Where do I go from here?

The leading factors in voluntary return or remaining in Ireland.

IOM International Organization for Migration

This publication is funded by the national Return Fund allocations, managed by the Dept of Justice and Equality. The project was of one year duration commencing in July 2010, and being finalised with the publication of this research in July 2011.

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Foreword

IOM Dublin has been providing Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVR) programmes in Ireland since 2001. 2011 marks the tenth anniversary of the provision of AVR services. During these ten years of service provision, IOM Dublin has constantly strived to provide the most appropriate services to meet migrant needs, in the context of promoting migration for the benefit of all.

From small pilot programmes in 2001, IOM Dublin AVR services have grown to provide assistance to migrants from over 80 countries returning home in a safe and dignified manner. Reintegration assistance was gradually added to the comprehensive return services provided by the Dublin office, and we strive to provide new and innovative approaches to the post return assistance available to each person wishing to return home.

In this report, we hear the voices of migrants themselves – their hopes and dreams, and the journey they have taken, both literally and figuratively. These narratives will help us understand their life journeys and consider the key factors which may influence the future paths they take. Listening to these stories, and learning from them, we aim to continue to build our programmes and services in line with migrant needs and aspirations.

IOM Dublin
July 2011

Acknowledgements

Many people participated in this research and very many others were of assistance over the last 12 months.

First and foremost, a large number of migrants gave freely of their time. Many an enjoyable and productive hour was spent in their company. I for one was regularly humbled by the generosity of spirit extended to me by these research participants.

A number of “expert commentators” contributed to this project as well. Busy people, working in both statutory and non-statutory organizations, welcomed me into their places of work and gave generously of their time and expertise. While not a central trust of the project, these inputs were invaluable in helping me to understand the dynamics of the migration/integration landscape, at the local level.

The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) , Department of Justice and Equality, Government of Ireland assisted the project, at every level. The free access granted to RIA’s accommodation centres was of particular help. Indeed, it is fair to say that it would have been extremely difficult for the project to progress, if this level of assistance was not in place. Local staff were always helpful and accommodation centre managers and staff regularly assisted with my often untutored requests for information and access.

A special word of thanks is due to Reiner Schmitz and the staff of IOM Dublin. IOM Dublin was hugely supportive of the project. Siobhan O’Hegarty was warmly welcoming and consummately professional at all times and provided enormous support and guidance throughout. Theodora Suter’s valuable inputs must be gratefully acknowledged as well. The project’s reviewers must also be acknowledged. Their timely and insightful comments did much to strengthen the text of the project report and I thank them for their willingness to lend their expertise in this way.

Dr. Liam Coakley.

Executive summary

Introduction

This project was commissioned by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with funding from the European Return Fund and the Department of Justice and Equality, Government of Ireland, in order to help develop effective migration management policies in Ireland by shedding light on immigrants' decision to stay in Ireland or return to their country of origin.

A non-directive approach was taken. A series of initial meetings were held with key actors and some baseline data was gathered using an initial social survey and a series of five focus group discussions (FGDs) with asylum-seekers and irregular migrants. However, this research design was influenced most strongly by developments that have occurred in biographical/life narrative research and a series of 61 detailed case-studies were conducted on top of this initial data set. This type of research seeks to use the actual voices of the participants to illustrate common experiences beyond that which is possible in an analysis of answers given to standardized questions. The migrant's experience of life in Ireland and his/her understanding of that experience was placed at the centre of the analysis and the project was structured around a series of detailed but highly individual, personal interactions, not around the compilation of answers to questions. In this way, the experiences of the individual were placed at the centre of the research and all analyses were based on a rigorous primary engagement with asylum-seekers'/ irregular migrants' experiences in this country.

The Decision To Stay Or Return

The decision to stay in Ireland or return to a country of origin is a dynamic one, influenced by a mixed pallet of structural and personal factors and anchored in the transnational imaginaries of the people who need to make it. When asked directly and allowed to articulate their own understandings in their own time, the vast majority of research participants swept back and forth between their country of origin, their current life in Ireland, and their hopes and aspirations for their future and, as such, a wide range of both objectively measurable and personally subjective influences were referenced by every research participant. This dynamism needs to be embraced. Even a seemingly discrete impulse such as the decision to stay in Ireland or return to a person's country of origin can be constructed in a situationally fluid and changeable manner

with the immigrant's engagement, with the idea ebbing and flowing between two poles depending on a plethora of considerations. In this way, as stated in Chapter 1, the decision to return is best conceptualized in terms of "cross-pressures to remain or return" (Dashefsky et al., 1992).

That said, some influences are firmly anchored in Ireland. Others are more clearly anchored in the country of origin.

Ireland's Migration Control System and the Impulse To Return

The migrants who participated in this research are subject to the workings of a legal process in Ireland. This process will ultimately determine whether they are allowed to remain resident in this country or whether they will be required to return to their country of origin. It does not, however, prevent people from wishing to make their lives in this country and I find that no mythology of return is in place.

The length of time spent waiting for a decision impacts on even the most steadfast of people and many otherwise determined migrants can come to question their prospects in Ireland and therefore the very validity of their decision to come to this country. However, I see no evidence to support contentions that the length of time a migrant spends subject to an asylum application will have a direct impact on the desirability of return. Many interviewees have spent a significant number of years in the asylum process. Almost none of them are happy to think about return. Rather, most will continue to look forward, in the hope of a positive outcome.

Rather than wearing people down, the workings of the Irish migration control process may actually reinforce the need to stay put and ultimately undermine the impulse to return to country of origin. Very many people currently housed in the direct accommodation system have simply made too much of an investment in the refugee-asylum process in this country. People are loath to opt out, given the investment already made. Many may simply feel that it is better to stay put than return into what is a potentially unknown situation, but the interviews conducted during this research lead me to believe that the often extreme experience of infantilization in direct provision means that some migrants may simply not be capable of engaging with such ideas, laterally. This is supported by the number of people who simply refuse to countenance the idea of return, even in situations where the quality of their life could conceivably be much improved in another place.

It is inevitable, in this context, that many people will become burdened by ideas of failure. Such thoughts can be particularly strongly felt among longer-term residents of the Reception and Integration Agency's (RIA) direct provision system, but rather than acting as a prompt to change their life path, these people invariably reach a point where the idea of return becomes confused and difficult to differentiate from the idea of failure and forced return.

The Government of Ireland is in a difficult position here. The length of time that migrants experience in the system is a function of Ireland's attempts to create a humane pattern of migration management that extends "due process" to all, but the longer the time spent in direct provision, the more difficult it is for the resident to think about alternatives.

In this regard, it would be naive to suggest that the Irish state's use of forced return as a final sanction for "failed" asylum-seekers will not structure immigrants' engagements with the idea of return in some way. However, just as length of time in the system is not commonly presented as a prompt to return, very few of the people who participated in this research state that they would consider the prospect of return to their country of origin on foot of fears over the possibility of deportation and I find very little to support the contention that the presence of a deportation threat impacts directly on individual migrants' decisions to stay or leave. While people are aware of the possibility of deportation and of return, most seem to adopt a "wait-and-see approach" and will not actively engage with the idea of voluntary return until it is too late and they are in receipt of a deportation letter.

It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, that the simple presence of a return programme does not promote the idea of return among the people interviewed here. There are reasons for this, of course. Despite pronouncements from the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector in general, IOM Dublin is clear in its wish to: i) inform people about return and ii) facilitate a decision that has been made, but to avoid actively encouraging people to return and, by association, promoting their own role in the process. This is a conceptually correct course. Return programmes operate best when they facilitate a decision that is already made and do not engage in self-promotion. Unfortunately, this means that some people are simply not aware of the option to return voluntarily, and others who are mindful of the possibility do not fully understand the dynamics of the process. Furthermore, the idea of return seems to suffer disproportionately from misinformation about the experience. I have encountered many stories told about difficulties encountered by migrants who have made a decision to return to their country of origin. These are inevitably third-party stories of the "I know a man" type and are therefore likely to be apocryphal in nature, but in that, they serve to illustrate an essential truth – many immigrants resident in Ireland do not know about return and the types of assistance that are available to them once the decision to return is made.

People simply do not understand where return programmes fit and even immigrants who are aware of their presence are mistaken about the nuances of their remit. It must be stated, however, that this simply reflects the general lack of engagement with the idea of return that was uncovered here and is not a comment on IOM's operational "footprint" in the Irish migration management landscape.

The decision to stay in Ireland is routinely layered with a discourse of safety and justifiable flight from danger, but economics are implicated as well.

Discourses Of Safety, Political Difficulty and Economic Opportunity

The vast majority of people who participated in this research state that they came to Ireland in search of protection from "danger" and that they had no intention of emigrating from their country of origin until a particular, and often unforeseen, difficulty drove them to leave. In this way, a discourse of "justifiable flight" is commonly invoked. Some people refer to an experience of imminent danger anchored in a particular set of circumstances. Others point to a sense of impending doom arising from appreciations of danger anchored in difficulties experienced by family, friends and wider personal contacts. Others still refer to more generalized experiences arising from structural difficulties present in their country of origin or from a general feeling of unease arising from wider patterns of inequality and injustice.

These appreciations are commonly presented in political terms and many of the immigrants interviewed during the course of this research firmly anchor their decision to leave their country of origin in articulations of difficulty arising from: i) personal political activity, ii) the political activities of those close to them, iii) difficulties arising from the persecution of the group to which they belong, or iv) a general appreciation of danger arising from a poor pattern of political leadership in their country of origin. In this way, most people's need to "flee" their country of origin is presented in terms that fit with the workings of the 1951 Convention on the Rights of the Refugee. In turn, these motivations structure most contemplations on return to country of origin and, unsurprisingly, very few people state that they are open to the prospect of return whilst they feel that the conditions that prompted them to leave their country of origin remain in place. Fears about the likelihood of experiencing personal violence are especially common. Interestingly, however, this general appreciation can be anchored in a much wider contemplation of need, and even migrants who happily relate the detail of their personal difficulties invariably seek to locate it in wider terms.

The intersection of difficulty, broadly based, and lack of opportunity in the country of origin proves to be a very powerful motivation to move and, conversely, a disincentive to return. Very many narratives follow a similar pattern. The decision to leave is anchored in a discourse of unexpected flight and life in Ireland is valued on foot of its order and predictability, but thoughts of return do not arise and are mostly anchored in discourses of economic need and wider structural difficulty in the country of origin.

While it is difficult to use this complex intertwining of economic motivations and political difficulty to question the validity of any individual's engagement with the language of "safety" and humanitarian need to develop a "flight narrative", immigrants' tendency to valorize their experience of political difficulty over and above their experience of multiple difficulty in their country of origin, it does beg the question whether this language is simply being used to project a migrant biography that offers the best chance of successfully applying for residency in this country. Many policymakers and migration "managers" can find this shifting quality particularly difficult to understand but this is

to miss the nuanced reality of the migration decision-making process – a process which cannot be easily reduced to one particular motivation. Even those who can be categorized as political refugees may have experiences of economic hardship and difficulty and even those deemed to be economically motivated may experience hardship arising from their personal lives.

This quality must be borne in mind in any consideration of the return decision. More personally, subjective understandings are important as well.

Return, Family Life and Subjective Appreciations of Well-Being

An individual's subjective understanding of his/her place in life is important in any decision to stay in Ireland or return to country of origin. Such appreciations are very difficult to assess but family and community are important. In the classic manner, an individual will internalize the likely experiences he/she will have in this regard transnationally and the decision to stay in Ireland or return will be made by assessing the absolute merits of life in one location over the other.

Individual migrants grapple with concerns about the sustainability of their return. Potential returnees are conscious of the need to re-engage with their country of origin but most are apprehensive and many question their very ability to successfully reintegrate into their old communities and life patterns.

Length of time spent away from the individual's country of origin weighs on many migrant minds. In extreme instances, research participants feel that they have lost their sense of connection with their country of origin. This may be especially the case in instances when the returnee may simply have grown as a person in Ireland and may not now embrace the same social and cultural register as their counterparts who did not leave. This loss of connection is a common and important experience and, in this regard, conceptualizations that view the migrant as someone who is "out of place" in their host society who needs to be returned to their "rightful" country are inherently misplaced as the idea of "home", as we know it, may no longer exist for the migrant, or at the very least, may be temporarily inaccessible to the individual concerned.

Many migrants worry about their ability to re-embed in their previous family and community structure. These worries act as a powerful disincentive, even in the face of other more positive conditions. Equally, even though most returnees will have had a strong pre-emigration social network, and most people feel that they had many friends in their country of origin, the vast majority of people who participated in this research feel that the experience of migration has diluted this social resource and most feel that the opportunity to re-embed into their pre-migration friendship networks has passed. Potential returnees are consequently apprehensive. This can give people pause for thought. In some instances, such stress may arise from the simple recognition that the individual has nothing to return to.

Many people struggle with ideas of success and failure. The idea that they have been resident in a Western context and have not achieved a level of financial success weighs on many immigrants' minds. They particularly worry about how they will be perceived once "back home". In many instances, this type of thinking can lead to feelings of failure and shame as the potential return migrant experiences a loss of self during the return process and his/her lack of economic success gets mapped onto his/her sense of self-worth.

This potential sense of failure can be further exacerbated in instances where a migrant may have borrowed money to fund his/her movement. Some people simply cannot return because they do not have the money to repay the debts they incurred in coming to Ireland. It is a matter of course that many migrants utilize an agent to facilitate their movement from the sending country to the destination country. Sums of many thousands of dollars regularly change hands in such transactions. This will inevitably add a further layer of difficulty, and immigrants contemplating return may very well be prompted to remain their destination country rather than return to face a debt, even one which is most likely owed to a close family member or relative.

An effective post-return assistance programme might help in this regard. IOM's return grant component of their AVR programmes is one example of such a potentially useful input that has been operating in many international contexts. Equally, however, the size of the grant is not attractive and does not serve as an inducement to encourage people to opt for assisted voluntary return (AVR) by itself. As in all other discussions of return, "big picture" economic and political concerns structure many engagements with the idea of a return grant. Those who valorize the importance of political safety over other potential motivations dismiss the presence of the grant, out of hand. In this light, it is difficult to support contentions now common in literature, which state that IOM's AVR programmes are best seen as part of a neo-liberal "deportation turn" premised on the subtle enlisting of migrant cooperation via targeted information and assistance.

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

Some factors that impact on the decision to stay or return are anchored in Ireland and can therefore be impacted upon by policy responses instituted in this jurisdiction.

i) Hopes for life in Ireland encourage people to stay

Many aspects of life in Ireland are attractive and motivate people to stay in this country. Even people living in "temporary" accommodation readily engage with the imaginaries of life in this country. In many ways, this simply serves to illustrate the nature of the migrant condition more generally. People move out of a desire for a better life. Migrants have enough exposure to the rhythms of life in this country to understand that in many respects, their likely quality of life will be higher in Ireland than in their country of origin. People understand that most applications for residency are rejected by the Irish authorities but they continue to live in hope. In some ways, this insistence that a life in

Ireland remains possible flies in the face of any objective assessment of the situation. In particular, all such understandings are built on the migrant's belief that they will be in a position to work and therefore earn money in this country. Any analysis of current patterns will show that this is unlikely to transpire for most. People wait, and hope that the specificities of their case will be deemed sufficient. This is not a strong position to adopt, for either the individual or the state, and should be countered through the fostering of an effective assessment system that identifies the specificities of each case early and provides all necessary information to the individual concerned.

There is a clear need to educate migrants about the full range of options available to them. A wider and earlier engagement with the idea of return would pay dividends, I believe, not just for the state but for the individual as well. Too many people who participated in this research are living an institutionalized existence. The vast majority are clearly very closed to the prospect of return. In my opinion, this does not automatically signal the presence of a strongly held view but rather is likely to be an expression of the individual's inability to engage with options laterally. Increased outreach and more proactive information provision is needed at every level of the migration management process. There is a particularly strong need to disseminate information that counters the multitude of perceived threats to personal safety in a person's country of origin. Specialist service providers can only do so much. A far wider-ranging engagement with the idea of return is needed. Both statutory and non-statutory organizations need to embrace this idea. I would suggest that the option to return be more widely advertised, even at point of entry to the state. While this may constitute a strain on people seeking political asylum, it is a better practice to have a realistic picture painted at the outset, albeit with due consideration given to the potential for trauma in individual instances.

Migrant advocacy organizations have a role to play here as well. There is a sense that many of these organizations do not fully embrace the idea of return to country of origin or the fact that, oftentimes, return represents the best option for an individual. While IOM is clear that it regularly referred migrants from organizations active in the NGO sector, many organizations state that they will only recommend the return option when they feel that all other options have been exhausted.

A more integrated engagement with return, based on the principles of partnership, would constitute a useful development in this regard. The presence of an AVR programme alone cannot motivate people to think of return.

ii) AVR is valued but its presence alone does not encourage return

Some people are simply not aware of the voluntary return programme's existence. Others are mindful of its presence but do not fully understand its role. The take-up on such programmes could be increased by more effective advertising of their presence. IOM cannot do much more than it presently does to advertise the presence of its AVR programmes. The Organization is strongly committed to information dissemination. Nevertheless, literature on return is rarely evident in accommodation centres. Indeed,

given its current remit, I see very little evidence of IOM's ability to increase its current profile, without the cooperation of all others active in the Irish migration landscape. Such specialist return programmes should be operational in Ireland, but they rely, by their very nature, on information pathways operating smoothly at a number of levels within the broader Irish migration control system. This does not happen in this country. People simply do not understand where AVR fits and even immigrants who are aware of IOM are commonly mistaken about the nuances of its work, especially its remit to facilitate a decision that has already been made – not to promote an option that has not been decided upon. More effective information is needed about the return programmes that are available in this country and this information needs to be disseminated far earlier in each individual's experience in Ireland and more proactively by all stakeholders.

It might be useful to separate the idea of voluntary return more firmly from the use of forced repatriation. Many migrants are mindful of the role that deportation plays in the Irish migration control system. This will "muddy the waters" for many – especially as many get much of their information from informal circuits of knowledge. While it is unlikely, given the centrality of forced return in this country's migration control system, the threat of forced return must be separated from any engagement with the idea of voluntary assisted return.

Other influential factors are more firmly anchored in the country of origin. These are difficult to address via responses instituted in this country.

iii) Discourses of safety encourage people to stay

Most people place a great deal of emphasis on their likely quality of life in their country of origin. Discourses of safety and justifiable flight are commonly invoked and very few people state that they are open to the prospect of voluntary return whilst they feel that the conditions that prompted them to leave their country of origin remain in place. This discourse is layered with complexity. Time and again, people will consciously project one particular image in response to a direct question only to range far and wide in the conversation that arises from that start point. In this way, references to economics, politics, social matters, cultural practices, community affiliations and personal lifestyle choices are routinely brought into rationales for migration that are initially and stridently anchored in the idea of flight.

Irish organizations can do very little to counter this perception of danger in country of origin. It is tempting, in this light, to state that if the Irish government is truly interested in the welfare of returnees then it should seek to play a more fundamental role in the lives of returnees, post return, possibly via the institution of a comprehensive monitoring programme. This is an unrealistic goal, in the current economic climate but more modest inputs can still yield observable results. For example, positive stories of return might be usefully disseminated on a wider level than is currently the case. Opportunities to

resettle could also be advertised. A wider engagement with positive stories of return, along the lines of IOM's current leaflet and DVD campaign, could certainly constitute a useful intervention here.

iv) Apprehensions about "settling back" discourage people from returning

Many people especially struggle with ideas of success and failure and worry about how they will be perceived should they return to their sending country. The idea that they have been resident in a Western context and have not achieved a level of financial success weighs heavily on many minds.

Inputs to counter this feeling may be useful here. The ability to contribute to a person's country of origin, in non-material terms, might help. Migrants who feel that they have learned something in their host society might be more able to think about returning if they returned under the guise of someone returning to contribute to their community. Certainly, there is some international evidence to suggest that migrants who feel that they have invested in skills and competences whilst abroad are more comfortable with the idea of return. The Irish migration control system does not help in this regard. While some educational inputs are available and while the idea of training and educating people who have not been granted residency in the state is conceptually problematic, the provision of more training inputs might actually serve to increase the attractiveness of return. Pre-return training might constitute a useful intervention here. This could be particularly useful for skilled migrants whose skill level has declined as a function of their inability to work in Ireland. A migrant who has opted to avail of an AVR programme could be provided with a short but intensive course targeting particular skill sets and valorizing new techniques. Existing educational/training organizations could be engaged to provide such training. Similarly, unskilled migrants opting to return could be provided with short applied courses in skills relevant to the workplace.

Current mechanisms, such as IOM's return grant, could be remodelled to provide for more forms of such non-financial assistances. The continuance of an effective return and reintegration assistance programme will still remain a useful input. However, current programmes show that the provision of a return grant is not a panacea for the worries of return. As in all other discussions of return, "big picture" economic and political concerns structure many engagements with the idea of a return grant. Those who valorize the importance of safety over other potential motivations dismiss the presence of the grant, out of hand. The principle of non-financial assistance is worthy of further examination.

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Introduction

It may be a little predictable to begin, as many do, by making the somewhat hackneyed observation about the flows that transformed Ireland from a country of emigrants to an attractive site of immigration between 1997 and 2007 now being reversed and stating, as a consequence, that this country is again best seen as a peripheral emigrant nursery in the globalized world economy. Nevertheless, patterns have come full circle and the Irish population is once again moulded more significantly by the outflow of Irish-born people than by any equivalent inflow of immigrants.[1] Only a few years have passed since the height of Ireland's experience as an immigrant destination, but it now seems extraordinary that experienced commentators such as MacEinri (2007: 248) were confidently forecasting that immigrants to Ireland and their descendants would eventually account for 20 per cent of the population of this country at that time. Be that as it may, the experience of mass immigration to Ireland in the period between 1997 and 2007 changed this country enormously and, irrespective of current migration patterns, a more multicultural and multi-ethnic population is present in Ireland today than at any time in our history.

This project has been commissioned by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with funding from the European Return Fund and the Department of Justice and Equality, Government of Ireland, in order to help develop effective migration management policies in this country. In so doing, and drawing on Pinger's (2009: 144–145) assertion that an understanding of the decision to stay or return is fundamental to the institution of effective migration policy, IOM/INIS (Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service) are seeking to yield clear policy recommendations based on an objective and independent assessment of the factors that influence a migrant to stay in Ireland or return to his/her country of origin. This motivation is especially important in Ireland as, contrary to Harvey's (2006: 103) assertion that there is a global repatriation programme in effect internationally and Black and Ghent's (2006: 17) belief that assisted voluntary return (AVR) has been a common policy response in Europe since the late 1990s, virtually no authoritative studies focusing on the potential for return have been carried out to date, in Ireland.

1 Population and migration statistics show that Ireland experienced a net migration rate of -34,500 in the year to April 2010. The largest group (by nationality) leaving the country were Irish born people (CSO, 2010: 1)

More than this however, and following on from Black et al. (2004: 15–19) acceptance of the fact that the decision to return is fundamentally influenced by a range of personal, societal and structural factors, the experiences of the individual are placed at the centre of this research. All analyses contained in this report are based on rigorous primary evidence of asylum-seekers'/irregular migrants' experiences in Ireland and any consideration of the impulse to return is situated in this experience. This is important. As Dolan (1999, cited in Harvey, 2006: 90) states, very little emphasis has historically been placed on the motivations of migrants themselves or on the role of social and political context, in consideration of return policy. Specifically, the decision to stay in Ireland or return to a person's country of origin is examined in as wide-ranging a manner as possible, transnationally between the individual's country of origin and current location in Ireland.

1.2 The Return Decision

A developing literature on the return decision is now in place. Abbasi-Shavazi et al. (2005: 13), for example, explore the role that conflict plays in determining the decision to return. Conversely, Ahmed's (2006:35) research on Sudanese migrants resident in Egypt identifies the role that the presence of family has in the decision to return. Elements of personal identity are examined in the literature as well. There is by now an extensive and geographically varied literature on the gendered experience of migration. Sumption (2010: 51) shows how the employment of migrant women lags behind the employment of migrant men in the UK, while IOM (2009: 9) shows how women migrants are more exposed to multiple disadvantages than men by virtue of their gender. Marcus (2009: 192) shows how her female research participants from Brazil held views of their migrant lives in the United States that were diametrically opposed to those held by their male counterparts. An appreciation of the role played by factors such as race and ethnicity is visible in the literature, as well. In this regard, each decision to stay or to return needs to be seen as an entity in and of itself. There are commonalities, however, and a number of ideas and concepts impact on most decisions made.

1.2.1 Voluntariness is a prerequisite for return

Voluntariness is recognized as a prerequisite for effective return. Indeed, Bialcyzk (2008: 6) states that this is a "cornerstone of international protection in respect of refugees". The migrant must choose to return in a voluntary manner, of his/her own free will and free from any coercive influence, and he/she must have all relevant information at his/her disposal.

Unfortunately, even when a broad definition of voluntariness is harnessed (as Black et al. (2004: 6) do when they describe voluntary return as a return decision made, "in the absence of force") this decision is not a linear one. Many layers of choice are implicated in even one decision. For example, many researchers have questioned whether a decision can ever be deemed to be voluntary when it is made against a background structured by a migration management system that uses deportation and forced removal as a

final deterrent. Most countries retain the right to remove an undesirable non-citizen from their jurisdiction. Noll (1999: 269–270) certainly states that many return decisions are made against such a background of compulsion. This is especially the case when a migrant weighs the likely economic, political and psychological costs that will accrue from an experience of forced return to their country of origin, and in this context, voluntary return, should not be seen in the same light as "will-formation in the absence of such threats" (Noll, 1999: 270).

An analysis of some factors that could impact on the voluntary nature of the return decision is contained in Chapter 3.

1.2.2 Return decisions must lead to sustainable lives

In many instances, the success of any return decision will hinge on the successful reintegration of the returnee in his/her country/society of origin and not simply on the mechanistic movement of people from their host countries back to their country of origin. In this regard, as Kraniauskas (2010: 71) states, the returning migrant will need appropriate reintegration assistance to overcome the often multifaceted difficulties he/she faces whilst trying to forge a sustainable return experience.[2]

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has identified three factors deemed to be central to the sustainable promotion of "just" return (Englebrecht, 2004: 101-102, cited in Bradley, 2009: 290). These are: i) physical safety "where there is protection from attack"; ii) legal safety that guarantees "non-discriminatory access to the exercise of civil, economic, social, political and cultural rights"; and iii) material safety that allows for reintegration and long-term economic opportunity. Concern over any one of these broad areas can undermine the attractiveness of return. Harvey (2006: 92), for example, states that "overcrowding in urban areas, poor housing stock, enmity towards other ethnic groups", "gaps in the rule of law", among other things, impact heavily on a migrant's decision to return or not. Black and Ghent (2006: 24) offer a more general conceptualization when they identify four specific factors as being important in this context. These are: i) security and freedom of movement, ii) access to services, iii) access to shelter, and iv) economic opportunity. Noll (1999: 271) goes further when he identifies the lack of proper health care as being an especially difficult issue to surmount in this context, while Malkki (1992) states that factors such as civil strife, war and political instability are as influential as more personal factors in prompting a person to stay in their host country or return whence they came.

The participants in the current research refer to many such issues. Many of these considerations are outlined in Chapter 5.

2 Some research does highlight the difficulties that people have encountered on return to their countries of origin (see for example, Crisp (2000) and Von Lernser (2008)) but this is contentious.

1.2.3 Conceptualizations of family, home and community

Rueben et al. (2009: 908) utilize a useful conceptualization when they state that return can only be sustainable when "returnees are provided with possibilities to become re-embedded in terms of economic, social network and psychosocial dimensions." The sustainability of return is therefore conceptualized as a series of interlinked processes or "mixed embeddednesses" (Rueben et al., 2009: 913) that determine how a person feels and how they can connect with society again. Measurable conditions are correctly recognized as being central to the experience of return but in equal measure, it is important to note the relative importance that each person subjectively places on them. Thoughts on the likely relationship that the migrant will have with their family, friends and community are common.

Re-embedding in the family and the community are important here. Indeed, psychological research shows that family members are important actors in all migration experiences (Tabor and Milfont, in press: 8). Wiles (2008: 128), for example, albeit working in a strongly Western context, feels that this is best summed up in the feelings of familiarity and intimacy that go with such structures and also in the ability of family to help ground the individual in their own personal history and story. This can especially be the case in instances of return.

Ideas of home are central. There tends to be an acceptance of the importance and possibly permanence of home in many considerations of return. Pabon Lopez and Davis (2009), as part of their analysis of Spain's Voluntary Immigration Return Plan, certainly state that most migrants do not move with the express intention of staying away "from home". However, many authors feel that return programmes pivot on an unproblematized acceptance of the existence of a linear relationship between migration and displacement from "home". Return is deemed to be of value as it cancels the displacement brought about by migration and returns the migrant to their "normal" and natural social and economic context, at home (Black and Ghent, 2006: 20). Much research into contemporary migration patterns show such conceptualizations to be inaccurate as the migrant's home place may not be intrinsically desirable any more (Black and Koser, 1999, in Harvey, 2006: 104). This is especially pertinent in situations where, as Sward (2009: 3) states, the returnee may face discrimination as a function of their return status, or as a result of continuing instability in the country. In effect, the mythical idea of home may simply no longer exist for the migrant.

As Ruben et al. (2009: 912) succinctly state, how can people be returning home when in many instances, the very reason for leaving in the first place was that "they did not feel at home there anymore"? McDowell's (1996, in Collyer et al., 2009: 13) study of Tamil refugees leads him to make a similar conclusion when he questions the use of the phrase "returning home" on foot of his observation that many Tamil refugees do "not have a clear sense of what home is" anymore. Migration research has also called into question the idea of community (Malkki, 1992, in Black and Ghent, 2006: 20). Returning migrants are seen to experience often extreme difficulty re-embedding in their communities of origin calling the very validity of return in question also.

Research participants' considerations of home, family and community are examined in Chapter 6.

1.2.4 The experience of migration tends to be transnational in effect

Kreienbrink (2006: 45 –46) offers a good overview of the return decision. Motivational factors in favour of return include neoclassical cost–benefit type of decisions made by a migrant who has decided that his/her migration has not worked and that his/her objectives are not attainable. New economic analyses of a return decision are made once a migration experience is deemed to have served its purpose, maybe in response to economic success in host country. Structural motivations are influential when a migrant assesses the changes that have occurred in a multitude of causative factors and transnational and network motivations are influential when the migratory element of a circular movement is deemed to have served its purpose. Obstacles to return are seen to include the continued relevance of structural causes, expectation barriers in the family and community and personal sense of alienation or weakened social ties.

These are not discrete and separate influences. Each individual decision is impacted by many of these factors, often operating in a subtle and nuanced manner. Classic push and pull factors, that can be personal, social, economic or political in nature, are commonly influential but so too is a person's stage of family life cycle and stage of migrant cycle. Monsutti's (2008: 59) research on Afghan migratory strategies certainly leads him to feel that the experience of international movement cannot be reduced back to a series of easily packaged motivations such as those inherent in the terms "political" refugee or economic migrant. Motivations ebb and flow in the life of the individual, often overlapping in a complex manner. They may be anchored in the migrant's current location or in his/her target location and can act to support a decision to migrate or a decision to return. Dolan (1999), for example, recognizes that there are a variety of "predisposing factors, structural constraints, precipitating events and enabling circumstances in place – which influence the decision to stay or return" (in Harvey, 2006: 95). These influences can prompt a reactive decision to return, possibly in response to a rapidly deteriorating situation in a person's host country, or be conceptualized as a proactive return decision, possibly in response to a personal desire to return to country of origin and employ what has been learned for the benefit of their community and family (see Black and Ghent, 2006: 31). In this way, some authors feel that return is not best examined simply as a result of the interplay between static structural influences and individual motivations (Goss and Lindquist, 1995: 345) but as a result of a dynamic decision-making process. Furthermore, as Koser et al. (2004 : 12–14) state, all influences can be wrapped up in an irrational and often personal engagement with the issues, modulated by elements of personal identity and outlook and the presence or otherwise of attractive and workable policy solutions. If the old truism that migrants move on foot of a desire for something better still holds true, then it is important to view return in terms of the individual migrant's subjective appreciations, in situ.

This fluidity is further complicated by the geographically "stretched" nature of the contemporary migratory experience and by the transnational economic, social and cultural fields in which the migrant operates. As Harvey (2006: 91) states, more generally, "the space available for international intervention is at least in part defined by the socio-economic and political realities of the region itself, especially in potential return destinations. Furthermore, the local political and socio-economic context will interact in complex ways with the perceptions, choices and agency of the refugees and internally displaced persons themselves."

While very few contemporary migrants maintain a classically "simultaneous" physical presence across space (see, for example, Kvisto, 2001: 570–571) many are effectively living their lives "in-between" (Portes, 1997, in Crang et al. 2003: 444). Carvey (2005: 359), for example, is clear when he refers to the many different ways in which migrants create transnational fields across borders and it is now well recognized that: i) migrants maintain "multi-stranded social relations" between their country of origin and their current residential location (Boyle, 2002: 533) and ii) many multidimensional identity spaces are being produced internationally (Smith and Bailey, 2004: 357). There is strong literature plotting the transnational nature of the migratory experience in Ireland as well. For example, Coakley and Healy (in press) show that many immigrants to Ireland operate within a clearly transnational economic field through the financial remittances they send back to family members still resident in their country of origin. Schuerkens (2005: 539) and Tiemoko (2004: 155) are just two of many who recognize the significant influence that such transnational money transfers play in immigrants' countries of origin. In this way, a complex transnationalized identity is constructed, often creating hybrid familial cultural patterns that may indeed represent a migrant's "self-positioning in a new frame of transnational reference" (Pries, 2001: 68). As Gutting (1996: 282) states, ideas of identity are as important in this context as patterns of behaviour. Any decision to stay in a host society or return to a person's country of origin must be anchored in this multidimensional conceptualization across, and indeed above, geographical space.

This transnational experience throws what Dashefsky et al. (1992) termed the "cross-pressures to remain or return" into sharp focus and it is incumbent on any researcher seeking to understand the decision to return to recognize that any migrant decision to stay or return will be conceptualized geographically and will arise out of competing sets of influences to stay or return (Tabor and Milfont, in press: 1).

These decisions, in turn, are often context-specific and are influenced by a raft of determinants operational at a range of levels – from that of the individual and his/her immediate contact group to society as a whole. Collyer et al. (2009: 25), for example, cites the importance of specific extreme events in prompting individuals from Sri Lanka to leave the UK, such as the London bomb attacks of 2005, while Strand et al. (2008) are equally clear when they find that wider structural influences, such as the fear of deportation, exert a significant influence on their Afghani research subjects. As Harvey (2006: 91) states, "the local political and socio-economic context will interact in complex ways with the perceptions, choices and agency" of individuals.

Each different migratory biography is simply an event in itself that needs to be examined in and of itself. A typology of return decision-making factors, if relevant at all, is therefore very difficult to construct. However, what can be said, with some degree of certainty, is that each migration is influenced by factors that can broadly be termed "push", "pull" and "hold", often overlapping and operating both in the direction of migration and the direction of return.

The complexity of this picture is further compounded by the fact that individual migrants may experience extreme difficulty in recalling their experiences and articulating their motivations here. Most life decisions are influenced by factors that are interconnected on many levels and individual thought processes hinge on aspirations, experiences and understandings that are both personal and structural in nature (see also Dolan, 1999). Moreover, international literature is replete with references to the fact that even well-informed and thoughtful people find it very difficult to reflect on their absolute priorities, hopes and aspirations in any changeable context and to articulate them in a meaningful manner. Consequently, it is very difficult to form any overarching view of the issue at hand and to construct an intellectually satisfying "universal" model of migrant decision-making behaviours in this context.

These factors are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 – Methodology.

1.3 The Possibility of Assisted Voluntary Return

Many governments have engaged with the idea of AVR in response to the experience of immigration into their jurisdiction (see, for example, Kraniauskas (2010) for a comprehensive overview of return programmes operational in European member states). Ireland is no exception. A deportation/forced removal programme is operational in this country.[3] However, as is common, the Irish government supports the operation of AVR programmes in this country and AVR is seen as a more preferable option to forcible removal from the state. There is an undoubted financial dimension to this preference. Voluntary return is recognized as a cost-effective and humane way of assisting certain categories of migrants to return home. Equally however, the state recognizes that AVR respects human agency and avoids the difficulties associated with forced repatriation.

As with the historical formulation of much Irish migration policy, however, Irish domestic legislation does not provide a clear statement on return (Quinn, 2009: 2). Local strategic command and control is quite advanced but the Irish government's engagement with the practice of AVR is best described as ad hoc in nature. Some strides have been made in recent years, but most experienced commentators (for example, MacEinri, 2007: 239) tend to see much of this policy response as being reactionary and uninspired in nature. Quinn (2009: 20–28) provides a good and accessible overview of the Irish legal instruments that impact on the conduct of AVR programmes. Predictably, she identifies the significance of Ireland's 1999 Immigration Act, Ireland's participation in the European

3 A total of 343 forced removals were conducted in 2010. So far in 2011, 131 forced removals have been conducted.

Union's Dublin Regulation (Dublin II) and flags the difficulties pertaining to Ireland's muted Immigrant Residency and Protection Bill. Ireland's ability to "opt out" of the EU's Schengen measures that relate to immigration matters is noted as well, as is the dearth of clear policy on AVR.

1.3.1 IOM Dublin and assisted voluntary return

While there is no legally binding instrument in place to govern the conceptualization of repatriation, a number of international instruments do stress the importance of voluntary return. Chetail (2004: 11), for example, refers to the UNHCR's 1951 statute's calls for the commissioner to "facilitate and promote voluntary repatriation" (Bailcyzk, 2008: 7) and the universal declaration of human rights – Article 13(2) makes specific reference to the fact that "everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country" (Black and Ghent 2006: 22). Return is also referenced in the 1969 Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention (article V) and some international human rights instruments make specific reference to such processes (see Bialczyk, 2008: 6). A legal infrastructure governing return is in place, in this regard, and many statutory organizations and state institutions operate such programmes. IOM Dublin, an intergovernmental organization located on 7 Hill St, Dublin, operates Ireland's voluntary return programmes on behalf of the Government of Ireland. IOM Dublin works closely with INIS, Department of Justice and draws funding from Irish governmental sources as well as from Europe.

IOM Dublin has hosted a range of different return programmes over the last 10 years. In the nine years between their inception in 2001 and the end of 2010, IOM Dublin's return programmes assisted 2,838 people to return to their country of origin. While returns to a wide range of destination countries are supported by the programme (see Quinn, 2009: 16), migrants who have availed of this service have mostly returned to locations in Europe, sub-Saharan Africa and South America (http://www.iomdublin.org/projectsVARP.html).

IOM's general voluntary assisted return and reintegration programme (VARRP) is the most significant of these programmes today. A total of 405 returnees availed of this programme in 2009 and 376 returned in 2010. A further 194 people have availed of this service in the first four months of 2011 (IOM Dublin, 2011). IOM Dublin offer the option of AVR to asylum-seekers from non-EU countries and to undocumented and "vulnerable" migrants.[4] "Failed asylum-seekers" who are in receipt of a deportation order are not allowed to avail of this programme, neither are people who are currently the subject of court proceedings in respect of a serious crime.

Once an individual migrant makes his/her decision to avail of a voluntary return programme, he/she will be given access to: operational support in Ireland; transit assistance, should it be required; and operational/ financial assistance in his/her country

4 In 2009, IOM instituted a specific programme to cater for undocumented vulnerable migrants. However, undocumented migrants have been assisted since 2001, on a case-by-case basis.

of origin. Information, counselling and operational support is provided to an applicant. Once an application is approved by the Department of Justice, travel is arranged and the applicant is booked onto a scheduled flight to their destination country, normally the country where they hold citizenship. Transit assistance is provided and, if necessary, IOM will arrange for reception assistance to be provided in the applicant's destination country as well and will assist with the reintegration experience, albeit at one remove.

IOM Dublin is not the focus of this research, but they are referenced by research participants and engagements with IOM Dublin's programmes are contained in Chapters 3 and 5.

1.4 Summary

As Van Hear and Brubaker (2009: 1) state, migration takes many guises. Some migratory movements are voluntary. Others are forced. Some movements are discrete and geographically bounded. Others are more difficult to "pin down". The impulse to leave may be large-scale and sudden in nature, possibly in response to a catastrophic event or a conflict. It may be more local, on foot of difficulties experienced by a particular community or in a particular region. Equally, migratory impulses may have no clear geographical context at all. They may simply develop out of a widespread but diffused engagement with the idea of difficulty in the developing world. They may even be anticipatory in nature, assuming the likely future experience of difficulty of one kind or another and therefore may even have no motivational context, other than the sense of impending difficulty.

Importantly, however, any nuanced study of migration at large will demonstrate that motivations and influences overlap (Monsutti, 2008: 63) and many different factors can input into even one single migratory decision.

Chapter 2
Methodology

2.1 Introduction

A range of different methods and methodological approaches could have been used here – each with its own benefits and drawbacks. Qualitative methods could have been used by themselves to produce highly nuanced data in individual contexts. However, this type of work is extremely expensive to produce correctly, and should not be undertaken without substantial financial support. On the other hand, less detailed quantitative methods could have been used to produce easily replicable data cheaply. Ahmed (2009), for example, uses a range of highly developed quantitative procedures to analyse survey data in respect of her study of the Sudanese population in Greater Cairo. However, the explanatory power of this data is limited in nature, especially in the current context, when nuanced and often highly personal data are required, and, in my opinion, it would have been very difficult to produce an intellectually rigorous treatment of the decision to return from such a data set.

Such considerations are common to all projects that seek to engage with the rhythms of migrant life in Ireland and researchers active in this area must necessarily seek to balance these competing ideologies and design a research method that maximizes their ability to address the parameters of the research call, at the scale required. In this instance, the national nature of the research field and the fact that the target population was likely to be both geographically and socially diverse effectively moulded the design of the methodology used. A combined method was therefore deemed to offer the best chance of success, and a broadly three-part methodological pattern was designed for use, along the following lines: i) Phase 1: interviews with key informants working with migrants and refugees, ii) Phase 2a and 2b: social survey and focus group discussions, and iii) Phase 3: detailed case studies informed by biographical interpretative method. A small number of workshops were also held, in an effort to debrief study participants. Field research commenced on 2 August 2010.

2.2 *Field Project*

2.2.1 *Phase 1: Interviews with key informants (36 interviews)*

A series of initial meetings were held with key actors. These dialogues were used to familiarize the researcher with the dynamics of the target communities and with the policy landscape in general. These interviews tended to be loosely structured around a short list of topics of interest.

The key informants who participated in the research included representatives from national and regional NGOs active with migrant populations (18 individuals), statutory service providers charged with the provision of services for migrants (9 individuals) and staff members working in RIA accommodation centres housing asylum-seekers (9 individuals). This element of the research is important on a number of levels, as these dialogues tend to provide insights that can be used to test statements made during other phases of research (see Appendix I for a list of participants).

2.2.2 *Phase 2: Social survey (sample size: 247) and focus group discussions (5 groups)*

Baseline data was gathered using a social survey of asylum-seekers and irregular migrants (see Appendix II). A total of 247 of these short question-schedules were administered, each containing 40 open-ended questions.[5]

This type of field work has its place in migration research. Moreover, each interaction can be completed rapidly, is relatively inexpensive and yields comparative data of a kind which can be scaled up as required and compared across multiple sites or over time. If done properly, it can be used to explore issues of behaviour and attitude, but only up to a point. There are inherent limits to the extent to which such methods can be used to explore complex and sensitive questions or to gain an understanding of the textures of people's daily lives and the decisions they make. This social and experiential depth was added through the use of the focus group discussions included in research phase 2b.

5 The dynamics of migrant life in Ireland mean that it is exceedingly difficult to gather large groups of relevant people together in one place at one time and much time was spent, at an earlier stage in the research, convincing individual migrants to complete this very basic survey instrument. It quickly became clear that a rigid pursuit of the initial research agenda/timelines in phase 2a would inevitably compromise the project's ability to deliver on the more time-consuming elements of the research project contained in phase 3, and a decision to expedite phase 2b was made. This decision was not a difficult one to make. The completed questionnaires constitute a significant data set in themselves, and an adequate empirical base for use in focus group discussions was produced from these completed questionnaires.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were favoured, in this context, on foot of their ability to gain an understanding of research participants' own views and how they are formed.[6] The value of this approach was two-fold: i) The behavioural data set produced by the social survey could be further examined here. General patterns gleaned from the survey could be subjected to the more dialogic questioning styles inherent in such interactions, areas of special interest could be probed, and potential absences could be addressed. ii) The key issues around individual decision-making process were especially examined in this setting. The ability of these groups to provide a more informal setting for data production than the one-to-one interview was drawn upon here and a more nuanced data set was produced than if a standardized social survey was used alone.

Five FGDs, each consisting of between four and eight people, were completed. A total of 15 Nigerians, six Pakistanis, two Moldovans, three Georgians and one Chinese person participated in these sessions. Importantly, occasional participants from non-target countries contributed to these groups, as well. These included one person each from Kenya, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Ghana, Burundi, Liberia and Sierra Leone. All FGDs were completed in English.

This method had the added benefit of allowing research participants to "reclaim some ownership of their data" by allowing them to discuss broad patterns in the data, consider the researcher's initial analysis, and comment on the progress of the research to date.

It is important to note that the role of the FGD was to probe more deeply into patterns uncovered by the initial social survey. Topics raised for discussion during FGDs were all anchored in the data produced by preceding field methods. They thus represent a logical extension of the field survey and are not best viewed as a stand-alone method. Free-flowing discussions were central to this method but all these discussions were initiated out of data patterns already uncovered. New areas of inquiry did arise out of these discussions but only at the behest of focus group participants themselves. The focus group moderator did not initiate new areas of discussion outside those covered in the primary social survey instrument, unless these were raised by the participants themselves.

2.2.3 Phase 3: Narrative interviews with migrants

A series of 61 case studies were gathered, and a highly nuanced data set was produced. Fifteen people from Nigeria, 18 people from Pakistan, 11 people from the Republic of Moldova and nine from Georgia were interviewed here. A further eight narrative interviews were conducted with non-target nationalities.[7] All but one of the participants currently have applications for residence under consideration in this country. Some have been resident in Ireland for many years, while others are more recently arrived in this country.

6 In line with international best practice, pseudonyms are used throughout.

7 These include interviews conducted with individuals from Rwanda, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Iran, Cuba and Bangladesh. I will never refuse to talk to someone who expresses an interest in the project. Apart from anything else, it is insulting to the person concerned to state that the project is not interested in their stories.

Most participants were interviewed in English (a small number of interviews were conducted with Pakistani, Moldovan and Georgian migrants, in the presence of an interpreter) and all interactions were digitally recorded onto SD cards, to allow for transcription and analysis. These interactions typically took between 1 1/2 and 2 1/2 hours to complete and a highly detailed data set was produced.

While broadly mixed methods such as the quantitative survey instrument and the FGD method used in Part 2 of this project could have been harnessed by themselves to provide a sound empirical understanding of immigrants' experiences of life in Ireland (see, for example, Phelan and Kuol, 2005; Coakley and MacEinri, 2007a), the use of the more deeply qualitative methods harnessed in part 3 of the field project provided a more comprehensive insight into the dynamics of the decision to return than would have been possible if the survey and focus groups were used alone. This is strongly in keeping with recent research in Ireland, which generally shows the complex and often nuanced nature of the migratory experience and the layers of meaning attached to even the most "everyday" of experiences/decisions. It certainly is the contention of the current research project that only detailed qualitative research dialogues can access the layers of meaning routinely tied up with such potentially difficult decisions as to stay in Ireland or return to a person's country of origin (see, for example, Coakley and MacEinri, 2007b; Coakley and Healy 2007; and Coakley and Healy, forthcoming).

There are many different ways of producing such a research project. Feldman et al. (2008), for example, used a series of surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus groups to produce an authoritative study of Chinese, Indian, Lithuanian and Nigerian experiences in Ireland as a whole, while MacEinri and Coakley (2006) and Coakley and MacEinri (2009) used semi-structured interviews and focus groups to examine the challenges and obstacles facing a range of different immigrant groups at a much finer level of analysis in Cork city and county. However, the research design used during this project was influenced most strongly by specific developments that have occurred in what is now generally known as biographical/life narrative research. This type of research seeks to use the actual voices of the participants to illustrate common experiences beyond that which is possible by an analysis of standard answers given to standardized questions (see, for example, Ni Laoire, 2008). No question schedules were used in this section of the field project and individual research participants were given the space to think and talk about their life experiences in whatever order made sense to them, albeit around a central spine of topics relating to the experience of migration and the idea of return. The migrant's experience of life in Ireland and his/her understanding of that experience was placed at the centre of the analysis and this section of the field project consequently pivoted on a series of detailed but highly individual, personal interactions, not on the compilation of answers to questions (Wiles et al., 2005: 90). This is a key strength of the method but, as each research participant was given the space to follow their own thought processes and tell their stories in a manner that made most sense to them, each interaction was different, and highly replicable types of data do not exist in this phase 3 data set.

The choice of this conversational approach was influenced by two assumptions: i) people organize their memories differently and it is therefore difficult to access the complex desires/aspirations tied up with the decision to stay in Ireland or leave using a standardized approach, such as that employed by researchers who use a set question schedule alone; and ii) the very act of asking a question inherently structures the research dialogue and is therefore to be avoided. This current approach provided a more complete picture of potentially nuanced personal decisions than if more structured dialogues were used alone. In this way, an attempt to understand the experiences of the research participants was sought, through the eyes of the people themselves, and the decision to stay or go is firmly anchored in both the realities of the individual's life and the individual's own understanding of those realities.

The immigrants interviewed during this research phase draw on a range of experiences and feelings and are, on the whole, forthright and thoughtful commentators on the experience of trying to settle in Ireland, whilst thinking of "home". These people's words are foregrounded at every opportunity, in the text of this report. In so doing, and after Devlin-Trew (2005: 2), "the actual voices of migrants" are to be used in an effort to uncover meanings "beyond that which is available in a written text."

This type of research is now common in migration studies and much importance is given to "personal stories, memories and experiences of migration" (Blunt, 2007: 686). Finlay, Crutcher and Drummond (2011: 187), for example, adopt such an approach during the research into return to post-conflict South Sudan. Fifteen returnees from Canada were interviewed here. A number of informal workshops were organized to allow the project to provide feedback

2.3 Participant Selection

Participants in this study were selected purposively following two selection criteria indicated in the research project: i) national identity and ii) the nature of the person's legal status in Ireland. Having said this, comment needs to be made about the question of participant selection. This is not a minor issue. Any policy statement arising out of an engagement with migrants living in Ireland will necessarily be strengthened if those who participated in the study can be said to be "typical". Equally, such statements might be weakened, in some eyes, if it is not possible to make such a claim of representativeness.

This dilemma arises in virtually all studies of migrants in Ireland. Only a full-scale baseline study (drawing on a very significant budget) would allow this issue to be addressed. As this was not possible in the present context, a pattern of theoretically sound participant selection was followed instead.

Rather than being selected "randomly", research participants were targeted in a purposive manner and, after Coakley and Healy (2007: 32), a rough "quota system was harnessed to ensure that the people participating in the study were illustrative of the types of people likely to make up" the population of immigrants selected for study by

IOM/INIS. Potential participants were invited to contribute to the research in an effort to ensure that as wide a spread of migrant statuses/experiences as possible were included in the study. These participants were targeted through gatekeeping organizations, such as immigrant organizations and migrant and ethnic-led organizations (MELOs) operational at both the local and national levels; faith-based communities; and RIA direct provision accommodation centres. I then drew on best practice when seeking to engage with potentially "inaccessible" populations by snowball sampling out from these starting points in order to achieve a wider spread, all the while keeping a close eye on the composition of the group participating in the research.

Such considerations were especially pertinent to the progress of research phase 3 – the narrative interviews. This phase, by its very nature, could only be based on a small number of detailed case studies. This small scale may indeed be seen, by some, to constitute a weakness in this research component, especially when seen against the almost certain diversity of experience present in the immigrant community in Ireland. However, it is important to note that this method draws its validity not from the breadth of its reach but from the depth of each individual interaction. This is important. The detailed nature of each research dialogue is valorized above all other considerations. These detailed interactions are time-consuming and expensive to source, conduct and analyse, and only a small number were possible, within the budgets and timelines allocated to this work.

2.4 Research Ethics

The relationship between participants in a research project and the researcher carrying out the work/the agency funding the research is often defined by notions of power and accountability. In the past, power differentials in research have meant that researchers/funders have been able to use the data generated in the field for their own purposes by not allowing research participants to impact on the nature of the project. Individual researchers could claim ownership of any data generated and present it in accordance with their own wishes. Such research could not be deemed to impact positively on the experience of the people on the ground and if replicated, in this instance, would not enjoy the support of the university or IOM.

Equally, there is a significant research fatigue among the communities under study. New communities in Ireland have been over-researched over the past five/six years. Much "low-level" academic/policy-driven research has been carried out, and while there has been a strong move towards "mainstreaming" applied research in general, research on migrant communities has often not yielded positive impacts for the people concerned.

The current project is mindful of these issues but has progressed under the opinion that: i) research, when carried out in an adequately grounded manner can positively impact on policy decision-making in Ireland and therefore on the target communities' ability to successfully engage with ideas of return; ii) research, in consultation with the

community, can impact on community development and capacity-building, at the local level; and iii) research that follows best academic practice can encourage debate and prompt an engagement with ideas of AVRR in a changing Ireland.

Best academic practice was harnessed during this project. Accepted research methodologies were employed and ethical safeguards, such as anonymity for all participants and transparency of purpose, were built into the research design at an early stage. For example, significant efforts were made to ensure that no research participant was exposed to harm by virtue of their participation in the research by ensuring that significant personal identifiers were removed from interview excerpts used in the compilation of this report. Importantly, informed consent was sought from all people participating in the narrative interview stage of this research. This informed consent was established via an approved informed consent form and the project submitted to the oversight of University College Cork (UCC) research ethics committee, at all times. In this way, a strongly ethical treatment of the issues was ensured and the project is positioned firmly for the benefit of the relevant communities in Ireland and the policymakers seeking to manage this complex process.

1.5 Summary

This complexity notwithstanding, the people who participated in this research were very generous with their time, and a wealth of information is contained in the interview data that was collected. This data forms the basis of the following discussions, all of which are anchored entirely in the words used by individual migrants to describe their lives, the stories they tell and the understandings they come to. A richly detailed picture of the migrant decision-making process comes to light in these stories and the range of factors that impact on an individual's decision to stay in Ireland or return to their country of origin are identifiable.

Chapter 3
Migration Control and the Impulse To Return

3.1 Introduction

The migrants who participated in this research are all subject to the workings of a legal process in Ireland. This process will ultimately determine whether they are allowed to remain resident in this country or whether they will be required to return to their country of origin. However, as is the case in other European jurisdictions (see, for example, Andrijasevic, 2009: 148) this process does not prevent people from wishing to make their lives in this country and most research participants talk strongly about their desire to stay in Ireland.

3.2 Disappointment, The Passage of Time and Thoughts of Return

The length of time spent waiting for a decision impacts on even the most steadfast of migrants and many otherwise determined migrants can come to question their prospects in Ireland and therefore the very validity of their decision to come to this country. For example, Brian, a 20-year-old uneducated Georgian living in the south-east of the country, is actively considering the idea of return to his country of origin. He states –

I have been three years in Ireland and I have many problems in Georgia and I don't have anything in Georgia. Even my mother has left Georgia. My father has left Georgia. I have nobody there. I don't have a house. Nothing. So I'm going just like I didn't have any chance to toast anything here. I applied to learn I could not learn because I didn't have paper and then I decide to go home because I can't work, I can't learn. I am 20 years old. I want to create my life now. That is why I decide to go in Georgia.

This particular immigrant is not being "pulled' back to Georgia by opportunity, family or changed circumstance. He is thinking of returning because his life in Ireland has not lived up to his expectations. Ahmed (2009: 6) presents similar findings. This survey-based study of Sudanese migrants in Cairo finds that economic difficulty, as well as poor educational prospects for migrant children and limited access to an already limited

Egyptian social welfare system, leads many migrants from Sudan to actively consider the prospect of return to their country of origin. In this, Brian is being pushed out of this country by disappointment. His final statement in this excerpt is particularly illustrative. He states that he wants to "create" his "life" and makes direct reference to his age. He feels the passage of time and does not want to give more time to a process that has an uncertain end. This is a common reaction, particularly amongst those living in asylum-seeker accommodation centres.

Some people can feel worn down by life in the direct provision system. The length of time taken to reach a decision is quoted by many.[8] Although, this is not commonly presented as a factor that encourages people to contemplate return, the sense of passing years must wear on a person's resolve and, in some instances, may prompt a return decision. Karl, while not contemplating return himself, offers the following illustration of how the passage of time can impact on a person's resolve to stay in Ireland. "A couple of my friends they went back home because they can't cope, they can't handle it, it's too much for them. Voluntary and it's not safe for them there. It's not safe for them to go back but they decide to go," he says.

Karl goes on to offer the following analysis: "At the time you are desperate, you have lost the hope you get to a certain point and you are not going to think anymore and you just decide dah dah, I'm just going to go back home. It's better for me to die there instead of just, really, just stay and be eating and sleeping at the same time like. They've given up."[9]

Some people will even make a decision to return in the face of continued difficulties in their country of origin. William, a Georgian man who came to Ireland on foot of a need to flee "a personal difficulty", is prompted to return the fact that he "can't see a future here. I don't want to waste my time." He goes on to illustrate the difficulties this entails when he states: "I wanna go home. So my origin town is (pre-migration residence). I grew up in (pre-migration residence) but I have apartment in capital so I will be able to live in capital. Something in capital, because I still have a problem, so I will be able to stay in capital." In this way, William is prepared to replace his emigrant/asylum-seeker persona for that of a returnee, full in the knowledge that he will not be going "home" but rather to another form of exile – that of being internally displaced from his home town, within his country of origin.

The migrant can rail against this experience and see the length of time taken to reach a decision as part of a wider pattern that is designed to discourage people from staying in Ireland. One such man, Colm, a Bangladeshi migrant, offers the following analysis when he

8 Statistics from IOM Dublin support this assertion. A total of 194 people have availed of IOM Dublin's return programme since the beginning of 2011. Forty-one per cent of these (79 people) have been resident in Ireland for less than three years. Forty-two per cent (82 people) have been resident in Ireland for between three and five years. Sixteen per cent have been resident in Ireland for six or more years (30 people) (IOM Dublin statistical reports, January–April, 2011).

9 A number of staff members employed by NGOs active in this area were firm in their belief that "the system is forcing people to do what they don't want to do" (NGO staff member, Waterford City).

asks: “Is the government really doing it purposely - making people sick so that they can be willing to go back. Is it a thing? What do you think it is? Because sometime I start thinking like that. Because they do know. They forget. After the interview. They forget about you.”

He finishes by stating that “I don’t think it is a human way of treating people.” Joseph, a migrant from Nigeria, further reflects this thinking when he makes a connection between the difficulties encountered in the asylum system in Ireland, the threat of deportation and the perilous state of Ireland’s economy, asserting that “every week they deport African people because they think that these are the people who are killing the economy” before going on to state “the way I see, especially if you are black, you don’t have any chance in Ireland.”

Such statements are the exception, however, and most people remain focused on gaining permission to stay in this country and talk far more strongly and completely about their desire to stay in Ireland than about any willingness to engage with the idea of return. Admittedly, many such contemplations are anchored transnationally. For example, when Charles was subjected to racially motivated abuse he contextualized any impulse to return against the dangers he was fleeing. “There were days when I felt of going home and those days were when I was discriminated openly or when I was racially abused in the streets. I say, I’d better go home,” he states.

He goes on to reflect on how this made him feel and to consider his motivation for being in such a position. “I made a comparison of, well the reason I’m here is that I wanted my freedom, I wanted my existence as a human being who can freely think, who can freely write, who can express himself, but if I’m being abused and my rights are taken in such a way – why am I here and I would not compare it as a matter of right but I compare it with being with right.”

However, he quickly places this experience in his hierarchy of need and comes to realize that such experiences do not warrant such action.

In public places I was openly discriminated to get service in shops in banks. It didn’t make me question the country but well I said this can happen in whatever Western country I be whether it be America or Europe or Canada, whichever, Australia, I could experience this. Well I said that wouldn’t it be better to be in Ethiopia than being here insulted but I said being in Ethiopia could make you, could put you into prison where nobody and remember and so on so I say, I refuted my opinion.

I see no evidence to support contentions that the length of time a migrant spends subject to an asylum application will have a direct impact on the desirability of return. Many interviewees have spent a significant number of years in the asylum process. Almost none of them are happy to think about return. Rather, most will continue to look forward, in the hope of a positive outcome. Grene (2011: 14) comes to a similar conclusion when, as part of her evaluation of IOM Dublin's IVARRP programme, she quotes one prospective returnee, who states that (of those left in the Irish asylum process) "many don't have the initiative to go back; they are paralyzed by the dream that things will get better." This person's own decision to return will inevitably impact on how he/she views those who are not ready to make that decision but he/she is illustrative of a wider truth. Length of time spent in the system does wear people down but it does not necessarily serve to promote the idea of return. In this way, while the experience of difficulty can prompt someone to consider return to their country of origin, many migrants seek to accentuate the positive aspects of life in Ireland over their likely quality of life in their country of origin.[10] Collyer et al. (2009: 24) make a similar distinction in their research on IOM returnees from the UK to Sri Lanka when they postulate that IOM migrants are very willing to explain away even the most difficult of experiences by holding that these experiences are nothing compared to what can happen in their country of origin. Consequently, it comes as no surprise when research participants seem more willing to give reasons to stay in Ireland than reasons to consider return.

3.3 The Irish Migration Control System Reinforces The Desire To Stay

Rather than wearing people down, the workings of the Irish migration control process may actually reinforce the need to stay put and ultimately undermine the impulse to return to country of origin. The Government of Ireland is in a difficult position here. The length of time that migrants experience in the system must be a direct result of Ireland's attempts to create a humane pattern of migration management that extends "due process" to all, but there is no doubt that the longer the time spent in direct provision, the more difficult it is for the resident to think about alternatives. As Alastair, a single Nigerian asylum-seeker living in Cork, states "the system is messed up because prison is better. Prison, when you go into prison, first of all they will tell you, you are going to serve six years and on 26 December you are going to be out. So you have some hope." In this light, people can find it difficult to disengage from the system. Kieran, who lives in a male-only hostel in Waterford puts it very succinctly when he states that his experience of living in direct provision has impacted on his ability to function in the real world as "to join society you need time, you need time to join a society and to do things again, you know. While you are sleeping for four years and then you try to move on again – is very difficult."

10 An NGO worker based in Waterford City does state that one of her clients opted to return to her country of origin because she grew "tired of waiting."

It is all the more difficult to make a reasoned decision to return in this situation and very many people currently housed in the direct accommodation system have simply made too much of an investment in the refugee-asylum process in this country. A RIA accommodation centre is, as one manager states, "an extremely difficult place to live. The environment is not an ideal environment." People invest themselves in this difficult environment in the hope of garnering a positive outcome at some point in the future. People are loath to opt out, given the investment already made. This has an impact on the place of return programmes. As the CEO of a large integration organization states: "It is important for any person's thinking – the idea of making a huge effort and living in accommodation that is basically miserable and isolated for years and years. And then to go home? This is very tough as you've not advanced your own cause." People can harbour a sense of wasted years and can despair of ever making good the time spent in the migration management system. As Joyce (a Nigerian women who participated in focus group 5) states:

So maybe if you are asked to go back home in the space of a year. That's different. You can still make a difference in your life. But you can't tell me that after five years, four years, you come back and OK how do you feel about going back home. Yes it's my home. I'm proud but at the end of the day what do I know now. I don't know nothing anymore coz I've lost that. So whatever maybe I'd think that I would do. Things that I maybe I've done two years ago, three years ago. It's different now. If maybe you ask a person in the space of a year about still going home. That's different. That person can still catch up. But three, four, five years, seven years, 10 years in, it just doesn't make sense to me.

She goes on to state: "If maybe I was asked that question like if I was like a year in the country, then I would have, probably I would have gone back. But now it's gone, yah, it's gone too far."

It is unsurprising therefore that people persevere. Many may simply feel that it is better to stay put than return into what is a potentially unknown situation but the interviews conducted during this research lead me to believe that the often extreme experience of infantilization in direct provision, what one focus group 3 participant calls being "programmed", means that many migrants may simply not be capable of engaging with ideas, laterally. This is supported by the number of people who simply refuse to countenance the idea of return, even in situations where the daily quality of their life could conceivably be much improved in another place. Many migrants may simply be unable to make logical decisions about the relative merits of one place over another. Rose, a focus group 3 participant from Nigeria, attests to this feeling when she relates the following story:

I was talking to a friend, a few days ago. She is a lawyer. She was talking about important and intelligent things you know and I'm like goo goo gaa gaa, you know. We were on the same level together before but now I can't, you can't even give me a book, it's just like a sleeping tablet."

It is inevitable, in this context, that many people will become burdened by ideas of failure. As George from the Republic of Moldova (focus group 2) states: "There is a failure. You are spending four years and you have done nothing in your life. You are wasting four years actually." Such thoughts can be particularly strongly felt among longer term residents of RIA's direct provision system, but rather than acting as a prompt to change their life path, these people invariably reach a point where the idea of return becomes confused and difficult to differentiate from the idea of failure and forced return, as is illustrated in this quote from Nora, a single Nigerian woman from focus group 5. Nora states:

For the fact that we are kept in a place, this place alone, to me it's like, it's like, even a prisoner is better because when a prisoner, when the person is about to finish their sentence they will introduce them in small thing to the community just by visiting because they know that at some point after being caged in in that way, at some point you missed that connection with the community. So for us to be kept in this way, for our children to be kept, they don't know, they don't even know like what is life out there. All they know is to go to sleep and be in a hostel. So for you as an adult it is hard to adjust it. So how much more for the child? And after seven years, 10 years you will tell me that OK you have to send that person home. If you as an Irish male – you were kept in an African country with no opportunities. You are not entitled to an education. You are not entitled to work. Not entitled to nothing and all they do for you is to cook and eat and sleep. That's all. How will you feel? And then they will tell you they send you back to Africa, to Ireland, this is the same thing that is happening with other Irish, Irish people in America they don't want to go because they've lost their connection. It is not because it is a shame to you as a human being. It's a shame to you because leaving the country, leaving your country of origin, 10 years down the line, you've got nothing at all. Even if they want to help you get back home. OK. We want to help you – nothing! Who are you? You've got nothing. You know, you are almost nobody.

She finishes with the phrase – "It's depressing." The following excerpts from Karl, a migrant from sub-Saharan Africa who is fleeing war in his homeland, and Richard, an undocumented migrant who initially came to Ireland as a skilled economic migrant but whose residency status changed, illustrate the frustrations that are inherent in this experience.

Karl states:

> **I don't take it personally like I'm not taking an offensive to anybody but it's hard for us. Imagine if we are escaping war to seek asylum in a place we didn't decide to come here. Our destiny brought us here so we ending up being questioned. Being put in places. Locked up. At the same time you don't have the politicians to do anything. The process of the system is too long because if in short time they told exactly that we refuse you that we don't want you. You can accept that and live with it but it's like people will make life here for five or six years and suddenly its gone. You're out. To be deport of whatever. The process of the long term that kinda of, that's really frustrating, it's really frustrating.**

Richard states:

> **How do you expect for an asylum-seeker to go back home after nine, 10 years? He's been stuck for a hostel for nine years without education, without nothing. Not even in limbo. How? Does this make sense to you? This man is a human being or this woman is a human being. She has to live her life. If you don't want him in your country you just send him back. Say I'm sorry the first time he came or she came. That's it, don't leave the people eight, nine years. They should have right like everyone else because they have nothing. They are useless. The animal is much better than them. That's what they think. They have nothing.**

It is unsurprising, therefore, that some people will wish to stay at all costs. People may continue to identify with their country of origin as Paul does, but rarely do they see themselves returning there, even in the face of extremely difficult personal circumstances living in direct provision centres in Ireland. As Paul states: "I want to stay here. Nigeria is not in my agenda. I don't miss Nigeria because I'm not going there to do anything. I swear to God Nigeria is not in my agenda." Aoife further supports this position when she

offers the following analysis: "For some people no matter how bad it gets here they will not leave. For some people the only alternative is to commit suicide, and that is not an option for the Blackman. It is not."

It may be that people subject to an application for asylum may simply not be motivated to think about return until the very last minute, preferring instead to focus entirely on the prospects of gaining their status in their host country but the difficulties that lead Joseph to ask, "What is this life? Better to shoot, you know. This government? Better to take these people. Better to shoot them. It is better than to keep them chicken and rice and then say well asylum is OK", must point to the salience of a more complex set of influences here and it is likely that people engage with the idea of return in an inherently transnational manner, weighing opportunities and difficulties in both their host country and their country of origin.

3.4 Migration Management and Assisted Voluntary Return

In contrast to our integration strategies as a whole, this country's migration management procedures are now well developed and workable, in effect. The very presence of this type of migration control infrastructure does draw often negative comment, not least from those who question its very conceptual foundations. For example, a representative from the Irish Refugee Council (IRC), one of the flagship NGOs working on behalf of migrants in this country, states that "migration is a bit like water. If you stop people in one way they will get through. They will find a way. There is no such thing as managed migration." Be this as it may however, asylum-seekers who come to Ireland in search of assistance will inevitably have to submit themselves to this system. For some, this period of their lives will end in success and they will be granted the right to live and work in this country. For the majority, however, their interactions with the Irish state will end in failure and they will be removed from the state and forcibly returned to their country of origin. Most people are painfully aware of this fact and while very few people will raise the issue directly, the spectre of deportation must impact on immigrants' experiences in Ireland and on their hopes and plans for the future.

It would be naive to suggest that the Irish state's use of forced return as a final sanction for "failed" asylum-seekers will not structure immigrants' engagements with the idea of return as well. As Bialcyzk (2008: 24) states, the presence of a final deportation sanction in the migration control system will fundamentally impact the immigrants' very ability to engage with ideas of return on a voluntary basis as the idea of voluntariness has to be subjected to question when it is a choice made against the background of an unpalatable alternative – deportation. A senior worker in NASC makes the very same point in an Irish context. She states: "We're always very nervous to understand that the voluntary return decision is actually voluntary."[11] However, just as length of time in the system is not commonly presented as a prompt to return, very few of the people who participated

11 NASC is a large migrant support group that is based in Cork. This organization only referred two people to IOM in 2010

in this research state that they would consider availing of an AVR programme on foot of fears over the possibility of deportation and I find very little to support the contention that the presence of a deportation threat impacts directly on individual migrants' decisions to stay or leave. Only one person, Martin, an immigrant from the Republic of Moldova who has already decided to avail of return assistance, states that the threat of deportation was really influential in his decision to leave Ireland. He states: "I don't have a choice when I stay here I say, I just say, I just say, in a few days maybe – coming, you know. I don't like something like that. Deport like a criminal. I don't like that." However, in equal measure he states that the reason for his leaving the Republic of Moldova is not of importance anymore and that his "trouble, I think, is gone."

While people are aware of the possibility of deportation and of return, most seem to adopt a "wait-and-see approach" and will not actively engage with the idea of voluntary return until it is too late and they are in receipt of a deportation letter. As Eddie states: "In the hostel we have a poster about IOM but no. I tell you, the guys say – 'Ok I wait.'" While Chris, a Georgian man, states: "Let's see what happens. My personal desire is that before my case is closed here I will close my case myself and go home." In Chris's case at least, he is confident in his ability to remain in control of the process and to make appropriate decisions at the opportune time, irrespective of the fact that he and his wife are subject to a legal process in this country, but most people simply choose to wait in hope.[12] It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, that the simple presence of a voluntary return programme does not promote the idea of return among the people interviewed here. There are reasons for this, of course. Despite pronouncements from the NGO sector, in general,[13] IOM Dublin is clear in its wish to: i) inform people about return and ii) facilitate a decision that has been made, but to avoid actively encouraging people to return, and by association, promoting their own role in the process. This is a conceptually correct course. Return programmes operate best when they facilitate a decision that is already made and not engage in self-promotion. This fact is illustrated by one IOM Dublin staff member who engages in information provision duties. She describes a typical visit to a RIA accommodation centre in the following terms: "Sometimes they want to talk about where they come from and if they do I will talk about that. Sometimes we talk about returning back home but we don't have a protection remit. The individual needs to make that decision."

Difficulties do come to light. Some people are simply not aware of the option to return voluntarily. Others are mindful of the possibility but do not fully understand the dynamics of the process. For example, Sean misunderstands the place of return programmes and their ability to influence life in sending countries when, in the context of a consideration

12 Voluntary return does feature in some people's imaginaries. Graham, a middle-aged man from Georgia who has already decided to return to his country of origin, states that he was aware of the option to return from the very early days of his stay in Ireland. He made it his business to arm himself with all necessary information early in his stay in this country and was able to access assistance once he had made his decision to return

13 One NGO worker based in Galway states that "historically there was the sense that IOM was trying to canvass people – to make a decision to go home."

of return, he states: "Giving one written guarantee if I go there and nobody kill me? No? Written? I am giving written guarantee? No one? So how is possible now that I take again chance. If they give me written guarantee nobody kill me, I go tomorrow."

Furthermore, the idea of return seems to suffer disproportionately from misinformation about the experience. I have encountered many stories told about difficulties encountered by migrants who have made a decision to return to their country of origin. These are inevitably third party stories of the "I know a man" type and are therefore likely to be apocryphal in nature, but in that, they serve to illustrate an essential truth – many immigrants resident in Ireland do not know about return and the types of assistance that are available to them once the decision to return is made. The following stories, related by Kevin, a Pakistani man resident in Galway, and Noah, a West African resident in Dublin, are illustrative of many such stories. In the first, Kevin relates how he knows a fellow asylum-seeker who has been trying to engage with the idea of return but to no avail, while in the second Noah talks about a fellow West African migrant who availed of return assistance, only to regret it later. Kevin and Noah state respectively:

I can ask a person from Nepal he is asking for more than four months five months like that one I want to go but they are not willing to go to him. They came here. The girl from IOM came here. Nearly two months and they say they are going to do they are going to do but they are not doing. They are getting side from the organization they are making their own money but they are not doing. I can prove that one. More than four months no result, no result." (Kevin)

I know one guy from Guinea. He was in the same hostel as me here he apply with IOM-EU and went back home if IOM wants I can give them this guy now he is there calling everyone he to ask whether to support if we can support him IOM give him no help for you to settle down there,. There is not help to protect you there and this guy is suffering everyday calling for help he is regretting going back. (Noah)

Noah finishes by using this information to reinforce his desire to stay in Ireland when he states: "My best wish is for me to get decision to live in this country."

People simply do not understand where return programmes fit and even immigrants who are aware of their presence are mistaken about the nuances of their remit. It must be stated, however, that this simply reflects the complete disengagement with the idea of return that was uncovered here and is not a comment on IOM's operational "footprint" in the Irish migration management landscape.

3.5 Summary

The complexity of the migratory decision-making process is only partly outlined here. One cannot take a process that is spread out over space and reduce it down to the set of influences anchored in one discrete part of that geographical system. As stated in Chapter 1, the decision to stay or return is an inherently transnational one and each migrant will engage in a process of evaluation that stretches across international borders. Nevertheless, the data used here demonstrate that migrants are actively assessing the nature of their lives in this country. These assessments will impact on the decision to stay in this jurisdiction or return to a country of origin.

Most of the people who participated in this research want to remain resident in Ireland and at this level, I find that no mythology of return is in place. Some experiences do prompt individuals to think about the prospect of return. Interestingly, however, the threat of deportation is not one of these push factors. Migrants are aware of the possibility but choose, by and large, to ignore it in favour of a more general hope that this eventuality will not come to pass. Appreciations springing from an engagement with discourses of safety and opportunity dominate instead, as will be outlined in the following discussion.

Chapter 4
Discourses of Safety, Political Difficulty and

4.1 Introduction

International best practice in voluntary return recognizes that experiences in a host society can only be partially influential in the decision to return and each prospective returnee needs to make an informed decision on return, based on a clear understanding of the conditions prevalent in their country of origin and on their conscious acceptance that local conditions will permit such return (Bailzyk, 2008: 16). A person's knowledge of the conditions extant in their country of origin and their engagement with the idea of a life recommenced in that country are therefore of fundamental importance in any decision to stay in Ireland or return, and research participants' thoughts on the likely quality of their return experience are of equal importance in this as any assessment they may make of their likely future quality of life in Ireland. This chapter (and much of the next) is based on an assessment of these thoughts of return.

4.2 The Idea of "Justifiable Flight", Discourses of Safety and Thoughts of Return

When asked directly, only a very small number of questionnaire survey respondents (88 people, 36% of the 247 surveys gathered during this research) state that they would be happy to leave Ireland and return to their country of origin. At this level of analysis, the possibility of return does not seem to tally with migrants' understandings of their journey at all and the vast majority of people, irrespective of their country of origin, simply refuse to contemplate leaving this country. This reticence is somewhat puzzling. If, as I suspect, Ravenstein's (1889) classic assertion about the migrant's desire for something better, still holds true in the twenty-first century, then many people should be thinking about return in the current difficult economic climate.[14] Migrant labourers have certainly been leaving this country in large numbers since the beginning of the current economic downturn.

14 Castles and Millar (2010: 9) have a different view. These authors are clear in their assertion that there is very little evidence to support the thesis that migrants return to their country of origin in economically difficult times.

4.2.1 Discourse of justifiable flight

An examination of the reasons people give for leaving their country of origin sheds light on this seeming lack of engagement with the idea of return. The vast majority of people who participated in this research state that they came to Ireland in search of protection from "danger" and that they had no intention of emigrating from their country of origin until a particular, and often unforeseen, difficulty drove them to leave. In this way, a discourse of "justifiable flight" is commonly invoked.[15] This feeling of danger and engagement with the need to find "safety" is cited by people from many different geographical contexts and is related to a range of experiences.[16]

Some people refer to an experience of imminent danger anchored in a particular set of circumstances. Mary is a middle-aged woman from West Africa. She was a successful business woman in her country of origin, with a chain of small-scale business interests, nationally. She states that she enjoyed a high profile as a function of her success and that she was commonly asked to participate in charity functions outside her home area. Mary traces her decision to come to Ireland firmly back to one particular incident in her home country when, as part of a wider contemplation on her experience of leaving her country of origin, she states:

> **I brought up the topic and I insisted and I brought up my finger and I brought the question out and so after that in the evening my room was visited yah and so, thank god I wasn't in the room I went out for a meal. And we came back, when we go for seminars they put us in rooms, two or three in rooms. That way there were just two of us in our room in the hotel. It was written on the wall in red – your life or nothing. I want to eliminate you.**

Others point to a sense of impending doom arising from appreciations of danger anchored in difficulties experienced by family, friends and wider personal contacts. Caroline was a newly qualified accountant in her country of origin, Sri Lanka. She secured a position in a medium-sized firm in her home city but was obliged to leave her country when she came to the attention of the authorities there. Caroline situates her decision to leave her country of origin in the following terms. She states:

15 Sixty-three per cent (155 people) of the people who completed the questionnaire surveys refer to such notions of "protection" and "safety" when seeking to leave their country of origin. A further 51 people cite related difficulties here.

16 Geographical patterns are to be seen as well. Only 10 of the people who participated in the interview and focus group elements of this study state that they think about return (three of whom have already made a decision to leave). Interestingly, seven of these are from either the Republic of Moldova or Georgia. Having said this, I think it would be incorrect, at this level of analysis, to take this data and use it to make statements about the geographical distribution of such motivations, Nevertheless, it is worth noting that far more people from a broadly European context (25%) state that they are happy to think about the prospect of return than others – only two Africans and one Asian (5% and 4% respectively).

The war is ended but there are still the problems going on. I was working in one company and the managing director is Tamil he is very very rich man and he had links with the rebel leaders so the documents they found - who were financially supporting the rebels and they found photographs of him with the rebels and actually I'm an accountant so I was working so I saw the figures even though the company accountant doesn't have control of everything. So then as I am from minority and my brother also was there so it was all linked and I had problem so I had to leave.

Others still refer to more generalized experiences arising from structural difficulties present in their country of origin or from a general feeling of unease arising from wider patterns of inequality and injustice. For example, Colm, a man from Bangladesh, relates a third-party story about the kidnapping of a recently returned immigrant and uses it as part of a wider treatment of culturally difficult practices prevalent in his country of origin when he states:

In some cases, before you are born they decide who you are going to get married to. So I mean that's ridiculous from before you are born you have to marry that boy or girl. It is sickness. As you grow the same case as religion as Muslim or Christian you must have right to choose what you like in life. So many things I might not like none of them. So those are the things I mean really really, some of the things you cannot even say it out. It is very painful. It is not about beating you torturing you in that case but mentally and physically you are so unhappy.

These appreciations are commonly presented in political terms and many of the immigrants interviewed during the course of this research firmly anchor their decision to leave their country of origin in articulations difficulty arising from: i) personal political activity, ii) the political activities of those close to them, iii) difficulties arising from the persecution of the group to which they belong, or iv) a general appreciation of danger arising from a poor pattern of political leadership in their country of origin. The following excerpts are illustrative of a range of different experiences here.

I. James (Nigeria) states that he was a leader of a "youth" movement in his country of origin. He states that he cannot return to his country of origin because he "had real difficulties at home. Fear of prosecution because they were crushing every opposition and they don't care. We have a dictatorship. So there is no need for me going back. My going back would not go well".

II. Harry, a Pakistani immigrant, refers to his brother's political activities and to his belief he was murdered by his political opponents as his motivation for leaving Pakistan. Harry states: "If I go there they will think that I am come to kill them who kill to my brother, kill to my brother, so I will go again. Too many problems in my country sometime is the religious problem sometime in the political problem. I swear to god nobody want to go nobody want to go back".

III. Oliver, an Ahmedi man from Pakistan, migrated to Ireland because of what he believes to be the persecution of his faith-based community. Oliver states: "It is because they don't accept us as Muslims they are not giving us our most basic religious right. Then what's the use of a vote? Of participating in politics? We don't participate at all in politics." He then links this to the experience of wider uncertainty in his country of origin when he states: "You see it now suicide bombing killing, target killing, it's an everyday thing but it is an everyday thing, it's an everyday thing, in Karachi, the biggest city in Pakistan; every day, every day, four or five people, I'm not talking about one. Four, five, four, five maybe more. Very dangerous, very dangerous, especially for us like us. I don't want to go home. But not in a hundred years. (Laughs.) No way, no chance. We are basically going to stay here."

In this way, most people's need to "flee" their country of origin is presented in terms that fit with the workings of the 1951 Convention on the Rights of the Refugee. In turn, these motivations structure most contemplations on return to country of origin and unsurprisingly very few people state that they are open to the prospect of voluntary return whilst they feel that the conditions that prompted them to leave their country of origin remain in place.

4.2.2 Discourses of safety and opportunity

Some people are happy to talk about the idea of return and what it means for them. Caroline, for example, states that she would be happy to return to her country of origin in the event of the current conflict situation being resolved satisfactorily. She states: "If they separate the country then there will be a 90 per cent chance but if they don't separate the country I don't think I can go back to my country. I don't think so". Equally, John identifies the importance of regime change when he states: "If there is change in government it's gonna make things better you can never find people here I bet you, when the security and everything is OK." Others, for example, Darragh, simply refer to the need to feel safe more generally. Darragh states: "If I had the opportunity and if I had the chance, if today everything is peace and everything is settled. I can move back. Sure. Why not?" In this way, discourses of safety are particularly common and when asked, people quickly identify the fears they have for their safety in the event of return. Fears about the likelihood of experiencing personal violence are especially common, and are referenced by all nationalities and backgrounds. As Ahmed (2009: 46) states, potential returnees commonly ask "how can we make sure that we are secure?" on return. Unfortunately, time and again, research participants answer this question themselves and stridently report their belief that they will come to harm if they go back to their

country of origin. Statements like this one, given by Liam, a middle-aged Pakistani nurse, resident in Ireland for seven months, are common. Liam states: "If they send me, I will definitely die. I will go there, definitely I will die. I will die. If I go there, definitely I will be die. Definitely." In equal measure, when asked directly, people state that they would be very happy to return to their country of origin in the event of their safety being assured. As Patrick (Republic of Moldova, focus group 2) states: "If it is not safe at home what you gonna do. This is the only point. If it is not safe. If it is safe, why not you know. Nobody like living in a hell. To be honest, direct provision is a catastrophe for the people for mentality like. If it is safe I would go."

This general appreciation is anchored in a much wider contemplation of need and even migrants who happily relate the detail of their personal difficulties invariably seek to locate it in wider terms. Often, searingly personal testimony is anchored in considerations of the wider unpredictability of life in the sending country and the concerns that arise for the individual concerned. Some Pakistani immigrants, in particular, are happy to relate the specific detail of the locally-based personal difficulties they face in their country of origin but equally they will always seek to situate their personal stories in wider appreciations of political and economic difficulty, nationally. For example, Dave, a young engineer from the Punjab who is resident in Ireland for two months; Tom a bank worker who is resident in Ireland for just one week; and Stephan, a website designer who is resident in Ireland for over two years, left Pakistan on foot of the difficulties that arose out of their insistence on pursuing a romantic relationship with women whose families did not approve.[17] Despite the extreme violence used in each instance, these immigrants anchor their desire to stay in Ireland in a wider appreciation of danger and economic inequality in their country of origin. Dave's story is illustrative of all three. He states:

Financially, they are strong and we are not so strong a little. From the girl side – my girlfriend. She died before two and half month ago. They kill her. But not kill her, but not kill how you say, accidently. She kill. With me, because we are going, we are going out and they caught her and her family, yeah her family didn't like me, because I am not as rich as they are and they are Shias and they beat her. But suddenly the hit in head. That is why, you know, his brother hit from the, I know they make her fall from the stairs. That's why she injured.

17 Length of time in Ireland accurate to when these interviews took place – in November / December 2010.

I had to leave because they are looking for me. In our country most people do not like boy and girls get married from desire. They don't like. Everything must be arranged and mostly in the same family. Mostly they want girls to marry boys in our family. Not other side. Caste to caste. According to their professions.

Dave goes on to anchor this experience in a wider Pakistani context when he states: "I don't think they will calm down. I don't think so because you, in our country people are very hard and understand cruel."

After relating a very similar story, Stephan sums this type of experience up by referring to his and his family's lack of financial means, and their consequent lack of control over their own situation in a country characterized by growing extremism:

If my family will think that I will be safe there then I can go back. Otherwise how I can go there? They can do anything. They could. Anything can happen. No control you see. Do you think there is rule of law in Pakistan? I don't think so. What is going on now is the extremism is becoming more stronger there. The extremism factor is more stronger there. So this is a problem. The people if they have money, money if they are good I mean to say powerful in society they can do everything.

The intersection of difficulty, broadly based, and lack of opportunity in country of origin proves to be a very powerful motivation to move and, conversely, a disincentive to return. Time and again, these experiences are intertwined in the narratives collected here. Ciara, a Nigerian migrant, does this when she gives the following statement about the prospect of forced return to her country of origin. She states:

Here you see if something happens to you, you just have, there is somebody to ask after you, maybe there is somebody to ask whether you survive so those are the kind of things we won't want our children to face because we have faced a lot of things that if you remember you be crying, you be crying inside, outwardly, you be crying all the time, so why is life like this. Because all the time, you think of what you are going through here you think if not for bad government, bad culture and bad orientation you won't be facing all those things, you know.

This research participant's reference to "bad government, bad culture and bad orientation" in her country of origin is telling. This migrant outwardly blames the political system and culture in Nigeria for her need to migrate. However, as she goes on to state, economics are commonly implicated in even the most overtly politically orientated motivations. Following directly on from this excerpt, Ciara contemplates the quality of life in her country of origin in the following terms:

If something happens in that country there is no safety. Nothing, they are just less concerned about the citizens they are just concerned about themselves. They don't care. A number of people die in that country every day, they don't even know, they don't even, they don't know the number of people, they don't know the population of people living in that country they don't know they don't care they just have this figure, that is what we have and they don't know whether you are dying or you are surviving you know so just like you live your life just like, how can I say it, people are just on their own. They don't just care.

She finishes by stating that "there are many things that are bad, very bad."

I see no evidence to support the contention that people move to Ireland expressly to make money to send home as part of a transnational household budget strategy, but economics are referenced by all nationalities and must therefore be important in the motivations of the individuals who took part in this study, especially in the decision to stay or return. Such appreciations can only be exacerbated when compared to the quality and style of life that migrants are exposed to in Ireland. As Aoife states: "the bottom line is that conditions back home is what keeps a person where they are. And they will want to see it through to the end."

She goes on to say:

I've come to realize that when people leave, the situation they find themselves here is a lot better than they will have to contend with back home so you'd want to stay and stay and see it through. If you are between life and death you would want to stay here and sleep on the streets than be dead. At least you have a chance of breathing here but if you go back you are going to be dead.

In many ways, this type of pronouncement simply reflects what King and Christou (2010: 117) refer to as "the fundamental migrant condition of life experience in two (or more) places which are inevitably subject to comparison," but it is equally tempting to state that the difficulties of life in country of origin are simply flagged up more clearly by virtue of this comparison.

Andrew, a young Nigerian immigrant resident in Limerick, adopts the following position on return. As is common, dissatisfaction with national politics is used to set the scene; he then moves through a wider contemplation of the difficulties inherent in life in Nigeria before stating definitively that he does not wish to return to Nigeria. He states:

In Nigeria, there is no hope, because here no matter you go to school, you don't go to school, but they give you document, if you are working or if you are able to do something, you have hope, but in Nigeria there is no hope. It is because of the politics because there is no good government. You just imagine since Nigeria is the only country that the president is senior in the country he can be 60 years president, 70 years president in the country. You can see the same people still needing money, still needing money, still needing money, but no industry. Nothing, nothing. No work. Nothing, nothing.

The rich people are making money sending the friend over. Sending their children to go to school. Good life. The poor remain the poor. The poor remain the poor. It is not like here. It is not like here where you can be half-rich. A life is, you see, if you watch people who have documents about five years ago. If you look at them, they have good life, they have good life, yeah, they have good life but if they can go back to Nigeria now you see they don't have good life.

He goes on to state:

> **I won't go back. No. What have I to go back. You know what I see today is better than what I didn't see. You understand? Maybe the government is trying to put things in order in one way or the other but it is OK I will see from here. It is OK. If I watch Nigeria movie or this thing Nigeria news. There is nothing good there. Nothing good there. Everybody is fighting for his own pocket.**

John (focus group 4) provides a good illustrative summary of many such positions when he makes the following statement: "Forget the economic problem, if some people go back home, [they are] going to be killed." However, he goes on to explain his bleak assessment in the following terms. He states: "You can't compare African country, you can't compare European country with Africa. In Africa is somebody kidnapped is killed nothing can bring out of it. There is no government that is going to judge it. Nothing that they can do that. No investigation. You have what they say is opportunity when you are in a foreign land like in Ireland."

Conversely, economic motivations intertwined with aspirations for political change can lead a person to think more proactively about return. For example, while he is fatalistic about the prospects of return to his country of origin, Victor, a migrant from Burkina Faso, states: "The real problem is not return at all. The real problem is the safety of return. This government will never change. Africa is full of resources you see. Do you think really if Africa was governed by conscious people and people do better for the people, would we be here in Europe? We can come in Europe for visit for work for businesses. That is it." This migrant's free movement from a discourse of safety to a discourse of economic justice is particularly illustrative here but, in general, it is very difficult to separate out the different influences. Even migrations that are intimately associated with one particular motivation can be prompted by a raft of other influences as well. Even the most personal and local of experiences are set against wider patterns, operational at the regional and national levels.

4.2.3 Discourses of order and unpredictability

Very many narratives follow a similar pattern. The decision to leave is anchored in a discourse of unexpected flight and life in Ireland is valued on foot of its order and predictability but thoughts of return do not arise and are mostly anchored in discourses of economic need and wider structural difficulty in country of origin. This complexity is further illustrated by Bernard, a Pakistani migrant. This migrant is resident in Galway but his wife and child are resident in Pakistan. This is a cause of deep concern for him and he

is consequently fearful. He begins his contemplation of the feasibility of return by making a broadly political statement. However, he quickly anchors this economic discourse in terms of the wider difficulties he associates with life in Pakistan.

My Pakistan is safety no have. Here – safety. You know, money have, no have, you going, lot of money you have, you going no problem. Money you have, you going no problem. My country is very big problem you know. Little is nice. Mobile. Nice watch. Nice address. Nice car. Two to three people your back, watch, watch, watch. Little you quiet area. Maybe stay, maybe stop, after catch maybe little bit fight knife, gun – small matter. Secondly, you know other people looking who rich few thousand maybe here 50 euro 50 euro 100 euro after kill yes. Maybe me her man is kill him maybe me get money from you - 50 euro. 50 euro take one bullet maybe here. Small matter here is death.

Life is hard. Very, very hard in Pakistan. Maybe rich man little little safe 50 per cent; poor man 100 per cent lost. No eat. Maybe no eat – die. Medicine – broker medicine – no good. You know cheater man cheater man make money. Me no doctor me no scientist me looking oh very good business me making medicine you know broker medicine sale and cash money. You know no life safe. No medicine safe. No food safe.

He finishes by stating: "Deported, I going few day I alive after maybe one week, two week life, one two week life."

Migrants from post-conflict situations in particular can fear that they will come to the attention of the law in their country of origin and be discriminated against on foot of their migrant status. As Paul states (focus group 4): "The problem is still there. The people are still there. The differences are still there. The war is finished but still the people, the differences, the politics. It has grown as well." There is much international evidence to support such a view. Harvey (2006: 93) for example, states that returning Croatian Serbs were often arrested on return to their country of origin, often on unsubstantiated charges and despite being given clearance to return by the authorities, while Sward (2009: 3) states that there is ample empirical evidence to support the contention that people returning to Sri Lanka experience varied forms of discrimination and harassment at the hands of the authorities in that country. Equally, Crisp (2000, cited in Black and Ghent, 2006: 17) shows that many refugees in Africa have returned to conditions that were not safe or dignified, as is enshrined in international law. The simple threat of such an eventuality is often enough to put people off the idea of return to their country of

origin. Gerard, a Nigerian participant in focus group 4, illustrates this fear when he relates the story of his unnamed "friend" who returned to Nigeria and was killed shortly after arriving. He states: "He was deported to Nigeria, which is two years ago. When we got deported to Nigeria and the guy was killed. I told them here that this is what happened to him and the government didn't believe me. They send him back and when they got him there – they killed him."

It is unsurprising, therefore, when asylum-seekers such as Leo (a Pakistani participant in focus group 4) state: "Unfortunately, if the government likes to deport asylum-seekers, better kill them. It is better. I'm trouble. I cannot go home, come back." Such concerns may be especially pertinent in situations where, as Sward (2009: 3) states, the returnee may face discrimination as a function of their return status, or as a result of continuing instability in the country. Kevin, an ex-Pakistani naval officer and intelligence operative, does not wish to return to his country of origin and offers some insight here when he states:

I am going to die soon. After two to three years because I do have cancer. I have completed my 56 years. Forty-seven is the approximate age of a Pakistani guy and I already have almost completed 56. Three, four years more and I will live and after that I will have to die. But no, no, I don't want to go back. I will. If they will send me back I will have to go I will have to travel somewhere else because where I worked they will not allow me to live in Pakistan and I don't want to.

IMF to come but don't mind that one this is normal country a man can live, that one a man can survive, that one a man can do his business at least in safety, in safety you can do that one. In safety you can get bread for your family as well as if you earn some money like that way you can do if you are voluntarily allowed to work somewhere you can do that one. You get by. Stability and you have safety at least when you go back, you come back and your family knows that one. It will happen an accident but it is real – one in thousand or in day but in Pakistan there is more than 50 per cent chance that you will not come back. You will not come back because of violence bomb blasting religion problems political problems agency problems every day. You know a lot of people are missing."

He finishes by stating that "there is no going back to Pakistan."

4.3 Discussion: Reasons for Migration, Reasons for Return

Inevitably, people come to Ireland on foot of a range of motivations. Some people will be open and forthright about their reasons for migrating and will talk freely in even the most fleeting of interactions. Others will be more circumspect initially but will talk at length about their experiences in the context of a free-flowing narrative interaction. Others will construct stories, even complete biographies, hold them dear and wear them like a shield through almost every interaction in Ireland. The following interview excerpt from Jeremy, an unskilled young adult migrant from Nigeria, illustrates this complexity. In response to a question on the feasibility of return to Nigeria, Jeremy starts off by structuring his thoughts very firmly in terms of the difficulties facing those who return. He uses the term "fire" in a particularly illustrative manner here. He then goes on to support this position by drawing a linear connection between the difficulties encountered in Nigeria in general to the moral difficulties associated with the forced deportation of Irish-born children and their repatriation to a potentially difficult and alien environment. However, he ultimately uses this example to support his position that young male migrants like himself should be allowed work in the waged labour force in this country. Later, firmly situating the dangers he associates with the idea of return to Nigeria in economic terms, Jeremy states of those who return:

The Irish do not allow their kids to suffer. A lot of ladies here, that was, that have kids here, they will be taken home to Africa, to Nigeria. The kids will start suffering. The mothers have no work. There is no family. They will start suffering. You will see. Irish kids, now who are Irish, will not be moving in the streets. With no clothes. Suffering. Playing in the sand with things. That is not supposed to happen, that thing.

I think when you will review that those kids – those kids, they are dying. Those kids will live and die. Their life will be miserable, just because their mother will be taken to Africa. Those kids they are not supposed to be taken back home. All I want and this is the last thing I will declare on this issue, Ireland should declare give document to we, the youth, and let us work, let us work.

He goes on to state:

> **I don't want the social to feed me I don't want the social money, I don't need the house. Why did I came to the country? For the right to work. If I am a lazy man, I will die in the street. If I want to live in the house I will go and work and I will buy the house, not that I should wait for the social to give me money and show me the house. You see that social is giving me money. You know, what I look like that? I look like that? Bullshit! They are bullshit. They don't know what they are doing. How much will social give you, social give you? 150 euro, 160 euro? You work. If you work under one week you will get nothing less than 500 euro. If you work you have a good job you can work and get two times the social will give you. Give document. Go out and work. Go work with your document. Go out and pay.**

Jeff later supports this statement when he clearly articulates his association of danger with his inability to provide for himself and the dangers inherent in the criminal activities that he might be forced to pursue:

> **If I return back home I am finished. I return back home. Every time they return Nigeria people people are getting threatened. They have nothing. They have nowhere to start from. When they are saying Nigeria has money. Nigeria has? No good that. If I have the money I would live there. I waste my talent. We that is here are not the ones who has the money. It is Nigeria. It is for them that rule.**

He finishes by stating: "If I go back to Nigeria I am a dead man or I will go back to stealing. In my country when you are caught with gun you are a dead human being. Firing squad, firing squad is the only resolution."

Jeremy's development of thought is particularly illustrative. This immigrant initially addresses the idea of return using discourses of danger, safety and the moral difficulties inherent in the process of forced return. However, he seamlessly moves into a completely different discourse when grounding this treatment in his own life. Specifically, he clearly situates his engagement with the idea of movement to Ireland and return to Nigeria in terms of his frustrations at: i) not being able to work in the waged labour force in this country and ii) the very real economic difficulties inherent in life in Nigeria and his fear for his future in a context where his only option might be to engage in forms of criminal behaviour. In this way, Jeremy gives us a glimpse into the complex manner in which

migratory motivations are accessed in each individual context. An individual's decision to migrate is anchored in this/her own experience of difficulty in his/her country of origin. However, these experiences are very commonly modulated by an understanding of the wider structural difficulties operational at a regional/national level in his/her country of origin. In turn, these blended experiences and understandings come to define that individual's aspirations in Ireland and ultimately that individual's understanding of the feasibility of return.

This excerpt illustrates the need for the dynamics of each individual migrant biography to be unpacked carefully. Interview narratives such as these may simply illustrate the changeable nature of the "normal" migratory experience. An individual may come to Ireland on foot of a clear set of motivations and with a clear goal in mind but become open to other motivations as a function of their experiences in this country. Equally, there is by now significant international literature illustrating the fact that all people, irrespective of their position in society, seemingly switch between "voices" in their narratives, at one time making strong statements to support a particular motivation while making seemingly contradictory statements in support of a different view in another part of their narrative. These multiple subjectivities, known in psychology as shifting "I" voices, can simply be embraced as a "normal" expression of the dialogic construction of identity, in many different everyday situations. In essence, the theory of the dialogical self pivots on an acceptance of the fact that an individual's identity is composed of a variety of different "I" voices, each constructed from the situational and often context-specific dialogic interaction that takes place between the individual subject "I" and multiple or even imagined "others", as long as these "others" have meaning to the individual in question and are deemed worthy of attention. As Stemplewska-Zakowicz et al. (2006: 73) state: "The voice or subject position is understood as an active totality of experience that is shaped in a particular social context and represented in a separate representation module." Importantly, these multiple oppositions are changeable. Different combinations achieve dominance in the imagination at different times and in response to different situations. An idividual's identity is therefore constructed from the continual cycling of these dialogic positions, in context, on foot of the individual's desire "to adopt the one that is most appropriate for the current task at hand" (Sakellaropoulo and Baldwin, 2006: 97).

Such passages may be illustrative of something completely different. Specifically, individual migrants can sometimes switch between different identities, deliberately and at will. Collyer et al. (2009: 6), for example, state that there is plenty of evidence among Sri Lankan migrants to show that people routinely "switch identities" from Tamil to Christian to "reduce social stresses" or increase "their job opportunities". This type of excerpt may simply provide an illustration of this tendency – in this instance, the tendency to appropriate the language of flight, irrespective of personal circumstance.[18]

18 There is no doubt that a direct question, whether it be in a questionnaire or an interview, will elicit a deliberate response on the part of the interviewee. One can never be sure that such responses are free from an individual's conscious desire to project a particular image. Conversely, stories told in a free flowing manner may offer a truer expression of intent and more "real" motivations may indeed be uncovered via such pronouncements.

While it is difficult to use this complex intertwining of economic motivations and political difficulty to question the validity of any individual's engagement with the language of "safety" and humanitarian need to develop what Knudsen (1995) calls an indiscriminate "flight narrative", many immigrant's tendency to valorize their experience of political difficulty over and above their experience of multiple difficulty in their country of origin, does beg the question whether this language is simply being used to project a migrant biography that offers the best chance of successfully applying for residency in this country (Strand, 2008: 13). There is nothing new in this. Kofi Annan, speaking at the UNHCR's global consultations in 2002, was clear when he stated that this differential construction of the migrant impulse lay at the very heart of the international community's engagement with the Refugee Convention when he stated that "I regret to say that today there is tendency, in some quarters, to suggest that the Convention is somehow out of date or no longer valid. In the minds of many, refugees are equated at best with economic migrants and at worst with cheats, criminals or even terrorists. We must refute this gross calumny" (Maley, 2002: 3).

Many policy makers and migration 'managers' can find this shifting quality particularly difficult to understand. Indeed, oftentimes, otherwise well-informed and expert commentators on the process of migration control in Ireland see this fluidity in the construction and presentation of life events as an attempt to deceive. Such understandings tend to miss the nuanced reality of the migration decision making process.

Eddie, an immigrant from Cuba resident in Cork gives the following insightful summation of the different experiences implicated in this fluidity:

There are different groups of persons. Different groups of asylum-seekers who have different reasons for staying in the asylum-seeker process. Many guys come to Ireland for work and after lost the work no work any more. Nothing. So that guy is going to make application to return because OK. I meet two three guys before in (accommodation centre) from Georgia and Armenia. Yes. Moldovan one. Moldovan went home to country. Go home. Going to make application to refugee but the government say no to application refuse so they say OK I go home. Other groups from different countries – Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria – one day I ask one guy about that he is in his seventh years there. Crazy, and I ask why you stay here? He tell me – in that situation I am happy because in my country before I can't live. Now I have live life in my situation. I have life, but in my country I have nothing. They have a different motivation. It might be bad here but it is better than at home.

Another group of guys live long time in Europe in different countries you know and come to Ireland because Ireland is friendly country, you know. You have a good system for asylum-seeker. You are safe and safety is important of course yes. In Ireland, you can wait a long time. You know, in other country, you know, Germany, Spain you need to go into some job – sometime like slave you know – and that group stay no worries.

And another group of course have, have real problems, in their country you know and fear is very danger for their go back.

As Eddie states, migrants come to Ireland on foot of many different motivations. These motivations may be transparent or they may not, but what is important is that all inevitably impact on the individual's outlook on life in Ireland and ultimately on their openness to the idea of voluntary return to their country of origin.

4.4 Summary

The transnational nature of the return decision-making process is outlined here. Migrants may be evaluating their opportunities in Ireland but they are equally conscious of the potential difficulties/opportunities that might impact/arise out from a decision to return to their country of origin. These thought patterns must be unpacked carefully. In so doing, what becomes clear is that multiple and shifting motivations are implicated in even a single decision to stay or return.

This reflects the nature of the migratory process. It cannot be reduced to one particular motivation. For example, even those who can be categorized as political refugees may also have experiences of economic hardship and difficulty and even those deemed to be economically motivated may experience hardship arising from their personal lives

The narrative method allows for this complex matrix of decision-making influences to be laid bare and explored. It does not allow for the expressly held views of the participant to be challenged or even deemed unworthy. I would see this to be an entirely unethical position to adopt, in this instance. Researchers are not advocates, nor are they activists, but they do have, what Duvell et al. (2008: 27) call “a set of complex responsibilities for high quality and ethical research” and all that can be stated at this juncture is that there is simply “no panacea for all the risks of return” in the twenty-first century – a point forcibly illustrated in the following contemplation of the more personal and subjective influences that migrants identify in the return decision-making process (Bradley, 2009: 291).

Chapter 5
Return, Family Life and Subjective Well-Being

5.1 Introduction

Migration is an inherently transformative process. People will move from their sending country at one stage in their lives and will have hopes and aspirations anchored in the understandings arising from their life experiences at that point. These understandings will inevitably change on foot of the experiences gathered during the migratory process but also on foot of the simple passage of time in an often difficult and markedly different social cultural and economic context. In this way, as Black et al. (2004) state, what is important in any treatment of the desire to return, is not only the objectively measurable conditions in a person's life but also the personal importance that the individual places on these conditions. Different individuals will have different understandings of what is important to them. These subjective understandings inevitably impact on how an individual engages with the idea of return, depending, as Boyd and Greico (2003, in Rueben, 2009: 917) state on the personal characteristics of the individual concerned and the wider structural factors pertinent in their country of origin. These subjective and personal influences are outlined in this chapter.

5.2 Children Resident in Ireland Encourage People to Stay

While large numbers of single-parent families avail of return programmes in Ireland, 24 people, a small but significant number of questionnaire respondents, wish to stay in this country because they are parents of children resident here. There is some evidence to support this data. Crawley (2010: 4) certainly states that very small numbers of asylum-seeking families in the UK choose to avail of the return option. While Crawley (2010) feels that a lack of adequate information may be influential here, the participants in this research are clear in their statements in this regard, and the presence of children living in Ireland reinforces the desire to stay in this country

Martina is the mother of a small child born in Ireland. She is resident in this country on foot of what she defines as a political problem and readily states that she could easily return to her country of origin as she and her husband are financially secure. However, she does not want to leave Ireland. This desire is based on her continued belief that she will be in danger if she returns to her country of origin but she states that her son makes it more difficult to return. She states: "The baby makes it, for us, more difficult to make

the decision to go back to Georgia." As Carol, a focus group 5 participant from Nigeria and parent of a small child, states: "I came here to seek life. Now you know. Then I was just alone. Then I was just alone. Now I am two. My child is part of me. Is my life."

This is a reasonable position to adopt. There is a long history of research into the fact that children of return migrants regularly experience a sense of trauma and loss on return to their parent's country of origin (see, for example, Arowolo, 2000: 68).

Parents who do not have custody of their Irish-resident child find it particularly difficult to think of returning home and potentially losing contact with their son/daughter. As George (a focus group 2 participant from the Republic of Moldova) states: "For me, I can't now go back. I have a daughter here." Other migrants, who are their children's legal guardians, often harbour strong fears about their children's safety in their country of origin. Rebecca (focus group 3) explains her reticence to return to her country of origin in such terms when she states:

Back home you would have a girl-child going to school and a teacher being like probably the man, molest the child or rapes the child and nothing is going to be done. (Tina, interjecting) you can do nothing about it. (Rebecca continuing) you will report that one, you will say something but nothing is gonna be done. So thing is, she say trying to say, the integrity, the human integrity here, that's something if you report here, action is gonna be taken. Back home, nothing, you can't go and report.

However, the personal nature of the thought processes involved is quickly illustrated when Rebecca moves to situate these articulated concerns about child protection within a much broader framework:

There are things that you always weigh before you make a decision. There are things that you always look and say OK I would be selfish not to consider my child because if it was only myself, I wouldn't stay. I would go to IOM the following day – if it wasn't for my child. He is blended in the community. He goes to school here. He is blended in the community. He has a chance of a better life. Obviously, there is no question about that. There is no question about that. You think of your kids.

A shifting pallet of influential factors clearly impacts on Rebecca's engagement with the idea of return. This complexity is further illustrated by Jacki, a single parent who fled to Ireland as a result of a familial difficulty in her country of origin. She has a 5-year old son

resident with her in Ireland and an older daughter resident with members of her family in Nigeria. Despite being worried about the quality of her daughter's life in Nigeria, Jacki is determined to remain in Ireland, for her son's sake. While clearly conflating ideas of voluntary return with ideas of forced deportation, this migrant feels that young children growing in Ireland should not be expected to return to their parents' country of origin. She states:

> **Many children that were being deported – sick. Many thing. I know of a child that died after they deported. He couldn't adapt after the refugee system you know so he started from food, you know in Africa there's nothing like hygiene or something so rough, he started vomiting, diarrhoea, food poisoning you know. It is very difficult. It is very difficult, for me. I won't lie to you. Difficult socially. Is wickedness.**

Importantly, she goes on to make the following broader statement about the difficulties inherent in life in Nigeria and the worries she has about her own ability to care and provide for her children in that country:

> **I'm telling you, even the mothers, there's nothing they do, most of them that is deported, there's nothing they do – they go out at home. They have no choice. They left that country they don't know what is happening and they want to you know. That is what they do for money. So it is a total wrong life that somebody that doesn't have the mind of prostitute, prostituting or robbing as in pick-pocketing or something like that suddenly they just find his or herself is such a frame.**

She finishes by stating: "I will be afraid to go back because, the safety of my children".

James, a Nigerian man, offers further testimony to this effect when he states that "the parents are fine because that is where they are born and brought up. Let them go back that is what life is all about, we are going on with it, you know what I mean? But what about the kids, they do not have that sort of life."

The transnational nature of the migrant's familial imaginary can complicate matters further. For example, a person may be motivated to stay in Ireland on foot of thoughts of future opportunities for his/her children while, at the same time being drawn back to his/her country of origin by thoughts of family members left behind. Finlay et al. (2011: 299) for example find that the presence of family members resident in country of origin remains a strong drawback. Over two thirds of all people who participated in the questionnaire element of the current research project and who state that they think

about return cite the presence of family as a major pull factor (68%, 43 people). Pinger (2009: 142) is certainly of the opinion that the decision to return is regularly influenced by conditions both at home and abroad (albeit modulated by legal status in a person's host country).

In other cases, however, even the presence of family members in the person's country of origin is not enough to prompt the migrant to think about return. Thomas, a migrant from Georgia, has a serious medical condition, for which he is being treated in Dublin. His wife and child are still resident in Georgia but he does not wish to return. He states: "If I go there I will be a burden to my family, but apart from the medical difficulties I will go back I will still need to support my family. It is still a difficult situation." Equally, Adrian (focus group 4), an Ahmedi Muslim from Pakistan, has been resident in Ireland since 2007 and states that his family members are suffering greatly as a result of his presence in this country. In particular, Adrian, a previously successful medical practitioner, states that his family's financial situation has deteriorated markedly since he came to this country and states that his children's education is now being threatened because of financial difficulties arising out of his absence. However, he refuses to even contemplate return. He states that he will only return "if government lifts the ordinance, I like, my trouble is finished, I like, I no stay here one minute. I go back." As Barnes (2001) states, there is a difference between refugees who are members of the "majority" community in their country of origin and those who are from minorities, in so far as majority-members are possibly freer to return when their personal circumstances allow. The fact that Pakistan "is neither a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees nor the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees" must add a further layer of difficulty here (Zieck, 2008: 254).

5.3 Personal Engagements with Life in Ireland

The migrant's sense of self is important. In this light, the decision to stay in Ireland or return to a country of origin can be strongly influenced by how the individual sees him/herself and how he/she assesses his/her own ability to take advantage of the relative opportunities that exist in each place.

The ability to find paid employment impacts positively on the desire to stay in Ireland. More correctly, an appreciation of the differential that exists between what can be earned in a migrant's host country and what can be earned in his/her country of origin is of pivotal importance. Even people who are not in a position to work at present weigh up their opportunities in this manner. For example, better educated people who feel comfortable in their ability to engage with an advanced post-industrial, information-driven economy may feel more determined to stay in Ireland in the face of adversity, as a result of their belief that the long-term potential benefits of staying far outweigh any difficulties being experienced at present. As Peter, a university-educated engineer from Pakistan states: "Let's wait and see because there is hope here (in Ireland)." He also states: "It is hope that drove me to this country and it is hope that makes me stay."

While exposure to a higher standard of living in a host society does not constitute a valid reason to stay away from ones country of origin indefinitely (see, for example, Bradley, 2009: 287) such exposures do impact on the thought processes of those who are affected and the migrant's ability to make a decision to return is lessened by factors anchored in the daily rhythms of life in this country.

In a similar manner, some people will prefer to stay in Ireland because they worry that their journey to Ireland will have impacted on their ability to earn a living in their country of origin, as Dan and James (focus group 5 participants from Nigeria) illustrate in the following excerpts.

Dan states:

> **You must understand – someone stay four or five years from his country and the conditions of the return are just. It is not about getting the return ticket and travel document. The sending you back home is the part, for me. Just see yourself as an Irish being in Australia or Japan for six years and you are coming back to Ireland just with a return ticket and the travel document and I don't know less than 1,000 euro. Where are you going to get cash. You will have to trade or invest it. After five years, at the end of it, we are talking about after five years, so the irony itself is horrific.**

While James states:

> **I normally listen to news, what is going on in my country but if I go there now there is no way for me to cope because I have lost so many things, contacts and some things that I can use to survive in the country.**

Length of time spent away from the individual's country of origin weighs on many migrant minds. In extreme instances, some research participants feel that they have lost their sense of connection with their country of origin. Alastair (focus group 1) cites a sense of connection with his country of origin and states that he doesn't find the thought of return appealing on foot of the fact that he would be "more isolated" on return – "coz everyone has moved on." This may be especially the case in instances when the returnee may simply have grown as a person in Ireland and may not now embrace the same social and cultural register as their counterparts who did not leave. The following excerpt from focus group 2 illustrates this difficulty:

George (Republic of Moldova) – "After four, five years ask for people to go back? They say they would be embarrassing like. After four to five years to go home. You spend four to five years and you say go home? You don't feel right. You spending your life here. You spending four, five years six years is a long time. You will change from your environment, your original environment. You already blend into the culture here."

Patrick (Republic of Moldova, in response) – "You will get more trouble. The way you have of thinking will get you more trouble. You see freedom or you see the way people think. The way people live their lives here. You go back – it's a different way of thinking, living your life. You try to say what's on your mind you will get even worse problem than the original one."

More personal difficulties arise as well. Carol (focus group 5) certainly posits her reluctance to think about return in these terms when she makes the following statement:

You will spend years in this country. Some of us came here in a very early stage, and you, you've missed out from education, missed out from you know so many things and by the time you go, let's say, for me now, I'm 26, I came here when I was going to 23 but today I'm 30 years of age. I don't have no education. No nothing. If I have been able to go back to, if I have been able to go back home, what do I have, what do I have. I've lost all the connection to home.

This loss of connection is a common and important experience and, in this regard, as Ruben et al. (2009, 908) state, "return migration is not always a process of going home." In this light, it is reasonable to state, as Black and Ghent (2006: 20) do, that the very conceptualization of return as a process that will "re-establish equilibrium" in the system by returning someone who is "out of place" in their host society "home" to their "rightful" country, is inherently mistaken, as the idea of "home", as we know it, may no longer exist for the migrant, or at the very least, may be temporarily inaccessible to the individual concerned. Warner (1994:160) makes a similar argument – a point reinforced by the following excerpt taken from an interview with a Nigerian man, Nick, who states:

If I didn't see Ireland I would have been OK in Nigeria. If I did not have any problem there, but there is still 100 and something million over there surviving. Surviving there. So people are going to be there regardless of what it is like. But you have seen outside world and you have seen a different thing, so to you and somebody like me, who thinks, who looks at things and says no, no, no. It is not going to be right in this way and becoming very exposed for me. When I read the Nigerian news I do act up. I say, look this is not the way it is supposed to. We have seen this thing. The outside world, how it works. Why can't it work in this way.

Nick still identifies with his Nigerian heritage. He still reads the news from Nigeria, for example. However, he clearly feels that life in Ireland has changed his outlook. In this way, the thought of return to Nigeria is alien to him. Ghanem's (2003: 15, cited in Ahmed, 2009: 16) treatment of the psychosocial aspects of return supports this analysis when he calls into question the very validity of conceptualizations that seek to posit the return process in terms of repatriation "home" as irrespective of the fact that national identity can be a very powerful connection to a past life when living as a migrant, unrealistic expectations arise whilst away. This migrant offers further support for this thesis when he goes on to state:

One day changes your life. One day you are out from that country and coming out to this place your life has changed. Why? Because there are certain things now that you used to do that you regard no, no, no that's not civilized now to do that. As I say what, regardless of what it is, it could be the way you eat. It could be the way you talk. It could be the way you look. One thing must have changed in your life so for that you go home and that way may not be the way of your wife. You might come back and look and say what is wrong with him. He hasn't seen a person looking at him in that way. Looking at him the way you are looking and not knowing that that is the way outside that looks. So that might not auger well between two of you. That may cause a problem and when you start a problem other things will start coming out and you will be saying OK but in Europe they do it this way and you have to say we, you are not in Europe, you are here.

As with many other aspects of this study, this may simply be an expression of a dynamic in the generic migratory experience. At the very least, what is clear is that ideas of home and belonging are not static or universal but rather are commonly contested, multiple (see, for example, Bialczyk, 2008: 12) and liable to change over time in response to new experiences and understandings but also in response to changes taking place in country

of origin over the period of time a migrant is away. People who come to Ireland and orientate themselves and their aspirations fully to life in this country may indeed come to see their country of origin as a "foreign place" irrespective of the exact nature of their status in this country. Conversely, others, who came to Ireland for a particular purpose and often for a predetermined length of time, may have a more "stable" view of home. Graham, a Georgian migrant who has already decided to return to his country of origin, provides an insight into thought processes here when he states of Ireland:

> **I could stay probably, but there is no place like home. I was thinking about going home before I left Georgia so it was always on my mind but I was waiting for the situation to calm down there so I could go. It is very difficult to put it into a time frame maybe one year maybe one year and one half but I think it is OK for me now to go home. I have never thought of staying here permanently. I like this country but mine is better for me.**

This complexity needs to be borne in mind. In many instances, people do not move with the express desire to stay away from their country of origin permanently (see, for example, Pabon Lopez and Davis, 2009: 32).

5.4 Concerns about the Ability to Re-Embed in Country of Origin

While structural influences operational at the national and regional levels are referenced by almost every participant in the current research (and are outlined in Chapter 6) people refer to a wide variety of more personal issues as well. Two broad groups are discernible at this level of analysis. These are: i) an immigrant's concern about his/her ability to re-engage with his/her family and friends, and ii) an immigrant's association of feelings of failure with the thought of return to his/her country of origin. In short, the motivations discussed here allow for an understanding of how individual migrants grapple with their concerns around the sustainability of their return.

The presence of family in country of origin was a very significant reason for return among Collyer et al.'s (2009: 27) Sri Lankan research participants; indeed Collyer feels that this is "probably the dominant reason for return" among participants in his research, particularly in cases of illness in the family. Such appreciations can prompt a person to return. Ivan, for example, a Georgian national who has been resident in Ireland for over four years, in response to a particular danger in his country of origin, is now actively thinking of return. He states that he is very happy to do this now as he feels that the danger that prompted him to leave his country of origin has now passed. However, he focuses mostly on the draw of family. He states: "I am very happy – I see my family. I don't have a problem now. I'm happy to go."

Conversely, worries about a migrant's ability to re-embed in their previous family and community structure will act as a powerful disincentive, even in the face of other more positive conditions. Ross offers the following insight into such fears when he states that he is afraid to go back as he doesn't know how he will be received by his wider community. He states, in particular, that members of his community may be less than willing to accept him on foot of the fact that he spent time in the West, when he says "people who go back and they think that they have been infiltrated with white people. I have seen this many times and they who back and is finished."

Gender can be influential as well. While large numbers of women did not participate in this study, some gender experiences did come to light and a number of women compare their countries of origin unfavourably with Ireland, expressly on foot of their different gendered experiences in the two countries. Leah, a Moldovan woman who was trafficked for the purposes of sexual slavery to Italy, only to escape and make her way to Ireland states that "when you walk on the street you can't be free like in Ireland. In Ireland you can go night time, one o'clock in the morning or something, but in Moldova – no." While this migrant's not uncommon (see Ahmed, 2001) but nevertheless extreme personal experience must have impacted on her understandings here, it remains that women in particular, can be impacted by the migratory experience. Koser (2010: 191) certainly states that irregular women migrants are at risk of abuse at a level greater than their male counterparts. Ita, another Moldovan woman lends further credence to this realization when she states that "woman in Moldova is not safety and in the family as well. The woman is not anything in Moldova."

Some migrants simply feel the passage of time and experience a sense of extreme dislocation from their country of origin and their pre-migration life. The following excerpt from Mary is illustrative of such a consideration. Mary, a middle-aged woman from Nigeria who has adult children living in her country of origin, states that she spent her life raising her children. Now that they are over the age of 18 she feels that there is no great need to return to her country of origin. She says: "Back home to be honest I have nothing anymore, because none of my children say, everything I left has been, I don't have a home to go back. I don't say my home is waiting."

Other people have more difficult understandings of how their migration will impact on their relationship with family members left behind in their country of origin. Saibh, a 35-year-old Nigerian woman, has two children, one of whom is resident with her in Ireland whilst her older child, a daughter, is resident in her country of origin. Despite speaking at length about the worries she has for her daughter's welfare, she refuses to contemplate return to Nigeria on foot of her belief that she will not be able to support her children financially in that country. This fear is articulated in a particularly poignant manner when she states:

I don't want my daughter to look up to me some day and say so why did you come back if you are going to add to our problems. I don't want a child to look up to me and say mummy you have disappointed me. They want a good life. They want to live like their mates. How especially when you don't, when you can't afford that? I wouldn't want any child to say that to me.

She finishes by stating: "I have no option. I have a plan to look up to God. The only plan I have is to wait. I keep waiting."

Even though most returnees will have had a strong pre-emigration social network, and most people feel that they had many friends in their country of origin, the vast majority of people who participated in this research feel that the experience of migration has diluted this social resource and most feel that the opportunity to re-embed into their pre-migration friendship networks has passed. This experience seems to span all national groups. Potential returnees are consequently apprehensive. Simple length of time away is important. As James states: "You've been out from your country for a long time like that, you have lost a lot. Time has been lost. Friends have been lost you know. You can't go back and say I'm going to stand up again now. No way, because your chance has moved. You have moved on in a different direction." This can give people pause for thought, particularly as Rueben et al. (2009: 931) state that when potential returnees are weighing up their ability to re-embed in their country of origin and "make their way" financially.

The ability to contribute to a person's country of origin, in non-material terms, might help in this regard. Migrants who feel that they have learned something in their host society might be more able to think about returning if they returned under the guise of someone returning to contribute to their community. Mary, for example, has no plan to return to her country of origin at present but admits that she thinks about return in the following altruistic terms

It is my wish to return. Because growing up I've always loved to help and Ireland has the means which I never knew anything about. Charity, I knew to help but I was doing it automatically. I remember when the nomads come from Niger and they come down to our area, we give them clothes, we give them food, some want uncooked food some want, and I came here and I've seen aspects of having charity shops where they donate and people with less money and it is not only for people with little money even people who are very rich, because not everybody has the means of arriving where to get what you like and go arrive into the charity shops and you will get what you like you have designer goods in it and it is something I pray for my own place also to have that ambition to help. So those are the things I always think in me. If I get the chance and if it comes to it one day that I'm free to help I will still like to help Africa.

Finaly et al.'s (2011) cohort of returning medical doctors tended to harbour similar desires to "help people in their country of origin by returning and using the skills that they have learned whilst abroad."

Conversely, however, many migrants experience stress at the thought of return to their country of origin. In some instances such stress may arise from the simple recognition that the individual has nothing to return to. Jeremy is the only surviving member of his immediate family. He uses this realization to support his desire to stay in Ireland. He states: "I have no family. I am alone. I am alone. I stay in the hostel here. I want to make up my family here. I have no family. I have nothing, nothing, just my case. Now they drop in the airport they turn their back – where will I go?"

In other instances, especially in the case of economically motivated immigrants, the thought of return can lead to anxiety. At a most basic level, as Arowolo (2000: 69) states, worries about the inability to "secure waged employment" can lead many to be apprehensive but general financial worries are common.

Many people struggle with ideas of success and failure. The idea that they have been resident in a Western context and have not achieved a level of financial success weighs on many immigrants' minds. They particularly worry about how they will be perceived once "back home". An experienced migration worker who is himself an immigrant from West Africa offers some illustrative comments when he states: "To go back is a failure and a shame on the whole family. If you tell them that things are not going well they wouldn't believe you. The accusation of being lazy is a big thing. They can only go home dead."

He goes on to reinforce this statement by making reference to his own experience:

If you told people in Cameroon about the difficulties they wouldn't believe you. 'You are the only one talking in this. Everyone is saying it is good'. Awareness is important. I'm telling you they will sell everything they have. Most of them are in remote villages. IOM won't get there. Sometimes when people are deported they will hide it. Hide the shame. They would prefer to die than go back.

Andrew reinforces this assessment. In response to a direct question on the desirability of return to Nigeria, this migrant states: "I have no computer. I have nothing. I have to go to Nigeria to start afresh?" He goes on to state that he would prefer to die as a failure than return to his country of origin, when he states: "For me, I would prefer to die. I prefer to die here than go home empty-handed. I swear to my god. I believe. I believe in my mind, that is the serious, my god I prefer to die here than to go to Nigeria. As a failure – a total failure."

Andrew's final statement is particularly illustrative here. In many instances, this type of thinking can lead to feelings of failure and shame as the returning migrant experiences a loss of self during the return process and his/her lack of economic success gets mapped onto his/her sense of self-worth. As Eddie states: "To go home with no money is shame. From Georgia to – same situation. Economic situation – is normal. Where is the money? In Europe – go to Europe. Where is the money? In America – go to America." Luke, a migrant from Nigeria, puts such appreciations down to a lack of education when he states: "There are some people who are not educated at all. They do not know about Europe and Western world. They believe going to Europe is very good to make money and become just a rich man and that is it you see." He then states: "Going back will never be an option. You'd hardly do it." At the very least, as Lee states, "if you come back with nothing that means that you didn't fit in", in a Western meritocratic context.

Such experiences are not confined to migrants from locations in the global South. A migrant from the Republic of Moldova who spent some time as an undocumented worker in Ireland before making an asylum application articulates a common concern when he states:

The most sore point is that people are expecting you to come back home with documents but that is not the reality. It is still something that bugs the one who is thinking of going back home. But I just want to confirm that there is still something that makes you happy or glad in a way that you are going back home. That is still there and you obviously go home to the dearest ones but there is disappointment that you go home too much empty handed that is it. To go home. To start all over again in Moldova.

This potential sense of failure can be further exacerbated in instances where a migrant may have borrowed money to fund his/her movement. Some people simply cannot return because they do not have the money to repay the debts they incurred in coming to Ireland. Jack, an experienced plumber from Nigeria, is one such person. Despite stating that he cannot go home to Nigeria because of fear of violence, Jack speaks strongly about his need to stay in Ireland so that he can repay his debt. He states: "Me and my wife cost me 14,000 euro to come here. A lot of money. A big money. I took a loan from the bank. We feel bad. That is why we are still waiting maybe we will work and start to pay our money." Interestingly, he ends rather lamely by stating "I cannot go back because of the political problem as well." It is a matter of course that many migrants utilize an agent to facilitate their movement from their sending country to their destination country. Sums of many thousands of dollars regularly change hands in such transactions. This will inevitably add a further layer of difficulty, and immigrants contemplating return may very well be prompted to remain in their destination country rather than return to face debt, even one which is most likely owed to a close family member or relative (see, for example, Strand, 2008).

The following excerpt from Gareth's interview has an especially illustrative quality:

Going back to do what? To start a life that you've left. It is like a newborn baby, you are going to a country that you have left and that you don't know anything about. If you leave Ireland for maybe five years and they ask you to return to Ireland. Fine, it is your country but you still would like to know what is the state in Ireland, what is in the labour market is there a job is there, you still have to take, it takes like a year to get yourself back. And people tend to say OK you are back maybe from Europe – nobody to tend to help you back home nobody will help you back home. So why you gonna go?

He goes on to state:

They look at you, you know, that this person has left for, nobody knows where you have left. Some people might know where you have so they might say. These people have fled maybe five years and then they see you coming back from Europe and they say maybe you've been working in Europe. You've been studying and they expect you to come back and just tap something out and you are coming back to tell them – oh please I need 10 cents from you. They want you to contribute to them rather than they to you.

They believe that someone in Europe will have a good life a refined life, best education, you know best in everything, so when the person now comes back home and starts telling stories that this is how Europe is this is how Europe is blah blah blah and there is nothing to show for it – how you gonna cope? Your parents are never going to take you back as in. You can never stay with your parents or your siblings, friends. Everybody see you as fail. Nobody want to work with you.

People fear that they have lost out as a function of their movement to Ireland (see also, Ahmed, 2009: 45).

Interestingly, while the term "home" is readily used by most migrants, ideas of "home" do not arise in these excerpts, even among the migrants who are happy to think about the prospect of return. It may be that people are inherently focused on the practicalities of return and do not overtly articulate the idea of home because this notion is simply implicit in their very engagement with return. However, Ghanem's (2003, cited in Ahmed, 2009: 16) seminal treatment of the psychosocial aspects of return is worth noting here, especially his questioning of the very validity of conceptualizations that seek to posit the return process in terms of repatriation "home", as irrespective of the fact that national identity can be a very powerful connection to a past life when living as a migrant, in many instances unrealistic expectations arise whilst away – expectations that often contribute to the creation of a significant myth of return. As Ruben et al. (2009: 908) state, "return migration is not always a process of going home."

5.5 *Reintegration and the International Organization for Migration*

Migrants considering return are conscious of the need to reengage with their country of origin. Most are apprehensive. Some question their ability to successfully reintegrate into their old communities and life patterns. An effective post-return assistance programme might help in this regard. While often bold experiments have been conducted (see, for example, Pabon Lopez and Davis's 2009 analysis of Spain's Plan de Retorno Voluntario or Kreienbrink's (2006: 48) analysis of activities in Germany), the return grant component of IOM's AVR programmes is the one such input that has been consistently operational in many international contexts.

The AVR return grant is commonly referenced in the narratives collected here. People who are motivated to think about return certainly are aware of this potential assistance and value its presence. Equally, however, the size of the grant is not attractive and does not serve as an inducement to encourage people to opt for AVR by itself.[19] As in all other discussions of return, "big picture" economic and political concerns structure many engagements with the idea of a return grant. Those who valorize the importance of political safety over other potential motivations dismiss the presence of the grant, out of hand. As Colin states: "If the country is not safe. No matter how much money, that country is not safe." Even those who may be motivated to see their migratory experience in "economically rational" terms and who may therefore be more open to the idea of an economically incentivized return than others deem the presence of the IOM resettlement grant to be of very little importance. As Paul states: "500 euro? 500 euro is just. 500 euro is no money."

A senior staff member at IOM Dublin supports this view when, describing the work of her section, she reinforces IOM's conceptualization of the reintegration grant as a mechanism to be used in support of income-generating activities, not instead of them. She states: "The reintegration assistance is not to buy furniture. It will not matter if you can't find a job to put food on the table for children." In this light, it is difficult to support contentions now common in literature, which state that IOM's AVR programmes are best seen as part of a neoliberal "deportation turn" premised on the subtle enlisting of migrant cooperation via targeted information and assistance (see, for example, Andrijasevic and Walters, 2010: 994). On the contrary, in Martin's case, IOM's operations team were scrupulous in advising him of options, other than availing of their programme. Martin states: "I tell IOM and IOM tell me you can make appeal now. Refresh your appeal but I say I spoke with him today. There is nothing to change. Maybe one year, maybe two – that's better the situation but I have no time. No, no. There is nothing to change."

19 The amount of financial assistance offered to returnees from Ireland is generally lower than that offered by other European states. See Kraniauskas (2010: 32–80) for a detailed comparison of measures instituted in different European contexts.

It is the sense of passing time that motivates Martin, not any overly positive view of the quality of his future life in his country of origin or of the amount of financial assistance available.

Current inputs are certainly valued by those who avail of them but they do not "set the agenda" here and do not act as inducements to return. Host-country governments could have an expanded role to play here. While Harvey (2006: 94) states that there is a standard understanding that all host-country governments want migrants to return to their country of origin, it is worth asking whether host country governments can help the individual by anticipating the dislocation associated with the move "home" and instituting a response proactively. In this light, return grants, in and of themselves, are not enough. The sustainability of return is most important and the long-term sustainability of return spins on the acceptability of return to the community in place (Noll, 2000, in Black and Ghent, 2006: 24). While reintegration assistance is in place in many contexts, a more widespread financing of broadly based assistance programmes to assess risks on return might constitute a useful intervention. Such schemes would be of particular assistance when subjective perceptions of threat abound.

5.6 Summary

An individual's subjective understanding of his/her place in life is important in any decision to stay in Ireland or return to country of origin. Such appreciations are very difficult to assess but family and community are important. In the classic manner, an individual will internalize the likely experiences he/she will have in this regard transnationally and the decision to stay in Ireland or return will be made by subjectively assessing the absolute merits of life in one location over the other.

Chapter 6
Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

The decision to stay in Ireland or return to a country of origin is a dynamic one, influenced by a mixed pallet of structural and personal factors and anchored in the transnational imaginaries of the people who need to make it. When asked directly and allowed to articulate their own understandings in their own time, the vast majority of research participants swept back and forth between their country of origin, their current life in Ireland, and their hopes and aspirations for their future and, as such, a wide range of both objectively measurable and personally subjective influences are referenced by every research participant. This dynamism needs to be embraced by any study seeking to understand the nature of the decision. Even a seemingly discrete impulse such as the decision to stay in Ireland or return to a person's country of origin can be constructed in a situationally fluid and changeable manner with the immigrant's engagement with the idea ebbing and flowing between two poles depending on a plethora of considerations. In this way, as stated in Chapter 1, the decision to return is best conceptualized in terms of Dashefsky et al.'s (1992) "cross-pressures to remain or return."

Most people place a great deal of emphasis on the likely quality of life in their country of origin.

6.2 Discourses of Safety and Lack of Opportunity in Country of Origin Discourage Thoughts of Return

Discourses of safety are common in all migrant narratives. Most of the people who participated in this research state that they are resident in Ireland because they are seeking protection from "danger" and that they had no intention of emigrating from their country of origin until a particular, and often unforeseen, difficulty drove them to leave. In this way, a discourse of "justifiable flight" is commonly invoked. The language of politics and political difficulty can be especially dominant here and most migrants present their experiences in terms that fit with the workings of the 1951 Convention on the Rights of the Refugee. These then structure most contemplations on return to country of origin. Very few people state that they are open to the prospect of voluntary

return whilst they feel that the conditions that prompted them to leave their country of origin remain in place and the prospect of return is almost uniformly seen to be a retrograde step.

This general engagement with politically structured difficulty tends to be anchored in a much wider contemplation of need and discourses of politics and economics tend to converge in the narratives of the people who participated in this research. The decision to leave is anchored in the idea of flight from danger and life in Ireland is valued on foot of its order and predictability but thoughts of return do not arise and the motivations given are mostly anchored in discourses of economic need and wider structural difficulty in country of origin. The intersection of difficulty, broadly based, and lack of opportunity in country of origin proves to be a very powerful motivation to move and conversely, a disincentive to return.

This is a key issue. The language of flight from danger is commonly used but the approach used in this study can unpack this language and show the array of other influences implicated in a decision to migrate. Time and again, people will consciously project one particular image in response to a direct question only to range far and wide in the conversation that arises from that start point. In this way, references to economics, politics, social matters, cultural practices, community affiliations and personal lifestyle choices are routinely brought into rationales for migration that are initially and stridently anchored in the idea of flight.

It is not my intention to question the expressly held views of the individuals who participated in this research, or to lay them open to criticism. The individuals who state that they are fleeing from a real danger and that they do not wish to return to their country of origin on foot of their belief that that same danger remains in force are adopting such a clearly stated position. We must proceed on those lines and accept such statements as a true reflection of the experience.

Irish organizations can do very little to counter this perception of danger in country of origin. It is tempting, in this light, to state that if the Irish government is truly interested in the welfare of returnees then it should seek to play a more fundamental role in the lives of returnees, post return. Return is not enough in itself – the long-term sustainability of return is. The institution of a proper monitoring programme to assess risks on return might constitute a useful intervention here. Unfortunately, this is an unrealistic goal, in the current economic climate. More modest inputs can still yield observable results. Migrants are not operating in an information vacuum. Most are well connected to their families and friends in their country of origin and most regularly consume news stories for “home”. While individual understandings of the conditions present in their country of origin might be at odds with the Irish government’s “objective” assessment of the reality of the situation in that country, it would be entirely incorrect for an Irish organization to seek to counter an individual’s stated belief that he/she would be in danger on return to their country of origin. However, migrants could be presented with an alternative view. Positive stories of return might be usefully disseminated on a wider level than is currently the case. Currently, news of people and places from home is filtered through the often

country-specific information pathways used by migrants in Ireland. "Bad news stories" can become magnified. For example, I encountered many third-party stories about the difficulties faced by returnees in their country of origin; I hardly ever encountered stories of people who have successfully settled back into their pre-migration patterns. Opportunities to resettle could be advertised, for example. A wider engagement with positive stories of return, along the lines of IOM's current leaflet and DVD campaign, could certainly constitute a useful intervention here.

6.3 Apprehensions about "Settling Back" in Country of Origin Discourage Thoughts Of Return

A transnational migrant familial imaginary must be in place in Ireland. A person may be motivated to stay in Ireland on foot of thoughts of future opportunities for his/her children while, at the same time being drawn back to his/her country of origin by thoughts of family members left behind. Some central Europeans certainly cited the importance of family when deliberately thinking of return. In other cases however, even the presence of family members in the person's country of origin is not enough to prompt the migrant to think about return.

Some migrants simply feel the passage of time and experience a sense of extreme dislocation from their country of origin and their pre-migration life. Other people have more difficult understandings of how their migration will impact on their relationship with family members left behind in their country of origin. They may wish to return and reengage with their family members still resident in their country of origin but worry about their ability to re-embed in their previous family and community structures.

In this regard, the vast majority of people who participated in this research feel that the experience of migration has diluted the social resource base that they will be able to call upon in the event of return. Many people especially struggle with ideas of success and failure and worry about how they will be perceived should they return to their sending country. The idea that they have been resident in a Western context and have not achieved a level of financial success weighs heavily on many minds. In this regard, it is important to note that "return migration is not always a process of going home."

Inputs to counter this feeling may be useful here. The ability to contribute to a person's country of origin, in non-material terms, might help. Migrants who feel that they have learned something in their host society might be more able to think about returning if they returned under the guise of someone returning to contribute to their community. Certainly, there is some international evidence to suggest that migrants who feel that they have invested in skills and competences whilst abroad are more comfortable with the idea of return. The Irish migration control system does not help in this regard. While some educational inputs are available and while the idea of training and educating people who have not been granted residency in the state is conceptually problematic, the provision of more training inputs might actually serve to increase the attractiveness of return.

The provision of pre-return training might constitute a useful intervention here. This could be particularly useful for skilled migrants whose skill level has declined as a function of their inability to work in Ireland. A migrant who has opted to avail of an AVR programme could be provided with a short but intensive course targeting particular skill sets and valorizing new techniques. Existing educational/training organizations could be engaged to provide such training. There must be excess capacity in the vocational training sector in this country, given the precipitous collapse in the number of people opting to complete an apprenticeship. Similarly, unskilled migrants opting to return could be provided with short applied courses in skills relevant to the workplace.

Current mechanisms, such as IOM's return grant, could be remodelled to provide for more forms of such types of non-financial assistance. The continuance of an effective return and reintegration assistance programme will still remain a useful input. However, current programmes show that the provision of a return grant is not a panacea for the worries attached to return. IOM's AVR return grant is commonly referenced by people who participated in this study. People who have thought about return are certainly aware of the types of assistance available to them. Equally, however, the grant does not serve as an inducement to opt for AVR by itself. As in all other discussions of return, "big picture" economic and political concerns structure many engagements with the idea of a return grant. Those who valorize the importance of political safety over other potential motivations dismiss the presence of the grant, out of hand. The principle of non-financial assistance is worthy of further examination.

In this light, as with the previous discussion, it is very difficult to see how a policy response instituted in Ireland could impact on migrants' perceptions of return that are anchored in their country of origin. Specific inputs may be able to effect a change on influences anchored in Ireland.

6.4 Hopes for Life in Ireland Encourage People to Stay

Many aspects of life in Ireland are attractive and motivate people to stay in this country. Even people living in "temporary" accommodation readily engage with the imaginaries of life in Ireland. In this way, the more comfortable the person is with Ireland, and the idea of Ireland, the more grounded they feel, the less likely they are to look favourably at the prospect of returning to their country of origin. Three strong influences come to light here: i) While exposure to a higher standard of living in a host society does not constitute a valid reason to stay away from one's country of origin, indefinitely such exposures do impact on the thought processes of those who are affected and the migrant's ability to make a decision to return is lessened by factors anchored in the daily rhythms of life in this country. ii) The presence of children in Ireland readily reinforces a parent's desire to stay in this country. iii) Aspirations to engage with the waged labour force and, therefore, to earn money encourage people to stay in Ireland. The existence of a clear differential between what can be earned in Ireland and what can be earned in a migrant's country of origin is of pivotal importance. Even people who are not in a position to work at present weigh their potential opportunities in this manner.

In many ways, this simply serves to illustrate the nature of the migrant condition more generally. People move out of a desire for a better life. Migrants have enough exposure to the rhythms of life in this country to understand that in many respects, their likely quality of life will be higher in Ireland than in their country of origin. People understand that most applications for residency are rejected by the Irish authorities but they continue to live in hope. In some ways, this insistence that a life in Ireland remains possible flies in the face of any objective assessment of the situation. In particular, all such understandings are built on the migrant's belief that they will be in a position to work and therefore earn money in this country. Any analysis of current patterns will show that this is unlikely to transpire for most. People wait, and hope that the specificities of their case will be deemed sufficient. This is not a strong position to adopt, for either the individual or the state and should be countered through the fostering of an effective assessment system that identifies the specificities of each case early and provides all necessary information.

The workings of the Irish migration management system reinforce this tendency.

6.5 The Experience of Difficulty Does Not Encourage People to Think of Return

Even the most steadfast of migrants can feel worn down by life in the direct provision system. Some question their motivation to stay on foot of the experience of uncertainty. However, even here, such pronouncements are commonly balanced by a reiteration of the migrant's primary motivation to come to Ireland – the need to be safe – and a condemnation of the "inhumane" nature of the Irish migration management system. Equally, I see no evidence to support contentions that the length of time a migrant spends subject to an asylum application will have a direct impact on the desirability of return. Indeed, rather than wearing people down, the length of time in the system may actually reinforce the need to stay put and ultimately undermine the impulse to return to country of origin. People experience a sense of infantilization whilst resident in direct accommodation. The structured and regimented rhythms of life can deskill a person at the most basic of levels and many migrants may simply be unable to make logical decisions about the relative merits of one place over another. This is clearly supported by the number of people who simply refuse to countenance the idea of return, even in situations where the daily quality of their life could conceivably be much improved in another place.

The Government of Ireland is in a difficult position here. The length of time that migrants experience in the system must be a direct result of Ireland's attempts to create a humane pattern of migration management that extends "due process" to all, but the longer the time spent in direct provision, the more difficult it is for the resident him/herself to disengage from the system and think about alternatives. Very many people currently housed in the direct accommodation system have simply made too much of an investment in the refugee-asylum process in this country in the hope of garnering a positive outcome at some point in the future. People are loath to opt out, given the investment already made. Even the threat of forced repatriation, this jurisdiction's

ultimate sanction against "failed" migrants, does not seem to impact on people in general. I certainly find very little evidence to suggest that the threat of deportation encourages people to engage with the idea of return. It may be that people subject to an application for asylum may simply not be motivated to think about return until the very last minute, preferring instead to focus entirely on the prospects of gaining status in their host country.

In this way, the debilitating nature of life in the migration control process is an impediment to return. People stay and hope that their lives will improve and do not engage with the likelihood of failure. Rather, they live in hope.

There is a clear need to educate migrants about the full range of options available to them. A wider and earlier engagement with the idea of return would pay dividends, I believe, not just for the state but for the individual as well. Too many people who participated in this research are living an institutionalized existence. The vast majority are clearly very closed to the prospect of return. In my opinion, this does not automatically signal the presence of a strongly held view but rather is likely to be an expression of the individual's inability to engage with options laterally. Increased outreach and more proactive information provision is needed at every level of the migration management process. There is a particularly strong need to disseminate information that counters the multitude of perceived threats to personal safety in a person's country of origin. Specialist service providers can only do so much. A far wider-ranging engagement with the idea of return is needed. Both statutory and non-statutory organizations need to embrace this idea. I would suggest that the option to return be more widely advertised, even at point of entry to the state. This would have the added benefit of separating the idea of voluntary return from any perceived threat of forced repatriation at the end of a long and drawn-out process and therefore allow people to truly consider the relevance of voluntary return in their lives. In this way, the return perspective should become more important, even at the very start of the application process. While this may constitute a strain on people seeking political asylum, it is a better practice to have a realistic picture painted at the outset, albeit with due consideration given to the potential for trauma in individual instances.

Migrant advocacy organizations have a role to play here as well. There is a sense that many of these organizations do not fully embrace the idea of return to country of origin, or the fact that oftentimes return represents the best option for an individual. While IOM is clear that it regularly referred migrants from organizations active in the NGO sector, many organizations state that they will only recommend the return option when they feel that all other options have been exhausted.

A more integrated engagement with return, based on the principles of partnership, would constitute a useful development in this regard. The presence of IOM alone cannot motivate people to think of return.

6.6 Ireland's Assisted Voluntary Return Programme is valued by migrants who engage with it, but its presence, in itself, does not encourage thoughts of return

Immigrants who make the decision to return "home", but who do not have access to sufficient funds, benefit enormously from the assistance provided by Ireland's AVR programmes.

Unfortunately, while most are aware of the possibility of return, people seem to adopt a "wait-and-see approach" and most do not actively engage with the idea of voluntary return until it is possibly too late and they are subject to a deportation order. It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, that the simple presence of an operational return programme does not promote the idea of return. Some people are simply not aware of its existence. Others are mindful of its presence but do not fully understand its role. The take-up on such programmes could be increased by more effective advertising of their presence.

IOM cannot do much more than it presently does to advertise the presence of its AVR programmes. This organization is strongly committed to information dissemination. Nevertheless, literature on return is rarely evident in accommodation centres. Indeed, given its current remit, I see very little evidence of IOM's ability to increase its current profile, without the cooperation of all others active in the Irish migration landscape. Such specialist return programmes should be operational in Ireland, but they rely, by their very nature, on information pathways operating smoothly at a number of levels within the broader Irish migration control system. This does not happen in this country. For example, there is a lot of misinformation about IOM and its role. I have encountered many stories told about IOM's unwillingness or inability to assist migrants who have made a decision to return to their country of origin. These are inevitably third-party stories of the "I know a man" type and are therefore likely to be apocryphal in nature, but in that, they serve to illustrate that many immigrants resident in Ireland do not know about IOM and its remit to assist them once the decision to return is made.

People simply do not understand where AVR fits and even immigrants who are aware of IOM are commonly mistaken about the nuances of its work, especially its remit to facilitate a decision that has already been made – not to promote an option that has not been decided upon. More effective information is needed about the return programmes that are available in this country and in light of the points made in section 1, this information needs to be disseminated far earlier in each individual's experience in Ireland and more proactively by all stakeholders.

It might be useful to separate the idea of voluntary return more firmly from the use of forced repatriation. Many migrants are mindful of the role that deportation plays in the Irish migration control system. This will "muddy the waters" for many – especially

as many get much of their information from informal circuits of knowledge. While it is unlikely, given the centrality of forced return in this country's migration control system, the threat of forced return must be separated from any engagement with the idea of voluntary assisted return.

Appendix I:

Brief profile of focus group/qualitative interview participants

The production of a statistically representative sample of migrants to Ireland was not part of this project's aims and objectives. While such an exercise has its place in studies of this kind, this study has drawn on a completely different epistemological rationale and in this regard, there are only limited gains to be made from exhaustively outlining the demographic nature of the sample of people who participated in this research. In the interests of completeness however, a short profile of the "sample" of people who participated in the focus groups and qualitative interviews is included here.

Nationality

Twenty nationalities are included in the interview/focus group sample. Nigerians, Pakistanis, Moldovans and Georgians dominate here. This is deliberate. These national groups were purposely targeted by the research design. Other nationalities are present in small numbers only and each national group is only represented by a single participant, in each case. People from China, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Ghana, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, Cuba, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Iran, Algeria, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia are included here. Despite the project's best efforts, only one Chinese person is included in this research (a focus group participant). This national group proved to be impossible to engage with, given the length of time the project was in the field.

Gender

More men than women were interviewed here. Sixty-nine men participated in interviews and focus group discussions, only 25 women did likewise. Women are more prominent in some national samples. Nearly one third of Nigerian interviewees/ focus group participants are women (10 of 30) and over 40 per cent of Moldovan participants are women. Conversely, no Pakistani woman was happy to participate in the interview/ focus group research. In some ways, this is an entirely predictable outcome. Nigerian women are present in Ireland in large numbers. Religious and cultural attitudes and practices are always likely to impact on the research's ability to access Muslim women, especially in the short period of time the project was operating in the field.

Status in Ireland

Most of the people who participated in this research are currently subject to an application for refugee status in this country. Irregular migrants simply do not come forward to participate in this type of research, preferring instead to remain invisible to all but a small group of trusted friends and acquaintances. In my opinion, a project seeking to engage with irregular migrants would need to be conducted over a far longer period of time than was available to the current project. Equally, even more nuanced methodological approaches than those adopted here would be required in the field.

Interestingly, however, four interview participants state that they were undocumented immigrants to Ireland in previous years. All four come from Georgia and the Republic of Moldova and all state that the experience of personal difficulties and deteriorating health in Ireland prompted them to apply for refugee status.

Most people are resident in Ireland for three or more years (70% of the sample). Nearly 10 per cent of those interviewed are resident for more than five years. Only a small number of people (seven individuals) are newcomers, resident in this country for less than 12 months.

Age and family status

Most participants were young. Nearly two thirds are between the ages of 25 and 39 with a further 15 per cent between the ages of 18 and 25. Coincidently, this is almost the exact same age distribution as that recorded by Black et al. (2004: 11). Participants from Pakistan (13 of 24 people) are a bit older as many of these are Ahmedi Muslims who fled their country of origin on foot of their forthright religious views.

Slightly more participants are single than married (35 interview participants, 57%). This data was not collected during focus groups, due to an oversight. Slightly fewer than half of all participants had children (48%). Most of these had at least one child resident with them in Ireland.

The vast majority of people who participated in the interview and focus group elements of this research state that close family members are still resident in their country of origin. Only 9.5 per cent of the sample is without significant familial connections in their country of origin.

Appendix II:
Questionnaire

These questions seek to gather information that will lead to an improved understanding of the needs of recent immigrants to Ireland and to the creation of effective return programmes in this country.

The information contained in this form is confidential and will not be used for any purpose other than compiling the results of this survey.

For further information, please contact:

Dr Liam Coakley, Department of Geography, University College Cork, Cork. 021 4904359 l.coakley@ucc.ie	Participant number:

Question schedule

Personal Details

1. Location	
2. Gender	
3. Age	
4. Marital status	
5. Children	
6. Religion	
7. Legal status in Ireland	
8. Length of time in Ireland	

Life in country of origin

9. Country of birth	
10. Childhood home – town/village/ district	
11. Did you live elsewhere growing up	
12. If so, where?	
13. Did family members leave the country when you were a child? If so, who?	
14. Employment before leaving "home" country?	
15. Residential location immediately before emigration	
16. Highest education	

Coming to Ireland

17. Why did you leave your home country?	
18. Why did you come to Ireland?	
19. Have you ever lived in another country (other than home country)?	
20. If so, where?	
21. How did you come to Ireland?	

Life in Ireland

22. Do you have family members living in Ireland?	
23. If so, are they living with you?	
24. If so, were they born in Ireland	
25. Do you have family members living in your country of origin	

26. If so, who are they?	
27. Do you work?	
28. If so, what is your occupation?	

Return?

29. Do you think about leaving Ireland?	
30. Do you think about return to your home country?	
31. Do you plan to stay in Ireland/ return/move to another country?	
32. Why?	
33. Would you ever go back to your childhood home?	
34. Why?	
35. Have you discussed this with your family/friends contacts in Ireland/in home country	
36. What are the main issues that will effect your decision to stay or to return?	

Assistance for return

37. Do you know of any assistance for return available in Ireland	
38. If so, what is it?	
39. What would make a difference in helping you to decide to stay or return?	
40. Do you feel that you have enough information about return?	

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