

Shifting Identities and Social Change in Contemporary Ireland: The Effect of Displacement and Migration

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Abstract: *In present-day Ireland – North and South – identity has become a subject of much debate. The influx of migrants has led to a radical change in the island’s demography. This article sets out to explore how the notion of a changing Irish identity is represented in contemporary Irish writing on both sides of the border. In relation to the demographic evolution in the Republic, I shall engage with Chris Binchy’s novel Open-handed as well as Roddy Doyle’s collection of short stories The Deportees. The quest for a new identity in post-Troubles Northern Ireland will be explored in the light of Rosemary Jenkinson’s collection of short stories. In Contemporary Problems Nos. 53&54, the author demonstrates how a new cosmopolitan outlook on the Northern Irish conflict may encourage cultural hybridization, making sectarian boundaries appear irrelevant. With the comparison of the three different pieces of writing, I shall illustrate how both parts of the island are confronted with the necessity of recreating and rewriting their conception of national identity against the background of a different socio-political history.*

In present-day Ireland – North and South – identity has become a subject of much debate. The influx of immigrants has led to a radical change in the island’s demography and has shed a new light on established notions of Irishness. In the 1970s and 1980s Ireland was the country with the highest emigration rate in the European Union (Clinch 24-42). However, between 1996 and 2002, after the outbreak of the Celtic Tiger, over a quarter million people came to live in Ireland.. By the end of 2002, it had become the country with the highest immigration in Europe (Ward 27), so that in 2005 immigrant workers represented around six percent of the population of the Republic (Lally 11). The arrival of citizens from different countries and the increasing mobility of the island’s population have encouraged new reflections on identities in a local and global context. Against the background of the current social transformations, themes such as multiculturalism and pluralism have become of topical interest. This study sets out to explore how social change and its role in the creation of identity are represented

in contemporary writing on both sides of the border. In relation to the demographic evolution in the Republic, I shall engage with Chris Binchy's latest novel *Open-handed* (2008) as well as Roddy Doyle's short story "Guess Who's Coming for Dinner" (2004). Both pieces of writing explore how economic progress and the presence of migrant workers have given rise to new forms of self-awareness among the Irish population. The construction of identity in post-Troubles Northern Ireland will be analysed in the light of Rosemary Jenkinson's *Contemporary Problems Nos. 53&54* (2004). In her collection of short stories, the author explores how displacement and migration generate alternative perspectives that render sectarian boundaries irrelevant. With the comparison of the three different narratives, I will attempt to illustrate how both parts of the island are confronted with the necessity of recreating and rewriting their conception of ethnic, religious or national identity in the context of social change.

In modern sociology, the notion of identity is seen as depending on the "combination of sameness and difference" (Lawler 2). According to this school of thought, difference plays an essential role in the construction of identity as individuals define themselves in relation to what they are not. The sociologist Harriet Bradley further argues that identities are "complex hybrids reflecting personal history and cross-cutting demands of social categorization" (Bradley 1996: 212). Thus, a person's biography and the perception of his or her social status generate a specific form of self-awareness. Traditional societies are assumed to give rise to a firm sense of self as interpersonal relationships are "reliable, continuous and face-to-face" (Adams 44). In this form of society, identities are supported through close knit community and family networks, which generate a feeling of "social inclusion" and promote a communal agreement on patterns of "right" and "wrong" (Boyne 121). In "traditional" Ireland, national and class identification as well as religion have provided a reliable basis on which identities could be created. Through the island's recent demographic changes, however, conceived notions of identity have become questioned. Since the early 1990s, economic progress and the boom of media technology have not only given rise to migration to Ireland but have also exercised a decisive influence on the loosening of family and community ties. A growing part of society has become increasingly mobile, shifting jobs and homes on a regular basis. According to Matthew Adams, this mobility is a decisive feature of a "post-traditional society". The consequence of this new form of society is a lack of communal bonds. For that reason, individuals become forced to scrutinize and reinvent themselves without the reassuring support of a social network (Adams 1). Through the dissolution of tradition and the "fragmentation of social bonds", they are less able to perceive themselves as "integrated subjects" (Hall 275), which leads to an "atomisation" of society (Adams 16). "Atomisation" in this context means the dissolution of interpersonal relations, which following Adams, turns society into "a landscape of distinct and isolate individuals" (16). At the same time, the authority and legitimacy of tradition begins to fade and stops providing a basis for "meaningful identities". Thus, the sense of self in a post-traditional society is created on the basis of a modern life style disassociated from

established moral and value systems (*Ibid.* 16). In the presence of migrant workers, the concept of nationalism becomes questioned and frequently confused with racism. Therefore, belonging to a certain nation provides a less convincing basis for the creation of identity. In Northern Ireland, the influence of migration on the creation of a particular sense of self has been considerably weaker than in the Republic. People in the North define themselves less in relation to the newly arrived immigrants than in opposition to the other ethno-religious community. The respective members of the Catholic and Protestant community display contrasting national and cultural identities that are deeply rooted in history. Due to their different ethno-religious background, they develop conflicting political and social aspirations. However, the progressing Peace process has questioned the traditional framework of Irish Nationalism and British Unionism. The reinvention of identities in contemporary Northern Ireland is a much debated issue in an attempt to create a multinational society.

In Roddy Doyle's short story "Guess Who's Coming for Dinner", the quest for a post-national identity is the central theme. Told in a humorous tone, the narrative is set in contemporary Dublin. The action unfolds around Larry Lianne, the committed father of four daughters and a son. Despite being surrounded by a network of strong family ties, the protagonist is forced to reconsider his Irish identity. Due to his daughters' cosmopolitan attitude, his "ethnocentric definition of identity" (Cronin 9), based on nationalism and Irishness, is no longer supported. In the course of the action, the protagonist has to realise that his strong identification with his native country has become debatable in a multinational society. At the beginning of the story, Larry defines himself through the successful upbringing of his daughters and the modernity of Ireland:

Their voices reminded Larry of the Artane roundabout – mad, roaring traffic coming at him from all directions. And he loved it, just like he loved the Artane roundabout. Every time Larry drove onto and off that roundabout he felt modern, successful and Irish. And that was exactly how he felt when he listened to his daughters. (Doyle 3)

The protagonist associates the lively presence of his daughters with the buzz of the city. He feels deeply rooted in his national identity as he is convinced of having contributed to the island's progress through his children. However, when his daughter Stephanie proposes to bring a black friend for dinner, his world view becomes destabilised. Whereas the girls are full of praise for Ben from Nigeria, Larry cannot cope with the idea of having a black man in his house. His daughters' description of their friend as "gorgeous", "dead serious looking" and "a ride" (5) irritates him and makes him react in an irrational way. Shouting: "He's not gorgeous or anything else! Not in this house!" (5), he gives voice to his fear of otherness. In order to prevent Ben's invitation for dinner, he makes use of common stereotypes about Africa and evokes criminality as well as religious fanaticism and AIDS. To his surprise, his arguments are curtly dismissed by the other members of his family. Through his daughters' tolerant attitude, Larry loses

his points of reference, which previously provided a basis for the construction of his identity. The unexpected openness of his family pushes Larry to scrutinize his sense of self:

He wasn't a racist. . . . When he watched a footballer, for example, he didn't see skin; he saw skill.

Paul McGrath, black and brilliant. Gary Breen, white and shite. And it was the same with music. Phil

Lynott, absolutely brilliant. Neil Diamond, absolutely shite. And politicis. Mandela, a hero. Ahern, a chancer. And women too. Naomi Campbell – Jaysis. There wasn't a racist bone or muscle in his body. Nothing tugging him to change his mind about Stevie Wonder or Thierry Henry because they were black. And it worked the other way too. Gary Breen, black, still shite but no worse. Naomi Campbell, white, probably still gorgeous but better off black. Bertie Ahern, black – Larry laughed for the first time in a week. (8)

Despite Larry's good intentions, his attempt to reflect on his attitude towards black people remains biased and simplistic. Whereas he does not object to stars in the media, he is unwilling to accept Stephanie's black friend at the dinner table. Unlike his daughters, who have adopted the idea of cultural pluralism, Larry is not yet able to identify with social transformations in contemporary Irish society. The changed demographic situation decentres his concept of Irishness. Confused about his self-awareness, he is forced to renegotiate his position in society.

Larry's lack of self-confidence manifests itself in the great trouble he takes over choosing the right kind of clothes for the encounter with the black invitee. Insecure about how to dress, he opts for a clean shirt and a good pair of trousers in order to demonstrate his authority as "the older man", "the citizen" and "the firm but fair father" (Doyle 2008: 10). As he assumes the young man will turn up in a track suite, he is convinced that he will establish himself in a superior position through his outfit. Seeing Ben, however, dressed in an elegant way, he becomes destabilised: ". . . there he was: in a fuckin' suit. The best, most elegant suit Larry had ever been close to. A small lad – very, very black – and completely at home in the suit. The wall looked filthy behind him" (11). Through the discrepancy in their choice of clothes, the power relation between the two characters becomes inverted. In contrast to Ben, who seems to be confident and at ease in his role, Larry is confused about how to behave. As an Irish host, he would traditionally be in a superior position to a foreign guest and entitled to display nationalism and pride in his country. However, he has to notice that patriotism has become less acceptable in the discourse of a multinational society. Speaking in Adams's terms, "the traditions, rituals and rules of culture which once shaped the contours of subjectivity have lost their salience irretrievably" (49). In this sense, Larry's self becomes "disembedded" from society, so

that he is separated from the “meaningful” and “unquestioned” traditional social context (Adams 49), in which he had been immersed previously.

In the course of the dinner, the protagonist’s behaviour increasingly turns into a farce. To overcome his insecurity, he exhibits his Irish identity by praising the new Irish potatoes. When the subject of Irish xenophobia is brought up, Larry tries to defend the Irish people by claiming that they are not only “warm” and “friendly” but also gave more money than any other country to Live Aid in 1985 (Doyle 15). Larry’s argument, however, is dismissed by Stephanie as “just stupid” (15). Through his daughter’s harsh reaction, he gradually becomes aware of the fact that his frame of mind is out of touch with the way of thinking expected in a modern Ireland by a younger generation.

When Larry learns about the fate of Ben’s family, he begins to feel sorry for his guest. Confused about his daughter’s and Ben’s relationship, he mistakes the young man for Stephanie’s boyfriend. Consequently, he makes a point of declaring his approval. When he is told by his daughter that Ben is just a good friend, he takes great pride in his own tolerance. To him, his spontaneous reaction is the proof of his open-mindedness and unlimited generosity:

He was happy enough. He wasn’t a racist. There was a black man sitting across from him and he wanted to be his father-in-law. He wasn’t sure why, but that didn’t matter. Larry was happy with himself. (25)

Larry’s self-reflexivity shows his eagerness to reinsert his voice into the changing discourse of a society in the course of social transformation. He feels unprejudiced against ethnic minorities, he thus conceptualises himself as a tolerant man. Dwelling on Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia, Hermans argues that identities are constructed out of a polyphony of voices, which are in constant dialogue. Discrepancies and contradictions between these voices are “intrinsic to a healthy functioning self” and contribute to its innovation (Hermans 113). Thus, it could be argued that in the course of the short story, Larry’s sense of self gradually moves from being a “monologic one” to a “dialogic self-awareness”. Whereas at the beginning he does not question his sense of self, through the confrontation with the members of his family, he realises that his previously accepted categories of thinking have become problematic. Entering into a discourse with different world views, he begins to develop a heteroglot form of identity in a bakhtinian sense (Bakhtin 43).

At the end of the short story, Larry takes a further step towards a more cosmopolitan attitude. He is intrigued by the smell of Ben’s cologne and asks him where he could purchase it. Whereas initially he resented the idea of men wearing perfume, he is happy to revise his attitude after having met Ben. Asking for the name of Ben’s African scent, Larry shows his acceptance of the culture, which he previously had judged to be an inferior one. His willingness to enter an African shop to buy the perfume shows that he is prepared to cross those ethnic boundaries that made him object to Ben’s invitation

for dinner. Gradually disassociating himself from a traditional “ethnocentric” (Cronin 9) way of thinking, Larry gets the chance to reinvent himself as a post-nationalist individual. His self-awareness becomes less conditioned by perceived world views and established nationalist value systems but is increasingly constructed through his own reflexivity and conscious selection of viewpoints. Through the adoption of a more open and tolerant attitude, he attempts to “re-embed” himself (Adams 48) into his changed social environment.

In contrast to Doyle’s short story, which is set in the home of an Irish family, the action of Chris Binchy’s *Open-handed* takes place in the milieu of Dublin’s migrant workers. In the novel, the life stories of a number of Irish, Albanian, Polish, Russian and Czech individuals become entangled with each other. In sociological terms, the characters from Eastern Europe depicted in the novel can be described as “post-industrial migrants” (Cronin 45), as they are available to work anywhere at low rates of pay. Binchy explores the ways in which the presence of migrants exercises an influence on the self-awareness of the local population. According to the sociologist Claire Mitchell, a certain “self-understanding relates to how we compare ourselves with other people and how we think we fit into wider society” (Mitchell 146). In the light of Mitchell’s theory it could be argued that in *Open-handed*, the Irish characters construct their identity by distancing themselves from the Eastern European workers. On the basis of their nationality and their material wealth, they stand out against the migrants and therefore claim a superior position in society. Speaking in sociological terms, they relay their identity on “the expulsion of what they are not” (Lawler 3). Through the characters’ pretentious attitude, Binchy alludes to Ireland’s transformation from an emigrant to an immigrant country. Thus, he suggests a reversal of history: whereas before the economic boom in the 1990s many Irish were forced to work under difficult circumstances abroad, they now inflict the same discriminatory working conditions on their own immigrants.

The central action of the novel is set in one of Dublin’s luxury hotels, where the lower jobs are mostly carried out by Eastern Europeans. Having come to Ireland in the hope of making easy money, the migrants are confronted with the reality of life and become involved in violence, prostitution and criminality. One of the main characters is Marcin, a geology student from Poland. Through a conversation between Marcin and his colleague Tommy, Binchy draws attention to discriminatory attitudes found in contemporary Irish society. When Marcin explains to Tommy that his Polish name is pronounced in the same way as the Irish “Mártín”, he replies in a condescending way:

‘I don’t know what you heard. The Irish for Martin is Martin’. ‘No, I mean the Gaelic. The Irish language.’ ‘Oh, that,’ Tommy said. ‘I don’t care about that. I’ll call you Bob. I can’t spend my life arsing around trying to work out what your fucking name is.’ . . . ‘I’m only messing with you,’ Tommy said, turning back to him. ‘Oh, right,’ Marcin said. ‘I’ll call you Marty. How’s that?’ ‘Fine,’ Marcin said. (72)

In his conversation with Marcin, Tommy displays a strong sense of superiority, refusing to memorise the Polish name. He considers Marcin and his culture as inferior and thus feels authorised to deride his colleague's name. At the same time, however, Tommy rejects Irishness as a marker of his own identity. Telling Marcin that he cannot be bothered with his Irish language, he articulates his disinterest in the culture of his own country. In Adams' words it could be said that Tommy stands "outside of tradition" (Adams 48). This means that he does not construct his identity on the basis of Irish cultural heritage but through the identification with a way of life, characteristic of a modern capitalist society. In Tommy's case, his lifestyle is founded on a striving for money and success. Cronin claims that the ways in which people represent themselves to each other and themselves is not only the result of their personal history, but is also bound up with the different manners in which their cultural environment obliges them to participate in economy and society (2). In this sense, it could be argued that Tommy's attitude and behaviour are conditioned by the social changes taking place in contemporary Irish society.

A further phenomenon explored in the novel is the role that power takes in the reconfiguration of human relations in a changing social order. Engaging with the power imbalance between the migrant workers and their employers, Binchy draws attention to sexism and discrimination. In the second chapter of the book, he exposes the questionable employment strategies used in order to hire Eastern Europeans. Agnieszka, a beautiful young girl from Poland, is interviewed for a job as a waitress by the bar owner Gavin. However, she is not employed for her experience but for her physical attraction. Having to turn around and show her body during the interview, she wonders whether the methods that have been used are permissible:

Could it be legal? She thought not, not here in the West, with its EU directives and honesty and cultures of excellence that must surely prevent employers making girls bend over in interviews, inspecting their haunches and teeth as if they were horses. But for the Eastern Europeans who came in droves through the door in response to Gavin's *Herald* ads, none of that mattered. They would take their minimum wage and occasional tips and be happy (11).

Through Agnieszka's reflections, Binchy attracts attention to the economic gap between east and west. East Europeans are described as financially dependant on their western counterparts and thus occupy a weaker position in present-day Europe. The liberties employers take in their choice of workers mirror their conviction of belonging to a superior form of society. The clear cut power relations between migrant workers and their employers situate the Irish at the top and the Eastern Europeans at the bottom of the social ladder. For that reason, the owners of bars and restaurants feel entitled to look down on their workers, treating them as second-class.

The identity of the Irish characters mentioned in *Open-handed* is constructed on the possession of money and the access to power. When Agnieszka is asked by her boss

Gavin to go out with him and his friends, she does not dare decline the invitation for fear of professional consequences. The fact that Gavin insists on paying for everything during the evening out embarrasses Agnieszka. When she wants to return his favour by buying him a drink, her offer is rejected. Gavin's money highlights his elevated status in society and gives him power over Agnieszka. A girl in the group of Gavin's friends explains to her: "They like to spend their money. It's a lot of fun. They'll pay for everything. They get everything." (83). The description of Galvin and his friends as "fun loving" and "money spending", resumes their identity as modern successful business men.

In Binchy's novel, the so-called "atomisation" of society is one of the central topics. In contemporary sociology "atomisation" is explained as the "turning away from organic, communal ties" towards a "landscape of distinct and isolate individuals" (Adams 16). Whereas in Doyle's short story the protagonist is deeply rooted in his family and community, in *Open-handed*, the different characters are disassociated from each other. Lacking strong interpersonal relations based on emotion and affection, they turn into isolated individuals, who struggle to find their place in society. Whereas the migrant workers are loosely linked to each other through their common misery, the Irish characters are merely in contact for the sake of business and money. In this way, "social disintegration" (Adams 27) becomes the decisive characteristic of modern Ireland presented in *Open-handed*. Taking the businessman Sylvester as an example, Binchy illustrates the atomised state of society. Sylvester regularly visits prostitutes to fill his lack of human contact as he is devoid of family and community ties. Estranged and emotionally disconnected from his wife and children, he lives separated from the members of his family. Only out of obligation he financially provides a certain standard of living for them. In the reunions with his family he perceives as "stiff and quiet", with "every one of them wishing to be somewhere else" (198). Helen, his wife, merely attempts to stay on good terms with her former husband out of financial interest. Having high hopes for his business projects, she is merely interested in her own share of the business. Sylvester is eager to invest in property in Eastern Europe and intends to trick his customers by selling low quality houses at a high price. Devoid of ethic and moral values, the character of Sylvester stands for greed and ruthlessness. Through his money-orientated behaviour, Binchy brings up the topic of capitalist imperialism. Once again, he points at a reversal of history. Whereas in the past, the island was colonised by the British, nowadays Irish business men set out to "invade" Eastern Europe by implanting their businesses in the different countries. In this way, it could be argued that the traditional Irish sense of victimhood has given way to a "capitalist settler mentality".

In a Northern Irish context, the topic of migration is less prominent than in the Republic. The issue of cultural imperialism also takes on a different form. It could be argued that in the case of Northern Ireland, the Catholic and Protestant communities try to impose a certain form of cultural imperialism on their ethno-religious counterpart. According to Mitchell, the society in the North is shaped by a strong "ethnonationalism" (145). This means that two separate nations want a certain territory to be governed by their

respective state. In this political framework, the two antagonistic communities develop an opposing sense of self, based on contrasting historical and cultural backgrounds. Due to Northern Ireland's different socio-political situation, Jenkinson does not explore the influence of migration on the local population in her short story "The City Loved". She concentrates on the changing relation between the two communities and engages with the influence of displacement and political changes on the deconstruction of established ethno-religious identities. "The City Loved" is the seventh story in the collection *Contemporary Problems Nos. 53&54*. The different texts deal with "everyday problems" experienced by characters living on the edge of society in Northern Ireland, England or Eastern Europe. Integrating different cultures and locations into her book, Jenkinson strives to set the Northern Irish conflict in an international framework. The action of "The City Loved" takes place in post-Ceasefire Belfast and develops around the Catholic protagonist Mark, who spent several years in different European countries. When he comes back to his native city, he begins to see Belfast in a new light. By choosing a protagonist, who had left Northern Ireland to experience life abroad, Jenkinson alludes to a new mobility among the local population after the Ceasefire. Thanks to the progressing Peace process and a developing transport system, more and more people are willing to shift their focus of attention from the local tension to continental Europe. When the protagonist returns from his five-year stay in Poland and England, his friends in Belfast seem to him "narrow" and "racist" (67). Through the changed perspective of the protagonist, Jenkinson explores the impact of displacement on the creation of a certain sense of self. Due to his years abroad, Mark reconsiders and reinvents his past experience of living in Belfast. Speaking in sociological terms, the protagonist turns into a "translated being" (Cronin 70), an individual able to be "translated" from one cultural context into another. His experience abroad does not only modify his perception of his friends but also makes him recognise his own sectarian attitudes. Telling his Afro-Caribbean friends in England about his native city, Mark becomes conscious of the extent to which the language he habitually uses is biased: "When they'd ask him about Belfast, he'd started on about it being a black hole, then saw their eyes out on stalks. 'No offence, but black means Protestant', he'd tried to explain, pink with shame" (Jenkinson 2004: 68). Mark only becomes aware of his discriminatory views through the reaction of his friends from an entirely different cultural background. As they do not belong to either of the antagonistic communities in Northern Ireland, they function as a lens through which the protagonist becomes able to scrutinize his sense of self.

Brought up in an Irish speaking family in Republican West Belfast, Mark develops a strong Irish identity at an early stage of his life. As a young boy, he was convinced of his community's superior position in society. He used to contemplate the divided city from his window taking for granted that the positive things of life are only to be found on the Catholic side:

He used to stand there as a child and think how lucky “They” were. Because on their side, they had the moon, the stars, one very bright star in particular. It was Venus but it had looked as bright as the star of Bethlehem. Yes, they even had Jesus on their side. He shivered suddenly in his light shirt, feeling the congealed pall of damp cold that the spring night carried in. (69)

Through the eyes of the young protagonist, Jenkinson draws on the “concept of a chosen people” central to the thinking of both communities in Northern Ireland (Nic Craith 66). The novelist alludes to the fact that religious beliefs and historical facts are frequently taken out of their historical context and become instrumentalised by the respective community. As the different denominations are associated with specific cultural traditions, members of each community have taken on particular political perspectives that play an important part in the creation of a personal ethno-religious identity.

In her story, Jenkinson engages with Belfast’s sectarian geography and the fact that belonging to a specific territory functions as an important marker of identity. His Protestant friends call the protagonist “Mark from Springfield”. By associating him with West Belfast’s Republican territory, his nickname gives information about his Catholic background. Mark’s territorial consciousness is illustrated through his movements across the urban space. Navigating the city, he has constantly to remind himself of where he is. In contrast to West Belfast, where he is able to move freely, in the east of the city he feels observed by the local population and threatened by dogs barking at him, whom he imagines to be “smelling his Catholic blood” (69). Thus, his freedom of movement becomes restricted because he belongs to the antagonistic community. The ethno-religious division of Belfast’s society is further illustrated through the depiction of the city’s physical shape. The cityscape is described as marked by the presence of peace lines, murals, flags and sectarian slogans. In this way, Jenkinson underlines the divided nature of the urban population.

After his stay abroad, Mark begins to cross ethno-religious boundaries by choosing friends from Protestant East Belfast. Whereas he spent his youth in West Belfast’s Republican milieu, he now socialises with members of the opposite community. Only after having been away from Belfast for several years, Mark is able to perceive the sectarian animosities from a detached point of view and he begins to disassociate himself from the strong Irish identity received in his youth. However, he is not yet able to show his new tolerance officially. When he meets up with his Protestant friends in East Belfast, he tells his father that he is only having a drink in the local IRA pub. He also does not dare admit to his family that he chose a British passport over an Irish one as it was thirty pounds cheaper. The fact that he renounces an Irish passport for the sake of money shows that Irish citizenship is no longer important to him. Rejecting an identity clearly defined in ethno-religious terms, he moves towards a cosmopolitan self-definition. According to Cronin, the stress of cosmopolitanism lies on multiple affiliations and

“the possibility of individual choice rather than the unwavering cultural determinism or communities of descent” (10). In this sense, it could be said that Mark frees himself from the expectations of his community, constructing his own “hybrid identity” (Nic Craith 114) through his personal choices.

Whereas Mark is able to reinvent his sense of self thanks to the time he spent abroad, certain parts of Belfast’s population seem to become able to question their identity due to the slowly changing discourse of the Troubles. Walking through Catholic Belfast, the protagonist notices the shaved heads of the local young men. He interprets their hairstyle as a rebellion against the “idealised image of the wiry-haired Irish youth who stared down at them out of the walls” (Jenkinson 71). Subversively hinting at the long-haired Bobby Sands, the Republican hero omnipresent on West Belfast’s wall murals, the author suggests that the cult of personality maintained by the Catholic community has become less important than in previous years. In so doing, Jenkinson suggests a changing attitude among West Belfast’s youth.

Mark’s new friendship with a group of Protestants demonstrates his desire to come to terms with his own and the region’s past. As a former IRA activist, he is now able to share a drink with the Protestant Wesley, who was once involved in loyalist crime. Like Mark, Wesley takes on a more tolerant outlook on Northern Irish society. Rejecting the traditional categorisation of people along ethno-religious lines, he explains: “. . . I don’t care any more what anyone is” he opened up to Mark. “I’m a humanitarian: I like people’s company” (Jenkinson 73). Through his remark he shows a strong sense of “cultural cosmopolitanism” (Held 58). In sociological terms this means that he has acquired the ability to “stand outside a singular location (the location of one’s birth, land, upbringing, conversion) and to mediate tradition” that lies at its core (*Ibid.* 58). When Mark accidentally lapses into Irish in the Protestant pub, the people around him fall silent. However, he is saved through Wesley’s intervention:

‘Aye, it’s Gaelic’, Wesley answered sharply. ‘Didn’t that champion of Ulster Cúchulain, speak Gaelic? Tiocfaidh ar lar!’ he shouted. ‘Our day will come. Whatever we are.’ ‘. . . Tiocfaidh ar la!’ returned some men at the bar, raising their glasses. ‘Thank you’, Mark said to Wesley. He was almost crying with relief. ‘No problem’, grinned Wesley. ‘You see, Irish belongs to us all.’ Mark felt a weight fly up from his shoulder. The final roadblock had been lifted. (Jenkinson 73)

With his reply, Wesley articulates a cosmopolitan point of view. Claiming that “Irish belongs to us all”, he shows his willingness to accept the cultural heritage of the opposed community as a new dimension of his own self-awareness. In this way, he indirectly declares his allegiance to both communities and the adoption of a dual identity, based on Britishness and Irishness to the same extent. In the context of the story, the Republican slogan “Tiocfaidh ar lar” (Our day will come), traditionally predicting the victory of

the Catholic community over their British counterpart, takes on a different connotation. Used by a former Loyalist paramilitary, the diction loses its sectarian connotations and points at a future day of mutual understanding. Able to accept otherness, Wesley turns into a symbol of tolerance and reconciliation. Through the two main characters of her story, Jenkinson depicts a Northern Ireland in which different national and cultural identities do not exclude each other any more, but are able to enter into a dialogue. In this sense, she advocates a utopian region, where both traditions will be able to express themselves freely.

In “Guess who is coming for dinner”, *Open-handed* and *Contemporary Problems Nos 53&54*, the three authors engage with the different ways in which identities become created in a changing social environment. Focusing on diverse forms of self-awareness, they give weight to contrasting aspects of social change in their respective narratives. In his short story, Roddy Doyle explores how the presence of migrants challenges traditional forms of nationalism. Living in a modern Dublin marked by multiculturalism, the protagonist has to reconsider his strong sense of Irishness in order to be socially accepted. Through his gradually acquired self-reflexivity, he is able to reinsert his voice into a post-nationalist discourse. In this way, the protagonist’s changed social environment pushes him to disassociate himself from a traditional “ethnocentric” way of thinking. In *Open-handed*, Binchy engages with the “atomisation” of society and the influence of power and money on the construction of identity. Portraying a society based on wealth and success, he demonstrates the loosening of social ties and the fading of Irish nationalism. The fact of being Irish only seems important to the characters when they define themselves against the migrant workers, who are perceived as being second-class citizens. Exploring the topic of “capitalist imperialism”, Binchy evokes the creation of an Irish identity based on the concept of economic and cultural superiority. Jenkinson engages with the issue of displacement in a different sense. Letting her Northern Irish protagonist come home after a stay abroad, she hints at a new mobility of the local population and underlines the importance of deterritorialisation in order to achieve a widening of perspectives. Only by leaving Belfast for a certain time, Mark is able to achieve a clearer vision of himself and the part of society he previously identified with. His monolithic ethno-religious identity becomes deconstructed through the prism of a different culture. In this sense, Jenkinson promotes the concept of hybrid identities as an adequate sense of self in contemporary Northern Ireland.

With their different approaches to depicting the island’s population on both sides of the border, the three authors attempt to attract attention to shortcomings in their respective society. They plead for an extension of identity references, through which any national or ethno-religious self-sufficiency would be prevented. The three authors suggest that the creation of identities has to take place in a more amplified European perspective. In this sense, they advocate an Ireland, which in Declan Kiberd’s words would take the shape of a “patchwork quilt of cultures” (92). Through their respective works, Doyle,

Binchy and Jenkinson plead for a cultural pluralism, leading to the affirmation and acceptance of difference in an evolving framework of a post-national Europe of regions.

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