



# Ireland Is My Home

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## *Abstract:*

The representation of outsiders is a common theme in Irish drama as a method to interpret and reinterpret Irish national identity. More recently, Irish theatre has explored the meaning and experiences of the “new Irish” (Salis 2010, 43). This paper, through a postcolonial analysis, compares the experiences of the returned Irish migrant in Tom Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985) to the fragility of tolerance exhibited toward the “other” by the native Irish in Donal O’Kelly’s *Asylum! Asylum!* (1994) and contrasts asylum to the celebration of Irish residency in *The Cambria* (2005). The analysis highlights perceptions on migration from Ireland and the complications of immigration to modern-day Ireland. The notions of home, Irishness and citizenship are explored against a backdrop of racism, othering and multiculturalism.

**Keywords:** Asylum, Immigrants, Irish drama, Postcolonial theory, Refugees

## *1. Introduction*

In recent years, Irish theatre has started to bring to the forefront forgotten memories of colonialism, emigration, and national identity within a variety of dramatic contexts. Simultaneously, Irish theatre has expounded the experiences of the displaced, traced changes that have significantly affected Irish society and offered to make sense of the new definitions of Irishness within a global context. Brenna Sobanski (2016) and Ronit Lentin (2002) reference this to the widespread notion of multiculturalism. A review of the dramatic works about emigration in Irish theatre shows that there is a number of plays that concentrate on the problems of those who departed from Ireland and romanticise about the land, among which, is Tom Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* (first produced in 1985). Wei H. Kao points out that:

The mass emigrations since the mid-nineteenth century are not regarded as a pleasant chapter in history; [...]. It could therefore be claimed that the increasingly large quantity of Irish plays written since the mid-twentieth century on migrant experiences reveals implicit but deep-rooted anxieties over this historical trauma. (2015, 65-66)

Michael Higgins and Declan Kiberd (1997) further explain that exile, emigration, and the return to a transformed homeland have always been part of the Irish national experience. Plays which tap into the wider area of immigrant experiences, however, came into prominence in the 1990s, among them is Donal O’Kelly’s *Asylum! Asylum!* (first produced in 1994). Meanwhile, the economic success of the Celtic Tiger reversed the flow of migrants from outward to inward; this shift in the identity of the Irish nation is captured in plays such as O’Kelly’s *The Cambria* (2005). According to Emilie Pine emigration has been extensively over-used in Irish dramatic works (2008, 312); the theme is still repeatedly revisited in scholarly works creating new linkages to help modern audiences acquire a more profound understanding of the traditions of Irish theatre in a modern context. Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* depicts a postcolonial nation’s infatuation with the American dream in the 1960s and the struggles of the returned emigrant to a changed homeland. Donal O’Kelly’s *Asylum! Asylum!* on the other hand, depicts the experiences of an illegal Ugandan immigrant seeking asylum in modern-day Ireland, while *The Cambria* an exceptional multifaceted play, celebrates the Irish citizenship of an Afro-American fugitive slave as well as the deportation of a Nigerian asylum seeker.

This paper, through a postcolonial analysis and reference to Homi Bhabha’s (2004 [1994]) Third Space theory, compares the experiences of the returned Irish migrant in Tom Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* to the fragility of tolerance exhibited toward the “other” by the native Irish in Donal O’Kelly’s *Asylum! Asylum!*, situating both the returned migrant to a changed homeland and the asylum seeker in the same position in terms of acceptance by the native Irish. It also brings forth the question of “who is Irish” and who is not based on long standing definitions of Irishness. The paper also contrasts the complications faced by immigrants and refugees in making Ireland their home to the celebration of Irish residency in another O’Kelly’s dramatic work: *The Cambria*. The analysis revisits the long-held perceptions on migration from Ireland to the United States in the early 1960s in order to evaluate the degree of change that has affected the Irish nation since in accepting outsiders. Moreover, the paper discusses the impediments globalization has inflicted on Ireland which have resulted in witnessing a growing number of outsiders seeking immigration to the land. The dramatic works accentuate the experience of being “unhomed” (Kao 2015, 68). The notions of home, Irishness and citizenship are investigated against a backdrop of racism, othering and multiculturalism. The comparative analysis hopes to raise awareness around the necessity of tolerating change within homogeneous societies effected by the dissolution of the concept of home for many around the world as wars over land and dominance continue in different parts of the world conjuring a new form of colonialism. The paper makes way for further research in relation to Irish drama and current world affairs as they inevitably strike at the core values of what constitutes Irishness.

## 2. *The Returned Migrant to a Changed Homeland*

*Conversations on a Homecoming* “[...] not only sets the disillusionment of the Galway characters against the recollection of their 1960s idealism; dramatically, it contrasts the longings of those who haven’t escaped with the chastened regret of the returned émigré who found even less away than left behind” (Roche 1995 [1994], 146). Michael Ridge, a returned emigrant from

America, post the 1960s is forced to deal with the decay into which his hometown has fallen. Throughout the play, he searches for an alternative home, and the pub The White House, which he co-founded before leaving Ireland, is the alternative. For him, the pub is “refuge” (Murphy 1993 [1985], 11). Celebrated initially as a success story of Irish emigration to America, Michael is unable to sustain this false image and is quickly marginalised by his old friends. Tom asserts his power over Michael by reminding him that: “I was always a better actor than you, better at everything” (80). This antithesis between Tom and Michael lasts throughout the play reflecting a binary opposition of power between the native Irish and “[t]he returned wank” (31). Michael’s return to Ireland is primarily a wistful search for identity. Emira Derbel explains that the return to the homeland often remains a necessity for the displaced emigrant because it is an expression of the longing to “reestablish [the] connection with the nation” (2017, 121). Michael in *Conversations on a Homecoming* is repeatedly hounded to answer the question: “what brought you back?” (Murphy 1993 [1985], 11). Nicholas Grene argues that Michael “comes back in the hope of finding again the hope with which he started” (2006 [2004], 207). Junior, a local at the pub sums it up in one word: “Nos-talgia!” (Murphy 1993 [1985], 311). The Greek definition of the word is the combination of sorrow and a return journey to the homeland. According to Emilie Pine, the nostalgia which prompts the returned emigrant to yearn for what is familiar and traditional is contradicted with the traumatic reality of finding that the home which they “half remembered, half imagined” (Pine 2008, 311) is no longer the place it once was. Poised between despair and hope, Michael’s attempt to refit within the local community is futile. His unease with the Galway community is an indication of the widening breach between what used to be and how things are. Hence, for the returned emigrant “the homeland is a place of trauma” and in turn, the returnee is often considered “a disruptive figure” (322).

Kao argues that the local community’s discomfort with Michael’s return is a reflection of the state of Ireland as a nation. Like Michael in *Dancing at Lughnasa* by Brian Friel, Michael in Murphy’s play, is a witness of things changing and “becoming what they ought not to be” (Friel 1990, 2). Michael’s prolonged absence in America causes Tom to accuse him of being an outsider who wants to claim territory “You came home to stay” (Murphy 1993 [1985], 51), “I think we have *another* leader” (50). The hostility which the Galway residents exhibit towards Michael at the pub heightens as they get drunk. They are apprehensive of his transformation and the knowledge that “strangers [are] comin’ in to run the town” (65). The pub, apart from being a refuge for Michael, serves as an “in-between space” (Kao 2015, 72), a space where postcolonial resistance to all that which is foreign is in display and where Michael’s national identity is re-evaluated. Michael is traumatised by the experience of returning to a changed homeland, and the play highlights that the returned emigrant is both an internal and external outcast. Additionally, the interrelated ideas of belonging further complicates his understanding of home leading to what Dermot Bolger calls “internal exile” (1986).

The imperial invention of domination of ‘the other’ is practiced by Tom to emphasise his superiority over Michael who is referred to by the Galway community as “The returned wank” (Murphy, 1993 [1985], 31). As Mária Kurdi suggests, the strain displayed between the Galway townsfolk and Michael is reminiscent of the tension and suspicion previously exhibited by the native Irish towards the imperialist when the advent of visitors often proved to be a cultural and economic invasion resonating with multiple perils for the native population (1999). Ireland is depicted in Murphy’s play as a nation that has carried forward into its present the imperialistic practices of the coloniser; subversion of power is an attempt to push Michael into internal exile and consequently back to the host nation: “I’m not sure what I came home for, but I think I’m finding out” (Murphy 1993 [1985], 59).

Examined through Homi Bhabha's Third Space theory, the hostility of the Galway community in *Conversations on a Homecoming* reveals the shifting nature of the nation's postcolonial identity in a globalised world. Fetson Kalua explains that a shift in rituals often leads to the formation of "culturally invisible zones" (2009, 23) hence necessitating "the emergence of border spaces" (*ibidem*) or what Bhabha calls liminal spaces. Consistent with Bhabha's definition of liminal spaces, Edward Said uses the term to refer to the connectedness of the "culturally invisible zones" (1984, 23), where he makes the link between the individual and the universal or in other words, between the local and the global.

Richard Pine (2014) explains that in this context, Ireland is both familiar and foreign to Michael; he finds himself "in-between home and homexilation" (Derbel 2017, 121). Unable to conform to the new invisible cultural structures of his homeland, Michael is confined throughout the play to a border zone – the pub. The pub plays a vital role in serving as a transit area between the present and the past; it is a dynamic space where Michael attempts to recover from the trauma of emigration and come to terms with his multi-faceted Irish identity. The play inevitably opens up the discussion around the question of what is Irishness and how is it defined within the new parameters of postcolonialism. By narrating his experience in the third person, Michael underscores the pain and demoralisation he experienced as both an emigrant in New York and as a returned Irishman to his homeland: "No! No! This isn't it at all! This kind of – life – isn't it at all" (Murphy 1993 [1985], 28).

John Walsh points out that "traveling away from home allows the traveler to view the site of belonging with a fresh eye, while making a genuine case about the effects of loss of all familiar recognitions" (1999, 30-31). Edward Said concurs with Walsh that the returned exile sees "things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual [...] there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation" (Said 1994, 44). This "plurality of vision" (55) is configured in Michael's knowledge of two cultures, the American and the Irish temporarily setting him apart from the rest of the Galway community. Bill Ashcroft *et al.* bring to the surface the hidden polemics around inclusion and exclusion in postcolonial spaces. Ashcroft *et al.* emphasise that 'the other' is often perused for the "essential cultural purity" (2004 [1989], 40), or in Michael's case, he is outcast because he now lacks what constitutes true Irishness in terms of a modern postcolonial Ireland. The theatrical performance of *Conversations on a Homecoming* allows the audience to review Michael's status as a returned emigrant and determine whether his romanticised Irishness makes him Irish enough to be re-accepted into the local community. The play, however, fails to give a clear definition of what constitutes Irishness in modern day Ireland, and the question is left open for audiences to ponder on amidst the adversity in deciding whether to leave one's home, remain or go back (see Kao 2015). Murphy's play repeatedly and implicitly asks the question "who is to inherit Ireland?" (Kiberd 2001, 81).

### 3. *Illegal Immigration – A Postcolonial Dilemma*

Post-1970s numerous people flooded to Ireland. Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh *et al.* reflect on the social and demographic changes which have taken place in modern Ireland, explaining that "We have tens of thousands of immigrants among us for the first time in history" (2007, 69). The unfamiliar faces of immigrants and asylum seekers scattered across the nation have left many of the native Irish aghast. Edward Said claims that this social change in Ireland is due to the "remarkable prosperity in the Celtic Tiger era" (1984, 49). Ní Éigeartaigh *et al.* recount on behalf of Declan Kiberd that despite the influx of immigrants in Ireland, "yet they seem all but invisible in our contemporary literature. Maybe it will take thoughtful writers a few more years

yet to work them into the script” (2007, 69). While Kiberd’s words may ring true, Irish plays like the ones written by Tom Murphy explore the cultural construction of the Irish identity from the perspective of the diaspora. Other dramatic expressions of the immigrant experience are depicted in Donal O’Kelly’s work. The disillusionment and displacement found in Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* are echoed in O’Kelly’s dramatic piece *Asylum! Asylum!*. O’Kelly attempts to use the imaginative space of the theatre to generate a sense of cross-cultural solidarity between the new Irish or today’s immigrants and the native Irish. Similarities between them may not be immediately apparent, but they ultimately share experiences of being dislocated; the arrival of new immigrants to Ireland and their struggles remind the native Irish of the pain of emigration and the difficulties that came with the attempt to return home. *Asylum! Asylum!* exposes the tactics of illegal immigrants and the anti-immigrant violence that comes with forcible deportation from Ireland. It also examines the collective self-image of the Irish which has been destabilized by the implications of globalisation. Additionally, Ireland’s relationship with Europe is presented as an anchor in a rapidly changing multicultural milieu; this relationship is also the framework against which the events unfold.

*Asylum! Asylum!* is constructed around the 1991 Bucoro incident in Northern Uganda reported by Amnesty International, relaying the horrors of repeated abductions, torture and killing of civilians by the Ugandan National Resistance Army. Joseph, a Ugandan asylum seeker, eagerly tries to obtain refugee status in Ireland. The first scene opens with his *status* already determined; he is being deported. Refusing to go back to Uganda, Joseph attempts to jump off the plane. Arrested, he claims asylum. Joseph’s dilemma in the play is sandwiched in the middle of the broken relationships of an Irish family. The Gaughrans as a family are affiliated with official government roles in Ireland and signify the larger Irish community. Leo is an immigration officer, Mary, his sister has a law degree and their recently widowed father, Bill, has retired from the service of the Church. As the outsider in the play, Joseph ironically catalyses the dormant tensions between the Gaughran family members and highlights their divisiveness around immigration within a wider national context. Amidst these social and legal complications, Joseph is determined to make Ireland his home by finding links between his world and the Irish. Any links or commonalities which exist between the immigrant and the Irish are often an attempt by the immigrant to “insert themselves into the portals of historical memory; [...] [or]embrace the idea of cross-cultural affinity through displacement to create sympathy [...] on the basis of a universalized human condition” (King 2007, 63). This “notion of a shared sense of affiliation” Jason King explains, “appears much more self-evident to immigrants in Ireland than to [the] Irish” (*ibidem*).

Invited to take refuge in Bill’s home as he files for asylum, Joseph discovers that both the Irish and the African cultures bear a similarity in valuing the worth of conceiving stories. Jason King takes this point of storytelling a step further by highlighting that African asylum seekers confronted with detrimental procedures across Europe tend to create credible stories (66). Bill, representing the older Irish generation who still remember the traumatic experiences of emigration and the potato famine years sympathises with Joseph. Unlike his son Leo, Bill is able to see the commonalities between the past traumatic experiences of the Irish and the trauma of dislocating experienced by the new Irish/illegal immigrants. Both Joseph and Bill share their experiences of suffering under historical and political events. Like Ireland, Uganda under British colonialism had been forced to adopt English, the language of its “former colonist” (Kurdi 1999, 227). Bill recalls the North Strand Bombing: “May 1941. Mammy gave me a terrible clatter for standing up at the window. The sky was lit by flames. ‘Get back in under the stairs’, she said. [...] I want to tell you this. I don’t want it buried with me” (Murphy 1993 [1985],

156). In turn, Joseph feels safe enough to recollect and recount the brutality he witnessed and experienced in his homeland to the Gaughran family:

The soldier lit the straw himself. He lit it at four different points. The straw blazed. The logs began to smoke. [...]. Lumps of burning soil fell through the logs onto the men in the pit. They screamed and coughed. Except the older man. He just moved his lips and looked at me. [...] The soldier took my passport led me to the part of the school where the roof still was. Smoke followed us. They strung me up *Kandooya* because I didn't burn the straw. (O'Kelly 1996 [1994], 143)

This act not only carries forward the Irish tradition of storytelling, but temporarily suspends the contradictions and incongruities that so deeply divide the Gaughrans “into indiscriminate existence” (199). The brief unity among the Gaughrans is juxtaposed against Ireland's self-dividedness over the nation's immigration policies. At the same time, recounting past trauma and sharing pain unifies the black and the white making the experience of pain human and universal, it dissolves the “status of in-betweenness” (Bhabha 2004 [1994], 199).

Immigrants in contemporary Irish society are “always envisioned under the sign of the ‘alien’” and their achievements “permanently undermined” (King 2007, 65; Said 1984, 49). This fragile relationship between the host nation and the new Irish is reflected in Leo, who as an immigration officer is convinced that Joseph's story is “emblematic of third world immigrants” which becomes enmeshed within an ever “great[er] web of deception” (Ugba 1999, 123, 76). Leo warns his sister Mary, a lawyer who has been assigned Joseph's appeal case for asylum against these tactics: “Six months to work on that one, Joseph. I'll hand it to you. It's the best I've ever heard. [...] it won't get you asylum. Unless you can produce proof. And that'll be impossible I'm willing to bet, isn't that right, Joseph!?” (O'Kelly 1996 [1994], 144). In order to fulfil the selfish reasons of survival, Ugba argues that many illegal immigrants “lie” (1999, 235). The émigré's capacity to devise fascinating and absurd narratives of discrimination and persecution is a most essential survival tactic. He further explicates that this is “a normative reaction for undocumented aliens who must live exclusively by their ‘wits’” (109). Leo relentlessly explains to Mary that his restrictive attitude towards Joseph “[...]is not hatred! It's ordinary streetwise commonsense!” (O'Kelly 1996 [1994], 144). Mary is appalled by her brother's inhumanity: “Jesus Christ! Have you no shred of humanity left?” (*ibidem*). The division over Joseph's calamity breaks the family up. Symbolising Irish immigration law, Leo is left to wrestle with the consequences of his family's acceptance of an illegal African immigrant seeking asylum in their family home. Donal O'Kelly masterfully utilises Leo and Joseph as signifiers to represent “two diametrically opposed concepts, Afrocentrism as against Eurocentrism” (Ashcroft *et al.* 2004 [1989], 40). They stand for imperialism and decolonisation. On a more complex level, this dichotomy can be interpreted as a representation of the search for “cultural purity” (*ibidem*). Introducing the Ugandan asylum seeker to his sister, Leo says “He says it's Joseph Omara. No apostrophe. (*Mary has to laugh*)” (O'Kelly 1996 [1994], 125). The subtle cynical joke is a nod to the racial difference and the shared understanding between the brother and sister of what constitutes Irishness. Leo's antagonism to Joseph's plea for asylum makes him use his job as immigration officer to deny the latter “sanctuary” (Kurdi 1999, 228). Additionally, Leo's own failed attempt at immigrating to another European country in search for better prospects break him. The demeaning treatment he receives in Europe for being Irish prompts his return back home, making him all the more determined to enforce expulsion practices against Joseph.

On another level, the inter-racial romance plot embedded in the play between Mary and Joseph signifies the transcendence of cultural differences as a metaphor for reconciliation;

however, it can also be easily interpreted as a portrayal of the widespread Irish anxieties towards “miscegenation” (King 2005a, 32). Patrick Stephen Dinneen highlights that Ireland cannot be Irish without cultural and linguistic distinctiveness. Accordingly, the theme of interracial romance, although is a common theme in a number of Irish immigrant drama, the romantic subplots either falter at the prospect of the protagonist’s deportation or are unconsummated marriages of convenience because of cultural differences. Dinneen further argues that with foreign cultures come “foreign modes of thought, foreign ideals [...], foreign customs, foreign manners, the spread of all that is debasing” (2018 [1904], 42).

In Act III, Pillar, another immigration officer and Leo’s mate, takes charge of the last stages of action in deporting Joseph. His aggressiveness and forceful nature cut off any means by which Joseph could attempt to integrate into society. He uses the deportation strategy which Europe calls “Operation Sweep” (O’Kelly 1996 [1994], 153) to expel Joseph by force:

I have orders to forcibly deport your Ugandan. [...] Do you know what that means, Mary? (*Pause.*) It means bursting into your father’s house with five officers, a belt, a mouth tape and binding, pinning the Ugandan [...] parceling him up, taking him to the airport and strapping him to a seat on a plane back home. It’s a messy untidy business. (154)

Pillar justifies his brutality by explaining Ireland’s situation in Europe with regards to allowing in immigrants and asylum seekers: “It only takes one leaky section in the walls of Fortress Europe and the flood of immigrants will pour in and swamp the Continent. [...] Europe thinks we’re leaky. [...] They’re seen as chancers to be made an example of” (153).

In short, post-independence Ireland is resistant to foreign penetration for fear of failing to safeguard the borders of Europe and of meddling with fundamental values that constitute Irish heritage. Pillar fails to understand Mary’s behaviour towards Joseph: “What the fuck do you see in him!? Are you blind to the fact he’s a chancer!?” (155). The play is, in many ways, an attempt to explore what it means to be Irish from the perspective of the immigrant, in this instance, an African illegal immigrant. On the other hand, Pillar and Leo stand for the nation as it fights to preserve its Irishness. There is strong emphasis throughout the dramatic text that it is the Irish State’s obligation to withhold the privilege of citizenship in order to regulate the policies related to residency and ensure that privileges are distributed fairly in terms of welfare and labour. In *Asylum! Asylum!* the fray of domestic ties is set aside to give priority to the predicaments of “escape, arrival and departure” at a time when “the borders between home and world [have] become confused” (Sweeney 2008, 284; Bhabha 2004 [1994], 9). The work raises awareness about illegal immigrants and Irish citizenship highlighting the challenges of being unhomed. As the title indicates, there is an imbalance of power permeating throughout. *Asylum! Asylum!* reintroduces the binary opposition of black and white as well as the colonial and the postcolonial in a modern context. It is however one of several examples of dramatic works that situate immigrant issues and Irish cultural encounters in a global context.

#### 4. *Citizenship. A Nation’s Identity*

*The Cambria* by Donal O’Kelly was commissioned initially to be performed on St. Patrick’s Day in 2005 in Dublin with the aim of “rebranding” (Sweeney 2008, 281) the nation’s identity and reflect the changes in the Irish social fabric. New expressions of Irish identity are explored in *The Cambria* that stand in antithesis to the notions of immigration in *Asylum! Asylum!* and in stark contrast to the idea of home in *Conversations on a Homecoming*. The opening scene

sets the pre-text: a young Nigerian asylum seeker is awaiting deportation at the airport in the present-day Ireland; this is embedded within the narrative of a historical trans-Atlantic voyage of the African-American fugitive slave, Frederick Douglass who flees America after having published his autobiography as part of an anti-slavery campaign. The narrative is implanted at the start of the permanent cultural, political and demographic change in Ireland, 1845, the year of the Great Famine.

There are limited works that document the relationship between Ireland and trans-Atlantic slavery, *The Cambria* being an exception. Among the few scholarly publications that examine this relationship is the work published by Nini Rodgers in 2007 and Fionnghuala Sweeney's work published in 2008. Like *Asylum! Asylum!*, *The Cambria* traces the shift from homogeneity to multiculturalism. Fionnghuala Sweeney explains that

the arrival of the new Irish constitutes the most significant challenge to the republican narrative of democratic commitment, [...] and the historical emergence of the state as a structural embodiment of centuries of resistance to colonialism and empire, by raising difficult questions regarding the Irish relationship to other countries. (2008, 281)

The historical trans-Atlantic voyage signifies a search for identity and raises awareness about varieties of Irishness. Ultimately, the predominant message is the prevalence of Irish citizenship as the decisive factor upon which identity is constructed (283). At the same time, *The Cambria* asserts the moral responsibility of the nation towards individuals claiming asylum or financial distress by placing the dilemma centre-stage. The play "in Brechtian terms" prompts at some point "a consequential moral response" (*ibidem*) from the audience beyond the theatre space. Collette, Patrick's teacher in the opening scene exclaims: "Fredrick Douglass came to Ireland. On a ship. Called The Cambria [...] if Frederick Douglass [...] came to Ireland NOW" (O'Kelly 2005, 4). The statement highlights the importance of reviewing which elements constitute Irish identity today. Ireland in *The Cambria* is home, a destination projecting republican idealism as it commemorates the flight from oppression in search of freedom, economic prosperity, and political identity. Immigration, in this context becomes the global resolution to financial and civil problems. Symbolically, Frederick Douglass's journey stages the responsiveness of past generations in contrast to current Irish outlooks on foreign settlement and refugee appeals.

The reciprocal engagement of subjects in a nation, according to Sweeney, is what forms the individual and collective identity (2008, 285). The play features ten characters played by only two actors on the stage and an Irish population on the dock who receive the fugitive slave. This minimalist technique supports Sweeney's point of view on reciprocal engagement of subjects in a nation. *The Cambria* makes no "attempt at naturalistic effect"; Collette and Vincent symbolic for the "Irish every-man and woman" (*ibidem*) play a variety of roles ranging between different races and genders. There are no distinctive signals that indicate the shifts in identity except the symbolic use of hats. Sweeney explains that this morphing and crossing of racial boundaries is an emphasis on the multiplicity of identity and its fluidity. Contemporary Irish theatre, in this respect, engages with and debates rigid definitions as well as refuses to rigidly circumscribe individuals within the parameters of traditional notions of nationality. Reality, however, may prove this to be untrue, many of today's immigrants find themselves unable to substitute their old identity for a new one that reflects the values and ideals of the host nation. This view derives from Homi Bhabha's Third Space theory where the immigrant, in an attempt to integrate into the social life of the host nation, is in fact trapped within a liminal space. The transient space is an invisible border that can never be crossed without a complete shedding of the origin, an



often all too painful journey that can psychologically break an individual. The sense of loss experienced by the refugee and the *status* of being unhomed lead to a fear of loss of identity. The result is either a distorted version of being Irish or a completely new configuration that is not even remotely connected to the traditions and values of Ireland. O’Kelly grasps these truths by confining the young Nigerian asylum seeker to the airport, a point of departure and arrival leaving the young man in limbo. Similarly, Frederick Douglass for most part of the play is trapped on a ship metaphorically making a trans-Atlantic journey in search of who he is.

The opening scene shows Collette recounting her efforts in trying to convince Immigration that Patrick should be granted citizenship underscoring the irony of his receiving a “B in Honours History” from Daniel O’Connell’s school (O’Kelly 2005, 3). Like Mary in *Asylum! Asylum!*, Collette’s efforts to support the citizenship of an African asylum seeker in the present-day Ireland fail. In parallel, O’Kelly dramatises the psychological complexity of denying one’s identity captured through the symbolic nagging of a little girl, Matilda who is convinced that Frederick Douglas is a minstrel and begs him to perform to make them laugh. Each encounter is a strike at Douglas’s identity carrying a streak of racism for his black colour:

MATILDA: Do you sing and dance?  
 FREDERICK: Em – not normally.  
 MATILDA: Oh yes you are. (7)

The identity crisis becomes more complex when Solomon, another Afro-American slave on the ship, recognises Douglass’s true identity and taunts him for traveling incognito:

FREDERICK: Stop calling me – Frederick Douglass!  
 SOLOMON: What’s wrong Freddie? It’s your name, isn’t it? (24)

In denying his own name, Douglass denies his past and all that he stands for in his autobiography. Significantly, the temporary denial takes place aboard the ship – a dynamic liminal space where he shifts personae to ensure his survival and safety. Much like the tactics of the illegal immigrant in *Asylum! Asylum!* where Joseph must live by his wits and scavenge the streets for economic sustainability, Douglass protects his freedom by appropriating the identity of a minstrel. Douglass’s character is established on a series of denials and the need to put safety first before identity. Ironically, he is travelling with a copy of his autobiography, an embodiment of his whole self, past and present as he heads towards a brighter future in Ireland.

In Section 4 of the play, while the choir ladies sing, Douglass contemplates about Ireland as his new home: “I face my future. Of freedom. I am racing towards it. Paddles chant my advance in the fastest vessel known to man. The Cambria” (23). Douglass’s arrival to Ireland as a free man is an enactment of the impossible being possible. As he lands on the docks of Queens-town, a free man, Frederick Douglass is greeted by Daniel O’Connell, music and a welcoming Irish crowd: “A howling cheer of unbelievable volume reverberates around the valley. It echoes back from the mountains [...]. Then echoes again from the mountains behind until the very land of Ireland seems to roar in welcome for me” (49). The play ends on a positive note with Douglass describing Ireland for what it truly is for those who wish to make it their home: “I can truly say I have spent some of the happiest days of my life since landing in this country. [...] the entire absence of prejudice against me, contrasts so strongly with my bitter experience [...] that I look with wonder and amazement on the transition” (*ibidem*).

### 5. Conclusion

The three dramatic texts examined in this paper are all critiques of present-day Ireland and are considered within two contexts: nationally and globally. According to Christopher Murray, the evaluative parameters for Irish plays must and foremost be driven by a sound understanding of the “Irish dramatic tradition” (2010, 1). Concurring with this view, it is important to point out that the dramatic works under study depict the complex relationships which the Irish have with America, Europe and Africa. The Irish fascination with the American Dream is satirised in Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* by focusing on the failings of the returned emigrant both at home and abroad. Ireland’s relationship to Europe is codified in it being a reference point for all its policies in relation to job security, immigration laws, and human rights within the European Union in *Asylum! Asylum!* and partly in *The Cambria*. Hints have also been made at Ireland’s relationship to other postcolonial nations such as Uganda and America once a slave-trading nation under British colonial rule.

In this analysis, Ireland is presented as a home in three different contexts foregrounding the idea of being unhomed as another major theme that raises complex discussions. Murphy’s Michael is nostalgic about an Ireland he no longer recognises while Joseph in O’Kelly’s *Asylum! Asylum!*, as an African, is unable to seek asylum and make a home for himself in postcolonial Ireland. Frederick Douglass significantly in *The Cambria* finds the true definition of home as he contrasts life in America to the life he makes in Ireland. Each of the main characters demonstrates the pain of being unhomed in accordance with Homi Bhabha’s notion of the Third Space. Homi Bhabha and Edward Said emphasise that the displaced and the alienated will always get caught in the in-betweenness of the invisible cultural structures of the new homeland; Michael is confined to the pub as a space of refuge and Joseph claims sanctuary in the immigration officer’s family home. Joseph and Michael consequently are forced to occupy a border zone; the difference here is that Ireland *is* Michael’s homeland. The commonality between Michael and Joseph is their “homexilation” (Derbel 2017, 121). Of further significance to this discussion is that both Michael and Frederick Douglass make trans-Atlantic voyages to Ireland, but they each experience the land differently. The returned emigrant coming back from America in the 1960s is shunned by his countrymen, while the run-away slave flees who flees from oppression in America in 1845 claims to live his happiest days on the soil of the Republic.

Home is both a psychological and a physical space, the plays magnify the intricacies of belonging within a geographical place as well as engage with the older notions of home and identity. The painful memories of displacement bring the discussion round to the fact that the native land is often a place of suffering and the host nation often unwelcoming. The psychological pressures that come with estrangement are expressed in the dialogues of the main characters exposing the difficulty of survival outside of Ireland and the toil they endure to infiltrate the tight social Irish fabric which is rooted in a deep history of Celtic ideals and traditional beliefs. Fear of newcomers from abroad is exemplified in the resistance of the native Irish towards the returned emigrant and the dividedness about accepting the new Irish as human beings in need of political refuge and economic sustenance. They are perceived as a threat to all that constitutes Irishness. This post-colonial defiance is substantiated by Bhabha and Pine as being common in post-colonial spaces. This, however, is reversed in O’Kelly’s *The Cambria*. Although the play ends with the acceptance of a fugitive Afro-American slave as an Irish citizen, it leaves the audience to speculate on the possibilities that enunciate around this immigrant dilemma if it were to take place today on the shores of Ireland.

Pointedly, the dramatic texts are illustrations of the struggles of male protagonists in search for freedom, economic prosperity and political identity; by making Ireland their home, they attempt to take their place in the world and as such redefine the terms of Irish identity and the nation's relationship to the rest of the world. All three dramas raise the question, "who is to inherit Ireland?" (Kiberd 2001,18) and highlight important issues related to emigration, immigration, and identity in a postcolonial nation within a global context, but at the same time warn audiences about the dangers of shoving the outsider into a liminal space forcing them to become the other. This all too dangerous act divides societies and allows hatred, discrimination and racism to manifest in otherwise peaceful existences. A need to enforce legal policies that regulate immigration, refugees and asylum can blind policy makers across nations to the need to respond to humanitarian crises. It is, however, important to emphasise that this is not a call to nations to forsake precautionary measures against illegal tactics to occupy land or have leaky borders that would give way to charlatans who seek economic prosperity. Notably, the dramatic texts discuss these issues which have either been neglected or often cause distress when remembered.

It is fair to conclude that the analysis has revealed a variety of Irishness and has made significant links between past emigrant experiences to current day immigrant and refugee sufferings. It has also engaged with the redefinition of Irish identity within a global context highlighting the implications of multiculturalism on Irish society as well as how it is perceived by outsiders. The divisiveness of the Irish nation over immigration and asylum pits the nation's fear of newcomers against its obligation to respond to global calamities. Moreover, the notion of home is manifested in ways that give way to new understandings of the complications of dislocation within one's own homeland which is further explicated by the feeling of being unhomed in the host nation. Within these dramatic works, Ireland is forced to conform to the demands of globalisation as it plays host to individuals who have either forgotten what it means to be Irish or immigrants and refugees of different nationalities who seek to claim Irish citizenship for a more stable and prosperous existence.

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