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Guest Editorial: Finding Home through Motion: Contemporary Migration to Ireland

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Finding Home through Motion: Contemporary Migration to Ireland

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Abstract: The introduction to this special issue of *Irish Geography* discusses three papers that emerged from the 45th Conference of Irish Geographers held in Galway in 2013. Essentially, the papers insist upon recognising the complex human geographies of migration and mobility, drawing upon different theoretical, methodological and analytical frameworks. The papers coalesce around the concept of home which is embedded in processes of migration. Doyle and McAreavey's paper adds to the literature on housing and immigrant settlement, highlighting the complexity of migrant integration in Northern Ireland. Their paper also highlights how something as mundane as setting up home has the potential to change socio-cultural geographies at a granular level. Cawley and Galvins's paper focuses on continuities and change in the migration process, noting the temporal endurance of transnational connections among migrants who have returned to Ireland. Their paper acknowledges the circular flows of mobility associated with transnational migration, highlighting that return to one's country of origin is more than just another circulation within the migratory process. Hanafin's research extends the discussion of return to children of emigrants and their parental homelands, highlighting the complex geographies of belonging that emerge for second generation returnees. Taken together, these papers provide important insights into transnational migration processes, in which Ireland is both an origin and destination. Additionally, they suggest that the various spatial, social, and cognitive practices constituting home must be conceptualised in a way that embraces the fluidity of home for migrants.

Key Words: immigration, return migration, home, belonging

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Introduction

After the collapse of the Celtic Tiger economy in Ireland, there was a return to discourses of mass emigration. While emigration did increase (for example, from 80,600 in the year to April 2011 to 87,100 in the year to April 2012), immigration did not cease (52,700 from 53,300 over the same period). Furthermore, the immigrants who made Ireland home during the Celtic Tiger did not leave *en-masse* when the economy crashed. Therefore, Ireland remains a migration nation, with complex patterns of inward and outward mobility embedded within the global economic system. It was in this context that the current collection of papers was initially presented at the 45th Conference of Irish Geographers held in Galway in 2013. Essentially, the papers insist upon recognising the complex human geographies of migration and mobility. Each paper in this special issue highlights one key dimension of these complex geographies. Carey Doyle and Ruth McAreavey's paper examines recent migration to Northern Ireland, focusing on how the global processes of migration become spatially localised through housing. Mary Cawley and Stephen Galvin's paper focuses on the continuities and change embedded in decisions to migrate and return, highlighting that stability and change co-exist within the migration process. Finally, Sara Hanafin's paper explores the multiple experiences of belonging that emerge among second generation return migrants to Ireland. While these papers draw upon different theoretical, methodological and analytical frameworks, common to all of them is how the concept of home is centrally located within the processes of migration and belonging.

Finding a Home: Migrant Housing Choices

The importance of secure housing in facilitating settlement is recognised in much of the academic literature around migrant integration (see Ager and Strang, 2008; Castles *et al.*, 2002; Phillimore and Goodson, 2008; Robinson and Reeve, 2006). Doyle and McAreavey's paper adds to this literature, describing the processes of how migrants find housing and settle into neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland. The explanations provided can be simultaneously contextualised within the spatial assimilation model (Gordon, 1964; Alba and Logan, 1991; Massey and Denton, 1985) and the place stratification model (Alba and Logan, 1991, 1993; Logan and Alba, 1993; Logan and Molotch, 1987). The former contends that immigrant ethnic groups start at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, and only have enough resources to purchase residences in less desirable neighbourhoods – in the research by Doyle and McAreavey, interface neighbourhoods. Gradually, as these groups move up the socioeconomic ladder, they convert increases in household wealth into upward residential mobility and disperse to a broader range of neighbourhoods, as highlighted by the advocacy worker from Portadown and evidenced in the high spatial mobility of migrant families in Doyle and McAreavey's study. On the other hand, the place stratification model emphasises that opportunities for mobility are restricted for ethnic minorities in particular. This was clear in Doyle and McAreavey's discussion of how constrained housing choices were for an individual Congolese respondent. From this perspective,

choices were not only constrained by socio-economic status but also by race, with housing institutions embedded in a process that prevents racial and ethnic minority groups from encroaching upon neighbourhoods that featured the best housing stock (Timberlake, 2003).

It is worth considering the potentially transformative nature of migrants doing something as mundane as setting up home. As noted in Doyle and McAreavey's paper, many early migrants settled in interface areas between Catholic and Protestant communities that were socially, spatially and physically segregated. While the incorporation of these newcomers was far from smooth, Doyle and McAreavey make clear that their presence impacts upon the social fabric of the places in which they arrive at the granular level of communities – streets, housing estates and other geographical demarcations that often get glossed over by official statistics on migration trends. Indeed, their paper clearly illustrates how setting up home can be contextualised as the starting point for a range of socio-cultural geographies (Cresswell, 2006) such as segregation, integration and community building. In their research, Doyle and McAreavey show that demographic, social and economic characteristics of immigrant households combine with the size, type, price and tenure of housing and location to produce a 'fundamental dynamic of change' (Dieleman, 2001: 261). In essence, the housing decisions of migrants in Northern Ireland can be understood as a series of opportunistic, complex and transformative socio-spatial relations that coalesce into the negotiation of the here-and-now.

The role that houses play as spaces of cultural refuge is part of that negotiation, particularly in the context of increased racially motivated crimes and racism directed against people from ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland (McVeigh and Rolston, 2007; Wallace *et al.*, 2013). In effect, Doyle and McAreavey's paper highlights how migrant houses become enclaves of belonging to multiple places and relate to a range of people at different spatial and temporal scales. This approach situates migrant housing decisions within an international context of a marked increase in the total numbers of people migrating and the changed nature of migration to one that is increasingly more transnational (Brah, 1996; Al-Ali and Koser, 2002; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). As Blunt and Dowling (2006:197-8) argue, a transnational approach to home and mobility allows us to 'unsettle the fixity and singularity of a place called home to invoke more fluid definitions of home that reflect transnational connections and networks'.

Coming Home: First Generation Return

When considering migration and mobility in the context of these transnational connections, a central focus has been on practices through which migrants maintain ties across nation-states (Vertovec, 1999). Implicit in this is a desire to understand how migrants create and maintain a sense of home that transcends the spatial and temporal constraints of mobility (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003; Brah, 1996; Olwig and Sorensen, 2003; Levitt and Waters, 2002; Rapport and Dawson, 1998; Salih, 2003). The *new mobilities* literature characterises this as 'double presence' (Cresswell,

2010; Urry, 2007), in contrast to the idea of ‘double absence’ developed by Abdemalek Sayad (2004). Contextualising migration as double presence implies that the main issue is not the question of return but the question of circulation (Benson, 2011; Sinatti, 2011). The importance of circulation is evident in Cawley and Galvin’s paper, which illustrates how migration creates patterns of circulation between origin and destination spanning the life-course of the migrant. However, while Cawley and Galvin’s paper acknowledges how migration can create mobility as people circulate back and forth between origin and destination, their research highlights that return, both imagined and real, remains an important dimension of the migration process. Indeed, their paper addresses both changes and enduring continuities of migration and return, highlighting that they are mutually defining concepts (O’Leary and Negra, 2016). In effect, home itself is a journey (Mallet, 2004), embodied and maintained through transnational relationships (e.g., social, cultural, economic, and political) and/or other transnational groups who share a connection with them to their place of origin. King and Lulle (2015) argue that visits to home are of such importance to (most) migrants that they are constitutive of the essence of the migration experience.

While Cawley and Galvin’s paper acknowledges the flows of mobility and potential for increased mobility associated with the process of transnational migration, they also highlight that return to one’s country of origin is more than just another circulation within the migratory process. It is clear that all of their respondents shared an enduring orientation towards home throughout their time outside their country of origin, an attribute Brubaker (2005) argues is a defining feature of transnational diasporas. As such, the distinction between home as a ‘lived experience’ and home as a ‘place of origin’ (Brah, 1986: 186), is blurry. This was apparent in the motivations of older generations of migrants whose initial decision to migrate was very often centrally embedded in economic practices associated with maintaining homes in their place of origin. Furthermore, the continued salience of chain migration facilitated by links in Irish migrant communities further challenges the distinction which Brah (1986) makes between the lived experience of home and the place of origin.

The analysis provided by Cawley and Galvin also draws explicit attention to migration and return in the context of the life course, which can be conceptualised as ‘a sequence of age linked transitions that are embedded in social institutions and history’ (Bengtson *et al.*, 2005: 493). In this context, return is mainly triggered by family and lifestyle considerations (Djajić, 2008; Haug, 2008; Plane and Jurjevich, 2009; Rumbaut, 2004). As such, key life events such as graduation, employment or the birth of children can trigger transnational mobility. In addition, Cawley and Galvin’s work confirms the importance of children in influencing decisions to move, with parents clearly influenced by the symbolic capital bound up with notions of returning to the rurality of Ireland to raise their children. These moves can be interpreted as international counter-urbanisation, with families making conscious decisions to relocate to rural communities from urban centres in Britain, the US and elsewhere (Ni Laoire, 2007).

Homeland Bound: Second Generation Return

Hanafin's paper is situated in the growing literature on the links between the children of emigrants and their parental homelands. This literature grew out of ongoing debates about how extensive and durable ties to home are beyond the first generation of migrants (Cassarino, 2004; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Levitt and Waters, 2002; Waldinger, 2015). Part of this debate is rooted in how the concept of home is understood. Lee *et al.* (2015) highlight the differences between the diasporic approach and the transnational approach, with the former conceptualising return as a desire for belonging in an idealised home. In contrast, the transnational approach depicts people 'strategically returning' to suit their own life-style. Lee *et al.* (2015) go on to suggest that decisions to return are a complex interplay of strategic mobility choices in the life-course and more complex longer term framings of these choices. They highlight Faist's (2010: 9) description of the two distinct theoretical frameworks of diaspora and transnationalism as 'awkward dance partners' with both contrasting and overlapping perspectives. MacEinri (2012) highlights that these new approaches differ from older binary definitions, whereby the migrant became assimilated into the new society or remained as a diasporic exile, fixed to a backward looking and unchanging notion of home. He further highlights that the transition from the American Wake style emigration to contemporary Ryanair Generation migration ensures that emigration is no longer a final departure, having been replaced by a much more fluid reality of sojourners, circular migration, and transnational experiences and identities.

The complexities of how second generation returnees negotiate home are very clearly represented in Hanafin's paper. It is very apparent that the respondents she spoke with were acting upon a desire to feel 'at home' (Brah, 1996). Respondents talked about Ireland as the place they were 'meant' to be, as a place to which they had a spiritual connection, making it possible to move beyond the initial re-settlement phase. However, while Hanafin's paper illustrates the enduring connections between the children of migrants and their parental homelands, she also highlights the tension between home as 'a space of imagined belonging and a lived space' (Walsh, 2006: 125). Her analysis makes it very clear that second generation return is not a clear-cut process, with children of emigrants accepted as Irish when they are abroad but not when they return. Her paper clearly highlights the emotional dimension of return, showing how it is often rooted in what Ni Laoire (2008) describes as a romantic view of a home that is central to ethno-national identity formation abroad. However, 'settling back' is often complicated by culture shock (Ni Laoire, 2008) and exclusion (Tsuda, 2003). In reality, Hanafin's paper highlights that for second generation returnees home is never fully arrived-at even when they are in it (Fortier, 2003). Of course, this negotiation of home is not unique to returning immigrants. Gilmartin and Migge (2015) highlight how immigrant narratives of home are highly variable, often conceptualised in different and contradictory ways for people. In essence, home is not only or necessarily associated with a place moved to or from, but involves a negotiation of multiple and complex attachments and detachments at different scales (Ni Laoire *et al.*, 2010).

Perhaps most importantly in terms of situating Hanafin's paper is the emphasis it puts on the spatiality of home, conceptualising home as a localised experience (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011). This is in direct contrast to arguments suggesting that in an era of increased globalisation and transnationalism, home has become increasingly a-spatial (Rapport and Dawson, 1998; Mallett, 2004; King and Christou, 2011). This is clearly not the case for second generation returnees as they are embedded in a complex set of thoroughly spatialised connections to places (O'Leary and Negra, 2016). While their multiple belongings call upon us to consider how we come to belong (hooks, 2009) and what it means to call a place home, it is clear that in the act of returning, they are prioritising one place over another in terms of a hierarchy of spatial attachments. This layering of spatial attachments demands sustained attention on how places can be simultaneously local and particular while remaining embedded within broader geographical contexts. This acknowledges that the moorings of home are embedded in a series of 'uprootings/ regroundings' that encompass the 'modes and materialities' and 'different contexts and scales' that make up the plural experiences of home (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003). In essence, home is a multidimensional concept in which temporality intersects with spatiality and social relations (Kabachnik *et al.*, 2010). As such, *home* derives meaning precisely from social relations which always stretch beyond them (Massey, 1992). For migrants in particular, whose lives often unfold in the relational spaces between here and there, it is essential to embrace 'the culturally multiple, dynamic and connective aspects of place in a globalising world' (Massey, 1994: 149). In other words, home is not only or necessarily associated with a place moved to or from, but involves a negotiation of multiple and complex attachments and detachments at different scales (Ni Laoire *et al.*, 2010).

While it is useful to consider a more fluid conceptualisation of home, it is also important to acknowledge that the lived experience of homes that transcend multiple scales is embedded in the inherently political nature of space and place (Harvey, 1996). Mary Gilmartin's recent book *Ireland and Migration in the 21st Century*, provides a hugely insightful discussion of how the politics of space and place interact with migration to influence those living within and beyond the physical, political and imagined boundaries of Ireland (Gilmartin, 2015). Hanafin's paper focuses particularly on the experiences of second generation return migrants and poignantly illustrates the discrepancy between the conceptual simplicity of returning home and its real-life complexities. In particular, her paper highlights the tension between returning migrants idealised visioning of home (Brickell, 2012) and the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006), whereby second generation return migrants are discursively positioned as different by the host group. In effect, second generation returnees find themselves caught in the distinction between nationality and ethnic identity, which often leads to exclusion from the majority group against their expectations (Tsuda, 2003). This highlights that the agency of return migrants in terms of identity formation is constrained, with tension emerging between their own self-concept of identity and how

it is negotiated and negated through engagement with the majority group (see Mähönen and Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2012). The mismatch between the self-identity of the returnees and the identity attributed to them creates double consciousness, a feature repeatedly documented in the literature on counter-diasporic second generation return migrants (Christou, 2006; Kunuroglu *et al.*, 2015; Sussman, 2010; Reynolds, 2008).

Conclusions

Ireland will continue to be both an origin and destination in transnational migration patterns, with Irish villages, towns and cities simultaneously constituted as *home* and *abroad* by a range of individuals and families embedded within the migration process. The papers in this special issue draw attention to three distinct groups of migrants, all of whom are in the process of making Ireland home. Doyle and McAreavey's paper highlights settlement patterns amongst first generation Polish migrants in Northern Ireland and the transformative nature of migrants doing something as mundane as setting up home. They also highlight the importance of the home in maintaining a distinct cultural identity, a node in the network of transnational mobility that connects people through space and time. This maintenance of cultural identity was also important among Irish immigrants abroad, as noted in papers by Mary Cawley and Stephen Galvin, and Sara Hanafin. In fact, the retention of ties to the place of origin was central in decisions to return and it is likely that similar trends in return will emerge amongst the Polish community in future. This circulation of people between places demands a reconceptualisation of home to incorporate a more dynamic understanding that embraces the fluidity of home. In effect, home must be understood as both a corporeal location of dwelling and an imagined place of identification and belonging. As such, it is important to acknowledge that the various spatial, social, and cognitive practices that constitute home are multi-scalar and trans-local, not necessarily or only transnational (Brickell and Datta, 2011).

Also, it is important to acknowledge the tension that emerges precisely because of the multi-scalar nature of home in the context of transnational mobility. It is clear in each of the papers that 'belonging' is a complex process, often marred by overt racism or more subtle forms of exclusion. In essence, migrants are often penalised for their mobility and rendered as 'out of place', unable to access the human capital that is embedded in being 'local'. At the heart of the local/not local binary is a practical orientalism that designates spaces as 'Ours', and not 'Theirs' (James, 2011). Overcoming such binaries will demand sustained attention to our subconscious and conscious biases and stereotypes, recognising the potential for mistrust that is borne out of cultural arrogance and/or fear of difference. Perhaps the key step for host and migrant communities towards learning to live together is an acknowledgement that home, however defined, is a journey for everyone.

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