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Making space for ambiguity: the value of multiple and participatory methods in researching diasporic youth identities

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Abstract: This paper explores the use of participatory methods in a research project with young people in return-migrant families. In-depth children-centred participatory research was conducted with children and young people who had moved to Ireland with their Irish return-migrant parents during the recent 'Celtic Tiger' era. I argue that the use of multi-modal and participatory methods in research with young migrants enables participants to express multiple identities and complex narratives of self. People frequently perform different identities in different contexts, but young migrants in particular, because of the disruptions and incoherences associated with their migrancy and their complex social and cultural positionings, can express ambiguous and apparently contradictory narratives of self. Recognising that research is a process of co-constructing meaning, I highlight the importance of using multi-modal methods in research with young migrants, showing how different modes of co-constructing meaning can allow different and ambiguous narratives of self to be articulated.

Keywords: participatory methods, multi-modal research, youth, return migrants, narratives, identities

Introduction

Diasporic youth are considered to have strong connections, often emotional, cultural or familial, and sometimes problematic, to a homeland. Much research explores these ties among diasporic youth who are living in their society of migration (for example, Dwyer 2000; Reynolds 2006; Scheibelhofer 2007; Valentine, Sporton and Bang Nielsen 2009). However, this paper is based on research which seeks to understand such connections from the perspectives of young people who grew up in societies of migration but have 'returned' to live in the 'homeland'. The research has explored young migrants' relationships with the parental or diasporic 'homeland' when it ceases to be a distant reference point and instead becomes the site of everyday life. I am particularly interested in how the young people who have grown up elsewhere construct narratives of self as they negotiate their complex social and cultural positions as migrants/not-migrants or as insiders/outsiders in a so-called homeland which has not always been their home. Their biographical memories connect them to other places as they negotiate their place in the 'homeland'. In this paper, I focus in particular on the methodological challenges of seeking to understand these complexities of identity and belonging and argue for the value of using multiple and participatory methods in research with young migrants.

The paper explores the impact of using multi-modal research methods on research outcomes, focusing on how participants in this research made use of different research methods to construct narratives of self which at times appeared contradictory. Recognising that research is a process of co-constructing meaning, the paper highlights the implications of combining different oral and visual research methods in the research relationship, showing how different modes of co-constructing meaning can allow different narratives of self to be articulated, and thus can contribute to nuanced understandings of migrant youth identities. The Mosaic approach to research with young children (Clark and Moss, 2011) has promoted multi-method and participatory research as a way of co-constructing meaning between researchers and young participants, emphasising the value of using of a broad range of modes of expression such as the visual and kinaesthetic alongside speech. Clark (2011) argues that different modes present different but intertwined communicative strands. This combination of different types of methods can provide young people with the space and time to communicate the complexities of their lives (Langevang 2007). I argue here that this is particularly important for research with young migrants, who, because of the disruptions and incoherences

associated with their migrancy and their complex social and cultural positionings and transcultural engagements, can express ambiguous and sometimes apparently contradictory narratives of self.

Coe et al. (2011) use the concept of 'everyday ruptures' to signify the dislocations experienced by young migrants who move between societies, while simultaneously recognising the continuities in their lives. They argue that young migrants' lives are characterised by 'fragmentation' as well as 'constancy'. As diasporic youth in return-migrant families occupy particularly complex social and cultural positions as simultaneously insiders and outsiders in their society of origin/destination, the ways in which they construct narratives of self in this context bring into sharp focus broader questions around the relationships between migration and discourses of identity and belonging. As Anthias (2002) argues, narratives are always produced in relation to socially available or hegemonic discourses and practices as people locate themselves in relation to complex intersections of social and cultural categories. In the context of migration, Anthias (2002) argues, narratives of location and dislocation are produced which are emergent, interactional and contain elements of contradiction and struggle – as diasporic youth perform and construct identities in ways which do not unambiguously state 'what they are'. In other words, diasporic and migrant youth construct narratives of self which are situated and contextual, which draw on available/acceptable discourses and which often articulate an ambiguity around identity and belonging – an ambiguity frequently not acknowledged in hegemonic discourses of return migration which tend to construct return migrants simply as homecomers (Ní Laoire et al 2011). In this paper, I explore the potential of using multi-modal methods in research with diasporic youth for producing research outcomes that are sensitive to these ambiguities.

The study

The study on which the paper is based was an in-depth exploration of the social worlds and migration experiences of 'diasporic' children and young people who had moved to Ireland with their Irish return migrant parents during the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' era[i]. The research involved mostly children who were born outside Ireland to Irish parents (although some had been born in Ireland), had spent part of their young lives outside Ireland, and had moved to Ireland with their return migrant parents in recent years. The study was part of a larger team project which explored the migration experiences, identities and belongings of migrant children from a number of different migrant backgrounds in Ireland (Ní Laoire et al. 2011)[ii] . The research aimed to understand their worlds from

their own perspectives, and while their migrancy was of particular interest, the research sought to allow the participants to identify what was important in their lives.

The research with children in return-migrant families was conducted over a period of almost two years (2007-2009) with 36 children and young people, and 21 parents (in 16 families) who had moved to counties Cork and Kerry in the south-west of Ireland. The ages of the young participants ranged from three to 18, and three young adults in their early 20s were also included. Some of the children had one or two Irish-born parents and some had one or two second-generation Irish parents. They lived in urban, rural and suburban locations, and they had all moved to Ireland during the period of high return migration between 1995 and 2007. The most common countries from which participant families had moved were the USA and England, but other parts of the world were also represented.

Contact was made with the participants through their parents and I met with them usually in their homes, sometimes as groups of siblings, sometimes on their own (younger siblings who were close in age usually met me together and took part in the same activities; the older teenagers took part in one-to-one interviews/conversations). In an attempt to promote their active engagement in the research on their own terms, and to develop relations of trust with them, in most cases, I met with them three to four times in all and built a relationship with them over time. During the course of the research, I also interviewed one or both of their parents once, but the child-focused nature of the research was emphasised throughout. I used multiple methods in the research, including photography, conventional interviewing, mapping, play-and-talk and other creative/visual methods. The participants could choose which methods they wished to use, and this usually varied by age. For example, research with the very youngest participants usually involved ‘play-and-talk’ and artwork, without a formal interview component, while many of the older participants preferred the conventional interview format. At the end of the research, the children received small gifts as tokens of appreciation and they were able to keep the products of their own work (such as photographs or drawings). This paper concentrates on the research relations developed with three young migrants in particular, all aged in their teens – Caoimhe, Cait and David[iii]. Caoimhe and Cait, both aged 15, had been born in England and had migrated to Ireland as children with their second-generation Irish parents, while David, aged 13, had spent a large part of his childhood living in Asia, returning as a 12-year-old to Ireland with his Irish-born parents. A photography activity was conducted with all three of these

participants, alongside semi-formal interviews. All three were interviewed alone, but because David had younger siblings who were close in age to him, he also took part in activities involving 'draw-and-talk' with them. Both Cait and Caoimhe also chose to take part in the 'design-your-own-cd-cover' activity (described below) while David did not.

Power dynamics in research relationships

As an Irish return migrant, and having previously conducted research with adult return migrants, I approached the research with a certain (part-insider) understanding of the issues likely to emerge from the research. However, I also approached it as an adult, and as someone who had experienced return, not as a child but as an adult. I was concerned therefore in particular to go beyond the adult experiences and to explore return migration from children's perspectives. The hierarchical nature of power relations involved in any form of social research, and in particular in research with children and young people, is well known. Research in the new social studies of childhood and participatory research paradigms seeks to address this through the use of research methods and approaches which acknowledge children's agency, and which attempt to involve children actively and on their own terms in the research process and to allow their voices to be heard (Alderson and Morrow 1994; James and Prout 1990; Thomas and O'Kane 1998). While my research did not adopt a participatory approach in the sense of involving participants as co-researchers, I sought to recognise children's roles as active socio-cultural producers and their competence as research participants through the use of methods that allowed them to participate actively in the research and to communicate in ways with which they were comfortable (Thomas and O'Kane 1998). However, it is acknowledged that it is extremely difficult if not impossible to completely overcome the hierarchical nature of research power relations. For example, Holt (2004) highlights the constraints on researchers' attempts to promote empowering research relations with children in the context of unequal societal relations between adults and children. As Matthews (2001: 118) argues, 'as adult researchers of children and young people, we need to be clear about the baggage that we carry with us and how our preconceptions or misconceptions may colour our interpretation of events and experiences'. In this paper, I attempt to engage reflexively with my own attempts to promote empowering research relations in my research with young migrants.

I wanted to explore their experiences as young migrants, and in particular as 'return' migrants. Reflecting now on the transcripts of conversations and informal interviews, it is clear to me that in many significant ways the research process reflected my interest as the adult researcher in particular aspects of the young participants' identities and lives, at the expense of other aspects of their lives. With all three participants, I conducted conventional semi-structured interviews – sometimes in combination with other methods. My concern with questions of migrancy came to the fore in some of these exchanges.

> Interviewer: And can you remember then when you found out you were going to be moving […] to Ireland?
>
> David: Yeah.
>
> Interviewer: What was that like?
>
> David: I didn't know we were going to move so I was surprised – a bit, like, sad as well. Like I'd had, like, a year's warning because we visited Ireland every summer.
>
> (Interview with David, 13)

In this typical interview excerpt, I steered the conversation towards David's memory and experience of the family's return migration to Ireland. Similarly, in all of the interviews, I chose to probe further when participants talked about being migrants and about questions of otherness, difference and national or ethnic identity. As might be anticipated, the interview data tended to reflect my concern with these issues and presented somewhat unidimensional narratives as a result.

The significance of this becomes apparent when analysing the transcripts of parent interviews alongside those of the conversations with their children. Both parent and child were interviewed separately in all cases. A biographical approach was used in the parent interviews in an attempt to understand their migration histories and their narratives of the family's migration and return to Ireland (Halfacree and Boyle 1993; Ní Laoire 2000). With the young people, a variety of visual and interactive methods were used as a tool to aid discussion and to facilitate the articulation of their own experiences and identities. Usually, these visual and interactive methods were accompanied by semi- or unstructured conversations, which were recorded. Some of the transcripts reveal striking similarities between parent and young person in terms of their narratives of return migration to Ireland. For example, both David and his mother emphasised the role of sport in David's life as a means of integration and acceptance on returning to Ireland. When I first met David, I asked him to draw a

picture to represent himself. He decided to include images to represent his school in Ireland and his love of playing both rugby and soccer. This representation was echoed in his mother's words in a later interview:

> … yeah but they've settled in really well, they love school, well they don't love it but they're doing really well at school and … [David's] […] on the […] rugby team and […] and they've all got great friends so … (David's mother).

David and his mother both independently emphasised the role of school and of sporting activities as part of a common narrative of the family's local integration and ability to fit in, to the extent that it had become part of David's representation of himself to the researcher.

In contrast, Caoimhe and her parents all presented a more problematic narrative of feeling not quite accepted where they lived. Caoimhe (15), like her parents and siblings, talked in our one-to-one conversations about feelings of not quite belonging in their locality, of having been bullied for their English accents and not being happy in the neighbourhood in which they lived.

> Caoimhe: I never used to fit in with the other girls because in the boys' eyes... the girls didn't have any problem but I didn't fit in with the boys like the girls did because I was different. I was English and I was weird and do you know.... [...] But like if I.... I mean I just can't wait to... you know I just want to get on with school and just get out of here.
>
> Interviewer: Really, yeah?
>
> Caoimhe: 'Cos it just annoys me so much. I hate living here.
>
> (Caoimhe, aged 15)

This type of discourse by Caoimhe was quite acceptable in her family context where other family members in their interviews reinforced this narrative of not-quite-belonging locally. Her parents and siblings all talked about having experienced problems in being accepted or of being unhappy where they lived.

A similar dynamic, though different sentiment, is evident in the exchanges with Cait and her mother. Cait told me that:

> Yeah, I mean growing up now, I way prefer life over here because, I have way more freedom because it's safer, because I mean we used to live in [town in England], […] , and I didn't have like, and obviously I was younger but I didn't have that much freedom at all (Cait, aged 15).

This echoes her mother's narrative of the family's decision to return to Ireland:

> I still think it's a better place to live here... than England and I think we definitely made the right decision for [Cait]. She's got a lot more freedom here than she would ever have ... in England (Cait's mother).

This coherence between parent and child narratives of the family's return migration reflects in the first place their shared experiences and shared interpretations of those experiences. However, given that intergenerational differences of perspective can exist in families especially at times of major change and disruption such as family migration (Bushin 2009, Hutchins 2011), the degree of coherence is perhaps surprising. One might expect different narratives to emerge. I suggest that this coherence can be understood as being in part a product of the research context.

In the first place, my role as the researcher in directing the interviews meant that the conversations with parents and children went in similar directions and as a result produced similar narratives. In addition, over time, it is likely that parents and children have co-constructed their shared narratives of the family's migration. Narratives draw in part on stories that circulate within families and contribute to the construction of familial narratives (Anthias 2002). As they articulate their experiences both within the family context and with others, a common story or set of stories emerges. This becomes an accepted family narrative, which is what is acceptable to articulate verbally within and outside the family. In addition, migration experiences can be so complex and contradictory that it is often necessary to simplify and to select in order to render them intelligible to others and to present them in a way that is socially acceptable in the context of the telling. De Tona (2004: 318) refers to this as 'smoothing out' the discontinuities of diasporic lives: 'Diaspora is an earthquake that opens ontological cracks in human lives; narratives are the social cement to fill these cracks'. Both David's and Cait's families construct narratives which represent their return migrations as successful and as justifications of the original decisions to return. Caoimhe's family narrative on the other hand presents a very united family which is coping with difficult circumstances.

Related to this process of co-construction of family narratives are the dynamics produced by the particular context and mode of the research encounter. All of the research interviews and encounters occurred in the family home, which brings with it particular limitations and challenges (Bushin 2007). It meant that my position became similar to that of a family guest and the research activities in general were undertaken within the confines of how parents and children 'normally' behave in the family home. In addition, the interview format encourages articulation of that which is sayable, of that which is within the boundaries of acceptability in the context of the telling. As Kaptani and Yuval-Davis (2008) point out, traditional interviews tend to produce chronological accounts and to reproduce normative perceptions and attitudes. In other words, they do not easily overcome hierarchical power relations or cultural differences between researcher and researched as the direction and emphasis of the interview is controlled to a large extent by the researcher. This was reinforced by the nature of the relationship already established with the young participants in this research. My initial contact with them was through their parents. While I made efforts to respect their autonomy as research subjects and to build relationships with them as individuals, I could not overcome my adult status and they were aware that I was also connected with their parents through the research and that the interviews were taking place in the family home, perhaps within earshot of parents. The situation therefore encouraged the articulation of acceptable family narratives.

The interview format did not allow us to overcome the boundaries of the familial context that shaped the research relationship, and as a result, the conventional interviews on their own presented quite unidimensional and coherent narratives. In other words, the conventional interview format, even where this took the form of a relatively informal conversation, as might be expected, tended to reinforce a hierarchical research relationship and did not easily allow the participants to break out of the restrictions imposed by the conventional question-answer format. This does not mean that the interviews did not yield valuable data, but that they presented very *particular* narratives of the participants' lives.

Multiple methods – making space for ambiguity?

It is argued that using multiple and participatory methods in research with young people can help to bridge some of the boundaries between the adult researcher and young research participant (Langevang 2007; Robinson and Gillies 2012). For example, using creative methods can allow

participants to express themselves in ways with which they are comfortable, and using multiple methods means that they can choose which methods they wish to use and therefore have more control in the research process (Clark 2011; Thomas and O'Kane; White et al. 2010). It is also argued that using visual or creative methods allows participants the time to reflect on their lives without the intrusion of the researcher, and thus can enable research to go beyond the researcher's preconceived understandings (Mannay 2010). Furthermore, Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller (2005) argue that using multiple methods with children does not merely duplicate data but also offers complementary insights and understandings that may be difficult to access through a single method. Langevang (2007) emphasises the role of multiple methods in combination with one another in capturing the diverse and complex experiences of young people, and Leitch (2008) highlights the importance of the synergy between visual and verbal methods in children's narrativisation. In this paper, I argue that different methods can allow participants to express different voices, identities and narratives of self. This means understanding subjectivity as something which is ambiguous and not necessarily coherent, but instead is partial, contingent and constantly becoming through repeated performances. As Luttrell (2010: 225) argues, there is not necessarily a 'single, neutral and authentic voice in a child' waiting to be extracted, but 'bits and pieces' of narratives as they make different identity claims with different audiences. As a result, methods which encourage young participants to express their multiple and fluid positionings will provide meaningful insights into the realities of their lives. As White and Bushin (2009) found in their research with children in an asylum-seeking accommodation centre, such methods not only provide valuable research insights, but can also be seen as resources through which marginalised children can develop and express their social and cultural identities in different ways.

The research methods used with the three young people in question (Cait, Caoimhe and David) included a combination of semi-structured interviews, informal conversations as well as artwork and photography. Following some of the key principles of participatory approaches which use photography (for example, Clark-Ibáñez 2004; Luttrell 2010), the photography project involved giving each participant a disposable camera and asking them to take photographs over a period of a number of weeks to represent the important people, places and things in their lives. The photographs were the focus of discussion at a subsequent meeting and the participants were also asked to produce a 'photobook' about their lives using their favourite photographs. Because of the logistics involved, the

photographs were usually not available for discussion until the third or fourth meeting, meaning that verbal research methods had dominated the first couple of meetings. The introduction of visual methods had a significant impact on the research dynamics.

In the initial conversations with Caoimhe and with her parents and siblings, they all tended to present quite a coherent narrative which emphasised feelings of not-quite-belonging in their locality of residence. However, Caoimhe's photography project, which was conducted at a slightly later stage in the research process, presented quite a different narrative. She had taken many photographs of her local friends and of places in the locality that she liked, including some of their housing estate. We talked about the photographs and in the course of the discussion her attachment to the locality became apparent. She had also taken a photograph of her school-friends with which she was particularly pleased because the boys had agreed willingly to pose for it. My impression of Caoimhe's position among her local peers was shifting as we discussed these photographs. A picture started to emerge of someone who was well-integrated in local peer networks, and who had attachments to particular local places through her relationships with friends and her involvement in sporting activities.

This does not imply that one of these narratives of belonging is more valid than the other – on the contrary, they are both meaningful narratives in the context of Caoimhe's life. It may be that the photography project allowed Caoimhe to perform a particular identity – of being an accepted part of a happy bunch of local teenagers – an identity she worked hard to maintain. The role of photography is important here – others have suggested that belonging is performed among teenage girls through visual reinforcement by taking photographs which feature friends (Tinkler 2008). This self-representation by Caoimhe put into context some of the earlier discussions where she had talked about feeling different and being targeted in particular by the local boys, suggesting that perhaps her relationships with peers are characterised by a tension between belonging and not-belonging – by ambiguity. The context of the interview meant that we focused on the acceptable shared family narrative of feeling different/not-belonging, which was reinforced by my concern as a migration researcher with the condition of migrancy. By using a non-verbal method of communication, an alternative narrative, one of settlement and local belonging was allowed to emerge. This highlights the inextricable connections between mobility and settlement in migrant identities, and that in negotiating identities between places, migrants constantly challenge fixed or static notions of belonging (Ahmed

et al 2003). Caoimhe presented herself as both a migrant and as rooted in place. In fact, it could be argued that she used the photography project as a way of constructing a particular self-identity, whether consciously or not – in this way, the research process can be seen as one in which identities are constructed in the research process itself (see also Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2005).

The early phases of the research with David (13) included a basic drawing activity accompanied by semi-structured informal conversation. As discussed in the previous section, like his mother, he emphasised in particular the very important role of team sports in his life both before and after the move, almost as the one element of continuity in his life, and as an integral element of his identity. However, his photobook began to reveal a more complex picture, containing numerous images of his housing estate and of places where he hung out with his friends, not doing anything in particular. This began to reveal an image of David more as a young teenager, developing a growing independence from his family in the context of the here and now, and fitting in with local peer cultures. Research has shown that young migrants frequently work hard to emphasise their sameness in the context of local peer cultures (Mas Giralt 2011; Ní Laoire et al 2011). In other words, David began to be seen not just as a child of return migrants but as he himself might like to be seen – producing a narrative of self which was just not sayable in the context of the conventional interview or even through drawing. The photography activity allowed David some, albeit limited, control in the research process, and to express himself on his own terms. He did this by taking the camera out of the family home, away from the formal spaces of sports clubs and into the informal spaces in which he hung out with his friends.

Some participants also participated in a ‘design-your-own cd cover’ activity (as developed by NECF and Katalyst Tales 2005). They were asked to design their own cd cover, presenting their ‘outer self’ (how they are seen by others) on the front cover, their ‘inner self’ (how they see themselves) on one of the inside sleeves, along with their favourite song lyrics and thank-yous to important people in their lives on the other two sides. Cait took this very seriously and spent a lot of time on it. We discussed the final product when she had completed it (Figures 1 and 2: go to http://migrantchildren.wordpress.com/images/). She attempted to present quite complex representations of her identity – both how she felt others saw her and how she herself felt. Interestingly, she understood the outer self to mean how she felt she was seen by friends (rather than

by others in her life). By its nature, the activity is designed to encourage reflection on the differences between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ selves, and as such, it brings these differences to the fore. Cait characterises the gap between inner and outer selves in terms of nationality as well as personality characteristics, distinguishing between her public self whom she feels is seen as ‘English’ and also as ‘posh, childish, good, confusing, happy and controllable’ and her inner self who is ‘Irish’ and also ‘mature, rebellious, normal’. She talks about having a reputation for being well-behaved (for example, not swearing), innocent and difficult to understand, not fitting in and also presenting a happy persona who is keen to please everyone.

> The first one I did like was...you see, I wanted them to be similar. Like, in the sense, that I didn't want... I wanted the actual idea of them.... So, I used bright colours in this because everyone... I'm always... to everybody else I'm always the happy person like. It's not that I'm not happy like, but they just always see me as happy. Because when I'm around other people I am always happy. Like, I'm kind of, you know, the...I'm the one that makes other people smile if other people are upset (Cait’s comments on the front cover (which is in bright colours).
>
> Yeah. Okay, this is how I see myself. I changed the colours because it's not that I'm not a really happy person but I think, the difference is, everyone else thinks I'm happy all the time, whereas I'm not happy all the time because I'm just a normal person, like (Cait’s comments on the inside image which is coloured in dark colours).

This characterisation highlights how important her local friends are in her public self-representation. It is not her parents, extended family members or others whom she feels do not understand her, but her local peers. There is a real sense of the inner struggles associated with just being Cait in a way that is acceptable not just to herself but also to her family and to her friends. She works hard to be seen as a positive member of her peer group, while trying not to compromise her own sense of self.

> … but I was torn between two lives because the life that all my friends wanted me to live I felt like that wasn't the actual me. But the problem was… the life that was me was somewhere else (Cait, 15).

The ways in which the tensions associated with being a migrant intersect with the tensions of being a young person are evident in Cait’s multiple and changing narratives of self. The desire to be accepted

among the peer group is further complicated by the ruptures and dislocations associated with moving between different societies – by simultaneous feelings of loyalty and belonging to quite different social and cultural worlds. Children and young people in diasporic contexts may negotiate and experience a sense of dual/multiple belonging in different ways (see for example, Mand 2010). Cait's narrative reveals how she experiences this at a very personal level. As her cd cover states: 'I can never please everyone'. The ambiguities of her complex social positioning are evident as she articulates complexity and dynamism through different modes of communication as part of the research process.

Conclusions

The use of conventional interviews and informal conversations alongside visual methods in this research has allowed different and often contradictory narratives of migration, belonging and identity to emerge. While the well-rehearsed 'public' stories are told in response to particular types of questions, visual methods can allow the expression of 'unofficial' narratives, which by their nature are difficult to articulate verbally. This is not a straightforward process and the design of visual or creative methods needs to be carefully tailored to the preferences of the participants and the aims of the research. Moreover, it is in the combination of different methods, such as more or less formal interviews, alongside visual or creative methods, that nuanced stories can be co-produced in the research process. Using visual or creative methods can allow for a different mode of expression, and can sometimes shift the power imbalance in the research relationships towards the participant (White et al 2010). It is impossible to reverse the hierarchical nature of research power relations but flexible and multiple methods can contribute to de-centring them and can help to create a space for the expression of ambiguity. At the very least, this reveals the limitations of research and the partial and contingent nature of any research encounter.

The research has contributed to understandings of how young migrants negotiate diverse social and cultural worlds and suggests that their narratives of self are likely to reflect their complex positionings in relation to these worlds (Ní Laoire et al 2011). I argue that migrant youth negotiate their identities in ways which reflect their intercultural competences and often strategic and contingent decisions about performances of identity in different contexts. As migrants, and as young people negotiating identities in adultist societies, they engage with a range of identity markers, codes and collectivities as they articulate narratives of self that make sense in particular contexts, and as they engage with different

‘audiences’ in presenting narratives that ‘smooth out the discontinuities’ (De Tona 2004: 318) and the contradictions of diasporic lives.

The paper argues that the use of multiple and participatory methods facilitates the expression of different aspects of identity. While this type of approach is likely to be productive in research with other target groups, this paper emphasises its particular importance in research with migrant and diasporic youth. Migrant and diasporic youth occupy complex social and cultural positions, and may express ambiguous identities and belongings reflecting the dislocations and uncertainties associated with both being young *and* being migrants. Multiple and participatory methods are therefore particularly helpful in creating spaces for expressing these ambiguities. This type of approach to research on diasporic youth identities acknowledges the ruptures and dislocations as well as the continuities in their lives and does not seek to position them in any fixed and immutable way. In this way, by opening up a space for ambiguity, it is possible to begin to understand the complexity of young migrants’ lives, and to begin to gain insights into the ways in which they negotiate the struggles and contradictions associated with being young migrants.

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Endnotes

i) The ‘Celtic Tiger’ era is commonly understood to refer to the period of economic boom and high immigration in the Republic of Ireland that lasted from approximately the mid-1990s to 2008.
ii) The Migrant Children research project was a Marie Curie Excellence Team project based in University College Cork and funded through the EU Sixth Framework Programme.
iii) Pseudonyms are used throughout.

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