of connection and seeing each other more alike than different.

The punctuation in the text of the letters is specific to the communication of me as a Ukrainian Philologist. In some instances where by rules of English Grammar supposed to be no comma, I have used comma intentionally – to stay connected with the accentuation of the words in the sentences specific to communication in Ukrainian language or to emphasis sudden change of thought, mood, or, particularly, to emphasise revelations which emerged during the writing process. Especially, this is relevant to comma-dash punctuation sign which is not common in contemporary English where current tradition is limited to dash only.

The frequent use of ellipses is justified by the trailing of thoughts, suspension, hesitation, change of the mood, indication of pause for thoughts or wavering in production of the narrative.

Exclamation mark is used according to the rules of punctuation in Ukrainian Grammar – name of a person or a Noun in Vocative Case always followed with the exclamation mark in all types of letters.

In the text exclamation mark is also used to express moods such as excitement, anger and revelation.

Generative Themes of the Letters

Where to start? We must find that project, act, event, that gives primary meaning to the person's life, that event the subject seeks to understand the most. This experience gives primary meaning to the person's life. We must discover that event and see how it embeds the person in their historical moment, then we can work back into history. (Sartre, 1963 in Denzin, 2013, p. x)

Freire (1996) asserts that in order to reach *conscientization* people must first investigate their *thematic universe* (p.103) which can be revealed through the *generative themes* – the themes and the issues which affected people's lives and which through reflection “generate energy and hope” (Hope&Timmel, 2014, p.17). The feelings and emotions that accompany the process of their generation play a crucial role for motivation of transforming human world. “Suppressed feeling contribute to a sense of powerlessness and apathy but if we tap into them, people can unearth new life for themselves” (Hope& Timmel, 2014, p.17).

Practically, the themes are elicited in “cultural circles” (Freire, 1996) by engaging in personal reflection through problem posing material. Through dialogue “the issues which the local people speak about with excitement, hope, fear, anxiety or anger” (Hope&Timmel, 1984, p.8) reveal the generative themes. The energy that surround the themes is a lifegiving energy for planning an action for radical change. Thus, generative themes are integral to emancipatory pedagogy.

Garcia S.J (1974) explains that to investigate the generative theme means “to investigate man's thinking about reality and man's action upon reality, which is his praxis” (p.69). Thus, through writing the letters, I have engaged in investigation of my own reality which was constructed by the patriarchal structures of the DPS.

When writing the letters, I was holding in my head a theme or an experience which had a significance or impact on me during and after the DP. But, by doing that, I was

not controlling the story, I rather had let the story flowing in the way as I would express myself orally. McCormack (2015) emphasises, that

if we let go of control and allow our thoughts freedom of expression without pressure to be clear and concise, we can take up a stance of allowing insights and meaning to emerge. (McCormack, 2015, p.216)

His affirmation resonates with what I was trying to achieve – for the meaning to emerge.

The first them that stayed in my memory and still evokes strong feelings was the issue of food provision and prohibition of cooking. The further themes emerged as follows: right to work, discrimination, after the Direct Provision, the women, education path. When compiling this document, I have adhered to the timeline of writing and named the letters according to the themes. The generative themes of the letters are quite explicit and signify particular experiences. The letter about women is quite different as it focuses on the positive experiences rather than negative. It is an ode to the women thanks to whom I was able to keep the sanity in the DPS.

Garcia S.J. (1974) emphasised

Opting for the interpretation that sees themes as linguistic representation of affective and cognitive responses and of the situations which elicit such responses does not mean that themes are entirely subjective. Thought and language exist always in reference to reality. (Garcia S.J, 1974, p.69)

The reality current to the letters is quite explicit and as pointed above are not entirely subjective. The letters tap into the realities and stories of other people and create a dynamic narrative which is in some instance's comparative and relational. Furthermore, the main themes generate myriads of other themes which at times interact with their opposite such as inclusion/exclusion, oppression/ freedom and so forth. The question might be raised why there are no themes which supposedly should be in the story yet are not being mentioned. Without naming those themes I will point out that it is either due to the ethical concern or my readiness to talk about some issues.

Each of the letter is written in its own style and reflects the mood at the time of writing. As I continued to reflect on the impact of the DPS, I came to better understand, identify and position myself in my own story, the narrative discourses and the context of societal landscape where I lived and learned to grow resilient. I started finding my voice and the voice started growing stronger and becoming more critical. Being more

critical in turn helper to elicit other important generative themes and reveal hidden meanings of my experience.

When letters were finished I had moved to the process of coding. Reading the letters for coding has affected me in different ways: it gave me a deeper insight into my experience, yet, provoked an embodiment of emotions in response to the themes that affected me the most.

Coding and Analysis

First analysis of the text happened upon reading the finished letters. Connolly emphasises that

feminist analyses of subjectivity encompass a highly complex set of elements, from the outside social norms and values, to the internalised imperatives, both conscious and unconscious. (Connolly, 2013, p.15)

She goes on to point out that “subjective data and analyses can capture complex elements and provide a meaningful account of the experience” (p.14).

Reading and rereading, coding and recoding, cutting and pasting, and colouring the data has revealed the themes, which will be discussed in the chapter Analysis.

Phenomenological study as the study and description of lived experience (Lieblich & Josselson, 1999) which is viewed as contextual, subjectively interpreted and complex in nature, entails searching for “all possible interpretations and permutations emerging from the data” (p. 56) through meaning units and imaginative variations.

It seems that analysis that have been carried for this research intuitively, fit into the description of what Denzin (2009) termed *interpretive interactionism* (p.108) where research begins with “the biography and the self of the researcher” and the events are elicited from personal experience as it is in my case. He points out that “the task is to produce “richly detailed” inscriptions and accounts of such experiences” (Denzin, 2009, p.109) as is it evident in the letters. Denzin explains that the focus of research is on “those life experiences (epiphanies) that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their life projects” (Denzin, 2009, p.109). On the contrary to the moments of crisis that elicited during the analysis in the Denzin’s account of interpretive interactionism, in this research the focus as driven to the moments of transformation through education and learning.

However, just as in Denzin's description of the analysis the subjective experience is situated within a given historical moment- life in and after the Direct Provision System. The interpretive process is congruent with Sartre's progressive-regressive method of analysis:

Progressively, the method looks forward to the conclusion of a set of acts or experiences undertaken by the subject. Regressively, the method works back in time to the historical, gender, class, race, cultural, biographical, and emotional conditions that moved the subject forward into the experience that is being studied. (Denzin, 2009, p.109)

The letters as contextualised material which is historical, relational and processual. Interpretive materials illuminate a phenomenon of subjective lived experience. Denzin (2009) points out that the stories should be connected to "larger institutional, group, and cultural contexts, including written texts and other systems of Discourse" (p.109). The contexts that are related to this will be explicitly elaborated on at the following chapter.

Through the analysis should be revealed "the competing models of truth and interpretation (rationality and emotionality) that operate in the subject's situations" (Denzin, 2009, p.110) and the stories should be presented to the reader "in the language, feelings, emotions, and actions of the people studied (p.109).

The following chapter will reveal the moral biases and ethical concerns of this research.

Ethical Concerns of Subjectivity

Freire (1996) emphasised, that "one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity; subjectivity and objectivity should be in constant dialectical relationship" (p.32). When approaching this research, I did not know what subjectivity was and what complexities it entails. I had an idea of telling the story of my experience and I was following it intuitively without any preconception. Over the course of the research I have come to realise that researching subjectivity is a complex process. It allows for exploration of deeper meanings, but it is emotionally demanding and hurtful. Pithouse (2008) emphasises, that a researcher committed to self-reflexive research requires

more support than those “adopting a more distant and objectifying stance in social research” (p. 13). My supervisor has raised with me a question of self-care on numerous occasions. An access to counselling services was available in the university but it was my personal choice not to access it.

It is important to highlight that I am familiar with the university’s research policy and should I have worked with other through the research, I would have fully adhered to the ethical concerns outline in the policy.

and intuitive” (p.14).

Confidentiality may have been an issue in this research, but, again, I had a choice to what extent I can share myself with the world.

It was elaborated earlier in this chapter on the challenges of writing the letters. I struggled through the process of writing letters as it was a process of walking back and re-living the past again, but “the pages of the letters” became my own counselling. I trusted myself, and I knew that if I want to, I can stop writing the data at any stage. Subjectivity had offered me to own my decisions. Writing the letters was also a self-healing process. I have definitely grown stronger through this experience. It is safe to say that this research was unethical towards myself as a subject of the research, but it was my personal choice to transgress through this experience. The possibility to find my voice and my creative power through the course of this research cannot be underestimated.

While writing the letters, I have been engaging in mindfulness and wellbeing activities: scrapbooking, mixed media and painting have allowed me to *express a world* (Levine, 2011, p. 26) that at times was falling apart. Working with creative mediums offered me a space for healing.

Subjectivity is being blamed for bias and writers equate masculinity with objectivity and femininity with subjectivity in qualitative research. Denzin (2009) points out that all qualitative texts are biased as they are “reflecting the play of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and culture, suggesting that so-called objective interpretations are impossible” (p.507).

For the process of objectively analysing the data I had situated myself into an objective position of the researcher to “suspend my subjectivity”, and “assumed the attitude of a disinterested observer” (Scott & Usher, 1996, p.21). It is not that purpose of subjectivity is to “produce of a psychology which has been made ‘public’ through honest introspection but rather it is the effect of sociality and the inscription of self in

social practices, language and discourses which constitute the research process” (Scott & Usher, 1996, p.154).

Connolly (2013) asserts, that “subjectivity is holistic, imaginative and multi-faceted, including the rational and logical with the emotional and intuitive” (p.15) and I totally in agreement with this assertion. It is important “to develop an understanding of subjectivity as a powerful aspect of the human condition, rather than an inadequate, deficient opposite of objectivity” (Connolly, 2013, p.15).

Chapter 3. Setting the Context

“The direct provision system was, to labour a metaphor, like a wolf that cut asylum seekers away from the pack, away from a solidarity of shared welfare rights and entitlements with citizens”

(Fanning, 2009, p.68)

It is important to explain a political context of this research – what Direct Provision System (DPS) is and what policies are constructing the system, so to help a reader gaining an understanding of the experiences elicited above. Herman & Vervaeck (2005) emphasised, that narrative text always functions in context, and, therefore, context is a very important ingredient of narrative as it is “always has to do with ideology” (p.8).

Asylum Seeking Process

The process of seeking asylum begins when a person makes an application and submits documentation in order to be recognised as a refugee. The requirements are outlined in the 1951 UN convention relating to the status *refugee* to which asylum seekers must fulfil. In plain English, a refugee is anyone who cannot return to their country due to well found fear of persecution for one of the following five reasons:

1. Race – including ethnicity
2. Religion – in some countries having no religion is viewed as badly as being of the ‘wrong’ religion
3. Nationality
4. Membership of a particular social group – it can include membership of a trade union, your gender (female, male, LGBTQIA+) and your sexual orientation

5. Political opinion – a member of a political party, political opinion or suspected to have a political opinion.

("Irish Refugee Council | Useful Definitions", 2019)

There is a great confusion in the society in understanding the difference between refugee and asylum seeker. The simple way to understand the difference is that an asylum seeker is seeking international protection outside of their country of origin but hasn't yet been recognized as a refugee. Asylum seeker is in the process of being recognised as a refugee. Refugees are entitled to be protected against forcible return to their countries of origin. If asylum seeker is not recognised as a refugee, they can be forcibly removed to their home country through deportation.

The legislative framework which overlooks the process is The Refugee Act 1996. It was amended in 1999, 200 and 2003. The Office of Refugee Application Commissioner (ORAC) was established as a statutory independent body that considers asylum applications at first instance while The Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) was established in 2000 to hear appeals of unsuccessful asylum decisions. The changes to the legislation occurred in 2015 seeing the International Protection Act 2015 simplifying the process of international protection by simultaneous application for subsidiary and humanitarian protection, unlike previously, when the humanitarian was following the subsidiary and could be done years apart. The most recent changes were welcomed with the European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018 which said to bring positive changes for asylum seekers (Thornton, 2019) in general apart from betterment of the regulations and the conditions of DP centres (European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018, 2018).

The Direct Provision System

Direct Provision system and dispersal resettlement were introduced first at the end of November 1999. "The system was created out of a crisis due to the sharp increase in the numbers of people seeking asylum" (Irish Refugee Council, 2013). It was introduced on a pilot basis and meant to deal as an emergency measure – "as an "interim" system which would provide accommodation for a six-month period" (Pollak, 2018). It became an official Government policy on 10th of April 2000.

The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) was set up in April 2001 and is a functional unit of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), a division of the Department of Justice and Equality which is *“providing accommodation and ancillary services to asylum seekers under the Direct Provision system”* ("Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) Ireland: Background", 2019).

Direct Provision is a means of meeting the basic needs of food and shelter for asylum seekers directly while their claims for refugee status are being processed rather than through full cash payments. ("Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) Ireland: Direct Provision", 2019)

While residing in DP centre, asylum seekers are expected to abide to House Rules and Procedures (RIA, House Rules and Procedures, 2015).

Dispersal resettlement is a very disempowering process, because you don't have a will over where you will be placed to live and who will be your neighbor. "Dispersal means that asylum seekers have no say where they live, making the formation of networks of family and friends near impossible" (Lentin & McVeigh, 2006, p.46). What even worst, once you have made a connection with the place you have been sent to, at any stage of the process you can be moved to another DP centre. It happens mostly as a way responding to breaking house rules assigned by RIA or as a coercion to voicing your grievances about the conditions of living and so forth.

DP centres are old hotels or hostels turned into the accommodation centres:

majority of the portfolio comprises buildings which had a different initial purpose i.e. former hotels, guesthouses (B&B), hostels, former convents / nursing homes, a holiday camp and a mobile home site. (Monthly Report October 2018, 2018, p.11)

The accommodation centres operate as a result of a commercial arrangement between the RIA and the accommodation centre owners. As last available report stated (Monthly Report October 2018, 2018), there were total of 37 centres and 5 temporary accommodation quarters dispersed around Ireland in 2018 with the contracted capacity of 5,848 places.

The hostility towards asylum seekers followed with fire-bombing of the hotels contracted by RIA in Rooskey, Roscommon, and Moville, Donegal, as well as the resent increase in numbers of the international protection applications have seen asylum seekers moved to a temporary emergency accommodation centres – rooms in hotels which are privately procured by a third-party company on nightly basis. This

arrangement led to the situations when 124 asylum seekers had to pack their belongings and move to another hotel for a night due to wedding functions.

There also are many people in the DP centres who were granted their refugee or leave to remain status but are not able to move out of the accommodations into the community due to the lack of housing and extremely high prices for rent. Around 10% of people in direct provision, as pointed out by the Department of Justice, “have been unable to leave the centres, even though they have been granted permission to remain in Ireland” (Ní Bhroin, 2019).

Being absent from designated DP centre for more than 3 consecutive nights will deem a bed space of an asylum seeker abandoned and may result in being expelled from the system.

Currently there are 6,355 people in DP centers around Ireland according to the latest figures from the Department of Justice (Ní Bhroin, 2019 yet the latest report available from RIA (Monthly Report October 2018, 2018) is from October 2018.

Over the years, when working with various groups in diverse educational settings I have regularly accessed the monthly reports of RIA to frame the situation in terms of how the system is structured and how the structure impacts personal lives of asylum seekers. The reports are very comprehensive and give an exhaustive information on applicants who applied for an international protection: age and gender profiles, family status, countries of origin, breakdown by nationalities and continents, and on those who were deported – sometimes, after spending many years in DPS.

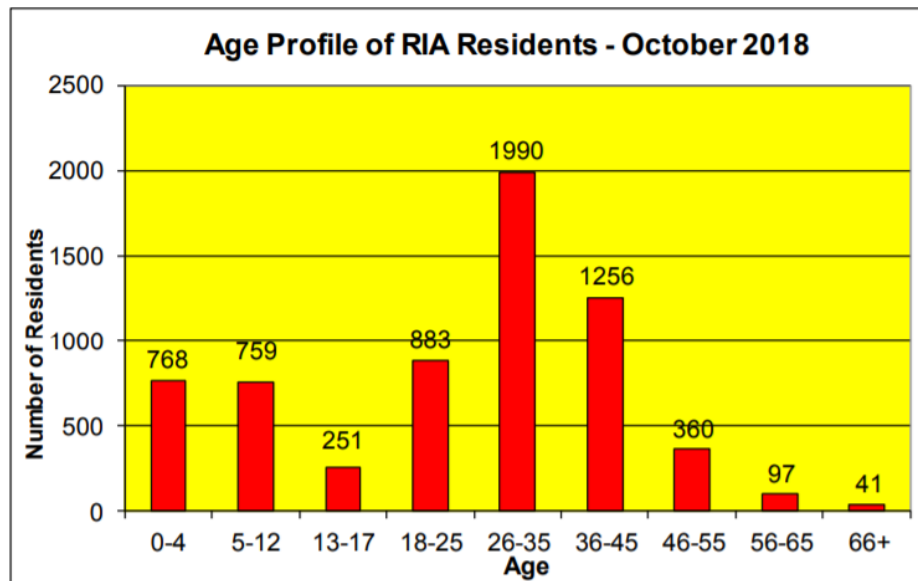
The images below (Image1; Image 2) show some tables in the RIA reports.

The figures above are taken from the AISIP database

Length of Time of RIA Residents in Asylum Process (Based on Initial Asylum Application) IN MONTHS											
0>3	3>6	6>9	9>12	12>18	18>24	24>36	36>48	48>60	60>72	72>84	84+
761	445	514	613	527	510	1036	796	285	126	80	272
12.8%	7.5%	8.6%	10.3%	8.8%	8.5%	17.4%	13.3%	4.8%	2.1%	1.3%	4.6%
Mean Length of Time: 27 Months, Median Length of Time: 21 Months											

Image 1

Age Profile of Residents in Direct Provision



The figures for the above profile are taken from the AISIP database. For the above profile there were 6,405 persons "live on system".

Image 2

I understand, that statistics are aimed to deal with numbers. Numbers are good for planning and prognosing an expenditure, understanding the bigger picture, reflecting a crisis if it exists and so forth; pies and charts can accommodate historical comprehension and comparing in a concise form. What numbers are not good for is to portray the experiences of the people behind the numbers. They are no good to show how a mother, who has spent more than 5 years in Direct Provision in refusing to take antidepressants, even though she is being offered them on every visit to GP. She would rather stay sane in her insanity but to be present in her own mind for her children. Numbers are no good to show how a father of the family struggles without having right to work and with inability to connect with his identity of a father – as fathers meant to provide for their children. Numbers are not good to show how a young girl is graduating from school and has no way to access further education because grants are not available for her as an asylum seeker. The numbers are good though to show that centers are full above the capacity but would you realise by looking at the numbers that four adults are packed into a tiny room as the beds are too close to each other to create any private space. The numbers on the first chart above show the time asylum seekers have spent in Direct Provision to date. 272 people have spent in the system

more than 84 month which is equal to 7 years. I welcome a reader to reflect on your own life. How your life has changed in the last 7 years? How 7 years can be experienced without a right to education, right to work and ultimately to reach self-actualization?

The second table shows age profile of the asylum seekers: 1778 children and 4627 adults are waiting for the decisions to be made on their cases. In their formative years children do not have privacy, sharing rooms with their whole families; they do not have a space to invite a friend over, because the rules of the accommodations do not allow bringing a friend to their rooms. These and many other limitations the system entails are preventing asylum seekers from exercising the human rights and strip them of dignity.

Socio-Economic Rights of Asylum Seekers

Although considered legally residents in the country, asylum seekers have little rights and entitlements until a decision is made on their case either to be declared as a refugee or to remain in the country for humanitarian or other compelling reasons, which grants to the person most of the rights assigned to a citizen of the country.

“The general principle of equality and non-discrimination is a fundamental element of International Human Rights law” (Human Rights, 2019), however “differences of treatment in the enjoyment of socio-economic rights may be justified where these differences are *reasonable, objective and proportionate*” (Thornton, 2014) The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states. Why there is scope for making a difference in socio-economic rights of those who need to exercise their human rights the most at the time of great loss and fleeing for their lives – this question is yet to be answered in the European and International Courts, I believe. The European Convention of Human Rights obligation should be relevant to all people. Purposely structured poverty for asylum seekers and prolonged time in DPS has a debilitating effect on people’s health and ability to progress with their lives after the DP.

Right to Work

The EU Reception Directive (“Reception Conditions”, 2019) has brought evident changes, which give hope to the asylum seekers. But the scope of those changes is very small. Right to work was obtained in June 2018 and considered as one of the best frameworks among European systems (Thornton, 2019). 2600 asylum seekers have received permission to work to date. Another 1239 were refused the right to work – the reasons are not specified, but it is said that large number of people who applied are caught in the law irregularities, such is waiting to be transferred to another EU country or applied after the first instance decision. Those awaiting decision more than 9 months prior to 2018 regulations implementation are not allowed to work.

The permission lasts for 6 months and accessible only to those who are waiting for first instance decision on their application to be declared as a refugee. The permission is very costly – 500 euro per application – which is very questionable knowing that a lot of asylum seekers might not be able to afford such a payment. I believe, it puts people into a great debt from their families or friends if not highly profitable personal loan companies.

There is certainly an important win, that have influenced the change of access to the job market for asylum seekers in Ireland, yet to apply for the permit an asylum seeker must have a concrete job offered before accessing employment as well as maybe only employed in certain sectors. Also, there is a charge for accommodation to those who obtained permission to work which depends on the level of income. (Information Booklet Labour Market Access for International Protection Applicants, 2018).

Health

Asylum seekers in Ireland unlike in other EU countries are eligible to a medical card through HSE (“Medical services and entitlements for asylum seekers”, 2019) which grants access to General Practitioner (GP) services, hospital in-patient and out-patient services based on public patient list, women’s health services, limited dental treatment to adults, hearing tests and hearing aids, optical test and glasses,

prescriptions and medicines (with some exceptions) and psychological services. It would be important to notice, that eligibility for medical card for many years was a subject for approval only to those asylum seekers who are in DPS. Those who opted out of the system but remained in the process seeking asylum quite often were deemed ineligible to medical card.

The mental health issues that asylum seekers experience due to various reasons, including the most evident one – the impact of living in DPS – should be investigated. Thornton (2019) points out that during 2015-2016 the state had spent 6,7 million euro on antidepressants for asylum seekers, emphasising “dragged up asylum seekers make compliant asylum seekers”.

Direct Provision Payments

Current rate of support for those in DPS is €38.80 per adult and €29.80 for a child ("Irish Refugee Council | Increase in Direct Provision allowance", 2018). In the context of the letters, adults in the system used to receive €19.10 per week, and children – €9.60. I use numbers here purposely as these sums are going to look differently in word, and I want the reader to picture living for this money. These sums, according to Thornton (2019), purposely remained the same for 16 years and were objected by the Department of Justice and Equality despite the proposal of many year by the Department of Social Protection to increase the payment. The reason for the objection was to deflect the income of the asylum-seeking applications to the country, which has caused an immense deliberate hardship to those who remained in the system for many years.

Other payments were available during the time reflected in the letters to support living in DPS such as €150 per adult and €75 per child twice a year clothes allowance; an extra back to school allowance to school-going children depending on the age assigned by the Department of Social Protection; €90 for 2 months for nappies; €150 maternity payment 6 weeks prior to due date; buggy/ pram expenses – if remembered correctly €200 in my case.

Education

Primary and Post-primary education is free to all children and young people in the process of seeking international protection. Preschools are free during the Early Childhood and Education Scheme (ECCE, 2019).

Access to Further and Higher education shows a different narrative. Asylum Seekers are not entitled to free third level education. The exception exists for those, who have been in the DPS for 3 years and have spent at least 3 academic years in Irish School System and obtained Leaving Certificate. The scheme is being reviewed on yearly bases. The progress is evident here, as in 2016 primary criteria for eligibility was 5 years spent in DPS and in Irish School System, with an Irish Leaving Certificate ("Ministers announce Student Support Scheme for Asylum Seekers to continue for coming year", 2019).

Adult asylum seekers have free access to an adult literacy and English language classes, but the access is varied in different counties.

There is also an ambiguity in access to Further Education courses above Level 4 of National Framework of Qualifications (Understanding the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), 2019). Some Educational Training Boards (ETB) around Ireland allow access to Level 5 courses, and some do not allow. Recently, it was emphasised in certain ETBs, that only those asylum seekers who were granted right to work would be eligible for courses above Level 5 and Community Education courses. This is devastating particularly in regard to Community Education courses because these particular courses are truly responding to the needs of the marginalised groups through creative and participatory approaches and allow for rich learning.

Significant work to support educational journeys of asylum seekers and refugees in Higher Education is done by Places of Sanctuary Ireland which work through community groups, schools, higher education institutions, churches, local councils, businesses and other organisations "to ensure that their voices are heard and that their skills and talents are given an opportunity to flourish for their good and for that of Irish society as a whole" (Places of Sanctuary Ireland, 2019). To date Dublin City University, National University of Ireland Galway, Trinity College Dublin, Technological University Dublin, University College Cork, University College Dublin,

University of Limerick as well as Irish Institutes of Technology became Universities of Sanctuary and offer a variety of scholarships to asylum seekers and refugees. Maynooth University Sanctuary Committee for the last year is working to offer various scholarships to welcome asylum seekers and refugees as students of Maynooth University and to join the Places of Sanctuary.

As this research is concerned with the influence of education on my own experience of living in DPS, the access to education and the meaning of it will be investigated further in the Literature Review chapter.

Food

It is important to emphasise that while in DPS as a rule asylum seeker are not allowed to cook their own meals. There are exceptions though in certain centres like Mosney where in some houses or flats ovens are installed. The system provides 3 meals per day during fixed times defined in house rules of each DP centre. The food provision is varied in each centre but the narrative that is being asserted by asylum seekers of different centres over the years is common:

The centres "menu" claimed the centre served a variety of ethnic dishes, but in reality, the residents rarely received anything other than chicken, rice, burgers, steamed vegetables and chips. (McNamara & Meagher, 2012)

"If you miss breakfast, you'll starve until the next meal" (MASI, 2018).

"I am hungry most of the time. I am vegetarian, but they will not cook me food I can eat" (Grayson, 2017).

The research carried by NASC (2014) on food provision and inability to cook reported that the food system in DPS has a negative impact on families and children, on people's health; does not serve personal, cultural and religious needs of the people and overall is not satisfactory.

Currently certain centres install cooking facilities which should be a celebratory time yet become another "a carrot and a stick" for asylum seekers. The kitchen facilities come with a point system which gives a certain number of points per week to an individual or a family: every Monday an adult receives 45 points and a child – 35 points which should be used within 4 weeks of top-up. The points can be spent in the internal shops within the centres to buy baby food or groceries, or to buy meals from the centres' kitchens – 5 points per meal. The price of the baby food is reported to be

highly priced. Also, even simple maths show that 45 points is too little to pay for the weekly meals (Edwards, 2018).

Local Support Groups

Local groups in the locality of the accommodation centres and the advocacy organisations play significant roles in the lives of asylum seekers. Working from person-centred approach and adopting values of equality and inclusiveness, the groups support integration and empowering people in DPS.

Croi na Gaillimhe Migrant and Asylum in Galloway, New Horizon Athlone Refugee and Asylum Seekers Support groups, Newbridge Asylum Seekers Support Group to name a few not only provide information to those in the process of international protection but also allow for eliciting people's grievances as well as experiencing understanding and solidarity of the local people. Usually organised by volunteers, the groups help to settle in the locality and support integration into the local community.

The local Non-Governmental organizations such as Irish Refugee Council, Immigrant Council of Ireland, Nasc, Doras Lumni, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, Mayo Intercultural Action, Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland provide a variety of support services, promote integration and campaign for change and abolishment of DPS, working to promote justice, empowerment, equality and inclusion.

Support of local people, groups and organisations and their work for the betterment, improvements of conditions of DPS highlights the importance of civic society in standing and advocating for the rights of asylum seekers and the change they are able to bring about.

Resisting and Criticising Direct Provision System

Over the nineteen years of existence of DPS the local support groups and NGO's have been on the forefront criticising the system and campaigning for its abolishment. DP centres became homes to thousands of families with children and aged out minors, who are living there for many years while waiting for decisions to be made on their cases. It is worth noting that aged out minors are the unaccompanied

children who turn eighteen while their application for asylum is still pending. Upon becoming adults, they are being moved from the care of the state – their foster care families – into the DPS and become known as an “aged out minor” (“Irish Refugee Council | Useful Definitions”, 2019).

A 2001 report by the Irish Refugee Council (2011, p.11), eighteen months after the introduction of DP, described it as “wholly inadequate”, “inhumane and discriminatory”. Since then the situation has got worse. Asylum applicants who entered the state after 1 May 2004 were no longer entitled to child benefit, thus increasing the risks of child poverty (Fanning, 2009, p.66) among asylum seekers.

The Direct Provision System was criticised and recommended to be abolished for many years (Lentin, Fanning, McVeigh and Veale, Thornton). The DPS has attracted criticism from agencies like European Antipoverty Network Ireland. The system has created isolation and poverty which in turn leads to mental illness and depression. Huge problem of not having access to the labour market for 18 years of system’s existence has led to deskilling of thousands of people, making the a fully dependant on the state welfare:

The explicit exclusion of asylum seekers from integration policies store up social problem for the future. Many people who receive refugee status or leave to remain in Ireland have been de-skilled and have become socially isolated, wasting a potential resource of new skills, ideas and energy which could be available to the Irish economy and society (“Integration of New Communities”, 2007, p,1).

Over the years the reports of harrowing conditions of DP centres have been emerging regularly. Living conditions were unacceptable in the Eyre Powell hotel in 2012 where 80 adults and 30 children were housed at the time: “Presence of cockroaches in the main kitchen, dilapidated furniture in the common areas, unkempt washrooms...The ethnic beliefs were also disregarded”... (McNamara & Meagher, 2012).The issues were resolved once the residents could not bear the conditions anymore and staged a protest involving extensive reports to medias, RIA and the Dail. As a backlash, a number of the protest leaders were dispersed around the country into the remote DP.

The most resent protest in Mosney DP centre arose following hospitalisation of a single mother who was moved from the centre to a hotel in Co Cavan with her three

children. The residents at Mosney were “fearful and reluctant to raise issues they have with management because the minute a person complains, they are moved to another centre” (Thomas, 2019). The protesters called on the Department of Justice and Equality to “treat people with dignity” and to abolish the DPS.

The racism and discrimination that asylum seekers and refugees are experiencing in rural Ireland and the rhetoric of othering most of the time goes unreported. Racism within DP centres adds to the oppressive environment:

In there, time turns against you, you feel ashamed of living in Direct Provision. The racism makes you feel you have no respect in society even amongst other asylum seekers. Other people in the centre suffered racism and abused people like me as a defence mechanism, facing racism by harming good people. (Grayson, 2017)

The extensive reports were carried out by the NGO's on complex issues of parenting in the system (Uchechukwu Ogbu, 2019); the effects of the system on children ("Irish Refugee Council | Irish Refugee Council's report on Children in Direct Provision", 2019); experiences of women (AkiDwA, 2010) and their safety and security in DPS (AkiDwA, 2012); the complex issues of living in limbo ("Lives in Limbo | The Irish Times", 2019). Yet all the recommendations were mostly undermined by the RIA and relevant structures of the Department. As far as in 2005 the Irish Government revealed its rhetoric in relation to DP and dispersal System:

It is not intended to discontinue the system of dispersal and direct provision in relation to asylum seekers which forms a key part of Government policy in relation to the asylum process (CERD, 2005).

The narrative was reiterated by the Minister Ó Ríordáin in 2014 that the system of Direct Provision will remain in place (Hayes, 2014). This rhetoric is still relevant today. There is a hope though that DPS will undergo change, once the Department of Justice and Equality ("Department of Justice to undergo 'radical restructuring'", 2018) will be restructured as Oonagh Buckley, Deputy Secretary for The Department of Justice suggested (Buckley, 2019). This year “140 people and organisations are calling for radical changes to Ireland's direct-provision system” ("Public calling for

radical change to direct provision system", 2019). The report will be published in the next few weeks but whether it will be taken to an account, we have to wait and hope.

It is evident, that the asylum seekers remain in the "no land" of Human Rights, which, apparently, can be hindered, excluding asylum seekers from the societal narrative. Despite 2018 Regulations have brought a quite positive change in terms of access to work yet didn't have an impact on the DPS itself which carries a highly institutionalised form of living. Placing asylum seekers – adults and children – and keeping them there for years leads to multiple breaches of their Human Rights. On one hand asylum seekers are safe and protected, have access to healthcare, basic education and a limited right to work, and on the other hand – experience institutionalization and purposely structured poverty. On the margins of society asylum seekers have difficulties gaining social skills and are prevented from self-actualisation (Maslow, 2019). If Ireland – whose people have experienced emigration themselves – had taken on the responsibility for the lives of asylum seekers, as a state it should be capable of ensuring to provide a dignified standard of living and subsistence for asylum seekers and treat them as human.

Theory underpinning the Direct Provision System

Direct Provision, as elaborated in the previous chapter, is a model of providing directly to those seeking asylum. It is a part of the Governmental structure as the system is being overlooked by the Department of Justice and Equality, regulated by the Reception and Integration Agency and managed mostly by private providers – owners and managers of the DP accommodation centres – hotels and hostel which are most of the time located in rural areas, far from the human eyes – on the margins of society.

This exclusion or rather banishment from participation in societal processes through the DPS had been justified by the Government as a state of emergency responding to the high numbers of asylum seekers entering Ireland at the end of nineties. But the existence of the system cannot be justified as a state of emergency for almost twenty years. So, if the system exists, it means it suits the Government, as it is quite evident that it doesn't suit the people who are being dehumanized by the disempowering regulations and the strict rules, as elaborated in the previous chapter.

There was another system of abuse and oppression in Ireland until 1996 – The Magdalene Laundries also known as Magdalene asylums, “cruel and medieval institutions in which women were imprisoned, stripped of their human rights and abused sexually and otherwise” (Hertz, 2018). It is significant that only 4 years after closing the last Landry the Direct Provision System was implemented into a reality. Created for supporting asylum seekers for the period of six months only, while their cases are being processed, it became a place of many years of oppression instead.

As well as excluding asylum seekers from the societal canvas, the Government has excluded them from the paradigm of Human Rights, which in itself is a crime. How come there can be a difference between humans and humans? The narratives which bring the topics of asylum seekers into an arena of societal discourses (Foucault, 1980) are usually the once of *othering* (Looney), scapegoating and blaming of dire economic situation (Liu, Volčič & Gallois, 2018) instead of unpacking the true reasoning behind austerity.

Fanning (2007, p.14) explains that governmental

bureaucracies are archetypically concerned with classification and sorting human beings. The legal system of the nation-state distinguishes between citizens and non-citizens”. It is evident that “non-citizens with lesser rights and entitlements encounter structural barrier to participation in society. (Fanning, 2007, p.16)

The failure of Irish Government to include those seeking an international protection in the paradigm of Human Rights and to provide an appropriate and professional services in response to the needs of asylum seekers who come from diverse ethnic, cultural, racial and class background may be deemed as institutional racism. Especially, this can be evident in the “processes, attitudes and behaviours which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping” (Lawrence, 1999) which put this group of people into a disadvantage in the society and exposes them to oppressive experiences. Mbugua (Gartland, 2012) goes on to summarise, that the DPS is a “glaring example” of institutional racism”.

As a system of oppression, the Direct Provision is considered as a “zone of exception” (Dunne, Onufer, Simocko & Viejo, 2013) where the law concerned to the Irish citizens does not apply. Gregoriou (2017) points out the resemblance of DPS to

the concertation camps drawing from Agamben (2008). At first, I was reluctant to accept this propinquity as it seems that understanding of the camp that I had was the Nazi's concentration camps, which recalls atrocities and death of the Jews before and during the Second World War. The modern camp Agamben (2008) talks about is the camp which arises as a political space of modernity and which strips asylum seekers of any political status right to the "*naked life*" (Agamben, 1998):

its (camp's) inhabitants have been stripped of every political status and reduced completely to naked life, the camp is also the most absolute biopolitical space that has ever been realized – a space in which power confronts nothing other than pure biological life without any mediation. (Agamben, 2008, p. 41)

"*Naked life*" "refers to humanity stripped of its political life through practices of bio-politics" (Gregoriou, n.d.) which in Western politics dichotomised against "*political existence*" (Agamben, 1998, p.8), thus, against inclusion in democratic processes and an ability to influence political decisions and choices.

The modern camps and detention centres that spread across the Europe, United States, Middle East, Australia and the rest of the world, in my understanding, would fit more into Agamben's assertion. Created as an emergency response to the migration processes and set up as "*zones of exception*", where the law applied to the citizens of the country does not work, is not accidental. Society does not want to know what is happening in the named above camps: abuse, torture, physical and sexual violence, rape (Townsend, 2017; Ismail, 2019; Costa Riba, 2018; Euronews, 2019; Wintour, 2019) somehow became normalised and silenced. The survival of these atrocities is the struggle to stay alive in the camps as a state-sponsored and politically constructed spaces – the enclaves that is not contained within political order of the "*nation-state*" (Agamben, 2008) which traps people between spaces and statuses.

However, my position regarding the DPS as a modern camp has shifted after watching the documentary *Violent Borders* (Aiello, Fruscione & Marconi, 2018a, 2018b). The stories of the women who live in the camps in Serbia were way too similar to what I have experienced while living in DPS. Waiting times and uncertainty, inability to cook and provide for their children, little privacy, harsh internal rules, strive for better life for their children and tackling despair, mental health issues, loss and trauma struck me right at the heart and caused an immense anxiety evoking memories of my own experience. The similarity of the experiences of oppression was striking.

I understand that the meaning of the modern camp is tied to a number of concepts as elaborated above. In my opinion the concept of “*naked life*” is central to the camp which reduces status of the asylum seekers to a passive subject of the unlawful rules within the camps and politically objectifies their existence to the point of biological survival. Contrarily to this, asylum seekers in Ireland are really privileged to have a “right” or a possibility to have or exercise a “*political existence*” – to organise and participate in the protests against the oppressive environment of the DPS (McNamara & Meagher, 2012; MASI, 2018), to participate in local elections as a voter and as a candidate. During this year’s local elections Ellie Kisyombe had made a history as a first female asylum seeker running for the Dublin City Council from Social Democrats Party (Bray, 2019). So, it would be fair to say, as referring to the previous chapter, that asylum seekers in Ireland are politically active and so a concept of “naked life” is not applicable to the DPS, and so drawing from that the DPS is not a modern camp.

However, the similarity of the experiences observed in the Violent Border do not allow me to close this topic just yet. Within the Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy (hooks, 2014) structures experiences of women are varied. Now I am aware that being a white woman in DP gave me a certain privilege. Black women’s experiences might have another level of oppression – an experience of racism. But it is not that we have to focus on how our experiences are different, but to look at the root of the problem instead – what is constructing our experiences? The very Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchal structures. We have to put aside the construct of race, which is created by the very structures and far outdated; we have to put aside any other difference that a constructed by the discourses of power and stand together in solidarity against the hegemonic structures that dehumanise and diminish us.

Reflecting on this chapter come to mind words of Lewis (2016, p.57):

I live in the Managerial Age, in a world of "Admin." The greatest evil is not now done in those sordid "dens of crime" that Dickens loved to paint. It is not done even in concentration camps and labour camps. In those we see its final result. But it is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried, and minuted) in clean, carpeted, warmed and well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices.

This quote quite precisely portrays the detachedness of the policymakers from the real world and from how people experience the policies. Fitzsimons (2017) asserts the justification of the policies by austerity which “ensures a sufficient level of public compliance” in the neoliberal discourse even when the policies are against most people’s best interests (p.10). Even though Ireland presents a beacon of hope to asylum seekers and the DPS is deemed the best in Europe, through the policies that marginalise, institutionalise and exclude from the realm of Human Rights the asylum seekers remain in oppressive day to day reality.

Being a woman in the Direct Provision System

Freirean critical pedagogy is deeply concerned with the understanding of the social context and the historical milieu as pointed earlier. It is absolutely necessary to expose the narrative of being a woman in Ireland. Often considered as a weaker sex located in the capitalist patriarchal structures (hooks, 2014) women experience multiple dimensions of oppression. As asserted earlier (reference) Irish history of treating women is far from equality. While the Magdalene Laundry survivors are being paid redress payments for the institutional abuses they were exposed to over the decades (Ó Fátharta, 2019), the 24-hour National Freephone Helpline answered over 21,000 contacts last year with vast majority of those disclosing abuse against women (Burke, 2018). The latest reports show a harrowing number of women murdered in Ireland killed by a man they know (Burke, 2018); half of the women were killed by their current or former partner and 61% of women were killed in their own homes. The latest grievous murder of the young girl by two young men has shocked the nation. Statistics on domestic and sexual violence from national and international surveys tend to shock those who are not familiar with them EU (“The EU and Irish women - Ireland - European Commission”, 2019): 6% of Irish women have experienced sexual violence by a current or former partner; 14% of women in Ireland have experienced physical violence by a partner since age 15; 31% of women have experienced psychological violence by a partner; 12% of Irish respondents in the FRA study had experienced stalking (including cyber stalking). This narrative of the culture that is silencing and objectifying female body through sexist oppression (hooks, 2014). Battling the politics of female oppression women have won the latest referendum on abortion (Bardon, 2019) reclaiming control over their bodies and their right for safe pregnancy. While

women outside of the DPS are further battling for equal pay for work, equality in decision making; gender equality in higher education and across wider society; dignity, integrity and ending gender-based violence ("The EU and Irish women - Ireland - European Commission", 2019), women asylum seekers are excluded from these discourses.

Caught up in the constructed by the system male identity of an asylum seeker womanhood becomes invisible. Reports (Ombudsman, 2018; AkiDwA, 2010) highlight experiences of women in the DPS. The need of female centres only to create a safe space for women who experienced abuse and rape; better treatment by the management and staff; complaints system when issues are arising with other asylum seekers; accountability for actions taken against women; issues of food and cooking; health and wellbeing for women and children; access to work and education; to be treated with respect are some of the issues that are being highlighted. These requests are simple yet show hegemonic construction and colonisation of women in the DPS. Filtering world through the identity of asylum seeker women are deprived of embodiment of self-love and self-actualisation (hooks, 2014). Extraordinary disadvantaged materiality, as pointed out in Chapter 3, women have to meet societal expectations fulfilling their roles as mother and as a wife. These expectations become an unbearably oppressive burden in the place like the DPS where women are silently dying (Holland, 2016) sometimes even without proper burial and a farewell from a friend (Thomas, 2019). Navigating between levels of oppression women turn into shields protecting their children from the structural discrimination (chapter) and coping with the day to day discriminative practices against their race, religion (Fitzsimons, 2017) and worldviews.

On the margin of despair, it is difficult for a woman to stay sane in "the world that is not inclusive of you" (hooks, 2014) where the oppression in all its forms supported by institutions and social structures. Only through the vehicle of feminist critical thinking and emancipatory education women can push the boundaries and transgress to liberation dismantling the male dominance, challenging certain aspects of culture and religion as well as the governmental policies which colonise their existence in the "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (bell hooks).

With the hope that this chapter has reflected on the context of the research extensively, the following chapter Literature Review will further explore the philosophical concepts that emerged during the process of coding.

Chapter 4. Literature Review

Introduction

At the outset of this chapter it would be valuable to remind the reader, that I position myself in this research not only as an ex-asylum seeker but also as a community educator working from the perspective of practical application to the Freirean pedagogy. Growing up in strengths through this pedagogy I always go back to the roots of the community, thinking, how can I stand in solidarity with women and those who feel marginalised and disempowered, and how I can change their reality without being intrusive or overpowering; how can I create a space for us to reflect on our lives and start naming our reality and revealing our world.

The implications of structural injustice that I observe in the community form contexts in which the experiences of people are being created. Freire (1996) asserted that the world is unjust, and that society is constructed in a way to keep the division of inequality between people which is being reinforced through education. Education is a powerful tool of maintaining the social order that was established with the capitalism. Through current neoliberal logic the market driven education became a tool of further oppression, and the growth of the gap in inequality is being maintained not only by the neoliberal policies (Fitzsimons, 2017) but also by the damaging discourses of othering.

Contrarily, the spaces of Adult Education such as Community Education and Popular Education, which adhere to the democratic choices of the participants and being facilitated in collaboration with the learners in the learning circles (Freire, 1996) are creating an opportunity for critical reflection and liberatory praxis. Engagement in critical discourses transcends into places of resistance, solidarity, struggle and hope. As an active participant in societal discourses around migration, education, rights of LGBTQ community and women's rights, I believe that only intentional engagement in critical discourses allows for creation of shared knowledge and transformative learning. It involves a sharing of personal experiences, perspectives and points of view on the matter and a critical reflection on the stories elicited during the process. The newly created shared knowledge can lead to solidarity of people and exercising of liberatory praxis – which can bring about social change. The critical reflection on

personal experiences and the intentional process of making a meaning of those experiences create an opportunity to interrogate and resist the discourses of power.

This study is concerned with my personal experience of living in the DPS. This chapter will provide a literature review which will illuminate the connection of the findings with adult education theory and practice.

Through the process of coding the three dominant generative themes were unearthed: experience of oppression and experiences of education and learning. It is valuable to examine the relationship of these concepts and their meaning and an influence on human life and would be important to explore their interrelation within the societal structures. The philosophers who will walk with me through this journey will be Jack Mezirow, Paulo Freire and bell hooks. I will try to wear a critical lens and give the reader an understanding how the theoretical view on learning, oppression and education of these philosophers can be married into a meaningful understanding the subject of the research.

Transformative Learning Theory

Not to undermine a variety of learning theories that exist within the paradigm of the adult learning, this research will focus on the Transformative Learning Theory. Yet, it is important to point out, that according to Merriam& Caffarella (2007) learning occurs in in three types of settings:” formal institutional setting; non-formal setting and informal contexts” (p.29). They add a concept of self-directed learning and indigenous forms of learning. They suggest that there is always overlap of three. Formal settings as a formal education considered to be “highly institutionalised” (p.29), whether non-formal education is described as “organised learning opportunities outside the formal education system” (p.30), usually in local community. They also highlight an indigenous learning which is linked with culture and can be non-formal and formal. Informal learning contexts, Merriam& Caffarella (2007) explain is “a spontaneous, unstructured learning that goes on daily in the home and neighbourhood, behind the school – everyday learning” (p.31).

Transformative dimensions thought to be inherent in the adult education and learning process. It is important to analyse the scope of significance and limitations of

transformative learning for personal and social transformation to be able to apply it to this research. This chapter will briefly describe the theory and will analyse some of the critique, which interrogates the validity of the transformative

Transformative Theory according to Mezirow (2007) is a theoretical model of how adults learn. It suggests that 'we learn what we seek to learn as a result of transforming our frame of reference' (p.10).

Development of Mezirow's research on Transformative Learning Theory was influenced by Habermas' (1971) Theory of Knowledge. The research was primarily focused on the Emancipatory knowledge, which is based on the ability of a person to be self-determined and self-reflective, but did not exclude Technical (scientific, rational and objective) and Practical (our shared standards and values as a society) knowledge.

Mezirow stated, that what he called an emancipatory knowledge is gained through a process of critical questioning of ourselves and the world we live in. How we arrive at this place of critical thinking and reflection is part of the process of Transformative Learning Theory and primary goal of Mezirow's (1991) education:

The goal of adult education is to help adult learners become more critically reflective, participate more fully and freely in rational discourse and action, and advance developmentally by moving toward meaning perspectives that are more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative of experience (p.14).

In 1978 Mezirow introduced his theory based on the research which was conducted with 83 women who returned to college after a long period away from education (Merriam & Caffarella, 2007, p.132). For this research he was inspired by the changes, which he saw happening in his wife, who actually went back to education at that time (Teacher's College, 2015). From this study he developed his ten stages process of personal transformation. For brevity I have drawn a chart based on my notes of the Psychology of Adult Education 2015. See Image 1.

According to Mezirow, personal transformation process begins with an experience of disorientation, which causes the individual to question assumptions or beliefs we unconsciously hold prior to that experience. 'Disorienting Dilemma' is the gateway to the process of transformative learning.

When something unexpected happens, when a person encounters something that does not fit in his or her expectations of how things should be based on experience, the choices are to reject the unexpected or to question the expectation. When people critically examine their habitual expectations, revise them, and act on the revised point of view, transformative learning occurs (Cranton, 2006, p.19).

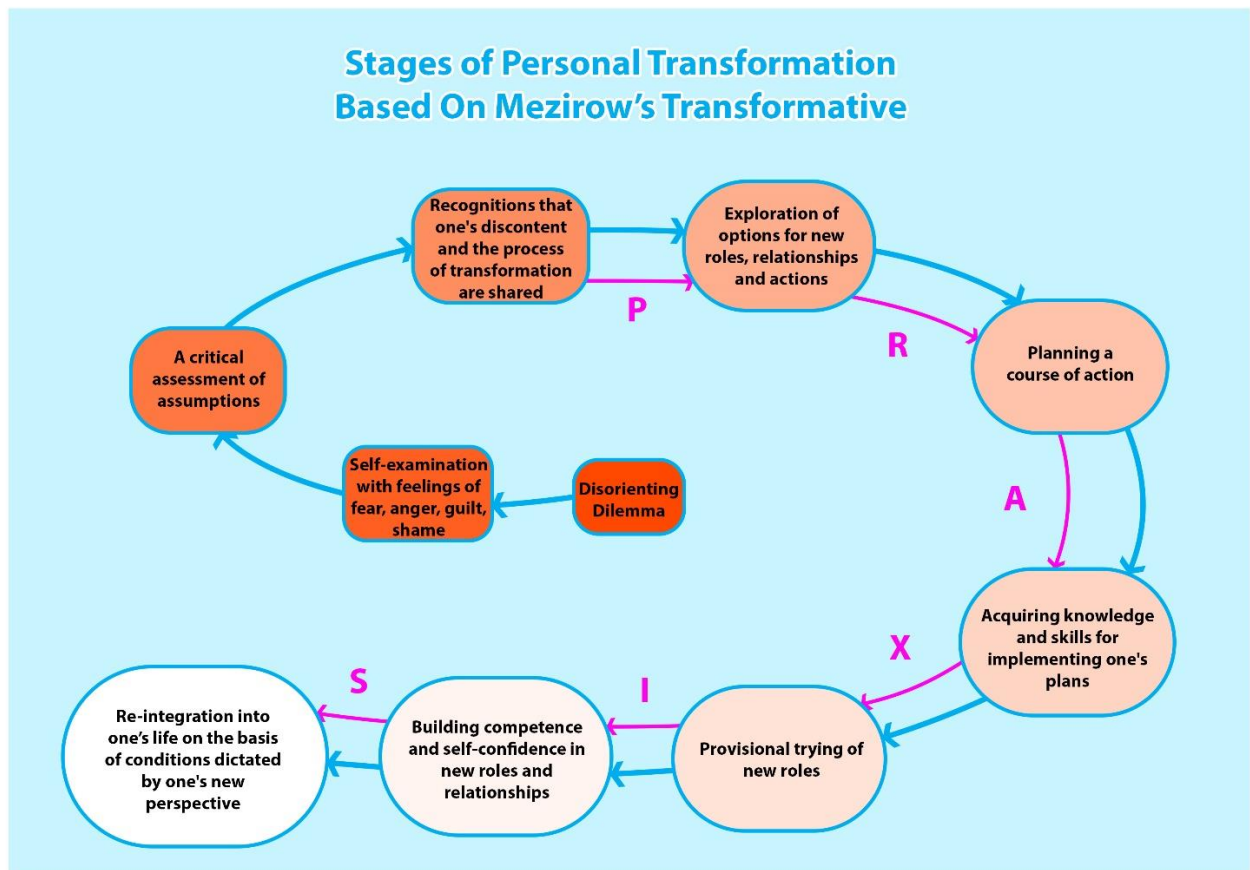


Image 3

The lens, through which we see our world or as Mezirow (2007) calls it - a 'frame of reference'- affects the way we interpret our experiences and how we make meaning from those experiences. Mezirow terms this a 'meaning perspective'.

Meaning perspectives consist out of 'habits of mind' and 'points of view'. Points of view are the ones, that are easier to change, as it generally impacted by assumptions and beliefs, that are unconsciously held and unchallenged.

'In addition to elaborating existing frames of reference (or meaning perspectives; see figure 4), learning new frames of reference, and transforming habits of mind, learning can occur by transforming points of view' (Kitchenham, 2008, p.119).

Mezirow (2000) highlights that people can change their points of view by ‘trying on another’s points of view’ but cannot try someone else’s habit of mind (p.21).

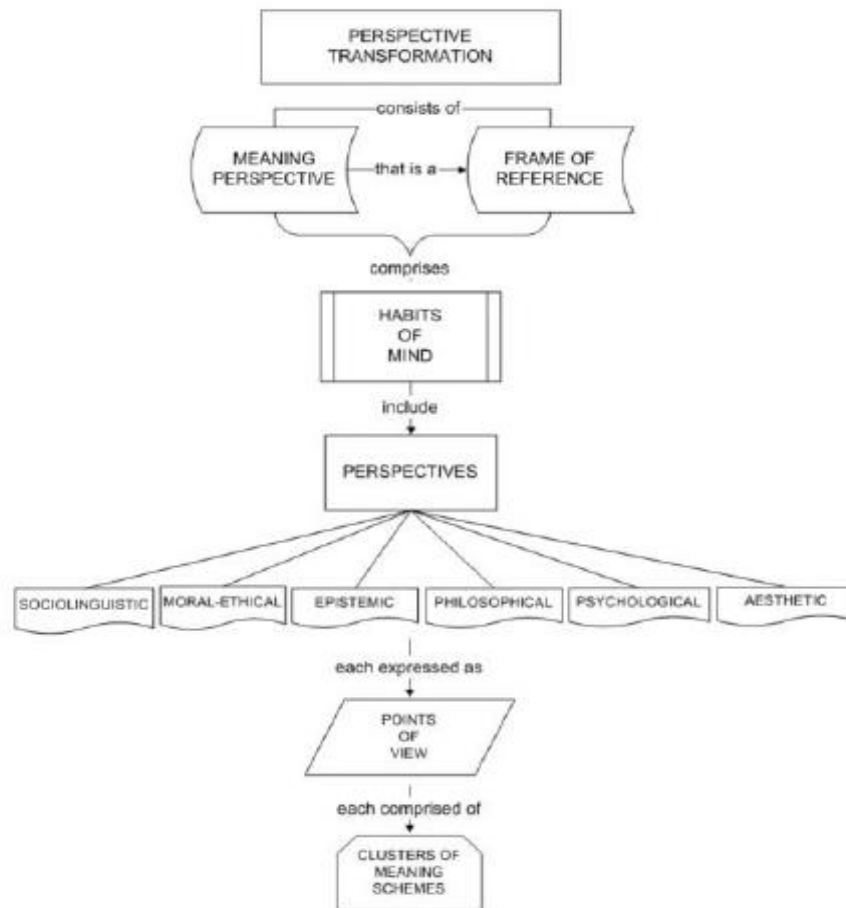


Image 4

In transformative learning experiences are passed through the filter of our habits of mind, and, depending on our ability for critical thinking, emerge as revised or new perspectives. This way our thinking becomes freed from the constraints or limitations of our unconscious and unquestioned attachment to assumptions which we may never know we held, or which may have been ‘distorted’. Previous assumptions are being transformed and taken into the new experience:

Transformative learning is the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of references (meaning schemes, habits of mind, mindsets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove truer or justified to guide action. (Mezirow, 2000, p.8)

Merriam (2007) emphasises four main components of the transformative learning process: 'experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action' (p.134).

It can be noted, that critical thinking is in the core of transformative learning, as 'the learner must critically self-examine the assumptions and beliefs that have structured how the experience has been interpreted' (p.134).

The new meaning, born from the transformed structure of assumptions will be tested through engagement in 'discourse' - a 'dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief', - which can occur in one-to-one group relationships, in community group or in formal and informal education setting (p.134).

As a final component of the transformation, action can be immediate, delayed or "reasoned reaffirmation of an existing pattern of action" (Mezirow, 2000, p.24).

In addition, Mezirow (1990) points, that action can be of any type, whether personal or social, but emphasises, that 'we must begin with individual perspective transformations before social transformations can succeed' (p.363).

The above model relates to the philosophy of Paulo Freire, who's critical pedagogy will be explored in the following chapter, and who's influence Mezirow (2007) acknowledged. The critical reflection termed by Freire as "conscientization" had a profound impact on Mezirow and forced him to significantly modify and redirect his research (p.11). In contrary, Newman (1994) criticized both philosophers, stating, that adults need to learn strategies of dealing with oppression and build skills in order to be able to use the very strategies.

I can identify with Mezirow's (1997) respond, that "often learners are unaware of being oppressed; they internalise the values of the oppressor" and "deconstruction of reified frames of reference" is extremely important (p.62). At the same time, I support Inglis' (1998) position on the "importance of developing a structuralist understanding of the self and linking this into a theory of power".

Taylor & Cranton (2013) highlights that transformative learning theory was founded:

on both humanist and constructivist assumptions, which reflect Western... values and beliefs that anyone can achieve anything, anyone can and should have an opportunity for freedom and happiness, if only they work hard enough to overcome all obstacles. (p.39)

However, these beliefs are false as they do not take to account a person's position in society, in our case the asylum seekers who are marginalised and disempowered in society group as asserted in the previous chapter. A very little progression is possible due to the limitations of their rights such as right for education, right to work and so forth, which as well was pointed out earlier.

Inglis (1997) suggests that people who are being excluded from the system of knowledge, are being limited in different ways by those in power. By being limited in their access to education, asylum seekers, consequently, are being limited in their access to the information, which can support their transformation. Because of being in the controlled position in society, 'they do not have the same 'habitus' - 'a system of social meanings and understandings' as those in power (Bordeaux, 1973, p. 40). Bordeaux (1973) emphasises, that 'habitus' primarily learned from family circumstances and a class which a person was brought up in. Habitus might carry the 'cultural capital or 'symbolic wealth' which creates an opportunity of educational success. Therefore, equal access to education is vital for obtaining cultural capital, and consequently, economic and political capitals, as Ingles (1998) points out.

Litter (2013) compared that in the past sixty years:

meritocracy has moved from a disparaging reference to an embryonic system of state organization creating problematic hierarchies through a dubious notion of 'merit', to a celebratory term connecting competitive individualism and an essentialised notion of 'talent' with a belief in the desirability and possibility of social mobility in a highly unequal society (p.68).

Meritocracy is intrinsic to Direct Provision System. Abiding to the rules and regulations, keeping the head down and not causing any troubles, as well as attending some courses of studies and progressing to show your interest in integration and participation in society – basically, being meritocratically good – was a promising reward of receiving a status in the country.

Even though it sounds contradictory to the above statement on access to education, a particular status of Humanitarian Leave to Remain is said to be welcoming of high educational attainments despite a very limited access to educational courses as asserted in the Chapter 3. Under section 3 of the Immigration

Act 1999 Minister, when determining whether person may remain in the state, is obliged to consider a number of factors including following:

- the nature of the person's connection with the State;
- the employment (including self-employment) prospects of the person;
- the character and conduct of the person both within and (where relevant and ascertainable) outside the State (including any criminal convictions);
- the common good and so forth (*Immigration Act 1999*).

Mac Veigh (2012) argues, that the societal pressure on a person through meritocratic achievements is wrong and dangerous, because it 'atomises the individual on the basis of personal characteristics, ignoring their relationship to the social and economic institutions and structures that stratify society along the class lines' (p.27). Furthermore, "moving away from their communities and cultures through transformative learning" and education in the pursuit of personal achievement and freedom, in fact, leads to 'cultural suicide' (Brookfield, 1995 in Taylor, 1993 p.40). Taylor (2013) asserts that:

'the phases of transformation involve pain, discontent, guilt and shame. The event or events that precipitate transformative learning are often traumatic but supposedly lead to positive outcome' (p.40).

The last point is certainly questionable. More likely the outcome of the learning is a loss or fragmentation of identity and submission to the culture of domineering culture. To tackle the issue of the loss of culture the learning spaces should be addressing diverse cultural needs and not reinforcing the culture of the ruling class. Is it the question of adult education not being able to be culturally inclusive and cater for diversity of knowledge through intercultural curriculum (Zilliacus, 2009) in order to support personal growth through acknowledgment of world experiences or 'educators themselves have been a significant domain for consensual adoption of capitalist logic as common sense' (Giroux, 1983, p.150)? More likely, both. Gramsci developed the notion of 'cultural hegemony':

referring to the ideological and cultural control of the working classes that goes beyond coercion to the development of systems of thought – reinforcing the notion of the powerful through consent (DK, 2016, p.259).

It seems evident, that education reinforces the loss of one's cultural capital and integrate humans into the logic of the ruling class by replacing the lost to “cultural suicide” culture with the cultural capital of the patriarchal structures, transforming humans into an obedient resident, proceeding with their further colonization.

Empowerment or Emancipation?

Taylor and Cranton (2013) looked at some issues, which in their opinion are overlooked in the Transformative Learning Theory or need a substantial development. They identify the following constructs: a pre-transformative ‘experience’ which needs to be ‘transformed’; a role of ‘empathy’ in transformative learning; ‘inherently good transformation’; ‘methodology’ used for transformative learning.

They also highlight a ‘desire to change’ as one of the points and particularly discuss a construct of motivation, which in their opinion can contribute to understanding of engagement of the learners in transformative learning experiences and activities.

They identify the ‘extrinsic (when people engage in an activity for an external reward such as a grade or a salary increase) and intrinsic motivation (when the behaviour itself is satisfying)’ (p.41), where their interest lays on the latter. However, the satisfaction of transformative learning may not be lasting.

Owing to the above statements, the question of longevity of the transformative learning arises as opposing to a temporary transformation of an individual within the existing power.

Inglis (1998) emphasises, that:

empowerment involves people developing capacities to act successfully within the existing system and structures of power, while emancipation concerns critically analysing, resisting and challenging the structures of power (p. 4).

According to him, the ‘power is invested in rules, regulations, discourse, and practice’ (p.1) and in his opinion, Mezirow fails to provide a frame on how the power can be challenged through transformative learning. He suggests that further clarification is

needed about “the nature of power and the distinction between individuals being empowered within existing social system and struggling for freedom by changing the system” (Inglis, 1998, p.10), which challenges the notion of freedom and emancipation being attained through personal transformation. This statement vividly resonates with the current political discourses in Ireland. The inability to question these discourses and the ‘norms, habits and the many hidden assumptions underlying institutional rules’ (Bufacchi, 2016) stem from the inability to question world critically and the ‘banking education’ (Freire), which the Irish state has put in place through laws and policies and subjects its citizens to a state curriculum that is infused with the teachings which reinforces the obedience, docility and acceptance of the oppressive regulations through the hidden curriculum.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) point out that the hidden curriculum creates future workers, - passive and obedient, who accept authority without questions as they are well prepared for it by the school regime, which is seen as” far more authoritarian than society in general” (Murray, 2016).

The ‘banking education’ (Freire,1996) is deeply rooted along with meritocracy in educational institutions. Bowles and Gintis (1976) referred to it as ‘jug and mug’ principle, where the teacher is a holder of knowledge who pours it into empty mugs – students. As a result, students are becoming ‘alienated like a slave’ and accept their own ignorance (Freire,1996, p.53). Freire (1996) emphasised, that this is not accidental. Banking education allows the oppressor to maintain the system of oppression. He determined, that:

‘the capability of banking education to minimize or annual the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interest of the oppressor, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed’ (p.73).

Under this system students do not have the opportunity to question or critically evaluate the world in which they live and see the inequality that is being reproduced in society. Generations of children who grew up through current education system, which had never challenged the status quo – the existing social and political issues in Irish society – are not prepared to critically analyse and reflect on their living experiences in order to take an action and pave the ways for strong united emancipatory movements. Consequently, they cannot ‘act upon their own lives’ to create a more equal and just society. ‘In Freire’s approach, personal empowerment

and social transformation are inseparable processes' (Meriam & Caffarella, 2007, p.140). This assertion will be explored later in this chapter.

Who Holds the Power?

Based on the discussion above, it is evident, that emancipation or true liberation can be achieved only through emancipatory learning, which according to Inglis (1998) 'involves engaging in debate and discussion in the public sphere, in social action, in civil society, and in a struggle to change these structures' (p.2). This emphasises, that education which addresses and challenges the power structures is in the core of societal changes, as Freire (2000) stated:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (p. 34).

Inglis (1997) justifies, that:

'being able to transform social life necessitates being able to understand different types of power and the way in which they operate in society, as well as in the lives of individuals' (p.5).

In Foucault's (1980) view the idea of power is intertwined with the subject of knowledge. He identifies, that they are used as a form of social control, and poses a very important question:

what rules are implemented by the relations of power in the production of discourses of truth? ...We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. (Foucault, 1980, p.93)

He sees production of power only through certain discourses of truth and questions: who the truth belongs to, who creates the truth and for what purpose. Whether it is a truth of those in power, it will be used to generate wealth, extend the existing power or further coerce those in a powerless position like in a situation of the asylum seekers who are constantly being positioned in the negative light, as asserted in the Chapter 3. If society accepts the truth without discourses, it accepts the power over itself. He emphasises, that discourses are important to determine the understanding of the truth are vitally important amongst groups and in the society as

a whole otherwise. Accepting the truth without questioning it will lead to conformity to those who created the truth.

According to Letseka and Pitsoe (2012) education is an important agent of socialisation which allows individual to obtain certain power through access to certain discourses. The level of critical thinking amongst young people is astonishing, yet schools provide only a certain level of discourses so that young people do not become too powerful or knowledgeable as youth is always seen as a powerful force of societal change. Even those who attain highest level of education are ultimately only taught so much, because those at the powerful position of society limit access to certain discourses. This is the most important argument Foucault holds regarding use of power in educational institutions.

Contrary to Foucault's theory of power structure, Mezirow, influenced by Habermas, believes that 'there is a realm of truth which exists beyond power and which is central to authentic human being, communication, and voluntary social order' (in Inglis, 1997). He argues that

'the theory of power can emerge through interaction of the teacher and the learner'; 'that acting as an empathetic provocateur, the teacher can help the learners to critically reflect about their experiences' (p.8).

From Mezirow's perspective, the educator is described as someone, who is self-reflective; can critically assess their own assumptions and is open to alternative perspectives; considerate and naturally empathetic. Who acts rather as a catalyst/ a facilitator in student's learning and transformation.

Mezirow (1991):

contends that the central goal of adult education should involve creating conditions to help adult learners become more critically reflective and 'advance developmentally' towards "integrated and discriminating meaning perspectives. (in Magro, p.3)

He sees it as the 'business of all adult educators' (p.3).

Contrarywise, Magro's (2002) research challenges this notion and identifies that:

the trend in many adult literacy institutions is toward 'narrowing' of skills and competencies that may be diametrically opposed to transformative types of learning', despite adult education literature emphasises the importance of educators critically challenging learners and 'fostering a climate where deeper level of transformative learning may occur. (p. 34)

Taylor and Cranton (2013) are raising an important issue of empathy as a construct, which should be native to all adult educators and should support fostering transformative learning. Mezirow (2003):

'discusses its significance when participating in critical-dialectical discourse as 'having an open mind, learning to listen empathetically, "bracketing" judgement, and seeking common ground' (Taylor & Cranton, 2013, p.37).

Naturally, it can be doubted, that all human beings possess empathy as a value or a feature of their character neither to say all educators. It is important, that the empathy – in theory – would not be expressed by teachers merely as a pity in practice, which I have experienced as a student and observed as a teacher in adult education settings. It can be overpowering and can be harmful for students' experiences of education. This argument leads back to the power, which needs to be considered in order to be challenged and overcome.

'Without analysis of power there is a danger that transformative learning, instead of being emancipatory, could operate as a subtle form of self- control' (Ingles, 1998, p.13).

Emancipatory Pedagogy

When thinking of the concept of oppression, to mind comes Paulo Freire. My first encounter with his philosophy happened when I was still living in the DPS. In Freire I found an ally, who had the understanding of my day to day struggles with such a precision as no one ever did. Even though the context in which his philosophy was born was distanced by fifty years and thousands of kilometres, it was strikingly applicable to my experience of oppression in the DPS. As elaborated in the previous chapter the DPS was structured to provide basic needs and safety of the body yet prevents asylum seekers from development and self-actualisation.

Just like bell hooks I felt "to be deeply identified with the marginalized peasants Freire speaks about" (hooks, 1994, p.46), and just like her I did not have a political language to name my world. Freire's theory that "merges from the context of poverty, illiteracy, and oppression" (Meriam & Caffarella, 2000, p.140) prompted me to reflect critically on the personal and collective experiences of my comrades in the DPS and our engagement in liberatory praxis. This critical pedagogy "makes oppression and its

causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for freedom” (Freire, 1996, p. 30).

Freire recognises the subject position of those “who suffer the gravest weight of oppressive forces” (hooks, 1994, p.53), yet, it is important to assert, that he fails to address the gender specific oppression. Hooks and Mayo criticise Freire for “not acknowledging the specific gendered realities of oppression and exploitation” (hooks, 1994, p.53) and for not “addressing gender, race and sexuality” (Mayo, 1999, p.113). So, when engaging in exploration of oppression, it is important to be aware of how it can be experienced from female perspective in the patriarchal structures and positioning of female experience in the liberatory paradigm.

The Direct Provision – a System of Oppression

As it was signified in the Chapter 3 the Direct Provision System is a system which marginalises and subjugates voices of asylum seekers. This attitude is being maintained by pushing them to the margins of society and stripping them or limiting their rights as humans. The stories of oppression have emerged over the years and are noted in the previous chapter. To make a meaning of how the DPS is being experienced, it would be valuable for the moment to analyse how Freire deconstructs the concept of oppression and how it is relevant to the DP as a system.

Freire (1996) defines oppression as an act of exploitation by the oppressor and the failure of the oppressor to recognise others as human which is quite evident in terms of the DPS. He sees *dehumanisation* as a product of historical oppression – the kind of oppression that penetrates the humankind to the point of turning humans into colonial subjects. The most basic relationship between oppressor and oppressed is *prescription* (p.29), which turns behaviours of the oppressed into a prescribed behaviour.

The prescribed behaviour of asylum seekers is being regulated by the House Rule book (RIA, 2015). There are inscribed consequences for breaking the rules, but also the consequences which are being imposed on the asylum seekers through the will of managers and other workers, who are the cogwheels of the system and maintain the power of the oppressor.

The question could arise, who is the oppressor in the case of the DPS. In the previous chapter it was pointed out that The Department of Justice and Equality and RIA are the main state bodies that overlook the DPS. The owners of the hotels and hostels, chefs and workers of the DP centres all maintain the oppressive attitude towards the asylum seekers. Through exercising democracy citizens are electing their representatives to voice their issues in the government. If their narrative is conforming to the oppressive discourse towards asylum seekers, they may be deemed the oppressor too.

The ongoing subjugating discourse that the department carries towards the asylum seekers makes them silent subjects of the oppression. Freire highlights the “culture of silence” and strategies that are enacted in order that oppression of the people is maintained:

Manipulation, sloganizing, depositing, regimentation, and prescription cannot be components of revolutionary praxis, precisely because they are the components of the praxis of domination. (Freire, 1996, p.57)

The culture of Ireland is one of the silencing its own people. Irish Travellers (O’Loughlin, 2017; Collins, 2013) have been silenced for years and with the efforts of the Government are currently being integrated back into the societal canvas through discourses of inclusion. Thousands of Irish (and non-Irish) women (Crawley, 2018) who were confined, abused and silenced in the Laundries have fought their way back into the narrative through demand of restorative justice. Asylum seekers are being silenced too.

The attempts to stand against the oppression and change the way system works end up, in what Freire calls, a “*false generosity*”. The temporary easing of the oppression is being reversed as soon as the leaders of resistance are being dispersed to break the power of people’s solidarity.

Contrarily, “*true generosity*” (Freire, 1997, p.27) will fight to destroy the causes of “*false charity*”. The “*false charity*” creates dependency on the oppressor and makes people to beg. The provision of food, expenses towards clothes, weekly allowance is a false charity that creates dependency of asylum seekers on the DPS and over time institutionalises them. Only in “*true generosity*” lays real empowerment of people when

they do not need to ask or beg with “trembling hands” (Freire, 1996, p.27) but have the freedom and power to create and work towards transforming their world. For the true generosity to happen the DPS should be abolished, so the asylum seekers could exercise their rights fully through access to labour market, education and so forth without legislative constraints. But it is important to highlight, that there are no plans to abolish the system as asserted in Chapter 3.

Biko (Mabasa, 2007) emphasised that “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed”. Freire points out that creativity is crucial for humans as curious beings because the creative power characterises life and prompts “the drive to search, to restlessness” (Freire, 1996, p.42). The lack of creative power suppresses life and pushes for the further embodiment of the oppression. This can be achieved by stripping the oppressed from creativity which makes them alienated (Marx, 1844). By its nature the DPS strips asylum seekers of creativity in all avenues of their lives. The lack of everyday simple creative processes such as cooking (Hoque, 2014), baking, sewing or any other creative activity makes asylum seekers alienated. A recently conducted research (Sharratt, 2019) identified creative activities to be a “distraction tool” to avoid stress; a “contemplation tool” for creating the mental space to reassess problems and make plans and a tool for “self-development”, building self-esteem and confidence.

Freire indicates that as a consequence of alienation, the oppressed lose the purpose and do what is prescribed to them. By losing self-determination, the oppressed become more like the oppressor, internalise their opinion and their culture. Furthermore, they internalise the opinion of the oppressor about themselves as incapable of learning, as less beings, which leads to “self-deprecation” (Freire, 1996, p. 45). This narrative is evident amongst the cohort of migrants and particularly asylum seekers who are personally known to me. The highest levels of education attained in their home countries is constantly being undermined, questioned or causes amazement from local people. The constant questioning of their abilities leads to them questioning their own abilities and losing a self-esteem.

Freire (1996) determines that alienated person becomes easily manipulated “by a culture of achievement and personal success, to recognize his situation as objectively unfavourable seems to hinder his own possibilities of success” (Freire,

1996, p 150). Her/ his achievement is determined by the culture of domination. The ideology of individualism (Althusser, 1971) is used as an “unwitting submission” to exploitation in capitalist society, even deeper it is experienced in the neoliberal discourse. Through this ideology society portrayed as a set of individually constructed lives where the responsibility for creating their people’s own lives lays on individuals. The exploitation rendered obscure to the very individuals so not to provoke a critique against it. However, Ratner (2013) opposes this idea by pointing out that behaviour and thinking of individuals are culturally structured which makes them cultural beings. Individualism “misconstrued as personal, authentic, individual agency, self-expression, personal responsibility, and free choice”. Freire (2000) asserts that the oppressed internalise this narrative through determining force of the culture of the oppressor which “hinders the affirmation of men as beings of decision” (p. 154).

The further dehumanization tends to structure thoughts of the oppressed and make them conditioned to oppression which colonises the whole person – the mind, the soul and the body. Hooks (1994) talks about the wholeness of the person, but the aim of the oppression is to fracture this wholeness. I imagine oppression as a disease which over time spreads over the person, enters every part of the human body, colonises the whole person and ultimately takes away the will to resist.

Moreover, those in power are interested to maintain a certain level of knowledge and certain discourses in society so the oppressed remain in the hegemonised position The Direct Provision is a very vivid example of this – the asylum seekers remain controlled by the governmental and legal constraints. The newly acquired rights to work bring more limitations than possibilities as mentioned in Chapter 3, and the limited access to education does not allow to acquire critical skills and knowledge. Segregated in the hostels on the margins, asylum seekers have a very little opportunity to integrate into Irish society.

Hooks (1990) understands “marginality as position and place of resistance” which is “crucial for oppressed, exploited colonized people” (p.149). Margin is “a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives” (p.149). It is “a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist”. It also “offers to one the possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine

alternatives, new worlds” (p.150). Can the DPS be the space of resistance which may open a radical possibility for resisting subjugation and domination and creating new subjectivities that are capable of strengthening and rejuvenating itself to carry the struggle? “Dispersal and fragmentation” must be both accepted and confronted in order for us to create a new world “that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become” (hooks, 1990, p.148) in the process of liberation.

Education as a Praxis for Freedom

To overcome the internalised colonisation the oppressed must decolonise themselves. It is a laborious task but can be done through specific type of education which Freire envisions as an instrument for liberation. He recognises that “the essence of education is the practice of freedom” (Freire, 2005, p.103).

This education is widely known as popular education, which Hope and Timmel (2014) define as “a community effort to acquire existing knowledge and build the new knowledge to reshape society, so that all will have the opportunity to a full life” (p.16). The notion of democracy in education which is about descent of dominant ideas and dominant believes creates the possibility to reshape the civic society through participation of the people in the political discourses.

As opposed to liberatory education, Freire analysis the existing in the society “banking approach” which, through its “narrative character” and the “act of depositing” the knowledge, turns people into “containers”, makes them “alienated like a slave” (Freire, 1996, p.53) and promotes self-deprecation. Freire emphasises that banking education is not accidental and is being used to maintain the system of oppression by minimizing creative power of the people. This serves the interest of the oppressor, who “care neither to have the world revealed” for the people, nor to see it transformed” (Freire,1996, p.73) as asserted earlier in this chapter.

Humanization, as the consequence of liberatory education, is politically subversive because it empowers oppressed people to question their own reality and their position in society. “Radical means going to the roots” (Hope&Timmel, 2014, p.16) of the human suffering to gain the understanding of conditioning of the human

life through the system of oppression which influences the division of race, class and culture and sets the context and predisposition to further reproduction of inequality.

Freire (1996) suggests, that *human-world* relationship in a particular time in history is “characterized by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites striving towards their fulfilment” (p.82). The generative themes capture the complexity of the personal experience as well as provoke critical reflection on the human-world relationship and the relationship between people in the world. Through this dialogical investigation the oppressive reality can be unveiled and the oppressed can challenge the historical milieu and achieve permanent transformation of reality in favour of the liberation of people.

Practically, the generative themes can be elicited through dialogue and listening surveys (Hope & Timmel, 2014). The deeper issues which contribute to the powerlessness of people may be unearthed with the help of creative “codes” (p. 19), which generate dialogue on familiar experiences and link the feelings of the group with the existing facts or issues. As codes are posing the problems, they prompt critical reflecting on reality:

In problem-posing education, men [women] develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation (Freire, 2005, p.12).

Sheehy (2001) confirms, “it is striking how much more energy codes can generate in group discussions than lectures or abstract questions” (p.19). Those in power resist dialogue and maintain the culture of debating which has a binary positioning. Dialogical discourse creates and opportunity to elicit diversity of perspectives, promotes deeper listening and reflection through questioning and opens up the paradigm of opinions and positions which in turn creates a rich and abundant learning. “Dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality” (Freire, 2005, p.64) is ought to the process of praxis.

Undoubtedly, the dialogical process of praxis is in the heart of emancipatory transformation: “liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1996, p. 60). See Image 1.

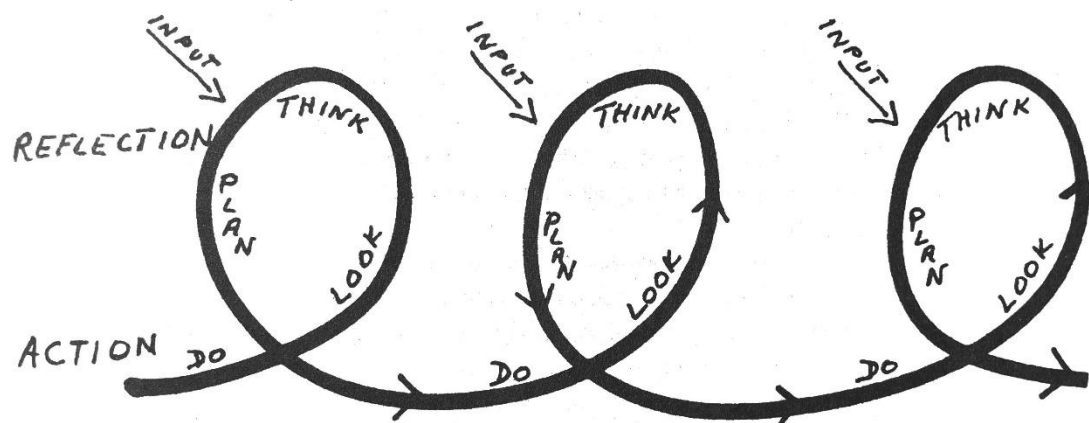


Image 5. The input is the form of problem posing.

The dialogical learning through questioning of subjective experiences in their social context creates a space for resistance and leads to political action against the “culture of silence”. Only through practicing the praxis humans reach their critical consciousness or “conscientization” (Freire, 1996, p.101) and become the praxis themselves. Only through conscientization human “become an active agent in constructing a different, more just reality” (Merriam& Caffarella, 2007, p.141).

The critique of the critical pedagogy names out its naivety and limitations (Ohliger, 1995), calling Freire’s work a combination of old-style socialism and liberal reformism (Gibson, 2006) and relying too heavily on Hegel's Phenomenology (Taylor, 1993) as well as not giving a “sufficient attention to difference, to the conflicting needs of oppressed groups, or to the specificity of people’s lives and experiences” (Jackson, 2007, 13). Nevertheless, the relevancy of Freire’s philosophy and the power analysis of the today’s society and to the DPS in particular cannot be underestimated despite not attending to gendered realities of women.

The above analysis of the DPS (Chapter 3) and positioning the asylum seekers as a peasant of nowadays assumes that liberatory education through conscientization may transform their reality. The truth is it cannot. The context of the hegemonic narrative of the DPS is unique being a purposely designed an oppressive structure within the societal structure, which creates a double context and a double narrative. The attempts of challenging the system from within – by the asylum seekers, causes

backlash in dispersal of the leaders and a fear of deportations from the country, so, consequently, the asylum seekers choose the social reality of disempowerment and oppression. It is the internalisation of the oppression and the acceptance of the power of the oppressor that causes a “fear of freedom” (Freire, 1996) and institutionalises the asylum seekers. The longer the time that asylum seekers are made to wait for the decisions on their cases in the DPS, the more severe the institutionalisation and dehumanisation.

In the pursuit of freedom, the asylum seekers need allies who will stand with them in solidarity to dismantle the oppressive system of the DP; the allies who have the power and influence on the political structures. Even though they may be well oppressed themselves within the societal structures, through exercising their active citizenship and the democratic right to vote together they have an immense power – the power of people in solidarity. This solidarity has to be purposely created through education – the very education Freire offers to us:

Solidarity – not is it the truth of men and women who fight side by side and learn together how to build this future – which is not something given to be received by people, but it rather something to be created by them. (Freire, 1996, p.21)

To create this solidarity there is a need to engage the citizens in the dialogue about the issues of asylum seekers with the asylum seekers themselves, so it is not the “banking education” but the empowering process through discovery. The dialogue and reflection on the hardship of the asylum seekers will create a possibility of the citizens to reflect on their own hardship and evoke the humanity in in each other – “solidarity requires that one enters into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture” (p.31) As “people educate each other through mediation of the world” (Freire, 1996, p.32), their problems will be simultaneously revealed to them through reflection which may lead to the action of engaging in the struggle with the oppressor, namely here – The Department of Justice and Equality –

to transform the objective reality. The process of struggle is happening now, as pointed out in the Chapter 3, but the scale of it is very small to bring about a real change, yet even this struggle and unity of civic society, academics and politicians cannot be underestimated.

The role of the leader, facilitator, animator or an educator is to bring the liberatory education to formal and informal educational spaces. Freire (1996) clearly states, that popular education can only be brought into the community through small educational project – “preparation for organization”, as those in power use systemic education as a tool of oppression.

The educator must be “a real humanist” who has “trust in the people, which engages him in their struggles than by a thousand actions in their favour without the trust” (Freire, 1996, p. 42). Only through authentic comradeship the solidarity will become an “act of love” (p.30), and only in the plenitude of this act of love there will be a true solidarity – its existentiality, in its praxis” (Freire, 1996, p. 32).

As an educator and an ex-asylum seeker I have committed to the praxis of solidarity. Mezirow, Freire and hooks light the way in the deeper understanding of the subjective and collective change as well as offer the tools for understanding the power, its social construction and the consequences of unjust order. Away at the margin looking for the calculations of the openings and the cracked passages that allow the light of hope in there is a place to grow resistant. “Enter that space. Let us meet there.” (hooks, 1990, p.152).

Conclusion

This chapter has looked upon the issues related to the transformative learning theory and critical pedagogy, their interrelation and validity. The persons, who encounter a dilemma, do not exist outside of the society. Their pre-transformative experiences are congruent with their economic, political and especially cultural capital, which derive from the habitue the persons have lived in. The experiences of structural oppression cannot be neglected, when discussing transformative learning. They are deeply connected with structures of society, as well as with the notions of gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, culture and so forth. In other words, transformative learning theory should be viewed through the framework of intersectionality. Despite not experiencing ‘desire to change’, existing power structures and meritocracy in neoliberal society may press an individual to commit ‘cultural suicide’, which on one hand helps a person to integrate into the new reality and supports transformation, but on another hand challenges their meaning perspectives

and ability to fit. Following on from that, the transformation may lead to a traumatic experience, which challenges the idea, that the outcome of personal transformation always leads to a positive change.

The education system, in fact, reiterates discourses of those in power through hidden curriculum, which does not allow development of critical thinking. As well as that, it fails to be culturally inclusive and to support the diversity of knowledge through intercultural curriculum. As it stands, it fails to acknowledge experiences from other cultures and through banking approach injects the values of those in power and supports cultural hegemony. Within this system transformative learning becomes a tool of self-control within the power structures.

The need of a dialogue, which critically reflects on the issues of the voiceless and marginalised in the society is vitally important, because through the dialogue they can reveal their own world, which will enable them to resist the oppressive power and in solidarity with others to challenge the power structures and reach an emancipation. Freire believed, that reflection and action are inseparable. Humans cannot act without thinking and reflection without action will not change reality. Freirean philosophy is very close to Mezirow's transformative learning. But "in Freire's approach, personal empowerment and social transformation are inseparable processes" (Meriam,2007, p.140). Praxis which lead to "conscientization "are the most valuable learning, that helps person transform their lives and their world. The issue of implementation of the Critical Pedagogy into practice more likely will always be through a disjointed project rather than through the change of the education system. The projects – short and long course – are a necessity as a precondition for fostering critical thinking and practicing resistance which eventually lead to a structural change. This "herculean task" demands enormous strengths and courage and cannot be achieved by the educators only – there is a need in the plenitude of solidarity with the people of all walks to bring above the liberatory change. However, systems like the DPS may exist no more, should there be a unity in Irish society regarding derogatory experiences of the asylum seekers. The following chapter will provide the analysis of the phenomenological text elicited for the purpose to make meaning of the subjective experience of living in the DPS.

Chapter 5. Analysis

It would be important to remind the reader that the starting point of this research was to make a meaning of my personal experience which upon reading the produced data provoked a questioning of meaning of the learning and education to one's life in resisting the oppressive structures of the DPS. The reading of the theory made a link between the learning and education as empowering and emancipatory praxis respectively and supported further investigation of the findings. This chapter will analyse the findings through the ideas explored in the Chapter 4. As the methodology dictates, the analysis will seek to reveal the meaning of the particular personal experience. The difficulty of subjectivity, as signified in Chapter 2, is to analyse the data objectively. For the purpose of distancing from ever colonising "I" of this research when refereeing to myself in the analysis I will use my name – Zoryana. It is done not to objectify myself in any sense, but to separate myself as a researcher in the context of analysis from myself as a narrator of the data. Also, for the purpose of analysing the deeper meaning of learning experiences, the learning will be looked at through two positions – learning in formal spaces and learning in informal spaces, where formal means educational settings and the informal is day to day life and the spaces that can be deemed informal. This is done only conditionally to separate the contexts to elicit the deeper meaning of the experiences.

Cooking as an Act of Resistance

Cooking as learning theme has a huge significance as it was revealed through the course of analysis. Being central to living and development food, as one of the basic human needs (Maslow, 1943, p.4) for subsistence (in Hope & Timmel, 2014, p. 87) was central to constructing experience of living in the DPS. Maslow signifies the meaning of food for human living:

Life itself tends to be defined in terms of eating. Anything else will be defined as unimportant. Freedom, love, community feeling, respect, philosophy, may all be waved aside as fripperies which are useless since they fail to fill the stomach. Such a man may fairly be said to live by bread alone. He dreams food, he remembers food, he thinks about food, he emotes only about food, he perceives only food and he wants only food. (Maslow, 1943, p.5)

This quote captures with precision human dependency on food which cannot be challenged in any way. On one hand the total provision of the food is being experienced as means of control:

Food was a means of control for centuries. And it still is. In direct provision we were being controlled through food, through water and milk, through locked doors to the dining room and kitchen, through judgemental looks of the chefs, and cleaners, and the management; through the surveillance cameras, through the feeling we should be grateful for what we have...to the point, that we started controlling our behaviour ourselves...

This ascending dynamic description portrays how total control of the food is inherent to the DPS.

Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy (2008) on the example of food banks show how power over “biological life arises through disciplinary institutional procedures that control food preference” (p.9). The use of *discipline* (*Going downstairs and line up for breakfast, go back upstairs, go downstairs and line up for lunch... Going downstairs for dinner... and Storing, cooking or having food in the rooms was prohibited*) and *punishment* (*being late for breakfast means no breakfast*) (Foucault, 1995) is an attempt of governing food–body relationship as the regulation is aimed at producing *docile bodies* (Foucault, 1995) and reinforces *culture of silence* (Freire, 1996) – people without will. This completely opposes the ongoing discourses in society on healthy eating and especially evident in the light of The Healthy Food Made Easy – a national programme devised by the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health and Children, in conjunction with the Community Nutrition Service of the HSE which aims to help people learn about healthy eating and healthy cooking in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere (Share, Share & Geraghty, 2009).

The oppressive experience of the food can also be evident in the following:

queuing for pittance, being under pressure to get sauce before its gone – otherwise nothing to have, food looks like scraps, leftovers, castoffs; experiencing disgust and wanting to get sick.

Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy (2008, p. 467) refer to the political importance of food which may be hindered by inability to understand the bodily experience of food choice and ideologies regarding food and eating. They conceptualise pleasures of eating as not only relevant to the tastiness of food but also to what Foucault referred to as *pleasures of knowing* (Foucault, 1990) knowing where and how food was

produced, who made it, what type of process was employed for the preparation. Provision of food without having a choice, as it is being exercised in the DPS, that is connected with specific tastes and needs of the person which the person can prepare herself works against a specific taste the person has developed through life. Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy (2008) emphasise that through governing the food choices the person's taste is being "governed" (p. 467). Drawing from this statement, food becomes a tool of governing the human body and the tool of oppression. It is also what Freire calls a *false charity* as it is being given to physically survive but does not offer a choice for personal human and cultural needs as pointed out in Chapter 3.

The stripping a person of the process of cooking, especially in the structures like the DPS, is taking away a possibility of engaging in creative praxis. As signified in Chapter 4, Freire points out that creativity is crucial for human "drive to search" and "restlessness" (Freire, 1996, p.42) and the lack of creative power suppresses life and pushes for the further embodiment of the oppression.

The practicing of cooking as a means of providing nutrition for children becomes for Zoryana a process of reclaiming identity of a mother which entails certain expectations from this role in the patriarchal structures, including cooking for her family. It is interesting how this process creates a struggle for Zoryana to fulfil her expectations of herself, of her family and of society when this inherent to her role process is being taken away from her.

Furthermore, if to look at the cooking as an indigenous way of learning and a way of passing on customs, traditions and culture, then taking away this abundant source of learning opens up a colonial narrative of the oppressors' culture and turning the asylum seekers into colonial subjects. As an instrument of domination, prohibition of cooking in the DPS becomes a cultural invasion, where "the invaders", namely, the Department of Justice and Equality as a creator of the harmful system and its horrendous policies, "penetrate the cultural context of another group" – here culturally diverse community of the asylum seekers, "in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression" (Freire, 1996, p.152). Taking away the cooking as an indigenous way of learning breaks the connection in "intergenerational learning" (Murphy, 2012) which leads to fragmentation of authentic cultural identity.

Another point which certainly cannot be neglected in this analysis is the revelation of epigenetic transgenerational trauma (Rechavi, Hourri-Ze'evi, Anava, Goh, Kerk, Hannon & Hobert, 2014) which concerned with the DNA recording memories of starvation during the famine and passing this traumatic information to the posteriors:

how experiencing a starvation during the famine is “recorded” by the human genes and passed down to the generations of posteriors... it all came together for me... I remember grandma telling me about famine...she should not have remembered, she was only four years old... but she remembered the feeling of hunger” ...

This bodily memory evokes the intergenerational trauma in Zoryana and creates an anxiety due to inability to have a control over food intake times and cooking. This analysis reveals an embodiment of an intergenerational oppression for Zoryana as a Ukrainian and as a woman of the particular family line. The intergenerational oppression is evoked through bodily memory and prohibition of cooking in the DPS. This point brings us back to hooks assertion pointed out in Chapter 4 about fragmentation of the person's wholeness in the patriarchal structures and the traumatic experiences of domination.

“I had chosen to survive! To survive and withstand the oppression I had experienced in direct provision through control of the food” affirms a willpower to refuse acceptance of the situation and proceeding with cooking, through the fear of being caught by the hand. Scott (1985) substantiates “where institutionalised politics is formal, overt, concerned with systematic, de jure change, everyday resistance is informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains” (p.33). The decision to start cooking covertly, while nobody watching, in this case becomes an everyday resistance. Thus, cooking, through practicing everyday resistance becomes a first stepping stone for further resisting the oppressive patriarchal structures.

Fostering Resistance through Learning Solidarity

This analysis is signified by the themes which are connected with the personal learning and the learning with the community of women inside and outside of the DPS. By personal learning meant the learning that is driven by personal disorienting

dilemmas which can be named as ***learning to mother without my mother*** and ***unlearning institutionalisation***.

Learning to mother without my mother is a process of becoming a mother which shows a woman does not become a mother when a baby is born. Becoming a mother is a process which takes a lot of learning about oneself as a woman and embracing the new identity of a mother. For Zoryana it comes with the struggle of fulfilling the expectations she has of herself as a mother in the society and the DPS, and the expectations and responsibilities that patriarchal society has of me. Being in tune with the little children and providing for all their physical needs becomes a hard task in the DPS. There is also a profound sense of loss of relationship with her mother, which explained in Chapter 2. This loss can be elicited through the memories that are connecting present with the past and leave Zoryana wondering in-between the spaces of how mothering could have been different back home. ***Learning to mother*** with the community of women in the DP centre brings a sense of solidarity and affirmation in the new role and prompts a birth of agency through creating a learning space for the children in the DP centre. Even from weakness comes out strengths; from the collective weakness through praxis of critical reflection and action may grow a collective strength which is a goal of Freire's solidarity.

Unlearning institutionalisation explained as

gripping with the new reality and learning to adjust to the living in the "open" society... and trying to fit into a new frame of what my life must be like" in fact is the process of unlearning the oppression: "to shed the peels and layers, that direct provision has covered me with...

This process is signified with trauma of losing the familiar space and the learning and knowing of how to deal with the familiar circumstances of oppression – *"my inner world was falling apart."* The living in "open" society comes as a disorienting dilemma and brings a huge challenge of ontological and epistemological positions. The realisation that the "open" society is not so open as expected, and that the desired from behind the walls of the DPS freedom in fact does not exist:

I was being crushed by the realisation, that the freedom I was dreaming of for so many years while in direct provision, in fact, doesn't exist...

This revelation comes with pain and creates a traumatic experience for Zoryana. Furthermore, the desire to fit in means that there is a struggle with a new identity, which is still unknown and only in the process of forming, nevertheless, the

loss of identity of the asylum seeker brings an experience of grieving. The familiar oppressive structures and the constant heightened feeling of being watched like in Foucault's Panopticon (1995) have been taken away but left Zoryana to deal with the effects of the psychological oppression (Hooks, 1984, p.48) and an internalised domination.

Learning from failure subtheme is a painful process filled with self-doubt and anxiety. In the culture of achievement which deeply inherent to humans through the "banking education" it is unacceptable to fail, in education especially. Capitalist society does not recognise failure, this is why failing comes with guilt, shame and anxiety. Again, these feelings are an impact of self-deprecating behaviour, which stems from oppression in patriarchal structures as asserted in Chapter 4:

for a while I thought of myself as a complete failure. Only about a year later, when writing a speech ... I suddenly realised –It was not failure! Not at all! It was just a part of learning!

Accepting this experience as a learning is empowering and have a sense of liberation. Hooks (2000) explains that institutionalisation, in fact, is an internalisation of the domination in patriarchal structures. She asserts, that the culture we live in is "the one institutionalised sphere of power" (p. 20) which impacts all levels of society and is being reinforced through social institutions, including family. She argues that there is need of learning self-acceptance, which is hard to achieve, because through the institutionalisation we are inhering a judgemental voice, which is "constantly judging, first ourselves and then others. That voice enjoys the indulgence of an endless negativity" (hooks, 2000, p.6). We must unlearn that "negativity is more real than any positive voice" (p.6). With learning positivity comes affirmation and acceptance of ourselves first as well as acceptance of others. The acceptance does not end institutional injustice, but rather prepares us to resist the patriarchal structures and unlearn the colonisation.

Theme **learning from my mother** emerges through Zoryana's childhood memories that are being elicited and intertwined with the memories from the DPS. Her mother's break out from the nowadays slavery for the sake of her daughter's education has a profound impact on the meaning of education in Zoryana's life. The so-called slavery is enforced through the traditional expectations of hard work and obedience from a daughter-in-law within the patriarchal structures.

Another important experience of her mother is an experience of going back to education as an adult and refusing to submit to demands of the bribery for the entrance to college. Yet, Zoryana emphasises, that she submits to pay whatever it takes for her education even though she has no means and puts herself into a conscious debt. It shows how Zoryana yield up to the meritocratic narrative of the neoliberal discourse, and how her mother is able to resist to the point of refusing to study. This difference in experiences is astounding.

Learning with the community of women inside and outside of the DPS especially evident in the letter “The Women” which shows respect to women’s struggles and tells a story of experiencing an immense support from Irish Mothers, Irish Sisters and Women Heroes. Hooks (1984) points out that support can mean “serving as a prop or a foundation for a weak structure” (p.62). However, there was no feeling of being weak in this relationship as the letter asserts. There are was no merely a pity, but the empowerment through engaging in conversations about each other’s struggles. As pointed out in Chapter 4, Freire emphasised, that having a trust in people and an ability to engage in their struggles the authentic comradeship will become an act of love which in its plenitude will be a true solidarity – in its praxis (Freire, 1996, p.32). There is a narrative in patriarchal structures that women are coming together to moan about their problems, but it is far from the truth. Such comments are degrading and disempowering. When women come together they engage in the discussions that are paving the way to overcoming “culture of silence” and fostering a critical reflection on their experiences created by the very structures. Hooks (1984) asserts, that when women are coming together to share their experiences, problems, feelings and stories of struggle from this sharing comes the realisation that “what was thought to be individual is in fact common: that what was thought to be a personal problem has a social cause and a political solution” (p.65).

As pointed out in Chapter 4, Mezirow emphasises that the new meaning, born from the transformed structure of assumptions, will be tested through engagement in ‘discourse’ - a ‘dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief’, - which can occur in one-to-one group relationships, in community groups or in formal and informal education setting (p.134). In these spaces, whether in groups or one-to-one, through the dialogue women learn “to see how social structures and attitudes have moulded them” (hooks, 1984, p.36). Through repeating the cyclical process of action and reflection women

reach “conscientisation” – an ability to understand critically their reality and recognise the social and political structures that oppress them. The solidarity of women clearly did not lead to emancipation in Zoryana’s case, but, certainly, has fostered development of agency and personal empowerment in both, friendships and a collective empowerment within the community in the DPS. The “unity in resistance and struggles”, states Hooks (1984) is “deeply political feminist unity and a struggle against the oppression of patriarchal structures which we all experience” (p.38). This unity makes personal experience less of a burden and empowers to resist daily oppression. Solidarity in this case is deeply humanising experience which fosters an acceptance of the whole person, gives the strengths to resist further and develops agency to withstand the oppressive structure of the DPS. Despite not developing into a social action, it fosters the empowerment in the presence of power. The site of oppression becomes a site of possibility for liberation by resisting submission to the oppression.

Learning for Liberation

The literature review underscored the value of the transformative learning as a praxis of empowerment. It is difficult to capture with the precision the learning that can occur in person’s life as well as how one learning leads to another as it is ever evolving process. However, the threads of transformative learning are vividly evident in the letters signifying disorienting dilemmas such as “ found myself in direct provision”, challenging assumptions and cultural beliefs in diverse space of direct provision, a first sleepless night after leaving the DP centre with the status, and capturing the empowering element of the transformation: “something changes that day”, “life changing experience”, “started seeing life differently”, “amazing journey which will never be forgotten”, “keep this learning in my memory forever”. These phrases are referring mostly to the courses in educational settings, namely to the courses of the Partners TFT, Community Education as well as the outreach courses and on-campus courses with the Department of Adult and Community Education, MU.

Learning to speak, apart from accessing Western knowledge, opens up a possibility of engaging in the practice of dialogue, which creates a possibility for Zoryana to reveal the world around her and to engage in further learning. The significant revelation comes upon reading Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which gives a

name to the experience of oppression. This transformative experience raises a question of why the word “oppression” was not learnt at the English class and signifies the importance of the critical literacy which creates a “connection between ‘reading the word and the world’ and ‘approaches subjectivity through the development of *conscientization*’ (Freire, 1996, p.19). As pointed out in Chapter 4, *conscientization* involves a critical assessment of the world and use of the knowledge to act on the issues that are being revealed through the reflection. Learning literacy has a potential to be “a cultural action for freedom” (Freire, 2000). However, in this instance learning the language became a tool of fully engaging with and integrating into the culture of the oppressor, namely, the culture of the DPS and the wider societal culture, which, by allowing for the oppression to exist in the DPS, becomes the oppressor too, as pointed out earlier.

Learning creativity is signified with the experience of feeling as “becoming a God”, and this revelation explains the repetitive returning to this empowering experience. As asserted in Chapter 4, creative power is a life-giving force which prompts “the drive to search, to restlessness” (Freire, 1996, p.42). Engagement in the process of creativity unveils and reproduces a creative power of a human and, thus, learning creativity becomes a process of overcoming alienation which is constructed by the “prescriptions”- regulations of the DPS. Developing creativity extends human repertoires of organic intellectual engagement as Connolly (2013, p.1) points out.

Furthermore, practicing creativity creates a condition for having “the capacity to exercise agency, while, at the same time, resisting discourse and social practises that are subjugating” Larkin (2016) conveys. Learning creativity moves outside of the space of Community Education and outside of the walls of the DPS and becomes a practice of creativity and friendship which brings a colour to everyday reality of the dark rooms and the oppressive environment.

As well as that, creativity is central to adult education, and particularly to the Freirean pedagogy. Thus, this subtheme includes learning creativity for working with groups – from jewellery making classes to creating and using problem posing material, which is central to eliciting generative themes with the groups and creating a dialogue which unveil real issues that people experience. So, learning creativity in Zoryana’s case moves over time from the learning to create to practicing creativity with the groups, and becomes a life-giving force for overcoming alienation and fostering creativity in others.

Learning for liberation is the theme which implies all the learning that leads to developing a critical awareness of the complexities of societal structures and is fostering resistance in Zoryana to the very structures as well as leads to her engagements in facilitating Freirean pedagogy.

Reconnecting with the cultural identity during the Intercultural session; re-discovering the leadership skills; experiential learning about power and realising that the power can be shifted and resisted; learning the “creative” toolbox of a facilitator for working with groups in Freirean approach are only some transformative learning experiences with Partners TFT that are recalled in the letters. Learning the word “facilitator” and experiencing the facilitation of creating a shared knowledge; learning the word “oppression” when reading Freire for the course; learning philosophy, sociology and feminists’ studies; becoming a qualified tutor and so forth only some of the significant experiences at the courses with Department of Adult and Community Education. Of course, Partner TFT and the named above department cannot be compared as those are different organisations with different streams of funding and different approaches to education. What is common though, that the experience with both organisations are truly transformative and not only because of the learning gained during the course, but because of the people who facilitate the education. The significance of solidarity of the tutors/facilitators, their trust in students and their humanity; their understanding of human struggle and the facilitation of critical inquiry into the human experience and into the world makes these spaces of learning a space for freedom and democracy as elicited from data. As indicated in Chapter 4, Freire (1996) emphasised that “real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favour without that trust” (1996, p.60). So, the experience of education is significant not only because of the learning it offers but because of the people who facilitate the learning, adhering to the adult education values such as respect, dignity, equality and justice. However, huge contrast holds the second part of the letter which tells the story of accessing higher education and the struggle to finance the courses due to ineligibility for grants. As pointed out in the data, the obstacles to receiving the grant for education is the previous education from back home, which is not relevant in Irelands as well as after 6 years in the DPS Zoryana’s deskilling is illuminated in the story of voluntary teaching Russian language in the local library.

Overcoming obstacles to access the studies is a real pushing through experience with finishing the Hdip, entering for MA programme, leaving due to the debt, borrowing the money for the payment, coming back again, snapping during the writing of the data and coming back again to finish the studies. These actions prove struggle but also a resistance to give up, persistence and perseverance to finish. In some way it maybe a resistance to submit to the previous experience of so called “failure” and to the circumstances that created the obstacles or something else, which hopefully will be discovered in this analysis.

There is also an acknowledgement of being “hooked on education”, which probably can be explained by the feel-good factor – an empowerment that transformative learning brings into Zoryana’s life. Yet, it can be underscored here, that the empowered that is gained thanks to education is temporary and does not lead to liberation.

There is an evidence in the story of “desire to learn” and a remarque is made about looking for a job before engaging in studies. This means that there are an intrinsic and extrinsic motivations as elaborated in the Chapter 4. In Zoryana’s case those are intertwined, with the former – studying towards certificates, which, when presented to the decisionmakers, could influence outcome of her case and earn her a ‘ticket to freedom’ – during her time in the DPS. This is a false believe, that being good on the basis of merit will eventually lead to the desired emancipation. Transformative learning as pointed out in Chapter 4 allows transformation within certain boundaries but does not actually allows to reach emancipation (Tailor& Cranton, 2013).

The process of repeatedly going back to education is empowering and disempowering at the same time. Empowering due to giving Zoryana a hope and strengths to survive the day to day experience and resist the oppressive structures of the DPS. Disempowering – because, while she was seeking spaces of freedom, the power structures of the DPS remained the same with her family remaining within these structures. Owing to the above statements, the question of longevity of the transformative learning arises as opposing to a temporary transformative empowerment of an individual within the existing power structures as asserted in Chapter 4.

Personal transformation does not allow for the social change, as the social change needs a collective engagement in the praxis of freedom, otherwise it is merely an individual empowerment, as in Zoryana’s case, within existing social system, which

rather operates “as a subtle form of self-control” (Inglis, 1998, p.13). This statement challenges the notion of freedom and emancipation being attained through personal transformation.

Or, is it because I have jumped on the train of meritocracy, and feel, that I must go further; I must progress; I must achieve; I must succeed... because if not, – I am a failure... –

clearly portrays a believe into the “individualist discourse that claims people can lift themselves out of poverty through their own actions” (Fitzsimons, 2017, p. 42). This individualism, Fitzsimons (2017) asserts is “an important cornerstone in neoliberalism” which is “increasingly cemented in hegemonic logic through the notion of social agency” (p.42). Domination of the individualism is evident in rationalisation of spending money on education which looks like Zoryana is manipulating herself into believing that she does the right thing.

There is a sense of grieving for the lost in the DPS time which upscales the game of meritocracy or what Freire calls a manipulation by the culture of achievement which is determined by the culture of domination as pointed out in Chapter 4. Internalisation of this narrative is the driving force behind Zoryana’s actions. Furthermore, her conscious decision to stop moaning her culture and “earn” her way out of the DPS through education ends up in committing “cultural suicide” (Brookfield, 1995 in Taylor, 2013) which, as asserted in Chapter 4, “can result from people moving away from their communities and cultures through transformative learning” (p.40). *“Integration comes with blood and tears”* Zoryana states. This reaffirms Taylor’s (2013) conclusion that “the phases of transformation involve pain, discontent, guilt and shame. The event or events that precipitate transformative learning are often traumatic but supposedly lead to positive outcome” (p.40).

Contrarily to the last point, the conscious decision of blocking part of Zoryana’s life experiences and culture in order to survive the oppression as well as to integrate in the society had created ongoing issues of anxiety and depression. It might have happened partly because the learning spaces she had been attending were not addressing her cultural needs and were reinforcing the culture of the ruling class. As pointed out in Chapter 4, it could have been due to the adult education not being culturally inclusive and not catering for diversity of knowledge through intercultural curriculum (Zilliacus, 2009) as well as undermining world experiences as a source

for enrich and diversifying Western knowledge. Submission through “cultural hegemony” (Adamson, 1980) reinforces the notion of the powerful through consent. Connolly (2013, p.14) points out that women and other subordinate groups develop their identity through the feedback from their peer. Seeing herself through the eyes of society as an asylum seeker, Zoryana has internalised the dominant cultural norms of the society. This “disjointed sense of identity” (Connolly, 2014) prompted her to deny the validity of her own experience prior to the DPS and turned her into a self-deprecated being. Zoryana is grieving for her fragmented identity and uses education as a vehicle for reclaiming her prior to the DPS identity and for the attempts of freeing herself from the internalised colonisation inflicted on her during the years in the DPS. The last subtheme that has to be mention is ***learning to find my voice***.

Through transformative learning and the praxis of “conscientization” Zoryana becomes an educator and an active agent of the learning which deals with the narrative of patriarchy and the oppression of the DPS:

I need to tell about it, so when people get to know, something can be done for the system to exist no more... for the people to struggle no more... for the children to be discriminated no more... We are strong and smart people. We want to fully contribute to society. Don't steal our life in the dark rooms of direct provision. Don't steel our hopes and dreams. We are Humans... Have a closer look. We are more alike than not. We are more connected than not. We all belong to this planet... We have so much to give...

Through her work she resists to the domineering narrative on asylum seekers and works to bring about change. She resists to submit to the discourses of power. Her voice grows stronger through the course of the letters. Through the years of education and transformation she develops agency for herself, for her family and for the people who need solidarity like she needed it in the position on the margin of society. Her experience of oppression and subjugation carved her into who she is now. She facilitates education that is meaningful, congruent in people’s experiences and through reflection and action leads to “conscientisation”. This is praxis of personal radical transformation in solidarity with others which does not move her “from the margin to the centre” but keeps her grounded in the roots of the community as an ex-asylum seeker with the asylum seekers and unites her in solidarity with their struggles with the hope for the emancipation for all.

Chapter 6. Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations

This study is important because it offers a new insight into an experience of a woman asylum seeker from the feminist standpoint. It also affirms a vital role of adult education and learning for a person's ability, or, even better to say, for a woman's ability to resist the patriarchal structures – whether structures of the DPS or the societal structures.

Furthermore, the research points out that simple everyday tasks like cooking have an immense significance for creativity, learning, resisting, developing agency and practicing an authentic culture. The further research of cooking as an indigenous source and way of learning may illuminate a new insight into this simple everyday process and bring a new knowledge to the field of theory and practice of adult education.

Learning to mother without my mother theme seeks to shed a light on the learning of mothering away from home and with little communications with mothers of new mothers. Further research on *unlearning institutionalisation* may create a possibility to investigate a reconstruction of identity, dealing with internalised oppression and traumatic experiences after the of the DPS.

The impact of education and of transformative learning on “cultural suicide” (Brookfield, 1995 in Taylor, 2013) and its causes would bring an interesting insight about integration into the cultural context of the “oppressor” and, certainly, would impact the theory of transformative learning.

Besides, assertion that adult education is not being culturally inclusive and not catering for diversity of knowledge through intercultural curriculum (Zilliacus, 2009) as well as undermining world and cultural experiences as a source for enrich and diversifying Western knowledge needs to be investigated further. Adult education by its principles should be inclusive of all cultural and other diversities to create an opportunity for rich learning and to facilitate social inclusion of marginalized groups such as asylum seeker, refugees, migrants, Travellers, LGBTQ+ and so forth.

Conclusion

This research aimed to make meaning of my personal experience of living in the DPS and to explore how this experience is intersected with adult education theory and practice. For the purpose of this phenomenological study to elicit the story and the deeper meaning of personal experience a creative medium of an epistolary autoethnography was invented and addressed to my mother to write the story from the heart. The meaning making of the experience emerged in the process of the reflexive writing of the letters as well as the deeper meaning was elicited through the analysis of the data.

The study provided a framework of the context of the DPS as well as the societal context in which the personal experience was carved. The research methodology outlined the standpoints from which this research has sprung. The literature review examined theoretical and philosophical perspective on education and learning in response to the themes that emerged during the process of coding.

The dividing of myself for a researcher and a subject of the research for the purpose of analysing the data gave me an opportunity to look at the data from the distance, yet, to dig deeper into the meaning while stepping back from bias.

The true revelation of experience during the analysis has been signified with embodiment of emotions. The revelations were bringing together deeper understanding of how personal and political always intertwined, and how one does not exist without the other.

The key themes unearthed from the findings were as follows: *Cooking as an act of resistance*: cooking as learning; *fostering resistance through learning solidarity*: learning to mother without my mother, unlearning institutionalisation, learning from failure, learning from my mother, learning with the community of women; *learning for liberation*: learning to speak, learning creativity, learning to find my voice.

The deeper meaning of *cooking as learning* is a practicing of everyday resistance against oppressive structures of the DPS as well as resisting transgenerational oppression. *Fostering resistance through learning solidarity* is signified by the learning as a mother, learning from own mother and learning of solidarity with the community of women. The two subthemes *unlearning institutionalisation* and *learning from failure* are entailing an emotional struggle to cope

with the internalised domination inflicted by the oppressive structures of the DP as well as coping with the second level of patriarchal structures in “open” society, which create a double narrative of oppression. The themes *learning to speak*, *learning creativity*, *learning for liberation* and *learning to find my voice* signified with the development of the language, creativity and agency, however, there is not enough strengths that needed to resist the meritocracy within the societal patriarchal structures.

All the themes are interrelated where one theme of learning leads to another and all of them are intertwined. Engagement in education and richness of learning from the family, peer and the community created an abundant experience of empowerment, solidarity and resistance to the structures of oppression. If placed along an imaginary continuum of praxis, these experiences are a persistent move towards emancipation. Through the analysis comes a devastating understanding that emancipation is an unripe task to be achieved alone, however, the solidarity that the women are able to foster in the face of the patriarchal structures gives a hope for the emancipatory change. This process is congruent in the praxis of an emancipatory education that seeks “conscientisation” through collective engagement in praxis and solidarity.

This research challenged my assumptions about the meaning of learning and adult education as a counterhegemonic force of resistance and absolutely challenged my preconception about the meaning of cooking for the intergenerational learning, intergenerational resistance and intergenerational oppression as well as an indigenous way of learning.

The transformative learning is the move along the continuum of learning that is closer towards radical social transformation, but this transformation can only occur when the praxis of conscientization extends to collective action.

Researching subjectivity is a complex process. It allows for exploration of deeper meanings, but it is emotionally demanding and hurtful. It is safe to say now that this research was unethical towards myself as a subject of the research, but it was my personal choice to transgress through this experience. Without this push I would not have achieved the transformation I experience when closing this thesis. Indeed, this research became a praxis of freedom where I was able to reflect on my personal experience and how it has been constructed by the dominant discourses of the patriarchal structures. The Direct Provision System was a school of survival and a school of learning. I came to understand that the learning to resist in the Direct

Provision System taught me to resist within the structures of domination. The people I have met along the way have humanised me and made the survival possible. I am grateful to the educators who make education an empowering emancipatory process.

There are unavoidable limitations, despite the research has reached its aims. Subjectivity is congruent in personal experience, therefore, to make a meaning of experiences of other asylum seekers, there is a need to employ a different approach to the research to investigate the scope of impact of the Direct Provision System on the people's lives.

Phenomenology is a rich source of data but appears to be difficult to analyse due to ever emerging meanings. Due to this process other rich generative themes had to be abandoned to make data a manageable source for eliciting meanings.

And, finally, this study asserts that personal experience is constructed by the political systems of domination and that political discourses of power have a profound effect on a woman's life, and that the personal stories have to be shared to challenge the discourses and to reveal the effects that they have on personal experiences. Thus, this thesis maybe deemed "an act of counterhegemonic resistance" (hooks, 2012, p.5).

As an educator, I hope, that the data and the findings of this research may be used by teachers, educators and facilitators in the field of the adult and secondary education as a problem-posing material or as a starter for discussion on the topic of asylum seekers and the Direct Provision System with the hope to evoke critical questioning, awareness and prompt action to solidarity in resisting institutional oppression and to bring about change in treatment of the people who are seeking protection. It is important to remember that at the time of uncertainty in the global power discourses everybody is a potential refugee.

Chapter 7. After the Conclusion

When working on the analysis of the findings, I have realised that over the period of writing the thesis I had intensely resisted the expectations, that patriarchal structure of society has of me as a woman, which are being reinforced through the social institution of a family unit. I concluded that during the time in the Direct Provision I had to deal with multiple contexts of oppression: the context of society, the DPS and the family context. This research gave me the understanding and the strength to recognise these contexts, to resist them and most important to voice my indignation.

There is so much work that needs to be done to change the oppressive, colonising structures that exist within the societal patriarchal structures. I believe with my whole heart that it can be done with emancipatory education. Because of my experience in the DPS and as a result of this thesis I commit working with women, so we can engage in the praxis of reflecting on our place in the world and take revolutionary action to change the system that is oppressive towards many, – with the hope that we may transgress to emancipation during my lifetime. And for now, I will practice an everyday resistance that started almost thirteen years ago with covertly cooking in the Direct Provision System.

A Food for Thought*

Verse Libre

When food becomes a *means of control*
life is being stripped of dignity
right to the “*naked life*” –
it becomes
a tool of *biopolitics*.
But there is always a space for *everyday resistance*
because people are not empty vessels.
You cannot pour the food down their throats
like the *banking knowledge* into their heads.
They come with their own *culture*,

which should be respected.

Food is central to the culture.

Food is life-giving.

Cooking is a process of creativity:

If you don't see how food is made

if your hands are not dirty from making a bread

peeling a potato

washing the dishes

you become *alienated*.

You need to fulfil your hunger

for creativity

but you are collecting food

from a production window instead...

Disrespect...

"False generosity" –

Giving safety but denying a basic right –

Cooking

You line up collecting the pittance

You are being regulated:

timed breakfast lunch dinner

No wonder,

it is *governmentality*.

You as an adult *woman*

want to feel *empowered*

by providing for your children the *nutritional*

rich in love food

fulfilling the traditional expectations of your role

but you are *not allowed*.

As a mother

as a woman

you are failing

The rules of ruling *imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchal structures*

do not allow you to cook.

Because *cooking is a political action*.

It is an *action for liberation*
A connection with one's culture.
That's how the kitchen becomes a battlefield of power.
The oppressor against the oppressed...
The oppressor over the oppressed
The experience of food –
the taste the smell the look
causes you to puke –
the oppressor is happy.
The food is oppression.
But you have something
growing stronger within you!
It's the desire to be a creator,
to be a *mother*,
to be a *woman*!
You grow *resistant*!
You are cooking
for reconstructing
of your identity.
An asylum seeker is a male form of the word
which has an expectation of you being silent in the "culture of silence"
But you need to save the "naked life" of your child!
You – on your own
cannot stand against the system of oppression.
You find allies!
Other women stand with you in *solidarity*
they cook and bring food for your children!
Women teach you to be resistant.
And even though you are the one inside the system,
you are no more alone!
Women carry you on their shoulders!
They give you broccoli and a steamer.
You missed seeing the colour
In your food.

Green is life-giving
It will give your children strengths of the Earth.
You cook, withholding your breath
in the fear
to be caught
by the hand
and to be prosecuted
for cooking love for your children!
But who can stop you?
You practice *everyday resistance*:
Cooking becomes an act of resistance.
You grow to be a dissident, a rebel.
Cooking is an act of rebellion.
Your mother
and grandmother
and great grandmother
stand with you in the room.
They whisper to you – stay strong
you are one of us
we live in you
Your grandmother lived through famine 1933
she was a little girl then
just like your daughter now
She didn't have a choice but to survive
Biopolitics
And you have no choice
you have to grow strong!
If the *choice* is not given to you –
you have to take it.
You cannot choose the food
that your taste buds want you to have,
that your body needs to enrich itself.
The *wholeness of the body* is being fractured,
your taste becomes "*governed*" by the politics.

Isn't it the idea of governmentality
to make you obedient,
coerced
and silenced
through food.

Your *body becomes a site of biopolitics* – surviving...

Every day you practice a little bit of resistance:

you keep your cutlery hidden in the toilet,
you sneak in the food to your room,
you wash your hands a thousand times
when coming back from the dining room
that's how your body resists to give up...
being broken...

you are reclaiming yourself

You are *reclaiming your life through cooking*

Institutionalised

You can never pronounce this word
correctly

You forget to cook,

Because you are *institutionalised*

You learn to cook again

you unlearn to be regulated

You know that *food is capable of healing*

The smell, the look, the experience

will stay in your *memory*

Your old memories are happy,

rich in colour and taste

where you float on your mum's buns

like on clouds.

Those are memories of love and care

You miss your mother...

In your memories

kitchen is a site of intergenerational learning

In memories of your children

it is not going to exist
Transgenerational memory
The connection is broken...
The oppressor doesn't want you to be liberated
No cooking is allowed:
Cooking is a cultural act
through cooking you *reclaim authenticity*
Your mind
and body and taste buds
demand resistance:
your body becomes
an active agent of resistance.
It grows in you.
You don't know about it yet:
It's the first step.
It's only the first step.
You are going to learn word *oppression* soon
You will start using word *feminism*
Hopefully, you did enough
to *create memories for your children*
and to feed them *freedom...*
5/06/2019

* This poem was written on the day when *cooking as learning* theme was analysed and the meanings were revealed through the process of analysis.

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Image 2. – Reception and Integration Agency. (2019). *Monthly Report October 2018* [Ebook]. Retrieved from <http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/October%202018%20monthly%20report%20updated%20.pdf/Files/October%202018%20monthly%20report%20updated%20.pdf> (*Monthly Report October 2018*, 2019)

Image 3. – Pshyk, Z. Created by Chepyha, O. July 2019

Image 4. – Kitchenham, A. (2008). *The Evolution of Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory*. Available at: https://www.usm.maine.edu/olli/national/postConference/2012_confWorkshops/workshopMaterials/Jon%20Neidy/The%20Evolution%20of%20John%20Mezirow's%20Transformative%20Learning%20Theory.pdf (accessed 25 May, 2016)

Image 5. – Hope, A., & Timmel, S. (2014). *Training for transformation: A handbook for community workers: Volumes 1-3* (Rev. ed.). London: Intermediate Technology

