

**GEOGRAPHY OF HEART:  
HOME AND BELONGING IN THE LIGHT OF ADULT AND COMMUNITY  
EDUCATION**

**VIKTORIJA MONSTVILAITE**

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**Department of Adult and Community Education  
Maynooth University**

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**Supervisor: Michael Murray**

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## ABSTRACT

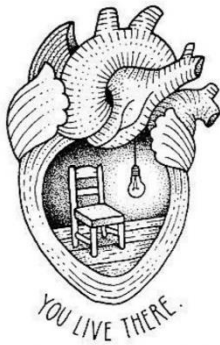


Figure 1: Facebook 2021

...‘I am comforted by the knowledge that I could die here. This is the way I imagine the end’ claims hooks (2009, p. 6) who has been the main inspiration for this personally professional academic journey in search of home and a sense of true belonging in the context of adult and community education. Being an adult educator myself, it made sense to use adult education as the setting for my research; however, firstly, adult education is concerned with issues of belonging – particularly regarding community education which offers an opportunity to look at claims of whether it encourages grounding-as-belonging or inspires mobility. Therefore, linking personal with professional, employing qualitative research with elements of an autoethnographic approach and semi-structured interviews, the data has been collected, the findings have been derived and compared in relation to reviewed literature and the most significant discoveries have been summarised: although finding or creating home – our final destination - can take a lifetime or just a glimpse of a moment, there is no single definition when it comes to describing it. The concept is perceived individually and uniquely by everyone and can consist of many elements: people, places, familiarity, feelings and a sense of ownership. Alternatively, the notion of self-acceptance and finding home within yourself is a significant factor in the journey of happiness and contentment. Furthermore, comparing the notions of home and belonging, it is evident that two ideas interconnect but also vary at the same time. While the thought of home may incorporate a number of essential elements, the fluid concept of belonging revolves around aspects of family or community. Finally, the multi-dimensional nature of adult and community education plays a role which can be liberating, grounding or even both at the same time, where liberating is perceived deeper than just an act of physical freedom and grounding revolves around a number of positive ideas such as a sense of purpose, security, self-love and belonging.

**Key words:** home, belonging, adult & community education, liberation, grounding.

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## PROLOGUE

I guess, lucky are those who have lived their lives with such certainty and fullness and who are sure of having arrived at their final destination, however, I don't have that feeling yet. I feel like I am in transition, on the way, but where to?

I don't remember questioning my identity and the concept of home before leaving my home country 17 years ago. I knew where I belonged and I knew where I was going, well, at least, I thought I did. Or maybe I was just young then, I hadn't faced too many of life's trials and tribulations, I had no experience of the big wild world, my beliefs and values hadn't been challenged by time and trials that life throws at us. I knew so little back then...

Yes, as a teenager, I recollect dreaming of going to America in search of my own Promised Land. Not that I was unhappy at home. Probably, because that seed of searching, wondering and questioning has always been in me just it has been dormant for many years or it needed richer soil to start growing.... Almost 20 years later, I still haven't set my foot into the 'New World' and I don't even want to anymore.

Only after coming to Ireland, settling here and starting to live independently did I feel a strange longing in my heart. Life just got too real and I realised that the emotional distance between me and my birthplace became too big. Although, when I am there, I say 'I am going home' to Ireland and when I am in Ireland, I go 'home' back to Lithuania. I feel like a permanent foreigner – in Ireland I feel more Lithuanian and in Lithuania I feel more Irish. Yes, I still feel nostalgic when I think of my country; I miss my parents and my friends, but I can't imagine myself returning to my roots like hooks did (2009). I love going back but I feel like a visitor. I watch people rushing by, getting on with their lives and I realise that I don't really know this place anymore, I only remember it and just like hooks, my visits home almost always leave me torn: I want to stay but I need to leave (2009). Therefore, when asked 'when are you coming home', I can't give a straight answer. Maybe it's because I am never coming back. On the other hand, although Ireland has been very welcoming to me, I have always felt that the Emerald Isle is only a temporary harbour for me and I would set my sails someday when the winds feel favourable.

Coming to Ireland to study initially, knowing it would be a temporary adventure, I felt a great sense of freedom, independence and new experiences. Yes, I was homesick but I knew I'd be

home soon. When did all this change? What happened to a carefree and adventure-mad young girl? When did life get in the way and dim that desire to discover and explore? When did the real living, where there is no place for big dreams and aspirations, start? When did I stop being brave to try?

For the last few years I have been fantasising about moving to Italy. However, will this time ever come? Will I dare to exchange the comforts of my current life for something new and unexplored for the sake of finding something that I haven't lost? I am not certain anymore. Nothing seems definite and I realise that once black or white assumptions are slowly gaining grey shades as I am getting older.

After paying my 120<sup>th</sup> rent, I remember having a temporary glimpse of realisation that I was finally at 'home'; however, that feeling was so short-lived and it soon got replaced by this nagging sense of temporality when you know that something is missing but you don't know what.

Raising a child on my own, I was too busy with survival so I had no time for utopian daydreaming. However, as life settled and I was finally able to pull my head from under the nappies and bibs, I finally was able to realise my old dream of returning to education as a mature student. It was ground-breaking. The experience opened my mind to new ways of thinking and steered me towards my own professional path in adult and community education. I feel the process has awoken this inner analyst in me and planted existential questions in my head and heart: what is the purpose of living? Where is home? Is it where we were born, where we were raised or where we are now? Is it somewhere we live? Somewhere we left? Someplace that shaped us? Or maybe we gather up our understanding of home from little pieces of memories and places that we hold dear?

I guess, I still have a life to live and invaluable knowing to discover.

## INTRODUCTION

‘I need to move around a bit.

To shuffle my surroundings.

To wake up in cities I don’t know my way around  
and have conversations in languages I cannot comprehend.

There is always this tremendous longing in my heart to be lost,  
to be someplace else,

to be far far away from all of this’.

(Taplin 2021)

Home /həʊm/

Noun:

- the place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household;
- a place where something flourishes or from which it originates;
- an environment offering security and happiness;
- the finishing point in the race;

Verb:

- (of an animal) to return by instincts to its territory after leaving it;
- move or be aimed towards (The Free Dictionary, 2003-2021).

Sure, in the world of Google everything is quite clear cut: home is a house or a place, ok, maybe a family, too; it could also be a final stop where eventually we come back led by our instincts as, at the end of the day, we are closer to the animal world more than maybe we would like to be. However, in real life, when dealing with real people, definitions and meanings become deeper and so much more complex. Therefore, a couple of years ago I set out on an academic journey to find the answers to the questions that have been nagging me for quite some time: what is home? Do we find it or do we create it? What is the true sense of belonging?

I left my home country at the age of twenty on a student exchange programme and happened to settle down in Ireland 17 years ago; however, I have been feeling that there has been something missing in my life, that I am not where I am supposed to be. Additionally, returning



to education as a mature student, becoming an adult educator and realising the invaluable input that education had in my life, I felt it was right to bring adult and community education into my research and explore its role through the lens of home and belonging, and I don't mean the obvious role – to educate adults or the role defined by AONTAS<sup>1</sup> (2020) – to respond to the needs of the local community, especially as adult education is associated with questions of belonging – particularly with respect to community education which gives an opportunity to explore the claims of whether adult education creates conditions for grounding-as-belonging or encourages mobility and migration. I wished to delve deeper into the less visible world of adult and community education and find out whether it liberates or grounds people. Therefore, the link between the two parts of the research – personal and professional – has been established in my thesis.

Without a shadow of a doubt, I started my academic venture with pre-conceived assumptions: I was convinced that home was a place, a person or a feeling. I was sure, there was a definition to describe the concept and I just had to find it. Additionally, I was certain that home and a feeling of belonging were synonyms, that you could use one instead of another and still get the same meaning. Finally, when it came to adult and community education, I trusted it was solely liberating and enlightening, giving people wings to fly and direction to follow. I used the terms such as liberation, emancipation, empowerment, freedom interchangeably without even thinking about their true meaning and purpose. On the other hand, although I didn't believe that, I desired to explore and find out whether there was anything grounding about adult and community education, whether instead of liberating, it enticed people to stick to the locality and the familiar. It seemed to me that the notion of grounding had a negative touch to it, it had this sense of being shackled, restricted and even trapped... Yes, I had my assumptions and I thought I had the answers; however, I delved into the research with an open heart and an even more open mind. I followed the required steps and let my findings take me through the process into the world of new knowledge and discoveries.

I began my academic journey with a research proposal which, if I look at it now, seemed so naïve, superficial and idealistic. However, as I started going through the research process, I witnessed the scope of my study getting narrower as the truths I was trying to discover were hidden deeper than I realised.

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<sup>1</sup> AONTAS – The Irish National Adult Learning Organisation.

Professionally, I desired to aim my research findings and conclusions at the adult and community education facilitators and learners. I hoped that better understanding would lead to promotion of inclusion and integration among the ones involved in adult and community education. Also, I believed this research could be valuable to community development initiatives as it would explore creation and functions of a healthy community. Or maybe it could shine a light onto the paths of those who are lost and out of place physically and emotionally.

On a personal note, the study mattered to me as I was hoping to deepen my knowledge of the rationale behind human behaviour and contentment. Why did some people leave their homelands while others stayed? What forced people to come back to where they started? On the other hand, I felt that I had been in search of 'home' myself. I sensed the inner knowing that there has been something waiting out there for me and I have been looking for a place where I could truly belong. I was hoping that the discoveries made during my research process would help me shift this feeling of placelessness that I have been carrying in my heart, therefore, I used an autoethnographic element in my research which has informed my study and allowed me to be a researcher and a participant at the same time. While exploring the literature in question, interviewing my participants, analysing my findings, reflecting on my learning and drawing the conclusions, I questioned my own understanding and my personal life experiences which, I believe, had an invaluable input towards my findings and the meanings I made throughout the process.

### **Structure and Outline of My Thesis**

My thesis begins with a prologue which, I hope, shows a bit more of the personal side of my study and portrays how it had informed my research process. Additionally, in front of each chapter I have added some poetry from Kaur (2020) and Taplin (2021) which, I thought, serves as a suitable lead-in into each section. Additionally, I feel, it is reminiscent of the poetic and nostalgic nature of my study and the autoethnographic approach I have adopted.

#### **Chapter 1 – Literature Review**

In this chapter I will explore the literature on home, belonging and their relationships with immigration and identity. Also, I will analyse adult education as a global discourse and I will look into community education and its grounding, yet liberating, nature. The key arguments

offered in this chapter will be: the notion of home and belonging is closely related to the ability to be free to be who we truly are; additionally, belonging revolves around self-acceptance, fitting in, creating bonds and becoming part of something collective; furthermore, adult education – as a global discourse – in the light of cosmopolitanism connects local to the worldly, and, finally, community education liberates and grounds at the same time portraying grounding as a positive concept.

I will support my review with publications from AONTAS (2004, 2020), The Government White Paper on Adult Education (2000) and SOLAS<sup>2</sup> (2020-2024) and the works of Beck (2002), Brown (2017), Connolly (2010, 2016), Fitzsimons (2014, 2017), Freire (2018), Gustafson (2009), hooks (2009), Mezirow (2000), Murray (2007) and many more.

## **Chapter 2 – Methodology**

This section defines my dual role – being a researcher and a participant - within my study and represents my ontological and epistemological positions. Additionally, it outlines my research design and the rationale behind it: why qualitative research? What research methods have I adopted? Who were my study participants and what was their input into my work? Finally, this chapter portrays the ethical dilemmas and challenges I faced while carrying out my research and writing my thesis.

## **Chapter 3 – Findings**

This chapter highlights the reflections and experiences of my study participants and outlines the themes and subthemes that have emerged after analysing the data. As my research had an autoethnographic element, my own reflections and answers to the questions have been intertwined among the ones of my interviewees. The findings chapter presents the richness and the depth of my topic and the different takes on it including the key arguments: there is no single definition of home; however, it might be closer to us than we think and we need to search within ourselves. Also, settling down is a very personal concept and people experience it individually. Additionally, belonging has a physical and emotional dimension which revolves around place and community. Finally, adult and community education plays a diverse role

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<sup>2</sup> SOLAS – Further Education & Skills Service.

within the context of home and belonging – it liberates us, it grounds us and sometimes it does both.

#### **Chapter 4 – Analysis**

The analysis chapter demonstrates the relationship between my research findings and the literature review. In this section of the thesis I take raw data, distil the meaning from it and discuss the key arguments such as: there is no single definition when it comes to home; additionally, belonging is a unique concept closely connected to home and feeling free to be who we truly are; furthermore, the notion of liberation isn't as straightforward as initially anticipated, it has a conflicting side too; moreover, adult education has a distinctive connection with globalisation and cosmopolitanism serving as a gateway into the world, whereas community education acts as a grounding force.

#### **Final Summary and Reflections**

This chapter revisits what has been discussed throughout the thesis, draws on my own reflections on learning and answers the question: how does my work confirm or depart from existing knowledge? Additionally, it emphasises the implications of my study and the impact of my findings by revealing who is impacted and how. Also, it discusses the limitations of the study and outlines the areas for future research.

The epilogue, as part of my autoethnographic approach, draws on my reflections and emotions and offers the final word, a closure to my study by tying together the professional and personal aspects of my research. Furthermore, appendices provide a list of my interview questions and full transcripts for context. Every single chapter and section within my thesis plays a significant part in the creation of new knowledge and meaning. However, in order to get the full picture, it is worth laying the research process foundation and starting from the beginning – the literature review which is the first stop in my academic journey.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

‘Perhaps we are all immigrants  
Trading one home for another  
First we leave the womb for air  
Then the suburbs for the filthy city  
In search of a better life  
Some of us just happen  
to leave entire countries’.  
(Kaur 2020)

### 1.1. Introduction

As already mentioned in the introduction to my thesis, the focus of my study was the search for home and a true sense of belonging. I wasn’t interested in the asylum seekers or forced displacement. I wished to explore voluntary migration and the rationale behind settling down or continuing to look for one’s place under the sun. The question mattered to me as I hoped it would deepen my knowledge of the motivation behind human behaviour and contentment. On the other hand, I feel that I have been in search of home myself. I have noticed that I have been looking for a place where I can truly belong and I have been trying to make sense of my quest for meaning and self-actualisation.

Adult education is concerned with issues of belonging – in particular with regards to community education which allows us to explore the claims of whether adult education encourages grounding in terms of belonging or whether it leads to mobility. As a result of that, I wished the understanding of home and belonging to be the lens through which I observe the role of adult and community education – does it liberate people? Does it help to shake the shackles of physical and emotional stagnation or does it actually ground us and knit us even tighter into the local community?

Therefore, linking personal with professional, I have analysed the literature and have reviewed key ideas, trends and limitations within the area of my research. Additionally, based on my personal experience and the position that I am in, I have critiqued some assumptions and findings presented in the selected readings which have set the scene for reporting on my study.

I am not making any claims outside of my research, but on the basis of my study, the key arguments offered in this chapter include: the notion of home and belonging is closely related to the ability to be free to be who we truly are; additionally, belonging revolves around self-acceptance, fitting in, creating bonds and becoming part of something collective; furthermore, adult education – as a global discourse – in the light of cosmopolitanism connects local to the worldly, and, finally, community education liberates and grounds at the same time portraying grounding as a positive concept.

This chapter will look into the publications of AONTAS (2004, 2020), The Government White Paper on Adult Education (2000) and SOLAS (2020-2024) and will explore the ideas of Beck (2002), Brown (2017), Connolly (2010, 2016), Fitzsimons (2014, 2017), Freire (2018), Gustafson (2009), hooks (2009), Mezirow (2000), Murray (2007) and many more in the context of home, belonging, cosmopolitanism, globalisation and liberation.

## **1.2. In Search of Home & True Belonging**

Reviewing my chosen literature, I realised that I ended up with more questions raised than answers provided. Getting overwhelmed by readings available, I felt that my personal experience was my most valuable resource, therefore I have analysed the key ideas and limitations of the literature through my reflective lens of personal understanding and observations.

Although I don't necessarily view the world through a feminist prism, I must admit that bell hooks has been my biggest inspiration for choosing my research question and embarking on an autoethnographic journey in finding home and the sense of true belonging. I could hugely relate to hooks's story and search for meaning in life which made me shine a reflective light on my own personal path. Therefore, along with other readings, I used hooks as the starting point in my exploration of the geography of the heart and mind (2009).

While sociodemographic factors such as social class, sex and age play an important role in the search of territorial and emotional belonging (Gustafson 2009) and, as hooks suggests, 'call to home comes at times when we are ready to slow down' and 'stop somewhere' (2009, p. 203), the aim of my literature review was to find key ideas of what defines home and true belonging

regardless of any sociodemographic characteristics. Instead, I wished to explore the less tangible side of the topic.

As a result, based on my readings, self-acceptance, fitting in, creating bonds and becoming part of a community or something collective have surfaced as connecting concepts within the literature. hooks (2009) suggests that home and a true feeling of belonging stem from being totally free to be who you truly are with your native accent, race and personal values. Additionally, she signifies that 'to fully belong anywhere one must understand the ground of one's being' (2009, p. 220) living at ease with oneself and one's surroundings (May 2011). On the other hand, Brown (2017) highlights that real belonging is not a passive state which comes with just joining a community, it's not conforming or posing; it's an experience which requires us to be exposed, outside our comfort in order to learn how to be comfortable with the others without losing our true selves. Also, Brown (2017) believes that true belonging is a feeling of believing in and belonging to yourself to such a deep level that you can open up to the world and find peace in both being part of something collective and standing alone. True belonging only occurs when we present our genuine flawed selves to the world but don't allow the sense of it to be greater than our self-acceptance (Brown 2010):

'True belonging is not passive. It's not the belonging that comes with just joining a group. It's not fitting in or pretending or selling out because it's safer. It's a practice that requires us to be vulnerable, get uncomfortable, and learn how to be present with people without sacrificing who we are... because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world. Our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance'.

Maybe it's not the truth that many want to hear but I feel it resonates highly with me. It is my firm belief that we can be accepted and surrounded by the most wonderful individuals in the universe, we could be living the most beautiful and convenient life; however, if we are not at peace with ourselves, we will never be at peace with the world surrounding us. However, in my view, sadly, it raises a new dilemma: how strong do we have to be to withstand the pressures of fitting in and being accepted if self-acceptance is the only weapon we have? I don't think we, as simple mortals, are strong enough to face it and even if we are resilient enough, I sense that our communities mightn't be prepared for such authenticity and diversity in ideologies.

Surely, unconditional acceptance of being part of a genuine community with shared vision, integrity, possibilities and embracing your own identity without pseudo-intimacy where people just pretend to be close and united play a significant role in finding your place under the sun. Watt & Badger (2009), Gustafson (2009) and Lambert et al. (2013) collectively highlight that

sense of belonging is driven by authentic active interpersonal relationships with people and a feeling of acceptance and fitting in which stems from our childhoods in the form of essential human needs such as bonding and attachments (Bowlby 1982, Bretherton 1992). It is in our DNA to look for a community and get involved in something shared which aids the creation of our social identity and finding the meaning of life. Watt & Badger (2009) furthermore stress that the most significant aspect of belonging is being accepted and fitting in but then, in my opinion, it poses the question what being accepted and fitting in really means? For me, acceptance and fitting in aren't straightforward and raise even more questions: does it mean we get accepted as individuals with our peculiarities and differences or do we have to conform and follow the unwritten codes of expected practices in order to fit in? I sense that more often than not we have to be approved and dictated to in order to become part of something collective as, although we live in a democratic society, it is still being run by structures of power with more or less obvious rules. According to Durkheim (1982), this is a form of social control which questions the meaning of freedom and the choices we make.

The Government Green Paper on Education (1992) claims that being part of a community encourages identity creation; however, does it mean that the community gains the power over us just by accepting us? The purpose of my research was voluntary migration or settling down, however, when you reflect more deeply on it, the structures of power are everywhere (Inglis 1997) and our choices and identities aren't just something that we create ourselves; sometimes they are forced upon us and we only think that we make our own informed decisions in life. This suggests to me that belonging to something affects our freedom and we must make claims for space and recognition and potentially trade our autonomy in the name of fitting in (May 2011). As a consequence, this poses the question of emancipation as people's understanding of it can be different, therefore difficult to measure. We must make sure that one's freedom doesn't become someone else's oppression and the oppressed don't become the oppressors (Freire 2018). I accept that every aspect of our existence is dictated by some structures of power; however, I feel that even if belonging to something threatens our freedom, it is more fulfilling to be part of something than facing the world on your own which can be a lonely place. On a more superficial note, I agree with May (2011) that sometimes we don't even need to look too deep - it's the pure familiarity and our mundane everyday habits and tasks which like pieces of a giant puzzle create that warm and whole sense of belonging and being at home.

Finding or creating home is a highly spiritual journey but, according to hooks, it can't exist without a geographical centre to ground ourselves in (2009). In contrast, Lambert et al. (2013)



stress the importance of acceptance and fitting in and completely disregard the concept of physical location when it comes to home and belonging which, for me personally, raises more questions than answers: I believe that we can fit in in more than one location and we can be accepted by multiple communities. In this case, does it mean that home can be more than one place or is home just a state of mind, a pure feeling without any physical grounding attached to it? On the other hand, what if I fit in, feel accepted, form authentic relationships and contribute to a collective goal (to educate the community); however, I still feel the urge to escape and long to find a place where my heart is full and my soul is at peace. Sometimes it feels like I am homesick for a place that I haven't found yet.

Watt & Badger (2009) highlight that in order to satisfy the need for belonging, people create authentic social bonds, relationships, friendships and paternal or maternal attachments. However, often these bonds aren't positive and lasting and we are forced to move on or move out. Do we then completely lose our sense of belonging? Sometimes it occurs to me that belonging is a greater sense which shouldn't be reduced to our little worlds, ordinary dramas and mundane experiences.

On second thoughts, although I can relate to hooks's journey and I find myself raising similar questions of belonging and finding my place, as inspiring and touching hooks's story is, she writes from the perspective of a black female which adds another dimension to the concept of finding home and the sense of belonging (2009). Additionally, not having experienced racial discrimination, it is hard to relate to the hardships it brings to someone's life. For me, hooks's autoethnographic narrative is both a strength and a weakness at the same time as, although being subjective and personal, it isn't as much applicable to the current times in Ireland.

### **1.3. Relationship Between Immigration, Identity & Belonging**

Formation of identity influences every aspect of our life but the depths of identity formation would be a thesis in its own right. Belonging, on the other hand, as explored in the previous section, is being part of a community which shapes us into the individuals we eventually become. However, what about voluntary immigrants? What is the relationship between immigration, identity and belonging?

Stating that it is ‘unnatural to live away from your people’, hooks swears on coming back to one’s roots, land and traditions (2009, p. 165), although she clarifies that:

‘No one is seeking timeless paradise; and no one, however nostalgic, is really seeking to turn back the clock... What people are seeking is not so much the home they left behind as a place that they feel they can change, a place in which their lives and strivings will make a difference – a place in which to create home’ (2009, p. 221).

Evidently, hooks found her ‘geography of heart’ in her home country, not far from her birthplace but, based on my experience, I contend to agree that coming back to our roots always leads us home. Yes, a deep well of memories, nostalgia and sentiments never dry out but we don’t necessarily belong there anymore. Time passes by, life takes its place and people grow out of their once inexperienced and naïve selves. Sure, there is always that feeling of homesickness but returning to where our journeys have begun isn’t always the answer (Watt & Badger 2009). hooks (2009) states that we betray our ancestral legacy by leaving home but, in my opinion, it is rather questionable. I don’t believe we really deceive the heritage of our ancestors by trying to find ourselves and our happiness which, in my firm belief, is the purpose of our humble existence.

Gustafson (2009, p. 490) claims that the sense of belonging determines our desire to move or stay. Additionally, he suggests that ‘mobile people tend to have a weak sense of belonging’ whereas individuals with a strong sense of belonging are less willing to relocate; however, I am not convinced by that. I sense that the concepts of home and belonging don’t always revolve around a physical place but rather is an important part of human spirituality which doesn’t always depend on geography or social bonds and statuses.

The world is one turbulent place and people have been migrating since the beginning of time; however, voluntary migration is totally different to the one that is forced. When we leave voluntarily, we cannot blame war or economic hardships for our unsuccessful odysseys which again mould our identities like soft clay.

Gustafson (2009, p. 494) explains that often international migrants develop a sense of home and belonging to both ‘sending and receiving countries’ and ‘time spent in a place increases the degree of attachment to that place’, however, I don’t think that this is always the case. My personal feeling is that, being a voluntarily migrant, it is possible to lose one’s sense of belonging altogether and become a permanent outsider – a citizen of the world, a cosmopolitan clone without stable foundations or a clear destination, permanently detached from one’s roots

and everything else that makes us indigenous, temporarily belonging and searching for a place to permanently ground ourselves but ending up never belonging anywhere.

#### **1.4. Adult Education as a Global Discourse**

Adult and community education as a field of practice is highly diverse and complex. It is defined by a number of theories; it plays many roles and one's lifetime wouldn't be enough to cover all its nuances. However, my intention was to explore the role of adult and community education in a different light – I wished to investigate the role of adult and community education in the context of home and belonging; I yearned to find out whether it liberates or grounds people: does it create conditions for freedom and making informed decisions or does it make decisions for us?

Although Beck claims that in today's modern society nothing seems to be perceived just locally or nationally anymore (2002), Murray argues that life in some communities in early 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland remains 'the preserve of locality and place' (2007, p. 117), however, the result of globalisation is the fact that 'communities and the local are determined less by physical boundaries of locality and more by common identity' (2007, p. 123), especially, as some individuals associate with the locality as their initial authority but, at the same time, identify with global discourses (Murray 2007). Furthermore, Murray claims that 'no community can be deemed wholly open or wholly closed to outside influence' (2007, p. 118), although, Gustafson (2009, p. 491) and Beck (2002) contend that globalisation and the rapidly changing face of the world dictate the way we exist and think: widespread mobility threatens to generate 'uprootedness and loss of meaningful places' and modern lifestyles strive for cosmopolitan identities forcing the definite boundaries of communities to fade and locations to become less and less relevant for communities. To some extent, I must agree with Gustafson and Beck, and even though their research and theories were proposed more than a decade ago, I feel that the trends they highlighted are still very much alive in today's world: narrow primitive local playgrounds are becoming just too small for our growing needs and aspirations, people are migrating, reaching out further and turning into citizens of the world. It seems like every aspect and fundamental event that combine the essentials of being human - societies, lifestyles, attitudes - are gaining a tinge of global interconnectedness (Held et al. 1999) and temporality. However, I can also relate to Murray as, although some people identify themselves as global

citizens, a lot of people still identify with local and a local community still plays a significant part in their lives. Finally, I also agree with Murray that some people just get their belonging from being in the world and they don't require their identities to be determined by place or national recognition (Murray 2007) to what hooks adds that 'our first home is earth anyway, and it will be where we come again to rest forever' (2009, p. 203) which, in my opinion, suggests that geography, borders and communities become irrelevant when our time on this earth comes to an end.

When it comes to adult education, my reviewed literature suggests that adult education has a huge role to play in connecting the local to the worldly: by opening doors and giving opportunities, adult education as a global discourse can offer so much: a promise to travel, global citizenship and potential employability. Education gives choices and this is liberating.

UNESCO (1976, p. 2), furthermore, states that adult and community education is 'an integral part of a global scheme for lifelong education and learning' with Duke (1994) adding that it is an international movement endorsing adult education as a tool to fight inequality, support democracy and promote social and cultural development. Adult and community education liberates, breaks chains and destroys boundaries educating people 'for European citizenship' (The Government Green Paper on Education 1992, p. 12). Additionally, SOLAS (20/24, p. 24) highlights that their vision is to 'enable learners to succeed in the labour market'; however, in my opinion, it raises a question of who benefits the most from designing an army of capable mobile cosmopolitan workers prepared for today's society - uprooted people or global corporations? Adult education is often referred to as lifelong learning; however, according to Brine, it also became synonymous with 'post-compulsory vocational education' which is nothing but the development of a workforce in order to satisfy the demands of economic growth and expansion of labour markets (2006, p. 651). Furthermore, Grummell (2014, p. 128) proposes that market-focused employment targets have shifted the adult and community education 'agenda from a broad vocational ethos to a targeted training for employment' suggesting that education has become adapted to market needs and often 'driven by commercial forces emphasising on profitability and economic value of people as workers and consumers' instead of prioritising the holistic development of individuals learning in a social context. The Government White Paper on Adult Education (2000) stresses that economic competitiveness and social cohesion generate creation of new jobs which equals the raised levels of education; however, it doesn't say anything about individual wellness. Lastly, O'Reilly (2014, p. 163) summarises that following this corporate path education becomes not an individual right but:

‘a tool which harnesses liberal values of independence and autonomy that facilitate a flexible, responsive individual who can adapt to this uncertain and market driven economy. Rather than participating voluntarily at a time and stage which is spurred by one’s life and aspirations’.

This, in my opinion, questions the liberating side of adult and community education and raises a doubt as it might not be the path to emancipation but rather a lure into social and corporate conditioning.

Finally, in terms of home and true belonging, while our resumes expand with significant capabilities and achievements in the rush of the modern world, there still isn’t a single prescription that leads to finding our feet, settling down and finally being happy. I feel that the truth is much deeper and more complex than I initially anticipated and there isn’t a single correct answer which I was hoping to find.

### **1.5. Community Education as a Liberating and Grounding Force**

I embarked on my academic journey to find answers to the questions that have been nagging me for quite some time now: what is home? Do we find it or do we create it? When do we know that we truly belong? What role does adult education play within the context of home and belonging? Does it liberate or ground people? The aim of my study was to at least try to understand the complexity of human nature better. Additionally, I was hoping that this research could be valuable to community development initiatives as it would highlight the importance of a healthy community and the concept of belonging to it (‘to belong is to matter: sense of belonging enhances meaning in life’ (Lambert et al. 2013, p. 1418)). Finally, I desired to find some answers and reach anybody who was in a similar situation to me – in search of their final destination or place under the sun.

When I began my research, I was convinced that grounding was a negative concept; I was sure it meant being trapped, restricted and disadvantaged. However, delving into my study proved me wrong and showed me another side of grounding: I have discovered that grounding is not adverse at all and, although technically meaning ‘reconnecting us to the earth’, in my study, it translates into belonging as a social phenomenon – it’s all about the people, not the place, it’s a social dimension as opposed to a geographical one and it’s ‘the degree of meaning that individuals give to their local community that is paramount’ (Murray 2007, p. 125).

Apparently, as my research suggests, community education can be liberating and grounding at the same time because when we are grounded, when we firmly stand on the ground with our own two feet, we know who we are and we automatically become balanced and liberated.

However, before exploring the liberating and grounding nature of community education, it is worthwhile analysing its concept in the first place.

AONTAS (2020) defines community education as:

‘adult learning which takes place in local communities across Ireland. It is learner-centred and responds to the needs of the local community. Community education is non-formal in nature’.

Therefore, offering a variety of programmes, it may act as ‘a first positive step back’ and additional stepping-stones towards confidence building and a return to further education and employment (AONTAS 2020). However, apart from its expected role – to educate adults, to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge and skills – it may serve a much deeper purpose of emancipation and transformation which can lead to creating conditions for learning, self-awareness, shift in assumptions and the discovery of a higher meaning to life (Mezirow 2000), especially, giving an opportunity to disadvantaged learners who lack self-esteem and are exposed to discrimination (AONTAS 2020). Finally, AONTAS outlines that the philosophy of community education revolves around the establishment of community education in social justice and the process of empowerment. This aims to build the abilities of local people ‘to respond to educational and structural disadvantage and to participate in decision making and policy creation’ in order to bridge the gap between institutionally obtained adult education and ‘the kind of education that arises from the people themselves’ (2004, pp. 18-19), and, although various sources describe adult education as a global discourse, community education is for the community within the community (Smith 2009) which, I believe, is a very true, grounding and reassuring concept. Having worked in a local adult and community education setting, I have witnessed what education and an opportunity do to people, how they contribute to people’s self-worth and finding their ground.

Connolly (2016), Freire (2018), hooks (1994) and Pshyk (2020) collectively suggest that community education emancipates and empowers giving ordinary people a voice and a chance to try or start all over again creating ‘liberating conditions for making more autonomous and informed choices and developing a sense of self-empowerment’ (Mezirow 2000, p. 26).

Furthermore, Fitzsimons (2014, p. 158) believes that community education allows ‘people to lift themselves from their life circumstances’ in the name of a better life and a brighter future.

Additionally, it not only liberates but also raises critical consciousness along with personal and collective awareness (Connolly 2010; Connolly 2016; Freire 2018) what The Government White Paper on Adult Education (2000) identifies as one of its six core roles. Although in today’s globally minded perception the understanding of what a community is changes (Hotsenpiller 2016); community education is considered to be a tool in community building and development (Connolly 2010; Pshyk 2020; The Government White Paper on Adult Education 2000). Furthermore, Fitzsimons (2017), Ryan (2014) and SOLAS (2020/2024) believe that community education reinforces social inclusion which, consequently, leads towards cohesion (The Government White Paper on Adult Education 2000) and a more equal society (Fitzsimons 2014) which then contributes to a collective feeling of belonging, feeling grounded and balanced. Lastly, The Government Green Paper on Education (1992, pp. 34-35) suggests that community education promotes individual ‘self-esteem and self-worth with a respect for the rights and beliefs of others’ which is significant for effective functioning within a healthy community.

I have been an adult educator for the past five years and I can definitely relate to the arguments outlined above. I have witnessed learners finding their voice, developing nurturing relationships with their tutors and then modeling empathy, respect, encouragement and equality in their relationships (AONTAS 2020). After all, community and its education isn’t just about a physical place, up-skilling for employment, but is more about the social aspect of it, its human contact, finding yourself and discovering where you belong. On the other hand, although various theorists claim adult and community education to be empowering and emancipatory, Inglis (1997) argues that the concept of power is often left out of the equation. Furthermore, he (1997) suggests that there is a difference between empowerment and emancipation: empowerment encourages development of capabilities to exist effectively in the present system and structures of power, whereas emancipation inspires to challenge the existing structures of power and strives for a change within the system, which, from my standpoint, portrays individual’s different needs and aspirations. When it comes to power, I must agree with Inglis. From my personal experience, I have seen how institutions of adult and community education use power in the form of policies, procedures and relationships between learners and their educators which affects our understanding of emancipation and empowerment.

Mezirow contends that ‘liberating conditions for making more autonomous and informed choices and developing a sense of self-empowerment is the cardinal goal of adult education’ (2000, p. 26); however, Inglis (1997) critiques Mezirow’s notion of adult education led self-empowerment, claiming that Mezirow only focuses on an individualistic aspect rather than the social side of empowerment which works against the idea of collectiveness within a community which, according to my research, is important for creating that sense of belonging. I see Mezirow’s point, yet I believe that empowerment shouldn’t stop with individuals but rather be the starting point towards self-awareness, as it is through self-discovery but also ‘through a dialogue with others’ that adult learners can learn to ‘read and understand the world and become personally and socially transformed’ (Inglis 1997, pp. 3, 5).

Additionally, The Government White Paper on Adult Education (2000, p. 12) outlines competitiveness as ‘an area in setting out a role for adult and community education’ but, in my opinion, that doesn’t fit into the idea of building a more equal society. Bourdieu (1977) names this phenomenon social capital and claims that, conversely, it is used to create inequality which is hardly a pillar of a strong community.

Finally, Shor and Freire (1987, p. 109) summarise that ‘liberation is a social act’ and if we cannot use our liberty to help others to be free by transforming society as a whole, then we are employing only an individualist approach towards empowerment and emancipation, which doesn’t work within a strong and healthy community which, according to my study, plays a significant role in creating and nurturing the sense of belonging and being at home.

But then again, in my own view, not every adult and community facility runs on a dialogical, student-centered approach. The structures of hierarchy and power are obvious and, although the learners are given an opportunity for education, often they don’t feel empowered or emancipated, nor do they feel grounded. They are not taught about liberation of any sort which, ironically, suggests that they have been given tools but haven’t been taught how to use them. Grounding, just like liberation, is a welcome state, however, only successfully translated into everyday life and practices it can be truly beneficial and rewarding.



## 1.6. Conclusion

In my analysis of the chosen literature I reviewed the key ideas and assumptions made. Although there were a few connecting themes (acceptance, fitting in, creating bonds and being part of a community), I didn't detect a single theory which was being prescribed and I lacked the depth of qualitative research as I believe it would have done more justice to the delicate and complex concepts of home and belonging (all chosen articles were based on quantitative research).

Yes, we live in a highly globalised world which never stops developing. There doesn't seem to be anything constant anymore as we exist in an infinite state of change. Globalisation and education open new paths and create innovative opportunities. Values change as life gets tinted by a lingering sense of temporality. Mobility of people increases as they travel further and further to work or in search of new experiences. Bonds and relationships are being created and then broken down once they cease to satisfy the desires of humanity. The needs of people change and the concepts of home and true belonging change with them.

Reviewing my chosen readings, I believe, I have laid the foundation for my study: I have explored the literature on home, belonging and their relationships with immigration and identity. Also, I have analysed adult education as a global discourse and I have looked into community education and its grounding, yet liberating, nature. I have supported my review with various government publications and works of experts within the fields in question. Finally, I offered my understanding on highlighted ideas and limitations of the theories that I had come across.

I believe, my reviewed literature will gain even more substance when applied to the findings of my study in chapter four. However, before analysing the data of my research it is worth looking into the methodology of my investigation and the processes and methods which informed my study.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

‘It is a strange thing to see you now  
and be unable to recall how it felt to love you.

Like a half remembered dream,  
the essence of what we shared is there,  
but the details are all hazy.

Like a house I grew up in,  
you are still familiar to me,  
but the feeling of home is now missing’.

(Taplin 2021)

### 2.1. Introduction

My literature review chapter laid a foundation that I have built my research upon. On the other hand, the methodology chapter serves as a frame that holds the separate parts of my study together – without it, the rationale behind my research would be just a concoction of random shapeless and meaningless processes.

Although my study has a highly personal and sentimental value to me, still, it is an academic piece. Therefore, with the support of works from Blaxter et al. (2006), Mason (2018) and many more, I have systematically designed the process to ensure valid and reliable results in order to address my research aims and objectives. I have named the methodological choices I had made and have justified the ideas behind my choices. Therefore, as a result, my methodology chapter outlines the methods used and practices engaged in during my academic journey: it portrays my role within the study and explores the reasoning behind it. Additionally, it defines my ontological and epistemological positions. Furthermore, it demonstrates how my research was designed and explains why certain techniques were adopted: why I chose qualitative research approach; what methods I used and what the rationale behind it was; why I designed my interview questions in a particular way and what purpose they served; who my research participants were and how I selected them. Finally, this chapter explores some ethical dilemmas and challenges that I encountered along the way and portrays how I addressed them.

I believe, I have made the most suitable methodological choices to serve the aims and objectives of my study. Every aspect of my academic journey plays a significant part in the process, however, one of the key elements has been my own place within the research and how it has informed my investigation and its findings.

## **2.2. My Role in The Research**

I commenced my academic journey with a purpose – to find the true meaning of home, belongings and to explore what role adult and community education plays in this context. In other words, in correspondence with Guba & Lincoln (2005), I wished to understand how social reality was perceived through the viewpoints of the researched and my own experience and understanding.

This research truly had a professional and personal value to me: as a professional I facilitate learning and form authentic relationships with my learners, therefore, I was hoping to become even more sensitive and empathetic towards my students as their notion of home, and especially belonging, might have a huge influence on how they integrate and settle (or not). On the other hand, from a personal perspective, I embarked on this academic journey for rather selfish reasons - I felt that I have been on a quest to find my place of belonging and I was hoping that my study would provide me with answers that I have been searching for. I believed, I could find the missing piece, that piece being the definition of home and true sense of belonging, therefore, I was hugely drawn to the question as a piece of research.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, I chose semi-structured interviews to collect my data. However, interviewing my research participants wasn't the only data-obtaining method I used – my own part within my study extended much further than the one of just a researcher. But what other voice did I adopt?

My dual role that I took on in this research is congruent with Durdella's description of a 'chief research instrument – designing, implementing and producing final reports' (2020, p. 7). Additionally, I 'originated, coordinated, managed and led all the processes' (Durdella 2020, p. 7); however, I also played the part of a participant and my own personal take on my interview questions have been recorded in the findings chapter along with those of my interviewees.

Furthermore, my life experiences and reflections have been recorded and spread across my thesis for a more personal and intimate approach to the study.

But why did I feel the need to expose myself to that extent? I guess, the rationale behind adding an autoethnographic element to my research stemmed from my quest for answers and wanting to share my story as I felt that my personal experiences were a powerful force shaping me and my understanding of the world around me. Adding an autoethnographic element, I felt, was not so much ‘a way of knowing about the world’ but, as Ellis describes it, ‘more like a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally and reflexively’ (2013, p. 10). I strived to describe and analyse my personal experiences in order to understand cultural ones (Ellis et al. 2011). Additionally, I felt that it fitted in with the qualitative research which, according to Mason (2018, p. 4), ‘requires highly active engagement of its practitioners’. Furthermore, without trespassing into someone else’s private space, this research method allowed me to use my personal experience as part of the data to describe, analyse and understand the social reality that I was trying to explore. I was able to connect subjective with sociocultural and the stories people told me on a much deeper and more profound level (West 2002). Moreover, although there was a risk of sentiments running loose, I felt that writing in a personalised style suited my research, the nature of its question and, finally, me as an individual, which corresponds with Wall’s take on autoethnographic approach (2006). Also, I sensed that this method matched the reflexive nature of my study. I submerged into my research as a researcher and as a participant in the hope to finally understand the phenomenon of home and belonging and the role of adult and community education within this context; therefore, I was always aware of my own influence on the study. Yes, I started my study with preconceptions, however, I did that with an open heart, an open mind and a list of to-be-challenged assumptions (Blaxter et al. 2006). My personal journey interwove throughout my research and made me part of the data that was being collected in the form of reflexive practice and journaling the glimpses of which can be found in my prologue and epilogue as, I feel, these were the areas I could freely express myself in: no academic restrictions, no strict rules to follow (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2018). Why journaling? It seemed the most holistic and reflective way of doing it: it allowed me to look deeper into myself and my experiences, it also captured my learning and my paradigmatic shift, it mapped my changing views and helped to cope with intellectual and emotional puzzles while I was distilling my ideas in writing, as suggested by Blaxter et al (2006). I felt that I was continuously questioning the truths I was discovering. I was in a continuous dialogue with my literature, participants, findings and

assumptions. I answered my own questions, I compared my answers with the ones of my participants and I tried to connect the dots and see the full picture. In terms of analysing my own data, I used my personal narrative inquiry, memories and rewriting of my own story.

The fact that my research had an autoethnographic element which allowed me to be the researcher and the researched at the same time, I feel, softened the power that my role as an investigator alone could have given me as I was not only observing and analysing but also reliving the episodes of my life and reflecting on my own feelings, thoughts and experiences.

### **2.3. My Ontological Position**

Research is a social activity hugely affected by the researcher's own motivation and values, as suggested by Blaxter et al. (2006) and my study is not an exception: the question mattered to me personally. However, I strived to carry out my research with objectivity, honesty, openness, accountability and fairness in mind.

Reflecting on my values and the understanding I have in relation to my research and the social world, I feel that at the start of my research my initial ontological position was rather broad and superficial. I guess, I started my research from my own personal view which itself was shaped by my own experience and values (Grix 2002); however, I delved into it with as open a mind as possible: I wanted to observe a social phenomenon, I collected data, I examined it and explored the possible reasons and trends of what occurred and why. Finally, I developed a theory from my data in order to explain the social phenomenon I was after (Znaniecki 1934). I was sure that home and belonging was a positively similar concept; also, I was convinced that home was a place, a person (people/ family) or a feeling. What kind of feeling? Perhaps just a sensation of being in the right place where we belong. How did I know that? My realisation and knowledge stemmed from my own beliefs, intuition, instincts, emotions and imagination (Mason 2018). This was my social reality and I dived into the research with this assumption. However, as the research progressed, I noticed my beliefs being challenged and my ontological position shifting. I realised that my interpretations were being replaced by much deeper and complex claims: there is no single right definition of home and belonging; both concepts are deep and complex matters. Also, home can be much more than just a physical place, a person (people/ family) or a feeling. Additionally, based on my own experience, I was convinced that adult education was solely liberating. However, critically examining my ontological position,

I believe that adult education can be both liberating and grounding or liberating in order to ground and grounding in order to liberate. Finally, I discovered that the concept of liberation was far more complex and contradictory than initially thought: based on my research, I discovered that liberation didn't mean physical mobility alone; it also served as a force of mental and emotional freedom which, very often, had more significant meaning and implications to people than being physically free.

What supported my knowing? What were my main sources of knowledge that justified my claims? Continuous research, literature review and fieldwork – interviews. The people that I talked to spoke their truths and there was validity in their stories. In other words, my ontological claims were based on acclaimed knowledge and that knowledge happened to be theory, stories and my interpretations.

Certain claims I hoped to be true. Certain views I was not too sure about. I brought my principles into this research and sometimes I felt that those values were contradictory. As I was researching and finding new ideas, my understanding of home and belonging kept changing. One day I felt that I had grasped the notion of it and the next day that understanding faded away into the mist of new ideas and assumptions.

My ontological claims were based on my research, the time frame, locality and environment, my chosen participants, their attitudes, perceptions, experiences and social and cultural constructions as these were variables which changed and directed my investigation (Mason 2018). If I was to do the same research in twenty years in a different environment, most likely I would get a glimpse of a totally different social reality.

I witnessed that over the course of my research my ontological paradigms shifted and gained a different shape which was influenced by my research findings. I am not as sure of my beliefs anymore. Additionally, I gained new insights, which helped me to become the person I am today – with my mind a bit more open and my heart a little more content.

#### **2.4. The Nature of Knowledge (Epistemological Stance)**

Initially, I did not want to conform to someone else's understanding of what research was or what position I should be taking; therefore, I left this part of my methodology for when my research was completed and my findings were analysed as I needed to understand what

constituted my knowledge and how it was acquired. Consequently, looking back over the path of my study, I can see that there is a number of elements of epistemological approaches in my investigation.

Firstly, I believe, there is a strong hint of interpretivism. We, humans, are meaning-makers and in order to understand any social action we need to understand the meaning of the actions in question (Elliot et al. 2016). Additionally, as O'Reilly (2009) suggests based on Weberian theory, in order to understand human societies, we must begin with individuals and the meanings attached to individual intentions, decisions and actions which means that absolute truth can never be found as it is subject to multiple interpretations concerned with authenticity and in-depth understanding of things. Therefore, my task was to try to understand and interpret what happened and what caused these actions. However, in order to interpret what I observed, I needed to draw on my own cultural values and understanding of the social reality without allowing it to affect my findings. Listening to the revelations of my research participants and reflecting on my own path, I looked for meaningful findings which would inform my study. Consequently, I realised that life and humanity were complex and unpredictable matters as very often our actions led us to unintended outcomes and changes in life.

Social constructivism is another epistemological paradigm which, I believe, can be sensed in my study as it suggests that knowledge is constructed through interaction with others (Vygotsky 1962). Clearly, my own individual learning took place because of my dialogue with my research participants, the stories they shared with me and the reflections I engaged in in order to digest and analyse the findings I had discovered.

Human behaviour must be understood in the context of the social reality in which they exist. Although we want to be or we believe we are, we aren't simply independent individuals making our independent decisions. More or less, we are part of something (family, community, society), hence, our intentions, decisions and actions are the product of social conditions in which we live (Calhoun 2002). My research is no different as everything is related in it, one step leads to another, one thought births the next one and the whole process falls into place, connects to a broader system. This, in my view, suggests that there is also an element of structuralism in my study, too.

## 2.5. Research Design

This section of my study refers to the overall strategy employed to carry out my research: it outlines the rationale behind adopting a qualitative approach to conduct my investigation; additionally, it discusses the methods used, the interview questions designed and the research participants selected. These components form a significant part of my study, define the nature of my research and knit the processes I have carried out together.

### **Why qualitative research?**

I chose to embark on a journey of qualitative research as it allows a subjective variety in collecting and examining information. Additionally, it facilitates interpretations of how the world is understood, experienced and shaped (Mason 2018). Concerned with a smaller number of cases, it allows greater exploration which, in my opinion, is more interesting, revealing and deep rather than broad which helps to produce rich, subtle and detailed data (Blaxter et al 2006 & Mason 2018). Finally, qualitative research ‘assumes dynamic reality’ which is fundamental in trying to understand the phenomenon of the social world (Blaxter et al 2006, p. 65), therefore, I felt that this was a suitable approach for my study.

### **Methods**

In order to explore a greater variety of perceptions to further my understanding, in my research, I chose to employ two methods – fieldwork in the form of face-to-face interviews and an auto-ethnographic approach with sources of data such as people and my own reflective practice. I believe, interviews allowed me to engage with the community and facilitated reaching out to the world outside my doorstep (Blaxter et al 2006). I found this method really useful as, due to its dialogical nature, it enabled better engagement with my research participants and allowed collecting valuable data which would not be accessible using techniques such as observations or questionnaires. I felt that during some encounters the interviews turned into discussions which allowed witnessing how meanings were ‘made, negotiated and challenged’ (Blaxter et al. 2006, p. 194). I also chose to incorporate other people’s views and use qualitative interviews as ontologically I felt that people’s knowledge, understandings, interpretations, stories and experiences were ‘meaningful properties’ in the study of social reality (Mason 2018, p. 111). Additionally, I like the fact that people are a live source of information with their emotions and feelings which makes the whole research process more personal and real. Therefore, I chose



semi-structured interviews as they felt more like purposeful conversations rather than just an interrogation in order to extract information. Additionally, the nature of semi-structured interviews gave the participants freedom to express themselves but also made sure that I collected original data that I needed for my research. Due to their interpretative nature, interviews allowed not only straightforward excavation of information but also construction of knowledge and important findings (Mason 2018).

On the other hand, my participants weren't just my research objects that I was using. I was working with them, not on them: as work colleagues, we would meet quite often, my participants often wanted to know how my research was going, we usually would continue my research-based discussions outside the interview setting, therefore, I felt that my participants were more than just my interviewees; I felt like these people were my team.

### **The interview questions**

If I am honest, I was looking for definitions when I was designing my research questions, therefore, I structured them the way I did. However, regardless of that, I started all my interviews with a broad opening in order to give some context and ease into the topic and the process (see appendix 1 on p. 84). Some interviews stuck to the 'plan' and some expanded into more elaborate discussions and bitter-sweet journeys down Memory Lane.

### **My research participants**

In order to explore the concepts of home and belonging and to underpin the role of adult education within that context, I invited members involved in local adult and community education to take part in my study which, along with my own involvement in adult education, allowed me to gain an 'insider's perspective' (Blaxter et al 2006, p. 65). I wished to cover a wide range of different attitudes and experiences. Therefore, aged between 40 and 65, with various life and professional achievements in adult literacy, ESOL, management and even coming back to education at a later stage in life, my interviewees provided me with fascinating insights into their lives and social realities. Yes, it was a purposive sampling on my behalf as I felt my chosen participants would make valuable contributions to my study. I chose an even number of male and female participants – five each – and although women are usually assumed to be home-makers, my study was never gender biased. It was based on the participants as individuals with their own unique paths and life stories without any particular focus on their gender. Due to time constraints I chose a fixed sample size (10 participants) and I gathered

meaningful data with significant themes coming through. Finally, in order to draw my attention to what, in my view, was of particular importance, I used annotating, labelling and selection data management techniques as I found these methods to be the most effective for my research (Blaxter et al. 2006).

## **2.6. Ethical Dilemmas and Challenges**

I realise that my research topic is not a controversial one; however, home and belonging can be a very sentimental area, it could trigger some memories or touch sensitive spots, therefore, I believe, one of my biggest challenges was exposing the vulnerability of my participants and dealing with it accordingly. When the recording stopped and the stories were shared, what did I leave my participants with? Did I provoke any anxieties or uncover any hidden wounds?

Confidentiality and anonymity were also ethical issues that I had to take into consideration. Therefore, in order to address it, I respected and honoured what my participants told me and I thought through how to disguise my participants and their personal information. Furthermore, to protect the identities of my research participants, I transcribed the interviews myself which was extremely time-consuming; however, on the other hand, it allowed me to familiarise myself with my findings even better.

At one point I faced a dilemma regarding the anonymity of my interviewees: I questioned the meaning of my fieldwork and deemed it to be pointless as I couldn't use 'real people and authentic stories'. I felt like the study was becoming fictional and initially I struggled to come to terms with it. I assumed if people agreed to participate in the research, they didn't mind their identities being exposed. However, eventually, I realised that the whole purpose of the research wasn't names and faces but rather valuable knowledge behind them. Additionally, regardless of how controversial or not the subject was, another implication of being anonymous was for people and their protection in the long run. Furthermore, ethics played a key role in analysis of my findings as I decided what to include and what to exclude.

Professionalism was another ethical challenge which informed my study as I conducted my research among other professionals who were also my colleagues. Yes, ease of access and ability to get down a lot deeper quicker was advantageous; however, I was aware that sometimes it could be difficult to maintain anonymity and participants might feel uncomfortable exposing their vulnerable side to somebody they know (Blaxter et al. 2006). On

the other hand, my participants weren't just my research objects that I was using. I was working with them, not on them, and, although some of my research participants were my former students, there were no issues of power between us. By choosing semi-structured interviews, honestly and sincerely, I ensured the interviewees were encouraged to view the process as a space for expressing their voice. Additionally, semi-structured interviews felt more like conversations with purpose rather than just an interrogation in order to extract information. Therefore, in order to address these issues appropriately, I opted for full disclosure and made the consent form and the interview questions available to my participants in advance which, I believe, gave them time to think about the process, any sensitive questions and opt out if desired. This worked out to my advantage as it created an internal dialogue in the heads of some of my participants which encouraged them to prepare and dig deeper into their thoughts and feelings as opposed to coming up with the answers on the spot during the interview. Luckily, my study was welcomed willingly and open-heartedly which I treasure and respect and as a fair trade I followed through with my participants and offered transcripts and analysis of my findings when my study was complete.

On a more personal note, especially the fact that there was an autoethnographic element in my study, as Mason (2018, p. 4) suggests, I had to fight the temptation to make my research only about me and 'showcase ego-centric or confessional tales about myself' alone which could have stood in the way of making objective research decisions. So, what criteria did I bring to judge the quality of my research? I tried to be impartial. I had to be vigilant and not allow my feelings, assumptions and desire for a single truth to steer me away from my findings; therefore, I wrote a prologue and epilogue to present my story and outline the questions I was striving to answer. I attempted to think critically about what and why I was doing, confronting and often challenging my beliefs and recognising the extent to which my own thoughts and experience shaped my study (Mason 2018). Additionally, I made sure that my own story in the form of reflections ran in parallel to my literature review and my analysis. I was continuously monitoring my own ethical performance and the research process. I hope my attempts were successful.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

As already discussed in this chapter, I embarked on this academic journey for two reasons – to develop professionally and, on a more selfish note, to find some answers to the questions that

have been nagging me for quite some time, those questions being of home and true sense of belonging. Additionally, realising how life-changing involvement in Adult and Community Education can be, I wished to explore its liberating or grounding role within the context of my study. However, no research process can be complete without a methodology chapter which not only outlines the methods and procedures used but also provides the rationale for selecting such techniques and practices.

Therefore, supported by works of Blaxter et al. (2006), Mason (2018) and many more, in this chapter I laid my cards on the table and demonstrated the what I did and why I did it: I justified my dual role within the study and explored how this choice informed my work. Additionally, I defined my ontological and epistemological positions. Furthermore, I demonstrated how my research was designed and explained why certain techniques were adopted: why I chose a qualitative research approach; what methods I used and what the rationale beyond it was; why I designed my interview questions in a particular way and what purpose they served; who my research participants were and how I selected them. Finally, in this chapter I highlighted some ethical dilemmas and challenges that I encountered along the way and I reflected on how I addressed them.

I believe, each method chosen and every technique adopted added a personal touch to my research process and led me to the heart of my study – the findings which will be presented in the next chapter of my thesis.

### 3. FINDINGS

‘I stopped telling myself that I’m lost.

I’m not.

I’m on a road with no destination,

I’m just driving with hope

that I’ll find a place

that I like and I’ll stay there.

I’m not lost. I’m on my way’.

(Ahunnaya 2021)

#### 3.1. Introduction

No thesis would be enough to contain all the beautiful sayings, quotes and definitions about home. Also, can we really put into words what it truly means to belong? Finally, what role does adult education play in this context – does it help to ground or does it liberate?

Finding the answers to these questions was the purpose of my research. Initially, I wanted the responses for my own selfish reasons as I feel that I have been in search of my own place under the sun. Moreover, I wished to at least try and understand the complexity of human nature. Additionally, I was hoping that this research could be valuable for community development initiatives as it would highlight the importance of a healthy community and the concept of belonging in it. Hence, joining together my personal motives, professional aspirations and academic guidelines, as discussed in the methodology chapter, I embarked on a journey of qualitative social study. Therefore, in order to delve deeper into the field, I designed my questions, I carefully selected my study participants and interviewed them while looking out for hidden clues and emotions being shown. Choosing ten individuals involved in adult education - students, tutors, members of management within the field of adult and community education - I felt, added a deeper dimension to my research as these people had a closer relationship with the area I was exploring. On the other hand, having an autoethnographic element in my study, I took on the role of the participant myself and answered the same questions in order to contribute to the collection of valuable data. I tried to separate my dual roles: from the perspective of a participant, I outlined my views under the themes and subthemes of the findings chapter. From the standpoint of a researcher, I expressed my pre-

conceived assumptions throughout my thesis and I outlined my reflections on my own learning and the shift in my worldview in the final chapter of my thesis.

Finally, after annotating, labelling and summarising the data that I have carefully collected during my semi-structured interviews, I witnessed some themes and subthemes emerging which eventually became the foundation for my findings of which the key arguments include: there is no single definition of home, however, it might be closer to us than we think and we need to search within ourselves; also, settling down is a very personal concept and people experience it individually; additionally, belonging has a physical and emotional dimension which revolve around place and community; finally, adult and community education plays a diverse role within the context of home and belonging – it liberates us, it grounds us and sometimes it does both.

### **3.2. A Little Bit About My Discoveries**

The semi-structured nature of my interviews allowed my respondents, including myself, to pour their hearts out while I was gently guiding them through the process with questions which I designed specifically with potential themes in mind as I believed they would help me paint the clearest picture and reveal the meaning of the concepts in question. I explicitly looked for definitions of home and belonging, I questioned the notion of home formation and finding one's final stop. Also, I examined how participants' understanding of those concepts shifted throughout their lives. Additionally, I encouraged my respondents to compare the ideas of home and belonging and I nudged my partakers to reflect on liberating or grounding sides of adult education. The rest of the findings emerged from our conversations and careful analysis of data. When it comes to my own responses, in order to answer the questions I was posing, I immersed myself into deep reflections and recollections.

As a participant, I embraced the process and tried to reach deep into my worldview and memories to come up with the answers. However, as a researcher, although I dived into the research with an open mind, I must admit, I had some of the questions pre-answered in my own head: I assumed that home was a physical place, a person or a feeling, perhaps a combination of these factors. I believed that home and belonging was the same concept. Additionally, in terms of the role of adult education – whether it is liberating or grounding – I had no doubt that

it could only emancipate people. I was convinced that to be grounded meant to be tied down, limited, stuck, trapped or even restricted, however, my findings opened up my mind and helped me to uncover many unexpected truths which were divided into themes and subthemes and discussed further in the chapter.

This is what I have discovered:

Themes	Subthemes
1. There isn't one single definition of home. The concept is as complex as humanity itself;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes home has a heartbeat;</li> <li>• Home as a familiarity;</li> <li>• Home as an emotional dimension;</li> <li>• Sense of ownership;</li> <li>• Home as determined by life stages;</li> </ul>
2. Settling down;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to adapt;</li> <li>• Finding your final stop;</li> <li>• Do we find or do we create home?</li> <li>• Is home and belonging the same concept?</li> </ul>
3. Emotional and physical dimensions of belonging;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belonging and community;</li> <li>• Belonging and place;</li> <li>• Belonging is not a fixed concept.</li> </ul>
4. Finding home within yourself;	
5. The influence of adult education on home and belonging.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult education as a liberating force;</li> <li>• The grounding side of adult education;</li> <li>• The diverse nature of adult education.</li> </ul>

I have selected the most relevant parts of our conversations and have included them in this chapter. However, in order to get a better idea about the questions asked and the responses I got, I recommend reading the full transcripts which are available on p. 85 under appendix 2.

### **3.3. There Isn't One Single Definition of Home. The Concept Is as Complex as Humanity Itself.**

I began my research assuming that home was a straightforward concept, however, my interviewees revealed a much deeper and more complex reality. Analysing my data, it became evident that my participants had diverse understanding of home which encompassed people,

familiarity and an emotional dimension. Additionally, sense of ownership and different stages of life influenced how people viewed the idea of home.

- **Sometimes home has a heartbeat**

Many participants associated home with people and felt that not what or where but who we share our lives with really mattered in life: ‘home is where the parents still live. As long as they are still alive, it’s the family centre, the unit’ (Patricia). Additionally, Mary added that:

‘home is people and relationships with people, family and friends, feeling settled with people around you. A house is a building. A house is not home unless it’s the people in it that make it’.

Laura felt that ‘home is having people that you can communicate with, it’s feeling that you can contribute something back to the community’ and Siobhan claimed that home:

‘is feeling comfortable with people around you, it’s about your connections with your community and friends, knowing that people have your back, knowing that people can rely on each other. I would have said home is family but it’s not, it’s who you make your family cuz it’s not necessarily your blood family’.

Finally, Campbell stressed that home could be more than just one place because it’s the people who make it special for us: ‘my past homes are still there in the people, I miss people’.

- **Home as a familiarity**

Some participants compared the feeling of home with the comfort of knowing and being familiar with it. Regardless of how exciting and enticing new experiences and places could be, Denis claimed that:

‘home is small things, everyday habits and familiarity, being familiar with people and places, not having to adapt all the time, something that is not alien to you’.

Additionally, Jude suggested that home consists of little elements which connect everything into shared experiences and everyday routines:

‘it’s a place where you sit and read, it’s a place you sit together in a company or a table that you sit around, it’s walls that tell stories of the things that happened’.



- **Home as an emotional dimension**

Personally, I think that home is a feeling. A feeling of being in the right place, possibly with the right people and knowing that you've found your spot. I believe, it doesn't matter what causes us to feel this way: a person, a building, a memory, a smell or a sound, anything can trigger that sense of contentment in our hearts.

On the other hand, while some participants associated home with people or familiarity, for some respondents home had an emotional dimension: 'home is security and the sense of safety and feeling relaxed and happy' (Patricia). Additionally, Francis observed that:

'it's also a place of safety, a place of refuge, comfort and routine. It provides a stable basis from which you can then venture out into the world knowing that if things go too bad, there is a place I can go back to and lick the wounds or recuperate or get my head back together again before taking on the world'.

- **Sense of ownership**

To some respondents a sense of ownership and pride owning something had a significant impact on the concept of home. For instance, Jude highlighted that 'home is somewhere that's yours'. Additionally, Patricia opened up:

'I do feel more at home that I live in my own house. It's not just space, it's a place to call my own where I can just be me. Home is having my own place to live that I feel fully in control of...'

In correspondence with Jude and Patricia's ideas, Gabriel stated that 'it's nice to have your own place, to call your own', defined home as 'having a place to come into, take my shoes off and warm up through my feet' and added that paying his bills and having his own independence made a significant difference to his life, although, the notion of ownership never really appealed to me. I don't own anything, I never felt like I needed to, therefore, this might be the reason why I constantly feel wrapped up in this feeling of temporality and preparation for something else, something grander.

- **Home as determined by life stages**

While the concept of home was linked with physical or emotional aspects for some respondents, another key feature emerged from the notion that home carries with it a more fluid

meaning that can change over the course of time and, to some extent, can be defined by significant moments in a person's life. For example, Francis observed that:

‘there's a historical element to where home is, it's the house I grew up in, it's the town I grew up in and it's the associations I have with that place in my mind with a very strong sense of origin where you started from in life, your childhood experiences, the locality, all dependant on some sort of stable continuous experience that provides a kind of bedrock of the concept of home. The other side of it is much more present – it's where I live now, my wife, my kids and the life we have constructed there. My sense of home has shifted from my family home - it doesn't feel like my home anymore, it's a house I grew up in - to where I established myself, where I've had children, where I and my wife have created something new'.

Similarly, Campbell stated that:

‘home becomes family once you reach a certain point in life and then, before you reach a certain point in life, probably, home is family with the home you grew up with and then you set yourself free of that home and you wander around for a while and then eventually you find home of your own'.

### **3.4. Settling Down**

I never questioned my identity and the concept of home while living in my motherland. Only in the last number of years while living in Ireland this strange void started opening up. Maybe becoming a mother triggered it or maybe it's the stage of life where you don't want to be somebody anymore, you want to find yourself, your place and call it your own.

Coming from different backgrounds and having travelled many paths in life, my participants reflected on the notion of settling down and it became evident that it influenced their understanding of home which suggested another theme for my findings.

Although Gabriel claimed that:

‘growing up and settling doesn't always end when we reach adulthood or similar. But sometimes it takes years of struggle, wanderings and being lost to finally grow up and find your place...’

to which Maria added that: ‘the whole settling down took me a while. I always had this free spiritedness in me but you can't be wild forever’. Denis observed that getting older meant valuing the idea of home much more: ‘as you get older, you probably appreciate home more or a home whatever home you have’. Finally, Jude concluded that:

‘the older I get the more I hate being away. I would drive to get home late at night to be back in my own house rather than stay over somewhere. I like coming home’.

- **Ability to adapt**

While many participants associated home with settling down, some felt that home could be recreated again and again. For instance, Denis identified that:

‘people can make homes in different places and have different homes and feel at home in different places throughout their lives and at the same time, too’.

Additionally, Francis added:

‘home is not just this fixed one place, it’s something that you can create and if you’ve created it in one place, you can probably create it in another’.

Finally, Jude summed up that:

‘people look for this home that’s a bit like religion and you make yourself believe that you can’t just do without it. I have always been able to adapt. My home is here in this house but if it happened that it changed and we had to move, I would have made that home, too’.

Personally, I thought, we can settle down and feel content for a while but that doesn’t mean we are where we are supposed to be. Unless our desire to escape ceases, we aren’t truly home yet.

- **Finding your final stop**

In fairness, I was a bit apprehensive asking my participants a question which required them to think about arriving at their final destination as this meant they had to think about dying where they lived at the moment. However, I felt that the aspect of settling down to that extent and the notion of finding true home was important to my research.

As a result of that, when asked if their current homes were their final stops, some participants couldn’t see themselves moving again: ‘I don’t think I’m ever going anywhere else because I have too good of the life here’ (Gabriel). ‘If I had to move, I could adapt but it’s too much of me here now, too much invested that you’d be throwing away’ (Jude).

Additionally, Campbell admitted that it took some wanderings and searching to find his place but once he did, it felt right:

‘it’s a sort of rolling stone type curious person who has to go out and be homeless in a sense for a while in their life to find a place for them’ and ‘some people grow up and never leave. I always knew there were somewhere else out there that was better suited to me. I feel like I’ve found it. It’s never really changed - the understanding of home and belonging - it just feels like it’s happening’.

While some respondents were certain of having arrived at their final destination, Mary observed that it all depended on life itself:

‘probably in the long term it will be my home and if I still feel at home here when/ if circumstances change, I will stay here. If I don’t, I won’t.’

Lastly, few participants didn’t feel settled for good and saw themselves moving again: ‘it would be hard to leave the town but my physical home I’d be willing to move out of if something changed in my life’ (Patricia). Additionally, some felt that their home meant more than just a location to them and didn’t want to part with it even though they didn’t necessarily see themselves staying there forever: ‘I imagine that I’d always have this home. This is my home and obviously my son’s home’ (Siobhan).

Finally, Francis summed up:

‘we could easily sell up and move on if we wanted to. Having said that, we look around at the amount of time and effort and emotion that we have and the memories we’ve put in having a family in this particular house on this particular two acres of soil, it would be a very hard wrench to tear away from that. We’ve so many memories embedded, we physically built, we decorated the house or refurbished it. Don’t really want to leave it. But if I was to leave it, I wouldn’t want to sell it. It’s an emotional thing. I want to hold onto the fact that it’s also where the kids grew up and that maybe they might want to come back to it at some point cause it’s their home’.

Personally, I feel that I am on a quest to find my place. I am definitely still on the way and the place where I am now is just a temporary stop.

- **Do we find or do we create home?**

The concept of home was becoming more and more complex the more I was researching it. The boundaries between the physical and emotional dimensions of it were fading as I realised how much it really encompassed. Speaking of finding or creating home, many participants collectively agreed that home had to be created and a lot of aspects were important when considering it. For instance, Patricia observed that:

‘a house can just be four walls but unless you put your stamp on it, I don’t think it’s going to feel like home. It’s evolving with me and changing and it feels like home because I am making it my happy place, my comfortable space’.

Additionally, Jude stated that:

‘home is in your head or your heart. It’s a continuous process of making a house into home, even in terms of the environment that you create. It has to be something I am attached to. I am attached to here, where I live with my family, because every single room in the house we’ve changed so we made it home’.

Moreover, Francis confessed: ‘I almost physically broke my back building the house to something we can live in’ and mentioned that we could find a place that we liked or that reminded us of our previous home, however:

‘you try to create a home rather than a house that reflects the values that you have, that you’d be considerably comfortably safe, a place that you feel that you’re your own boss, that you have certain freedom, liberty, that you can call your own’.

Finally, Laura signified that integrating into the community and neighbourhood also played an important role in creating home: ‘you can’t expect it to come to you, you have to make an effort and be willing to talk to people and get to know them’ to which Siobhan added that:

‘creating home is like creating an environment for people, it can evolve, it can change. It’s more about where it is and who I am surrounded by and what I am surrounded by’.

While many respondents stated that home had to be created considering physical and emotional aspects of it, some participants claimed that it’s the combination of finding and creating that turned a house into home. For example, Campbell observed that:

‘I have always been a proponent for finding a place that you really enjoy and creating something for yourself there in that place. A mailbox helps, address, some art on the wall... You start to gather your stuff in one place that starts to become home or you find a place and you start investing into that and then, with the continual acceptance by the community all of a sudden there’s a place that’s home’.

Similarly to that, Mary added that: ‘it’s finding yourself among the right people, belonging, maintaining relationships and being accepted’.

Lastly, Denis stated that home could be found ‘by accident’; however, people played a vital role here: ‘physical place is part of it but people are essential to forming a home’.

In my opinion, we find a place that gives us this feeling of home and then we build upon it, we create our life there.

- **Is home and belonging the same concept?**

Initially, I assumed that home and belonging was one concept. I believed that we belonged at home and home created that feeling of belonging. However, based on my fieldwork, it turned out to be more complex than I originally expected: different participants had diverse views about it. For instance, Gabriel believed the concept of home and belonging was the same idea: ‘it’s the same thing. I’m on the inside looking out and I feel better within myself.’

Some participants suggested that the two concepts were interrelated: ‘you feel at home when you belong somewhere’ (Mary).

Likewise, Jude observed:

‘they are symbiotic in terms of the needs that are fulfilled within or one leads to the other – belonging somewhere brings you home in your head or your heart or brings you home to a physical place’.

On the other hand, many partakers felt that home and belonging were two different notions. For example, Patricia admitted that:

‘home for me is my sanctuary, it’s my safe, happy, relaxed space. It’s quite a physical feeling and it’s a little bit different to belonging. Belonging is more the acceptance and people’.

Siobhan also agreed that: ‘you can still belong somewhere but my home is very much my private space’. In addition to that, Maria observed that: ‘you can be at home in yourself but a sense of belonging is attached to something or someone’.

Furthermore, Denis contemplated that:

‘you could be at home somewhere or live somewhere all your life and not feel that you belong and you can feel that you belong somewhere even if it’s not your home’.

Finally, Francis summed up that:

‘you can belong in situations to groups or to communities or to contexts but that doesn’t necessarily make them home. Some people don’t feel that home means they belong there anymore, that their home has been disrupted or was dysfunctional or was taken away from them so their sense of belonging is more to do with people or their new situations. It’s an individual personal experience – when I go back to ‘my house’ where I grew up and where my mother still lives, I have a strong connection, belonging to that house but I don’t call that my home anymore as home is where you feel completely comfortable, where it’s yours, it’s your territory. This is where you can do what it is that you do’.

In my eyes, the notion of home and a sense of belonging are closely related; however, they are not the same: home gives us this feeling of belonging, however, we can also belong in places or situations that aren't our home.

### **3.5. Emotional and Physical Dimensions of Belonging**

According to my fieldwork, the concepts of home and belonging were closely interrelated, however, I feel, it would be incorrect to use them as synonyms. While home turned out to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon, the notion of belonging, based on my interviews, was mainly related to fitting in, being accepted, being part of something and mostly revolved around people.

Personally, I think, a sense of belonging is a feeling which can be created by right people or being in the right physical place. It's a feeling of this pure contentment and peace in your heart. We can belong among many people and in various places and this feeling can shift and transform over time.

- **Belonging and community**

Many participants collectively associated the sense of belonging with people, connectedness, being part of something and being accepted. For instance, Maria claimed that:

‘belonging to a group would be having similar interests or similar viewpoints or similar talents, the same way of thinking, same value system, the same sense of social justice’. ‘It's when you feel comfortable, you feel at ease, you feel rooted, grounded, accepted, like you're a part of something where people understand you’.

Additionally, Denis stated that ‘belonging is not a fixed thing. It's just knowing people. It's not really the place, it's kind of community’. Moreover, Mary highlighted that:

‘belonging is being part of community. Community can be friends, can be family, can be people. You feel like you have a lot in common with people around you and you feel safe’

to which Siobhan added:

‘it's having connections and friendships. It might just be a habit, you get used to things, you know what you know and what you're used to but there is a strong sense of community’.

Similarly, Campbell observed that:

‘belonging is a personal thing but a community can definitely help or hinder the feeling of belonging. It’s a feeling of acceptance from those around you’.

Additionally, Francis defined belonging ‘as a feeling that you connect to a person, a place or a community through a shared experience’ and Laura seconded that saying that belonging was ‘being involved in the community serving and being accepted’.

Patricia observed that:

‘it’s about acceptance and feeling that no matter how I am, how I appear, I am accepted by people. It’s the people rather than a place that make me feel a sense of belonging’ and, finally, Gabriel confessed that belonging - ‘it’s what I have going today, a family. I have happiness. You know you truly belong when they trust you with a key’.

- **Belonging and place**

Although many respondents associated the idea of belonging with people - family and community - in some cases the aspect of place played an important role, too. For example, Maria observed that:

‘when you hear the word belonging, you think belonging to something. Belonging to a place would be important. A physical place’.

Additionally, Francis stated that:

‘belonging is a feeling of familiarity with a place, immediate connection and recognition. There is no sense of novelty or exploration’.

Finally Jude summed up that:

‘you can belong to a landscape or to the culture. You just feel comfortable in your own skin, you can live comfortably in this place, you have an opportunity to express yourself, feel safe, feel fulfilled, feel warm, you have supports, you have people who understand you, people who get where you’re coming from’.

- **Belonging is not a fixed concept**

While many respondents felt that the sense of belonging was closely related to community or place, some participants believed that different circumstances, contexts and stages of life had



a significant impact on the notion of belonging and how it was understood. For instance, Francis observed that:

‘belonging is a floating concept that can dissolve or reconstitute in different contexts. I have changed and because the place has changed. I don’t feel as if I belong to it in the same way I did when I was a kid. It’s in my head of what the place used to be’.

Similarly, Patricia added:

‘it can be your time of life. You mould to a situation. Since I got older, I feel more assured and confident in who I am and who I want to be. It brings a lot of acceptance, self-acceptance so it helps with that feeling of belonging’.

On the other hand, feeling that you truly belong didn’t necessarily mean being surrounded by people or living with anyone, as my fieldwork suggested. It turns out that we can be perfectly happy alone, but not lonely, in our own company, doing our thing and watching the world go by, as Gabriel suggested:

‘people might find that weird but I’m happy on my own. There’s no one to take my remote control. I love listening to a bit of music but I like living on my own’.

### **3.6. Finding Home Within Yourself**

Although the narrowest theme, however, it is the one that struck me the most and shook my assumptions to the core. I anticipated that home could be a physical or an emotional element, yet, I never imagined it being so close to us or even more within us, to be precise, which suggested that being in peace with ourselves led us home. Therefore, although not many participants expressed this idea, I felt that it was quite significant to be mentioned and included in the findings.

According to Laura, ‘home is where you feel comfortable in your own skin’. Additionally, Jude added that ‘home is where you have freedom to be yourself’ to which Patricia seconded: ‘it’s really special to have that freedom and space to make decisions and just be you’.

Finally, Maria reflected deeper on finding or creating home observed that:

‘I would have belonging and home as a sense of place but I also have that sense of home in myself, being comfortable with myself. Even if I was somewhere else, I would still feel a sense of home in me. It’s more to do with the way I feel about myself, it’s more that I’ve created a sense of home in myself and because of that sense of groundedness I feel at home regardless of where I am’.

### 3.7. The Influence of Adult Education on Home and Belonging

Having been personally and professionally involved in adult education, I witnessed how multi-functional and multi-dimensional it could be and how differently it could impact the lives of learners and even educators. Adult education is a unique phenomenon and apart from its obvious and expected role – to educate adults, to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge and skills – it may serve a much deeper purpose of emancipation and transformation which can lead to creating conditions for learning, self-awareness, shift in assumptions and discovery of higher meaning. However, the purpose of my research wasn't to dissect adult education but rather to explore one aspect of it – its influence on home and belonging. I longed to find out whether adult education liberated or grounded people: whether it had the power to liberate learners, to open their minds and hearts to new worlds, fresh experiences and shifted assumptions. I strived to investigate whether people felt that with the help of adult education they had better opportunities to be more free and mobile which automatically posed the question of home.

On the other hand, I thought that adult education could actually ground learners instead of emancipating them. I set out to explore the grounding aspect of adult education and its implications for people's lives: whether it tied learners closer to the locality, whether it limited their choices and forced them to fit in and conform.

- **Adult education as a liberating force**

In my opinion, Adult Education liberates us, whether mentally or physically, it opens up our minds and gives us wings to reach further and higher. Additionally, many participants considered adult education to be liberating, empowering and transformative: 'for a lot of people it opens their eyes to new ways of thinking, new ways of looking at things' (Denis). 'It's liberating with the freedom of choice, people have freedom to do what they want with it' (Mary).

Similarly, Gabriel added that:

'you're learning how to spell, you're learning how to write, you're learning how to add and put forms and be able to fill them in and send them away and you're doing it all in your own handwriting. You're not getting someone to do it for ya and I can do these things today. That's what education has given me – a bit of freedom'.

Additionally, Francis observed that:

‘education is like stepping-stones towards something that would lead onto something better in life. Education isn’t just for getting a job. It’s far more about exploring different worlds and different ideas’.

Finally, Laura stated that:

‘when people do get empowered, they’re able to take part in the community, they feel confident, they’re able to do things that they wouldn’t have normally been able to do’.

On the other hand, Francis noticed that:

‘adult education on its own, I don’t think, would be enough to liberate everybody. There are other supports that people will need. They may need more guidance, more hand-holding, more encouragement’.

Additionally, as Laura suggested, without right support adult education can also be alienating as once the people break away from the set community or family ‘rules’, they become excluded:

‘people feel that they don’t belong to the family because they’ve been empowered but they’re at a different level and their mind-set is totally different’.

Finally, Jude highlighted that:

‘the problem with education is rooted in social issues. Of course, education liberates and gives people chances but they have to have those opportunities before it can liberate them. Education for a lot of cases tends to support the status quo’.

- **The grounding side of adult education**

On another note, some partakers believed that adult education was grounding. However, the grounding side of adult education turned out to be nothing what I expected it to be – it revolved around the sense of purpose, belonging, being part of something, settling down and finding/discovering yourself. Analysing my fieldwork, I couldn’t detect any negative aspects of groundedness that came with being involved in adult education. For instance, Patricia stated that:

‘adult education helps ground people, it gives a sense of purpose, it gives that sense of belonging, it can help to get rid of a lot of fear as you realise that other people are in the same boat, you realise you’re not alone and being part of a group can be very reassuring, very grounding instead of it being anxious and challenging’.

Additionally, Francis suggested that ‘from the personal development point of view adult education has a huge self-affirming input’. Furthermore, Denis highlighted that ‘grounding can

help you fit into somewhere, it can help you integrate’ and, finally, Campbell summed up that: ‘you got people who just need a sense of community again, they go to class, they don’t care if they pass or fail and this is grounding’.

As positive as the concept of groundedness sounded, still, it didn’t come without a price to be paid on which Siobhan contemplated that being involved in adult education meant dealing with constraints and facing commitments:

‘while you’re partaking in adult education in your area, that will ground you more because you have to be there, you have to participate. Maybe it’s actually about an age and a state of life – if you don’t have responsibilities, you are young, you have no kids, elderly parents, siblings or people with special needs to look after, adult education can open it up for you, however, a lot of learners are coming to education later in life or they are returning to it having never finished it but they are in a situation now where either they bought a house, their parents are here, their children are here’.

- **The diverse nature of adult education**

While many respondents viewed adult education as being liberating or grounding, a number of participants believed that it could be both. For example, Denis observed that:

‘English classes help people to fit in, at least feel a little bit more part of the country’ which is grounding but ‘being able to do things themselves – that’s liberating’.

Additionally, Siobhan claimed that:

‘you do it to open up and liberate yourself but the more embedded you become in it, you end up being more grounded in the society or community’.

Maria specified that ‘education liberates people to ground them, root them’ and Campbell agreed that ‘it’s both liberating and grounding depending on a person’.

Finally, Francis summarised that:

‘adult education has the possibilities of doing both those things – grounding and liberating. It grounds you in a sense that you know where you stand in relation to your own abilities intellectually. It also has the power or the ability to liberate you – it can direct you down the particular road, it can lead you to pathways and doors that you probably never would have had the opportunity to do so unless you’ve taken the education route’.

### 3.8. Conclusion

I am not going to lie, even though I embarked on the journey of qualitative research with an open mind, I started the study with some questions already answered in my head, especially, when taking on the role of a participant; however, as the transcripts came to life and the stories of my participants unfolded in front of my eyes, I realised that there was so much more to it than I initially thought.

Before outlining my findings in this chapter, I interviewed ten participants who were involved in Adult Education in one or another way. Also, I answered my interview questions myself and added my answers to the collected data. I wanted to hear and explore stories of moving, travelling and settling which were lived by real people making their own choices in life or at least what looked like their own choices initially. As a result, although coming from different backgrounds and following different paths of life, everyone united for a common goal – to reflect on what home and the sense of belonging meant to them.

Overwhelmed with my participants' dedication and their eagerness to help, I dived into ten different lives, I reflected on my own path which enabled me to discover many truths. I set out to find 'the perfect answer' but what I discovered surprised me – there is no single textbook definition in real life. Therefore, in this chapter I highlighted the undefinable nature of home and the meaning of a true sense of belonging and its multi-dimensional nature. Also, I uncovered a surprising discovery of finding home within yourself. Finally, I explored the liberation and grounding nature of Adult Education and outlined how my study participants, including myself, viewed it.

As a consequence, I will analyse my research findings in light of my reviewed literature in the next chapter of my thesis.

## 4. ANALYSIS

‘It was when I stopped searching for home within others  
and lifted the foundations of home within myself  
I found there were no roots more intimate  
than those between a mind and body  
That have decided to be whole’.  
(Kaur 2020)

### 4.1. Introduction

I went into the research to find answers to the questions that have been nagging me for quite some time now: what is home? Do we find it or do we create it? When do we know that we truly belong? Additionally, as a professional, I desired to explore what role adult education plays within the context of home and belonging? Does it liberate or ground people?

Being personally interested in my research findings and having been involved in Adult and Community Education, I adopted an autoethnographic style which allowed me to approach my study from the perspective of an observer and a participant at the same time.

Since starting my research, I have been in a continuous process of looking for, recognising and critically analysing my taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions about what true home and belonging is and what hides behind the obvious liberation and not so obvious grounding roles that the adult and community education contains within itself.

Therefore, in this chapter I will analyse my findings in the light of my reviewed literature elaborating on the key arguments such as: there is no single definition when it comes to home; additionally, belonging is a unique concept closely connected to home and feeling free to be who we truly are; furthermore, the notion of liberation isn't as straightforward as initially anticipated, it has a conflicting side, too; moreover, adult education has a distinctive connection with globalisation and cosmopolitanism serving as a gateway into the world, whereas community education acts as a grounding force.

Finally, I will examine the elements that inform my research and will propose implications which will be discussed in the concluding and final chapter of my thesis.

#### **4.2. The Undefined Definition of Home and the Meaning of True Belonging**

While on my academic journey, I reviewed my chosen literature, I carried out my fieldwork and, additionally, I observed the process through the lens of a participant. I watched the research findings unfold and I was continuously comparing them with my own path, my story as if I was searching for missing pieces of an invisible puzzle that puzzle being the meaning of home.

To my surprise, while searching for that one magical definition, I discovered that there is no single truth of what home is. Different theorists and my research participants understand it uniquely, individually and diversely: while hooks (2009) asserts that finding or creating home cannot exist without a geographical foundation to ground ourselves in, which parallels with the ideas of Maria, Patricia, Gabriel and Jude (see pp. 41, 46), May (2011), Denis and Jude suggest that it's familiarity and our everyday habits that define home (see p. 40).

Additionally, hooks states that 'call to home comes at times when we are ready to slow down' and 'stop somewhere' (2009, p. 203) to which Maria, Denis, Jude and Gabriel agree reflecting that we can adapt if we have to but we probably appreciate home more once we get older and more settled (see pp. 42, 43). Although, Campbell contradicts that idea and claims that home can be more than just one place because it's the people who make it special for us to what Denis and Francis add that we can create, recreate or discover home multiple times throughout our lives (see pp. 42, 43).

Surely, hooks's situation is quite specific – a black female in the racist environment of white supremacy – which doesn't exactly translate into the context of my research and today's Ireland. Additionally, although hooks clarifies that returning home doesn't mean coming back to homes we once left behind, she claims that it is 'unnatural to live away from your people' (2009, p. 165) and that we betray our ancestral legacy by abandoning our roots (2009), some of my research participants disagree with these claims: Campbell observes that home is a family that we are born in, however, it's only natural to spread our wings and find our own home to which Francis adds that historically we might have a 'strong sense of origin' where

we started in life that ‘provides a kind of bedrock of the concept of home’, yet, home is also where we find ourselves, where we settle and create our new history (see p. 42).

Finally, in all fairness, sometimes what we are looking for is much closer than we initially thought – I have never imagined that my search for home and belonging would make a full circle and lead me back to myself: Brown (2017), hooks (2009) and May (2011) collectively claim that home is much more than just a physical place but it is where we can be our true selves which also corresponds with my findings: a number of my research participants agree that home is feeling comfortable in your own skin and having freedom to be your true unique self: safe, happy, relaxed and warm through your feet as home is a place of refuge, comfort and routine (see p. 41).

Have I found the answer to my question? Am I able to define home now? What I have discovered is not so much of a definition of home but more like different interpretations and understandings of it, and, although clear to the reviewed theorists and my research participants, the notion of home is still slightly intangible to me, although, I am getting a notion that if we dig deeper and look through the dimensions of home, at the end of the day, it all comes down to a feeling: home can be a building or a location, it can actually be more than one place, it can be a person or our everyday familiarity, it can be created or found due to the right time in our lives; however, whatever it may be, it all gives us that feeling of being where we are meant to be and this, I sense, is missing in me, therefore, I can’t seem to settle and feel content. Maybe I am even somewhat disappointed. I must admit, I was searching for a ‘quick fix’ - for one solid and mutually-agreed-on definition of home which would direct me to where I truly belong. Frankly, I underestimated the complexity and uniqueness of human nature and our social reality.

What about belonging then? Is home and belonging the same concept?

If we look closely into the structure of the word ‘belong’, we will notice that this word can be viewed as a compound consisting to two separate words (verbs) – ‘to be’ and ‘to long’ and if we take that into consideration when defining the concept of belonging, it will become evident that ‘to belong’ means to long for something or someone which, based on my literature review and research findings, can be human interaction, authentic relationships, the community or being part of something collective. Additionally, when in use, the verb ‘to belong’ usually comes with the proposition ‘to’ which again hints that we have to belong ‘to’ something or someone. After analysing my research findings, I am getting the picture that belonging is based



on relationships, emotionality and attachment, attachment serving as the base for our emotional and social development (Bowlby 1982). It is ingrained in us from our childhoods and, sometimes even subconsciously, we search for those long-lost or missing bonds and safe foundation that we can build our lives upon (Bretherton 1992). Bonding seems to be an essential human need that can only be satisfied by other humans, therefore, people feel the urge to bond, to establish relationships or connect with others based on common interests, experiences and feelings, and, according to my study, once we feel bonded, we belong: 'it's having connections and friendships'; 'it's about acceptance and feeling that no matter how I am, how I appear, I am accepted by people'; it's 'having similar interests or similar viewpoints or similar talents, the same way of thinking, same value system, the same sense of social justice'; finally, it is 'being involved in the community serving and being accepted' when 'you feel like you have a lot in common with people around you and you feel safe' (see pp. 47, 48).

When it comes to a sense of true belonging, according to some of my research participants, it can be related to a physical place and a feeling of familiarity, immediate connection and recognition (see p. 48); however, in support of the above argument, Watt & Badger (2009), Gustafson (2009) and Lambert et al. (2013) collectively highlight that a sense of belonging is driven by authentic active interpersonal relationships with people and a feeling of acceptance and fitting in which, in my opinion, is really a definition of a community and what corresponds to the thoughts of my research participants (see pp. 47, 48). As well as that, Murray proposes that life in some communities in early 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland remains 'the preserve of locality and place' (2007, p. 117) which parallels with Campbell's thoughts that 'some people grow up and never leave' (see p. 44). On the other hand, thinking about it, we don't necessarily have to settle in one area in order to have strong connections with certain places and we don't have to migrate in order to identify with global movements – life is much more multidimensional than that.

Analysing the stories of my interviewees, it's evident that all of my research participants migrated throughout their life to some extent: some lived abroad but later came back to their hometowns ('I had no idea what I wanted to do so went to different places...to have a bit of an adventure. I ended up back here cause I had some health problems'; 'There was nothing happening in Ireland... job-wise, I wasn't sure where I wanted to go with my life so I just thought I'd go... travelling'; 'I always wanted to drink. I should have been trying to deal with it but I didn't want anybody interfering with me drinking so I had to move'; '...to... broaden my mind and just have a bit of freedom... and independence. I wanted... to work with people and communities that were more disadvantaged... that's why I moved back', (see pp. 89, 92,

97, 98, 110, 111); some came to Ireland and stayed although originally from a different country ('...my parents travelled and then my grandparents also travelled so I grew up sort of in a van driving around America'. 'Waves. Surf' brought Campbell to Ireland (see p. 86) and some migrated within Ireland and eventually settled in their home towns or in a different place ('I didn't move for work, just at the time... things were very bleak and it was a case of getting an opportunity and a house and moving'; 'I moved away just to go to college'; 'I didn't really feel at home here (in Dublin) so I decided with the encouragement of my friend to move down to Sligo'; 'Love brought me to Sligo' (see pp. 103, 104, 107, 113, 116). This suggests to me that often circumstances (and not necessarily choices) dictate how people's lives turn out. The reasons behind the migration of my research participants were family/ work commitments, breakups, health issues and only a few searched for a better life or a positive change which, I feel, questions the nature of this type of migration in general. At the end of the day, is it really that voluntary or do we create our lives and weave our paths shackled in conscious or subconscious constraints that, apparently, the concept of belonging comes with? Analysing the literature and my research findings, I get a sense that the notion of belonging can become a double-edged sword: in addition to being accepted and becoming part of something shared and collective, belonging can become suffocating and dissatisfactory as we might have to conform and sacrifice our needs for the expectations of others. We are all born into structures of power (families, communities, society) and those structures affect our viewpoints, determine what kind of people we become and shape our lives whether we want that or not, and this is especially visible in cases when people engage in Adult and Community Education: as Laura suggests, 'people feel that they don't belong to the family because they've been empowered but they're at the different level and their mind-set is totally different' (see pp. 109, 110).

But what role does the desire to wander and search for something else, something better play in this context? Gustafson (2009, p. 490) claims that the sense of belonging determines our desire to move or stay. Additionally, he suggests that 'mobile people tend to have a weak sense of belonging whereas' individuals with a strong sense of belonging are less willing to relocate and find a new home which, to me, sounds quite superficial and single-dimensional. According to my study findings, the sense of belonging is much more complex than just a desire to leave or to stay: some of my research participants who had a very clear and strong sense of belonging, go deeper and claim that it all depends on circumstances such as people or inner happiness rather than a weak sense of belonging and sometimes, although we feel nostalgic for different places, long gone times or memories, we are still willing to change something, to move for a

hope of a better life, to find our home and to experience a true sense of belonging (see pp. 114, 115, 117). As a result of that, it's not as straightforward and clear cut as having a strong or a weak sense of belonging. The dimensions of attachment and meaningfulness of the concept, evidently, stretch much further than our desire to move or stay: very often there are memories (see pp. 95, 96, 122, 123), guilt, responsibilities and even fear of the unknown attached to it... The aim of my research was to explore voluntary migration where people make their own informed decisions to move or to stay without any structures of power forcing them. However, in life power doesn't always come in the form of politics or money. As human beings, we are complex creatures tangled in our emotions, feelings, desires and duties fighting inner battles and trying to balance between our obligations and self-care.

When it comes to home and belonging, some of my research participants claim that these two notions mean the same concept; some of the interviewees argue that the concepts are different and some suggest that they are different but complementary. My reviewed literature suggests that home and belonging isn't the same concept but the notion of these perceptions rather stem from the same source - from being totally free to be who you truly are and from fully understanding the grounds of one's being (hooks 2009, p. 220); therefore, although there is no agreed definition of home, there is a common understanding of the notion of belonging and these two terms are more intertwined than I initially thought, sometimes the terms can even be interchangeable: home is really a feeling created by a physical place or people and belonging is a social phenomenon, it incorporates physical aspects (locality, community, individuals); however, in order to know that we truly belong, we must sense it. Therefore, it occurs to me that psychically, emotionally or socially, it's a state of mind, it's a feeling of something that makes our hearts full and minds content and this seems to have a very close connection to home.

On the other hand, the definition of home and belonging wasn't the sole aim of my research. I also wished to explore what role, if any, adult education played in encouraging or consolidating the feelings of home and belonging. Subsequently, it raised another dilemma: do home and belonging influence how we perceive adult and community education or does adult and community education impact how we understand home and a true sense of belonging? In order to uncover that, it is worth exploring the notions of liberation, globalisation and cosmopolitanism in the context of adult education. Mistakenly, I have been using these terms as synonyms; however, they are significant in their differences and they have a unique connection with my research question.

### 4.3. The Conflicting Nature of Liberation Within the Context of Adult Education

The findings of my research suggest that, although we find or create our home and finally experience the sense of belonging, we still might desire to liberate ourselves. When it comes to liberation, the initial thought revolves around freedom from a physical location, ability to get up and leave, a notion of actually releasing yourself from invisible chains and restrictions. However, reflecting on my academic journey, it becomes evident that the nature of liberation is not one-dimensional but rather contradictory. This has been a significant finding for me: we can perceive liberation as a force for physical mobility but it can also be a power of mental and emotional freedom from any sort of oppression, old beliefs and assumptions. According to my study findings, it is one of the key roles that adult education plays within the society: due to its developmental and emancipatory nature, it has the power to liberate learners from the limits in terms of thinking and behaving showing them the world in a different light (see pp. 50, 51) to which Connolly (2016), Freire (2018), hooks (1994) and Pshyk (2020) collectively agree and further suggest that it emancipates and empowers giving ordinary people a voice and a chance to try or start all over again creating ‘liberating conditions for making more autonomous and informed choices and developing a sense of self-empowerment’ (Mezirow 2000, p. 26). This, additionally, corresponds with Gabriel’s idea: ‘that’s what education has given me – a bit of freedom’ (see p. 50). Finally, Francis adds that: ‘education is like stepping-stones towards something that would lead onto something better in life’ which doesn’t necessarily mean leaving your community or relocating (see p. 51). This act of liberation tends to happen within individuals in the form of transformative learning (Mezirow 2000).

On one hand there is this idea of freedom and on the other hand, there is the notion of groundedness, which, initially, to me seemed like a trap, the end to our aspirations and opportunities; however, although, ironically, at first being an adverse concept, based on my research, the notion of grounding turned out to be the absolute opposite and much more in correspondence with the contradictory nature of liberation. As the findings of my study suggest, the concept of grounding is about discovering yourself, forming a firm ground under your feet and finding where you belong: Francis claims that ‘from the personal development point of view, adult education has a huge self-affirming input’ (see p. 51) which, in my view, is empowering and liberating. Furthermore, Connolly (2016), Freire (2018), hooks (1994) and Pshyk (2020) collectively suggest that adult education emancipates and empowers. As I see it, emancipation equals liberation and empowerment means being grounded when you can’t be

shifted and disturbed by negative influences of the surrounding world. This suggests that adult and community education can be both liberating and grounding at the same time which makes these two concepts more related and resonates with the reflections of my study participants: according to Denis, Francis, Siobhan and Maria, ‘adult education has the possibilities of doing both those things – grounding and liberating’; ‘...classes help people to fit in, at least feel a little bit more part of the country’ which is grounding but ‘being able to do things themselves – that’s liberating’; ‘you do it to open up and liberate yourself but more embedded you become in it, you end up being more grounded in the society or community’; ‘education liberates people to ground them, root them’ (see p. 52) and to create ‘liberating conditions for making more autonomous and informed choices and developing a sense of self-empowerment’ (Mezirow 2000, p. 26). This gives an impression that adult education liberates our minds but grounds our souls which hugely contributes to the sense of belonging and finding or creating our home: when we are liberated mentally, when we know where we stand, it is easier to settle or to keep looking in order to discover where we belong even if that means venturing out into the world but returning to our community or never leaving but remaining with more self-awareness and self-affirmation. From a glance, home and belonging and the notion of liberation seem conflicting and quite opposite concepts. However, digging deeper and reflecting on my academic journey, I sense that these notions, although contradictory in nature, are more corresponding than initially meets the eye.

#### **4.4. Globalisation and Cosmopolitanism in The Light of Adult Education**

Initially, I thought globalisation meant liberation, open doors, broader horizons and more opportunities. In a way that is true when it comes to broader horizons and vaster opportunities as when the borders fade, societies engage in worldly trades and ventures; however, globalisation is about economic processes, it is linked to mobile, flexible and disposable labour and employability which has little to do with personal development and liberation of individuals. So, what is the connection between globalisation and adult education?

UNESCO (1976, p. 2) states that adult and community education is ‘an integral part of a global scheme’. Additionally, Duke (1994) proposes that it is an international movement endorsing adult education as a tool to fight inequality, support democracy and promote social and cultural development. In contrast, Jude bursts the utopian bubble in terms of the unquestionably

empowering and emancipating side of adult education, contradicts what Duke said about it promoting equality and summarises that it is not enough just to engage in adult education. According to Jude, ‘the problem with education is rooted in social issues’ (see p. 51). Yes, education liberates and gives people chances but they have to have those opportunities before it can liberate them. ‘Education for a lot of cases tends to support the status quo’ (see p. 51), which suggests that very often people forget the small print and those chances given by adult and community education aren’t as equal as expected.

Finally, SOLAS (20/24, p. 24) highlights that their vision is to ‘enable learners to succeed in the labour market’; however, mobile, flexible and disposable workforce isn’t what adult education is striving to facilitate: Francis argues that ‘education isn’t just for getting a job, it’s far more about exploring different worlds and different ideas’ and Denis adds that: ‘for a lot of people it opens their eyes to new ways of thinking, new ways of looking at things’ with Mary concluding that: ‘it’s liberating with the freedom of choice, when people have freedom to do what they want with it’ which suggests to me that capitalism, temporality and disposability – which is the core critique of globalisation – isn’t necessarily the goal of adult education (see pp. 50, 51).

Delving into the social reality deeper, Gustafson (2009, p. 491) claims that globalisation and modern lifestyles are striving for cosmopolitan identities forcing the definite boundaries of communities to fade, which, in a way, seems liberating as it creates a sense of freedom and openness. Furthermore, Beck argues that in this new modern world people are not tied to traditions anymore and everyone is free to create their own identities and become cosmopolitan citizens of the world (2002). However, based on my study, I feel that the notions of liberation and cosmopolitanism are filtered through the local lens which correspond with Murray’s ideas that the connections in some communities remain very strong and local still matters (2007). This doesn’t necessarily suggest a physical space but rather the development of a common identity, solidarity, empathy and collectiveness. This is liberating in terms of intellectual endeavour and shifted perceptions which, in my view, is the grounding aspect of my research rather than a feeling of having to belong to a physical space. People want to be liberated but on their terms. Therefore, as some of my research participants argue, adult education is not necessarily about employability or wanting to physically leave a local area (see pp. 50, 51, 52). It helps to broaden people’s views, however, this doesn’t mean that everyone has to abandon their roots and move somewhere. As my research suggests, adult education acts as a gateway to the world, physically or in terms of allowing people to broaden their worldviews by creating

the conditions to explore different worlds and different ideas which is liberating. The concept of cosmopolitanism, furthermore, suggests that people could become citizens of the world and form one unified community which could share mutual respect despite the differences in people's beliefs and circumstances and, to me, this is liberating and promising. However, being free doesn't mean being placeless somewhere in the world as the true nature of adult education is not to turn people into displaced and dispersed vagabonds but rather to give people freedom to make more autonomous choices and decisions in life (Mezirow 2000). According to my researched literature and the findings of my study, we can be in a liberating state of mind, we can identify with cosmopolitan ideas, but we don't have to physically leave which, to me, poses a contradiction in terms of adult education, cosmopolitanism and liberation and uncovers the truly complex multi-dimensional nature of the concepts that I have been trying to explore.

#### **4.5. Community Education and The Notion of Grounding**

Analyzing my researched literature and the findings of my study, I have come across the global/cosmopolitan element and I examined its connection with adult education. However, on the other side, there is a more grounded notion of community education.

As already observed, when I began my research, I was convinced that grounding was a negative concept. I was sure it meant being trapped, shackled and restricted. However, embarking on my academic journey challenged my assumptions and shifted my views: I have discovered that grounding was not adverse at all and, although technically meaning 'reconnecting us to the earth', in my study, it translates into deeper self-awareness, self-affirmation and self-contentment. However, although my research proposes that adult education serves as a gateway to the world, physically and mentally, and the idea of cosmopolitanism, additionally, hints that people could become citizens of the world and form one united community, I feel that the concept of grounding gains a specific, more personal dimension in the context of community education. It's the notion of belonging and self-awareness in a more private, transformative and even life-changing way. According to some of my research participants, being part of something, a sense of belonging and feeling grounded plays a significant role in the lives of adult learners and luckily, with right supports and successful facilitation community education has the power to provide that and give that sense of purpose (see p. 51). Additionally, according to Connolly (2010), Pshyk (2020) and The Government White Paper on Adult Education

(2000), community education is considered to be a tool in community building and development to what Laura says: ‘when people do get empowered, they’re able to take part in the community’ which, as far as I am concerned, promotes the collective feeling of belonging (see p. 51). It’s like pieces of a giant puzzle fitting together and creating a bigger picture.

Based on my study, belonging seems to be a social phenomenon – it’s all about people, not the place, it has a social dimension as opposed to a geographical one and, as Murray suggests, it’s ‘the degree of meaning that individuals give to their local community that is paramount’ (2007, p. 125). The ability, desire and necessity to bond and communicate is fundamental to human interaction and the social aspect of belonging to a community. We cannot belong to a community we can’t communicate with, even the words ‘community’ and ‘communicate’ are similar and share the same root. Therefore, as Fitzsimons (2017), Ryan (2014) and SOLAS (2020/2024) collectively believe, community education reinforces social inclusion which, consequently, leads towards cohesion (The Government White Paper on Adult Education 2000) and a more equal society (Fitzsimons 2014) which then contributes to a collective feeling of belonging, feeling grounded, balanced and, ironically, liberated at the same time: once we stand firmly on our two feet, we get this sense of freedom being our own person and taking on the world. For instance, for an ESOL student education can be both liberating and grounding, too: Denis claims that ‘English classes help people to fit in, at least feel a little bit more part of the country’ which is grounding but ‘being able to do things themselves – that’s liberating’ (see p. 52). Furthermore, Denis highlights that ‘grounding can help you fit into somewhere, it can help you integrate’ with Campbell summing up that: ‘you got people who just need a sense of community again, they go to class, they don’t care if they pass or fail and this is grounding’ (see pp. 51, 52) which, to me, suggests that community education helps to create conditions for belonging. Additionally, Siobhan reflects that people engage in adult and community education to liberate themselves, but the more embedded they become in it, they ‘end up being more grounded in the society or community’. Furthermore Maria specifies that ‘education liberates people to ground them, root them’ and Campbell agrees that ‘it’s both liberating and grounding depending on a person’ (see pp. 51, 52). Finally, Francis summarises that (see p. 52):

‘adult education has the possibilities of doing both those things – grounding and liberating. It grounds you in a sense that you know where you stand in relation to your own abilities intellectually. It also has the power or the ability to liberate you – it can direct you down the particular road, it can lead you to pathways and doors that you probably never would have had the opportunity to do so unless you’ve taken the education route’.



However, as liberating and empowering community education is, Laura suggests that without the right supports once the people break away from the set community or family ‘norms’, they may become excluded which, unfortunately, exposes the not so obvious and shadier side of the matter (see p. 51):

‘people feel that they don’t belong to the family because they’ve been empowered but they’re at a different level and their mind-set is totally different’.

This is alienating and discouraging. Therefore, regrettably, many adult learners choose not to engage in community education as they don’t feel strong enough to withstand the surrounding pressures and oppressions alone. They don’t feel that they stand a chance.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

It took a very long time to get here: initially, I reviewed my chosen literature; then, using a method of semi-structured interviews and an element of autoethnography, I collected valuable data; moreover, after a thorough process of annotation, labelling and summarising I came up with themes and subthemes which informed my research findings; finally, I engaged in the analysis of my discoveries in the light of my reviewed readings which is portrayed in this chapter of my thesis.

Some findings came as a surprise. Some discoveries were expected and understandable; however, I realised how temporary and unique our social reality was. It’s like a river, flowing deep, sometimes turbulent, sometimes calm and dreamy, but it’s never the same: different times, various stages of life and diverse circumstances inform how we view ourselves and the world we live in and everything can change in the blink of an eye.

Therefore, while analysing my research findings through the lens of my reviewed literature, I tried to uncover the complexity of us, human beings, and the way we understand life, the concepts of home and belonging and the role of Adult and Community Education: I explored the undefinable nature of home and the meaning of a true sense of belonging; I looked into the notion of liberation through the lens of Adult Education and uncovered its conflicting nature; additionally, I examined the concepts of globalisation and cosmopolitanism within the context of Adult Education and I analysed what connection Community Education had with the idea of grounding.

Finally, after an in-depth analysis, I turned the outcome of my study into implications and outlined them in the next and concluding chapter of my thesis – final summary and reflections where I also reviewed the impact of my proposed implications along with a final summary, areas for further research and my reflections on my own learning.

## **FINAL SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS**

‘Today marks the day I return home to myself.  
That I begin the long journey that will be learning  
to trust in my own power again – to engage life,  
be light, and stand confidently in my own skin.  
And when I arrive, I will move gently through  
each dark, narrow room.  
And proudly draw back the curtains’.

(Taplin 2021)

Life is a busy and complex matter with unique findings, losses, surprises and peculiarities. No life is the same and we all follow or create our paths in search of meaning and higher purpose. Do we ever find it? Perhaps, but first of all we have to start somewhere. Somewhere it all began and here I am at the final stage of my research trying to conclude my study and ponder upon my own reflections and learning.

It’s been a marvellous journey: there were times when inspiration and excitement pushed me forward and there were moments when my academic mountain seemed too steep and too menacing to conquer but I persevered and immortalised the process and the findings of my study in this thesis.

I posed my research question and set to find some answers: what is home? When do we know that we truly belong and what role adult and community education plays in this context: does it liberate people and give them wings or does it ground them, shackle them and knit them deeper into the locality and its mundane life? Adult education is concerned with issues of belonging – particularly with respect to community education which offers an opportunity to look at claims of whether it encourages grounding-as-belonging or whether it inspires migration. Therefore, linking personal and professional aspirations, I got into the research for the ontological view, to prove it and I brought my own experience and subjective knowledge. As the research process was unfolding, I discovered many different truths and made new meanings which have been recorded in this paper.

Consequently, after completing my thesis, I drew my conclusions and their potential influence on parties involved in adult and community education and presented the core arguments and findings in the form of implications which are outlined below.

### **Implications**

During the course of my study, I have observed my understanding changing, my assumptions being challenged, my beliefs being shaken and the deeper and more complex dimensions of my topic emerging in front of my eyes. I have witnessed how my focus narrowed, how certain aspects became irrelevant and how some new ones developed and shaped my study. I feel like I was a different person back then, when I started a couple of years ago.

Therefore, after a thorough analysis of my chosen literature, findings and my own personal experience, I derived six main themes and implications, which, I believe, frame my study. These are the core arguments that I am making in relation to my research question:

Home... Although supported with hundreds of definitions, the concept of home is a hugely complex and diverse phenomenon which has a unique and personal value to everyone regardless of where we come from and where we are going to. Therefore, even after carrying out qualitative research, I can only provide a feel of the concept and not a definite answer.

Belonging, while often an individual matter and significantly and closely connected to the notion of home, is a separate concept which usually revolves around people and community, the idea of being accepted and fitting in and being part of something collective and shared which, very often, comes with commitments, responsibilities and even constraints.

The notion of self-acceptance and finding home within yourself seems to be of paramount significance. When we are comfortable with ourselves, it is easier to belong somewhere else. It's not the different places we should be looking for. If we believe that we will be happy when we go and live somewhere else, we often learn that it doesn't work that way. Wherever we go, we take ourselves with us and without self-acceptance and building home within ourselves, we will never find the peace and contentment that we are looking for.

The controversial nature of liberation is a force of mental and emotional freedom as opposed to just physical mobility. My study doesn't provide definite answers. The contradictory notion of liberation means different things to different individuals and uncovers the real complexity of our social reality.

Globalisation and cosmopolitanism - two very powerful words, both with a connection to freedom; however, the notion of globalisation is more targeted towards capitalism and the creation of labour markets which isn't really the primary role of adult and community education. Whereas being a cosmopolitan citizen of the world doesn't mean being uprooted and placeless: we can identify with universal ideas, however, we can still be integrated into our community.

The debateable concept of being grounded: this has been one of my most significant learnings from this research. I was convinced that to be grounded meant to be tied down, limited, stuck, trapped or even restricted. However, I have learned that being grounded wasn't a negative concept at all! Being grounded signified becoming more self-aware, freeing yourself from fears of being excluded and lonely, finding your sense of purpose (meaning) and path, standing firmly on the ground, knowing where you stand, where you belong and where you are going to, not feeling lost or misplaced which in itself was empowering and liberating. Based on my research, I feel, grounded ties in very closely with the sense of belonging and, ironically, mental and emotional liberation.

## **The Impact of My Findings**

### **Who might be impacted and why?**

The potential audience for my research, its findings and conclusions, I feel, is as follows:

- adult and community education facilitators;
- learners;
- myself as a professional and as a human being striving to find some answers.

The adult and community education facilitators (tutors/ teachers) are crucially important as they are the front line, the bridge between the facilities and the learners. Very often it is down to the adult educators and their ability to create conditions and interest among the learners.

Adult and community educators very often can make or break some learning experiences especially among vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.

Learners are the base and heart of adult and community education as without them there would be no point in this type of initiative.

Lastly, myself as an adult and community education facilitator and a human being. As a professional, I am impacted as I facilitate learning and form relationships with my students. I teach English to speakers of other languages, therefore, I am hoping to be even more sensitive and empathetic towards my students as their notion of home and belonging can be a very delicate matter.

As a human being, I wished to at least try to understand the complexity of human nature better and I desired to find some answers and find somebody who was in a similar situation to me – in search of their final destination or place under the sun.

### **How might everyone be impacted?**

Facilitators: hopefully, it will help the facilitators understand their learners better, aid in building authentic relationships with their learners and making their learning experiences more positive and beneficial.

Learners: Yes, adult education with the aid of right facilitation builds foundation and then, once equipped with ability to critically reflect and problematise, learners may engage in non-formal transformative learning which occurs outside the system, through conversations and lived experiences. In the right circumstances adult education provides learners with tools to think autonomously, challenge their assumptions and make new meaning (Mezirow 1997). With the help of successful transformative learning experiences, adult education could ground people in order to liberate them or liberate them in order to ground and very often that was what the people really needed: a sense of purpose, belonging and self-acceptance because it's not always about gaining qualifications or getting a job after a course. Sometimes it's about getting to know themselves, their limitations, their strengths and accepting themselves just the way they are – perfectly imperfect and unique in their own peculiar ways.

However, without the right support from family, community etc. desired transformation and emancipation can rapidly turn into alienation leaving the learner misunderstood, even more

vulnerable and torn between fitting in and being accepted. For me, this has been a significant learning that emerged from my study. I knew that engaging in adult education had its challenges, however, I didn't realize that in this day and age an individual could be alienated by their family for seeking education and a better life for themselves.

Myself as a professional and a human being: I went in with an idea and a few questions and I let them be challenged by the process and my participants. As a result of that, while reading, researching, questioning and critically reflecting, I felt my frames of reference being transformed: the concepts that I held true in my heart gained a different depth and a wide array of feelings (enlightenment, confusion, apathy, determination...).

Professionally, I explored the multi-dimensional notion of adult and community education in the context of home, belonging, liberation and grounding. I discovered that these concepts were much deeper and more complex than initially anticipated. I gained a better understanding and more empathy which, I hope, will help me to become a better adult and community educator.

Personally, I've realised that this was my story as much as it was someone else's. I went through a process of researching and finding some truths which came as a huge surprise for me (finding home and self-acceptance within myself, learning that education can be alienating...); therefore, I believe, that my research impacted me on a personal level, it gave me some answers, although maybe some of them weren't what I was expecting to discover. I feel that the research changed me in a way. I believe, I experienced some significant transformative learning myself. It encouraged a deeper level of reflection and made me confront my own beliefs as I embarked on this academic journey as a researcher and as a participant, therefore, every question I asked, every theory I discovered made me question my own understanding of home, sense of belonging and the role of adult and community education within this context.

### **Limitations and Areas for Further Research**

A twenty-thousand-words thesis is just a drop in the ocean of possibilities and potential research topics. One's lifetime wouldn't be enough to answer all the questions that might arise during an academic journey. Therefore, in this study I only focused on a narrow concept of home, the true sense of belonging and the liberating or grounding role of adult and community education. I didn't make any universal claims or claims outside of my study question as there

were and still are many different truths; therefore, I have outlined an extensive list of limitations which could suggest areas for further research and development.

I believe that I acquired a lot of significant information which added richness and depth to my study. Although it's been rather tough leaving out some interesting ideas, I tried not to be greedy with my data and, based on the parameters of the thesis itself, time limits and my research question, I carefully handpicked the themes and sub-themes in order not to lose the focus of my enquiry.

Firstly, the emphasis of my study was voluntary migration, therefore, I didn't explore relocation caused by displacement or asylum seeking, and, although the participants of my study, including myself, migrated willingly, people still dealt with certain amount of homesickness and emotions living away from home; however, these topics would be a research topic in its own right.

Also, thinking about home and belonging, identity can be very strong in people, but, although I touched on identity and its relationship with migration and belonging, I didn't delve deeper into the notion of it or, for instance, trading autonomy for recognition in terms of identity formation as it would have changed the scope and nature of my paper. As a result of that, I didn't concentrate on any specific ethnic group, gender analysis, age or race issues as the emphasis of my thesis was the concept of home and sense of belonging viewed by a variety of participants rather than representatives of a certain ethnic or a social group.

Initially, I was hoping to cover the insights of community development, but I realised that it would make my research too broad. Therefore, in my implications section I only mentioned that learning the true sense of belonging would positively affect community building and development. This topic could be researched further and deeper.

Based on my research findings and some of my reviewed literature, finding home within oneself is a major, if not the primary, factor. I believe, it is closely connected with self-discovery, self-acceptance and self-actualisation which is a very meaningful and current topic in need of a further and fuller analysis.

Moreover, although sensed through my thesis, the structures, discourse and practices of power within the setting of adult and community education or within society in the form of positive or negative constraints and decision-making would be another area for further research and development.



Finally, the area of adult and community education is as broad as life itself, therefore I only explored a miniscule fragment of it. Stemming from my research, diverse characteristics of adult and community education could be explored further, for example, its ‘darker’ alienating and potentially conditioning side, as outlined under the last sub-theme in the findings chapter. Additionally, student support and equality or, as suggested by one of my study participants, its role to ‘clean up the big mess’ that regular education leaves (see Campbell’s interview on p. 88) I believe, could also be a subject for further research and analysis.

### **Reflections on My Own Learning**

It’s a bitter-sweet moment reflecting on my academic path and pondering about my own learning. It feels like I have been engaged in this process for as long as I remember myself – forever. Starting with an idea, research becomes a question, then a process and it subtly takes over your everyday life and thoughts. And, although a dreamed-of end is within grasp now, I can almost sense the feeling of strange emptiness slowly crawling into my heart. What now?

Personal and professional highs and lows, times of despair and light bulb moments, doubts and reflections were my constant companions during my academic journey and even though I probably would never embark on a similar venture again, I am glad I persevered and didn’t give up.

As already mentioned through my thesis, although I had an open mind and I was willing to learn, I went into the research with pre-made assumptions and some questions already answered in my head: I thought that home as-a-feeling and a-sense-of-belonging were both the same concept; additionally, I was convinced that adult education only liberated and anything to do with grounding was negative, limiting and dark. When I started out it was if I just wanted a confirmation of what I already ‘knew’; however the process taught me the concept of real exploration and opening your mind to different truths. Therefore, I allowed those assumptions to shift and transform. I embraced qualitative research with its messy, confusing and emotional nature and I felt that I was guiding my study but at the same time my study was guiding me.

If I am brutally honest, as this process had a personal value to me, too, I started my research in the hope of coming out with precise and definite answers, pretty much ‘a recipe for a happy and content living’ which would only require going, seeing, attaining and keeping. However,

it feels like I have discovered a manual for self-discovery which doesn't necessarily suggest any shortcuts. So, what about the findings of my investigation?

Seemingly, there is no single definition when it comes to describing home – the concept is understood individually and uniquely by everyone. Home, whether created or found and determined by different life stages, can consist of many elements: people, familiarity, feelings, self-acceptance and a sense of ownership which eventually influences us to adapt, settle down and search for our final stop.

Furthermore, comparing the concepts of home and belonging, it is evident that the two notions interrelate but also differ at the same time. While the idea of home encompasses a number of fundamentals, the shifting perception of belonging revolves around aspects of family, community and place but there are usually people at the core of this concept.

Lastly, the diverse nature of adult education plays a significant role which can be liberating, positively grounding or even both at the same time.

Some parts of my work confirmed existing knowledge – home being a person, a place or a feeling; adult and community education liberating people, however, some aspects of my study departed from what I knew already; but the most revolutionary discovery for me was finding home within yourself. I would have never thought of joining these two concepts together – home and self-acceptance. It never dawned on me that, in order to find happiness or our home, we need to be at peace with ourselves, that endless searching or attempts to create something fail when we are still in search of contentment within our own hearts. And once we do, once we aren't in conflict with ourselves, when we accept ourselves and feel comfortable within our own skin, we know who we truly are and where we stand which is a highly reassuring and liberating moment – it is also grounding.

Speaking of grounding, initially, if asked what being grounded meant, I would have painted my answer in negative tones: I was certain that grounding meant being restricted, stuck and limited. I imagined that if grounded, people were destined to a certain existence for the rest of their lives without options to choose from; however, the findings of my research made me look at this concept less superficially and revalue my assumptions. None of my research participants claimed the idea of grounding to be negative. On the contrary, it is associated with a sense of purpose, security, belonging, finding your feet and being at home physically or emotionally which was... liberating which has been another revolutionary discovery for me – I never

assumed these two opposite-from-the-first-glance concepts had so much in common. Apparently, being liberated doesn't mean being uprooted. I learnt that we could be totally cosmopolitan and free in the world with our ideas and identities but we can still feel grounded knowing where we belong. We could live in the same locality all our lives still feeling free to go and to choose. We could liberate ourselves to feel grounded and ground ourselves to feel liberated. Therefore, I got the sense that both liberating and grounding notions were more emotional dimensions rather than physical situations, therefore, they could live together within us balancing each other and giving us this much needed stability and contentment.

The same was with adult and community education: I was certain that its only role was to liberate people, broaden their minds and never tie them down, never 'ground' them; however, after analysing my literature and research findings, I realised that adult and community education was just as grounding as it was liberating in the most positive way: it not only had the ability to transform people's lives, show them different worlds and open new doors but it also had the power to connect people, to create a sense of purpose, security, belonging, contentment and this precious feeling of self-acceptance.

The literature is reviewed, the findings are summarised, the analysis is concluded; however, if I am perfectly honest, I don't feel that all the questions have been answered. Maybe it's the nature of qualitative research and our complex social realities? Maybe some answers are not meant to be revealed or maybe exploring the peculiarities of humanity is a lifelong process just like life itself as the more we search, the more different truths we discover. Therefore, in order to conclude on my reflections, I would like to offer some of hooks's wisdom. She was the main inspiration behind the choice of my research question so it's only fair if my academic journey begins and end with her: hooks illuminates that the Earth is our first and last home. It is where we all – 'people of one blood' – come from and it is going to be our 'final homeplace'. In that case, maybe that's some consolation knowing that if we fail to belong in this world, we will come home when our time in this world runs out (2009, p. 78).

## EPILOGUE

In my mind I am in a place with no name, somewhere warm, I can feel a gentle breeze through an open window which frames the ocean in the distance. I sense that I am where I should be, where I truly belong. But where is that place? Will I ever find it? Maybe I haven't found my home so far because it's not the time for me to settle yet. Perhaps I still have paths to travel and places to explore...

After celebrating my 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a tenant, today more than ever the question of home is vivid in my head. I remember thinking to myself: when my dog is gone, it will be time to move out and start looking for my forever home. However, my dear four-legged companion crossed the rainbow bridge less than a year ago but I am still here. I am still here where I was ten years ago. Why am I hesitating? What am I waiting for?

Could it be that subconsciously I am torn between the home I left and the home I am trying to find? Every time I go 'home' to my parents, I notice my dad getting a bit older and quieter and my mum becoming a bit greyer with a few more wrinkles around her kind eyes (17 years is a long time) and immediately the guilt kicks in: should I be there? Should I embrace my duties, go back to my roots and settle where my journey has started initially?

However, my thoughts always bring me back to Ireland – The Emerald Isle which has been my home for almost 20 years. I grew up here as a person, I have lived, loved, lost and experienced here. This is where my most significant life and learning happened. Would I be brave enough to leave everything behind and dive into the unknown? What if that perfect place doesn't exist for me? What if it's just an illusion, longing for something I don't have, like a distant dream that keeps me hoping and going? What if I never gather up courage to really look for it in case my expectations are shattered in the face of a new reality which isn't as dreamy as I was anticipating? Or what if my truth isn't hidden as deep as I thought and if I move again, a few years down the line I become restless again? What if I am not searching for that perfect home but rather for a thrill of new beginnings? Some people are born, grow up and settle in the same place and don't have a desire to move past their doorstep; some people leave and return and some individuals spread their wings to settle someplace else. However, there are those who can't seem to settle at all as if the world isn't big enough for them. But at the same time, maybe it's ok to be that permanent migrant, a restless wanderer longing for something that hasn't been

found yet. I guess, it's allowed to be that bit different. Perhaps my 'forever place' is the world with everything it has to offer and that, also, is ok.

I believe that without the academic path that I've been following, I wouldn't be here posing these existential questions. Therefore, regardless of the sometimes ambiguous tag that adult and community education gets, I owe my paradigmatic shift and transformative learning to it, to coming back to education as a mature student and seeing the world in a light that I haven't seen before.

As a consequence, I have a feeling that my 'real' life hasn't started yet, that I have been only rehearsing, that I am at a crossroads and I just need to figure out where to go or perhaps I need to acquire something I can call my own. I sense that someday I will feel it, I will find, create or rediscover a place where all my attempts to escape will cease, but for now, I have to...

let it go  
let it leave  
let it happen  
nothing  
in this world  
was promised or  
belonged to you  
anyway

all you own is yourself  
(Kaur 2020)

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 'Interview Questions'

1. Tell me your story: where were you born and where did you grow up? Have you moved or travelled much throughout your life and, if so, what were the circumstances that caused your migrations?
2. How would you define belonging? How do you know when you truly belong?
3. Home means so many different things to different people. For example, for some home has a physical meaning (a building, a place, a person) and for some it's all in the head and heart in the form of a feeling, memory or self-awareness.
  - What is your definition of home and where is home for you?
  - Have you found or created your home? If home must be created, what creates it?
  - bell hooks (2009) states that home is a place where one's journey ends, so, do you feel your current home is your final stop?
  - Has your understanding of home and belonging changed over time? How and what caused it to change?
4. Do you feel that home and belonging is the same concept? Why yes/ why not?
5. The role of education within the community is multidimensional and is individual to everyone. People take up education or return to it for so many different reasons. The ability, desire and necessity to communicate is fundamental to human interaction so, for example, for an ESOL student education is both liberating and grounding as it allows them to travel, move but also learning the language gives them a chance to fit into the locality (we cannot belong to a community we can't communicate with; as the matter of fact, both words even stem from the same root 'communi').
  - In your opinion, how adult education contributes to belonging?
  - How do you feel about the idea that education liberates people and encourages them to step outside the community or do you think education grounds people within their locality?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add or is there anything that I haven't mentioned?

## Appendix 2 ‘Full Transcripts’

I have added full transcripts for context.

**N. B.** The names of my research participants have been changed.

The list of transcripts is as follows:

Campbell

Denis

Francis

Gabriel

Jude

Laura

Maria

Mary

Patricia

Siobhan

## Campbell

**Can you tell me a little bit about yourself: where were you born, where did you grow up, have you moved or travelled much throughout your life and, if so, what were the reasons behind that.**

I was born in California, grew up in New York, travelled loads because my parents travelled and then my grandparents also travelled so I grew up sort of in a van driving around America.

**So when you were travelling, were you staying/ living in those places or were you just travelling?**

My grandpa's Seneca Indian which is a tribe from Canada, so we travelled all around East Coast and little in the middle so that was a lot of travelling.

**And in terms of moving and living, have you lived in many places?**

I have lived in New York, and Hawaii and Ireland most of my life.

**So what brought you to Ireland?**

Surf. Waves.

**How would you define belonging? And when do you know that you truly belong?**

Belonging is probably a personal thing. You feel like you belong and then you belong or if you don't feel like you belong, you don't belong, there's probably no rules, or rime or reasons to it. In saying that, a community can definitely help or hinder the feeling of belonging...

**So how do you know that you belong?**

I suppose it's a feeling of acceptance from those around you of whatever community you surround yourself with. If you have a feeling that you're accepted, you probably think you belong and if you have a feeling you're not accepted, you probably have a feeling that you don't belong somehow.

**What does home mean to you? And where is home for you?**

Home is Ireland. But when I say I live here now and people say oh do you miss home which is New York, I say no but I miss people. Yeah, so I see what you mean, home is in other parts of the world for me, my past homes are still there in the people and I guess I feel like Hawaii for instance, I felt I had a sense of belonging within the community and that community dispersed and then so I felt without that community anymore and then I guess now when I think about it more like I didn't belong.

**But why Ireland? What makes it home for you?**

Family. Now I have my own family. Before I was wondering around wondering what to do. So yeah, I think home becomes family once you reach a certain point in life and then before you reach a certain point in life probably home is family with the home you grew up with and then you set yourself free of that home and you wonder around for a while and then eventually

you find home of your own. I think with a lot of people who think like me, there'll be a time when you are wondering, looking for something.

**So what you're saying is that there comes a time in your life when it's time to settle?**

Not everybody's life but some people's life. It's a sort of rolling stone type curious person definitely has to go out and be homeless in a sense for a while in their life to find a place for them. That's not everybody. Some people grow up in one place, never leave.

**So do you find home or do you create home?**

I suppose it depends. You could find it, you could create it, you probably do both. I have always been a proponent for finding a place that you really enjoy and creating something for yourself there in that place. My wife would be like figure out something to do and then find a place that accepts you and values you and go there. But I don't work like that. Once I have found a place I'll figure out a way to stay there.

**But the reason for it to happen you have to like the place? You find a place that you like and you create your home there?**

Yeah. Geographically, I have to like people, surroundings, the environment, other than that there's no reason for me to try and create that. So I guess for me I'm more of a home creator than a... you know?

**Ok, so what creates home then?**

I guess a mailbox helps, address, some art on the wall... the dwelling is definitely part of it, you move into some place and then it's just a temporary thing, you start to gather your stuff in one place, that starts to become home before that it's another university dorm. Is other parts of life, but then you find a place and it becomes your home and then you start investing into that and then I suppose you have to feel a continual acceptance by the community and then all of a sudden there's a place that's home.

**So it's a combination of finding and creating?**

Sure.

**Ok, so you said that Sligo is home for you...**

Well, yeah, Donegal now but sure close enough to Sligo. I have a little farm in Sligo, eventually I wanna build a place on a little plot that we've got. We both envision our future in county Sligo.

**So do you see that as your final destination?**

Yeah... maybe when we're old and decrepit I can retire down to Portugal and drink wine until I croak but yeah the sort of last main stage I see myself.

**So do you think then that your understanding of home and belonging has changed overtime? And if it has, how? And what influenced it?**

No, I never really enjoyed the place that I grew up too much so I was always looking for, I always knew there were somewhere else out there that was better suited to me so then I feel like I've found it so it's never really changed, it just feels like it's happening.

**Do you mind me asking why didn't you enjoy living there?**

I grew up in South Hampton New York, it's a seasonal resort town for the richest people on earth and growing up there is really strange. So there's people coming in the summer time, billionaires, the top 1% and they do what they want and then there's all the locals who kinda support them and that's about all there is there, it's a strange place filled with rich assholes and there's a lot strange things going on and speaking of community, it's a very strange sense of community and the only community I had there was through my grandpa's friends who were Indians who had a reservation right in the middle of Hamptons and they're some of the poorest people in New York so it's a really odd place to grow up watching all that from the perspective that I've watched it from so I couldn't wait to leave and find somewhere normal. So as soon as I could I went to a university in Hawaii which was insane in a totally different way.

**And you didn't feel that it was your place?**

I spent a decade there but eventually I felt like no, this is not the place for me, I don't see myself getting old here, looking at other people that got old here... I don't wanna get old here. It's a tiny place and eventually I felt that it was too small. It's a 50 square mile island that I lived on, drive across in about an hour so 10 years on a rock...it's called fever so eventually I think that the island fever overcame me and I needed to go, see other things.

**So what is your opinion on the role of adult education in terms of home and belonging (liberating or grounding)?**

The role of adult education is to mop up the mess that regular education makes. There're people who go the educational system and never feel a sense of belonging and they leave early, they hate it. I was one of them. If it wasn't for one teacher who kinda got me into liking English and reading literature I would have never finished school. And the education system is flawed in so many ways and the people that don't thrive in that system, who fail in that system sometimes ... it doesn't mean that they don't like education, it just means that they couldn't get along with the system that was created to educate them so the role of adult education is to clean up a big mess.

**But behind all this, does education liberate people or ground them?**

I mean both are good things, aren't they? Some people can ground themselves, if they have kids that feel that they can help with their homework, they can feel that they can read along with their kids so that's probably grounding. And then there's probably younger people who are coming back in their twenties and stuff and it's liberating to see the steps that it takes to get to the university or so get somewhere where all their peers got to earlier and say oh well it's not too late for me, it's amazing, I can do this, I'm gonna get this course done, I'm gonna get my level 4, 5, 6 and then there you go, I'm back in the game so both. And then you got people who are 60 years old, they just need a sense of community again, they can go to class, they



don't care if they pass or fail, they just want to come and have a chat to people, so it's both liberating and grounding depending on a person.

## Denis

**Can you tell me a little bit about yourself: where were you born, where did you grow up, have you moved or travelled much throughout your life and, if so, what were the reasons behind that.**

So I was born in Sligo, grew up in Sligo, went to the university in the North of Ireland, spent couple of summers in London, then ended up in London after I graduated from the university trying to make some money and pay my debts and stuff and I had no idea what I wanted to do so I ended up doing a post-grad in TEFL and then went to different places Portugal, Iceland to teach English. Just to have a bit of an adventure and see a bit of Europe.

**So why did you decide to come back to Sligo then?**

Well, I didn't actually decide to come back, I ended up back here cause I had some health problems so I came back to recover from them. It took a while to get a grip on that so I kind of ended up here, I started working here, got a part time work, got involved in the Spanish society, started teaching Spanish and English and so kind of put down roots here.

**So if it wasn't down to your health issues, would you have stayed in Portugal or somewhere else?**

I wouldn't have stayed in Portugal but I was planning to do like a post-grad in publishing in England so probably I would have gone to England and got some work there cause I did a lot of publishing work there. I'd say that's probably what I would have done. My idea was to get into publishing and EFL publishing cause obviously I was trying to put the two together cause I was interested in the area of books and publishing.

**How would you define belonging? And how do you know that you truly belong?**

I don't know, I don't have a definition for that. When do you know that you truly belong? I don't know, I don't think you... personally I wouldn't have a definition for it and I wouldn't really feel that you know when you belong somewhere. Someone could live somewhere all their lives and not feel that they belong (in the place). Especially as they get older and their friends move away or they die or whatever, all the other people are living in their town but their town has changed, or the new people have moved in... they've lived all their lives there but they don't really belong there or they don't feel that they belong. So I don't know how to answer that to be honest. It's not something I have ever thought about.

**Ok, but let's say if you think about Sligo, you stayed here and you settle and you're working. Do you feel good here? Do you feel that you belong here?**

I suppose I do, yeah. But I do think that I could move somewhere else and kind of fit in somewhere else. (Belonging) It's not a fixed thing. I suppose part of it is... the main this is people, knowing people in the place. If you know people that kind of ties you to a place. If

you're looking for a definition, I would say that's probably what it is: just knowing people, not even just friends or family but even just people that you know, people in shops that know your name, that know that bit about ya, that you've been going to for 5 or 10 years. So it's not really the place, it's kind of community.

**What about your definition of home? And where is home for you?**

Well, I mean home is Sligo. But I think it could just as easily be somewhere else, I would be quite at home in Dublin. I was in Dublin for the last 2 summers and the second summer I was there I was doing the same job, living in a more or less the same place, I felt at home there.

**So what is this feeling of being at home? What does it feel like?**

Part of it is just familiarity, being familiar with people and places, you are not having to adapt of the time, something that is not alien to you, something that you're familiar with. It doesn't have to be an emotional thing, it can be just a habit, something that you're used to. And I think people can make homes in different places and have different homes and feel at home in different places throughout their lives and at the same time, too. If I go to Dublin and stay around the area where I was staying before I feel quite really at home there because I kinda know the area, I know where everything is, I know where the supermarkets are, I know what buses to get into town, I know few people around, I know some people who work there (in the university), the ladies who work in the canteen, the small things like that. The idea of home is just small things really.

**Do we find home or do we create it? And if we create it, what creates it?**

I think people can find it just by accident. You end up somewhere and you think ok, I feel ok here, I've got to know people and I'm gonna stay. I think people are important, physical place is part of it but I think people are essential to forming a home, yeah.

**So you don't think that Sligo is your final destination?**

It might be but if I'm in Sligo for more than 2-3 weeks, I have to get out, I need to go somewhere. Sligo is small enough and it's somewhere I grew up so I know it, I've known it all my life.

**And do you think you settled in Sligo because you were born here?**

Kind of accidental in a way. I ended up here because I was recovering from illness and then I had to get some work even though I was still restricted in terms of what I could do, I had to get some work so I could survive financially. So when you start working, you start meeting people and then you get involved in things, you meet people again and then you're putting in roots all the time. It's kind of accidental. Obviously, I came back because my family was here but when I came back I didn't know many people, I knew very few people, I've away for 10 years or more, 8-9 I suppose. So coming back to Sligo I knew the place but I knew very few people so I could have ended up anywhere... Limerick or Colerain or Dublin or wherever. It would have been a similar thing. So it was like a coincidence.

**So would you say that your understanding of home and belonging has changed throughout your life and how did it change?**

Probably. I didn't have any real sense of it before, I wanted to travel and see different places so it wasn't that important for me to have a home essentially. So it was more important to be moving and be seeing different places rather than to be fixed in one place. So I think as you get older you probably appreciate home more or a home whatever home you have. So probably I think it has changed.

**So would you think then that home and belonging is the same concept?**

I'd say they are slightly different, as I said you could be at home somewhere, live somewhere or live somewhere all your life and not feel that you belong. I think that you can feel that you belong somewhere even if it's not your home. People often say that about Ireland. Someone comes here and says ah yeah I felt like I belonged straight away. So they end up here and then encounter the difficulties of living here but it's often at first people come and they feel that they belong.

**So what is your opinion on the role of adult education in terms of home and belonging (liberating or grounding)?**

Well, I mean it could be both, can't it? It doesn't have to be either or... it's definitely liberating. For a lot of people it opens their eyes to new ways of thinking, new ways of looking at things. Just I know from the students I had last year and the year before and they're moving up different levels and stuff and they're feeling progress and they're feeling that they are getting better so that's obviously any kind of progress you feel is liberating. If you feel you're progressing, you're moving forward, that makes you feel stronger. Grounding... grounding in the sense that it can help you fit into somewhere, it can help you integrate. For example, ESOL students... without our English classes a lot of them would be in big trouble. They wouldn't have any access to the Irish world, to what it's like to live in Ireland... so we're not just teaching them English, we are teaching them a bit of the culture and helping them to integrate into the society, so that's grounding. In the sense that it helps people to fit in, at least feel a little bit more part of the country which might be quite alien for them if they don't have any help, they don't have contact. Being able to do things themselves - that's liberating.

**Do you have anything else to add?**

Just what our colleague was saying last night... we've got a great job cause we're actually making a real difference for people, people's lives and that's true. You'd hope that everybody involved in education is make a difference in people's lives but not everyone is, I don't think. They are teaching somebody accounting or something. Maybe they need it for their job or maybe they'll never look at accounting again (the student). It's not really profoundly changing the way they live in the country or in the society but I think what we do is absolutely vital, especially ESOL and the literacy part. For a lot of our students, if they didn't have these classes, they would be lost, they'd be in trouble. If people don't have these classes, they become separate and they stay in their language groups and they don't integrate, they don't mix and that's really bad for them. The separation is dangerous for the society. So I'd say that that's the essential thing that we do and it's not recognised even slightly. We should have more hours ESOL for people because that would really help people integrate and finally get work and start

paying taxes and be part of the society and improve the whole country if our thing is resourced properly. And it's actually not terrible. I think we better than other regions.

### Francis

**Can you tell me a little bit about yourself: where were you born, where did you grow up, have you moved or travelled much throughout your life and, if so, what were the reasons behind that.**

I was born and grew up in Dublin. I have travelled quite a bit in my life before I eventually settled down. When I left school I went to America for about 3 months, stayed with friends, came back. Hitchhiking around Europe for about 3 months the following summer with another friend, then in 1983 I went to live in Germany and I worked there for about 2 months and then I travelled to India with 2 more friends. This was when I was about 20. So travelled to Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, India and then came back. There was nothing happening in Ireland then job-wise, I wasn't sure where I wanted to go with my life so I just thought I'd go back travelling again. Went to Morocco for a while with another friend for about a months, went back to Germany, lived there for about another 2 years just working, then saved up the money and went travelling again back to India. Travelled around India, Nepal, Tibet for about 9 months, came back to England. I was in Ireland for a short time then in 1997, worked in the Dublin gas company for about 6 months, saved up some more money, went back to England, worked there for about 2 years, saved up some more money and went travelling around the Middle East (Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Israel, Turkey) and came back to Ireland and decided to live in Connemara for few months, trying to make up my mind where am I gonna go, what am I gonna do. The only thing I knew in my life at that particular time was I didn't want to live in England anymore so after about a year while I was working in Dublin I decided to go to college I think by the age of 29 and I studied philosophy and anthropology. And the circumstances that kind of led me down that road... I suppose few different things contributed to that. One was curiosity. From very early age I was always very curious about the rest of the world, particularly India. When I left school in 1980s in Ireland, Ireland was going through pretty much a downturn, there was no jobs, there was massive emigration every year up to 50-60 thousand people leaving so there was no sense that there was any future prospects of staying in Ireland and also there was a time in my life when I had no responsibilities, I wasn't in a relationship, I was only young, I had no idea what direction I wanted to go in terms of third level, it didn't even enter into my thinking because I had no idea, I just thought I might as well go off and see what the world had to offer and then the other aspect of that were the other people in the same boat who... you know, there was nothing going on in Ireland and the thing is when you're with a group of people and you decide to embark on something together that gives you a support to head off and do things that you probably wouldn't do on your own. So that's kind of what led me to leave home and to go out and explore the world.

## **What would be your definition of home then?**

I was trying to figure out one. I kinda started off with belonging, trying to figure out what that meant and I came up with few different ideas and thoughts related to belonging and then how they feed into concept of home.

### **Ok, so belonging first.**

Basically belonging in my mind anyway... there's a couple of overlapping sort of ideas. One is that it's a feeling that you connect to a person or a place or through a shared experience or with community. So that would be having to belong to a group of people or to other people in some sense. Another aspect that's very closely allied to that would be to do with locality or a feeling of familiarity with a place, for example, from childhood. So for example after having travelled in all these different parts of the world, when I came back to the place where I grew up, it was very odd to see it again from haven't being around but at the same time there was a sense of familiarity that I got from that place that I could get from nowhere else on the planet. Cause I grew up on those streets and I knew the cracks in the pavements and the buildings, even if I wasn't sure who all the people were, it was very very familiar. I remember walking through the town one day (this is maybe 10 years after I left home) and there were certain characters who passed me by who recognised me. And these guys I would have never hung out with at all but we connected just because we all grown up a wee bit and we recognised each other from our youth and I thought yeah that's odd, that makes me feel this is where I belong even though these people weren't close friends or anything, there was a sense of identity, a sense of familiarity, a sense of relationship there even from people who would have been quite distant from me and you don't get that from anywhere else on the planet. You know, you arrive in a place, you're a stranger, you don't usually get someone who is familiar and recognises you so I thought it was an interesting detail about the sense of belonging even though I didn't feel it necessarily, I was made feel it by other people's recognition of me. So in a sense I felt connected to that place through other people's recognition or haling me or acknowledging me. The other thing that comes from that feeling of familiarity with place that there is no sense of novelty or exploration, you're familiar with it, so there's an immediate connection to the place whereas when you arrive in a new place or a new country, you're a little bit at sea, takes you long time and map out and become familiar with the place and even if you've done that it doesn't necessarily mean you belong, just means that you know your way around.

The more I thought of it, the less stable the basis for it became. I felt very much like a floating concept that can dissolve or reconstitute in different contexts and what I mean a bit like identity. Sometimes when I did go back home (whatever that was), I felt yeah I recognise it and even though people recognise me and acknowledge me I still don't feel that I belong there anymore, that I have grown out of it so this kind of tension or struggle between... there are certain feelings that I have in relation to that place that I don't get from anywhere else which kind of makes me feel as if I belong, where I belong in a certain kind of way that I couldn't possibly belong to anywhere else in the world and then at the same time it has changed a wee bit, I've changed a wee bit so much so that I actually don't feel as if I belong to it in the same way I did when I was a kid. So the whole idea of belonging has changed a wee bit now because I've changed and because the place has changed. You know, they've changed the visual environment, they've put up new buildings, they've put different walls, they've cut down trees, there's new businesses in town, different people shopping that I don't recognise so I don't feel

as if I belong there as much anymore. The kind of place that I belonged to was more a memory, it's in my head of what the place used to be. So that was another sense of belonging that downed to me that it shifts a wee bit. Because I can remember when I went back to Germany, back in the 80's after having travelled, I felt I belonged there because I knew where the pubs were to go to if I wanted to meet somebody, I knew the shops to go to, I knew where to sleep rough if I was stuck for a place to sleep or where to get cheap food. That was a familiarity there and within a very short space of time I reconnected with all the people I knew and I felt of yeah this is as much my city as Dublin was. So that sense of belonging can transfer also to other places.

### **What about home then? What is your definition of home and where is home for you?**

I came up with a couple of ideas. One – where I grew up. So there's a historical element to where home is. I still think of where my mother lives as my home. it's the house I grew up in, it's the town I grew up in and it's the associations I have with that place in my mind. The other side of it is that much more present, where I live now. The house I live in Leitrim, my wife, my kids and the life we have constructed there. So that's home also. Going back to the place where I grew up there's a very strong sense of origin where you started from in life, your childhood experiences, the locality, all dependent on some sort of stable continuous experience that provides a kind of bedrock of the concept of home, the feeling of home, that if you're ever in trouble, you can always go back there and you'll be safe or you'll be listened to or you'll be comforted. It ties in neatly with the notion of belonging in that the place or others see you as belonging there. So my parents or my friends would have seen me as belonging to that place that we called home. Home for me is also a place of safety, a place of refuge, comfort and routine. It provided a stable basis from which you can then venture out into the world knowing that if things go too bad knowing that there is a place I can go back to and lick the wounds or recuperate or get my head back together again before taking on the world. So home in that sense had a kind of emotional dimension to it as well as being a physical place.

### **Would you say that home and belonging is the same concept?**

I think they overlap. I think you can belong in situations to groups or to communities or to contexts but that doesn't necessarily make them home. I've moved up to this side of the country from the East side and even though I have been living here 20 years which is probably almost as long as I lived over in Dublin, I will never think of this place as home in the sense that it's my home/ it's where I originated from or where my connections were established. You know they have this idea of your formative years. Formative years in your life are the ones which put an indelible stamp on you which you carry for the rest of your life. No amount of living in Leitrim or Sligo is ever going to form me the same way that maybe living in Dublin did. I imagine my children's formative years will have been living in the house we live in etc. etc.

I'll be worried that I know people who don't feel that home means they belong there anymore, that their home has been disrupted or was dysfunctional or was taken away from them so their sense of belonging is more to do with people or maybe their new situation and they can't look back into the past with the sense of belonging anywhere anymore because all that has been destroyed. I think it comes out to each individual's own personal experience in the sense that because my mother still lives in the house in which I grew up, when I go to visit her and back in 'my' house where I grew up, so I have a strong connection, belonging to that house but I

don't call that my home anymore in the sense I mean it then the place where I feel that I can kick off my shoes, leave a place in a complete mess, have a row with somebody, shout, scream whatever. Where you feel completely comfortable, where it's yours, it's your territory. This is where you can do what it is that you do so that is a different sense of home where you have more autonomy and in that sense I belong more there than I would in the house I grew up in.

**So do we find home or do we create it? And if we create it, what creates it?**

I think you create home. Well, you could find a place that you think ok this is where I want to create my home and it might have certain elements that appeal to you, that have some sort of emotional resonance that it might remind you of your previous home or might have elements that you think oh yeah I feel more comfortable here than I would in some other place. But when you said about trying to create home rather than house, you probably try to recreate things that you value, create the house that reflects the values that you have, that you'd be considerably comfortably safe, a place that you feel that you're your own boss (not in an oppressive way), that you have certain freedom, liberty, that you can call your own.

**So the place where you live at the moment... would you consider it your final stop?**

No. Myself and my wife we had ongoing discussion about is this where we want to end up, is this where we want to stay and a lot of those questions were never fully answered, they're only sort of temporarily answered and says yeah, we'll stay here, the kids are still growing up, we're not going to disrupt their lives bla bla bla but then there'd be practical considerations that kick in and these would sometimes override the emotion in the sense that we live out the country which means we have to drive everywhere. When we get older, it might be more difficult to drive everywhere every time you want to go somewhere. Also, when you get older you want to be closer to facilities and services and people so there's always this kind of possibility in the back of our minds that at some point in our future we might decide that first of all we're sick of the rain, we're sick of the cold, we're sick of living out in sticks, we want to be closer to shops, we want to be closer to people, want to be able to walk to the shops and the pubs. We do like living in the west of Ireland, I would much rather be closer to the sea myself so despite having lived there for 20 years there's always this sort of feeling that we're not embedded here, we're not stuck in the ground, we could easily sell up and move on if we wanted to. At the same time, having said that, we look around at the amount of time, and effort and emotion that we have and the memories we've put in having a family in this particular house on this particular 2 acres of soil, it would be a very hard wrench to tear away from that. We've so many memories embedded in like physically we built, we decorated the house or refurbished it. I almost physically broke my back building the house back to something we can live in. Don't really want to leave it. But if I was to leave it, I wouldn't want to sell it. If I could afford that, it's an emotional thing, I want to kind of hold onto the fact that it's also where the kids grew up and that maybe they might want to come back to it at some point cause it's their home.

**Would you say that your understanding of home and belonging changed over time and if so how?**

Yes, definitely, yeah. Because when you're a kid, you take home for granted. It's a place where you can run to as a refuge which I did on and off my life even as an adult. You know, you come home, you have no money, no idea, no sense of direction, where do you go to? You go back to the family home which fortunately was still there. However, that's all changed for various

reasons which I won't go into. It doesn't feel like my home anymore, it's the house I grew up in and even though my mother still lives there, when I go up I stay with her in what was my own house, my sense of home has shifted more to where I established myself, where I've had children, where I and my wife have created something new. So that made me then realise that home is not just this fixed one place, it's something that you can create and obviously you can move around and if you've created it in one place you can probably create it in another.

Sense of belonging... I'm still not 100% sure. The sense of belonging that you get from a locality... I'm very conscious of the fact that's something that I carry in my head. Now, other people recognise me and that challenges that idea that it's just in my head, it's clearly in other people's minds when they see you and recognise you and they've had shared experience with you from 1965 or 1972, you can't shake that off and ignore it. It's not just in your head, it's shared by other people as well.

**So what is your opinion on the role of adult education in terms of home and belonging (liberating or grounding)?**

Speaking in general terms about education, than just I suppose, well, adult education, I think it has the possibilities of doing both those things, depending hugely on the individual. For example, I had no idea what I wanted to do when I left school, that's why I went off travelling around the world and wasn't until I came back that I decided... it was an idea that was always floating, like an expectation that I should be in 3<sup>rd</sup> level or should I? It was one of those debates that was just floating around in the back of my mind all the time and almost feeling guilty that I wasn't pursuing that line of enquiry until I decided I had enough travelling for a while and I came back to Ireland and I spent a year trying to make up my mind would I go down the road of education because part of me didn't feel I wanted to, I was kind of grounded in myself cause I travelled and I thought oh well I know enough now, I don't really feel that I need to be verified or approved or validated by an education establishment but then there was another huge curiosity which is what if I'm missing something that could be very good here just out of this pride or whatever. So I thought isn't it better to go down the road of education, find out whether or not it's what you want to do so in a sense my final decision to get involved in education, I meant college 3<sup>rd</sup> level did kind of ground me in the sense that it made me more fully aware of me and my own potential within an institution cause I've never known whether I was academically inclined until I went to college and I came out at the other end of it with a much greater sense of confidence in my own intellectual abilities cause I've never had it confirmed really apart from your parents telling you that you're great or other people saying oh yeah this guy reads loads of books but you don't know how to apply it. When you come out the other end of education, that institution confirms it for you: yes, you've reached this standard, you're alright, you know, you can move on if you want to. So in one sense it's very good from that point of view. It's both grounding and liberating. It grounds you inside in a sense that you know where you stand in relation to own abilities intellectually. It also has the power or the ability to liberate you. It can direct you down the particular road particularly if you specialise in a certain area that you're interested in through the formal structures of education. It can lead you to pathways and doors that you probably never would have had the opportunity to do so unless you've taken the education route. This is where I found myself but I suppose in a more general sense for people who are contemplating adult education, I think it has both aspects. Adult education on its own I don't think would be enough for everybody to liberate them in a sense



that they would then feel this is springboard from which I can jump anywhere. I think there are other supports perhaps that some people will need. They may need more guidance, more hand holding, more encouragement, more cause I know I did. Just because I came out of college with BA or an MA didn't give the confidence I needed to go into teaching for example. That took years and years of confidence building. In fact it kind of left me dangling at the end of it actually cause I wasn't sure where I wanted to go even after that but definitely for some people it provides a very clear path for them, I think where without it they've never got there so education is like stepping stones towards something that would lead them onto something better in life. With the sector we're working in adult education, well the further education sector, very often for people who might have struggled at school or found education didn't work for them at that time in their life but there may be some reason why they feel that they want to come back to education because one thing I've always believed myself (and sometimes I think it's underemphasised particularly by governments or policy) that education isn't just for getting a job. It's far more about exploring different worlds, different ideas, opening different worlds of ideas to people that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with finding work. Ideally, it's great if you can but there are so many developmental areas that can be opened up through education that sometimes I think it's overlooked. It's actually that confirming to yourself that oh actually I got through it, did that, I'm actually that good, I can reach that level. So I think that from the personal development point of view adult education has a huge self-affirming input to a person's... particularly in further education in they had negative experiences that it can show them or teach them or demonstrate to them that no, you are worthwhile, you're able to do this and that's one positive aspects of further education. And I suppose from the practical end of it as well, if you are an early school leaver and you have no qualifications, you know yourself that their career opportunities are nil, no one's interested in you but whereas if you go back to education and if you're supported you come out at the end with qualification, straight away your opportunities are much greater.

## **Gabriel**

**Can you tell me a little bit about yourself: where were you born, where did you grow up, have you moved or travelled much throughout your life and, if so, what were the reasons behind that.**

I was born in Sligo. I had a good upbringing, I was the baby of the family. I got everything. Most of my brothers were gone, they were gone to England, they couldn't live in Sligo because there was no work. I came from alcoholic background, was always drink in the house, I always wanted to drink. I hear people saying they never wanted to drink like their father, they didn't want to drink like their mother. I wanted to drink like my mother, I wanted to drink like my father and I wanted to drink like all my brothers.

**So did you grow up in Sligo?**

Yeah, I grew up in Sligo until I was about 16 and I was drinking at the time and I thought there was no harm in it, I remember my mother sitting down with her husband saying ' John, what are we going to do with him, he's gone out of control, the guards are coming up around the

house and I kinda took a resentment towards my mother then. I had a bad resentment towards her and by the time I was 16, I was on a bus or a train going to London and I had no problem. It was called geographical. I was running away from something that I should have not been running away from. I should have been trying to deal with it but I didn't want anybody interfering with me drinking so I had to move. My mum wanted me to stop drinking or cut down on it and I didn't. I thought there was nothing up with me so I took a resentment towards my mum straight away. So I went to London and nothing had changed. So the first pub I ever drank in I was in trouble the first night, arguing with the barman and all that. It was all drink, it was all revolved around alcohol. I never thought about anything else, I just wanted to drink. So I moved around London a bit, got into a relationship or anything and the girl would get too close, I'd move. I didn't want no one to tie me down, I wanted to be free. I used to think women were out there to catch ya. That's the ways I lived and that's the ways I thought but sure they weren't out there to catch me, they just wanted to be with me. I moved on and I drank all the time.

### **So how long did you stay in London?**

About 20 years on and off. Over and back. When I get fed up on London, I come here for a while and my mum would let me in and everything would be great. Didn't the drink start again and she get afraid of me, she get afraid of my drinking, she get the guards or a get court order and get me out of the house and I thought that she was just out there to get me. The woman was just afraid of me when I was drinking. I remember the last time I got arrested and the guards were standing there and there was a young guard there and he said you come back near this place again I'm gonna kick the shite out of ya. He says look what you're doing to your mother and she's in her 70s. I couldn't see that of course. I thought I was in the right. But no, my mum never done anything to me, it was me. I never blame anybody for what I done when I was drinking. It was all my business. I drank alcohol and I ended up sleeping rough on the streets and places you wouldn't fucking your worst enemy to. Some places I slept they were rough. But I done that and there was a friend of mine I used to hand around with and he was a good friend of mine and he watched my back and I watched his back, we kinda kept our nose clean but I still done a lot of stupid things like you know but the stupidest thing I've ever done was posing as a policeman. No really, I could have got 10 fucking years in jail if I was caught but we weren't caught and we took money and I don't know if we took drugs but sure we were out of it anyway, out of up or down, mad things like that. I done other stuff I'm not proud of.

### **And when did you come back to Sligo?**

I came back to Sligo in 95.

### **And what made you come back?**

Just wanted to come back to Sligo cause I wanted to live here. I could never live here while I was drinking. Never.

### **Oh so you stopped drinking and then you came back?**

I stopped drinking in 91 and my first AA meeting was in London and I thought the woman who gave me the number of AA was up spying on me to make sure I went to AA. No, but I'm only saying, Josephine and she came into the meeting I thought she was up spying on me but she was 17 years sober herself. She was a nurse, she had a good job but she was telling me that she

lived with a doctor for years but the only reason she lived with him because he was buying her drink. I got to know her and I got to talking to her. I think she just taught me how to live with people.

**So in 1995 you came to Sligo because you were sober and you wanted to live here.**

I wanted to live here, I wanted to spend a bit of time with my mum, I wanted to spend time with my brothers and sisters. When I came back, I was grand and I bought a wee car and I could bring my mum out. I think was just being back, you know, what I done, I told her I loved her and I told her I was sorry and she said if you stay away from the shitting drink you'll be alright. I could do all these things cause I wasn't drinking. In 94 I went to America to the world cup, how I done that I don't know. It was just all these things that started falling into place, I started going dancing. As I say, people do think it's a joke but it's very hard going out with someone when you're not drinking cause you don't know what to talk to them about. I found that hard and I thought that I was a great fella and I remember Josephine telling me not to get into any relationships for the first year or two. She said and I went out with this girl but it was just a disaster, I just stopped doing it and then I met a girl about a year later and she was living here in Sligo and I came for her, you know cause I thought there was going to be a big romance relationship. There wasn't. Well, there was and there wasn't.

**How would you define belonging?**

I think it's what I have going today. I lived with Pam for 12 years. Sometimes I do think that was mistake. But then I wouldn't have known Roxy, and I wouldn't have known Ava, and I wouldn't have known Rita, and I wouldn't have known all her family and them all are at the height of respect for me. They treat me well. I'm invited everywhere. When I was drinking, I was never invited anywhere.

**So when you say belonging is what you have at the moment. What is this that you have at the moment? You have a family?**

Yeah, a family. I have happiness. I'm really happy within myself. I like getting up in the morning. When I was drinking, I used to be hoping God would take me. When I'd be sick with drinking, sometimes I used to say I hope that the fucking devil would take me. My head was all screwed up when I was drinking. My sponsor said to me once... I thought that Pam and Rita and Roxy were all trying to make a laugh at me and I went I seen my sponsor and I talked to her and she says but they're not. She says they're looking at you and you're sober, you don't drink, you have a good life, you keep yourself nice and clean, you know, you have a car, you have a house to go to and they're just looking up to you because they have no one else to go to. And she was right like you know and ever since that my life has been brilliant with them. Roxy is the apple of my eye, I'd do anything for her and she knows it. She says wee things to me and she says I have two granddaddies but they never brought me to school and they have never collected me from school, you did. They were never there for me to give me something for my birthday or anything like that and she said you've always been there for me and you always come and visit me and you always come and see me. We have a good grand relationship. I have a good relationship with Pam and all them.

**When do you know that you truly belong?**

When they trust you with a key.

### **Of the house?**

Yes. Or they give you €600 to mind for them. You definitely know you're being trusted. I think that's very important. Like my sister wouldn't let me into the house when I was drinking. Now she opens the door and we do have a bit of craic. I have a good relationship with my own family like. I have a better relationship with Pam and them. It's when they give you the key and ask you to mind the house, to mind the dog, you're sure you feed the dog. And all that. I do find it weird when people... cause I still go back to the old ways of 30 years ago. Cause my mother used to say in the house, the wall has ears, that would be me so I'd be talking. She often said she took the wrong baby out of the hospital because I was bad. But you know, all these things... but yeah... when you're trusted with something, minding the house. James rang me the other day, his mum was sick. He said will you mind the 3 boys, I'll be only gone for half an hour, I said no problem. And I found that weird someone asking me to mind 3 children, I really did and I was saying to myself fucking hell, this is real. And it is real. It's weird in a good way but it's real and it's not a dream and it's not someone taking the Mickey out of ya or anything. That's what I find since I got sober and I've living back here in Sligo and I met some lovely people. Like yourself. You know, and I'm friends with people that wouldn't talk to me, I find that sometimes very weird. Weird in a good way and I see people talking to me today now that would have never talked to me if I was drinking.

### **What would be your understanding of home? What does mean home to you?**

Having a nice place to go back to. I lived in squats in London. There were some of them good and some of them rough but to come into my own house last night, take my shoes off and I was warm up through my feet, there was heat coming through the floor – I never had anything like that. Paying bills. I never paid a bill in my life when I was drinking. I'd want you to pay it for me or I'd want somebody down the road to pay it for me. I always wanted someone to look after me but I still didn't wanna pay them either. It was just madness in my head. When I went to London, I wanted my brother and his wife to look after me. They had 4 young boys and they had to look after them before they look after me but I thought I should be on top of the list. Now, I have my own independence. I can do what I like, well, within reason. I go and visit the kids, I was up with the kids yesterday and I was out with Roxy last night and had a lovely time. We drank tea and had a laugh, a bit of craic, we watched a couple of films on the television and you know it was absolutely beautiful. Where would you get it. It's a caring thing.

### **So where would you say is home for you?**

Sligo.

### **So do you think you created your home or you found your home?**

I created my home, I didn't find it because I was living in the old folks' house, my mum and dad's house and I walked out of it. I went away living with Pam now I don't know if that was a disaster or not but I still thought I was a single man. I thought it was alright to go out and it wasn't. You know, when you are in a relationships, it's hard. It's hard at times because I lived on my own all my life and I'm happy on my own. Don't ever forget that. You hear people saying I'm happy on my own. There's no one to take my remote control. I love my old telly. I love listening to a bit of music but I like living on my own. People might find that weird. I like my own company too. I'm very wary of that.

### **So if you created your home, what creates it?**

Not drinking. See, it's very different for the likes of me and you. You're not an alcoholic, I am. I'll always be an alcoholic. I'll be an alcoholic after I'm dead and gone, I'm still and alc. I remember, people used to say that and you know, when you're in alcoholism and you come out of it and then you have to make major decisions. They're scary at times but they're always right because you're in the right frame of mind. Moving back here, as you said, that was a great decision cause I was living in London, well I knew a couple of people but they're all scattered. When you're in Sligo, you can walk up the road to my sister's house, you can walk down the road to my niece's house. I go down to Pam's house nearly every day and I don't know, we're like an old loving couple but... I have to drive her around and she's always giving out and I have to listen to her, you know but I don't know if I'd ever live with someone again, I'd find it hard. I don't think I'd survive. It's very hard to get into a relationship, you know, you been on your own so long.

### **But it's not for everybody.**

Oh, it's not for everybody, I know what you're saying. I still thought I was a young fella and I still thought I could go out and I could be chasing women behind this woman's back but I knew it was wrong. It was wrong and I did apologise to her and I said I was sorry for what I done and she accepted me apology and the whole family because if that was my mother it done it to I'd fucking kill him. I'd kill him. I'd hit him with something. If it was me done it and my mother I'd fucking... I'd do him in. no, but these people accepted, they're different than me.

### **So would you say that this place where you are at the moment is your final stop?**

I don't think I'll ever go anywhere else. Ah no. I'll never move on again, I'll never decide to go back to England because I have too good of the life here. I have a car, I have a house, a big coloured television, I've all sports on the television, I have all these things that I always wanted. I'd see someone else having it and I'd be wondering why I can't I have that. But I was always taking in drink. So, I couldn't have nothing and even if I got paid, you know, people might say this, you might think this strange, I be walking up the road... I remember walking up the Harrow road and I had 40 or 50 pounds in my pocket and I was thinking I have the price of the drink for Saturday or Sunday. And I didn't even have a drink. I remember telling Josephine about it and she said normal people don't think like that, they just go out and have a drink, they don't be thinking will they have the price of the drink for the next day or will they want to drink the next day. Once I drank I wanted to drink. I mean I got into the state where I just couldn't stop. Doesn't bother me now at all. There was a woman down there the other day and I had to buy her 3 cans of cider and 20 cigarettes, she had no money. She said she'll go back yesterday but she didn't go back with it but I don't mind. I don't mind helping a person that's sick. I try to help people that have drink problems if I can and that's another goal. I like helping people.

### **Would you say that your understanding of home and belonging changed over time?**

Oh it did, yeah. I'd ups and downs and overs and backs and I always had... I don't know what it was... how could you describe it. I got lovely places but I just didn't want to pay for it. Drink was more important.

### **So your priorities were different?**

My priorities were different. Today now I pay my rent, I pay my electric bill. Well that was the very first thing they always said to me when I come into AA – get your priorities right, pay your rent and pay your electric bill. No rent, no tent. It's just as simple as that. That's what they'd say to you. And they'd be telling ya, you know, people that have been long time sober, get yourself a wee job, don't get into relationships for the first year or two, you know, all this stuff. And it was good, you know, great advice and I still look for advice today. I always try to better myself a wee bit, like going to education and all that. It's a think I always wanted to do but I never had time but I'm doing it now so it's not too bad. I don't mind even though I'm 67 or 66 but I don't mind doing it, I think it's a good thing. If more people done it. I would have loved it done it say 10 years ago or 20 years ago but I didn't.

### **So would you say that the idea of home and belonging is the same concept or are they different?**

Ah, it's the same thing I think anyway. I'm not on the outside looking in anymore. I'm on the inside looking out and I feel better within myself. I know people depend on me now and then. You know, Roxy rings me to bring her in, you know. I just would be saying to myself, you know if I wasn't here I wouldn't be able to do it but it's really good and it's a great education.

### **In terms of education, so what is your opinion on the role of adult education in terms of home and belonging (liberating or grounding)?**

Oh it's liberating and I think it's good and it's good that I'm able to read a bit and spell. I'm not bad at the reading but I just don't concentrate, I'm lazy, I know that. No, I'm not saying that, I know that, I was told years ago. Like it's not the first time someone said that to me. I remember when I was at school I'd be thinking of doing something else and then I had to lather in, I never went to school at all. I was out robbing orchards and all this shit, you know but I never just... I thought the education when I was young wasn't... I wasn't good enough. Self-esteem was very low.

### **So you said that education liberates. How?**

You see you're down in you doing something, you're learning how to spell, you're learning how to write, you're learning how to add and put forms and be able to fill them in and send them away and you're doing it all in your own handwriting. You're not getting someone to fill it in for ya. I like that. I like to be able to do stuff like that.

### **So it gives you freedom.**

Freedom, you know and if I look at it rightly it is so simple. I know I do bring forms down here but I still do fill them in myself and I do think yeah, that's good but it's all about learning. But I can do these things today and I think that's very important and I can do these things today. I like my own company, as I said and I like doing all these things and that's what education has given me – a bit of freedom. But I can't hide behind the education all my life, you know and I have to move on a bit after a while. It's a wee bit scary, sometimes, you know, I find making decisions.... I have to think them out first time, I have to ring somebody.

### **But don't we all?**

But I think I'm different. I don't think you think the ways I think but you do, you see, that's what I've learned too coming to education. Like most people think on the same basis but I might think different but it's mostly all on the same basis. That's what I've been taught.

### **But I think everybody has their own doubts and insecurities.**

And I think that's why I like being on my own, that I don't have to make decisions, I find that... yeah... like when Roxy was going to Dublin last week I wanted to do it and I just stepped back and I said no, that's nothing to do with you. Her mother is there and her granny is there, let them do it. And it was grand that way but then again I didn't think she'd be in as much pain as she is (god love her).

### **Anything else you want to add?**

It's nice to have your own place, to call your own home. Very very important. If I had to live my life again, I'd try to change a few things for the better but I'm a very stubborn man, I know that and I'm mellowing. Me old age. I really am and I know I am but I know I wouldn't change anything from the 1991, I wouldn't change anything because I only started growing up then. If I hadn't have find the AA, I would have never grown up. I would never be sitting here beside you talking and it's the truth cause I know myself, I know what it's like. I see people in difficulties at the moment and you're powerless over them, you're just powerless over people, places and things and I learned that a long time ago.

## **Jude**

### **Can you tell me a little bit about yourself: where were you born, where did you grow up, have you moved or travelled much throughout your life and, if so, what were the reasons behind that.**

I was born in 195 in a country town and we moved because my father changed jobs we moved to Dublin when I was 10. And that was a big change of experience because I have moved from a small country town to starting secondary as what we call here culchie wearing the braces and the corduroys trousers when everyone else was in the grey trousers into a boy school, academic boy school (they didn't have woodwork, metalwork, art or any of those things) and following that I went to college in UCD. I moved then in terms of my life I lived in Louth in a couple of places, I lived in Dublin. Growing up at 21 I moved, I used to board a house in Tallaght. From there I moved to Kimmidge road for 3 years and then I moved to county Kildare for 11 years or so and then I moved to Ballymorejustus for 3 or 4 years and then Athigh for a year, back to Sellbridge in Kildare for 2 years, out to Great Pottle for 5 years, out to Maynooth and then I finished up here in Sligo in 2008.

### **So all the moving was basically work related?**

No, I didn't move for work, just at the time in the 80's things were very bleak and it was a case of getting an opportunity and a house and moving house. No, it wasn't really related. I actually moved to county Kildare and then discovered, took a job in Swords as a principal of a school

which was an hour and a half travel every day so that's why I moved again. But we tended to stay in Kildare and certainly I moved over to Sligo for life quality reasons and happened to be lucky that suitable job came up that I got.

### **So what are life quality reasons?**

The whole thing about the infrastructure. I was on a journey with no traffic about half an hour from work and usually took me an hour and 15 to an hour and a half in the morning and the same in the evening, I was on the M50. I suppose a lot of people think when you're from Dublin and I grew up in a big family and all of my brothers and sisters are cosmopolitan, they live in cities and people thought that in terms of the arts expose the city is the only place you get them so I didn't believe that. The quality of life meant certainly for the first 5 years when I came over here in the job that I could have a lot more freedom in terms of what I would do with my day, when I start work, getting back home, not being away. If I had a meeting, I could go in an hour earlier and explore where it was so I've got to know a lot of places in Sligo and Donegal, Mayo, Leitrim, wherever I was.

### **How would you define belonging?**

I don't know. I actually was talking to my wife recently and I was just saying: we live in Sligo, absolutely love Sligo, I feel I belong to it but I have no sense obviously of connection. What we didn't know at the time when we moved over here that her grandmother is from Sligo but it was never really talked about, I don't know why but there was no real connection. We didn't come to Sligo for family but it has made a difference because a number of cousins have turned up. In terms of belonging, I certainly have an Irish identity. It's not particularly nationalistic or republican in view but it's certainly a consciousness of the language and the culture. In fact, I'd be wary of the whole idea because it's really an accident of birth where you are born, what religion you are born into, people don't get that and we are conditioned to think things like that. In terms of belonging, you can belong to a landscape, you can belong to where you feel there's an opportunity of self-expression or to absorb the culture there. Moving to Sligo, we found people very friendly, very few people knew about Sligo so I have no sense of... and even driving past places where I did live and people said to me 'where you come from', I said I grew up in Dublin, moved over from Kildare and I'm living in Sligo so I don't have a sense of being from a particular county which a lot of people do have.

### **So you don't feel homesick for any place?**

No, as I drive by them, I wouldn't think twice.

### **How would you know that you truly belong to something or somewhere?**

You just feel comfortable in your skin, you can live comfortably in this place, you have an opportunity to express yourself, feel safe, feel fulfilled, feel warm, you have supports, you have people who understand you, people who get where you're coming from. Like in most relationships it's about recognising other people's weaknesses and accepting them so there's a certain sense of that.

### **Where is home for you?**

I think it's in your head or your heart. Yeah, in terms of the house that we have here. It's still a continuous process of making a house into home. The walls tell stories of the things that



happened and you're conscious of that. You have an identity, there's a place in your house whether it's a place you sit and read or whether it's a place you sit together in a company or a table that you sit around, I think that's important and I think that we made our house here particularly that it's very much our home. Could we have done it somewhere else? Yes. And as I said if I go back to where my ancestors are from, which was from the land in Louth, and I would have years ago walked that land, but I think it's a mixture.

### **What would be your definition of home?**

Home is somewhere where you feel comfortable in your skin, where you have freedom to be yourself. And I suppose even the physical thing where home is, is somewhere that's yours, that you create even in terms of the environment that you create. Some people live in a very minimalist house, other people won't have photographs around the house so we tend to create things like that around the house and that sense of home is a physical sense. We go on holidays to the same place every year and that feels very much at home when we go there so if you said to me where is home, having moved so much, my home is here in this house in Sligo but if it happened next year that it changed and we had to move to Kerry (which was a possibility few years ago), I would have made that home. I mean, it's lovely sitting here under the shadow of Benbulbin but if it had been the shadow of Lugnaquilla or in the city... I think people that look for this home that's a bit like religion or something and you make yourself believe that you can't just do without living... if you from Dublin, you have to live in Dublin or in Kildare or you have to be associated with hurling if you're from Kilkenny. I have always been able to adapt.

### **So we don't find home, we create it?**

Yeah, yeah. Now you can find a place where you can build that. I think when we go to Spain, and particularly the first few (times) after my wife wasn't well, we stood that year on the beach and I said this ticks all the boxes, this is exactly as I dreamed it was going to be from last year and if I'm thinking about what you're doing, I think of that place and standing on the beach at 8 o'clock in the morning. Years ago when a number of my family were getting married, I bought a house that was nothing in it and my sister bought a house and all the curtains, all the furniture and everything was there so she had that sense to make home whereas I would have always felt it had to be something I was attached to. I'm attached to here because every single room in the house we've changed so we made it home.

### **Is Sligo your final destination?**

If I had to move because that's the way I am, I could adapt but this is as close as I think, I don't want to move anymore, it's too much of me here now, too much invested that you'd be throwing away because you really do start again from scratch. Some people don't see that, some people are running after the material... even in terms when you say home, the town, I like the fact that here to have found a place where we can walk into town in 10 ten minutes compared to where we used to live was a drive of 7 or 8 kilometres. Places in town, meeting people, there's a nice sense of to walk into town. It can take up to 5 minutes sometimes to walk in Sligo and sometimes it can take half an hour and that's lovely. If you're on your own then, would you feel without the people in the community, and I'd say no for us or for me, we have a set of friends here that are part of a circle, number of different circles that fulfil different wants and needs in different areas whether it's socially or culturally or functionally. And I

suppose we always tend to immerse friends from other places in what we have here. I grew up by the sea and I've always liked water whether it was sailing or canoeing so liked to be beside the sea, I didn't like not being at the sea or near water.

### **Would you say that belonging and home is the same concept?**

They are interlinked. They are sort of symbiotic in terms of the needs that are fulfilled within or one leads to the other, so belonging somewhere brings you home in your head or your heart or whether brings you home to a physical place. The older I get the more I hate being away. Even going away abroad I like coming home. But in Ireland I would drive to get home late at night to be back in my own house rather than stay over somewhere, the older I get. I like to get away on holidays but I really love coming home. I have a sense which I try to instil in the kids, when you're coming in through the mountains and you see the Gaelic knight on the horseback there and then you see Benbulbin in the distance, and even I am not from here, from the very beginning that I came here that was a sense 'wow, we're all home'. We came here in December 2008 and even that coming back was a sense this is coming home.

### **What is the role of adult education (grounding or liberating)?**

I think the problem with education is rooted in social issues. Of course, education liberates and gives people chances but they have to have those opportunities before it can liberate them. I was very lucky at the time when I finished school, you could emigrate, get a job if you're really lucky or go to college and I was lucky that we were very comfortable off so my father wanted me to go to college. He was a self-made man so I had that opportunity but I'm very conscious of the fact that when people talk about education liberating, I mean I worked in Clondalkin back in the 90s and there was 1 guy from the secondary school that went to university so it liberated him but it didn't liberate all the others because it didn't give them that opportunity. Education also for a lot of cases tends to support the status quo. For example, in that new report that came out about schools that play rugby, the schools in Dublin where young people are all rugby players that go into and become lawyers and doctors and people who make laws and rules. You don't see a lot of judges or dentists or even teachers coming from disadvantaged areas so that's a major challenge for us. What education could do if you bring it to people there, in terms of Irish solution where you have your voluntary schools and you have your community schools and you have your vocational schools that came from the VEC side of the house but you still see that the schools in urban areas reaffirm social status and people who come from different schools, it'll determine by the school where they are gonna end up in a lot of case. The other thing, I think that people tend to think about education always having to be accredited. I always thought it was one of the mistakes of... you mentioned earlier about people going back to education. A lot of it is really to do with economics, to function. Back in my days when I was working in Tallaght, further education teaching people to read and write was being able to read the back of the cornflakes box or instructions or the labels or whatever, there wasn't really something about the joy of learning (ok, it depended on an individual), the joy of reading etc. and that's a thing that can't be lost. I am just flabbergasted, my 15 year old who doesn't like school, having seen when I was a principal in Dublin and seeing young people who came from war torn countries at that time, who talked about walking 5 or 6 miles to school and then talking to girls and fellas who were wasting their education and telling how disgraceful and ashamed they should be of themselves.

I would add that no more than religion, anyone who follows one religion or sees a county or a place as home and becomes passionate about it, that verges on the jingoistic or nationalistic pride but like I said, it's an accident of birth. The country, the town, the family, the religion, anything you're born into. You're very privileged if it works out well and that's why I find it very hard when people are so dogmatic about religion.

## Laura

**Can you tell me a little bit about yourself: where were you born, where did you grow up, have you moved or travelled much throughout your life and, if so, what were the reasons behind that.**

I grew up in Dublin, my dad had a grocery shop which had a big influence on our lives because we all worked in it as children and travelled... probably didn't travel till I left school, but done a good bit of travelling. My daughter lives in Australia so as a result of that I've travelled and I have a lot of family in Canada, so been to Canada good bit.

**Ok, so you were born in Dublin and you grew up in Dublin, I presume.**

Yes.

**So all the travelling and moving was family related?**

Yes.

**Ok, and what brought you to Sligo?**

My husband brought me to Sligo.

**So, love...**

Love brought me to Sligo. Yes... yeah... we were living and working in Dublin and my husband's father had a heart attack and had to have a major surgery and we had to make a very quick decision to come and help him and his business.

**And your husband is from Sligo obviously?**

Yeah.

**Ok so you lived in Dublin and that was kind of the plan to be and stay and everything but then for family reasons you moved.**

Yeah.

**Ok, so how would you define belonging and when do you know that you truly belong?**

I suppose, when I was a child because of the shop, I felt I belonged very young because I was involved in the community serving... worked an awful lot on the till so would have known a lot of people, so walking down the street would have known most people that I would have met because that was a small village. And... when I came to Sligo I found it hard to feel I belonged

for a while because I felt people wanted to know who you belonged to nearly before you felt you were accepted and when my daughter was born I found it a bit easier.

**What do you mean by saying you felt people wanted to know who you belonged to nearly before you felt you were accepted you.**

Yes, well, the fact that my husband was from Sligo was a help but I did feel a bit of an outsider when I came first.

**Ok, so you feel like people... judged and then the fact that you were with your husband that was important as well.**

Oh it was the help, I think... yeah... to being accepted.

**So how do you know for example now that you truly belong?**

I suppose the fact that I have a wide circle of friends, I am very sociable myself I think, I like people, I can't live without people, even if I'm in the house for full day, I feel I have to get out and go next door or something. I'm very involved in the community, my work of course as well makes me involved even more.

**Ok, so do you feel that you belong here now?**

I do feel I belong here now, yeah, Sligo is home. I'd never think of being a Dub, you know from Dublin and if people even say you're a Dub, I think what are they talking about cause I'm so long here, I feel I'm a Sligo person.

**Ok, so you said that Sligo is home...**

Yeah...

**Ok, so what is the definition of home?**

Where you feel comfortable in your own skin, you know you've people that you can communicate with if you really need to. You're up down town and you just meet people that you know, I love that feeling. I know some people don't like that. You feel contributing something back to the community.

**So do you think then, do we find our home or do we create it?**

I think we create it.

**Ok, so what creates it then?**

I think you can't expect it to come to you, you have to make an effort. You have to be willing to talk to people and get to know them, maybe invite them for meal or coffee or something. I would have found that because I've move house as well and when I moved house I felt it was up to me, it wasn't up to me to wait for the neighbours to arrive with a bunch of flowers or a bottle of wine. I had to say look I'm just after moving in, you come to me for a cup of coffee.

**Ok, so if I'm understanding it correctly, for you home is very much connected to the neighbourhood.**

Oh absolutely, yeah, it is.

**Ok, so you said that Sligo is your home. So would you consider it to be your final destination?**

Absolutely, yeah, yeah...

**Ok, so do you think that your understanding of home and belonging has changed throughout your life or throughout time?**

Probably has, that I had no work to put into it when I lived in Dublin because my family were very well known because of the shop so I didn't have to put in any effort as I was my father's daughter so everybody knew me. When I came to Sligo, I didn't have that so had to put the effort in myself. You know, it wasn't handed to me then. I had to... my interests were different compared to my husband's so I couldn't rely to come to him for the things that he was interested in like I'm not a swimmer, he would have been involved in swimming, he was in the boy scouts so I wasn't interested in that, so I had to kinda find my own interests.

**And we probably appreciate it more when we have to work for it.**

Absolutely, yeah... I do think that children are a big help though... I suppose I moved at the right time, my children were small, so I got into play groups and then they went to school, I met new parents and we had moved to an estate with all the young children so that was another big plus. If I hadn't my children, it would have taken longer, I think.

**And did you ever think of moving back to Dublin once you came to Sligo?**

No, my husband did but I love Sligo, I wouldn't move back now. I think the quality of life is really good here, I think we have so much here with mountains, we've the beach, we're not too far from other places really as a town. Where we live we're only about 20 minutes from the city centre, so you've the theatre, you've the swimming pool, we've dancing classes for the children whatever. We have it on our doorstep, you know. So I think the quality of life too does help to find out where you belong.

**Would you say that home and belonging is the same concept or are they two different ones?**

They probably are the same concept. Yeah...

**So what is your opinion on the role of adult education in terms of home and belonging (liberating or grounding)?**

It's very interesting that I have thought about that because with family learning we set to empower parents to be able to help their children. Sometimes by empowering them they make space for developing their own education and some of them have told me oh I'm doing level 6 now but my family have kind of thought here she is now, she's a bit of a swat and she's not with us and she won't come out and have the craic. So they feel now that they don't belong to the family because they've been empowered but they're at the different level and their mind-set is totally different. On the other hand, when people do get empowered, they're able to take part in the community and they feel confident, and they're able to do things that they wouldn't have normally been able to do like go to the library, go to the theatre or go down to the Nilland gallery and their lives are more enriched in the way they live. It's a two-sided coin really, isn't it?

**And from your own experience, being involved in adult education, would you say then that it's grounding or liberating?**

Oh definitely I think it's liberating. You can see it in people and unfortunately in the ETB I don't think there's enough of valuating done on self-esteem, on the quality of life a person has because we are all ticking boxes that they do QQI and that maybe they don't want QQI, all they want to be able to go and do their shopping or be able to use the ATM machine or fill out a form or book a flight or do things like that and that is liberating for them and they can do that, they're not relying on somebody else.

**So people don't really have to go (somewhere) to be liberated, it's what they are able to do, isn't it?**

Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

### **Maria**

**Can you tell me a little bit about yourself: where were you born, where did you grow up, have you moved or travelled much throughout your life and, if so, what were the reasons behind that.**

I was born in West Cork, I grew up in a small town there until I was 14 and then I moved to a big city Dublin and I lived there until I was 21 and then I emigrated to Barcelona and lived there until I was 24 and then I moved back to Dublin and lived in Dublin until I was 28 or 29 and then I went to art college in Sligo and for 3 years I think and then I went back to Dublin and I worked in Dublin for 7 years and then I moved to Donegal and I have been there for 12 years.

**So what were the reasons for all those movings?**

Ok, so the first move which was from West Cork to Dublin was because my dad got a job in Dublin so we all moved. The second move was to Barcelona and that was because I wanted to live abroad and initially I was going to study abroad and then I just went for an interview for a job teach English in Spain and they asked me where I wanted to go so I just thought Barcelona sounded nice so that was just to experience living in a different culture, to kind of broaden my mind and just have a bit of freedom as well and independence.

**Ok, so why did you decide to go back (to Ireland from Spain)?**

Yeah, so I think I got tired of teaching English and I had studied social science and I have studied diploma in adult education and I felt I wasn't working in the area I wanted to work in. I felt I was teaching people who were well off and I wanted really to work with people and communities that were more disadvantaged. So my sense of social justice was very strong, I think, so that's why I moved back then and I started to work in adult literacy with county Dublin so that's the reason for moving back.

### **Ok, so why did you move to Sligo then?**

So then I was working during the day and at night I was doing a lot of art classes and I realised I had an interest in art so I decided to do a foundation art course in Dublin and I really liked it so then I decided to go to art college and I had a choice of going to art college in Dublin or Sligo but because I grew up in the country, I always had that pull to live in the country and to want to be in the country, in the country side I suppose or outside of a big city so that's why I decided to come to college in Sligo and I really liked it and then after I finished college in Sligo, I applied for loads of jobs in Sligo and I couldn't get them and I applied for 1 job in Dublin which I wasn't pushed about but I got the job so that's why I went back to Dublin. And then even all those years (like I was 7 years in Dublin) I still always had that feeling that I wanted to go back to the country so then I actually met somebody from Donegal and then after a year and a half or something I moved down but it was a really easy decision you know because just living in the country side, looking out the sea, looking at the mountains, being down the road from walking on the beach compared to living in a city so I was delighted, yeah.

### **How would you define belonging? And how do you know that you truly belong?**

When you hear the word belonging you think belonging to something, like belonging to the place, belonging to the group, yeah, just belonging to something so I suppose belonging to a place, for me the place would be nature, would be really important so being in a place where that was by the sea, I don't think I'd like to be living somewhere where's no water so I'd like the idea of belonging to nature where is water, where is mountains, where is kind of wild landscape cause I would associate that with my childhood as well so belonging to a place would be important. A physical place. Then belonging to a group would be having similar interests or similar viewpoints or similar talents I suppose. So for me belonging to a group would be belonging to a group of artists because I'm an artist so I would have a lot in common with other artists. Or belonging to a group of people who would have the same way of thinking, people who have the same value system, people who have the same sense of social justice, and people who believe in sort of giving to the world rather than taking from it.

### **So would you say that for you the concept of belonging is a combination of a physical place and a group of people who share same values or same interests?**

Yeah, yeah, I think so.

### **So how do you know then that you truly belong?**

You feel comfortable, you feel at ease, you feel rooted, grounded, accepted, like you're a part of something I suppose where people understand you. Understanding would be another thing.

### **So what would be your definition of home then? And where is home for you?**

So home is an interesting one. So probably when I was a child home would just have been my childhood home but because I've moved so much... now I would consider Donegal my home. Probably took a long time but I would consider Donegal my home because when I actually... if I'm driving anywhere away when I'm actually coming towards where I live then I do feel that I'm coming home so therefore I would have belonging and home as a sense of place but I also have that sense of home in myself so a sense of sort of being comfortable with myself. So even if I was somewhere else I would still feel a sense of home in myself.

**So would you say that you found your home or you created it?**

I think it's more to do with the way I feel about myself, it's more that I've created a sense of home in myself so that I'm very comfortable with myself and because of that sense of groundedness I feel at home and I feel most at home probably in Donegal because that's where I've been for the last 12 years but if I lived in Spain I would probably still feel at home because I have that sense of home in myself.

**So would you say that where you live at the moment is your final destination?**

I don't know. I would say it's definitely for part of the year because my goal is to spend some of the year in Spain so I suppose my plan is to spend half of the year in Spain and half of the year in Donegal so I would see maybe Spain and Donegal as my home in the future.

**Would you say then that home and belonging is the same concept?**

I think they are slightly different cause home is... you can be at home in yourself but belonging is like belonging to... belonging to a group, belonging to a place. Sense of belonging I think it's attached to something or someone.

**So what is your opinion on the role of adult education in terms of home and belonging (liberating or grounding)?**

It sort of depends on where people are coming from because let's say for example I would have a lot English language students so it depends on where they are coming from like say I would have few students from Spain so their reason for being here is to learn English and for their children to learn English so that they can return to Spain and get better jobs so for them it's a form of learning but it's so that they can have a better life in their own country. But then there are other students who would come from warzones and asylum seekers and refugees so it wouldn't have been voluntary for them, they have come here but not by choice, they have come here as a form of escape so the first thing they say is they feel safe here and because they feel safe they want to create a sense of community so for them it's like forming a new life here so education sort of empowers them, especially English language empowers them then to have the basic language first of all and then they can go and learn other skills, learn healthcare or childcare or get third level education whatever they want to do so that they can then get a job within the community. Education liberates them to ground them (root them).

**Mary**

**Can you tell me a little bit about yourself: where were you born, where did you grow up, have you moved or travelled much throughout your life and, if so, what were the reasons behind that.**

I was born here in Sligo, grew up here in Sligo. I have two brothers and parents, there's 5 of us. I finished school, I was working for a little while and then I went back to college as a mature student and I've done pharmaceutical science. With that then I did travel, I travelled to college, I started in Athlone. I've done a cert first there and then after that I moved to Dublin. I've done a bit of placement in Athlone and Letterkenny as well cause we had to do placement and in



hospital so I've done both then so I lived in Letterkenny for few months and was in Athlone for few years, then in Dublin for few years after that. Then I went and done my teaching in Limerick and then I came back to Sligo. I didn't really move outside of Ireland.

**All that moving was related to college?**

It would have been, yeah.

**What brought you back to Sligo? Why did you decide to settle back in Sligo?**

I suppose work was here and I just thought my family and friends are here. I moved away just to go to college and I was working in Dublin. I loved it there. I do find it was a bigger city, I just felt that travelling to and from and even meeting up with friends and a lot of travelling would bring me back home so when the opportunity came up, I moved back to Sligo. I suppose, I could have stayed in Dublin either but just the way it happened. Family and friends are here in Sligo so it's just nice to be closer to.

**How would you define belonging and how do you know that you truly belong?**

Belonging is being part of I could say community. I mean the community can be friends, can be family, it can be people. People would be the common thing for any community, whether it's family, whether it's friends, whether it's social... so people.

**How would you know then that you truly belong?**

I suppose you feel like you belong, you feel like you have a lot in common with people around you. You feel safe.

**What about home then? How would you define home? And where is home for you?**

Home for me is as oppose to being a building or anything, it's the people in it, so my family for example. I think family is one part of home, but home is also where you feel... I'm gonna say the word 'settled', but what I mean is with the people around you rather than being in a building or a specific place. Yeah, it's the people and feeling of belonging would mix to that as well. To feel at home you almost have to feel that you belong there to feel fully at home, no matter what group of people that you're with, home is with people. I suppose traditionally people consider home to be with your immediate family and I would in one sense but you also feel at home when you're with friends as well that you've known for a long time, you almost consider them family. So people would be home. A house is a building. A house is not home unless it's the people in it that make it.

**So where is home for you?**

Home is in traditional sense with my family. Sligo in general because my family are here but my friends are here as well so I also feel home in that sense. Like I would hate to live here and have this my home and have my friends somewhere else and never be able to see them, if that makes sense. So home it's just the way it happened that a lot of my friends are here and a lot of my family are here. Now I have obviously friends that are not here and it creates a distance when they are not there because you don't see them as often but you still feel at home in their company when you meet up with them but in the general context for me it would be here (Sligo). For me it will be because my family and friends and a lot of people in my life are here that are important.

### **So do you create home or do you find it?**

A bit of both.

### **So what creates home then?**

Home is family, yes but when you say creating it it's almost maintaining relationships whether that's with your parents, with your siblings, with your extended family or with your friends. It's always a two way system, it's always give and take, it's always effort made by everybody to meet up, not just one or two people. So it's kinda people and belonging and maintaining relationships (what creates home). It takes effort when it's natural. You still going to feel like you can give an opinion or you can say something or someone else feels that they can say what they want to say, it's not going to disrupt ... it's being accepted.

### **Is your place in Sligo your final stop?**

The house I'm in, no. I can't honestly answer that. The reason why I say that is because friends and family at the moment are here for me now, my work is here at the minute which I love, work is a huge part of that as well but again you can travel with work, it's a movable part in the whole thing. For me my family and friends are important and they are all here at the moment but that can obviously all change in terms of location. So I can't say it's my final home for sure. I would like to be in the general area as long as people who are in my life were in the general area. I would say Ireland is home because I have a brother who doesn't live in Sligo, he lives good few hours away in Ireland. Ireland is home, Sligo more than likely. For the minute I do feel that this is my place I'm going nowhere for now definitely and I think probably in the long term it will be my home and if I still feel at home here when/ if circumstances change, I will stay here. If I don't, I won't. You're going to create a place that you feel is home and sometimes change has to happen for that to happen, too. But for the moment definitely this is home and from what I can see my future, this is home. Everything is working out in the favour to stay my home.

### **So do you think then that your understanding of home and belonging has changed overtime? And if it has, how? And what influenced it?**

I suppose it has been the same. When I was living in Dublin, I wasn't sure how long-term or short-term that would be, it was more job related. When I was there at the time and then I thought no it doesn't really feel like home, just feels like a place I'm staying for now where this does feel more like home so it's not that it has changed, I always did considered Sligo home (general area of Sligo). Home has always been with family, I'd always consider myself coming home to meet people. Of course I met people in Dublin and Athlone but it's not the same as people who are long term in your life that you know for years. Home for me has always been people and relationships with people.

### **So would you think then that home and belonging is the same concept?**

Home and belonging would be interrelated together. But definitely to think of home you think of belonging and home, yeah. I can't see someone feeling they belong somewhere but it not be home. I suppose if you feel like you're in a working environment and you belong in that area but then that's where it's not home, ok, you feel at home at work but it's not your personal life, it's more of your working life. I think they are kind of linked, they have to be because to feel

like you belong somewhere, you feel at home when you belong somewhere. If you don't feel like you belong somewhere, it's not home.

**So what is your opinion on the role of adult education in terms of home and belonging (liberating or grounding)?**

I would consider it more liberating with the freedom of choice. For example adult education, so somebody does a course, now they've opened up loads of more opportunities to move to a different city if there are more job opportunities there but if they don't feel at home there, they mightn't want to move there but the choice is there. In that sense it's liberating. I don't think that education itself is grounding, no. You could look at the fact that they consider this to be home and not want to move as a grounding factor but education itself is definitely liberating, I think it's a completely positive thing. They're getting more education and it's up to themselves what they want to do with that. Whether they want to work in the area and move away or stay where they are, whether they want to do further education and move away to do that. If they want to travel with that now new education that gives them more jobs, again that's their choice. So it's liberating in the sense that they have freedom to do what they want with it.

**So do you think that the whole grounding concept, is that only a negative thing?**

No, I wouldn't put it a negative thing. It depends on your own personal circumstances. If someone didn't want to move, then it's not a negative thing. I suppose education does link somebody closer into the community but again it's a choice if they want to stay or not. I still think it's liberating in the sense that they have the choice to do what they want with that education now. It doesn't necessarily have to tie anyone anywhere. It doesn't have to tie someone to a certain area, to a certain community. The choice is there.

**Patricia**

**Can you tell me a little bit about yourself: where were you born, where did you grow up, have you moved or travelled much throughout your life and, if so, what were the reasons behind that.**

So I was born in Dublin and my father was training to be a doctor, a GP, and I lived there for two years and then my grandmother's home situation changed, my grandfather passed away and she became nervous living on her own and my father is from a very rural part of Cavan. By that time he qualified as a GP and small village next to where my grandmother is from and my father grew up, they needed a GP at the exact same time so it was kind of a meant-to-be scenario so we ended up moving from Dublin to Cavan and we lived in a village out 7 miles away from where my granny lived. So it was a perfect scenario and my parents are still living there. So, I lived in Cavan until I was 18 and then I went to UCD and after college I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. I studied psychology but I wasn't sure I wanted to be a therapist, I didn't know where I was going to end up. During my college time in Dublin (this is an important part of my journey) my best friend in national and secondary school went to college in Sligo to study fine art and I used to come down and visit her twice a year (didn't have enough money to come down all the time) and I met all her lovely friends. It was so welcoming and

really really warm and fun (really really fun) so whenever I get back to Dublin I'd think oh God, you know, this is very dry, very boring, it's very expensive and my type of people aren't here, I don't really feel at home here so I decided with the encouragement of my friend to move down to Sligo for the summer and see how it goes and I am here 22 years later. So I suppose, in terms of movement I've been to probably about 20 countries in the world but I've never actually went away for a long term, I've never had a year away, I've never done Erasmus, I've only gone on holidays so in that sense I suppose I am a bit of a home bird, I never had the burning desire to go away for full year.

### **So what would be your definition of home then? And where is home for you?**

Ok, so for me home really is Cavan where my parents are still living. It's still the family centre, the unit. I have a brother living in Norway, sister living in county Cavan, I live in Sligo but my home and where I want to be at Christmas is always Cavan with my family. So, as long as my family are alive and well I think I'll always call Cavan home. What's interesting here now is that I bought a house in Sligo 11 years ago (11.5 years ago at this stage) and I have a physical home now in Sligo, I do feel more at home that I live in my own house and my own... it's not just space, it's place to call my own where I can just be me. I don't have to live with anyone else and I've choices. That's a big part of it. I've shared accommodation since I've been living in Sligo until I bought my home and it's really special to have that freedom, space and freedom to make decisions and just be yourself.

### **So would you say that you have found your home or created it? Is home being found or created?**

Home, I think, has been created, I think a house can just be 4 walls but unless you put your stamp on it, I don't think it's going to feel like home. I bought an old house, purposely so I'd have to put my own stamp on it. I didn't want something fresh, I wanted something with a history and something that I felt a house that had stories, it has something special about it that would feel nice, nice energy when I walked into the house, not a cold brand new built in a huge big housing estate. So I bought an old house and I'm still doing it up 11 years later room by room, keep changing colour schemes and buying new furniture as I change colour schemes and it's exciting, it's evolving with me and changing. And it feels like home because I'm making it my happy place, my comfortable space. A big part of having a place of your own, I found, because of a lot of friends that are artists I've a lot of art, I've a lot of paintings and I can just put in nails in any wall I want and hang them up, that's exciting. You know, I've whole collage in my sitting room of paintings, all original and it's wonderful and I couldn't have done that before.

### **How would you define belonging? And how do you know that you truly belong?**

For me belonging is slightly different to feeling at home. Belonging to me is more about acceptance and feeling that no matter how I am, how I appear, I am accepted by people in a particular place. So for example, that could be the work place, feel at home or feel like you belong, it's a part of a team. I feel I belong with my friends cause they know me so well and obviously there's a good relationship there. I feel like I belong with my family. It's the people rather than a place that make me feel a sense of belonging. So Sligo for me has been very welcoming and I have always felt like I belong here because people have opened up to me and I know some people that have moved here and don't feel like it, they feel like I'll never be from

Sligo, I'm an outsider. I suppose it depends on who you meet. I also think it can be your time of life. Since I turned 40, my life definitely has changed. I feel more assured and confident in who I am and who I want to be and I'm less of a people pleaser and I look after myself, that's number 1. And that brings a lot of acceptance, self-acceptance and it means that I accept what's going on around me and then others, it reflects on others and how they interact with me. So it helps with that feeling of belonging. If you feel you belong, you usually do. You mould to a situation. We can have a home as a mansion, big glass doors, beautiful and not feel at home.

**Do you think that your current home (Sligo) with your paintings is your final stop?**

I suppose a long-term goal, I'm 44, I'm single, I would not like to remain single for the rest of my life so no, I don't necessarily see it as my always always home. I feel that if I'm to meet somebody in the future, they may have their own home as well and if things were to work out maybe we both would buy a home together. I wouldn't necessarily say that I would move to his home or he'd move to my home but I'd be open to moving again. So I love my home and I feel very much like it's my secure base and I'm happy to live there on my own for the rest of my life but I'm definitely open to moving somewhere else to a different home. Now in saying that, I don't know if I really want to leave Sligo. I love living in Sligo, I've made a life here. Really solid friends, best you could ask for, it's like having a second family and they are all here. And it would be hard to leave so I feel Sligo is my home and I belong in Sligo but it's definitely my home now but my physical home I'd be willing to move out of if something changed in my life.

**Do you feel that home and belonging is the same concept? Why?**

Ok, I was thinking a little bit about this and I think yes, home is having my own place to live and that I feel fully in control of. So home is security and the sense of safety and feeling relaxed and happy. It's quite a physical feeling. And that has evolved definitely from having to share houses with people as a student and even when I moved to Sligo renting houses sometimes even with friends and realising that living together you're not that compatible. Can really be good friends but maybe you shouldn't live together and finding it very difficult and stressful. At the very start when I bought my house recession had hit and our wages in work got absolutely slashed and I ended up having to rent my spare room for a year. I had absolutely no choice. So after buying this house that I could afford and within 2 months I absolutely couldn't which was horrifying and very upsetting cause the whole point was I wanted my own space, not rent with people anymore, so I had to share my house. Now that I have it back, I was fortunate that it only lasted for a year and a half, I was able to keep it to myself from now on so I don't share my house anymore, it's just me and for me it's my sanctuary, it's my safe, happy, relaxed space and it's a little bit different to belonging. I don't have to accept myself, I have accepted it already so belonging it's more the acceptance, it's more people and home is more physical.

**So what is your opinion on the role of adult education in terms of home and belonging (liberating or grounding)?**

I think engaging in adult education helps ground people, it gives a sense of purpose, it gives that sense of belonging, belonging to an educational group or community so for example we're in ETB now so taking part in adult and further ed, for example, an ESOL class, no matter what country you're from you're involved in attending an ESOL course and that brings with it lot of

diversity cause there are people from all over the world. But because the tutors and the delivery of the programmes are so person-centred and that individual characters and individual learning plans to a point are taken into consideration. The experience can be very grounding and it can help get rid of a lot of fear. You realise other people are in the same boat, they don't know the language either, it's ok, it's now safe, you realise you're not alone and being part of that group can be very reassuring, very grounding instead of it being anxious and challenging, it can become something that you embrace and say ok, this is actually normal and it's ok and I'll get there like the others can do it and I can do it. I think there's a lot of positive modelling as well of behaviour by the tutors.

## **Siobhan**

**Okay so can you tell me your story: where were you born, where did you grow and have you moved or travelled much throughout your life and if so, what caused it?**

I was born in Dublin in 1970 and then grew up in a housing estate in an area in Dublin and nearly everyone on the road had the same kind of family makeup, you know, dads went out to work, mums stayed at home you know it was one car if even one car per family so there was... and then every estate would have been built in the 60s so everyone who moved in with sort of similar age so there was like this generally everyone had like 5 kids, sort of between 4 and 6 kids of around the same age. There were loads of kids you know so it was very busy, full of kids and we played out on the road it was always some parent in somewhere in the house and then we moved when I was 10 in 1980. We moved to Meath, the countryside, the middle of nowhere kind of which was kind of grand as well.

**Why did you move?**

My mum always wanted to move, she kind of always felt confined being there probably 20 years, yeah I think my oldest brother was about 15 or 16 and I think she was just getting too busy and she wanted us to be out of there and living... you know she didn't want us growing up as teenagers then coz maybe there was too many teenagers... her and my dad have grown up sort of near that area as well but she always wanted more space. So originally, she wanted to live in Malahide, it had always been her dream to live in Malahide which is kind of the posh part of area that she came from the outside of Northside. Then she went out to visit some guy that my dad was working with and him and his wife had moved over from England and they had moved into this house in this country so it was in Meath, it was not too far commuted like was only really about half an hour from my dad was working in Finglas, maybe 40 minutes kind of commute and she just thought Oh I love this, I'd love to live like this and so then they bought a house in the middle of the country. She couldn't drive and we'd cycle about 3 miles outside the village and my older brothers kept going to school in Dublin and then myself, my sister and my younger brother all went to the local school and stayed there and then I went to College back in Dublin for 5 years and then after that I moved to New York 14 years.

### **So what brought you to New York?**

Well, one of my brothers and my sister were living there at time and he had been illegal there and. At the times there was a recession in Ireland in the mid 80s and loads of people and my brother he was there illegally and then there were thousands of Irish people were there illegally so they brought in a visa which was this should try particularly had a high folks on Irish people from the Irish illegals in New York to try and get them you know visas. Like they knew they were all there, they knew they were all working but now they wanted to legalise them paying taxes and all that and there was someone of Irish descent who proposed this and it went through. So it was like a lottery system but there was a high percentage of Irish people were allowed to apply for it and then they did one next year the Morrison visa anyway... Because my brother had been living illegally and he was applying for these, he put all... I didn't even want to go but he put me and my younger brother's name in the lottery as well so we got it and he didn't. So we were living in Ireland and we didn't even want to go. He ended up getting married anyway and you know, he married his girlfriend and he got his visa through her.

We just went over kinda just to activate visas, just to try it out and visit them as well. My sister she was being sponsored so she had a job and then she ended up getting a visa in the next round. I think kinda everyone then ended up getting a visa, so I went over and there was a whole bunch of my friends then who all applied as well in the next round and everyone got them so there was a whole bunch of us who kinda moved over and we said we'd go for 6 months to New York and then move on San Fransico, that was our plan and then 14 years later I was still in New York. And then I decided to move back to Sligo.

### **So what brought you back to Sligo? Why Sligo? Why not Dublin?**

Because when I was in New York my son's father, he was originally from Ireland but had moved there when he was 16 and so for me would come he was from Dublin and then when we'd come back and we'd visit his family and my family and then usually try and go somewhere else like you know just explore another part of the country and then one time we went to Sligo, neither of us had been and we both had heard nice things about it and we decided to go and he had one friend who had moved down to Sligo so we just went and visited. When we were staying here we both just loved it as soon as we arrived we loved it and then he said I have this friend who lives somewhere around, I'll look him up and went to visit them and we just loved their set up. He was an artist, he had his art studio, they lived on this converted farmhouse and it just seemed especially coming from New York, you know living in these tiny apartments and here is all this nature and you know all the things we were dreaming of and these people were kind of living this idealistic notion of what we thought we wanted to do so we started looking at houses and buying a cottage and doing it up. When we'd been in Ireland before we looked at a few places to end like Aaron islands in Galway and we looked around and Sligo just felt really special and it also was people were much more welcoming like when we were in Galway we were kind of regarded as strangers and when we were in the Gaeltacht area we didn't speak Irish language. We drove all around the county and used to come back then, that was kind of our trip back then and at the time like you know the estate agents would either post over or fax us brochures so we were often with a map trying to find places from fax, pictures and anytime we stopped and asked people like people were just always really welcoming. So we just really liked it and when we ended up finding place and then needs to come back and do the college and then we had our kid and then we ended up still coming back.

But then we broke up and then I went back to New York. It was just very hard being a single parent. I was working in the film industry and living in these small shitty places but very expensive. But it was not like you know I had family and friends around me and all that but it was and also I was thinking about his secondary school. The primary schools are brilliant there but it depends on where ye get into secondary school again it's a bit randomly selected.

**OK so you were talking about people being welcoming so what would be your definition of belonging and when do you know that you truly belong?**

When I decided to move, it was really really hard to leave coz I really felt I belonged in New York.

**How did you know? What made you feel like that?**

I suppose it might just be habit that you just get used to things and you know what you know and what you're used to but there was a strong sense community, there was um you know I liked people that I worked with, the people that I... see it is very different in New York because you don't have... you don't really know your neighbours, you know people in your neighbourhood coz you get to know them and New York is very neighbourhoody so like everything you need is kind of within a 10 block radius so I mean people obviously go outside their 10 block radius but in I mean and that's a random number but you know like you because there's so many people everything's in very close proximity anyway but you don't really know your immediate neighbours or who's living beside you or who's in the apartment next door, who you're hearing all the time and people are kind of generally wary too. But then there's some... really strong sense of community within your neighbourhood and even an identity within your neighbourhood. Those neighbourhoods are very very different even just a few blocks apart. So it's really was about the connections with who I was working with, socialising with, parenting with you know cause you have to go on play dates or you go to the park, like you arrange to go to the park cause the kids can't be let out on their own and that was one of the reasons why I wanted to move here. And when I decided to move here I wanted my son to have a better life like our childhood convert freedom that I would have experienced and that I could see kids in Ireland had a better experience. Kids in America do too is just in the city where we were but I didn't want to... I felt if I was gonna make the move I don't wanna move outside the city cause all my supports and community were around me and to be living outside the city and have bigger commutes and have sort of... it was hard enough being a single parent and juggling everything on the minding and the work and everything and so when I wanted to move back here it was right just before the recession hit again so it was like boom. When I came back if I thought if I went to Dublin which it would have made more sense for me to go to Dublin cause I had family and friends there but I would have encountered the same problems as in high rent, working hard to pay the rent... like if I was gonna stay in the city, New York was a better city for me. So I then at one point Oh yes sorry I was actually saying it was really hard to leave New York coz I felt like I really belonged there but for my son's welfare and happiness which would ultimately have a knock on effect on my wellbeing and happiness so I felt like that it was time to leave but I couldn't actually get up and leave, I needed to let New York fall away so before whenever I come for the summer and spent summer here I like I'd be crying leaving and going back to New York on why am I going back and then within a day like I just adjusted again but I just felt it was too overwhelming to leave what was my home and



the home that my son knew all his life. Like he had come back here in summers so he knew life here too.

**So how would you define belonging in your words?**

It's really hard. In line... I suppose, it's having like connections and friendships and someone's got your back and you've got someone's back, you can rely on people, you know. As well like when you don't have a partner you're sure more reliant on friends and you know and then there was other people like you know other single parents that we would help each other out and also I felt coming back here like if people were gonna be judging as like the country I would've left would have been kind of more judgemental and more conservative and it is now until I was kind of going like and then I even coming to Sligo thinking I'm being more conservative but I knew I didn't know at this stage I didn't know few people or new people who've moved back from New York as well to Leitrim and I knew some friends from Dublin who moved to Leitrim like I'd say I knew about 6 people and it's funny coz I probably hardly ever saw... The original couple that I knew I would see them still a lot but the others... but I thought Oh yeah I know these people and they were into films as well and you know and I never see them.

**Okay, what about home? How would you define home and where is home for you?**

Say, Christmas now... I would say I'm going home to my parents' house, they are still there and my brothers and sisters, their kids and stuff are coming home for Christmas too and I would still say I'm going home but when I'm there I say I'm coming home to Sligo. I mean for me I think Sligo is home now and especially in relation to my son because he you know I thought when he is going off to college I was thinking yes like when he's done this leaving cert I can go travel and I can do all these things and then I realised oh no this is his home, I can just up and leave and he still needs home and now he actually comes home every weekend nearly cause he's working in Sligo at the weekends.

**So how would you define then, what is home?**

For me I suppose it's being more around like where you're feeling comfortable, like when you're feeling comfortable with people around you because say like I was renting for the first six years I was here so I was in different physical houses but I still liked where I was living and I had made had formed relationships with within my community again. I suppose for me it's more about you know when you are single that it's more about your connections with your community and friends.

**So it's a feeling of... feeling good within your surroundings...**

Yeah, and again knowing that people have your back and knowing that people you know that you can rely on each other, like a friend of mine who is also a single parent, she was just recently like she had a heart emergency thing, ended up in A&E and you know and she rang me to say would I be able to like pick up her daughter and feed her things like that and knowing like that you know and she was just kinda contemplating on that going like when you are on your own you don't have that partner or family to rely on like before I probably would have said home is family but it's not but it's who you make your family cuz it's not necessarily your blood family.

**So would you say then that... do people create home or do they find home and if they create it, what creates it?**

I'd say it's both it because you can create a home, create a home is like you're creating an environment for people but like your home bring people into your home then like say recently where have brought you know there's a... I have a new partner, well he's not that new, he's few years now and you know he's part of... It can evolve, it can change, it changed its circumstances that you would like saying when I... when me and my son and his dad (when me and his dad were together) that was you know like to me like I was so happy, this is our home like the physical... the tiny little apartment in New York that wasn't really suitable and then we had this cottage in Sligo that wasn't suitable either like didn't have a roof or a bathroom. Physically speaking they weren't that all that but it was still our home but then when he left I had to sort of reclaim that space and even coming down to Sligo as well like as you know coz that's where we broke up was in Sligo and he went off with someone else so for me it was still quite raw kind of place and then when I went back to New York as we were here and then September the 11<sup>th</sup> happened and whatever those few instances happened so we didn't go straight back. My son had asthma and then the air quality is bad there you know. I delayed going back and I had to kind of reclaim that sense of that apartment coz I know I'm back to that apartment like he moved out and I went into that apartment with my son and you know I had to sort of re-establish that this is my home now and remove the kind of hurt and memories or something or get on with it or move forward and you just do and even I was thinking about this as I was driving past the old houses that I was renting (well, I rented 2 before) and thinking like I don't even think about that house anymore. Even though I still have memories of stuff we did but yeah I suppose for me the physical space it helps your environment but it's not really about physical home. But like now I bought my own place. For me I suppose it's more about where it is and who I'm surrounded by and what I'm surrounded by. Although I never thought I would live in a housing estate but I do.

**So would you say then this is the final stop?**

No.

**So you see yourself moving or you could be moving?**

Yeah, well I still have notions of travelling because maybe I didn't do so much travelling when I had a child. I mean I did, I did bits but... I had a good chat when my partner was asking if I wanted to move to where he lives. I was like no way. But like he's only renting and I was like this is my home and obviously it's my son's home. I imagine that I'd always have this home but I would maybe rent it out and go try somewhere else for a bit. And I thought about going back to America even like just to go back for a while, work you know but then I only thought about that in the last year. Then I had no interest in going back, it was done, over and done with. And the people that mattered to me that were so important and made up my community I don't see anymore. But no, I do, like the ones that kind of really close ones, like this one girl... 2 were from Ireland and one she was one of those who moved over... actually, there's a few people there who we moved over with originally you know so they still come back and visit, I still see them and then the others are my family and they come back but I haven't been over there.

**So would you say that your understanding of home and belonging has changed as the time went by and how?**

Or I didn't really spend much time think about it. It just was or is, you know... Or like say my brother has broken up with his wife or fiancée and they've been together for 7 years and they have a load of kids between them and all that. I suppose I associate home with family maybe whatever your family is and he's just completely devastated and like doesn't want to be living where he's living and is was only about the family and only about all of them so I suppose when I was looking at that thing and he's always complaining about where he lives, so I was kinda going well like that home environment... but like I would be looking at him thinking you have to recreate you know... Yes, it hurts and it's painful and it's horrible to have a break up but actually you have it yourself you know cause I was thinking I'm going to be seeing him for Christmas thinking like is he still moping about this. I know that sounds terrible. Like it's probably 6 months or whatever so... and it was a big break up but he doesn't like the town he's living in and I think that's what made him realise that she made it bearable but I still think like he it's within yourself to make it work. Because like even like the various houses or apartments or things that I lived in that you know that one without the toilet or one without the roof whatever you know he just like yes of course you want them to be better but you know they are what they are so this level of creating that your own environment.

**It's just like with anything, if we don't like something we have to change something about it, like it's not going to magically change itself.**

Even if it's just changing your attitude.

**Would you say then that home and belonging is the same concept or two different things?**

I think they are 2 different things because you can still belong somewhere and you escaped your own private home. I feel like I belong in Sligo now but my home is very much my private space that Sligo isn't in.

**It's like a different dimension, like separate little world...**

**So what do you think then, in your opinion, what is the role of adult education - is it grounding or is it liberating and why?**

I think you do it to open up and liberate yourself but the more embedded you become in it, you end up being more grounded in the society or community. Or people even who go away and come back to it...

**You mean, they go somewhere abroad and then they come back?**

Yeah, like even if they went to Dublin to study and they often come back well maybe I don't know... I suppose it depends on the type of adult education as well. If it's addressing a particular set of skills that are needed in one place or if you can travel with them.

**So is there anything else that you would like to add or anything else that I haven't said or haven't mentioned or in relation to home and belonging and adult education and its role look within the context?**

I suppose maybe while you're partaking in adult education in your area that will ground you more because you have to be there, you have to participate. Maybe it's actually about an age

and a state of life thing that maybe if you are younger or less responsibilities you know like say if you don't have kids or if your parents are well and young, you don't have the kind of family responsibility or you have like siblings or people who don't need you know have special needs or anything like that so if you don't have responsibilities that it's where it can open it up for you and you can go but maybe... Say a lot of my students in Access you know a lot of them are only doing this course specifically in Saint Angela's because they are coming to education later in life or they are returning to it and having never finished it but they are in a situation now where you know either they bought a home here, their parents are here, their children are here, for whatever reason...

**They call it 'positive constraints' – something that holds them or doesn't allow them to do something.**

So they are very much returning to stay here.

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