

2016

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### Recommended Citation

Fischer, Dore (2016) "Balancing Diversities: Multiculturalism and Cultural Identity in a Selected Number of Works of Modern Irish Fiction," *CALL: Irish Journal for Culture, Arts, Literature and Language*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 14.

doi:10.21427/D7W882

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/priamls/vol1/iss1/14>

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## **Balancing Diversities: Multiculturalism and Cultural Identity in a Selected Number of Works of Modern Irish Fiction**

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### *Abstract*

Since the mid-1990s Ireland has rapidly changed into a multicultural society and the migrant population is increasingly becoming a well-established part of modern Ireland. This article is linked to one of the conference themes, 'literature as multicultural criticism', and is a contribution to the wider debates in the Irish media and academic circles on multiculturalism and cultural diversity in Ireland. From the beginning of the new millennium, these topics have started to have an impact on Irish literature. The article discusses a small number of Irish literary texts (by Hugo Hamilton, Dermot Bolger and Roddy Doyle, published between 2001 and 2007), which explore, articulate and reflect the development of Ireland into a multicultural society and its associated challenges. Irish identities, as represented in these stories, are in a process of significant change, with the concept of 'Irishness' becoming increasingly diffuse.

*Keywords:* migration; multiculturalism; interculturalism; cultural diversity; Literature as Multicultural Criticism; Modern Irish Fiction; Cultural Identity; varieties of 'Irishness'

### **Introduction**

On 18 September, 1926, George Russell (AE) wrote in the *Irish Statesman*:

“We do not want uniformity in our culture or our ideals, but the balancing of our diversities in a wide tolerance. The moment we had complete uniformity, our national life would be stagnant. We are glad to think we shall never achieve that uniformity which is the dream of commonplace minds .....”<sup>1</sup> As Terence Brown explains: “From the first AE was determined that Irish life should be open to diverse influences from abroad.”<sup>2</sup> Approximately fifty years later, in the 1970s, when the concept of ‘pluralism’ was introduced to the Irish intellectual debate, it “seemed like a vindication to an earlier solitary thinker like George Russell, who ... had defended cultural diversity, as a natural resource.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Irish Statesman*, 18 September, 1926, p. 29; quoted from: Terence Brown: *Ireland. A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002*. London: Harper Perennial, 2004, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, *Ireland*, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, *Ireland*, p. 295.

When AE advocates cultural diversity and tolerance, this has a modern and highly topical ring to it. In the 1990s, Ireland started to develop rapidly into a multicultural society. The ideas of cultural diversity and pluralism were suddenly moved from the merely ideological plane to a much more realistic item on Ireland's political and sociological agenda. As a result, the term 'multiculturalism' has become a keyword since the late 1990s, especially in the Irish media (but also in literature/theatre, official/government policy), and to some extent, has replaced the term 'pluralism'.<sup>4</sup>

Up to the Mid-1990s, the Republic of Ireland was a mono-cultural society, mainly, of course, because of its relatively stagnant and poorly developed economy, especially when compared with the economic strength of other European countries.<sup>5</sup> A small number of European Continentals arrived in Ireland to buy property in the 1960s,<sup>6</sup> but overall, up to the 90s Ireland had been protected from having to face the challenges of multiculturalism. From then on and with increasing prosperity and economic growth, Ireland rapidly changed from a country of high emigration to a country of high immigration. In the decade between 1999 and 2005, more than 540,000 people immigrated into Ireland. "But with the new prosperity of the years from 1994 onwards, there came not only a large influx of returning Irish emigrants, many of them bringing with them wives and children acquired abroad, but also from the mid-1990s onwards tens of thousands of foreign workers, and from the late 1990s onwards some 10,000 asylum seekers a year."<sup>7</sup> The 2006 Census showed a 10.4% foreign born population, and during the period covered by the 2006 Census the non-Irish population had almost doubled.<sup>8</sup> Estimates at that time were that by 2030 there could be 1 million foreign born residents in Ireland, which would represent 18% of the population.<sup>9</sup>

While migrants increasingly became a well-established part of modern Ireland, the speed with which economic and social changes happened posed challenges to the development of a successful multicultural society. As early as 2003, Dr. Garrett Fitzgerald (former Taoiseach) had identified that the scale and pace of change was likely to pose a serious challenge to

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<sup>4</sup> Brown, *Ireland*, p. 423-424.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Lee: *Ireland, 1912 – 1985: Politics and Society*. Cambridge: University Press, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Garret Fitzgerald: 'The Origins of Irish Monoculturalism and the late Twentieth-Century Emergence of Multiculturalism'. In: *Mosaic or Melting Pot? Living with Diversity. Proceedings of Royal Irish Academy Conference*. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2003, p. 94-100.

<sup>7</sup> Fitzgerald: 'The Origins of Irish Monoculturalism', p. 99.

<sup>8</sup> CSO.ie, Census 2006 Reports.

<sup>9</sup> The 2011 Census shows that the number of non-Irish nationals increased further since 2006 and that they now account for 12% of the population (CSO.ie: Census 2011 Reports).

social cohesion. He noted that the migration of a relatively small number of Western European Continentals, who bought property here in the 1960s and 1970s, had caused “minor flurries of resentment at local level”. Referring to the period 1996-2003, Fitzgerald stated that: “the speed with which all this has happened - the rapidity with which the Irish economy has moved within seven or eight years from relative poverty to prosperity, coming on top of huge demographic changes, and radical changes in social mores that took much longer to affect other states - has created problems and tensions that we are currently seeking to transcend. For a country that has already had to move in quite a short space of time from a narrow mono-culturalism to acceptance of a multicultural Irish identity within a relatively unfamiliar European context, this is a serious challenge.”<sup>10</sup>

From the 1960s onwards, Irish writers have written extensively about the subject of emigration.<sup>11</sup> The mobility of people within Europe and subsequent intercultural contacts, both within and outside Ireland, are reflected in a substantial number of works of modern Irish literary fiction.<sup>12</sup> This included the representation of previously mentioned immigration of Europeans, especially Germans, Dutch and French who were seeking an alternative lifestyle and building up small enterprises, American business people building up multinational businesses, and a large number of tourists visiting Ireland. These are often represented stereotypically, using foreign characters as cultural contrast, different from ‘us’. This also applies to the occasional representation of other, more ‘exotic’ nationalities (Indian, African, Asian) being portrayed as very rare and even more different to the indigenous culture. From the late 1990s onwards, the rapid and dramatic economic, political and social changes were beginning to have some impact on modern Irish literature. But an even bigger impact could be noticed in Irish film and theatre: “The transformation of Ireland from a country of emigration to a country of immigration has also become a conspicuous theme in contemporary Irish film and is taken up in several contributions which explore the depiction of ‘ethnic otherness’ and racism.”<sup>13</sup> While film and theatre have been receptive to the topic of immigration, this applies to a lesser extent to writers of prose fiction.<sup>14</sup> However, from the

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<sup>10</sup> Fitzgerald: ‘The Origins of Irish Monoculturalism’, p. 99-100.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph O’Connor: Introduction. In: Dermot Bolger (ed.): *Ireland in Exile. Irish Writers Abroad*. Dublin: New Island Books, p. 11-18.

<sup>12</sup> Dore Fischer: Ireland and Europe: The ‘European Experience’ in selected works of Irish fiction. In: *ABEI Journal. The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies* 3 (2001), p. 77-86.

<sup>13</sup> Werner Huber, Sean Crosson: ‘Contemporary Irish Film: An Introduction’. In: Werner Huber, Sean Crosson (eds.): *Contemporary Irish Film. New Perspectives on a National Cinema*. Wien: Braumüller, 2011, p. 1-12, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *The Irish Times*, 23 May, 2007, p. 15.

beginning of the new millennium in particular, a small number of Irish literary texts explore, articulate and reflect both the creative and destructive dimensions of intercultural contact. Issues dealt with include: immigration into Ireland, the challenges of multiculturalism in Ireland, stereotypical representations of immigrants, emerging intercultural and trans-cultural identities and varieties of 'Irishness'.

In this paper, some of these texts will be discussed. These include novels by Dermot Bolger,<sup>15</sup> Hugo Hamilton,<sup>16</sup> and one of Roddy Doyle's stories.<sup>17</sup> All of these, in varying ways explore, articulate and reflect the development of Ireland into a multicultural society and the associated challenges for both the immigrant population and the host culture.

However, before proceeding to an analysis of the texts, some of the terminology used in this article requires some definition and explanation. The term 'multiculturalism' refers to "the grouping of many cultures together, with no recognition of the lack of equality between cultures, or the dominance of one culture."<sup>18</sup> The term does not identify the relationships between the different cultures, nor the many challenges linked to the contacts between the culturally diverse groups that may emerge.

The term 'interculturalism' is used to refer to the process by which different cultures (minority and majority) impact on or dialogue with each other. It suggests a challenge to the dominance of one culture and to the propensity of the dominant culture to assimilate the minority one.<sup>19</sup> As there is much more to cultural diversity than just cultural differences between people from different backgrounds, the term interculturalism implies a more fruitful engagement with cultural diversity. Also Edna Longley contends that: "'inter-cultural' is a better term than the somewhat ambiguous 'multi-cultural' for the project of engaging with genuine differences and making them fruitful."<sup>20</sup>

The term 'trans-culturality' is also used in the context of cultural analysis. Trans-culturality is usually used to refer to concepts such as intertwinement, the fusion of cultures, hybridisation,

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<sup>15</sup> Dermot Bolger: *The Valparaiso Voyage*. London: Harper Collins, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Hugo Hamilton: *Sad Bastard*. London / New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Roddy Doyle: *The Deportees and other Stories*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Mike Fitzgibbon, Gertrude Cotter: *Creating an Intercultural Campus*. Cork: The Higher Education Equality Unit, no year, p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> Fitzgibbon and Cotter: *Creating an Intercultural Campus*, p. 109.

<sup>20</sup> Edna Longley: 'Multiculturalism and Northern Ireland'. In: Edna Longley and Declan Kiberd: *Multiculturalism: The View from the two Irelands*. Cork: University Press, 2001, p. 9-10.

and ‘border crossings’ to places beyond, or what Homi Bhabha calls the ‘third space’.<sup>21</sup> Wolfgang Welsch’s concept of trans-culturality envisions cultures to be able to link up and undergo transition, while aspiring to avoid uniformity and homogenization.<sup>22</sup> These ideas remind one of AE’s proclamation on cultural diversity and the Statesman’s alert to “those aspects of Irish intellectual and cultural life that tended to national exclusivism, xenophobia, and cultural imposition.”<sup>23</sup>

‘Identity’ is a much used and abused term of indistinct definition. “Identity as a concept is fully as elusive as is everyone’s sense of his own personal identity.”<sup>24</sup>

Research literature distinguishes between personal and collective identity. Personal identity relates to a person’s awareness and questions of who he or she is, and to his/her continuity and coherence. Collective identity refers to an awareness of sameness with a group or groups, in contrast to a perceived distinctiveness, i.e. a possible way of distinguishing oneself or a group from others. Collective identities produce “societal boundaries allowing individual members as well as groups and collectivities, in actual or desired, existing or imaginary communities, to make sense of ‘us’ versus ‘them’.”<sup>25</sup>

These two concepts, personal and collective identities, are closely related and inter-woven. In the literature under discussion in this paper, the personal identities of the key characters are an important focus and are inextricably linked to the issues of collective, cultural and in some cases ‘national’ identities.<sup>26</sup> The concepts of multi-culturalism, inter-culturalism and trans-culturalism emerge at different points in the analysis.

### **The Valparaiso Voyage**

Dermot Bolger is one of the authors whose work regularly features cross-cultural contacts. At the end of his 1991 novel *The Journey Home*, Bolger writes about a future vision of an Ireland which has been almost entirely bought out by foreign business people and is the last

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<sup>21</sup> Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Wolfgang Welsch: Transculturality - the puzzling form of cultures today. In: *California Sociologist* 17& 18 (1994/95), p. 19-39.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, *Ireland*, p. 109.

<sup>24</sup> Anselm L. Strauss: *Mirrors and Masks. The Search for Identity*. London: Transaction Publishers, 1997, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> D. Moore and B. Kimmerling: Individual strategies of adopting collective identities: the Israeli case. In: *International Sociology* 10 (1995), p. 387 – 408, p. 387.

<sup>26</sup> National identity, defined by A.D. Smith (*Nationalism. Theory, Ideology, History*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991, p. 179) as “the subjective feelings and valuations of any population which possesses common experiences and one or more shared cultural characteristics.”

green resort in Europe.<sup>27</sup> He imagines that the indigenous population is reduced to the provision of services to tourists and business people.<sup>28</sup>

A decade later, in *The Valparaiso Voyage*, Bolger describes a new Ireland which has changed in a very different way than he predicted 10 years earlier.<sup>29</sup> *The Valparaiso Voyage* tries to portray the complexity of contemporary Irish life: issues such as corruption and criminality, tribunals and money laundering, childhood abuse and incest, the Celtic Tiger, rapid social change, multiculturalism and racism, are among the topics dealt with by Bolger. He begins the book with a reference to the lynching of a black sailor which is supposed to have happened in Navan at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The locals, who had never seen a black person before in their lives, decided that he must be the devil and hanged him in the market square. While Bolger concedes that this story may or may not be entirely true, the fact that it is part of local folklore suggests that there were significant racial tensions in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland.<sup>30</sup>

The main character of the *The Valparaiso Voyage* is Brendan Brogan, who, now in his forties, returns to Ireland after years on the run from traumatic childhood experiences allied with enormous gambling debts. He has taken on the identity of his dead half-brother Cormac, the real Brendan supposedly having died in a train crash in Scotland. With his new name and identity, he returns with the hope of healing his emotional wounds and sorting out his life. His objectives include avenging his father's murder and re-establishing contact with his estranged son.

When he had left Ireland “there was graffiti scrawled in the toilet in Dublin airport: *Would the last person emigrating please turn out all the lights*. Half the passengers on that flight were emigrants, fleeing from a clapped-out economy.” On his return, he finds an Ireland that has changed beyond recognition. Walking around Dublin, he notices “a striking preponderance of black faces compared to ten years ago.” And in a house in the North Inner City he finds “every face that appeared on each landing was black or Eastern European. I had spent a decade abroad, but somehow in my mind Ireland had never changed..... before I left, the occasional black visitor was still a novelty, a chance to show our patronizing tolerance

<sup>27</sup> Dermot Bolger: *The Journey Home*. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

<sup>28</sup> In the context of Ireland's economic and financial situation since 2007, this vision seems to have a realistic ring to it, although most unlikely not what Bolger had envisaged in the early 1990s.

<sup>29</sup> Bolger, *Valparaiso*.

<sup>30</sup> Bolger, *Valparaiso*, p. 6.

which distinguished us from racist Britain. We had always been an exporter of people, our politicians pleading the special case of illegal Irish immigrants living out subterranean existence in Boston and New York. So, with our new-found prosperity, why did I not expect the boot to be on the other foot?"<sup>31</sup>

In the Irish media, he finds various reports relating to issues of multiculturalism in Ireland: Romanian singers deserting their choir in order to go underground, illegal immigrants queuing outside the Department of Foreign Affairs, "reports of split communities and resistance committees being formed in isolated villages that found themselves earmarked to cater for refugees," and marches by local people against the attempted deportation of refugees and children.<sup>32</sup>

Brogan also personally witnesses clashes between newcomers and the host society, and soon after his arrival he unwillingly gets involved in a vicious racial attack in the North Inner City of Dublin. He subsequently befriends three Nigerian asylum seekers who live there. These Nigerians fled their home country after they experienced persecution, violence, torture, rape, mutilation and the murder of family members. Trafficked by criminals for a lot of money and under appalling conditions, they were transported through Spain in vans and in boats to Ireland. Their hopes were to gain political asylum and secure for themselves and their families a better future. Since their arrival in Dublin, they have been living in poor, cramped conditions in a small run-down flat in the North Inner City. They are not allowed to work, and their everyday life consists of spending hours queuing outside the Refugee Application Centre. Their future is uncertain, and they live in constant fear of the police, criminals, and most of all, of being deported. Repeatedly they become victims of racial attacks; these are sometimes violent physical attacks, sometimes verbal attacks with strong language<sup>33</sup>, or non-verbal intimidation such as glaring or staring. Another example of this negative branding happens when Ebum, Brogan's Nigerian girlfriend, is accused of getting involved with him because she is trying to get married to or pregnant by an Irish citizen so that she can then stay in Ireland. She strongly rejects these allegations.<sup>34</sup> While the Nigerians help each other, they are resentful of, sometimes hostile to, asylum seekers from other countries. There is rivalry, hostility, sometimes even racism between some of the ethnic groups. For example, the

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<sup>31</sup> Bolger, *Valparaiso*, p. 71-72, p. 70, p. 45-46.

<sup>32</sup> Bolger, *Valparaiso*, p. 74, p. 264.

<sup>33</sup> "Fuck off back to your nignog friends", in: Bolger, *Valparaiso*, p. 340.

<sup>34</sup> Bolger, *Valparaiso*, p. 159, p. 370.

Nigerians feel proud and superior to the Eastern Europeans and call them “gypsies”. Despite their hard life and uncertain future in Ireland, they are determined not to go back to their own country. As one of them states: “I will never go back, even if your people deport me. ... Death would be better than back there.”<sup>35</sup>

While the reader learns a lot about the plight of the asylum seekers, the focus of the novel remains on the experience of the main character. After defending the Nigerian woman Ebon against racial attackers, Brogan befriends her and her relatives. In the turmoil of his life he sees them as his only friends and their sparse and cramped accommodation as “the only place in Dublin where I still feel at home.” While they are somewhat hospitable to him, they are quite suspicious of people like him who fraternize with them. For him, however, they have the function of a mirror or a lens through which he looks both at himself and at Ireland in general. He identifies with his foreign friends because like them, he is haunted by a traumatic past, and in the ‘new’ Ireland, he too feels like a foreigner, a homeless outsider who doesn’t belong anywhere any more. This identification with his foreign friends is intensified by an incident in his old home town. In order to conceal his true identity he pretends to be a foreigner who doesn’t understand English, and overhears derogatory comments about foreigners. This first-hand experience of racism makes him realise that this is everyday life for his friends, “perpetually judged by self-appointed juries of strangers, the stigma of looking different.”<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, he is also confronted with his own ambiguous feelings towards the large number of immigrants. While he strongly identifies with their situation, their suffering and their sense of homelessness, he too experiences bouts of resentment towards them. “I hated the stab of hypocritical prejudice I was discovering inside me, but somehow it felt as if this queue (outside the Department of Foreign Affairs) was robbing me of my home-coming.” Unlike them, he is an Irish citizen and he sometimes feels that he has a greater right to be in Ireland than his Nigerian friends. One of his friends concedes that this may be true; however, she says: “Perhaps so. But I have more need”.<sup>37</sup>

## Sad Bastard

<sup>35</sup> Bolger, *Valparaiso*, p. 124, p. 161.

<sup>36</sup> Bolger, *Valparaiso*, p. 159, p. 271.

<sup>37</sup> Bolger, *Valparaiso*, p. 121, p. 160.

Hugo Hamilton's novel *Sad Bastard* is also set in Dublin.<sup>38</sup> A sequel to his earlier novel *Headbanger*,<sup>39</sup> it unfolds like a detective story and re-introduces Pat Coyne, an ex-policeman. Coyne's son gets into trouble: he is wanted first by the police, and then by some criminals. Coyne tries to come to the rescue, but he has a lot of his own problems to sort out, including his attempts to save his marriage.

This novel also contains many references to the drastic change in Irish migration patterns. In the past, "[e]very story ended with a man or a woman taking the boat to England. Remember the sign on the old mail boat as you walked across the gangplank: *Mind your step!* The last word of advice to the Irish exile." Throughout the book, there are references to Irish historical memories of migration, when Coyne draws repeated parallels between the Irish emigrants of the past and the new immigrants of today: "These were the Blasket Islanders coming back....Here they were the first of them - thousands who had fled poverty and were now returning at last. ....The famine people coming back in their coffin ships."<sup>40</sup>

Now the tide of emigration has turned. The book starts with a "consignment of illegal immigrants" landing in Dun Laoghaire harbour, brought into Ireland by criminals and Irish ex-fishermen who now make serious money through trafficking. Like the Nigerians in *The Valparaiso Voyage*, these Eastern Europeans arrive in Ireland after a long and harrowing journey. However, soon after their arrival, they find jobs and live in better conditions. But they are also living in fear and under threat from criminals. For example, one of the main characters, Corina, is caught shoplifting. Even though she is working full-time in a fast-food restaurant, she is under pressure to pay debts to the traffickers and needs additional income. When she doesn't meet the debt deadline, her brother is attacked by the criminals.<sup>41</sup>

Like Brogan, Coyne is an outsider who befriends a group of illegal immigrants from Romania. However, unlike Brogan, there is no ambiguity in his feelings towards the newcomers. On the contrary, he could be called a xenophile. Looking for authenticity but unable to find it, he criticises and rejects his own, the Irish culture, and is attracted to the newcomers' culture and glorifies their influence. He welcomes the immigrants enthusiastically and euphorically: "Coyne raised his glass to them all. He was already spinning with passion.

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<sup>38</sup> Hugo Hamilton: *Sad Bastard*. London / New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Hugo Hamilton: *Headbanger*. London: Vintage, 1997.

<sup>40</sup> Hamilton, *Sad Bastard*, p. 13, p. 57-60, p. 115.

<sup>41</sup> Hamilton, *Sad Bastard*, p. 14, p. 92-95.

Toxic with emotion and charting the great undiscovered link between Ireland and Romania. ...He stood up with his glass to make a statement. Welcome to Ireland, he said... It's not much of a country, but you're welcome as the flowers in May to any part of it. As long as you don't start playing golf. That's the only thing I'd like you to do for me. Don't take up golf, for Jaysus sake. This country is blighted by golf courses already."

"My God, these Romanians had something to show the Irish. They understood dancing the way it was meant to be. No more of the pseudo-Irish dancing with the wiggle of the hip. This was rock 'n' roll with gypsy blood. .... Coyne danced like a madman. A truly international epileptic explosion of boogie, shuffling, jiving and set dancing. .... He was enjoying this night in spite of himself. Having a ball for once without a single Irish person in sight.... That night, Coyne appeared to lose all the inhibitions laid on his shoulders. He was abroad, away from Ireland in a strange land of dancing and swirling plum brandy. <sup>42</sup> Coyne is willing to change and adapt his 'original Irish identity' to some kind of 'third space'. He also takes on the role of an intercultural mediator in a multicultural society, who tries to help and protect the newcomers against the racists who abuse them and vicious Irish criminals who threaten and mistreat them.

Hamilton provides other examples of varieties of New-Irishness and trans-cultural identities. These include: a Russian fisherman who sings Danny Boy in the local pub, "an old song of emigration, rescued from the graveyard of trite emotion and brought back to life with the fresh lungs of Russian loneliness"; the Romanians who bring in their own culture and add to a new cultural diversity; some Irish emigrants, who return from Germany with their German wives whose ethnicity and indigenoussness is being queried by the locals. "They were too tanned and well dressed, taking their affluence to extremes, laughing and joking with the locals in a thick Dublin accent laced with a Bavarian swagger. The language of lederhosen ...." Their credibility and authenticity is only restored when they compare themselves to the Hiace van, "a true icon of Irish life".<sup>43</sup> Further to this topic, in a 2004 interview, Hamilton highlights the relatively recent change in Irish identity: "For centuries the Irish race was a disadvantage. Now we've turned it into a virtue to such an extent that we can't see the virtue in being anyone else."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Hamilton, *Sad Bastard*, p. 116-117.

<sup>43</sup> Hamilton, *Sad Bastard*, p. 36-37, p. 130, p. 131.

<sup>44</sup> *The Irish Times*, 24 February, 2004, p. 12.

### “57% Irish”

Literature as multicultural criticism per se is created by Roddy Doyle in his selection of short stories, called *The Deportees*.<sup>45</sup> These eight stories were originally written for ‘Metro Eireann’, a small weekly multicultural newspaper which was started by two Nigerian journalists in 2000. Metro Eireann claims to be one of the primary sources of information and news for the Irish immigrant population and ethnic communities in Ireland. With its news and stories it “has become a forum for inter-cultural communication, showcasing the rich cultural diversity of Ireland.”<sup>46</sup>

Unlike Bolger and Hamilton, Doyle puts issues related to multiculturalism and cultural identity at the centre of his stories, and explores both the immigrant and host culture perspectives. He deals in some detail with the immigrant experience and views, but his main focus remains on the Irish protagonists. Their encounters with the immigrants have a mirror-like effect: they are confronted with their own awkwardness, helplessness, insecurities, prejudices, xenophobia and sometimes racism. For example in *Home to Harlem*, it turns out to be difficult, if not impossible, to be both Irish and black.<sup>47</sup>

Several stories in the book show the variety and complexity of Irish identities and the increased difficulty of defining 'Irishness'. In *57% Irish*, Doyle explores the question if and how ‘Irishness’ can be not only defined, but also measured. Ray Brady, a failed graduate, had spent much time in previous years on research centred on the question of how to “measure nationality”. Now he is hired by the newly developed government Department of Arts and Ethnicity. His brief is to develop a device which can “measure Irishness”. As the Minister of the Department of Arts and Ethnicity explains to him, this new test is “to make it harder to be Irish, but to make it look easier”. The test called “The Failte Score” measures Irishness by exposing applicants for Irish citizenship to “the best and the worst of Ireland” and measuring their reactions. The criteria used are, for example, the applicants’ reaction to Robbie Keane’s goal against Germany during the World Cup 2002; to watching *Riverdance*, listening to the Irish tenors, attitudes to the GAA, Darina Allen’s cookbooks, or watching Irish pornography.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Roddy Doyle: *The Deportees and other Stories*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2007.

<sup>46</sup> [www.metroeireann.com](http://www.metroeireann.com)

<sup>47</sup> Doyle, *Deportees*, p. 179 – 214.

<sup>48</sup> Doyle, *Deportees*, p. 101, p. 107, p. 106, p. 114, p. 109-110.

The Minister himself scores a mere 57% in this test, hence the title of the story. The true purpose of the test is to get rid of as many foreigners as possible. Roy Brady's brief is to manipulate the test so that immigrants score too low in their 'Irishness' so that they can be denied Irish citizenship, and can then subsequently be deported. However, when Brady's Russian girlfriend, who is also the mother of his son, is under threat of deportation he decides to manipulate the test in the other direction. Scoring high, she fulfils all necessary requirements, and therefore is allowed to stay in Ireland. Encouraged by this result, Brady manipulates the test in favour of the immigrants, and in subsequent years he grants Irish citizenship to over 800,000 Africans and East Europeans.<sup>49</sup> Doyle in this short, very funny story uses exaggeration or farce to highlight some very relevant issues relating to a developing multicultural Ireland. These include the difficulties of defining the concept of 'Irishness', bureaucratic and political resistance to immigration, and the potentially positive impact of individual action on multicultural issues.

### **Immigrant Literature**

A very interesting development in recent Irish literature is the publication of a small number of works by foreign writers resident in Ireland.<sup>50</sup> This non-Irish born population of Ireland have an increasing voice in the media and academia, theatre and film.<sup>51</sup> To date, the number of literary texts is relatively few, and there has been very little reflection of these works in literary criticism and literary research.

In countries with a longer tradition of multiculturalism, such as Germany, France, Britain, and the USA, so-called migrant literatures constitute an important and substantial part of the national literatures and literary criticism. Because of Ireland's short and very recent history of multiculturalism, we may have to wait for the second generation of the immigrant population to take up their pens before their voices have a significant impact in Irish literature, literary criticism and research.

### **Conclusion**

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<sup>49</sup> Doyle, *Deportees*, p. 128.

<sup>50</sup> Two examples are: 1. a novel by Marsha Mehran: *Pomegranate Soup*, London: Arrow, 2005; 2. a poetry collection by Eva Bourke and Borbala Farago (eds.): *Landing Places. Immigrant Poets in Ireland*, Dublin: Dedalus Press, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Huber and Crosson: 'Contemporary Irish Film', p. 2.

Hamilton, Bolger and Doyle use the sudden change in migration patterns and the evolving multicultural society as the setting for their stories. They draw parallels with the Irish history of emigration, and give a realistic portrayal of modern Irish society and the challenges of multiculturalism. They highlight some of the darker sides of the immigration issue, such as: the trafficking of illegal immigrants, the ordeals of asylum-seekers, racism, xenophobia, and the exploitation of foreign workers. They also deal with considerable tensions and sometimes violent clashes between new-comers and members of the host society. Ireland as a multicultural society, as it is represented in these works, is still far away from the ideals of interculturalism, or even from the concept of transculturality.

While some of Doyle's stories are written from the new-comers' and foreigners' perspectives, the focus in Hamilton's and Bolger's novels is mainly, but not exclusively, on the experiences of the Irish characters. Multiculturalism is not the main theme of these authors, but provides an important setting for their examination of modern Ireland. In all the stories the closer contacts between the newcomers and the main characters lead to the latter's increased critical self-awareness of their own identities, with the former serving as a mirror for critical self-reflection by the protagonists on themselves, and on Irish society in general. The Irish protagonists are often portrayed as experiencing a sense of alienation, feeling like foreigners in their own country, like outsiders in a rapidly and dramatically changing society. Cultural and personal identities in the books mentioned are in a constant state of flux and the concept of 'Irishness' is becoming increasingly diffuse against the background of a multicultural Ireland.

Novels and stories like these can give the reader an insight into the complexities of Ireland as a developing multicultural society. In my opinion, they also show that Irish writers can play an important role in raising awareness of the necessity to 'balance diversities' and to further develop the ideas of interculturalism and multiple identities.

Nearly ninety years ago, when AE proclaimed his appeal for cultural diversity, he certainly had not been thinking of the Nigerians or Eastern Europeans who feature in Hamilton's, Bolger's and Doyle's stories. In fact, in terms of cultural diversity, Ireland today has probably changed beyond even his wildest dreams.