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"In a world that fears the unfamiliar": multiculturalism and immigrants' social agency in the short stories of Roddy Doyle, Roisín O'Donnell and Melatu Okorie

Florianópolis
2023

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Orientador(a): Profa. Dra. Beatriz Kopschitz Xavier Bastos

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O presente trabalho em nível de Doutorado foi avaliado e aprovado, em 31 de julho de 2023, pela banca examinadora composta pelos seguintes membros:

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Florianópolis, 2023

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[...] as we attempt to respond to a rapidly changing world composed of increasingly complex and overlapping matrices of social, political, and economic relations. If we cannot control the consequences of our interventions, we can at least commit ourselves to a responsive, experimental, and deliberative attitude as we confront emergent problems and possibilities across the variety of contexts within which we act.

Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische

ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the representation of immigrant characters in selected short stories of Roddy Doyle, Roisín O'Donnell and Melatu Uche Okorie. The stories take place in the newly-founded multicultural Republic of Ireland during the so-called Celtic- and Post-Celtic-Tiger periods, from the turn of the century to the present. In Doyle's *The Deportees* (2008), the stories examined are "Black hoodie" and "The pram"; in O'Donnell's *Wild quiet* (2016), "How to be a billionaire", "Crushed" and "How to learn Irish in seventeen steps" are analyzed; and "This hostel life" and "Under the awning", from Okorie's debut collection *This hostel life* (2018), comprise the final set of narratives carefully selected as part of the corpus of this research. The analyses are split into two chapters: the first, placing the spotlight on young immigrants, and the second, focusing on adult female immigrant characters. One of the key requirements for the selection of the corpus was that the immigrant characters were given some sort of protagonism by the authors, and that the characters offer the opportunity to be examined and contrasted based on some common element, in this case, the age or gender group. The characters' nationalities, and their educational and social backgrounds, differ, and this certainly enriches the analyses. By examining the representation of immigrant characters in these short stories, in the light of the concepts of social agency and multiculturalism, while also offering contextual background, my main goal is to find out whether, and, if so, how, these outsiders' potentials for emancipation are constrained by their status as "other" in a societal structure that enhanced the ideal of Irishness and privileged those who complied with this construction. Bearing in mind that the immigrants' incorporation into the macro societal structure depend on factors such as country of origin and type of migration, it is not surprising that, in the stories, the newcomers face diverse struggles during the process of "fitting in". The analysis of the way these characters are represented shows how they cope with that societal construction, and whether their actions denote a position of active mediation in the face of often-impairing events which might have challenged their agentic potentials. The analysis is informed throughout by considerations in the literature on the concepts of social agency and multiculturalism, from the work of writers such as Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, John W. Meyer and Ronald L. Jepperson, Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder, and Bryan Fanning, among others.

Keywords: Irish short story. Social agency. Multiculturalism.

RESUMO

Esta tese analisa a representação de personagens imigrantes em contos selecionados dos escritores Roddy Doyle, Roisín O'Donnell e Melatu Uche Okorie. As narrativas têm como pano de fundo uma República da Irlanda se descobrindo enquanto sociedade multicultural, durante os chamados períodos do Tigre e Pós-Tigre Celta, da virada do século até os dias atuais. Em *The Deportes* (2008), de Doyle, as histórias examinadas são "Black hoodie" e "The pram"; em *Wild quiet*, de O'Donnell (2016), são analisados "How to be a billionaire", "Crushed" e "How to learn Irish in seventeen Steps"; "This hostel life" e "Under the awning", da coleção de estreia de Okorie intitulada *This hostel life* (2018), compõem o conjunto final de narrativas selecionadas como parte do corpus desta pesquisa. As análises são divididas em dois capítulos: o primeiro destaca imigrantes jovens, e o segundo, imigrantes adultas. Uma das maiores preocupações na seleção do corpus era de que os autores tivessem atribuído aos personagens imigrantes algum tipo de protagonismo, e que os personagens pudessem ser, de alguma forma, analisados e comparados considerando algum elemento comum, nesse caso, a faixa etária ou gênero. As nacionalidades, o grau de escolaridade e a classe social dos personagens de cada conto diferem, o que certamente enriquece as análises apresentadas. Ao esmiuçar a representação de personagens imigrantes nos contos, à luz dos conceitos de agência social e multiculturalismo e, ao mesmo tempo, discutindo o contexto histórico, meu principal objetivo é descobrir se e, em caso afirmativo, como o potencial de emancipação desses imigrantes foi limitado por seu status como "outros" em uma estrutura social que enfatiza o ideal de *Irishness* e privilegia aqueles que aceitam tal construção. Tendo em vista que a incorporação do imigrante à estrutura macrossocial depende de fatores como seu país de origem e o tipo de migração, não é de se estranhar que, nos contos, tais personagens enfrentem diversas lutas durante o processo de habituar-se ao novo meio social. Nesse sentido, a análise da representação desses personagens expõe como eles lidam com tal construção e se suas ações denotam uma posição de mediação ativa frente aos eventos muitas vezes incapacitantes que podem ter desafiado seus potenciais de agência. A análise dos contos é informada, em toda a dissertação por literatura crítica a respeito de agência social e multiculturalismo, em obras de autores como Mustafa Emirbayer e Ann Mische, John W. Meyer e Ronald L. Jepperson, Steven Hitlin e Glen H. Elder, e Bryan Fanning, dentre outros.

Palavras-chave: Conto irlandês. Agência social. Multiculturalismo.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Description is itself a political act [...] [R]edescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it.
Salman Rushdie[1]

1.1 Introductory remarks: context of investigation, corpus and thesis statement

Writers and critics of the short story have acknowledged the richness and value of the genre in Ireland. The modern Irish short story, which emerged at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century with authors like George Moore, with *The untilled field* (1903), and James Joyce, with the ground-breaking collection *Dubliners* (1914), has established its significance and is considered by many scholars as Ireland's "uniquely national genre" (D'HOKER, 2015, p. 3). Anthony Burgess, in the preface to *Modern Irish short stories* (1980), recognized it as the form in which Irish writers excel (15). In *The lonely voice*, short story writer and critic Frank O'Connor, highlighted that in Ireland "there has been no development comparable with the development of the short story" (1985, p. 206).

Irish short fiction, as noted by Heather Ingman, has always been closely tied to the urgencies of Ireland's history (2009, p. 130). With the emergence of a new era during the so-called Celtic Tiger period, from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, and a whole new configuration of the country, in economic, social and cultural terms, literature in the Republic also flourished distinctly, mainly as a response to this new context. During the Tiger years, Irish people lived an "economic miracle" and experienced great changes in the "social ethos" of the country (KEOGH, 2012, p. 321). The term Celtic Tiger, first used by a financial analyst to compare the economy of the Irish Republic with that of the "tiger" economies in Asia, had a huge impact on popular discourses, and it did not take long for it to reach other instances of Irish societal construction, being also employed to refer to politics and culture. Colin Coulter notes that the term would come to operate as "a widely recognized and understood master signifier for a very particular and essentially hegemonic reading of the nature of contemporary Irish society" (2003, p. 4). Although the term was largely used in referring to various spheres of contemporary life in the Republic of Ireland, scholars have questioned its use, in terms of its possible disregard

[1] Imaginary Homelands (14).

for what, in fact, the Celtic Tiger phenomenon represented for the lives of not-so-privileged people. Steve Loyal warns that "like all metaphors, it occludes as much as it includes; as a way of representing, it is just as much a way of misrepresenting" (2003, p. 74); and Sinéad Kennedy draws her criticism from the widely divulged idea about these years that "we have never had it so good" (2003, p. 95), questioning for whom and in which terms the metaphor represented such a positive reality.

Ireland's progress and changes in this period were not, however, limited to the financial system. They included a broader range of factors in the political and the social scenario: restoration of political stability; the peace process in Northern Ireland; serious scandals involving the Catholic Church, which led to decline of its status as an institution; the return of a great number of Irish citizens – and the arrival of immigrants, whether in the status of refugees, asylum seekers or as part of the general labor force. During the Tiger years, due to the high employment rate and the lack of skilled workers (in a few areas), and unskilled workers (in many) – as explained by Steve Loyal (2003, p. 79-81) – people from various parts of the world migrated to Ireland, attracted by the "healthy roar of the Celtic Tiger" (KEOGH, 2012, p. 336). Asylum seekers made up a large proportion of the total number of newcomers arriving in Ireland. Since 1991, immigrants from more than a hundred nationalities have entered the Republic of Ireland (KEOGH, 2012, p. 352).

The country that was once a "nation of emigrants", then became "a home for immigrants" (FERGUSON, 2014, p. 52). If the changes in the economic and political landscapes of the country granted its citizens extraordinary financial and career opportunities, the changes in the "ethnographic landscapes", as underlined by Burcu Tekin (2015, p. 86), presented a challenge to their historically constructed and strongly-rooted sense of nationhood. In the chapter "Multiculturalism in Ireland", from *Racism and social change in the Republic of Ireland*, Brian Fanning argues that in spite of State discourses as from the Tiger years, which advocated for the idea that Ireland had joined the hall of multicultural nations, such discourses contrasted with the "entrenched assumptions of societal monoculturalism" (2002, p. 184) presented by governmental policies and which also reflected on the citizens' demeanor towards such new state of affairs. Fanning's intriguing appraisal questions the extent to which Ireland was a multicultural society in ideological and political terms. His argument ends up converging with that of Steve Loyal, who explains that due to the extensive work done by the state and other institutions to create the sense of Irishness after the partition, since the 1920s, Irish people have been taught and guided to recognize themselves in very specific terms, mainly related to whiteness and Catholicism. Loyal goes further clarifying that:

> Processes of nation state formation invariably invoke homogeneous narratives of ethnicity and national identity. In Ireland, this narrative was originally predicated upon the idea of a white Celtic people, defined in opposition to British colonisers. Irishness in this sense leaves no room for non-white, non-Celtic people or for those who cannot participate in its collective historical experience. (2003, p. 83)

With the increasing number of immigrants in Ireland, the country and its citizens faced a new reality. While the State – through the Department of Justice – had to decide whether to grant a refugee status or a work permit to immigrants, or deport them (KEOGH, 2012, p. 350), people's lives mingled with those of the newcomers. Such encounters have been, mainly from the Celtic Tiger period onwards, the object of attention of several writers in the southern border of Ireland. Roddy Doyle's *oeuvre*, for instance, comprises novels and short stories that deal precisely with the outcomes of these intercultural relations. *The Deportees and other stories*, published in 2007, emerged as a result of Doyle's enterprise to "embrace the new changes in Ireland creatively, rather than see them as statistics" (ALLEN-RANDOLPH qtd. in TEKIN, 2015, p. 86). The stories, first published in Métro Eireann – an online newspaper which addresses the issue of multiculturalism in Dublin and has been run by two Nigerian journalists since 2000 – deal with the relationship between locals and outsiders, the Irish and the "new Irish" (FOGARTY, 2014, p. 121), and focus on the conflicted nature of such relations.

More recently, a new generation of writers have also encompassed the reality of multiculturalism into their works in diverse and startlingly manners. Roisín O'Donnell's *Wild quiet* (2016), for instance, sheds light on Irish and "new Irish" lives that bear witness to a country which seems to be at once strange and familiar. Whilst the surroundings are vividly constructed to portray the vibrancy of the national *milieu*, people's social interactions seem not to carry the same clear-cut delineation as the environments surrounding them. O'Donnell's characters – all of whom are somehow dislocated – find ways to cope with the dispossession of being outsiders, whether in the literal sense – for the ones who were not born in Ireland – or in the non-literal sense – for the ones who are Irish-born but for some reason do not fit within the pre-established codes of Irishness.

In the 2018 collection *This hostel life*, Nigerian writer Melatu Uche Okorie discloses the lives of Nigerian women in a Republic which – seemingly – is not as welcoming as the one sold by State narratives. The title story exposes the reality of migrants living under the so-called "direct provision system", which is shown to be highly controlling at all levels of the newcomers' experience, as Okorie declares in the "Author's note" section: "direct provision is like being in an abusive relationship" (2018, p. vii). Okorie herself spent nearly nine years in the provision system and found in writing a means of sharing her own story, since the life that

she – and thousands of other immigrants – knew, as relieving as it might have seemed in the beginning, turned out to be a besieging system which restricted these people's most essential needs: "you never know what you are going to wake up to each morning", she reveals (p. viii). The fear of retaliation was also a present concern for the asylum seekers under the provision, since they did not want to be seen as troublemakers in the hostels where they were accommodated: "I, like the other residents, have learnt to live under these almost tyrannical conditions" (p. viii). Disturbing as it may feel for us looking at this from the outside, the Direct Provision system lasted for quite a long time, and has only come to be questioned and inquired into recently. The second story chosen for this study, "Under the awning", is a meta-narrative in which an adolescent girl shares, through story-telling, her own experience as an outsider in twenty-first century Republic. The natural distress already seen in the other teenage stories chosen to be analyzed in this dissertation acquires a higher tone in Okorie's story, since the girl's authorial narrative, shared with her peers in the reading club of which she is a member, is misunderstood by them, conferring on her a feeling of injustice and dislocation. Okorie's exposure of multiculturalism in action provides a new dimension for the discussion I am proposing here: a fresh voice speaking from the immigrant perspective, writing and publishing in Ireland, exposing the wrongs and anxieties which she herself has lived through as an immigrant.

This dissertation, thus, aims to analyze the representation of immigrant characters in Doyle's, O'Donnell's and Okorie's work, whose roots run deep and are far from being local. In Doyle's "The pram", the reader becomes acquainted with the story of a Polish nanny whose misfortune lies in the troublesome relationship established between her and her abusive Irish employers. In his "Black hoodie", a group of school teenagers, one of them a Nigerian girl, conduct a social experiment through a school project, in which they seek to prove people to be racist. Doyle's "How to learn Irish in seventeen steps" tells the story of a Brazilian teacher whose struggle to fit into the Irish job market discloses the paradoxical construction of national consciousness in contemporary Ireland. O'Donnell's "How to be a billionaire" and "Crushed", its sequel, in turn, expose the coming of age of the Obinwanye brothers, Ezequiel and Kingsley. Mostly set in and starting from the school environment, O'Donnell's touching narrative shows us the blossoming of these two Nigerian boys, but also how it is to be in their position, from an unstructured family, and with one of them having special needs. Finally, Okorie's collection comprises three stories, two of them set in Ireland – the ones analyzed in this study. The first, which gives title to the collection, is "This hostel life", exposing the everyday life of a Nigerian woman in a direct provision center in Dublin. "Under the awning", the second story, depicts a

Nigerian girl's strategy to come to terms with the transformations she has been through as the outcome of migration.

Although these characters' "otherness" cross-links the narratives in terms of their outwardly similar position, the differences and challenges they face reaffirm the plurality of experiences which the "new Irish" encountered in a newly found multicultural State. Roddy Doyle's *The Deportees* (2007) comprises eight stories, all of them addressing the reality brought about during the Celtic Tiger period: multicultural encounters were no longer a matter of choice, they became at the time an unavoidable actuality. Roisín O'Donnell's *Wild quiet* (2016), comprising twelve short stories, depicts not only what it is to be an outsider in the Republic, but also stories of the Irish diaspora, with narratives set, for example, in Dubai and Seville. In Melatu Oche Okorie's collection *This hostel life* (2018), the third and last collection selected for this study, two of the three stories are set in Dublin, and are thus the ones selected for the corpus of this dissertation.

The first criterion for choosing the stories was that they must portray the lives of immigrants in twenty-first century Republic of Ireland, and that in them these newcomers are given some sort of centrality, even if they are not the main or only protagonists. Their voices, however, need to be heard, rather than being a mere allusion or a hinted presence in a narrative centered on the locals; this has been shown to be a recurrent strategy in contemporary short fiction, "where immigrant characters are frequently mentioned but receive the vaguest of delineation" (2019, n.p.), as exposed by Paul Delaney in his most recent article on immigration and Irish short fiction. As a result, the stories selected necessarily have multicultural encounters in the spotlight.

The second criterion has to do with an organizational and coherence stance, since the stories vary in their choice of characters, whether in terms of ethnicity, gender or age. The characters in the stories selected can be organized in, or split into, two different age groups: adolescents and adult women. This choice allows the proposed analysis to be coherent, since the analytical chapters will be organized by age group, including stories by each of the three authors. Since O'Donnell's "How to be a billionaire" has a sequel, "Crushed", the chapter addressing the adolescent age group will comprise these two stories as well as "Black hoodie" by Doyle and "Under the awning" by Okorie. The adult-women chapter will comprise "The pram" by Doyle, "How to learn Irish in seventeen steps" by O'Donnell and "This hostel life" by Okorie. That said, some stories could not be included in the corpus of this study for reasons of scope, and particularly for not calling enough attention or not giving enough room to the immigrant characters' experiences.

By scrutinizing the representation of immigrant characters in the short stories that I have chosen, my main goal is to find out whether – and if so, how – these outsiders' potentials for emancipation are constrained, due to their otherwise status within a societal structure which enhanced the ideal of Irishness and privileged the subjects who complied with such a construction. Bearing in mind that the immigrant's incorporation into the macro-societal structure depended on factors such as country of origin and type of migration, it would not be surprising if, in the stories, the newcomers faced diverse struggles during the process of "fitting in". In this sense, the analysis of these characters' representation is relevant for apprehending how they coped with such construction and whether their actions denoted a position of active mediation in the face of the often-impairing events which might have challenged their agentic potentials. Therefore, I aim to analyze whether these characters established a position of agency, in spite of their supposed subjugated position, and if they were able to find a possible pathway for empowerment.

1.2 Purposes of the research

One of the most significant issues which contemporaneity has brought to light is the concern in relation to borders, in particular their reaffirmation and/or their dismantlement. It is, however, appropriate to ask: whose concern? The concern of a nation's citizens? The concern of the State? That of religious institutions? In the case of Ireland, in which the border has been, historically, a site of confrontation, resistance and pride, the answer seems to encompass a component of each of these possibilities. Migration in itself is no big news for Irish people, and this makes the issues of inward migration even more conspicuous: how come the Irish, who have a history of emigration, for a number of reasons in different periods, had trouble in fully incorporating immigrants into their own social *milieu*?

The purpose of this research is to shed light on the questions involving contemporary borders, and how individuals from different social, historical and personal backgrounds negotiate such boundaries; how they live these experiences; and how social interactions are mediated at a time in which immaterial borders are seemingly as settled as the physical ones. Through the representation of immigrant characters in contemporary Irish short fiction, and taking into account the scant number of works, particularly short stories, in which immigrant characters have a substantial role, the purpose of this study is also to identify how Irish and non-Irish authors, who, in their literary works, give room for these outlawed figures, represent them within the contemporary construction of a modern, prosperous and supposedly welcoming

society that was the Irish Republic from the Celtic Tiger period onwards. In a wider perspective and since migration flows are not a particularity of Ireland south of the border, this study might enhance our insight when it comes to migration flows in realities which are closer to ours. Brazil itself has recently received a massive number of immigrants from neighboring countries who, similarly to immigrants from many other places, did not have much of a choice except that of leaving their homelands. The maintenance of borders as we know them, or their renegotiation and flexibilization, require discussion at a time in which the world appears to be increasingly intolerant, despite the (post) modernity in which we currently live.

1.3 Significance of the research

In the past few years, the Nucleus of Irish Studies at UFSC has been consolidated with fresh and enriching research carried out by professors and post-graduate students. I am glad to say that I have been part of this team since 2016, when the Nucleus was founded, and I started my master's course at the Post-Graduate Programme in English (PPGI), where I have successfully concluded my research on modern Irish short fiction: *Portrayals of women: female agency in Mary Lavin's early stories*. Fortunately, I have been able to continue my academic journey still working with the Irish short story, however now with special focus on contemporary issues and writers. At PPGI-UFSC, my doctoral dissertation is the first to address the issues of multiculturalism in contemporary Irish short fiction, and also the only one to discuss the works of Roddy Doyle, Roisín O'Donnell and Melatu Okorie. Doyle is a long-established author who has been extensively discussed in the academia, internationally speaking; in the Brazilian context, however, there has been only one master's thesis written on his *oeuvre*: in 2015, Camila Batista Franco, from USP, defended her MA thesis entitled *Entrelaçando temporalidades: passado e presente em A star called Henry,* de Roddy Doyle. In 2018, there was an undergraduate's final work on literary translation: *Tradução comentada da oralidade e intertextualidade* em *The commitments,* de Roddy Doyle, defended by Bruna Lourenço da Silva (UFU). Roisín O'Donnell and Melatu Okorie, on the other hand, are authors whose works have received little scholarly attention, in local and foreign terms. While Okorie's unsettling *This hostel life* attracted massive press attention in the Republic, O'Donnell's delicate work *Wild quiet* has not been so much in the spotlight. In Brazil, Patricia de Aquino Brazil, explored the work of the three authors, among others, in her doctoral dissertation at USP, *The contemporary short story: identities in transformation* (2019).

This dissertation, thus, seeks to shed light on the works of these authors, who dared to approach a theme so current, controversial and unavoidable as is multiculturalism in Irish society. Its significance lies also in the fact that there has been little debate and analysis on representation of multicultural Ireland in contemporary short fiction, while as short fiction addressing the theme is also scarce. This work, thus, serves both purposes: to give centrality to multicultural encounters; and to bring to light the works of authors who have given these encounters the attention that the subject so urgently requires.

In analyzing the representation of immigrant characters in the short stories of Roddy Doyle, Roisín O'Donnell and Melatu Okorie, this dissertation makes a contribution by enhancing and enriching the discussion on both multiculturalism in general, and also multiculturalism as represented in contemporary literature. From another standpoint, it may also make a contribution as a critique of the system of which we are all currently part and the extent to which we become blinded by it. What treatment are we granting to these people? And is the discourse that is the subject of propaganda put into practice in state policies in fact? It is my hope that such a discussion may draw attention to our *modus operandi* in a contemporaneity that seems to call out for bonding rather than separation.

1.4 Objectives

General:

To analyze the representation of immigrant characters through a comparative examination of the short stories "Black hoodie" and "The pram" by Roddy Doyle (2007), "How to be a billionaire", "Crushed" and "How to learn Irish in seventeen steps" by Roisín O'Donnell (2016), and ultimately "This hostel life" and "Under the awning" by Melatu Okorie (2018).

Specific:

a) To identify the major characteristics of each character in terms of personality, conflicts, relationships, professional activities, and engagement with social and political issues.
b) To establish whether the "outsider" status of these characters within Irish social construction left them in a position of ostracism and marginalization.
c) To compare and contrast the characters from the point of view of social agency, to establish whether they show themselves as being in an autonomous and active position and, if so, with what demeanor they portray this status, taking into account, initially, their age group, and secondarily, the particularities of the social structure in which they live, and the possibilities for emancipation in each case.

d) To scrutinize the portrayal of the Republic as a multicultural society, investigating whether such renderings of the modern reality challenge or endorse the ideal of "the Ireland of one thousand welcomes".
e) To examine and discuss the issues of nomenclature, by considering the level of multiculturalism depicted in the fictional renderings of Celtic and Post-Celtic Tiger Republic.

1.5 Hypotheses

The general hypothesis of this work is that by tackling the issues of multiculturalism in their short stories, Roddy Doyle, Roisín O'Donnell and Melatu Okorie challenge the commonsense image, widely disseminated by official narratives, that Ireland was the nation of the "one thousand welcomes". By doing so these authors unveil a new dimension of these immigrants' experiences in a newly-found multicultural State. My argument is that in carrying out a writing enterprise which depicts such encounters, in spite of the criticism they might have received for doing so, these authors – especially Doyle and O'Donnell, who wrote from the Irish perspective – provide through their art a re-signification of these newcomers' experiences, shedding light on the issues which might have remained overshadowed by the propaganda-like official discourse.

The specific hypothesis of this study resonates the understanding that social agency is bound up with a range of variants, which include the individual's social background, social class, gender and race/ethnicity. Thus, agency needs to be thought of within a historical context, considering the asymmetric ways in which individuals realize it, and bearing in mind the dangers of defining agency merely as an attitude of objection or denial in face of a difficult situation or hostile environment, since subjects have different ways of assimilating, and reacting, and their interpretations of possible constraining events are not straightforward. In these terms, the specific hypothesis of this dissertation is that the immigrant characters in these seven short stories – "Black hoodie" and "The pram" by Roddy Doyle; "How to be a billionaire", "Crushed" and "How to learn Irish in seventeen steps" by Roisín O'Donnell; and "This hostel life" and "Under the awning" by Melatu Okorie, published in 2007, 2016 and 2018 – are represented as individuals whose demeanor, in spite of the constraints presented for outsiders in a quite rigid society, depict a position of agency in diverse and startling manners, due to their heterogeneity as regards background, class, social position, age, gender and race.

1.6 Research questions

The questions I address in the dissertation are:

a) What degree of multiculturalism are Doyle, O'Donnell and Okorie depicting in their literary representations of the Celtic and the Post-Celtic Tiger Republic?
b) The analyses being divided into two age groups – young immigrants and adult women – what are the major differences between these immigrant characters, in terms of personal and social conflicts?
c) To what extent do Doyle, O'Donnell and Okorie challenge the ideal of the "Ireland of one thousand welcomes" propagandized by the State?
d) Okorie being a Nigerian writer based in Dublin, and Doyle and O'Donnell Irish-born, how different is their multicultural short fiction in viewpoint and approach to controversial issues?
e) In terms of the characters' outward positions in the Irish social *milieu*, are they portrayed as autonomous individuals and/or are they depicted as possessing any sort of agentic potential, in dealing with the personal and social obstacles they face?
f) Is the multicultural short fiction produced by these authors daring, or accommodating, in the way it treats the encounters between the Irish and the so-called New Irish?

1.7 Review of literature

1.7.1 On the works of Roddy Doyle, Roisín O'Donnell and Melatu Uche Okorie

The inflow of migration to the Republic of Ireland from the 1990s onwards has received attention from writers of the most varied genres. The representation of immigrant characters has received scholarly interest, indeed there are whole books published of this aspect. Some recent examples are: Pillar Villar-Argáiz's *Literary visions of multicultural Ireland: the immigrant in contemporary Irish literature* (2014); and Charlotte McIvor's three books *Staging intercultural Ireland: new plays and practitioner perspectives* (2014), *Migration and performance in contemporary Ireland: towards a new interculturalism* (2016), and the brand new *Interculturalism and performance now: new directions?* (2019). Villar-Argáiz's book is particularly important as a source of critical material for this dissertation, since several of its

contributed essays explore Roddy Doyle's *The Deportees and other stories*, namely Anne Fogarty's "'Many and terrible are the roads to home': representations of the immigrant in the contemporary Irish short story", Amanda Tucker's "Strangers in a strange land?: the new Irish multicultural fiction," and Eva R. White's "'Who is Irish?': Roddy Doyle's hyphenated identities".

Academic accounts on Roisín O'Donnell's *Wild quiet* (2016) and Melatu Okorie's *This hostel life* (2018) are scarce, although there have been reviews published on their works, mostly on Okorie's. There is, however, a recent article by Paul Delaney, published in the latest issue of the Canadian Association for the Studies of Irish Literatures (CAIS) Journal, which alludes to these two collections: "'I wanted them not to be lost': immigration and Irish short fiction". Delaney's article draws an overview of immigrants' representation in Irish literature since the 1960s, with Brian Friel's "Mr. Sing my heart's delight", to contemporary times. Delaney's appraisal is particularly enriching since it converges with recent criticism of the lack of depth in many of the immigrant characters in contemporary Irish literature; and, although his account does not examine the works of O'Donnell and Okorie, it offers support in terms of exposing what is in such narratives and what is not. This, together with the criticism on Doyle's *oeuvre*, is a helpful starting point for a field of study which still requires deeper understanding, and wider dissemination.

1.7.2 Multiculturalism x interculturalism: the sociological debate and the nomenclature clash

I shall begin this section by addressing a question which is seemingly – and justifiably – ever present – when discussing the usage, conceptualization and choice of the terms multiculturalism and interculturalism. Literature on this field is vast, but scholars have not reached agreement on exact working definitions for these concepts. In "Interculturalism vs. Multiculturalism: a distinction without a difference?", Geoffrey B. Levey (2012, p. 220) points out that even within the group which advocates for the use of multiculturalism there are divergences on what exactly would be the substantial features of a multicultural society. Even so, there are some determining general qualities of each, which can be pointed out as a means of clarifying my choice in favor of multiculturalism.

The "models of management of diversity", as George Bouchard has called them (2011, p. 444) are based on two distinct points: interculturalism recognizes and defends the existence of a dominant culture; while multiculturalism advocates otherwise. Interculturalism adopts as

a basis the so-called "duality paradigm" (p. 445) – that is, "us" versus "them", or "majority" versus "minority"; while multiculturalism is based on the repudiation of the idea that the state is "the possession of a single national group", as explained by William Kymlicka in "Multicultural states and intercultural citizens", which might end up legitimizing types of discrimination and public life exclusion towards minority groups (2003, p. 150).

On the one hand, Bouchard fiercely advocates for the use and application of interculturalism, nearly demonizing multiculturalism, on the basis that it supposedly disregards the history and existence of the "dominant" culture's right and power over minorities. On the other hand, Michel Wieviorka and Geoffrey Levey argue that the terms can, in fact, be used interchangeably, since the divergences between scholars themselves and the materiality of the term's usage in plural societal constructions are not so clear-cut, whilst Levey's appraisal seeks precisely to discuss the differences, or the lack of them, debating both terms. Meanwhile Wieviorka, in "Is multiculturalism the solution?", makes reference to this clash of concepts to introduce a series of pertinent questions about the effectiveness of multiculturalism and what it takes for a society to successfully achieve such a structure.

The plural society which Ireland has become at the outset of twenty-first century is referred to by official acknowledgements as a multicultural society. Historian Brian Fanning also uses the term multiculturalism in the book chapter "Multiculturalism in Ireland", in which he briefly mentions that interculturalism may be used, in the Irish context, as a reference to a distinct form of multiculturalism in equality policy discourse (2002, p. 186); his term of choice used throughout the book is, nonetheless, multiculturalism. In spite of the internal divergences within those adopting "multiculturalism", in general these scholars, Bouchard being the only exception – advocate for the use of multi- rather than interculturalism – and also tend to converge to a definite description: multiculturalism is not merely a name used to refer to a non-monocultural social *milieu*, it is first and foremost associated with citizens' respect for differences and state policies to fight any possible sort of discrimination. As Kymlicka has expressed it:

> A 'multicultural' state, in this context, may still be a unitary state – i.e. it may not have any explicit form of territorial or consociational powersharing between the dominant group and newer immigrant groups – and it may still only have one official language. But it will make efforts to ensure that all public institutions, from the schools to the police and courts to media and the hospitals, fight discrimination, accommodate diversity, promote integration, and present a more open and inclusive image of the nation (2003, p. 152).

1.7.3 On social agency and its variants

The cultural construction of social agency, according to Meyer and Jepperson, relies on a system which is imagined to operate via actors pursuing their goals (2010, p. 100). The modern actor, in such an environment, works as a mobilized agent for her/himself, and their agentic potentialities would emerge from the goals that reside in their personality and life course. The modern actor, as a historical and ongoing social construction, needs to have her/his actorhood accounted in a wide variety of features, including the ones which are unnoticed, uneven and non-straightforward. Yet, the word agency in itself might recall a set of other words which it has been historically associated with: selfhood, motivation, will, purposiveness, intentionality, choice, initiative, freedom, and creativity (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 962). One must not stay strictly bound up with closed definitions of agency when discussing its depictions in society, since agency encompasses distinctive dimensions and diverse social manifestations. It is, definitely, not a flat term (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 963). For the sake of the analyses proposed in this dissertation, I will resort to a working definition of agency which relies on the arguments of Meyer and Jepperson, Emirbayer and Mische, and Hitlin and Elder: modern actors are agents for themselves, under a social construction – being oriented by past events, living under present circumstances in a process of social engagement, who under such structure find ways to elaborate their agentic potentialities. Meyer and Jepperson highlight this with the statement: “differentiated individuals in a complex society are thought naturally to acquire individual consciousness and actorhood” (2010, p. 104) – consequently, in terms of agentic demeanor, there would be no room for helplessness and passivity (p. 107).

1.8 Procedures

The general and specific objectives of this research lead to some pivotal questions: does the multiculturalism represented in the works of Doyle, O’Donnell and Okorie mirror the one sold in State narratives? And does it endorse or challenge that view? Equally important in scrutinizing whether these authors adopt an accommodating or challenging view of such encounters in a twenty-first century Republic, is the examination of what sort of multiculturalism is being employed in these short stories. The second question, which is the backbone of this study and its main issue, regards the discussion of social agency: whether the immigrant characters represented as individuals who depict a somehow autonomous demeanor account for the multiple variables that are involved in such a debate, the main issue.

These seven contemporary stories – "The pram", "Black hoodie", "How to learn Irish in seventeen steps", "How to be a billionaire", "Crushed", "This hostel life" and "Under the awning" – respond to the anxieties of an era which many did not see coming, a time in which Ireland would experience a turning point in its migration flow: from outwards to inwards. A country of emigrants becoming a home for immigrants. Since this study is based, fundamentally, in bibliographical research, I shall initially offer a historical contextualization of the Celtic and Post-Celtic Tiger periods, focusing on the social changes Irish society has been through since those periods – bearing in mind that Okorie's collection was published in 2018. My historical appraisal will be informed not only by historians, but also by critics, which may expose in more explicit terms the blurred and not so clear-cut conditions in such periods. Authors and works I resort to include: Dermot Keogh's "Ireland at the turn of the century: 1994-2001", one of the chapters from *The course of Irish history* (2012); another chapter of the same book to be resorted to is "Turning corners: Ireland 2002-11", by Patrick Kiely and Dermot Keogh; some of the articles in the 2001 book *The end of Irish history? Critical reflections on the Celtic Tiger*, including Collin Coulter's "The end of Irish history? An introduction to the book", Sinéad Kennedy's "Irish women and the Celtic Tiger economy", and Steve Loyal's "Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: racism, immigration and the State"; and, as a blend of history and criticism, two essential books by Irish historian Bryan Fanning: *Racism and social change in the Republic of Ireland* (2002) and *Migration and the making of Ireland* (2018).

The issues of migration and multiculturalism have been closely interrelated since the beginning of the Tiger years, and, for this reason, works such as the ones by Fanning may tackle both subjects at once: the historical changes at the time of the boom, its attractiveness for economic and non-economic immigrants and the outcome of such state of affairs: the emergence of a multicultural society. In relation to multiculturalism, and in particular the reasons for adopting this term rather than interculturalism as terminology, and addressing the term in both conceptual and social terms, this dissertation will be informed by pivotal works, such as the articles "What is interculturalism?" by Gérard Bouchard, "Interculturalism vs. Multiculturalism: a distinction without a difference?", by Geoffrey B. Levey and "Is multiculturalism the solution?" by Michel Wieviorka. Seminal works and books, for instance, Salman Rushdie's essay "Imaginary homelands" and Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined communities* will be used as additional resources, although the focus of the thesis will not rely on their major discussions as fundamental background for analysis.

In defining social agency, sociologists lack a usable unit. Since the concept of social agency is the backbone for the analytical chapters of this thesis, I will resort to authors who not

only discuss the term, but also problematize it in a broader sense. To provide a working definition of social agency to be employed in this study as well as a discussion of the multiple types of agency to be accounted, this dissertation will be informed by works including the following: Ronald L. Jepperson and John W. Meyer entitled "The 'actors' of modern society: The cultural construction of social agency", Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische's thorough discussion "What is agency?", along with Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder Jr's essay "Time, self, and the curiously abstract concept of agency", to mention some of the primary references.

Specific criticism in relation to Doyle's, O'Donnell's and Okorie's short stories will also be an important section. Whilst Doyle's work has been thoroughly debated by critics and scholars, accounts for O'Donnell's and Okorie's writing enterprise is scarce. That, however, is not essentially an adverse situation, since the analytical chapters will compare these writers' work, providing criticism on the forerunners in short fiction tackling the question of multicultural encounters is a great starting point.

1.9 Upcoming chapters

1. Introduction: The introductory chapter comprises subsections on the context of investigation, significance of the research, general and specific objectives, as well as the research questions and hypotheses. Furthermore, the Review of literature section makes reference to the criticism on the corpus, as well as pinpoint some of the issues on the conceptualization of multiculturalism. It also tackles the question of social agency, providing a working definition to be further developed in the theoretical chapter. Finally, it addresses the significance and purpose of the research.

2. Theoretical chapter: 3.1 A question of nomenclature? Multiculturalism, its different levels and the conceptualization clash. 3.2 Social agency, social actors and the variants of autonomy.

3. Analytical chapter: "Black hoodie", "How to be a billionaire", "Crushed" and "Under the awning". Stories with young characters.

4. Analytical chapter: "The pram", "How to learn Irish in seventeen steps" and "This hostel life". Stories with adult women characters.

5. Conclusion: This final chapter includes final remarks and conclusions, revisits important topics in the discussion proposed in the study, as well as presents the results of the research and possibilities for further research on the fields of contemporary short fiction, multiculturalism and social agency.

2. THEORETICAL CHAPTER
PART I

Multiculturalism can be acknowledged, championed, challenged or rejected, but it cannot be ignored because it describes a central feature of the world in which we live.

Jonathan Seglow[2]

2.1 A question of nomenclature? Multiculturalism, its different levels and the conceptualization clash

In "Multiculturalism", Jonathan Seglow's opening remark, which was also chosen, with some thought, as the epigraph to this section, not only sets the tone of his (fierce) defense on the subject, but also invokes two pivotal issues in relation to the field: the first refers to the continuing clash of concepts on usage of the terms "multiculturalism" and "interculturalism"; the second, emerging from and closely related to the first, has to do with the extent to which these terms affirm a position for, or against, the factuality of a multi-faceted social *milieu* which in reality and practice is one of the central features of modern western societies. As Geoffrey Brahm Levey suspects in "Interculturalism vs. Multiculturalism: a distinction without a difference?", his clarifying account on this conceptual dispute, this debate is a political one, inasmuch as the rationales for both multiculturalists and interculturalists are grounded in historical, social and juridical stances adopted in public life (2012, p. 217).

Interculturalism has as its fierce defender Canadian historian and sociologist Gérard Bouchard, widely cited even by those who stand on the other side of the intellectual arena. In "What is interculturalism?", Bouchard resorts to the state of affairs in Quebec to make a case in his advocacy for interculturalism as a "formula for coexistence in the context of diversity" (2011, p. 437). Drawing upon the "models of management of ethnocultural diversity", Bouchard pinpoints the paradigms that provide the basis of a nation's chosen model – which he cites as: 1. Diversity, with groups placed in a given cultural *milieu* "on equal footing and protected by the same laws" (p. 441); 2. Homogeneity, based on the "ethnocultural similarity" of groups under the same social and cultural *milieu* (p. 442); 3. Bi- or multi-polarity, which refers to societies comprising two or more groups or subgroups, which may be officially

[2] Quotation from Jonathan Seglow's article "Multiculturalism" (2003, p. 156).

recognized as such – of which Northern Ireland is one example (p. 442); 4. Duality, an important paradigm for Bouchard, and the one that basically grounds his defense of interculturalism as the most successful model for management of diversity – being founded on the ideal of the existence of majority foundational groups as opposed to minority ones; and, finally, 5. *Mixité,* which arises from the idea of miscegenation as a feature which may reduce the diversity of a nation, possibly leading to the emergence of a "new culture separate from its constituent elements" (p. 443) – Brazil being given as an example.

According to Bouchard, the levels of analysis in relation to ethnocultural diversity include these paradigms, the models associated with them, such as interculturalism and multiculturalism, assimilationism and republicanism, for instance; and the "concrete ethnocultural structure of populations" (2011, p. 443) as proved by official data. Official acknowledgements, in turn, underwrite the paradigms that lead to the choice of a specific model of management of ethnocultural diversity attempted by a specific State. Bouchard's logic bases his rationalization on why and to what extent nations are effectively following these logics in their choice and employment of individual models and, although he himself is known for being a fierce advocate of interculturalism, in the Quebec case, specifically, his line of thought proves to be useful also for other cases of diversity – especially in relation to the paradigms and how they lead public discussion and, as a consequence, official positionings.

Conversely, multiculturalism is the term chosen by several other scholars who are openly critical of the *modus operandi* proposed by interculturalists. There are, too, those who see no practical differences, in concrete, real-world situations, in the use of one term to the detriment of the other. Levey, for instance, contends that "whether interculturalism differs substantively from multiculturalism is very much beside the point", (2012, p. 223) insofar as what is in fact at stake in such a debate is much more a political matter than a conceptual one. Similarly, in "Is Multiculturalism the solution?" Michel Wieviorka argues that the terms are "a competing vocabulary which in some cases appears to be almost interchangeable" (1998, p. 882) – though throughout his account he offers several arguments which endorse the position of multiculturalism as a more inclusive term to be applied in diversity contexts, for reasons which will be given shortly. In his "Multicultural states and intercultural citizens", Will Kymlicka construes a bridge between the terms, conveying that multiculturalism on the macro level leads to the development of citizens' intercultural skills at the micro level: "the intercultural dispositions we encourage within individual citizens should help support and reinforce the institutions of a multicultural state" (2003, p. 148). In other words, a state's

multicultural policies work as the basis for society's progression in diversity management also at the individual level.

But what, after all, are the distinctions between multiculturalism and interculturalism? Returning to Levey's article, there is the discussion on what he calls the "alleged differences" (2012, p. 217) between the concepts, in which he contends that there is a political aim at stake in the campaign to supplant multiculturalism by interculturalism. He clarifies that whilst multiculturalism "means different things in different places" (p. 217), interculturalism tends to focus on "the relations among citizens and groups in civil society rather than on the State's relation to its cultural minorities" (p. 218). This might lead us to consider that, by using inter rather than multiculturalism, the state is precisely not taking on board its share in the dynamics and regulations of such relations, but instead transferring its responsibility – as an institution with legal power to somehow regulate these encounters – to the hands of society. Kymlicka's attempt at building a bridge, in these terms, falls apart, inasmuch as it is precisely from the macro, the institutionalization of inclusive policies, that individuals have their strategies and skills expanded and transformed. Not only does Kymlicka point to the dangers of an "intercultural" enterprise, but his reasoning also demonstrates how Bouchard's argument on interculturalism as a "formula for coexistence" (2011, p. 437) in plural societies ends up demeaning the individuals who are not labeled as "foundational" (p. 442).

Another crucial distinction exposed by Levey is that, whereas multiculturalism "is said to operate in a 'diversity' paradigm, in which individuals and groups have equal status under the same laws and there is 'no recognition of a majority culture', interculturalism is said to operate in a duality paradigm" in which the diversity is taken more as a relationship between the dominant culture, the majority, and the minorities – the immigrant groups (2012, p. 220). In these terms, the two concepts operate in divergent spheres: interculturalism stands for the recognition of a majority culture, multiculturalism refuses it. Interculturalists advocate for a strong national identity and cohesion (p. 218), while multiculturalists praise the integration between cultures, sometimes even disregarding national identity (p. 219). The ideals of interculturalism resemble duality; those of multiculturalism resemble diversity.

On interculturalism, Bouchard, its most notorious advocate, asserts that:

> Interculturalism recognizes the status of the majority culture (its legitimacy, its right to perpetuate its traditions, its heritage, and its right to mobilize around developmental goals) within a framework designed to reduce the excesses that all majorities are capable of enacting on minorities. (2011, p. 448)

Kymlicka, on the other hand, clarifies what is at the core of the multiculturalist ideal:

> First and foremost, a multicultural state involves the repudiation of the older idea that the state is a possession of a single national group. Instead, the state must be seen as belonging equally to all citizens. Second, as a consequence, a multicultural state repudiates those nation-building policies that assimilate or exclude members of minority or non-dominant groups. Instead, it accepts that individuals should be able to access state institutions, and to act as full and equal citizens in political life, without having to hide or deny their ethnocultural identity. (2003, p. 150)

As I have noted, "interculturalism takes shape principally within the duality paradigm" (BOUCHARD, 2011, p. 445), making explicit how the dominant group, or foundational culture – in Bouchard's words – is elevated to a degree which the minorities could seemingly never reach. In spite of Bouchard's assertion that minorities are as important as the majority, critics have seriously questioned such duality inasmuch as it does not prove to be so easily dealt with in practical terms as Bouchard's arguments suggest, especially when one comes across statements that are somehow contradictory to the general ideal of an intercultural model, for instance: "interculturalism encourages creative initiatives from individuals and groups working on a microsocial level" (BOUCHARD, 2011, p. 449); and "the central challenge of interculturalism is to smooth over and to alleviate the us/them relation rather than inflame it" (p. 446). The two statements appear to be inconsistent, precisely due to interculturalism's pivotal idea that there is, unquestionably, a majority culture which by right is positioned above all the other, minority, groups.

Along these lines, Kymlicka's ideal of multicultural States and intercultural citizens seems to offer a good strategic apparatus for understanding how the relation of a State with its citizens works in such a plural social environment. Skills and attitudes on the individual level are indeed relevant here, and can assist in making a difference to the lives of the not-so-privileged. On a large scale, however, official acknowledgments and social policies turn out to be essential for an appropriate treatment on such a serious matter as the encounter between locals and newcomers. In sum, a successful model for diversity management would seem to be the one that combines State efforts and individuals' willingness to learn about others and to consider how issues look from other people's points of view, instead of assuming a position of superiority (KYMLICKA, 2003, p. 157).

Still, such an endeavor is not as easy in practice as it is in theory, for the requirement of legitimacy on the part of non-dominant groups may seem unfair to the "foundational" ones. Seglow points to some of the "positive claims" (2003, p. 157) about how to properly recognize multiculturalism and what should be involved in such a model: firstly, there are the rights that have to do with the government, an element which involves representation in politics and also minorities' rights before the law; the second type of multicultural right has to do with the

accommodation of a variety of distinct cultural practices, or of giving special rights to a disadvantaged minority; the third type is not easily categorized and has to do with collective esteem, a group's attitude towards itself:

> This becomes a matter for public policy when the symbolism of flags, currencies, names, public holidays, national anthems, public funds for cultural activities and the content of school curricula bear on a minority's fragile presence in the public political culture. Inevitably affecting how the mainstream regards it, the gaze of recognition affects how members perceive themselves, and in turn their attitude towards the wider society of which they are a part. (2003, p. 158)

The recognition approach mentioned by Seglow and Wieviorka refers to the ideas proposed by Charles Taylor in the essay "The politics of recognition", in which the author contends that individuals require not only respect from others, but also other people's positive attitude towards them (TAYLOR, 1994, p. 70) or, as Wieviorka puts it, "it is not a question of tolerating cultural difference, but of ensuring balanced articulation" (1998, p. 895) to the extent that whilst individuals recognize and respect other people's differences and receive that in return, they end up assuring a more positive view towards themselves, for recognition "is not an optional extra, but a vital human need" (SEGLOW, 2003, p. 161).

Multicultural rights, thus, start from an unstable terrain and must pass through the conflicted ambit of human relations in public life, especially when this involves, as it must, the politics of recognition. Many scholars contend that reaching a proper multicultural *milieu* is not an easy task precisely because the State and its citizens must go through a careful and thorough examination of their *modus operandi* as regards what differs from what is natural to them, what diverges from the *status quo*. In the Republic of Ireland, for instance, there have been official acknowledgments concerning the plurality of the State from the Celtic Tiger period – in the 1990s – onward. There is a gap, however, pinpointed by historians and critics, concerning legal policies to support such a statement; the debate on the case of Ireland goes hand-in-hand with the discussions brought about by the scholars mentioned above, and, again, it does not have to do with nomenclature *per se*, but with politics. There is, indeed, something highly political at stake in the models for diversity management, and Ireland would not be a different case. Many of the obstacles and challenges discussed by scholars pervade not only the official policy as regards lawful stances, but also how such a sphere is strictly bonded to the individual level. The macro and the micro function as a two-way road for a successful inclusive apparatus, and there resides the difficulty:

> Some multicultural rights such as the exemptions from common laws and limited self-government cause very little pain to the majority. Political issues of recognition are not like this. They are hard to resolve because they call into question not just a minority identity but the majority's too, and a problem caused by others is always a resented gift. (SEGLOW, 2003, p. 158)

When Seglow states that he wants to move multiculturalism from the outskirts to the center of our political thinking (2003, p. 170), he is taking a stand and bringing to the fore issues that require more widespread discernment and understanding. Seglow calls attention to what Bryan Fannin, in the book chapter "Multiculturalism in Ireland" denominates as the evaluation of multiculturalisms (2002, p. 179); Fanning's chapter offers a critical overview of the Republic of Ireland at the outset of the Tiger and subsequent years, remembering that since 1991 more than a hundred nationalities have entered the country – whether as asylum seekers, refugees or as the general labor force (KEOGH, 2012, p. 352). Fanning also briefly discusses, in the Irish context, the use of the terms interculturalism and multiculturalism, pinpointing that interculturalism may be used as a reference to a distinct form of multiculturalism in equality policy discourse (2002, p. 186); he highlights, nonetheless, that the use of interculturalism often depicts a position of assimilation rather than the integration of minority cultures, and also neither accounts for the issues of racism and discrimination within Irish society, nor challenges the experiences faced by asylum-seekers, refugees and other minority groups (p. 186).

In the Republic of Ireland, diversity became a matter of official debates only from the 1990s, in what is known as the Celtic Tiger period. This era brought about – for the first time ever in the history of the Irish Republic – the context of a multicultural society. From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, Irish people witnessed a huge turning point in the economic and social spheres of the country, the first leading to the latter; impressively, the Republic registered levels of economic growth that soon became the envy of every other western states, including the United Kingdom – when in 1996 the economy of the twenty-six counties surpassed it for the first time ever (COULTER, 2003, p. 3). This, together with encouragement from the Irish government, led to a flow of inward migration to the country which, only a decade before, would have appeared to be unimaginable for the Irish. The "economic miracle" (COULTER, 2003, p. 13), together with the change in the social ethos and the arrival of a great number of immigrants, formed a combination that turned out to be the fuel for the roar of the Tiger. These elements somehow explain the widespread idea of Ireland as almost a new promised land, and it is this very perspective that is challenged by critics who ponder whether that positive atmosphere proved to be so beneficial also for the less privileged groups within the Tiger *milieu*. These scholars bring to light what Loyal calls the "dark side" of contemporary Irish society, by

scrutinizing the experiences of non-nationals in the Republic (2003, p. 74). It is important, nonetheless, to become acquainted with how the Irish State was officially dealing with such an unprecedented state of affairs.

I shall use, as a clarifying example of the inconsistencies between official discourse and concrete practices during this period, the motto of the Irish Tourist Board in the Tiger years which, translated from the Irish, was: “One hundred thousand welcomes” (LOYAL, 2003, p. 74). The implied and guiding question to these scholars’ critique is: one hundred thousand welcomes for whom? They take an issue with this idealistic view of the Republic at the turn of the century, a country that was selling itself as a welcoming, prosperous, possible new home for outsiders. The State has sold Ireland, as pointed out by Loyal, as an open, cosmopolitan, multicultural, tourist-friendly country (p. 74). And it was, to a certain extent. The question is that the celebrated values of freedom, choice and opportunity – which were supposedly intrinsic to the “new Ireland” (LOYAL, 2003, p. 74), ended up overshadowing, for instance, the growing cases of xenophobia and racism:

> The recent development of contemporary Irish society is inherently paradoxical. At the same time as producing unprecedented wealth, it has created poverty and social exclusion. It is largely, although not exclusively, by reference to this paradox that we can attempt to understand the growth of racism in Ireland. Although racism may take the form of a relatively coherent theory, it can also appear in the form of a less coherent assembly of stereotypes, images and attributions, and as an explanation that is constructed and employed by individuals to negotiate their everyday lives. (LOYAL, 2003, p. 87)

This is why intercultural relations during the Tiger years, although unavoidable, were more problematic than they might have seemed at first glance for a country which, until the early 1990s, had been isolated from the globalized trend. It is worth remembering that since the establishment of the Irish Free State, in 1922, the Republic had been fighting to consolidate its sense of nationhood, which included an enhancement of the Gaelic tradition and institutionalization of the Catholic Church (LOYAL, 2003, p. 83). However, with the emergence of the new, Celtic Tiger, era, the consequent insertion of Ireland in a more globalized environment, and the materialization of diversity, such beliefs and pillars of Irishness were also put to the test. Similarly to critics Colin Coulter and Steve Loyal, historian Bryan Fanning also assumes a critical posture as regards State discourses in view of the real experiences lived by the groups which came to constitute the plurality of the Irish social climate. Fanning argues that, regardless of official acknowledgements of Ireland as a plural, multicultural country, concrete efforts and policies were not reflecting such propagandized discourse (2002, p. 184); he highlights that “such acknowledgments sit uneasily with entrenched assumptions of societal monoculturalism” (p. 184), a status which ended up reinforced precisely due to the difficulties

in contesting "Irish people" as an ideological category, founded in dominant understandings and political formulations of Irishness (p. 185-186).

The historically constructed and deeply-rooted sense of Irishness grounded on a believed homogeneous basis is contested by Loyal, insofar as the notions of homogeneity, although widespread, had not been challenged only with the arrival of immigrants at the end of the twentieth century: the existence of Travelers, Protestants and Black-Irish people in Ireland, long before, bears witness to the fact that Irish society, in spite of having its pillars in whiteness, in Catholicism, "was always more diverse than it claimed to be" (LOYAL, 2003, p. 75). Steve Loyal's argument on how challenged the ideal of Irishness was, especially from the Tiger years onwards, matches Bryan Fanning's rationale as regards the level of multiculturalism employed within the structures of the nation: "responses to social problems are influenced by dominant understandings to these. Multiculturalisms stand to be evaluated by their explanations of and responses to inequalities encountered by black and ethnic minorities" (FANNING, 2002, p. 182). The multiculturalisms to which the historian makes reference are the types, the levels, of multiculturalism that can be envisaged within a diversity *milieu*. The essence of Fanning's criticism relies on the fact that self-denominations are not effective proof of what is, in fact, being done at government levels to combat racism, discrimination and exclusion towards minority groups. If State policies, in relation to multiculturalism, do not reflect positively on the lives of those who must be supported and affected by them, they depict – thus – a weak multiculturalism, one of the multicultural possibilities highlighted by Fanning (2002, p. 183). In "Multiculturalism in Ireland", Fanning discusses four multicultural possibilities, that can also be referred to as levels or types of multiculturalism. The first one is denominated "overt assimilationism". This multicultural possibility takes shape when minority groups are seen as inferior to the dominant ones: they are "pathologized" and their problems are justified as a result of their distinctiveness. An important characteristic of this level of multiculturalism is that there is no discussion about racism, assimilation[3] being seen as the solution for the issues faced by non-dominant groups (FANNING, 2002, p. 183). In "weak multiculturalism 1", the second possibility, there is still no focus on questions involving racism, although there is a signal in the direction of acknowledgement that dominant groups lack "ethnic sensitivity and cultural understanding" concerning minorities (p. 183). Still, the conflicts faced by these minorities may be explained due to the "inappropriateness" of their cultural, familial and community traditions.

[3] Assimilation is an idea based on the universalism of individual rights as a means to fight discrimination. The problem with such an approach is that minorities might be "dissolved" by their assimilation within the dominant cultural construction (WIEVIORKA, 1998, p. 895).

As a response to the inequalities brought about in this level of multiculturalism, Fanning pinpoints the persistence of assimilationist attitudes, as a result of a critique of the damages caused by racism in society. Furthermore, multicultural initiatives are directed to the minorities rather than to all constituent groups in the societal construction.

When it comes to "weak multiculturalism 2", as categorized by Fanning, there is some sort of recognition of racism as a problem, although structural inequalities caused by racism are still not acknowledged. Progress can be seen, however, when it comes to legislation against discrimination, as well as with multicultural initiatives targeted also at dominant groups, and not only at minorities. At the top, "stronger multiculturalism", which has as its most important feature the discussion of structural inequalities caused by racism. As a result, unequal social relations are sought to be transformed, re-signifying the dominant versus non-dominant groups relations into egalitarian ones. A strong multicultural society also pursues minorities' rights before the law as well as positive discrimination[4] strategies (FANNING, 2002, p. 183).

As could be seen, multiculturalism can be operationalized in a number of different ways and to different extents within public policy. What is interesting about Fanning's critique of such enterprises is that most of them simply manage diversity, instead of effectively contesting inequalities caused by discrimination (FANNING, 2002, p. 179). Besides, the historian's line of thought on the degree to which inclusive strategies start from the macro to the micro, and the extent to which such debates are political, converges with that of other critics previously mentioned. Saying that multiculturalism, and other models for dealing with diversity, is political seems to be quite obvious. It is a redundancy, nonetheless, that requires to be brought to light often, otherwise one runs the risk of assuming that such an endeavor does not need to have official institutions as its strong defender. As discussed at the very beginning of this section, authorities must not ignore their responsibility in assuring that each and every one living under its rules are assured of basic, lawful, and inclusive policies for a respectful and mutual coexistence. Society's share in cooperating with such an enterprise is not under discussion, for no policy is successfully carried out if the micro level is not functioning in accordance with the structural forces guiding it. Thus, it must be remembered that "multiculturalist perspectives are governed by underlying conceptions of social justice and

[4] Positive discrimination is a synonym for "affirmative action" and has to do with policies that favor groups which have been previously discriminated or disadvantaged, such as ethnic minorities (BRUCE; YEARLEY, 2006, p. 237). Although Fanning reflects that "positive discrimination sits uneasily with the concept of egalitarianism in western citizenship" (2002, p. 182), he also ponders that some actions like these have been necessary, serving to ensure the rights and respond to demands of "significantly large minorities" (p. 182).

equality. The imagined parameters of multiculturalisms are ideological and political" (FANNING, 2002, p. 181).

Binary positions and dualisms, which do not have integration or inclusion as a focus, are to be avoided. Regardless of the many fault lines detected in some multicultural possibilities, a strong feature of multiculturalism as a model not for managing, but for approaching diversity, is that it does not endorse a dualistic perspective, but provides a means to avoid what Wieviorka calls "the tyranny of the majority" (1998, p. 900). Indeed, multiculturalisms need to be evaluated, and their processes require improvement; standing for multiculturalism as a political endeavor does not exclude being critical of it. Many of the remarkable features of a strong multiculturalism are not given or created: they are the result of the actions of its everyday practitioners, as Seglow points out (2003, p. 165). Multiculturalism, in this sense, is a process which demands – from the macro and micro sectors of society – engagement. Is multiculturalism the solution? In accordance with Wieviroka, multiculturalism, with its variants and diversity, is effectively a response (1998, p. 889).

PART II

Action is always a complex social and interactive phenomenon.
Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische[5]

2.2 Social agency, social actors and variants of autonomy

Just as "sociology is a diverse and pluralistic discipline", as stated by John Scott at the very beginning of his book *Sociology: the key concepts* (2006, p. xvii), so is the concept of agency, chosen as one of the analytical tools and resources in this dissertation. The nineteenth century witnessed the rise of agency as a proper sub-area of studies in the sociological field and, although debates on human freewill had been taking place for centuries at that time, it was with August Comte and Robert Spencer that such discussions took a different, more concrete, course. In the book *Essential concepts in sociology*, Anthony Giddens and Philip W. Sutton elaborate precisely on the origins of the term and how it has been shaped and re-shaped by scholars over time. Starting from the primary idea that there were such things as external forces and a society which might have limited one's individual freedom and power, Comte and Spencer elaborated upon it, establishing a line of thought which has since then been central to the debates on the logistics of human agency: social structures (GIDDENS; SUTTON, 2014, p. 52-53).

Later, following this rationalization, Émile Durkheim came up with the idea of social facts, and society as an entity in itself (GIDDENS; SUTTON, 2014, p. 53). In *The Sage dictionary of Sociology*, Steve Bruce and Steve Yearley enlighten the author's mindset: Durkheim was not interested in the reasons why people acted in certain ways or executed certain actions, his interest relied on how the structure in which those individuals were placed induced such actions to take place (2006, p. 7). In other words, the structural forces of society had characteristics of their own which would impact people's behavior. These ideas gave rise to a new chapter in the sociological studies of agency: "The type of sociology which emerged focused on how individuals are molded and shaped by social structures that are, to all intents and purposes, external to themselves and beyond their control" (GIDDENS; SUTTON, 2014, p. 53). In the twentieth century, although still latent, this structure-based perspective started to lose its force. Sociologist Talcott Parsons, for instance, believed that social structures ground

[5] Quotation from the essay "What is Agency?" (1998, p. 906).

certain types of behavior, especially those which become patterned and socially acceptable; his viewpoint, however, already started to signal a decreasing thing-like emphasis on social structures as a ubiquitous power which thoroughly ruled individuals' demeanor (2014, p. 53).

An important sociological clash emerged in the mid-twentieth century: the pendulum switched its focus from structure-led theories to enlightenment on the subject and its creative means of coping with social structural forces. Arguing that the theories which limited their focus to the structural and systemic weight on actors offered too little room for discussions on individual's actions, theorists – such as Dennis Wrong and George Mead – turned to a more "agency-focused perspective" (GIDDENS; SUTTON, 2014, p. 53), bringing social action to the spotlight as the proper focus of the sociological debate. These theoreticians advocated for the idea that social structures cannot be taken as the sole key element in what concerns "the ways individuals create the world around them," as clarified by Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner in *The Penguin dictionary of Sociology* (2006, p. 9). Whilst some of them have laid emphasis on the processes of interaction, others drew attention to the competencies, skills and moral commitments of actors, features believed to be "intrinsic" to their routine of accomplishments (SCOTT, 2006, p. 4). On a more radical branch within the agency-focused perspectives, some sociologists even argued that there was no such thing as social structure (ABERCROMBIE; HILL; TURNER, 2006, p. 9).

The two-sided spectrum of structure-based versus agency-focused theories have become, as explained by Bruce and Yearley, "a major fault line in sociology" (2006, p. 7), whilst Giddens and Sutton classify it as the "most enduring division" in sociological debates (2014, p. 54). That is to say: the long-standing sociological clash resulted in a Manichean discourse, which set the perspectives of structural forces and the actor's individual capacity to act creatively as completely divergent matters, indisputably dissociable, unable to become functionally dialogic. In this sense, Abercrombie, Hill and Turner explain that "the debate revolves round the problem of how structures determine what individuals do, how structures are created, and what are the limits, if any, on individuals' capacities to act independently of structural constraints; what are the limits, in other words, for human agency" (2006, p. 9). How can one go beyond such long-established dualism in the sociological arena? This is seemingly an axiomatic question to be reflected on.

From the 1960s onwards, theorists such as Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu have tried to overcome the structure/agency dualism. Referred to as "rational action" theorists, these writers have sought to integrate actors' purposes and intentions and the influence of structural

constraints on individuals' actions (SCOTT, 2006, p. 4). The new-age theorists tried, first and foremost, not to set either structure or agency as exclusionary means for understanding individuals' behavior: the reconciliation of both structure-based and agency-focused perspectives was at the core of this new mindset. The theorists declined the idea of structure ruling individuals, and that of individuals ruling themselves regardless of structure – or even that actors are "independently creating their world" (ABERCROMBIE; HILL; TURNER, 2006, p. 9).

The agency/structure divide has been challenged by theorists in a wide variety of perspectives, which Scott defines as a "sophisticated middle way conception of actors, action and agency" (2006, p. 4). Just as there were diverse theories and emphasis on structure-based and agency-focused perspectives, the same occurs within the new-age theoretical panorama. Some of the concepts discussed by these theorists, although named differently, may echo one another's view; the same happens with their reasoning: terms may be named differently, but the overall notion leads quite to a similar path. To illustrate this idea, one might resort to the concepts of "habitus" used by Pierre Bourdieu, "practical consciousness" used by Anthony Giddens, and "lifeworld" used by Jürgen Habermas, in which the authors discourse about how the "out-there" – the structures, the macro – has entered the interactional level, the "in-here", the actor (SCOTT, 2006, p. 5). Individuals, therefore, have imprinted in themselves the mark of structural forces, while their response to such weight might be to challenge, or to subscribe to, external patterns and societal structures. In accordance with the middle-way theorists, the problematic of analyzing structure and agency as completely dissociable subjects is that, in spite of the undeniable existence of social structures, these structures may crumble or be strengthened, entirely through individuals' action. Pursuant to this reasoning, Giddens and Sutton argue that "studying structure without agency and agency without structure would seem to limit the sociological imagination to partial accounts of social reality" (2014, p. 55).

In these terms, one may not deny the concreteness of the external world's influence on social actors, just as one may not disregard the fact that sociology considers both the macro and the micro level. Michele Dillon pinpoints that whereas sociology may be concerned with social structures – the macro level – and the extent to which they shape and influence the organization of the social environment and thence how they end up formalizing patterns of social actions, it is also dealing with the dynamics of individual experience and interpersonal interactions – the micro level – across the various contexts of social life which are daily presented to individuals (2014, p. 10-11). While the sociological battlefield seems not to have come to a consensus on

what specifically should be the focus that sociologists should study, and bearing in mind that all three sub-fields of the aforementioned study have a range of supporters and critics, I must agree with Bruce and Yearley: the question is not whether structure or agency should be the scope of sociology; the central point is "where we expect to find the effective cause of whatever interests us" (2006, p. 7).

Agency is my primary interest and the theoretical resource that I use to analyze the contemporary short stories that constitute the corpus of this study. I believe, nonetheless, that an agentic demeanor is strictly bonded to the urgencies which society imposes on individuals. The critics and sociologists so far cited in this chapter endorse this view, and this is the stand I am assuming in my writing enterprise in this dissertation: I believe that mediation between human agency and the structural forces will offer a more complete apparatus for the analysis of the literary characters, insofar as these characters are occupying a space in a specific time period, which might have dictated how they must act, and how and whether they might have chosen otherwise, because "action takes place in the midst of social relations, practices and structures" (SCOTT, 2006, p. 4). The point is not to deny the existence and relevance of either structure or agency, but to gather the best insights of both in a productive way, "moving beyond the dichotomy", to use the words of Giddens and Sutton (2014, p. 55), with whom I am once again in agreement. Analyzing a literary piece under these terms, however, requires more than simply combining relevant aspects and applying them to the writings. Literature presents a density which demands one not only to move beyond dichotomies, but also to transcend commonsensical beliefs. The characters, therefore, must be analyzed on a wide range of different levels, as a means of apprehending why they act in certain ways and how they may possibly be corroborating or confronting given structures.

Individuals have the capacity to respond to, rework, creatively resist and transform social structures and social processes by employing individual or collective actions (DILLON, 2014, p. 11). Which force drives an actor to challenge pre-established codes of conduct, social patterns, and socially accepted behaviors? What impels one to confront the structural forces that are historically built and often officially underwritten? The answer is simultaneously simple and complex: agency.

2.3 Agency: working on a definition

In the article "Time, self and the curiously abstract concept of agency", Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder Jr. refer to agency as a "slippery term" (2007, p. 170), in that its uses differ depending on the epistemological roots of the scholars who are employing it. As a case, it is possible to imagine, for instance, how differently Parsons, a structure-based theorist, and Bourdieu, an agency-focused theorist, would define it. Further, the middle-way theorists themselves offer diverse perspectives on what agency is, and what would be the virtues of the agentic actor. In agreement with Hitlin and Elder Jr., Mustafa Emirbayer and Anne Mische, in "What is agency?", point out that the term "has maintained an elusive, albeit resonant, vagueness", being usually associated with words such as "selfhood, motivation, will, purposiveness, intentionality, choice, initiative, freedom, and creativity" (1998, p. 962). The myriad of epistemological perspectives in that study justifies the lack of unity among scholars. There is, however, among those that I have selected for this present study, a certain similarity in their positioning and critical outlook. Again, there could be no agreement, simply because agency is not a flat term, and its diverse and startling uses demand a versatility which a closed definition may not offer.

My aim here, by bringing attention to some working definitions previously given by scholars, is to build a coherent line of thought, reflecting on what would be an appropriate working definition of agency for this thesis – one which is not exclusionary and that goes beyond the dichotomy previously discussed. I have selected excerpts from different sources which I have already referred to in this chapter, and others which I will explore in subsequent sections. The first two working definitions are found in books which deal specifically with the issues of sociological conceptualization; Bruce and Yearley's account, and John Scott's overview, both of which I have discussed above. The other three working definitions are presented by authors whose works I have selected to comprise the sub-sections of this theoretical chapter, for their accounts on agency and the depth presented in their discussions offer a range of different angles and analytical tools in which to observe individuals' agency – and this is precisely what such a thorough analysis asks for, and what I propose in this work – to go beyond barriers established by dichotomous understandings of the concept.

The working definitions are as follows:

1. "Agency denotes individual **capacity** for free thought and action" (Steve Bruce and Steve Yearley, *The Sage dictionary of Sociology*, 2006, p. 7).

2. "Agency is the dynamic element within an actor that translates **potential capacity** into actual practice." (John Scott, *Sociology: the key concepts*, 2006, p. 3).

3. "The temporally constructed **engagement** by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination and judgement, both **reproduces and transforms** those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations" (Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, "What is agency?" 1998, p. 970).

4. "Agency occurs at the level of the actor's **control** over his or her **self-experience**" (Hitlin and Elder, "Time, self and the curiously abstract concept of agency" 2007, p. 174).

5. "The proper **modern agentic individual** [...] **manages** a life, **carrying** a responsibility not only to **reflect** self-interest but also the wider rationalized rules conferring agency. Helplessness, ignorance, and passivity may be very natural human properties, but they are not the properties of the proper effective agent" (Meyer and Jepperson, "The 'Actors' of modern society: the cultural construction of social agency". 2010, p. 107).

Interestingly, in the first two excerpts, the authors convey quite similar messages, especially in relation to the use of the word "capacity", in a reference to the person as bearer of the ability and power to experience, understand and respond to diverse circumstances, and to do so in a – somehow – position of active mediation. Scott's working definition presents a little more theoretical input, although still objectively explained: by calling agency the "dynamic element within an actor" and stating that it "translates potential capacities", Scott is responding to those who believe that saying individuals possess agency is a given, a redundancy, since the very fact of being human already signals possession of agency. The word "potential" just before "capacity" is utterly important, in that it confronts the commonsense belief that putting agency at the center of a study or scrutinizing one's possibility for agentic demeanor is unimportant, due to the "everybody has agency" mindset. What is clear is that everyone has the potential ability to act creatively, however, one may not do so, depending on a wide range of factors (social class, historical background, race, age, gender, ethnicity, and religion). Secondly, Scott's working definition also signals the abiding presence of structure, and to actions taking place within a given social environment; the "actual practice", or the locus in which individuals can tangibly translate their potential capacities into concrete action is precisely the out-there, in the macro-level.através do Programa de Geração Automática da Biblioteca Universitária da UFSC.

When it comes to the intermingling relation of agency and structure, Emirbayer and Mische are even more explicit in making it clear. These authors' perspective on agency will

comprise the following sub-section of this chapter, which will focus on the temporal relation individuals establish with current given structures, and the strategies they resort to as means of settling an active position in response to them. This working definition, therefore, very much exposes what is the focus of their line of thought: habits, imagination and judgement are key words for their theorization, since they represent the temporal-relational aspects which they refer to. In Emirbayer and Mische's work, the central issue is how actors apply such potential capacities in order to actively evaluate and respond to "changing historical situations" (p. 970). To do so, they make use of temporal resources which have to do not only with the immediate context in which individuals are inserted, but also have recourse to previous experiences and evaluate possible outcomes for their actions. Also, by pointing out that the actors may not only transform structures by also reproduce them, the authors bring to the debate, and challenge, the idea that agency necessarily has to do with a position of denial or confrontation. In Emirbayer and Mische, structure – whether the immediate one or past structures which might have shaped one's *modus operandi* – plays a big role in the fulfillment of agency.

Control and self-experience are the central points for Hitlin and Elder, not only in their understanding of agency in the statements referred to above, but also in relation to their approach and how they elaborate, in their article, on the possibilities for an agentic demeanor. Just like Emirbayer and Mische, however concerned they may be with the temporal aspects of social intercourse, Hitlin and Elder blend the temporal dispositions with the notions of the self, its interests and purposiveness. Besides, they also join the issues of structure, agency and time, which would work as a bridge between the everlasting dualism of the micro and macro levels; social structures, for them, cannot be torn apart from agency studies since "human agency is inextricably social, structured by interactional situations" (2007, p. 185). The control which they refer to in this summarized conceptualization of agency is the control over how one experiences situated activities, creating parallels with past events and possible future consequences, in a very similar way to the way in which Emirbayer and Mische express it (1998, p. 972). In sum, one does not simply passively undergo temporal situated events; the agent her/himself exerts agency by shaping her/his experience of time (p. 174).

Meyer and Jepperson make their considerations on agency starting from the conceptions of the modern actor, who is not necessarily an individual *per se*; actors, in their terms, include nation-states and organizations (2010, p. 100) – the idea of the "modern agentic actor" being tightly bonded to the historical movement from religious to post-religious evolution. Interestingly, the authors make use of the term "self-interest" and, like Hitlin and Elder, emphasize the motivation, purposiveness and individual freedom that reside in and arises from

within the subject as a result of external forces. The modern agentic actor, therefore, establishes strategies and creates mechanisms to overcome possible constraints, since – as exposed by Meyer and Jepperson – passivity is not a defining feature of the modern agent (2010, p. 107). These authors are more explicitly critical in relation to the vagueness of the concept of agency, and also harsh on the construction of the modern agentic individual and its supposedly god-like authority: the actors, in their view, become conditioned to act in certain ways which would reinforce their position as authorized agents, even if that contradicts their "raw interests" (p. 107). While such a statement can easily be exemplified when analyzing the agency of nation-states and organizations, applying it to individuals becomes a tougher, and more slippery, matter. After all, one can never know, beneath the veneer of a subject responding, reworking and re-signifying socially constructed and validated events, what exactly are the subject's raw interests. Their viewpoint, although extremely strict in some matters, resonates Hitlin and Helder's understanding of the individuals' self-experience and self-interest, and offers tools for an analytical enterprise on the role of actors and the sorts of agency they can resort to in modern constructions of societal interaction.

The working definitions and understandings of what are the main constituents of agency show that many of the theorists' ideas converge. Once again, agency is not a flat term and therefore a closed definition would not attend to the many possibilities for depicting an agentic demeanor, since "humans are fundamentally active beings" (HITLIN; ELDER, 2010, p. 185), constantly receiving, apprehending and re-signifying meanings within themselves. The first aspect to be taken into account is that although individuals carry potential capacities for behaving in unanticipated and creative ways, not everybody, for a number of different reasons, will depict such a state of consciousness in relation to their own capabilities. Therefore, an agentic demeanor in the terms here discussed is not a given for all individuals. Secondly, these theorists go beyond the ever-present dichotomy of agency versus structure, and thus beyond the Manichean discourse, because "agency stems both from individual and external circumstances that direct one's attentional focus" (HITLIN; ELDER, 2010, p. 175).

Equally relevant is these critics' understanding that individuals may depict agency in diverse, startling and non-straightforward ways – hence the importance of accounting for the different types of agentic demeanor, since such acknowledgement helps also in breaking down another barrier: the idea that agency is necessarily related to an attitude of confrontation or denial in the face of an adverse condition. A person's agentic demeanor may go way beyond such a simplistic view, hence the necessity of bearing in mind that "unacknowledged agency dynamics permeate and shape modern social structure" (MEYER; JEPPERSON, 2010, p. 110).

The theorists and critics I have selected to constitute the following subsections of this chapter show the various dimensions in which an agentic potential translated into actual practices may reside, involving time, self, and the main causes and features of the modern agentic actor. I conclude by quoting Emirbayer and Mische, who have beautifully explained why one must not disavow the various angles of agency: “by differentiating between the different dimensions of agency, we can help to account for variability and change in actors’ capacities for imaginative and critical intervention in the diverse contexts within which they act” (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 970).

2.4 Agency as a temporally embedded social process

In the acclaimed article “What is agency?”, Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische affirm that their main purpose in offering a new account on the concept of agency is to capture its full complexity (1998, p. 963). Their main objective is to show the diverse dimensions of agency since, as they put it, previous theorizations could not overcome one-sided perspectives, and therefore ended up disregarding the dynamics of action in the myriad of social intercourses. In such terms, “agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement” (p. 963) is the means through which they attempt at reconceptualizing the term and construing their rationale; thus, individuals’ temporal orientations are the precept for the understanding of the startling dimensions of agentic demeanor. The authors argue that this process of social engagement, carried out by actors, is informed by the past, oriented toward the future and evaluative of the present (p. 963); consciously or not, actors have the capacity of interplaying between one or more of these temporal qualities. In these terms, Emirbayer and Mische contend that the key for apprehending the dynamics of human agency is to perceive it in its variable changing orientations over time: “the agentic dimension of social action can only be captured in its full complexity […] if it is analytically situated within the flow of time” (p. 963).

According to Emirbayer and Mische, three elements constitute human agency: iteration, projectivity, and practical evaluation. These components guide a person’s conduct in reaction to social structures which are, in turn, also temporally oriented, insofar as “action is always a complex social and interactive phenomenon” (1998, p. 966). Both agency and structure, thus, need to be thought of as fluid elements in a complex set of social events; hence the need to account for the inventive and critical aspects of agency (p. 967). The “chordal triad of agency” (p. 970), which comprises the three temporal elements referred to above, enables an analytical perspective on the positioning of human actors in relation to the passage of time, and also makes

it possible to understand how, by using temporal agentic resources, these actors re-work and re-construct their orientations toward past, present and future events (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 971). These agentic dimensions, thus, are the paramount notion for understanding how precisely individuals' agentic power relies on their temporal orientations and, importantly, how such agency is enacted in each case.

The iterational dimension of agency

Iteration is the dimension within the "chordal triad" which resonates mostly with past events. Although one may argue that experiences occur in the present moment, it must be remembered that one's response to current events is also conditioned by past experiences; in Emirbayer and Mische's words, the present in which events take place is "permeated by the conditioning quality of the past" (1998, p. 975). Iteration is a crucial, and theoretically neglected, notion in agency studies, for it has to do with the stabilization of the actor's identity, which is done so through habit and repetition, leading to an apparatus which the modern agentic individual resorts to in her/his everyday interactions. The iterational element is enacted in "actors' abilities to recall, to select, and to appropriately apply the more or less tacit and taken-for-granted schemas of action that they have developed through past interactions" (1998, p. 975). Thus agency – in this dimension – lies in how individuals recognize, locate and implement such "schemas" in ongoing and situated circumstances. Interestingly, actors may not be fully aware of such internal organization, but still be capable of putting such patterns into action.

The internal structure of iteration comprises a set of interrelated components, each involving a specific type of engagement on the part of the actor. "Selective attention" is the first to be explored and it has to do with one's ability to focus on a very specific area of reality, so that the actor may be clear on what are the resources required to effectively respond to a specific type of interaction. "Recognition of types" also concerns directed attention with a focus on "typification", i.e. recognition of emerging experiences which might resemble past ones. When it comes to "categorical locations", besides building the bridge between past and ongoing experiences, actors place these typifications and apply them to persons, contexts and events, so as to "locate" where emerging experiences fit and thus maintain social intercourses working within acceptable and known lines. "Maneuver among repertoires" relates to the fact that there is not a completely unconscious or automatic action. While individuals may resort to this repertoire in more or less flexible terms, they do need to handle it so as to respond appropriately to given situations. Notably, the degree to which actors employ these repertoires varies,

depending on how (un)problematic the circumstances are. The last internal structure discussed is “expectation maintenance”, which has to do with the actors’ knowledgeability of social relations, assisting them in predicting future occurrences and providing resourceful methods for stable and continuing action (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 978-981).

The projective dimension of agency

Projectivity is the dimension within the “chordal triad” which most resonates with actors’ future expectations. In Emirbayer and Mische’s words (1998, p. 971), it concerns “the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors’ hopes, fears, and desires for the future”. The authors argue that actors are not only capable of mediating past and present circumstances, but that they can also inventively create new possibilities for thought and action. Within this creative dimension and “imaginative engagement” of agentic demeanor, the actor is capable of shaping and directing future possibilities (p. 984). Through hypothesization of experience, actors can establish a critical dialogic process with the other two dimensions of agentic demeanor. A mediatory enterprise then takes place while actors “move ‘beyond themselves’” into future projections, construing links between where they are and where they want to be. Projections are, too, a culturally embedded social process having social actors negotiating their path towards the future and “receiving their driving impetus from the conflicts and challenges of social life” (p. 984).

The internal structure of projectivity encompasses processes involved in the projection of future actions, which clarify how projectivity works in the course of social actions. “Anticipatory identification”, for instance, involves the identification of patterns in likely future horizons, yet still understanding that future outcomes are vast as much as they are nearly always unpredictable. In this case, actors once again draw upon their “typifications, repertoires and social narratives”, since this stock of lived circumstances helps individuals to have a broader outlook on their goals and intentions, and to locate possible future constraints (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 989). “Narrative construction” encompasses the acknowledgement of typical trajectories so as to glimpse future ones “in relation to more or less causal and temporal sequences” (p. 989). Narratives function as temporal frame resources and broaden actors’ maps of action, while also helping them in the making of new plans of action for emerging constraints.

The “symbolic recomposition” process echoes the idea of narratives in a sense that, once actors have no means of predicting how the future is going to be materialized, they resort to

specific moments in past experiences, which can be enabling or constraining, and place them forward into imaginative projections of future; such resourceful components assist actors in making decisions on the basis of these unexpected combinations (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 989-990). This process leads to "hypothetical resolution", in which actors, after having iterationally assembled experiences so as to set possible scenarios of action, turn to the phase of hypothesizing resolutions for these imagined future frames which will "adequately respond to the moral, practical, and emotional concerns arising from lived conflicts" (p. 990). Lastly, the authors single out the "experimental enactment" dimension of projectivity, which refers to the "borderline between imagination and action" (p. 990), between the future and the present. This is the stage in which actors, after having gone through the different phases of projectivity, put the hypothetical resolutions to the test in social intercourses. The projective dimension of agency, therefore, expands actors' insight on human interactions and reveals the transformative and innovative effects of human agency in deeper levels of social interactions.

The practical-evaluative dimension of agency

Practical-evaluative is the dimension within the "chordal triad" which mostly resonates with the actors' response to demands and contingencies of the present. Of the three temporal dimensions of agency, the practical-evaluative seems to be the one which activates individuals' resourceful power for agentic demeanor, leading them to draw upon past and future experiences so as to best discern about present challenging events. Agency, thus, functions in a cycle: for a thorough evaluative positioning of given present situations, it is often required of actors to adjust routine dispositions (even the ones which are relatively unreflective), and also re-evaluate projects, desires and intentions for the future in more practical and realistic terms, in line with "real-world circumstances" (EMIRBAYER; MISHCE, 1998, p. 994). A practical-evaluative conduct, in these terms, enables actors to exercise agency in a mediating fashion which potentially grants them the agentic apparatus to challenge and transform ongoing situational contexts of action.

The internal structure of the practical-evaluative dimension encompasses five major processes which lead actors' in the contextualization of projects and habitual practices to be in tune with concrete, real-world circumstances. "Problematization" is the first component: it involves actors' abilities to discern whether a present situation is "ambiguous, unsettled or unresolved" (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 998); after problematizing a conflicted present circumstance, it is expected that individuals will move toward altering that *status quo* and thus

turning the once troublesome actuality into “unproblematic, settled and resolved” (p. 998). “Characterization” echoes the iterational dimension of agency, in which the actor draws upon past conflicted events, establishing a link between the typifications, schemas and principles in order to characterize them and establish an appropriate line of action for the emerging situational context.

“Deliberation”, in its turn, echoes the projective dimension of agentic demeanor, for once the actor has settled what is the proper line of action to be carried out, she/he must more than just adapt her/his upcoming actions to the present constraints, and also – potentially – weigh the response not only in the light of ongoing events, but also ponder its outcomes in the light of future goals and projects (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 999). Deliberation leads to “decision”, or the choice on how precisely the agentic individual is going to act responsively in determined situations; whether the response presents itself as a big deal within a person’s situated context, or just goes with the flow of practical activity, both instances conduct the actor in the direction of action, in that the response also translates the person’s action into engagement with real-world circumstances. It is important to notice that “choices can be a matter of tacit adjustment or adaptation to changing contingencies . . . as well as the product of articulable explicit reasoning” (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 999).

“Execution”, or the executive capacity, is the ability to act “rightly and effectively within particular concrete life circumstances” (EMIRBAYER; MISCH, 1998, p. 999), the idea here being that the actor is not only establishing what would be the right course to take, but how to take it in accordance with the given case and expected outcomes. Excellence, thus, is the aim in the actor’s execution of the action – though this does not necessarily lead to a happy ending; often, it just works for the “fulfillment of a lesser evil” (p. 1000). All in all, practical evaluation entails actors’ potential engagement, response, and transformation of the structural environment in which actions unfold.

Agency: a temporal-dialogical process

Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische’s account of agency is thorough and offers many insights for an analytical enterprise of the modern agentic actor. By pointing out the common fault lines in the sociological discourse on the concept, they offer didactic clarifications, and elaborate on unresolved and undiscussed issues. Their special skill, though, is in establishing a connection between agency and the temporal dimensions of human experiences – for time permeates all sorts of social relations, and individuals are indisputably making use of its

resources, whether they are aware of it or not. Time and structure are also tightly correlated matters, for external social forces are not born powerful or fragile, they become so by being reinforced or challenged through the actors' response to them; the actors' response, in turn, is how and when modern agentic individuals find room to exercise their potentialities, translating them into actual social practices:

> They continuously engage patterns and repertoires from the past, project hypothetical pathways forward in time, and adjust their actions to the exigencies of emerging situations. Moreover, there are times and places when actors are more oriented toward the past, more directive toward the future, or more evaluative of the present; actors may switch between (and reflexively transform) their orientations toward action, thereby changing their degrees of flexible, inventive, and critical response toward structuring contexts. Such a perspective lays the basis for a richer and more dynamic understanding of the capacity that actors have to mediate the structuring contexts within which action unfolds. (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 1012)

Actors, in this sense, simultaneously experience past and present experiences whilst also conferring on them future projections. Understanding this point demonstrates the temporal nature of human experience, which is apprehended and re-signified in a wide variety of ways, more or less creative and reflective. Further, one must not disregard the fact that modern actors inhabit a temporal space in which social intercourses change very easily and rapidly: although the aftermath of the individual's actions is not under her/his control, what is at stake is precisely the ability to – at least – respond to situated social events in appropriate responsive ways, with the specificities each situation requires. To do so, actors draw upon their vast repertoires, putting into action the temporal dimensions of human experience. Agency, thus, enables individuals to respond creatively and responsibly, enhancing their own self-transformative potential through the execution of an agentic demeanor.

2.5 Self, identity and manifestations of agency

In "Time, self and the curiously abstract concept of agency", Steve Hitlin and Glen H. Elder Jr. take a stand against the vagueness with which the concept of agency has been applied in diverse theoretical foci, usually for conveying a very broad message pointing towards human freedom, and individuals' free will. To present, thus, a less vague and more consistent approach on human agency, the authors draw upon notions of temporality – notably the one offered by Emirbayer and Mische – whilst also converging the temporal perspective with models of the

self[6], which is in its essence a temporal phenomenon. By blending both dimensions, the authors make an attempt at re-shaping the concept and providing more sustainable analytical tools for its application. As they explain: "Study of the self, a phenomenon that allows for both choice and constraint, individual spontaneity and social patterning, individuality and group and social identification, is fundamental to – but missing from – debates about the nature of agency" (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 173).

The idea that "individuals' actions are oriented towards meeting the conditions of social life" is at the core of Hitlin and Elder's rhetoric on agency (2007, p. 175). They build on the argument that actors have plenty of capacity for controlling their temporal orientations and, therefore, full capacity to take experiences over through their own temporal perspectives. Agency, thus, starts from within the actor and her/his mediatory attitudes towards socially circumscribed events: even if actors' responses are automatic, carefully considered or long-term, this demeanor "implicates individual action, effort, and intention" (p. 175); such an outlook becomes clearer with the idea proposed by Giddens that "the actor might have done otherwise". Originated from the self, agentic actions are embedded in a person's personal orientations towards past experiences and future projects, while simultaneously co-existing with self-reflexivity regarding present circumstances; each of these temporal orientations, as seen previously in Emirbayer and Mische's account on agency, lead to different aspects of the self within action, since "individuals shift their time horizons based on the problems that emerge within situated interaction" (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 175).

Within this prism, Hitlin and Elder's argument both echoes Emirbayer and Mische's position when it comes to the agency versus structure paradigm, and also relates to Meyer and Jepperson's outlook on the construction of modernity and the rise of the agentic actor – a topic to be explored in the next section of this chapter. As a result, the analysis of potential agentic actions needs to be located within given structures which prompt individuals' responsive mediation; whenever an analysis of human agency is removed from the locus of human experience, such an analysis runs the risk of poorly and vaguely applying the concept of agency (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 175). Considering that human experiences take place within given situations which, in their turn, are materialized in the macro-level, then structural-based perspectives may walk hand in hand with agency-focused ones, since "people's actions do not occur in a vacuum" (p. 175), either in temporal or in structural terms.

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[6] The self is "an organized and interactive system of thoughts, feelings, identities, and motives that (1) is born of self-reflexivity and language, (2) people attribute to themselves and (3) characterize specific human beings" (Owens qtd. in Hitlin and Elder 173).

The model of agency proposed by Hitlin and Elder, which has its focus on the self and its agentic dimensions, is also strictly correlated to the temporal orientations which guide individuals' responsive mediation. In these terms, many of the arguments and expositions made by the authors overlap with that of Emirbayer and Mische, whilst also introducing a little of what is exposed in the work of Jepperson and Meyer. The references used by the authors are those which advocate for a middle-way perspective, which excludes neither structure nor actors; by doing so, and offering a plural outlook on the elements of agency, inspired by previous theoretical backgrounds, Hitlin and Elder seek to "anchor the concept in different levels of experience and help resolve seemingly incommensurate dimensions" (2007, p. 175). The four types of human agency they propose are as follows:

Existential agency

A basic premise for understanding this quite abstract idea is that possessing agency is different from being aware of such a possession. Existential agency, as clarified by Hitlin and Elder, has to do with the universal human potentiality for acting actively – resulting in the meaning "inherent to social action". They hasten to explain, however, that capacity for action does not equal self-efficacy, that is, the acknowledgement of such potentiality (2007, p. 177). As regards this type of agency, it can be said that humans do control most of their actions – evoking Giddens, again, one might have acted otherwise – yet these actions are indisputably "socially channeled" (p. 177), and the consequences to actors for they choices may be severe. Broadly speaking, existential agency does not have much to do with "free will", as may appear at first glance, since it calls on "self-reflective understandings of our abilities and capacities within specific domains to exert this will" (p. 177).

Pragmatic agency

When habitual responses to routine, habitual and social-patterned circumstances fail, then an actor's pragmatic agency arises. When habits break down and are not thoroughly capable of appropriately responding and re-working situated events, actors must make choices which are not those pre-established routines that had effectively guided their social actions. Pragmatic agency is about choosing wisely when the iterational dimension of one's agency is not capable of effectively mediating unanticipated events; accordingly, pragmatic agency occurs within present-moment temporal orientations, embedded in given structures, not apart

from them: “we are not dispassionate, analytical actors. We make choices within the flow of situated activity, and emotions and personality traits – along with idiosyncratic personal histories, moral codes, and predispositions influence the choices we make in emergent situations” (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 178). Pragmatic agency is indeed influenced by aspects of one’s personality, biography and values, but it is most frequently depicted when such iterational, habitual responses are challenged, thus prompting individuals to act creatively and with novelty when patterned responses fail in the face of emerging conditions (p. 178).

Identity agency

This type of agency is closely related to the maintenance of an actor’s role within structure, and to the reassurance of the “sense of self” (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 181) within interactions. Distinct from pragmatic agency, which arises in response to troublesome events, and is pretty much bonded to the iterational temporal dimension, identity agency is goal-oriented and reflects the individual’s active appraisal of the conditions for adapting or sustaining identities which are, in their turn, constructed, challenged, internalized and modified in the course of social intercourses: “social interaction is a constant interplay between internal standards and external feedback, between self-verification and self-presentation. We modify our behavior based on feedback, and the maintenance of successful interaction relies on agentic choices”, Hitlin and Elder clarify (2007, p. 180). An interesting aspect of identity agency has to do with the reproduction of given social structures; the authors contend that within the interaction order, agentic individuals have commitments, both to themselves and to others, which are enacted and recreated within such interactions. It is precisely those commitments which might lead to the reproduction of structure, once again contrasting with the idea that an agentic demeanor is intrinsically confrontative: “what we refer to as identity agency relies on the personal autonomy we possess even while following social dictates”, they ponder (p. 181). It is worth noting that not all sorts of agentic demeanor that do not present themselves as confrontational are reproducing social structures. An individual may not depict denial attitudes, but even so not be compliant with the *status quo*; as it is the point of this chapter to explore, agency is a multifaceted concept and therefore does not fit flat and oversimplified definitions.

Life course agency

This is the type of agency which mostly resonates with Emirbayer and Mische's understanding of projectivity, here put as the actor's attempt at shaping her/his life trajectory (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 182). The central ideas of life course agency encompass two main features: the exercise of action directed to long-term interests and goals; and the "self-reflective belief" in one's own capacity to achieve projected objectives (p. 182); with that in mind, projective agency resides in an actor's current agentic choices working through her/his beliefs about "possible future selves" (p. 183). In this sense, both life course agency and the projective dimension of agency have converging rationales: a movement from who the actor is to who she/he is willing to become. The process of becoming, in such a mediatory and goal-oriented position, demands that individuals depict a fully active positioning within their life pathways, as Hitlin and Elder make clear:

> Life course agency involves individual orientations toward potential self-capacities for constructing and engaging in successful long-term plans. It highlights the variable nature of the life course at particular junctures based on social structural position and personal resources. (2007, p. 184)

In this regard, life course agency also draws upon an actor's maneuverability in relation to present, real-world circumstances, and the capacity for self-orientation and self-efficacy in relation to projected future events. It is clear, in this case, that the projective dimension of agency, or life course agency, could not exist if it were not for the actor's ability to somehow exert agency also in the present moment – although the agentic demeanor may nonetheless not necessarily be aimed at achieving an immediate outcome (2007, p. 183). All in all, life course agency exposes the interplay of agency and structure, the former being influenced by the latter, while structure is both challenged and reproduced by the individual's actions. I conclude by quoting a straightforward and didactic working definition of Hitlin and Elder's last type of agency: "Life course agency refers to individuals' capacities to orient themselves toward long-term outcomes, across social domains" (p. 183).

2.6 The agentic actor

In "The 'actors' of modern society: the cultural construction of social Aaency", John W. Meyer and Ronald L. Jepperson draw upon the idea of the actor and the modern organization of societal intercourses as the means that together construe the idea of agency. The actors to which the authors refer are not only individuals pursuing their goals, but also nation-states and

organizations which become “agents for their underlying interests” (2010, p. 107). In addition, they argue that, in modern times, actors are granted a type of agency that is the result of the decline of a religious mindset dominant in the past: the actors of modern society thus become empowered with a sort of godlike vision and authority. In this sense, the agency once attributed to a high spiritual authority figure is now repositioned within the dynamics of modern society, in its structures and rationales (MEYER; JEPPERSON, 2010, p. 105); this is what the authors call “the rationalization of representations of the spiritual world and the rise of the agentic actor” p. 105).

Structure is seen by Meyer and Jepperson as both enabling and constraining and, as they explain, its incentives and impairments work as the background conditions for agentic actions (2010, p. 100). The authors’ rationale resonates that of Giddens and Sutton, who have also highlighted the double-sided character of structure and how individuals’ responses may reinforce or challenge them (2014, p. 56). Importantly, Meyer and Jepperson pinpoint that actorhood is often seen in scholarship as a given condition, as if it were an inherent characteristic of all human beings; and that such a view can lead to an unreflective use of the term, and disregard of the proper features of an effective agentic demeanor. They contend that the terms actor, actorhood and agency should not be used with little reflexivity, or taken for granted; reflexivity, and criteria, are the path toward a solid analytical perspective on the proper features of agency.

Meyer and Jepperson have come to three important conclusions as regards actors and agency: first, they argue that the modern social system is imagined to operate via actors pursuing their goals (2010, p. 105). This perspective echoes the discourse propagated from the 1960s onwards by the new-age theorists, who criticized the overt structure-based perspective employed at the time. From this period on, emphasis was given to individuals and how they played “a creative and active part in social life” (SCOTT, 2006, p. 3). Second, they state that the modern actor is a historical and ongoing social construction (2010, p. 105); that is, actors cannot be torn apart from their social *milieu*, the macro level, since the macro level cannot be said to work as an entity in itself without taking into account the weight of agentic actions responding to its demands. Giddens and Sutton (2014, p. 54), Bruce and Yearley (2006, p. 7) and Dillon (2014, p. 11) have emphatically endorsed this positioning in their works. Ultimately, they contend that the specific features of actorhood, including anomalous and unnoticed ones, need to be accounted for (2010, p. 105). Fortunately, this is no news within agency studies, as evidenced by Judith Butler’s performativity theory, which emphasized the various means through which an individual may depict an agentic demeanor. It should be remembered that, of

the theorists cited in this chapter, it is Emirbayer and Mische who thoroughly clarified the many resourceful and innovative strategies actors draw upon in their pathways for empowerment.

Within the logistics of modernity, Meyer and Jepperson argue, the potential capacity of actors to employ a functional agentic demeanor comes from the "wider cultural system" (2010, p. 105), inasmuch as societal contingencies mold individuals who, working as authorized agents within that framework, adjust their responses in ways that corroborate their authorial stances. This wider cultural system, or the macro level, simultaneously enables actors to translate their potential abilities effectively into actual mediatory attitudes, while it also challenges their strategies for overcoming structural impairments. Although modernity, with the rise of a post-religious mindset and an emergent rationalized outlook, grants individuals a more refined sense of selfhood and acknowledgement of personal authority, it takes more than simply being rationalized and having personal or collective interests to be definitely considered an actor: "For an entity with recognized interests to be seen as a legitimate actor requires another step: the cultural construction of the capacity and authority to act for itself" (MEYER; JEPPERSON, 2010, p. 105). Therefore, some sort of active mediation in reaction to given structures is an essential constituent of the modern agentic actor. In their study, Meyer and Jepperson single out four types of agency seen in modern social intercourses:

Agency for the self

The modern agentic individual exerts her/his potentials for active mediation for the sake of her/his own purposes and interests. In these terms, the management of goals that the authors refer to resides in the actor's personality and life course (MEYER; JEPPERSON, 2010, p. 106). With that in mind, a correlation with the temporal dimensions of agency could be established, since personality is construed and reaffirmed through and within the actor's iterational character, insofar as life course agency might be paralleled with practical-evaluative and projective dimensions – and thus the actor's ability to evaluate emerging contingencies and respond in accordance also with future projects and interests.

Agency for other actors

This is the agency exerted by individuals in benefit of other actors or for the sake of a common good: "they can do this, with rapidity and facility, as employees and consultants, as friends and advisors, as voters and citizens. They can do it in exchange for resources, or as a

free good to the world around them" (MEYER; JEPPERSON, 2010, p. 107). It can also be seen, for instance, when a group of people challenge established societal hierarchical constructions with the purpose of making some structural change, which benefits not the group itself but other sectors of society; this is clear in the feminist movement, for example.

Agency for nonactor entities

By "nonactor entities", Meyer and Jepperson mean "the ecosystem, whales, trees, birds, plants, or species in general" (2010, p. 108). This sort of agency takes place when actors act in behalf of elements that are not entities in themselves but are accepted as being important instances of the cultural system. Moreover, agency for "imagined potential actors", such as minority groups, can also be placed in this category; this type of agentic demeanor comes to the fore due to "the modern actor's imagined competence in applying natural and moral law" (p. 108).

Agency for principle

This takes place when actors assume responsibility to act as agents of the imagined natural and moral law, which may happen while they are also depicting agency for the self, for other actors, nonactors or entities, otherwise the actor "risks either incompetence or corruption" (MEYER; JEPPERSON, 2010, p. 108). Through this prism, although actors operate under very general rules, and regardless of the type of agency they are deploying, an important principle or ideal may serve as their background motivation. These principles conform to higher interests, as indeed do the actors.

Modern society and its meanders are intrinsically bonded to the ideas of actorhood and agency proposed by Meyer and Jepperson since, as they have repeatedly stated, it is the modern system itself that instigates individuals' agentic potentials, leading them to become "authorized agents" for themselves – which is also linked to the main feature of the actor, its ability to act in its own benefit. In addition, the authors affirm that this "constructed capacity for responsible agency is the core of modern actorhood" (2010, p. 106), and we should not forget the power of structural forces in such a construction – a point of view which resonates with Giddens and Sutton's argumentation on society being simultaneously enabling and constraining, with individuals' active mediation and response toward these conditions being what arouses in them the potential to turn abilities into concrete, real-world practices. The assertion that modern

actors are agents for themselves, in the sense that they act in benefit not only of themselves but for the sake of a collective or common good under very rationalized standards, is true; let us also remember, nonetheless, that they are so under a social construction.

2.7 Theory as a tool: some remarks

This dissertation analyzes literary representations of immigrant characters during the Celtic Tiger period. Multiculturalism in Ireland, as a reality within Irish societal construction, was brought into being specifically from the Tiger era onwards. This is the first reason why I believe it is indisputably necessary to address it in more detail in my arguments; the second, and key, reason why I chose to approach it not only in historical terms, but also in critical and theoretical ones, is Bryan Fanning's critique on the number of ways in which multiculturalism can be operationalized, how it works as a process, with daily construction by its practitioners, and how – depending on the level employed – it may end up overshadowing inequalities instead of contesting them. In this context, in the literary representations in the short stories by Roddy Doyle, Roisín O'Donnell and Melatu Uche Okorie, I will analyze which multicultural possibility is being depicted.

Social agency was my term of first and foremost choice for the analysis of these characters. Nonetheless, it turned out to be necessary, in the course of my research, to combine it – and it is a complementary and coherent match – with multiculturalism. Since the analysis becomes richer if the context in which the characters are being placed is better understood, I investigate in significant detail not only whether they are portraying their agentic potentials, which sort of potential and how they are doing so, but also under which circumstances, and the extent to which these circumstances may be more or less constraining. In "Imaginary homelands", Salman Rushdie argues that art is capable of retrieving ideals taken over by the State, so that it – in this case, literature – can assist in creating an alternative reality, inasmuch as "description is in fact political" (1991, p. 13), and describing such realities might work as a means of re-signifying them. With that in mind, together with other criticism on how the Irish State dealt with and conducted logistics during the Tiger era, I analyze the stories as proper re-significations of immigrant experiences – since, indeed, Frank O'Connor's famous saying on the nature of the Irish short story, back in the 1960s, is still current: it gives voices to the marginalized, to those individuals "wandering about the fringes of society" (1985, p. 19), to the lonely voices.

3. YOUNG IMMIGRANTS AND SOCIAL AGENCY

3.1 "We're constantly being labelled": The social agency of immigrants in Roddy Doyle's "Black hoodie"

> *My girlfriend is Nigerian, kind of, and when we go through the shops, we're followed all the way. We stop – the security guards stop. We go up the escalator – they are three steps behind us, and there is another one waiting at the top. We look at something, say, a shoe. And people – ordinary people, like – they see the security guards looking at us, and they stop and start looking at us, in case something good's going to happen. You're never lonely if you're with a black girl, or even if your hoodie is black. There's always someone following you – 'Move along, move along' – making sure you're getting your daily exercise. (DOYLE, 2008, p. 130)*

"Black hoodie" is the seventh story in Doyle's collection *The deportees.* Its narrator, who is also one of the leading characters, tells the story of how he and two classmates ended up in Pearse Street Garda Station. One of these classmates happens to be a Nigerian girl, to whom he refers to throughout the narrative as "Ms Nigeria". He explains:

> I'm not telling you her name. And that means I can't use my own name either. Because, how many Nigerian girls is the average Irish teenager going to be hanging around with, even here in multicultural, we-love-the-fuckin'-foreigners Dublin? If I give my name, I might as well give hers. So, no. (DOYLE, 2008, p. 131)

It might be debatable whether an account that seeks to portray the immigrant's experience, but is told from the Irish perspective, can be validly described as multicultural, and this is indeed one of the reasons why Doyle's work has been severely criticized. It is, though, undeniable that in this collection this is one of the stories that deal explicitly with the issues of racism and discrimination.

The first analytical, chapter of this thesis has discussed in depth the issues faced by African immigrants in the Republic, and also how such issues vary depending on one's country of origin, gender and social background.

This chapter focuses on the portrayal of young characters in stories whose background is the Celtic Tiger and Post-Celtic Tiger periods of Ireland. My main concern is to ascertain whether this group of characters faces different struggles, and receives different treatments, due

to their age, which might detach them somewhat from the group of women previously examined. In this chapter I will give less contextual information on the characters' country or region of origin, since it is the same as that of the women immigrants discussed in the first chapter.

In Doyle's fifth story in *The Deportees*, it is unclear whether "Ms. Nigeria" is a first- or second-generation immigrant to Ireland. On the other hand, even if she had been born in the Irish Republic, children of immigrants continued to be seen as "alien", since – as noted by Fanning (2007, p. 440) – the result of the 2004 referendum was to limit the constitutional right to Irish citizenship to individuals born on the island of Ireland to the children of Irish citizens – thus supporting an "effectively mono-ethnic" view of identity, because of its explicit distinction between citizens of the nation-state and Ireland-born children of immigrants (2007, p. 440).

Research by Stevens *et al* in 2015, entitled "An internationally comparative study of immigration and adolescent emotional and behavioral problems: effects of generation and gender" sought to investigate the impact of immigration, in emotional and behavioural terms, on adolescents in ten different countries, including Ireland. The study analysed data from 11-, 13-, and 15-year-old adolescents and recorded information such as their ethnic backgrounds, life satisfaction, psychosomatic complaints, physical fighting, bullying and socio-demographic characteristics. The research used data from 2010, collected via questionnaires, in the receiving country language, applied in schools and completed in the students' classroom. One of the primary results shows the variation in immigration policies and attitudes to immigrants, with Greece and Ireland having "relatively unfavourable scores" in these categories (STEVENS *et al*, 2015, p. 4).

Several appraisals on immigration and young immigrants to the Republic endorse these findings. In "Ireland's immigrant children", Jonathan Culleton writes that "a wide body of anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that a more positive attitude exists in Ireland toward Eastern European and other 'white' immigrants" (2010, p. 266), since "phenotypical differences" play an important role in the process of integrating into society (p. 266). An interesting perspective is shown by Dianna J. Shandy in the complex discussion presented in "Irish Babies, African Mothers: Rites of Passage and Rights in Citizenship in Post-Millennial Ireland": the rites referred to in the title – becoming a mother and being born – mingle with the newness of doing so transnationally. African women's bodies have been the centre of political and popular discussion – Fanning refers to the outcome of the 2004 referendum as "a political response to immigration" (2007, p. 440): in that referendum an overwhelming majority, of more than 80% of those that voted, voted to deny citizenship to the children of immigrants

(FANNING, 2007, p. 442). With this in mind, Shandy comes to a conclusion that is useful for understanding the positioning of the young immigrant character analysed in this story:

> Irish anxieties point to a lack of clarity over whether it is possible to eventually incorporate these children into some version of a future Irish society that is similar to what is known today, or whether these children represent a transition to a completely different society. (2010, p. 825)

Stevens's findings indicate that being an immigrant adolescent, either from the first or second generation, results in relatively high levels of emotional and behavioural problems due to stress resulting from that condition (2015, p. 6); and also that these immigrants – of whatever generation – unlike their native peers, report higher levels of bullying and physical fighting, and lower levels of life satisfaction (2015, p. 6). There are also differences when it comes to gender-related issues: socialization demands may differ considerably for boys and girls, since girls are more restricted than boys in terms of autonomy and freedom of movement than boys, which may lead to the first group being more vulnerable to the conditions associated with immigration than the latter (p. 2). On the other hand, the vulnerability of young male immigrants has more to do with immigrant parents having higher academic expectations for their sons than for their daughters. Also, boys may be more likely to show emotional and behavioural struggles due to experiencing higher levels of stress than girls (p. 2). Broadly speaking, Stevens's research found that "immigrant adolescents run an increased risk of emotional and behavioral problems as compared with their native peers, and that this risk does not significantly differ between receiving countries" (2015, p. 7).

In Roddy Doyle's "Black hoodie", the female immigrant character, a schoolgirl, along with two of her classmates – who are "nationals", seem to be quite aware of the system that is operating, and its impact on societal norms and conducts. Summarising: the Nigerian girl, the narrator and another boy, who pretends to be disabled by using his brother's wheelchair, take part in a school project in which they have to create a mini-company. Interestingly, they opt – within the project – to conduct an "experiment" in which they prove people to be racist. When asked by the puzzled teacher about their idea for the mini-company, the Nigerian girl explains that:

> – We are all labelled and stereotyped…
> – Because you're black?
> – Because I'm young, says Ms Nigeria. – And, yes, because I'm black . . . Well, myself and my colleagues here – and she points at me and the other fella – are going to establish a consultancy firm, to advise retail outlets on stereotyping of young people, and best practice towards its elimination". (DOYLE, 2008, p. 134-135)

The project consists of going to shops, starting with small shops in Dublin city centre, in which the Nigerian girl (due to being black), and the narrator (due to his using a black hoodie) would be the centre of attention, while the boy in the wheelchair – harmless in the eyes of the shop owners – would steal sweets, ice cream or even packages of microwave popcorn. When their action is finished, they talk to the manager and explain what has been done and how they got to do it, returning what has been "stolen." Their company, then, would seek a consultancy fee, for the service of helping to eliminate prejudicial behaviour on the part of the staff.

Although the story is told from the Irish point of view, the immigrant character is represented as a young girl with a tremendously impressive personality. Having the idea for the project, she demonstrates high awareness of her positioning in the country's social construction. In "Multiculturalism in Ireland", Bryan Fanning questions the extent to which Ireland was a multicultural society in ideological and political terms, affirming that "multiculturalist perspectives are governed by underlying concepts of social justice and equality" (2002, p. 181). Clearly, these concepts do not appear to be in operation when a teenage girl is discriminated against for being black, and in company of a boy using a black hoodie. The shops' discriminatory attitude would appear to be a reflection of institutionalized racism, in this case the "inability or unwillingness of organisations and institutions to take into account societal diversity in the provision of services" (p. 180).

The group's certainty that their experiment would prove people to be racist and discriminatory would indicate how familiar they are with such events. The Nigerian girl shows a strong self-confidence in who she is, and what she is capable of doing. Compared to the Irish boy (the narrator), for instance, she appears far from being an ordinary teenager, and this is clear not only when her voice is heard, in the narrative, but also in how she is represented in it. An example is the dialogue which took place between her and a police officer at the Garda Station after the three of them have been caught by the police as they conducted their experiment at a huge department store:

> – You, says the new Garda.
>
> He's pointing at Ms Nigeria.
>
> – Shut your sub-Saharan mouth.
> – Excuse me? She says; but it's not really a question.
>
> He stares at her.
>
> – You can't say that, she says. (DOYLE, 2008, p. 141)

The racist demeanour towards the girl, by an authority, is shockingly explicit. Unfortunately, this attitude is not further problematized in the story by the girl herself, although

the narrator, later, confronts this police officer, notifying him that he would be reported to the authorities for "using racist language intended to inflict hurt on a member of an ethnic minority" (DOYLE, 2008, p. 150). Throughout the narrative the girl reasserts her posture, corroborating Meyer and Jepperson's conception of the modern agentic actor as one who makes all sorts of efforts to assume and express their capabilities (p. 107), but who is also doing this in favour of a wider cause. Since they are acting under a specific social construction, which is the result of past events being negotiated under present circumstances, these actors, such as this Nigerian immigrant, carry "responsibility not only to reflect self-interest but also the wider rationalized rules conferring agency" (MEYER AND JEPPERSON, 2010, p. 107). This young Nigerian girl challenges current structural fault lines precisely by confronting and exposing institutionalized racism and discrimination. While many might have remained silent, this young girl acknowledges such constructions, and takes a stand in changing them. As Seglow states: "social circumstances demand a response" (2003, p. 156), and challenging the weak multiculturalism in the society of which she was now a member is certainly a good one on her part.

It is also possible to place this girl, and her peers who take part in the school project with her, within the "projective dimension" of agency, as discussed by Emirbayer and Mische in "What is agency?". These authors' thorough overview on the concept, and their attempt at broadening such a debate, have been presented in other chapters and sections of this thesis. It is nonetheless worth revisiting some of the core aspects examined by them. The projective dimension is the second of three in what they call "the chordal triad of agency": it refers to the actor's capability of inventively creating new possibilities for thought and action by employing and resorting to "imaginative engagement" of agentic demeanour – the projective dimension of agency – in which, by doing so, the actor is able to shape and direct future possibilities (1998, p. 984).

This is precisely the outcome expected by "Ms. Nigeria" and her peers in Doyle's "Black hoodie". Unhappy with the ongoing societal state of affairs, as regards racism and prejudice experienced by certain groups of people in daily life, this group of young people, led by the immigrant character, propose a radical and concrete intervention, aiming at raising awareness in the very people taking part in such dysfunctional mechanisms. The particular action of extending the project to beyond the school gates – thus moving beyond theory and effectively tackling the problem – endorses the view of this character as a girl whose agentic demeanour is being unarguably demonstrated: "in proposing new social ends as well as different means for arriving at them, actors draw upon – and sometimes extend, rearrange, and transform – the master frames extant in the broader political culture" (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE,

1998, p. 993). Throughout the narrative "Ms. Nigeria" shows herself to be unafraid, as well as assured in relation to the project, and there is not a single moment in which she seems to share other people's apprehension and uncertainty about it. She also functions as the one who unites the other pupils of the group, perhaps because she is the individual whose personal experience has the closest fit with the subject matter of the project they are carrying out.

In accordance with the ideas presented by Emirbayer and Mische, who assert that the processes of agentic demeanour are temporally embedded – that is, oriented towards the past, present or future which, in their turn, are correlated to the social engagement of situated actors, I turn to the discussion of Hitlin and Elder, also grounded on the study of temporal orientation and the variants of an individual's agentic capacities. On the same lines as Emirbayer and Mische, these authors contend that:

> Agentic actions involve differential orientations toward the present and the future. Temporal orientations can be analytically separated and implicate different aspects of the self within action. Individuals shift their time horizons based on the problems that emerge within situated interaction. (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 175)

With that in mind, I have selected an excerpt of "Black hoodie", which I split into two parts, to be analysed focusing on the point of view of "self within action". The fragment I select is the moment at which, after being caught "stealing" in a department store "much loved by Dublin's mammies" (DOYLE, 2008, p. 137), the group of teenage pupils is taken to the police station at Pearse Street. The narrator, the boy who, in the opening citation to this section, referred to "Ms. Nigeria" as his girlfriend, is extremely frightened, imagining – and sharing with the reader – the most catastrophic possibilities for what the police officers could possibly do to them. He is also carefully examining the girl's behaviour in relation to the possible outcome of their enterprise that day:

> She's angry – you should see her eyes –. But she's calm. It's amazing. She's a girl – she's the girl, like, the only one in this part of the cop-shop. But she's the only one not blabbing or crying, or both. She stares at the cop. He's not even looking at her but he feels it. Like, the rays from her eyes. They burn the arse hair off him, or something. He looks at her.
> – What?
> – You have no right to speak like that, she says. (DOYLE, 2008, p. 142)

In this first half of the excerpt, the reader becomes familiar with how the girl is seen, in this particular context, from an outside perspective, and specifically how her body language is interpreted by the narrator – which stands out in his point of view due to her assertive and unalarmed posture. She does not seem to fear the authority of the police officers as much as the narrator, nor does she bow to the officers' often intimidating demeanour towards them. While

the boy avoids eye contact with the "cops" and keeps his head down most of time (to his own shame, as the reader notices in the boy's report), the girl "stares at the cop" (p. 142), in a manner which shows that she's not casually glancing over at them, but that she is visually questioning their conduct. Although she does not get to properly debate with the officers, she is assertive in her verbal message: "you have no right to speak like that" (p. 142). In Hitlin and Elder's discussion, they claim that some "circumstances may require heightened attention and thus extensive conscious control" (2007, p. 175), an idea that seems to describe this young girl's attitude at the Garda Station. In this sense, one can say that Ms. Nigeria is pragmatic, and so is portraying the associated – pragmatic – type of agency, which comes to the fore when an individual focuses her/his attention "most strongly on the present moment within problematic situations" (FLAHERTY QTD. IN HITLIN AND ELDER, 2007, p. 178).

The second half of the excerpt shows the authorities' response to the girl's intervention, immediately after she verbally reprimands them:

> It's like, for a second, she's the cop. But then it changes. He catches up with her – that's what it looks like. He stands up real straight, so he's looking down at her and all of us.
>
> – If I was you, love, he says, – I'd keep my mouth shut for a while.
>
> She looks back at him.
>
> – And don't worry, he says, – We don't torture people in this country. Amn't right, lads? (DOYLE, 2008, p. 142)

The boy's narration of the scene discloses his view of this as being, somehow, a power game – and one in which the young people are clearly at a disadvantage. On the other hand, Ms. Nigeria is not fearful of the officers' attempt at exerting their authority over them. For a brief moment, there seems to be even role-playing in progress – indicated by his perception that, for a moment, she was acting like the cop – thus, demonstrating some sort of command. This soon changes when the 'real cops' take over the situation in an attempt to show the young lady that she cannot possibly be in a position of questioning or telling them what they could or could not do. The officer's mocking response serves not only as a means of regaining control of the situation, but also of abashing the girl. Even so, differently from her peers who are clearly afraid, she maintains her posture and reaffirms her non-verbal communication by directing her gaze at them even more firmly. On the other hand, the officers – especially the one who talks to the girl – show a quite unprofessional and disrespectful demeanour.

This particular officer tops out his reprehensible attitude with an explicit attack on the girl's origins: "and don't worry… we don't torture people in this country" (DOYLE, 2008, p. 142). As a figure of authority, this officer's action exposes his lack of preparation for dealing

with such events. This, in itself, coming from an authority who represents the laws of the State, is in itself a source of severe concern. Whether this is an isolated case or not, one can characterize his stance as misfeasance.

The issue is finally resolved at the Garda Station when the parents of the adolescents arrive. It is also worth highlighting the posture of Ms. Nigeria's father, whose "voice takes over the room, and the station, and the street" (p. 151), as reported by the narrator. He interrogates the officers as to the reasons why they have kept his daughter incarcerated, arguing that such a thing as accusing her of shoplifting is "ridiculous", for the school project is "a quite legitimate business venture" (p. 152). After "throwing the dictionaries" (p. 152) for a while, Ms. Nigeria's father manages to resolve the matters in question, and they all leave the Station together.

In consonance with the elements of agency mentioned above, one may also link the group's project and its objectives with another type of agentic dimension, discussed by Meyer and Jepperson: agency for other actors, that is, when a group of people challenges established societal hierarchical constructions with the purpose of making some structural change, which benefits not the group itself but other sectors of society. This of course is the purpose of the "labelling project" carried out by these pupils – from the start they make it clear that their goal was to "advise retail outlets on stereotyping of young people, and best practice towards its elimination" (DOYLE, 2008, p. 135). In that sense, Meyer and Jepperson explain that "Individuals in an instant can advise others of their true interests, or can participate in complete good faith as advisors and consultants to organizations that they might have known nothing about previously" (2010, p. 107). Moreover, actors may exert such agency in an exchange of resources – as exemplified by the group's intention to be paid for their advice – as well as for providing "a free good to the world around them": elimination of stereotypical conducts towards a certain group of people.

The girl's attempt, via the project, to raise awareness on labelling and stereotyping also demonstrates exercise of action directed to long-term interests and goals, which fits the idea of *life course agency* proposed by Hitlin and Elder (2007, p. 182). With the aim of advising outlets on stereotyping and consideration of practices towards its elimination, the main character is acting in the projective sphere – in which an actor's current agentic choices work through her/his own beliefs about "possible future selves" and experiences. Hitlin and Elder, in their discussion, indicate that one's identity selection takes place during major transitions which "fundamentally affect the self" (p. 184), such as the transition to adulthood:

> These transitions are normative, but they allow for personal discretion; within limits, the timing and order of these choices are up to individuals. Such limits can be both

> biological and structural; we do not have the power to become richer, or smarter, or often to accumulate resources that enable more privileged individuals more options. Much of sociology focuses on the limits and social structural constraints that channel people's choices. What can be lost, however, is the fact that within these limits, choices are made. Agency is present. (Hitlin and Elder, 2007, p.184)

In other words, life course agency reflects the individual's capacity for self-orientation and self-efficacy in relation to projected future events, via the actor's ability to somehow exert agency also in the present moment. Echoing Emirbayer and Mische's explanation on the projective dimension of agency, which mostly resonates with an individual's future expectations, life course agency also strongly correlates with the interplay between individuals and social structures, taking into account the ways in which the latter impact an individual's agentic potential (p. 184). It is also worth noting that the projective dimension of agency leads actors to a mediatory enterprise that leads them to "move 'beyond themselves'" into future projections, building connections between where they are and where they want to be. That is, certainly, also the case of "Ms. Nigeria" who, working in favour of other actors and also resorting to the projective and life-course spheres of agency, is aiming for a broader and deeper change in ongoing and future societal structures.

In relation to multiculturalism in Doyle's "Black hoodie", in Bryan Fanning's overview on the topic, he singles out certain "multicultural possibilities" which can be identified in plural societies: of the range from over-assimilation to strong multiculturalism, the Republic might be classified as a society which shows a "very weak multiculturalism," that is, one characterized by "cultural disparity rather than parity" (2002, p. 179). In contrast to a strong multicultural society, which has anti-racism policies, weak multiculturalist environments have some acknowledgement of racism as embedded in society, although the structural inequalities caused by it are not acknowledged (p. 183-184). Fanning argues that "multiculturalisms stand to be evaluated by their explanations of and responses to inequalities encountered by black and ethnic minorities" (p. 182), and since such responses might not have come from state policies, at least not in the early stages of multicultural Ireland, it might have been left to other sources to challenge these realities: literature is a crystal-clear case.

In "Black hoodie", Doyle portrays a society which is, on many levels, unprepared for dealing with prejudice and racism as attitudes and actions embedded in everyday social interactions. Indications of this include the confused and unsettled reactions of the teenagers' teacher when they first present the idea of the project to her, and the approach and treatment they – especially "Ms. Nigeria" – receive at the police station. The officers' outrageous conduct towards the young girl, indeed, corroborates the urgent need for such a project to exist. Also, it

endorses the argument that a "weak multiculturalism" is the sort of policy (or lack of it) being put into effect – since the Garda, as an official institution, should be the first agent seeking to assure an equal treatment for each and every individual living under its rules. If the officers, who are expected to conduct this process in a manner that is respectful and lawful, do so in a manner that is so brutal and prejudicial, what could one expect from ordinary people? Would they be punished if caught insulting and ill-treating minorities? Doyle's narrative effectively raises this question.

If art has the power of politicizing reality and if writing is a politicized act, so Doyle – by writing an entire collection on multicultural Ireland – is indeed making his share of contribution to this endeavour, not by altering the facts, but by exposing them. By highlighting society's overt racist and discriminatory demeanour towards the Nigerian immigrant in "Black Hoodie," Doyle is certainly challenging the weak multiculturalism that he portrays. However harsh the criticism that has been written about his multicultural enterprise, his effort to bring an unavoidable reality from the periphery to the centre of people's thinking should be, at least, regarded as an act of courage.

The Nigerian immigrant in "Black hoodie" not only represents agency for the self, in favour of her own interests, but also depicts what Meyer and Jepperson call "agency for other actors," in that the attempt to bring up the issues of racism and discrimination by offering the consultancy service to shops might lead to a change in people's behaviour and mindset which may be considered a "free good to the world around" her (2010, p. 107).

Seglow's description seems an appropriate description of this girl's endeavour:

> "As cultural agents remake their worlds and endow them with cultural meaning, they revise the contexts within which apparently immutable values are defended and maintained" (2003, p. 163).

3.2 "WE'RE NOT FROM AFRICA! WE'RE FROM THE NAVAN ROAD!": The social agency of immigrants in Roisín O'Donnell's "How to be a billionaire" and "Crushed"

> *It's too bad Shanika walks past my desk just when I've got my hand in my mouth, messing with the tooth that's bothering me. Shanika's got freckles on her nose and she's got hair like autumn. She's the only kid in our class that's Irish, apart from Felix, who says he's from Cork, but I know he's Nigerian like me. My brother Ezekiel always says Forget It Kingsley, Shanika's never gonna fancy you. But one time when we were washing our hands after doing Art, Shanika's hand touched mine, and I felt sort of funny, and ever since then I've just known I like her and nothing can stop it. (O'DONNELL, 2016, p.22)*

3.2.1 "How to be a billionaire"

"How to be a billionaire", the first of two stories in Roisín O'Donnell's collection, tells the story of the Obinwanye brothers, Irish-born children of Nigerian parents, now based in Edenmore, a district in the north side of Dublin. Kingsley is the eldest, and the first story is told from his point of view, allowing him to report how he feels about the relations established within the school environment – which is, in this initial moment, the most important setting for understanding the dynamics in these brothers' journey.

The narrator makes numerous references to Kingsley's eleven-month younger brother, Ezekiel, who is in the same class; to the girl who makes him feel sort of funny, Shanika; to school authorities – mainly Miss Lacey, one of his teachers; and to the Principal[7], whose name is not revealed. Kingsley is not like the others: "I've got special needs," he clarifies, right at the beginning of the story, "and I Need Time out coz sometimes people piss me off, and sometimes I can't do stuff" (2016, p. 23). The main character's disorder is not specified[8], but he does share some of his struggles, such as a huge difficulty in concentrating, and apparently a cognitive delay: "I'm ten but I'm still in Fourth Class coz I had to repeat Junior Infants, coz I was so crap

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[7] The Principal is always written with the first letter capitalized. Along with hers, the names of the parents also remain unknown throughout the story. I discuss these narrative choices further in this analysis.

[8] In "Crushed", it is mentioned that, at the age of six, Kingsley was prescribed methylphenidate, which is a central nervous system stimulant, acting by affecting chemicals in the brain and nerves that contribute to hyperactivity and impulse control. It is commonly prescribed for treating attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and narcolepsy. Retrieved from: https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/methylphenidate-adults/ and https://www.drugs.com/methylphenidate.html.

they made me do it *Twice*" (2016, p. 23). It can also be noticed, via this excerpt, that either this young boy has quite low self-esteem and an accentuatedly negative view of himself, or he is merely reproducing what he has possibly heard from adult figures – at school or at home. At such a young age, and considering Kingsley's circumstances, I doubt he had come to such conclusions completely by himself. In fact, he discloses some intimate aspects of his life which demonstrate that he was not positively supported by most of the people either in the sphere of his education or his family.

Kingsley is often punished for his "mis"behaviour, while from his perspective he was merely responding to the events happening around him. Once, for instance, he is taken to the principal's office to discuss his demeanour towards Shanika, a classmate whom he has obstinately sought to bond with. The principal leaves the room and, in the meantime, Kingsley colours all the pictures he sees in the frames, for he felt that the people on it were a bit too pale: "I coloured the teachers faces brown, dark brown and yellow. Then I got excited and coloured a few more of them pink, red, green, blue. I coloured the Principal in the Ireland colours. . ." (2016, p. 34). The principal had, actually, left the room for only three minutes, and is shocked by the pupil's speed in achieving this in her absence, about which he sagely explains: "I was the Usain Bolt of colouring in" (p. 34). What stands out most explicitly, though, is not Kingsley's colouring ability in itself, but his understanding on why he was so good at doing it: "When you're a Special Needs kid like me, colouring in is all you get to do" (p. 34). That is, despite his being in need of special assistance on the part of the educational system, which would allow him to develop his cognitive capacity via pedagogically accurate means, none of that is provided to him – several times he is withdrawn from his classroom, and withheld from the social interactions that the other kids have access to, only to be left in a small room with an untrained teacher, colouring in.

In the book chapter "New school, new system: the experiences of immigrant students in Irish schools", Merike Darmody, Emer Smyth, Delma Byrne and Frances McGinnity discuss the policies and practices of the Irish school system in relation to minority groups. An interesting aspect of these authors' approach to the theme is their focus on the point of view of young people in the school environment, regarding them as "active agents, who can shape their relations with teacher and peers" (2012, p. 286). Young immigrants' experiences in the school environment, though, are not straightforward, and may differ significantly depending on the pupil's background – social class, ethnicity, family support and access to information. The high volume of inward migration challenged the State's *modus operandi* on many levels, and the educational system also felt its impact; in 2006, nearly 7% of Irish school pupils in the 5-19-

year-old age group were foreign nationals (2012, p. 284), and in 2007, it was estimated that immigrant students constituted approximately 10% of the country's primary school pupils and 6% of its secondary school pupils (SMYTH QTD. IN DARMODY *et al*, 2012, p. 284). Within this group, it was estimated that 40% of immigrant children came from English-speaking countries; and within this 40% the number of Africans was higher than the number of Asians, while the opposite was the case in the general population (p. 284). The authors say that this ethnic diversity "has presented challenges to schools who previously catered to a relatively ethnically homogenous student intake, mainly Catholic, white and mono-cultural" (DARMODY *et al*, 2012, p. 283).

In "How to be a billionaire", the school authorities are clearly unprepared to deal with Kingsley: being a child with special needs, he turns out to be a minority within the minority group. Fanning observes that, in spite of the willingness of education professionals to offer better assistance to minority groups in school environments, they lacked training and support from the State: teachers "found themselves acting as amateur social workers at the expense of their role as educators," and "strove to make up for the deficiencies of the educational system with little or no training on issues relating to diversity, ethnicity or racism" (2002, p. 192). In O'Donnell's stories, especially in "How to be", in which the most significant events take place in the school setting, Kingsley counts on the support of Miss Lacey, his "Learning support teacher"[9] (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 23). Miss Lacey takes action when the regular teacher is no longer able to keep Kingsley in tune with the class, mostly due to his lack of concentration, and his struggle to understand what is to be done in some of the class activities. We learn that nobody has explained to Kingsley why he is taken out of the class to the support teacher's small room "to read and write and do maths stuff" (p. 23), but he infers that it is due to his special needs condition.

Although Kingsley's relationship with Miss Lacey appears to be one of the least troublesome in the plot – since she is one of the adults who shows him the most patience and

[9] "The role of the Learning-Support Teacher is to optimize the teaching and learning process so as to "enable pupils with learning difficulties to achieve adequate levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy before leaving primary school". That is to be achieved via the implementation of whole-school policies and approaches targeted at this specific group. Such policies establish a means of bringing together the work of teachers, parents and other actors. The activities of these professionals may be classroom-based or in the learning-support room." (Learning Support Guidelines, 2010, p. 15).

understanding – it seems to be hard for him to bond with her as he did with Cathy, his "Special Needs Sistant"[10] (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 28)

> Things were better when I had a Special Needs Sistant called Cathy. She was good. She always helped me do stuff, but she helped me real sneaky like, so nobody knew she was helping me. If some kid started pisstaking me, Cathy said pass me your work this second! And then she'd find some mistake in that kid's work, and then she'd Give Out Buckets, and then that kid would stop pisstaking me for sure. (p. 28)

With all the particularities it involved, the roles required of Cathy and Miss Lacey were indeed challenging. Cathy was nonetheless successful in her approach to Kingsley, because it was affectionate, supportive and nurturing. This is shown, for instance, by the way he refers to her, calling her by her first name instead of her surname. He also mentions that one day he had not brought lunch, so Cathy bought him a sausage roll "and it was good and flaky and Cathy said *You Messy Wee Thing* and we both laughed and laughed and I felt sort of happy" (p. 29). Kingsley does not seem to have such a close relation relationship with the other school professionals mentioned: the general tone is that – in contrast to Cathy – they were not as concerned to open up, so as to create a bond with him; indeed they did not show a single sign of being caring or hospitable towards him. On the mechanisms in schools in general, Darmody *et al* write:

> Irish schools had little prior experience of catering for a diverse student intake, and, at least in some respects, were required to rapidly adjust their provision and practice to reflect their new students. In addition, teacher training has not adequately prepared teachers for the newly multicultural student body. (DARMODY *ET AL*, 2012, p. 295)

In 2002, at the height of the Celtic Tiger period, not only were the Irish State and its microspheres getting used to the new multicultural reality, but Special Education in the country was also still in its infancy in terms of official regulation. Although there had been significant changes in government policies since the early 1990s, it was only in 1998 that the statutory basis for policy and practice for all education provision was established in the Education Act, which showed a specific attempt at including children and young people with disabilities and/or special educational needs. Further legislation, such as the Equal Status Act, enacted in 2000 and amended in 2004, "ensured equitable access to and delivery of special educational provision

[10] Differently from the Learning-Support Teacher, the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) provides non-teaching care support for pupils who have care needs resulting from a disability, behavioral difficulties or a significant medical issue. SNAs are allocated to schools to work with children who have specific care needs. (Retrieved from Citizen Information Website: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary_and_post_primary_education/going_to_primary_school/special_needs_education_primary_schools.html#l05c3d)

as discrimination is prohibited on nine grounds, one of which is disability" (SHEVLIN, 2016, p. 196). The Equal Status Act announced schools' obligation to meet the needs of a child with disability, ensuring the pupil's participation in school life – specifically, providing reasonable accommodation, including special treatment, facilities and adjustments (p. 196).

With official policies at such an early stage in the period in which O'Donnell's narrative is placed, it is unsurprising that full access to appropriate support for Kingsley would be lacking, leading to some degree of neglect in his formal education. Darmody *et al* note that "school is […] the first setting where being an 'insider' or an 'outsider' is actively negotiated between pupils and teachers" (DARMODY *et al*, 2012, p. 284).

In this story, Kingsley is doubly positioned as an outsider: as a second-generation immigrant and as a special needs child. He is repeatedly withdrawn from the dynamics of the class, and not many attempts are shown, on the part of school authorities, to bring him to take part – whenever possible – in those processes. Integration, thus, turns out to be a huge constraint on his journey, and he ends up facing one more challenge in the process of "fitting in", since school, for immigrant children, is the primary source of contact with the majority culture and thus a highly important environment for acquiring culturally relevant knowledge, and learning how to use it to navigate social intercourse. As Darmody expresses this:

> immigrant students […] depend on positive social interaction with peers and teachers in order to plot a course through the new educational system and to translate newly acquired social and academic knowledge into success both in and beyond school (DARMODY *et al*, 2012, p. 285-286).

When this process fails in its purpose, the whole "outsider" experience becomes more troubled and onerous. The lack of appropriate support for immigrant pupils, which could give them the chance to fully integrate into the important and decisive sphere that is the school environment, as discussed by Fanning, adds an extra issue to a context in which the existing, unalterable conditions were already a source of considerable stress and restraint.

Is there, ultimately, space for an agentic demeanour in Kingsley's experience? Hitlin and Elder's understanding of "existential agency" resonates with the construction, in the narrative, of the character of Kingsley: a seemingly powerless child who is, from a very young age, challenged with a series of impairments and constraints in social intercourses. These authors contend that "existential agency" is "inherent in social action, and as such is a universal human potentiality" (2007, p. 177). Here lies the key factor: although it is a universal force for proactive performance, having the capacity for action is not the same as self-efficacy – acknowledgement of that potentiality (p. 177). Kingsley's posture could, therefore, be seen

primarily through the lens of "existential agency" since, as a child, he had not had enough time to acquire a social repertoire, and mature his understanding of the societal working mechanisms in which he is inserted.

Further, the first-person narration enables us to be informed about the main character's responses to and impressions of the events surrounding him, which attest that his behaviour and understanding is far from being an unreflective one. But we must not forget that Kingsley is a 10-year-old special needs child who, through his thoughts and actions, manifests strongly the naivety proper to this age group. This is seen clearly in his response when he is reprimanded by the principal for having coloured the teachers and students in the pictures at her office: "The Principal told my Mam that I've got Anger Issues, but I wasn't angry at the moment. I was pretty happy, looking at all those colourful teachers and all those smiling kids underneath. I could have looked at that all day" (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 34).

Akin to this, Hitlin and Elder's perspective on agency is based on the idea of it being temporally embedded and historically situated, since individuals "do not simply passively experience time" (p. 174), they actually shape their experience of time, whether by enactment of socially valued activities, or by resisting them. These authors provide an interesting example on how individuals can model their experience of time: being prompt is a form of enacting socially valued experiences, whilst passing time when bored in a college lecture is understood as resistance (p. 174). This precisely portrays Kingsley's attitude when in the principal's office; left alone by her absence to attend to some other problem, even if only for a couple of minutes, Kingsley feels the urge of "passing time" by colouring the pictures in the room. He is not enacting what would be socially expected from him: quietly and passively waiting for the principal's return. This action is completely in consonance with the view that agency […] occurs at the level of the actor's control over his or her self-experience (p. 174) – as noted by Barresi (quoted in HITLIN AND ELDER, 2007, p. 174), such skills are learned at around three or four years of age.

Although the school is the main background setting in the narrative construction of "How to be a billionaire", the narrator and main character gives some hints about his family members and their position(ing) within that environment. It becomes clear that Kingsley is as overlooked by the school as he is by his family, especially by his mother, the only adult in his home and the one who was supposed to be in charge of and well-informed about her children's schooling and social liaisons. At one point Kingsley is taken to the Principal's office to explain a fight he has had with Marcel, a Bulgarian classmate who had said he was gay. Kingsley had punched the boy's face, and ended up getting a detention. The warning letter, sent to his mother,

was nonetheless never read, as he informs us in his statement: “my mam don’t even care about no letter” (O’DONNELL, 2016, p. 26).

We learn from Kingsley’s testimonial that his father is no longer in Ireland with them, and that his older sister, Faith, has moved to Galway as “she always said she would” (p. 26). Although there are only a couple of lines dedicated to her, Faith is portrayed as a very brave young woman, who would not stay quiet in the face of the often racist and xenophobic comments the family received. Kingsley explains that Faith “used to be the boss”, and that nobody would mess with her, for she brooked no offense and showed herself to be unafraid in confronting bullies. Once, for instance, he remembers they were all having dinner when some guys shouted “GO BACK TO AFRICA!”: “Well Faith just slammed her knife and fork down and shouted back WE’RE NOT FROM AFRICA, WE’RE FROM THE NAVAN ROAD![11]” (p. 26). Now, nevertheless, Faith[12] is gone and, in Kingsley’s words, there is “no boss in sight” (p. 26).

With no one else to be in the front line, and Kingsley and his brother appearing to be abandoned to their fate, it is no wonder that he does not nurture any positive feelings towards the place where he is living. He seems to be doubly displaced: he does not feel completely a part of that society, and he also seems not to relate to his family’s Nigerian background, in the sense of cultural belonging. At one point the teacher – after explaining a little about her origins and describing the place she used to live as a child – asks the pupils to write about where they come from. The request is made clearly as a reference to the pupils’ or their parents’ country of origin – since nearly all of the students in that class do not have an Irish background. Kingsley, nevertheless, does not seem to realize the implicit task: he does not make the connection to the idea of talking about somewhere else (Nigeria), especially since everything that he has known, justifiably, since he was born in Ireland, refers to his life in Dublin – which in turn is not quite as catchy and appealing as the one the teacher had described to the pupils. He explains:

> Where I’m from on Hunter’s Run is a block of flats that’s not finished. The stairs are filled with flyers saying *Buy One Get One Free, Sky TV, Macari’s Takeaway*. There’s a lift that’s normally broke. Behind the flats there’s this place everyone calls Wasteland. It’s where more flats were going to be, but I guess they never finished it, so now it’s just mud and bits of bricks and weeds and long grass and bits of stuff like somebody’s door or somebody’s window. (p. 27)

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[11] Navan Road runs, on the north side of the city, through the postcodes Dublin 7 to Dublin 15.

[12] Whereas some characters remain unnamed throughout the story, O’Donnell seems to make a point of playing with the names of some others. When Kingsley’s older sister leaves their home, everything appears to be falling apart since “Faith is gone”. Later in “Crushed”, Ezekiel would meet his wife-to-be, called “Hope”, with whom he was able to open up – someone whose presence brought a sparkle of light back to his life, after years grieving and feeling guilty for a tragedy in the family.

> All the other kids in the class are writing, but I don't know what to write. I wonder what Shanika's writing about. Bet she's writing something real good. There's nothing to write where I'm from. No fields or apple trees or big farm kitchens or cakes or Rambling Hills or nothing. (p. 27)

From this excerpt, Kingsley's lack of emotional and affective bonding with the place he considers himself to come from becomes clear: his perspective contrasts with that of his teacher, who gave a sensitive description of her childhood days, reminiscing about her family and the house in which she lived. On the other hand, not only does Kingsley not fulfil the task as expected – he actually did not do the writing activity, he started writing his name in graffiti style, inspired by the graffiti he saw on the big metal huts behind his block of flats – but the portrait he offers to us, readers, is a very crude and descriptive one. This not only underlines his lack of emotional bonding to his home, but also shows he is not as inattentive and disconnected from reality as the adults in the story may think. Possibly, he has not found anyone with whom he could construe a connection to the point of opening up about his perceptions, as well as having a quite explicit struggle in verbally articulating his ideas.

As mentioned above, agency can be seen as both a temporal and a dialogical process. This is the view of Hitlin and Elder (2007), and also the basis of Meyer and Jepperson's appraisal on agency, which sees it as a "chordal triad" of past, present and future frameworks for different agentic potentials. In this theoretical frame Kingsley's journey and capabilities can be placed in the "practical-evaluative" dimension of agency, which has to do with one's response to challenging events here and now. Judgements and choices are made in such contexts under considerable ambiguity, uncertainty and conflict, and possible consequences would demand, from actors, changes in strategy and direction. In this sense, actors gain in the capacity to make considered decisions that may challenge received patterns of action by deliberating with others or by being self-reflexive "about the pragmatic and normative exigencies of lived situations" (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 994). The capacity for practical evaluation strengthens in the actors the ability to exercise agency in a "mediating fashion", granting actors the chance of challenging and transforming situational contexts of action (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 994).

Kingsley's responses to impairments can be placed in such a framework, since the character is not seemingly acting in favour of future projects (projectivity), nor according to past events. He is, in fact, disrupting the order and the social expectations by acting in unexpected and unapproved ways. It cannot be affirmed that Kingsley is completely aware of such outer and inner mechanisms, especially since he is facing them at such an early age, equipped with little life repertoire to discern anything about the limitations constantly imposed

on him. An agentic demeanour, nonetheless, does not require the actor to be fully aware of it while exerting it; as an example, Kingsley is putting such potentials into practice when he is reacting against the passivity which is expected from him. This excerpt shows a clear example:

> Right then, Fourth Class, Mr O'Neill says, take out your Gaeilge. But I don't bother, coz there's no point when I don't understand nothing. Only Irish I know is Law Va Soo Ass. That means hands up, but I don't never put my hand up, coz I don't ever know none of the answers. So I put my head down on the table. Time for a snooze. (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 23)

Several scholars have catalogued the varying means through which an agentic demeanour can emerge: it can be overtly confrontational, or more subtle; it may be present when actors deliberately choose either to subscribe to social norms, or to subvert them. Agency, and its manifestations, constitute a plural and non-straightforward concept, and its form of execution depends on the actor's background, or may be directed toward present and future possibilities. Agency, as an inherent human potential, may be ruthlessly suppressed by the same elements which would allow its expression – and may also be manifested without the actor fully acknowledging it. Such is the case of Kingsley in "How to Be a Billionaire".

3.2.2. “Crushed”

In both “How to be a billionaire” and its sequel, “Crushed”, Roisín builds the narrative of the Obinwanye brothers’ journey through their character development. Although Ezekiel is not offered much space in the first story, it is noticeable that he exerts a deep influence on Kingsley’s behaviour and on the stance that Kingsley takes towards other characters, especially Shanika.

“Crushed” is the very last story in O’Donnell’s debut collection, and it serves two purposes; the first is to provide the reader with further detail on the Obinwanye family, for instance the parents’ early life in Ireland, the birth of Kingsley and Ezekiel in 1992, and the family’s move from downtown Dublin to the suburb of Edenmore when the boys were three. The second is to explain the set of events which, three years after the first story, led to Kingsley’s death. The narrative is told by breaking the story into three timelines: *INNÉ*, *INNIU* and *AMÁRACH* – in the Gaelic language, yesterday, today and tomorrow. The third-person narrator mingles past, present and future “mistakes” (as she/he names them), setting the tone for the background events which led to such a tragic and premature death.

Kingsley and Ezekiel work on opposing sides of the spectrum, physically, emotionally and most significantly in psychological terms: “Ezekiel was tall. Long-limbed. Always slightly pissed-off-looking. […] Kingsley, laid-back, short, good-looking” (O’DONNELL, 2016, p. 171). Whilst Kingsley’s developing agency is subject to other characters’ degree of acceptance towards him, Ezekiel’s demeanour is more explicitly confrontational. Whereas Kingsley’s self-assurance is unceasingly put to the test through the questioning of his discernment abilities, Ezekiel is frequently under-disciplined, for his “mis”behaviour does not attract the same attention as is given to his brother. Although three years have passed from “How to be a billionaire” to “Crushed”, the school’s strategy continues to be one of containment, rather of integration and understanding. Indeed, the school is just part of a wider system which was still not fully developed to incorporate the body of immigrant students into its system in a functional manner: “the dispersion of immigrant students across schools, coupled with the variety of nationality and linguistic groups in the immigrant population, meant that immigrant students could not generally rely on social networks of students from their own community (DARMODY *et al*, 2012, p. 295)”. Hence, it is quite easy to understand why integration was such a huge barrier for immigrants in a broader sense, and for school-going individuals in a more acute way.

The Obinwanye brothers end up being, although in different ways, neglected. The tenacious lack of apprehension on the part of the institution towards these brothers' conditions within and without the school walls endorses Fanning's argument that, as a common feature of a weak multicultural society, the dominant culture fails in recognizing its own active role in inflicting pain on the minority group: more than this, the majority culture transfers to the minorities the responsibility for their own troublesome experiences.

Crucial to Kingsley's narrative is his desire to strengthen ties with Shanika, the girl who he mentions to be the only Irish kid in class[13]. Not only does he aspire to bond with her, but actively engages in several attempts and inner orchestrations to call her attention. Kingsley's pure, affectionate and boyish descriptions of Shanika contrast with those of people by whom he might have felt openly ill-treated. Through his eyes, Shanika looks "so good and clean. I can't think of nothing to say to say to her coz she looks so perfect" (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 30). When he finally succeeds in being near her, he naively pictures her to the readers: "First time I realise those freckles on her nose are caramel colour, like the middle of a Mars bar, and her eyes are green, but in the middle they're orange like traffic lights when they're waiting to change" (p. 31).

Kingsley's deep aspirations towards Shanika may not be simply a puerile enchantment; it might be argued that by attempting to get closer to her, Kingsley is looking for mechanisms to cope with the feelings of non-belonging to his environment, and of being rejected by the individuals who participate in that structure. Meyer and Jepperson underline the importance of accounting for the unnoticed and anomalous depictions of autonomy (2010, p. 101), and this might well be such a case. It can also be argued that, although functioning under several constraints and limitations, not only due to being a minority within a minority, but also because of his age group, Kingsley somehow fits into the ideal of an agent managing goals which reside "in a personality or life course" (106), although due to his conditions he might not be fully aware of that.

The only time when Kingsley's positioning appears to be accounted for in wider terms is when, after an episode in which he attempts to get closer to Shanika and she ends up getting hurt, Miss Lacey acknowledges that both he and his mother need more support: "You've been Let Down by the Sis-tem Kingsley […] I know you're better than that, ok?" (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 35).

[13] Although we learn later that she was, actually, born in London. The reasons why she was considered the only Irish kid in class is an issue worth approaching.

Kingsley's enchantment for Shanika follows him to "Crushed", when, now teenagers, both he and his brother seem to nurture special feelings for the girl, causing a sort of a silent dispute between them. That is why Ezekiel's age – he is only 11 months younger than Kingsley – is indicated as one of the "mistakes": if he was, at least, one year younger, he would not be in the same class as Shanika and his brother and, perhaps, the end of the story would have been different.

The misfortune takes place in "Crushed" when Kingsley, Ezekiel and Shanika decide to play truant, going to a swimming pool. There, Ezekiel sees Shanika kissing his brother's cheek. He gets madly jealous and decides to take a different path on their way home, in spite of Kingsley's attempts at persuading him to take the same path as he and Shanika:

> But Ezekiel kept on walking, and soon the roar of the nearby M50 overpass swallowed Kingsley's shouts [...] When he reached the middle of the field, Ezekiel looked back and saw those two white guys from the morning coming down Hunter's Run in the direction of Kingsley and Shanika [...] When he looked again, he saw Kingsley with his hands spread wide, and one of the guys jabbing the air in front of his chest. His instinct was to sprint across the green to watch Kingsley's back as usual. But then he thought of Shanika in her red swimsuit, and he turned and kept walking homewards [...] This was the last mistake. (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 180)

The two white guys mentioned in the excerpt had already bumped into the trio when, earlier, they were on their way to the club. The guys, heads shaved, wearing grey tracksuits, and with a "soulless glint in their eyes" (p. 177), later noticed by Kingsley, had made monkey noises and shouted "Fuck off back to Africa" (p. 176), to which Kingsley replied by calling them losers while giving them the fingers. Kingsley seems to be very unsettled by the gravity of this attack, but Ezekiel had ignored them and tried to calm his brother down. In spite of this overtly racist demeanour, these two white guys would later demand an apology from Kingsley and, in response to his resistance, cowardly stab him to death.

Ezekiel hears Shanika's scream but he is not able to get there in time to save his brother. His absence would be a constant echo in his mind from that moment on: "Whenever he closes his eyes, he'll see Kingsley's face, as if the image is projected on the pink grape-skin lining of his eyelids" (p. 169). Shanika, who was the first to see the knife which was used for killing her friend, would also carry the weight of such trauma to her adulthood: introspection, diverse therapeutical approaches, a radical change in appearance, a growing taste for Iron Maiden and the writing of her first novel, all amongst unstable romantic relationships, would constitute her life after Kingsley's death. When she was already 24, a therapist would ask: "So, Shanika, would you say that these issues started around the time of this incident on Hunter's Run?". "Maybe", she would reply (p. 174). The "issues" may be related, also, to the anxiety that she

reported starting to feel right after the brutal death of Kingsley. através do Programa de Geração Automática da Biblioteca Universitária da UFSC.

O'Donnell's story is set in 2004, just before the citizenship referendum of that year, so that at that time all children born in Ireland were still entitled to Irish citizenship, regardless of their parents' immigrant status before the law. In this sense, Kingsley's murder, a humanitarian catastrophe as represented in the author's narrative, sends a signal for the growing public campaign which sought to question the legitimacy of granting citizenship to immigrant children. In "Irish Babies, African Mothers", Shandy witnesses the extent to which African immigrant women, especially those who came to the country pregnant or who found themselves pregnant while already in Irish territory, were seen as threats to the country's cultural homogeneity, which was regarded with pride and underlined by the country's history:

> "[…] migrant mothers and their 'Irish-born' children are subverting Irish conceptualizations of 'the nation' and 'the citizenry.'" For the Irish, many of whom, at least colloquially refer to themselves as a "race," Africans challenge this conflation of national and racial identity. While African asylum seekers were only a very small percentage of the inflow of people to Ireland, they were an extremely visible manifestation of changes besetting Ireland, principally because of their phenotypical characteristics. Therefore, while race is squarely implicated in all of this, race also indexes a larger set of issues associated with rapid societal transformation. (SHANDY, 2008, p. 824)

Fanning, in "Nationals/non-nationals: immigration, citizenship and politics in the Republic of Ireland", similarly contends that discussions on the 2004 referendum, which was approved with a vast majority, were grounded in mono-ethnic constructions of Irishness, fomented by a "process of exclusionary nation building" which, in its turn, turned Ireland into an "ethnic state" rather than a civic one (2007, p. 440). Other scenes from the narrative show subjection to racist and xenophobic offense as seemingly a constant in the Obinwanyes' experience. Kingsley's brutal fate is absolutely beyond explanations; nothing could ever justify what is done to him, a 13-year-old second generation Nigerian immigrant whose cultural and mostly phenotypical traits represented a threat to Irish citizenry, due to the unprecedented events of turn-of-the-century Ireland. While immigrant women and children in general were already feared since they challenged the white-Catholic understanding of Irishness, the children were imbued with a particularly potent sort of agency before the referendum – the year in which O'Donnell's story is set – because they were granted the chance of not only being in Ireland, but of gaining citizenship of Ireland by having been born there (SHANDY, 2008, p. 806). Being a second-generation immigrant with Nigerian roots would challenge the perception of the country's mono-ethnic and monocultural character.

"How to be a billionaire" paves the way for the character development of these two brothers, who live under very unfavourable conditions, and already shows the potential of each of them, although in differing terms. Kingsley's case, in the first story, is a tough one in that he has to cope not only with external but also with internal adverse conditions. His agency becomes evident in the first story, and its sequel – which takes place mostly outside the school boundaries – problematizes the immigrant experience at a higher level, outside of a controlled environment in which diversity is the rule, not the exception. Ezekiel, who plays a secondary role in "How to be a billionaire", comes more into evidence in "Crushed", a narrative in which he would be forever changed due to the unfortunate circumstances that followed their decisions to skip classes that day. Broadly speaking, Kingsley is placed as having fewer chances of effectively exerting his agentic potentials than his brother – but his actions do not confirm this, in that he seems to be, on many levels, much more subversive than Ezekiel.

"How to be a billionaire" exposes the fault lines not only of the Irish educational system, but also of the societal construction which Ireland found itself adopting at the outset of the twenty-first century – a multicultural society with a persistent monocultural mindset: as Fanning expresses it, 'Irish people' constitute an ideological category which reflects past claims of ethno-religious homogeneity won [...] through a process of exclusionary nation-building" (p. 185). It is not necessary to go far back into history to understand why it was so difficult to effectively embrace diversity, given the historical construction of Irishness under white and Catholic mores. The challenge to overcome such barriers, as well argued by Fanning, resides not only in people's acknowledgement of the inescapability of such reality but also in the need for official efforts to fight discrimination and racism, and legislation which might protect the underprivileged – as long as it does not, refugee children would continue to represent "bare humanity" (SHANDY, 2008, p. 824).

3.3 "It might be harsh but the truth usually is": The social agency of immigrants in Melatu Uche Okorie's *Under the Awning*

> *You got on your bus and after a while it filled up but the seat next to you remained empty although there were people standing in the small aisle. You have stared out of the window, willing the bus to move faster. A few stops later, you felt someone sit beside you. It was a white-skinned woman, but when her phone rang, she answered in a language that was not English.*
> *You got off at your stop and immediately searched out the house with the little children who always shouted 'Blackie!' at you, but there was no one at the balcony, so you hurried past with relief. (OKORIE, 2018, p. 27-28)*

The excerpt above shows the essence of Melatu Uche Okorie's metanarrative "Under the awning", the second of three stories published in 2018, by Skein Press, in the collection entitled *This hostel life*. In "Under the awning", a young immigrant girl shares her writing with the peers of the writing club in which she is a member. Before she reads them the whole work, as requested by the group leader, we get to know that the girl is, actually, a little restless and uncomfortable with this task: "outside, the weather was as unsettled as her disposition", the narrator explains. She was, in fact, expecting to read just an extract of her work – as was sometimes the request. Since it is not, since the leader has requested her to read all of it, she goes ahead, "stuttering her words" (OKORIE, 2018, p. 26). Okorie's story-within-the-story exposes the systematic racism experienced by a young Nigerian girl in the 21st century Republic, with hints of criticism of state policies, such as the 2004 referendum which approved the removal of the right of immigrant's children to citizenship with an overwhelming endorsement, by more than 80% of voters – as reported by Fanning (2007, p. 442). The names and ages of both girls, the author and the character in her story, remain unknown, which ends up blurring the line between fact and fiction, raising a doubt as to whether it is possible to detach the metanarrative from the girl's own experiences. In 2020, I had the opportunity to interview Okorie in a Round Table organized by NEI and, at the time, I asked her a question about the function of the metanarrative technique in "Under the awning", to which she replied:

> For that particular story, I found it a very useful form to write because there are some stories that you need to distance yourself from as a writer, because it might be a bit

> emotional or it might be a very tempestuous kind of issue or topic to write about, so you want to write it in a way that it is palatable to the reader, and in a way that if it is something that takes a lot of emotions from you… There are so many reasons that can come into play. For me, it was not a conscious thought to do that, it was more of something that had to happen for me to be able to present that story. With that particular story, the writing of the girl, the diary entry of the girl, was the main story that I wrote which I presented at a writer's club and then, with the comments that were given, I had to put it in another form to be able to push it out there… With the reaction that I got I knew that this was not a story that people would be comfortable reading, and so something had to be done. In some cases, like in Under the Awning, it worked out to be a great medium for the girl to be able to communicate her stress and her life to the group. (PPGI UFSC, 2020)

Therefore, the metanarrative worked, for the girl, as a means of coping with the struggles she faced in being an outsider, as well as a medium through which she could share her own experiences in a way that allowed her to untie herself from the narrative, turning it a little less personal, making it palatable – as Okorie herself explained – to the club members. In the story presented, the girl confronts the life she once knew in her homeland with the one she now endures in Ireland. The title, "Under the awning", is taken from an excerpt in which she is waiting for the drizzle to stop: "You stood under the awning, outside a Spar shop", she reckons; waiting for the rain to stop to be finally able to get the bus home, and that made her feel unsettled: "Back home, rainfall mean other things to you rather than discomfort" (2018, p. 27). Her uneasiness is seemingly connected to a sort of social anxiety, a fear of being among people who could ill-treat or look down on her. She ponders that, in her home country, "life would not stop over this 'small rain'" (p. 26), instead,

> It meant that the flat you shared with your mother's sister and her husband and your three cousins would not be stuffy. It meant that you wouldn't go to the well to fill the jelly-cans in the flat with water. It meant that there would be corn sellers lined up along your street selling your favourite fresh roast corn the next morning" (OKORIE, 2018, p. 27).

In contrast to the positive outcomes connected to such weather conditions "back home", in Ireland "you were desperate not to stand out, […] careful not to look directly at anyone, pretending not to be paying attention" (p. 27). The girl's social anxiety is thoroughly justified in the narrative, in which several examples are given, in diverse situations, in which she noticed a prejudicial attitude towards her, implicitly or explicitly, as in the case shown in the opening excerpt, in which her neighbours would shout "Blackie" at her.

As mentioned before, the girl's age is not revealed, but it is possible to infer that she is in her late teens, since her mother had enrolled her in a travel and tourism course as soon as she arrived in Ireland; that was only possible after the process of family reunification: her mother had moved first, with her two younger siblings, and she was able to join them only later.

Reflecting this, not only is the young girl struggling to fit into the new reality, but she is also facing relationship issues with her mother, whom she confesses to have blamed for leaving her behind. The mother-daughter relationship is clearly weakened, and they barely talk, which leads her to face another barrier: that of not being able to open up even to her mother about how deeply troubled she felt; her siblings, the only family members she could count on, were too young for her to be able to have this kind of conversation with them. In college, she does not report having any friends, in fact, she notices that the girls "told each other to mind their bags or made so much about their purses being in their bags whenever they wanted to use the toilet" (OKORIE, 2018, p. 36). Even worse, they have asked her where she learnt to speak English so well and "if it were true Africans lived in trees and how they could never live in hot country because they would melt" (p. 32). Displaced and judged by virtually everyone surrounding her, in every possible context, the girl does not even consider the possibility of confronting such absurdity: "You muttered an empty response, desperate not to show your real emotions, but the sadness would still come when you got home and you would cry into your pillow" (p. 32). Considering the girl's lack of appropriate support, in both the familial and social spheres, it is unsurprising that she would feel hopeless about her condition in the new reality, which she had no option other than to endure. Such hopelessness is explained by a hypothesis raised by Fanning, Haas and Boyle, in which they contend that "both familial (parental human, social and cultural capital) and environmental (levels of deprivation) factors influence child 'habitus' and wellbeing" (2010, p. 4).

As pinpointed by Shandy in "Irish babies, African mothers", the reasons why African women migrated to Ireland were as multiple and complex as their linguistic, cultural, and economic background and country of origin (2008, p. 810). Shandy interviewed women from several countries and, among the Nigerian ones, most said that one of the most significant reasons for migrating was the concern regarding the future of their children: "I want where my children will have equal opportunity and a better life" (2008, p. 816). While it is undeniable that asylum seekers and refugees had plenty of reasons for flying home, it is also debatable whether, in spite of the extensive official propaganda of Ireland as a welcoming and prosperous country, widely disseminated in the Tiger years, the opportunities given would be equal for all immigrants, especially for the unskilled labour force and non-Europeans. Plus, let us not forget that with the so-called "fall of the Tiger" after the 2008 economic crisis, unemployment levels started to rise: from 4% during the economic boom, to 6.5% in 2008, reaching 14.8% in 2012, according to data provided by Fanning in "Immigration, the Celtic Tiger and the economic crisis" (2016, p. 10). Okorie's collection *This hostel life* was published in 2018, but she started

writing it during the years she lived in the Direct Provision system; thus, it is highly probable that this was the historical context permeating the two narratives which take place in Ireland.

While the immigrant population in Ireland continued to rise during the crisis, as shown in the censuses of 2008, 2011 and 2014, contrary to general expectations of a drop in its numbers (FANNING, 2016, p. 10), the attitude towards immigrants became increasingly negative and, in spite of immigration being kept off the political radar in that period (p. 15), with Irish politics making little reference to anti-immigrant policies compared to other EU countries, "anecdotal evidence suggested a rise in racism during the economic crisis". Also, indicators of integration showed Ireland falling behind many countries in categories such as access to education, rights to family reunification and even rights to participate fully in the labour market; on this point, Fanning contends that there was, in fact, "less political commitment to integration and fewer resources put in to integration measures than in many other EU countries" (p. 13). On the other hand, whereas assumptions that migrant workers would return to their countries of origin in times of recession "have proven to be wrong", as noted by Pillar-Árgaiz and King in "Integration, migration, and recession in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland" (2016, p. 1), the state, the media and – consequently – the general public had turned its attention to more "heated concerns": contraction of the economy, the recession, the new austerity measures, and the many political and religious scandals that had recently come to the public's attention (p. 1). Thus, discussions on immigration, multiculturalism and diversity were no longer a main issue on the country's agenda. Indeed, a functional approach to multiculturalism must go way beyond mere public allusions to it – especially in terms of state claims and discourses. Fanning had already referred to this problem in his 2002 book *Racism and social change in the Republic of Ireland* (p. 184-186). The fact of such national questions being nearly completely off the radar in this period is, nonetheless, still concerning for anyone who was expecting an effective switch from theory to practice in terms of official policies.

One of the aspects thoroughly discussed by Fanning is that of integration in terms of the well-being of immigrants in a new society ("Multiculturalism in Ireland" 2002, p. 186-188). Moreover, along with Haas and O'Boyle, Fanning published a paper in 2010 entitled "Well-being, Cultural Capital and Social Inclusion: Immigrants in the Republic of Ireland" in which, through a survey of data on child, family and neighbourhood well-being, they examined the extent of immigrants' social inclusion. One of the most significant findings was that there is a strong connection between greater socio-economic deprivation and poor psychological well-being (p. 8). As well as this factor, they mention another study which concluded that "poverty and insecurity take their toll on parental mental health and detrimentally affect relationships

between parents and their children" (DUNCAN, 2005 qtd. in FANNING, HAAS and BOYLE, 2010, p. 13). This finding could help explain the troublesome relationship between the main character and her mother, whose erratic and often careless attitude towards the girl may also reflect her own inaptitude to cope with all the challenges, constraints and trouble she herself was possibly facing as a lone parent in a country in which she was only one more "outsider".

In the story, the young protagonist reveals that her relationship with her mother used to be better before they re-united. The mother, whose name is also not revealed, would tell her about life in Ireland, but she ponders: "this was at the time when you and she still talked" (OKORIE, 2018, p. 31). Now, she responds with "a familiar answer, silence" (p. 29). Their relationship has seemingly crumbled after the girl tried to communicate with her mother about the way she felt as a result of having been left behind in Nigeria, when her mother migrated with her two siblings. The girl's mother did not take this positively: "It always had to be about you", she said, walking out of the room. Real life as an immigrant might have been a shock to her mother as it was for herself, and the responsibilities as a lone parent might have taken their toll, too, on the mother's psychological wellbeing: "you were so excited to join your mother and imagined she lived in a big house and drove a big car […] In the coming months, you would find out your mother stacked shelves in a supermarket. She had been a manager at a telecommunications company before she left your father" (p. 31). Fanning's research, mentioned above, also found that single parents faced considerably greater financial difficulties than other family types:

> High levels of social need amongst lone parents were indicated in their having the highest levels of depression, lowest levels of life satisfaction, and lowest hope scores, as well as the lowest trust and reciprocity scores. For lone parents, high levels of poverty went hand-in-hand with poor psychological well-being and low levels of social capital. (FANNING *et al*, 2010, p. 18)

One could infer that both the girl and her mother are deeply troubled by the changes, which they might have expected not to be so distressing. At the same time, both seem to feel displaced in the new social context they find themselves in, while also feeling hurt towards one another in face of this new and challenging dynamic. The girl mentions that her mother has a friend called "Aunty Muna", who works in a refugee organization, and a friend called Dermot, who is also involved in volunteer work with immigrants. Although not stated, these are people with whom the girl's mother could possibly talk to in case of need. The young protagonist, on the other hand, in spite of having a cordial relation with her mother's friends, feels secluded and unseen. She ends up developing a closer bond with Dermot, who was trying to get funding

for a project for helping immigrant children and teenagers to integrate, since he did not think there were enough of this type of opportunity for these groups. With Dermot, the girl feels comfortable in sharing some of the experiences that troubled her – from her relationship with her mother, to the racist insults she has to listen to. In spite of being an approachable person, seemingly concerned with immigrants' issues and a great listener, Dermot ends up dismissing the girl's hurtful testimonials and shocking experiences: on the question of the neighbours who persistently called her "blackie", he told her not to bother about them; on the girls at college who would tell each other to mind their bags whenever they wanted to use the toilet, "he did not think they meant anything by it" (OKORIE, 2018, p. 36). Dermot, apparently involved and in and in favour of integration of immigrants, turns out to be an embodiment of the short-sighted approach to immigration and racism in the Irish state, as diagnosed by Bryan Fanning and other scholars on several occasions.

The girl's feeling of hopelessness once more comes to surface when she realizes Dermot is unable to apprehend the extent to which such experiences were being hurtful to her, and how badly they exacerbated her feeling of unbelonging. We, readers, learn that she wanted to tell him a lot more of the awful things she had been through, but she understands that it would be pointless:

> And you wanted to tell him about the woman at the church who told you that a Traveller woman had said that Travellers were no longer the lowest class since the arrival of the Africans. And you wanted to tell him about the bus driver who dropped you two bus stops away from your stop because there was nobody else apart from you still in the bus. And you wanted to tell him about the man who followed your mother to a supermarket car park and told her that he wanted a BJ, and how your mother told you she had felt bad she didn't have what he wanted until she realised what he meant. You wanted to tell him about these things but you didn't. (OKORIE, 2018, p. 36)

With this realization, frustration is once again the prevalent feeling for the protagonist: "you cried for a long time in your bed after he left, confused at how alone you felt with so many people around you and the next day, you went to the same Spar shop and bought a diary" (p. 37).

Buying a diary is the turning point in Okorie's narrative: it introduces the girl's redemption. It is the action of regaining control over her own narrative and of finding the means to tell her story and cope with it – since all the other options she had resorted to had failed. Considering that the metanarrative is an autobiographical piece, buying a diary and having the guts to share her story in a writing club is the very act of agency the girl was able to employ at that moment. While agency may be understood, in commonsense terms, as an attitude of confrontation or denial in the face of constraints, scholars have pointed out that individuals may

depict it in diverse, startling and non-straightforward ways. The girl's agency can, therefore, be appraised by understanding it in the terms put by Emirbayer and Mische, as a temporarily-embedded process, in a way that actors may exert their agentic potentials in consonance with past experiences, present impairments or future expectations (1998, p. 963). In buying the diary and daring to share it, even as if it were a piece of fiction, to an audience, the girl is resorting to a practical-evaluative conduct, that is, the type of agency which enables actors to exercise it in a mediating fashion which potentially grants them the agentic apparatus to challenge and transform ongoing situational contexts. The practical-evaluative dimension of agency mostly resonates with the actor's response to demands and contingencies of the present. As Emirbayer and Mische put it:

> The problematization of experience in response to emergent situations thus calls for increasingly reflective and interpretive work on the part of social actors. This exercise of situationally based judgment has been variously termed practical wisdom, prudence, art, tact, discretion, application, improvisation, and intelligence; here we designate it as the practical-evaluative dimension of agency. (1998, p. 994)

Reacting to real-world circumstances, and showing an evaluative positioning of in relation to the present situations she faces, the girl finds in the act of writing a means of communicating her anxieties to the world and, perhaps, finding a place of comfort and understanding. Unsurprisingly, though, the reception of her work at the writing group pretty much resembled the reaction she had received from Dermot. Her peers severely criticized the bleak and negative view presented in the story – they labelled the character as paranoid, and full of self-loathing and self-hatred. They also disapproved the second-person narration since, according to one of the members, they said, it prevented the readers from caring about the character: "I always know I'm reading a work of fiction" when the second person is used, she justifies (OKORIE, 2018, p. 37). The issue, though, is whether the girl's narrative was overtly negative, or whether the audience was not ready to accept this type of discussion. In any event the girl's courage in writing about such sensitive topics, clearly discussing much of what she had seen, and sharing it not simply with a close friend but with a group of people, leaves no doubt that this was the manifestation of her agentic potentials within an environment which ruthlessly attempted to impair that potential. It is, undeniably, an example of inventive and creative agency put into action.

The group's reception of the young protagonist's piece of writing represents a broader issue: taking a broader look, society, represented by the people in the writing club, seems to be unprepared to deal with the outcomes brought about by the new societal construction: an

environment that is no longer monocultural, revolving only around its own sustainment and needs. On the contrary, their reaction exposes a certain lack of awareness that maintaining that *status quo* no longer meets the needs of an increasingly changing milieu. On Bryan Fanning's scale of the various levels of multiculturalism, this would not even qualify to be called multiculturalism. It would still be at the phase of overt assimilation – in which minorities are pathologized, and their problems attributed to their own distinctiveness, with no sign of acknowledgement of the existence of racism ("Multiculturalism in Ireland", 2002, p. 183).

The girl, who is a representative of minorities and of a reality that is alien to the one experienced by the members of the group, and her act of agency, are nearly swallowed by the severe criticism that she receives right after finishing her talk. This harsh feedback is almost a demand by the group members for her to change the entire tone of the story so that it not be "all bleak and negative" (2018, p. 37) – as if there were any positive experience, she could possibly use to soften it a little, which of course there wasn't. The young girl is once more ostracized – this time for daring to bring to light the several occasions in which the idea of Ireland as a welcoming place has fallen apart. In the end, the group's reception only reinforces what the girl herself has exposed in her writing.

While Emirbayer and Mische give the name of "practical-evaluative" agency to the actor's response to the demands and contingencies of present circumstances, Hitlin and Elder discuss it as "pragmatic" agency, that is to say, the actor's innovative response to routine, habitual and social-patterned events when usual responses no longer function as expected by the actor. Within the temporal orientation, akin to Emirbayer and Mische's understanding of the practical-evaluative type of agency, Hitlin and Elder's pragmatic agency also occurs within present-moment orientations; thus, when one's habitual responses are challenged in the flow of situated activity, the actor must make choices within it and not abstracted from it (2007, p. 178). In addition, these authors state that pragmatic agency also works in interplay with identity agency, since "social interaction is a constant interplay between internal standards and external feedback, between self-verification and self-presentation. We modify our behaviour based on feedback, and the maintenance of successful interaction relies on agentic choices" (2007, p. 180). According to them, identity agency is closely related to the maintenance of an actor's role within structure, and to the reassurance of the "sense of self" (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 181) within interactions. Identity agency has also to do with the individual's personal autonomy for following or challenging social dictates, whether through a compliant or confrontational attitude towards them. This type of agency reflects actors not simply acting randomly, but

reacting when faced with situations that allow them to build and fulfil relevant identity commitments (2007, p. 180):

> There are certainly external sanctions, as well, that lead toward the maintenance of identities. This often occurs in situations where ascribed identities are "forced" onto individuals, as in situations of extreme racial prejudice. Such negatively valued identities may be internalized. What we refer to as identity agency relies on the personal autonomy we possess even while following social dictates. (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 181)

From this perspective it can be stated that Okorie's young protagonist makes an attempt at reinforcing her identity primarily by resorting to pragmatic agency, but combined with identity agency, since her identity performance was being severely and systematically constrained. Nonetheless, she does not do so explicitly, by confrontation; nor does she subscribe to the social dictates imposed on her; in her writing, she finds a way of stating the restraints being imposed on her, as a means of coping with those restraints while simultaneously confronting the negative identity being attributed to her via extreme racial prejudice (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 181). In sum, her act of registering through her writing the highly problematic experiences she had been through serves the purposes of both signalling her troubles to the outer world and also of internally reassuring her own autonomy and sense of self.

Going back to Emirbayer and Mische's discussion on the features of practical evaluation, it is worth noting that such potential for agentic action, as highlighted by the authors, "lies in the *contextualization* of social experience" (1998, p. 995). Deriving from and construed on Aristotle's idea of "practical wisdom"[14], the evaluative dimension of agency has a communicative nature, namely, it is closely related to an "ongoing community of discourse" (p. 995). They say that practical wisdom, as part of a broader understanding of one's situated judgements is "far from being purely individual or monological, it remains open to dialogue and persuasion and is profoundly implicated in common values, interests, and purposes" (p. 995). We can refer to Hitlin and Elder's view on the multiplicity of social interactions and the concern that there is a constant interaction between internal and external modes of conduct. Taking these two studies together gives a clearer view on why it is virtually impossible to detach the subject from her/his environment at any moment, and why structure influences one's demeanour as much as one's demeanour may have its impact on structure itself.

The girl's greatest act of agency, in practical-evaluation terms, clearly demonstrates its internal structure. To begin with, there is "problematization", that is, the realization that a

[14] In ethics studies, practical wisdom "is knowing what is good, right, or best, given a particular set of circumstances" (https://kstatelibraries.pressbooks.pub/EDCI702/chapter/module-2-practical-wisdom/)

particular circumstance is “ambiguous, unsettled or unresolved” (OKORIE, 2018, p. 38). In Okorie’s narrative, problematization is being progressively built and enhanced as the plot develops, since the character realizes that, in spite of – for instance – Dermot’s effort to bond with her and her family, and his apparent effort to be understand the issues of an immigrant’s integration, he disregards her experience, and diminishes her struggle. For her, in terms of “problematization”, this is the defining factor that leads to her action. “Characterization” is the second analytical component, and it encompasses also the actor’s awareness of principles, schemas and typifications from past experiences, so as to better discern what kind of path needs to be taken on the matter at hand. Characterization appears as a continuum of the girl’s frustration and her realization of being completely alone and having no one to count on. After this comes deliberation, which has to do with “a conscious searching consideration of how best to respond to situational contingencies in light of broader goals and projects” (1998, p. 999), that is, the individual’s ability to weigh what sort of action must be taken for that particular present contingency. This leads to the fourth analytical component, “decision”, to act “here and now in a particular way”, clearly identified in the plot as the girl’s decision to buy a diary. Finally, having decided what is the best road to be taken, the actor proceeds to “execution”, the last component, which is a “capacity to act rightly and effectively within particular concrete life circumstances” (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 999). Hence, in Okorie’s narrative timeline, the girl’s participation in a writing club, in which she would, sooner or later, have to share her thoughts, is the final component in the practical-evaluative spectrum of her agency in the particular situation.

In the final pages of “Under the awning”, readers witness the protagonist’s attempt at not crumbling in response to the harsh criticism of her writing. The comments are, overall, negative: she should not have used the second person; the story is too negative; she should have talked about the positive aspects as well; there was no chronology; there was no narrative thread; she should have given more names; the character is a paranoid:

> Your classmates who asked their friends to mind their bags were actually not doing anything wrong; the bus driver who dropped you two stops away from your bus stop could have done so be due to road works; the man in the supermarket who asked your mother for a BJ was just sick; and the children who called out ‘Blackie’ at you whenever they saw you passing could just be what they were, children”. (OKORIE, 2018, p. 40)

Like many of the characters in the metanarrative, and the girl herself, the club members are also not given names. Instead, they are referred to by letters: “A” says this, “B” says that. Okorie’s choice of de-personalization may be a technique for representing these people as an

embodiment of society itself – so that it does matter what their names are: that is to say, whatever their names may be, the reception of the girl's work would likely not have been different. The issue is that the girl's act of agency is repulsed, and that via their criticism the club members are, in fact, trying to silence here once more. She is systematically ostracized: exposure of the crudity of reality was apparently not something they were willing to endure. The privilege of the ones who had a voice. Unsurprisingly, at the very beginning we learn that the girl is sitting "directly opposite the leader" (OKORIE, 2018, p. 25), who remains silent while the members point out all of her supposed mistakes, and at the end encourages her to make some of the changes suggested by her peers – which she ended up accepting.

It is stated that she made some changes to her overtly bleak and paranoid narrative, though we hear only about some minor adjustments, such as giving the girl a name, and calling Dermot "the nicest Irishman", in two paragraphs she revises. But it seems that her changes were not enough for her peers. After she emailed them the changes, one of the suggestions made was still to "temper the racism" or give the girl a name – which she had in fact done, showing that the person had not even properly read the revised version she sent to them all. Also, the changes she made carry a heavy sarcastic tone, which tends only to strengthen her primary perspective: the bleak and negative one, which so displeased the writing club members. This indicates two aspects of her agentic potentials: (i) daring to regain control over her own story and sharing it; and (ii) later being able to respond to her peers' questions and suggestions despite her pain in listening to their criticism.

According to Emirbayer and Mische, agency is also the "capacity of actors to critically shape their own responsiveness to problematic situations" (1998, p. 971). Even after her changes, she still received a great deal of comments suggesting she make further changes, for example in the use of the second person, in the chronology, and to reduce the importance of the racism she suffered (as one of her peers called it). The impression is that whatever changes she made would never be enough -- her subjective experience, and thus her description of it, would never be enough for them: it would still not be palatable. The girl, via her act of agency, was ready to tell her story, but the club members, as an embodiment of Irish society itself, were not ready to listen.

CHAPTER 4: WOMEN IMMIGRANTS AND SOCIAL AGENCY

4.1 "Nobody is too old for *once upon a time*": The social agency of immigrants in "The pram" by Roddy Doyle

> *I want to make sure that this is a comfortable country in which to live and do business, whether you're Irish or new Irish. I've often said in the past couple of weeks that there is no black Ireland or white Ireland – there is Ireland. There is no old Ireland or new Ireland, there is Ireland, our country. And I want to make sure that everyone who is here can experience a sense of freedom, of participating in our communities right around the country. (Mary White[15])*

On the 1st of May 2004, ten countries joined the European Union. Only three countries – Ireland, the UK and Sweden – opened their labour markets to citizens from these accession states. According to a report by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), immigration in the Irish Republic reached a record high in the post-enlargement year (53,400), 40% of these migrants being from the Accession States, the majority from Poland: the impressive number of 63,276 Polish nationals were identified by the 2006 census as living in Ireland. Construction, manufacturing, retail and hospitality were the main areas in which the Poles found positions in the local labour market. Even with the 2008 economic downturn, which also affected the Irish Republic, the numbers of inward Polish migrants continued to grow and, although some of these migrants left the country due to the recession, most of them stayed, and were joined by some additional fellow citizens. The 2016 census showed 122,551 Poles living in the Republic, 28% of them in County Dublin. In his book chapter that examines Polish migration to Ireland, Bryan Fanning reports that by 2011, when there were already more than 122,000 Poles in the Republic, Polish overtook Irish and became the second most spoken language in the country (FANNING, 2018, p. 222). This fact illustrates much of the social and cultural phenomena since the 2004 EU directive on Freedom of Movement: areas such as religion, education, services and cultural events were transformed by the biggest immigrant population in Ireland, adding to "the rich diversity that always existed in Ireland, but which perhaps is now only beginning to be fully acknowledged" – as noted by Katarzyna Kropiwiec

[15] Excerpt from interview with Mary White, former Minister of State for Equality, Integration & Human Rights in Ireland, quoted in Bryan Fanning's article "Immigration, the Celtic Tiger and the economic crisis" (2016, p. 15).

and Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain in the foreword to their study "Polish Migrant Workers in Ireland" (2006, p. 4).

The 2004 EU Free Movement directive, and Ireland's adherence to this new system, coincide with the height of the Celtic Tiger period when, partly as a result of being a member of the European Union since the 1970s, the Irish Republic experienced both international and local factors in its unprecedented economic development during the years referred to by that label. The mood at the time is insightfully exposed in the foreword to the short story collection *The Deportees and other stories*: "It happened, I think, sometime in the mid-90s. I went to bed in one country and woke up in a different one" (DOYLE, 2008, p. xi). Irish people, as illustrated by Doyle's comment, lived the "economic miracle", and experienced great changes in the "social ethos" of the country (KEOGH, 2012, p. 321). The Celtic Tiger period was also a new era in terms of gender equality policies in the Republic. In the 1990s, two women presidents were elected successively – Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese – representing the growing desire of women to "challenge the bastions of patriarchy" in Irish society (p. 350). In terms of education and employment, there were more women attending higher education and being employed in historically male-dominated jobs, such as medicine and law (p. 351-352). This, though, did not mean that women had reached an apogee of gender equality: although the feminisation of the workforce rose from 38% in 1994 to over 50% in 2002, the majority of these women still earned less than men, "and sometimes less than men who are doing the same job", as emphasized by Sinéad Kennedy in "Irish women and the Celtic Tiger economy" (2003, p. 96). Kennedy discusses the roles of women in the *milieu* of the Tiger period, noting that the advances in women's participation in the workforce were a privilege, and an achievement, but something to which mainly Irish women had access. Thus, caution is justified in examining immigrant women's experiences in the Tiger era, for, as Kennedy herself has highlighted, "class position mediates one's experience of oppression" (p. 96). To that one needs to add: "background, education and race, too, are determining forces and elements in one's experience of oppression".

Since the focus of this literary analysis is a young female Polish immigrant to the Republic, it is essential to understand in more detail why so many Poles made the decision to migrate to Ireland. The background conditions for this movement included: the economic boom, the free movement system as from 2004, official propaganda of Ireland as a welcoming and prosperous country, and an overall unemployment rate of 15% in Poland (in 2006, when Kropiwiec and King-O'Riain's research was conducted) (p. 27). Other factors were the political situation in Poland, and a poor labour market in that country, not adapted to its citizens' needs,

as explained in "Island of hope: Polish immigrants in Ireland", a study by Magdalena Klimczak, in 2007 (p. 38). Aiming to shed light on the patterns of Polish people's migration to the Republic, the study by Kropiwiec and King-O'Riain included qualitative interviews with 33 Polish immigrants – conducted in Polish and then translated to English – which explicitly showed some of the motivations, both macro and micro. There were two major types of migration within the Polish community in Ireland: some had moved so as to work and send money home, or even save some of their earnings for a possible future return to their homeland; and others were the so-called "global cosmopolitan" migrants, whose main objectives were (i) to live new and better experiences to which they would not have access in Poland, and (ii) to expand their career possibilities (2006, p. 34).

Bryan Fanning's appraisal shows that most of these immigrants were young – also indicated by the data in Klimczak's article, reporting that 54% of the Poles who had arrived in Ireland until 2007 were aged between 14 and 24. Fanning's overview also endorses some of the findings in Kropiwiec and King-O'Riain's study in terms of the majority of these people regarding themselves as "temporary immigrants", in other words for most of them, being in Ireland was a means of providing and securing better future conditions for themselves and their families, but – initially – they did not have plans to stay in Ireland in the long term. Although their status as European Union citizens facilitated these immigrants' entry to the Irish labour market (they did not need a work visa as some immigrants from other countries did), this did not automatically make their transition as smooth as might be initially expected. The Tiger did expand Ireland's labour market, but the best career options would continue to be filled mostly by Irish citizens. As a result, most of the "Poles did jobs that the host population were unwilling to do" (FANNING, 2018, p. 225), and even the well-educated ones struggled to obtain jobs that could make use of their qualifications; and as a result of this, it usually took highly-qualified Poles several years to ascend to "white-collar employment" (p. 227). This hardship faced by Polish immigrants unable to do the work they had been trained for brings to light a deeper issue, one of the greatest challenges they faced: the language. All the scholars previously cited refer to poor English skills as a major problem, reducing Polish people's prospects in the labour market, leading to their tending to be offered lesser-skilled jobs and also affecting employer-employee relations, in the context of expanding unskilled service jobs. In "Island of hope", Klimczak discusses effects of the language barrier faced by a large proportion of Poles in Ireland:

> Their limited knowledge of English disadvantages Polish people in the labour market and results in their very often being unable to defend their rights when facing exploitation, substandard working conditions and low wages. Unfortunately, in many cases, they have no voice to stand up for themselves, which may result in their confidence and self-belief being easily destroyed. In many cases, they internalise their feelings of worthlessness and rejection, of not being good enough, their sense of being discriminated against, or even persecuted (2007, p. 40).

Poor English skills not only had a severe impact on these newcomers' working experience, but it also deprived them from interacting and establishing stronger connections with the local community and its culture, which in turn could lead to social isolation: "Poor English-language fluency appears to be a reason why many Poles interacted predominantly with fellow Polish-speakers, and relied on Polish acquaintances and family members" (FANNING, 2018, p. 230). Language is an obstacle cited by several interviewees in the studies by both Kropiwiec and King-O'Riain (2006, p. 46) and Klimczak (2007, p. 40), which showed that simple, daily activities such as finding accommodation, opening a bank account and interacting with Irish people resulted in these immigrants having a tougher experience than might have been Ireland's intention. Some immigrants may indeed have internalized the feelings mentioned by Klimczak in the excerpt above – of worthlessness and rejection in relation to the local community, and the impossibility of directly challenging this status – tending to make Polish people rely more on their own sense of community, resulting in a cultural effect which suited their needs, an atmosphere in which they could seek the advice and friendship they needed from their own compatriots. As Klimczak puts it (2007, p. 41), the tendency was for "feelings of fear, loneliness, and lack of appreciation" to "bring Polish people together and create a sense of unity among them".

With the enlargement of the Polish community, services and events emerged to suit it. By the time of Kropiwiec and King-O'Riain's research, there was the Polish Information and Culture Centre in Dublin, where Poles could seek information in their language; and the Polish Social and Cultural Association and the Polish House – centres where newcomers could go to meet and socialize. The Cultural Association also ran a library, where people had access to books in Polish. At the same time the Irish Polish Society served as a means to promote Polish culture to the Irish by organizing events in English (2006, p. 40). There was also an increasing number of concerts, art exhibits and lectures for Polish audiences, Polish pubs and restaurants where immigrants gathered, and could consume Polish food, and many stores and supermarkets serving their community (KROPIWIEC; KING-O'RIAIN, p. 41). Another significant cultural element was the importance of the Catholic Church as a place of support for these immigrants, since Poland – along with Ireland – has one of the highest percentages of Catholics in Europe.

At a certain point there were not only masses being offered in Polish, but the location itself turned out to be a meeting point for Poles, a place where they could get information, assistance and advice for everyday situation, such as getting a PPS number, finding accommodation and looking for a job. Klimczak felt that such an environment might make up for an often-perceived lack of welcome felt by these immigrants in wider social and cultural interaction: as she put it, "they are looking for emotional support" (2007, p. 41).

In this context, Roddy Doyle wrote the series of short stories which would later comprise *The Deportees and other stories*, published in 2007. In "The pram", he focuses on the experiences of Alina, a young Polish migrant, who lives and works in Dublin. Amongst other things, it is a ghost story. The conflicted nature of an intercultural relationship is presented in the third person by a narrator, who guides readers to sympathize with the point of view of a female immigrant, through vivid descriptions of unbearable conditions inflicted on her. Unlike the other stories in the collection, "The pram" does not have a "peacefully resolved" outcome of such a conflict (TEKIN, 2015, p. 87). Alina, the protagonist, is a Polish *au pair* who works for a middle-class family in Dublin and suffers as a result of the ill-treatment she receives from her employers – to the extent that she finally murders her boss in an ultimate act of despair. Initially, she seeks revenge by telling a horror story to the young girls that she looks after, aiming to "scare them shitless" (DOYLE, 2008, p. 160). The story within the story reveals itself as a means of empowering Alina, for whom the only way of escaping the constant humiliation by Mrs. O'Reilly and possible sexual harassment by Mr. O'Reilly is through the ghost story she recollects from her own folklore. Set in the final years of the Celtic Tiger period, "The pram" exposes the conflicted relationship between the Irish and the immigrant – in the form of the scornful treatment received by Alina, and its consequences.

This present study looks at the position of Alina as a female immigrant in twenty-first century Ireland, and how her potential for agency outgrows the prejudiced treatment she suffers. Within the context of the Celtic Tiger environment, I examine to what extent the immigrant in this story finds a means of coping with the restrictive and damaging conditions in the microcosm of which she is now a part, and more broadly whether this particular microcosm mirrors wider policies relating to multicultural encounters in a country which at the time was experiencing a fully plural *milieu*, as a result of its inward-migration policy, for the first time. The portrayal of social agency, a conceptual tool for analysing such encounters, and this particular immigrant character's responses to them, illustrating ways in which such a character might react to the constraints she experiences, may enrich discussion on the various forms of agentic demeanour, and in particular how such a position is not always depicted in a totally

straightforward manner. I will also reflect on the sort of multicultural society that Doyle's work depicts, bearing in mind that "unusual in its migration pattern, Ireland stands as an interesting example of migration but also of how societies grapple with increasing ethnic diversity in a fast-flowing economy and an increasingly global sphere (KROPIWIEC; KING-O'RIAIN, 2006, p. 7).

Roddy Doyle's "The pram" has at its core the essence of Irish short fiction's hybrid nature; incorporation of a ghost story within the short story medium enabled the author at the same time to approach the marginalized position of the female immigrant in a hostile environment, and to challenge those conditions through the "disruptive nature" (FERGUSON, 2014, p. 58) of the ghost story. While short stories carve out space for a "submerged population group" (O'CONNOR, 1985, p. 20), the ghost story can well be applied as a means of empowering these "outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society" (p. 19), like the powerless female immigrant in "The pram". The device provides people like Alina with a possible pathway for overcoming subordination and retaking their potentialities for emancipation (MCNAY, 2016, p. 39-40).

In the sociological field, the concept of "agency" has been discussed and reshaped by theorists who see it as an important characteristic for individuals to find a way out of the stifling regulatory rules imposed by social constructions. The agency/structure divide has been one of the major fault lines in sociology, as pinpointed by Bruce and Yearley (2006, p. 7), and in the context of this story the structure and the actor are indissociable elements when examining what possible types of agency the character may exert, as discussed in the theoretical chapter of this thesis. This divide results in a discourse which sets the structural pressures and the actor's individual capacity to act creatively as two distinct and powerfully opposing forces. Contrary to this manicheistic perspective, theorists such as Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu and Jürgen Haberma have recently attempted to reshape this dualism into a model in which structure and agency converge; that is to say, while social structures exist, they may be challenged or endorsed through individuals' actions, and the strength with which the external world may impact some actors – and, consequently, the dynamics of social interactions and their outcomes – should not be disregarded.

Although one may relate "agency" with words such as free will, choice and autonomy, it is also necessary to bear in mind that how an individual's potentialities for agency are realized varies according to the cultural context in which they are living, in that "the ability to act is always mediated by the dominant norms and relations of power that shape any situation" (MCNAY, 2016, p. 41). McNay, further, argues that some individuals or groups may manifest

more agency than others, and that the concept of agency "denotes a cluster of actions considered to be categorically distinct from the types of unreflective, habitual, and instinctual which are held to be quasi-automatic responses to external structural forces" (p. 40). She opposes the idea of portraying agency merely as an attitude of objection or denial in the face of a difficult situation or hostile environment, since people have different manners of assimilating and reacting, and their interpretations of possible constraining events are not straightforward. In that sense, considering that Alina is systematically subordinated because of her condition as an immigrant, and that she is deemed to be inferior due to the paid relationship controlled by Mrs. O'Reilly, one could affirm that her agency is indeed severely compromised. Although the power relation established by Mrs. O'Reilly as the Irish person over Alina as the immigrant is evident, Doyle is subtle in disclosing its implications in the narrative. Hints and elements are given from the very beginning that provide the reader with a sense that there is something wrong in that environment. Alina's sensation of being watched while taking the little baby for his walk, her bedroom door that does not lock, and the dubious behaviour of the little sisters towards Alina, are examples. These constituents of the story are carefully placed to generate an increasing tone of tension and incongruency in the narrative. An Irish family is seeking a nanny for its three children, especially to mind the little baby boy. The parents have their own jobs and spend most of the day outside the home, and the older sisters go to a part-time school nearby. The story seems to be asking in an undertone: What could possibly go wrong?

To begin with, the paid relationship between the O'Reillys and Alina as their *au pair* (the noun frequently used for a young foreign immigrant who looks after the children of people in a host country in exchange for a room, food and a small weekly payment) was not in 2007, and still is not, a legally recognized occupation. In some places, such as in the Unites States, the work of an *au pair* is regulated by the state, which ends up facilitating and mediating the relationship between locals and the immigrant, with both also having their rights and duties clearly stated. That is not the case in Ireland, since there are no legal rules to be followed for working as or 'hiring' an *au pair*. Some of the 33 Polish migrants in Ireland interviewed by Kropiwiec and King-O'Riain mention the unequal treatment given to immigrants from certain nations, Poland included (2006, p. 45). The method of segregation includes the job positions they occupy, and the lower wages or working conditions they are subjected to, even in legal and regulated work environments. In the light of these pieces of information, it is not surprising that Alina's circumstances would make it easier for the figure of power, the O'Reillys, to take advantage of her status and render her experience miserable, if they wished to.

The relation between Alina and the O'Reilly family portrays the encounter of two distinct worlds that have to negotiate space for their coexistence: this makes the ghost story a particularly appropriate mode for exposing the complex configuration of this interaction. Through the mysterious atmosphere provided by the genre, Doyle elaborates on the central issues. First of these is the intercultural relationship between people born in Ireland and a person born outside the country. Alina, as the outsider, does not belong to the microcosm of the O'Reillys' home, and thus can be seen as the "haunting Other" – the subject who provokes a sentiment of fear, uneasiness, and strangeness (FERGUSON, 2014, p. 52). Whereas Doyle dramatizes this encounter making use of supernatural elements, he also gives voice to the disempowered migrant who, through the ghost story, challenges the imposed norms in order to "reclaim power" – since ghost stories "give voice to people at the bottom of the social hierarchy, disrupting the continuity of the powerful" (p. 54). Therefore, working on both angles, "The pram" allows readers to have a clearer view of the migrant's perspective through a third person singular narration that guides them to sympathize with Alina and also to witness the "contemporary anxiety" (p. 58) related to twenty-first century borders, personified by the O'Reillys' demeanour.

Alina's working conditions were intolerable: she was repeatedly mistreated by Mrs. O'Reilly, and felt threatened by Mr. O'Reilly's abusive conduct towards her. Although she spent most of the time with Cilian, the baby boy whom she adored, she was also responsible for his older sisters, Ocean and Saibhreas. We soon learn that she "loved the baby", but "she was not so sure about [loving]" (DOYLE, 2008, p. 155) the young girls. They were smart girls who did everything together; they were polite, well behaved and had good manners. Still, disturbing as it felt for Alina, she did not know exactly why she disliked them. Cilian, on the other hand, arouse maternal feelings in her: "She loved everything about the baby. The tiny boyness of him, the way his legs kicked whenever he looked up at her, his fat – she loved these things" (p. 154).

From the beginning, the loving depiction of Alina's connection with the baby mingles with the blurred and obscure relationship she establishes with his sisters, who had a "sneaky" behaviour (TEKIN, 2015, p. 88) – which becomes evident when they find out about Alina's romantic involvement with a Lithuanian biochemist, without even seeing them together. Consequently, Alina's horrifying relationship with the parents worsens when Ocean and Saibhreas reveal Alina's affair to their mother: "Guess what, O'Reilly, they said, together. – Alina has a boyfriend." (DOYLE, 2008, p. 159). The already existing tension between the two women hugely increases with the revelation; Mrs. O'Reilly, who had already restricted Alina's

space within the house and outside the property, reacts even more scornfully to the young woman's affair. Confronted by her employer, Alina – who could not even look at Mrs. O'Reilly's face – replied:

> – It is, she said, perhaps my private affair.
> – Listen, babes, said O'Reilly. Nothing is your private affair. Not while you're working here. Are you fucking this guy?
> Alina felt herself burn. The crudity was like a slap across her face.
> O'Reilly put one foot on the chair beside Alina.
> – I couldn't care less, she said. Fuck away, girl. But with three provisos. Not while you're working. Not here, on the property. And not with Mister O'Reilly. (DOYLE, 2008, p. 159-160)

Pushed to the limit, Alina started to lose her temper with O'Reilly's ill-treatment. Forced to be an outcast, displaced and humiliated, the nanny has a grotesque idea: "Alina was going to murder the little girls." (DOYLE, 2008, p. 160) She soon changes her mind, and develops what she might have considered a more effective and painful revenge. The turning point is presented when Alina decides to terrify the girls by telling them a Polish ghost story about an "old and wicked lady" (p. 161) who would steal babies from their parents, put them in a pram and disappear into the woods. Her plan was clear: "(…) she would plant nightmares that would lurk, prowl, rub their evil backs against the soft walls of their minds, all their lives, until they were two old ladies, lying side by side on their one big deathbed" (p. 160). The pram – both in Doyle's plot and in Alina's storytelling – serves as the key supernatural element, representing the thin line between reality and fantasy, self-control and madness. When Alina says that "the pram had been moved" (p. 166) and that "the pram is haunted" (p. 174), she was clearly losing control of her mind and of the tale, in that she could no longer distinguish between what was real and what was not.

By resorting to Polish folklore as a means of having some sort of control over her own current experience, Alina well exemplifies Hitlin and Elder's understanding that "individuals' actions are oriented towards meeting the conditions of social life" (2007, p. 175), in that she displays a type of agentic potential named by them as "identity agency", which has a close relation to the actor's reassurance of the "sense of self" (p. 181) within interactions. These authors offer a model of agency which focuses on the self and its agentic dimensions, whereas it is also strictly correlated to the temporal orientations which guide individuals' responsive mediation. Identity agency is goal-oriented, and reflects the individual's active appraisal of the conditions for adapting or sustaining identities which may be, in their turn, constructed, challenged, internalized and modified in the course of social interactions. To this extent, Alina's reliance on a Polish ghost story serves not so much as a revenge against the young girls who

revealed her affair to Mrs. O'Reilly, as a mechanism of bringing back to Alina the feeling of safety which only what was deeply known to her, in the given circumstances, could offer. The components of her situation – finding herself isolated, being an outsider, and terrified by the strangeness of the unknown as represented by the figures of her Irish employers – arouse her need take action to bring her sense of self into real life. For this young immigrant, this action simultaneously shows the "motivating nature of identity commitments" (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 180).

In carrying out her idea of revenge using the Polish myth, Alina adapts it to the Irish setting – needing to bring it closer to home so as to easily frighten those "practical little girls" (DOYLE, 2008, p. 163). As the tension in the story grows, so does the conflict between herself and O'Reilly. Experiencing being referred to as "a bloody childminder" (p. 167), "my Polish *cailín*[16]" (p. 169), "my Polish peasant" (p. 176) and "a fucking nightmare" (p. 176), in an environment in which she felt trapped and had her identity diminished, Alina found in her country's folklore a way of coping with these constraints, even though by the use of "destructive means" (FERGUSON, 2014, p. 58). Mrs. O'Reilly's abusive demeanour towards Alina, and her supposedly superior position as the Irish person, the employer, and the mother, leaves Alina with no other option than to confront Mrs. O'Reilly's authority in underhand ways, and through this reassure her of her own sense of personhood. By this expedient she strives, also, not to internalize her employer's urge to frame, to categorize, her merely as "a bloody childminder" or, even worse, by referring to her as if, objectified, she was something her employer could possess: "my Polish peasant".

Mrs. O'Reilly's demeanour towards Alina is de-humanizing, since it de-characterizes and de-personifies the figure of this immigrant who, before considering her status as a nanny, is a person whose history deserves to be considered and respected. In this sense, it is reasonable to consider that Alina's enterprise – telling the Polish story to the little girls – functions as a defence of her own identity. Hitlin and Elder explain that external circumstances, in other words structural forces, may lead individuals to acts to maintain their identities: "this often occurs in situations where ascribed identities are 'forced' onto individuals, as in situations of extreme racial prejudice. Such negatively valued identities may be internalized" (2007, p. 181), and this is precisely the reason why Alina puts her plan into action – so as not to be diminished and dissociated from her history and identity by the hideous treatment given to her by the O'Reillys.

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[16] Word in Irish which means girl, young, unmarried woman. Source: WordSense Dictionary (https://www.wordsense.eu/cail%C3%ADn/).

In an interview, Roddy Doyle defines Mrs. O'Reilly as a "Tiger phenomenon […] making more money than she should", who had "an inflated notion of herself" (TEKIN, 2015, p. 115), as exemplified by her insistence upon being called by her surname, for it "terrified her clients […]. It was intriguing; it was sexy" (DOYLE, 2008, p. 158). Spending most of the time at work, O'Reilly seemed to feel threatened by Alina's closeness to her children, particularly to Cilian, and by the possibility of Cilian seeing Alina as a mother-like reference; one of O'Reilly's reactions is to forbid Alina to use the Polish language with the baby, because she did not want him "confused" (p.157). This attitude may suggest that the baby's "hypothetical confusion might not only be linguistic, but perhaps he might also be confused about who his mother is if he heard Alina speak more often than her" (FERGUSON, 2014, p. 56). The linguistic barrier was, it should be remembered, one of the greatest issues mentioned by Polish migrants in the studies by Kropiwiec and King-O'Riain, and Klimczak. We cannot be sure about Alina's English fluency, but O'Reilly's request for her not to use her mother tongue with the baby, with whom she spends most of the time, might have enhanced in her a migrant's feeling of inadequacy and worthlessness, the sensation of not having her history and origin valued, since "racism, particularly in the form of negative stereotyping, is an identified issue [and] there is often a lack of knowledge about Poland and its history among Irish people" (KROPIWIEC; KING-O'RIAIN, 2006, p. 5). Furthermore, in contrast to many of the interviewees in the two studies referred to, Alina has, seemingly, nobody to lean on while in Ireland, in terms of family bond and friendships. The young female migrant appears to be isolated in a place which has turned out to be an actual, real, nightmare. Perhaps Alina's closeness to the Lithuanian biochemist is also a means of finding some sort of similarity to someone, an attempt at having some relationship to somebody who, being in a similar position to hers, could possibly be seen as a reliable individual to resort to when in need. As it turns out we, the readers, do not have enough time to witness Alina's romantic saga evolving, since her concrete everyday pressures urge her to take a stand, and actively interfere in the course of events.

O'Reilly's position as a busy career woman reflects the conditions of Irish citizens in the Tiger years. With the economic boom, women had more opportunities to practice careers that were once a privilege of men. Irish women who once occupied unskilled employment positions, or who had even emigrated to work as childminders, were now on the opposite side: "The economic boom not only led to more women entering employment and thereby creating work for foreign childminders but, in addition, saw the aspirations of indigenous workers rise" (LOYAL, 2003, p. 81). O'Reilly's household reflected the economic situation in Ireland, thus

placing Mrs. O'Reilly and Alina in opposite positions: O'Reilly, as the representative of Irish society, embodied both the economic upgrade and also the personal struggle of dealing with the "haunting other" (FERGUSON, 2014, p. 52). The dichotomies between these two women are among the main issues approached in a review of *The Deportees*: whereas O'Reilly was a "monster" (SPILLANE, 2008, p. 150) to the extent that she tyrannically dominated the disempowered migrant, Alina functioned as the "long-suffering erasure" (p. 150), whose subservient position, both within the family unit and in a broader sense as an immigrant, might have bestowed on her the status of "silenced":

> Shocked, appalled, close – she thought – to fainting, Alina looked up at O'Reilly. O'Reilly smiled down at her. Alina dropped her hair and cried. O'Reilly smiled the more. She'd mistaken Alina's tears and gulps for gratitude. She patted Alina's head. She lifted Alina's blonde hair, held it, and let it drop (DOYLE, 2007, p. 160).

From the top of her egotistical ivory tower, Mrs. O'Reilly was not able to realize that Alina was, in fact, terrified and humiliated by O'Reilly's intrusive attitude to her affair with the Lithuanian biochemist. Her condescending tone and attitude towards her employee, whom she clearly saw as weak and inferior to her, exemplifies Doyle's categorization of her as an individual who has an "inflated notion of herself". Immersed in herself, O'Reilly did not realize the extent to which her actions had reached and hurt Alina, arousing in her an urgency to intervene and show that she was not as powerless as her Irish employers might have thought. Aware of her subjugated condition, Alina devises a distinctive pathway for her empowerment – instead of creating a direct confrontation, she demonstrates a type of agency that reflects her capacity to discern that the circumstances were impairing her power to take attitudes of emancipation.

This remits us to Emirbayer and Mische's discussion in "What is agency?", in which the authors discuss "agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement" (1998, p. 963): this process of social engagement, carried out by actors, is informed by the past, oriented toward the future and evaluative of the present (p. 963). Insofar as Alina's attempt at sustaining her identity encompasses the so-called iterational dimension of agency – correlated with the memory of past events which "through habit and repetition, becomes a stabilizing influence that shapes the flow of effort and allows us to sustain identities, meanings, and interactions over time (p. 975)" – her attempt at taking back control of her own experience also, and most importantly, displays what Emirbayer and Mische call the "practical-evaluative" dimension of agency, which has to do with "the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments

among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations" (p. 971).

In a first moment, at the height of her anger at O'Reilly's intrusion into her private life, Alina thinks of taking her revenge by murdering O'Reilly's two daughters, even daydreaming about how she could do it: "she would put pillows on their faces" (DOYLE, 2007, p. 160). Her self-regulation mechanism, however, enables her to have a clearer view of the whole situation: "she would not, in actuality, kill the girls. She could not do such a thing – two such things" (p. 160). It is at this moment that she resorts to the Polish ghost story as a means of reassuming control of her own path. In spite of having had a burst of anger, her ability to carefully examine the conditions she finds herself in, and her possibilities for mediation, are traits of an actor whose practical-evaluative dimension of agency is being put into action. By increasing their capacity for practical evaluation, actors strengthen their ability to exercise agency in a mediating fashion, enabling them (at least potentially) to pursue their projects in ways that may challenge and transform the situational contexts of action themselves (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 994).

By realizing the need to have her own share in the course of that narrative, Alina makes use of her agentic capabilities. Hence, the young female immigrant did not bow down under O'Reilly's rules, and made use of the ghost story as a device to "upset order" (FERGUSON, 2014, p. 57) – albeit the outcome of that decision was disastrous for both of them. When O'Reilly arrived home and witnessed the girls frightened to death due to Alina's tale, she decided to fire Alina, once again acting scornfully and dismissively, labelling her as "my Polish peasant". This is when Alina, unable to bear O'Reilly's behaviour any more, hits her over the head with a "decorative and heavy" poker, which "had never been used, until now" (DOYLE, 2007, p. 176).

O'Reilly's quick and silent death points up the fragile structure on which her overemphatic self-assurance had been built. Whilst Alina – driven mad – committed a crime, the author gives the reader little or no reason to empathize with O'Reilly; and this certainly gives Alina a sort of victory, insofar as the disempowered immigrant, in the end, regains control and takes back her agentic potentialities. Indeed, although Alina ended up out of her mind, and haunted by her own story, her transformation from a voiceless maid to an empowered woman does portray a major structural image: the triumph of the ostracized immigrant over the prejudiced native.

When Doyle published *The Deportees and other stories* in 2007, it was one of the first literary works to deal with the theme of multiculturalism in Ireland. Doyle is a Dubliner, and in

many of the stories we do see him speaking out from an Irish point of view, but it is not an unaware perception, quite the opposite – in that he very frequently questions the demeanour of the Irish towards these people who were coming to the country, encouraged by the government, to assist in the development of Ireland's economy: people who, in spite of being important members of that structure, lacked rights in both the economic and the social spheres.

In "The pram", the crudest story in Doyle's collection – in that it portrays the prejudices of gender, class and race towards newcomers – Alina is the representative of this category. The species of multiculturalism depicted in Doyle's short story, seen in the terms proposed by Bryan Fanning, most closely resembles the "overt assimilation" (2002, p. 183) type, which takes shape when minority groups are seen as inferior to the dominant ones: they are "pathologized" and their problems are justified as a result of their distinctiveness.

In the story, the lens is turned completely on to the O'Reilly household, and readers have little contact with the external circumstances that permeate the narrative. The story was published in 2007, and it was in 2006 and 2007 that the studies of Kropiwiec and King-O'Riain published their interviews with Polish migrants: it can be surmised that the Republic was still at the beginning of its journey to acknowledge the multiplicity of individuals constituting its *milieu*, so that these were barely yet a subject of political discussion. Fanning, writing later on the Polish immigrant community in Ireland says that, by 2015, "the Republic's response to its largest immigration community might be described as the kind of weak multiculturalism that is no longer fashionable elsewhere in Europe" (2018, p. 236). Since 2007 there have been some efforts to organize cultural events to celebrate the diversity that the Polish community brings to the country, and also strengthen Polish-Irish relations; nonetheless, at the same time, Fanning contends, proper policies to give Poles incentive to learn English, or to include Polish as a secondary school subject, have not been fully applied, turning the treatment given to this community into one of "benign neglect" (p. 236).

Although "The pram" is told in the third person, it succeeds in giving a view of Alina's perception of the events, to the extent that it reports her thoughts and feelings, in particular those related to Mrs. O'Reilly and the girls, who are the major characters in Alina's cultural conflict. Alina also suffers other encounters which to a certain extent strengthen her, for example her connection with the baby, and her involvement with the Lithuanian biochemist, who was in a position quite similar to hers (and thus may have unconsciously reminded her that there were many other people going through similar struggles). Interestingly, Alina's path to empowerment includes a significant component coming from her own culture, since the ghost story to which she resorted as a means of vengeance was part of Polish folklore. This is another

factor that portrays Alina's lack of identification with the country she was living in, possibly reflecting an assumed relationship between O'Reilly, as the hostile Irish native, and Irish culture itself. The ghost story also works as a resource to reinforce her identity, which was being diminished by the overbearing Mrs. O'Reilly. She develops a repulsion for anything that could be linked to the stifling and embarrassing rules imposed by her employer. The clearest example is her odd relationship with the little girls. At the same time, she worries about the possibility of sexual abuse by Mr. O'Reilly, since her room in the attic has no lock –a complement to her already desperate working conditions, although this is not fully developed in the plot. Her position as a powerless immigrant within a "hyper-masculine" household (TEKIN, 2014, p. 115) could have added a huge concern for her physical and psychological integrity.

Whereas we observe the story being subtly guided by the narrator to sympathize with Alina's point of view, an attentive reading also discloses the reaction of the Irish, represented by O'Reilly's questionable demeanour on the occasion of the arrival of a newcomer, and the difficulties they find in dealing with this situation. On a broader canvas, Alina plays the role of the generally unskilled workforce that migrated to Ireland (also as a result of the Irish government's policy). In contrast, the O'Reillys represent the Irish who, as a people historically accustomed to emigration, were challenged by the immediacy of a new reality. It was now no longer the internal borders (between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) that were the major issues, but the international ones – and the challenges they represented. This struggle of Irish people is exposed in its crudest form by the prejudiced mindset of the O'Reillys, while Alina takes the role of the surviving immigrant who fights to recover her own sense of belonging and personhood.

In *The history of the Irish short story* (2009), Heather Ingman states that short fiction in Ireland has always been bonded to the urgencies of the country's history. This is precisely the case for Doyle's collection – in that the twenty-first century presented this multicultural reality, in which a dialogue needed to be established between the newcomers and the locals, and Doyle's stories functioned as a means of giving voice to the people involved. In spite of the criticism on *The Deportees,* especially the argument that it takes a standpoint of privilege, Doyle in reality shows the other side of the coin in "The pram".

4.2 'How hard can this language be?': the social agency of immigrants in "How to learn Irish in seventeen steps" by Roisín O'Donnell

> *Watch swallows perform roller-coaster dips and dives across the pale June sky. You now have less than ten months in which to learn Irish. Post a cheque for two thousand euro to register for the Scrúdú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge. Séan will ruffle your hair and say: 'Seriously, babe? You think you can learn Irish in ten months? That's insane! For your arms. Think: how hard can this language be?*
> *(O'DONNELL, "How to learn Irish in Seventeen Steps", 2016, p. 87).*

Much has been discussed regarding the Irish Tiger, with all it meant and encompassed: the symbol of a new, prosperous era, summarized in a word whose symbology goes beyond the unprecedented financial and employment opportunities. It functioned, too, as the background for a whole new national attitude and practice from a wider social and cultural perspective. The Republic was, finally, completely brought into what modernity has brought to many other nations: heterogeneity. As thoroughly discussed in the previous sections of this dissertation, from the mid-90s to mid-00s, the Irish Republic went through a whole new transformation with the arrival of a great influx of migrants to its borders which, in a not-so-distant past, had witnessed an impressive number of Irish people crossing them in search of the opportunities they could not find in the Emerald Isle. What followed the boom, though, known by some as "the fall of the Celtic Tiger", was when a new recession struck the country, leading to a worrisome rise in unemployment levels. The numbers speak volumes: from an impressive 4% during the boom, unemployment rose to 6.5% in 2008 and, by July 2012, to 14.8%, as reported by Bryan Fanning in his article "Immigration, the Celtic Tiger and the economic crisis" (2016, p.10).

The economic downturn suffered by the Irish Republic after the Tiger era had severe effects on the Irish financial and social climate. These include: the collapse of house prices, with imminence of repossessions for those not able to meet mortgage payments; increases in taxes and pay cuts for those still employed; cuts to public services such as education and healthcare; and, as a result, huge increases in emigration. From 2008 to 2012, 358,100 people left Ireland: of these around 149,700 were Irish, 20,900 had come from outside the EU, and about 187,500 came from EU member states (FANNING, 2016, p. 10). The social turmoil experienced by the Irish during this recession period required political responses. These

included a change in government, with the 2007 general election, won by Fianna Fáil and the Green Party; extensive austerity measures; and, for some time, in Fanning's words, "an inchoate sense that Ireland faced some kind of existential crisis" (2016, p. 10).

Anti-immigration discourses now emerged in the political mainstream of many EU countries – but Ireland, in spite of its economic downturn, displayed little of this. That did not mean, by any means, that the Irish government found new and more functional paths for dealing with the immigration issue; indeed, "immigration remained off the political radar for the most part during the post-2008 economic crisis" (FANNING, 2016, p. 11). A couple of years before, in 2004, the Irish government had held a referendum on a proposal to change the rules about the constitutional entitlement to citizenship by birth, that is, people born in Ireland would not have a constitutional right to be Irish citizens, unless, at the time of their birth, one of their parents was an Irish citizen or was entitled to be an Irish citizen. Nearly 80% of the valid votes for the referendum were in favour of this change. As Fanning understood it, this sent a message to immigrants: "We are Irish, you are not" (p. 12).

In the years that followed the rise and fall of the Tiger there was contention in migration policies in the Republic. Politicians kept up a positive discourse, praising the contribution of immigrants to the Irish economy, but also implied that tough economic realities remained: "Government ministers made statements that were carefully positive about the valuable presence and contribution of migrant workers and their families in Ireland whilst, simultaneously, harsh restrictions on unwanted migrants were being mooted" (FANNING, 2016, p. 14). Even so, it was surprisingly easier to become an Irish citizen during the recession than it had been at the height of the Celtic Tiger years. A total of 63,900 applications for naturalisation were approved between 1 January 2009 and 31 May 2013. For citizenship, 97.6% of 29,412 applications were granted in 2013 whereas, in 2009, 47% of all applications for citizenship were rejected, under ministerial discretion. The rise in the percentage of approvals both for naturalization and citizenship might be seen as a consequence of the change of government after 2011 (p. 14-16).

Despite the increasing emigration numbers during the crisis, expectations that fewer immigrants would make Ireland their destination were proven wrong: while the 2006 census identified 419,733 non-nationals living in the country, this number rose to 544,357 in the 2011 census, and to 564,000 by 2014. Although the annual number of newcomers declined a little from 2007 to 2010, they increased again in the years that followed (FANNING, 2016, p. 10). Interestingly, public debate on the issues of immigration and integration, which were common during the boom years as a result of the unprecedented number of outsiders coming into the

Irish State, was somehow left aside after 2008 – despite the still impressive number of non-Irish citizens living in the country. On this point, Pilar Villar-Argáiz and Jason King, in "Integration, migration, and recession in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland", contend that:

> The presence of these immigrants in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland […] seems to be overshadowed by other realities. The intense and often contested debates on migration that dominated the headlines of Irish newspapers and broadcast media during the boom years inevitably dissipated. (2016, p. 1)

That is to say, while the efforts of the Irish State were focused on trying to recover from the economic recession, the media turned its attention not only to the financial depression in the Republic, but also to other political and religious scandals that were taking place at the time. In spite of the lack of official debates and acknowledgements on the issues of immigration and its plurality, and the lack of depth in media coverage on racism cases, old and unresolved issues continued, as explained by Fanning:

> Ireland came to lag behind many countries on many indicators of integration: access to education, rights to family reunification and even rights to participate fully in the labour market, that sphere where the politicians and bureaucrats in charge of Ireland envisaged integration as taking place, if they thought of it at all. In most of these domains there was, simply put, less political commitment to integration and fewer resources put in to integration measures than in many other EU countries (2016, p. 13).

In this context, amongst "incalculable feelings of anxiety, trauma and anger" (FANNING, 2016, p. 10) on the part of Irish people, there were still the problematics of contrasting the rise and the fall of the Tiger: while the former brought up a sense of fulfilment due to the unprecedented economic and social developments within society, the latter provoked uncertainty on whether such developments were permanent or ephemeral. One aspect, though, was assured: the heterogeneity brought forward by Ireland's first "immigration crisis", as Fanning described it, had not vanished with the economic recession. It may have been off the political radar for a while, but it continued in everyday social interactions between the Irish and the so-called new Irish.

It is in this atmosphere that "How to learn Irish in seventeen steps", written by Roisín O'Donnell and published in 2016, takes place. O'Donnell's debut short story collection comprises thirteen tales, the majority of them dealing with migration, whether of Irish people who left their homeland, or non-nationals who chose the Emerald Isle as theirs. "How to learn Irish in seventeen steps" is the seventh story in the collection, and deals with a young Brazilian immigrant who, like many of her compatriots, moved to Ireland with the primary purpose of

learning English. Luana Silva, the main character, is from São Paulo and has been living in Ireland for eight years. It is worth noting that, since 2004, the Irish government has been making efforts to promote the country as a destination for international students; Enterprise Ireland is the organization that orchestrates this movement, one of its main strategies being visits to education fairs, which have successfully influenced Brazilians to consider Ireland as a study destination. Since then, recruiters of students have considered Brazil as their largest market in Latin America, as Karine Dalsin explains in the book chapter "Why did you move to Ireland?" (2016, p. 166).

Data from the Central Statistics Office website shows that since the 2006 census the Brazilian population residing in Ireland has more than trebled: from 4,388 in 2006 to 8,704 in 2008 and, in the most recent census, 13,640. Similarly, Dalsin's chapter highlights that, amongst the many nationalities that now constitute the Irish *milieu*, Brazil has a prominent position, being in the top six non-European Union groups recorded, which are: Indians (11%), Chinese (9%), Brazilians (9%), Nigerians (9%), Filipinos (8%), and Americans (7%) (p. 165). In O'Donnell's fiction, Luana Silva is thus the representative of a population of immigrants which has been increasingly significant in Irish society. She belongs to what Dalsin calls "the second wave of Brazilian immigrants in Ireland" (p. 166) which, in contrast to the first – which dated from the 1990s and principally comprised immigrants working in the meat factories in Ireland's countryside, making good a shortage of labour in that industry – had a different socioeconomic profile, of people who migrated for different purposes:

> Among language students, Brazilian nationals are prominently featured. Since around 2004, Dublin has become the temporary home of many Brazilians seeking an experience of living abroad and the opportunity to improve their English language skills. Notably, in 2010, the Irish governmental body responsible for promoting the Irish education sector abroad, Enterprise Ireland, declared that the total number of Brazilian students had increased 60 percent since 2006. (2016, p. 166)

The study visa allowed Brazilians to stay in Ireland for a year, attending an English language school and working in the service industry; this scheme could be renewed for up to three years. How, then, is Luana still living in Ireland after nearly a decade? She explains in a dialogue with Caoimhe, who would later become her friend:

> "Eight years, almost. I came here for one year to learn English, but you know…".
> "Met a fella was it? Always the way. I'm Caoimhe".
> "Luana". (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 98)

Luana Silva has become Luana Paula da Silva O'Connor, after getting married to Séan, an Irishman with whom she has been since the end of her first year in Dublin. She was just about to return home when, on the eve of her trip, she met him and their encounter made her change her mind:

> His sandalwood aftershave will take you back to the night you met, when his first touch evoked a type of muscle-memory, as if your body already knew him from a previous life. You already had your flight to São Paulo booked, but your plans to leave Ireland dissolved the minute Séan first hugged you. You sensed your future dividing like the Parnaíba River Delta, splintering into different paths. (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 100)

Although the main objective of this excerpt is to evoke the atmosphere Luana experienced at the time she met Séan, it also gives the reader a sense of her emotions in relation to her life in Ireland, and the feeling of her life being split in two. She recalls this event in a moment of crisis, both in her relationship and in her experience as a non-national in Ireland. Possibly, at the time she met her husband-to-be, she might not have felt as split, in the negative sense, as she does when she reminisces about it or, at least, she might have focused on the bright side of staying in Ireland, a place in which – in spite of getting married to an Irishman – she would always be an outsider. Her personal and professional lives both seem to be falling apart simultaneously. The plot's primary background is her search for a job in her field of expertise, since she has an MA in education from the University of São Paulo: "I am a fully qualified primary school teacher with five years' teaching experience" (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 87) as she herself explains in the resumés that she hands in to various school secretaries – "none of whom will ever contact you" (p. 87).

O'Donnell draws a contrast between the life Luana knew in Brazil, where she has even lived with Séan for eighteen months, and the one experienced in Ireland. The blissful tone of the early pages shifts to a mood of fear and uncertainty, in which stability and harmony are no longer so close on the horizon; this can be seen in the following excerpts: […] hand-feed Séan *coxinha* and *pão de queijo*. Laugh when he takes pictures of the oozing *misto-quente* and black-bean *feijoada*" (2016, p. 86) – a moment in which happiness was the dominant tone in their lives, differing from the distressing emotions Luana goes through when, already married, they both fly back to Ireland and a new reality takes shape before her eyes. The timespan between the joyous images of their wedding celebration and their life in Ireland where things start not to fit in is not explicitly stated, but is seemingly short: "Kiss Séan's neck and wriggle against him. When he doesn't react, consider flicking the light back on. Say nothing. Perhaps fears are like *fantasmas*; if you don't mention them, then they won't be real" (p. 91).

Luana no longer recognizes the man with whom she fell in love and whose connection made her change her life completely. Simultaneously, she endures professional problems, due to the difficulty of finding a position as a primary teacher; a sentiment of frustration emerges, enhanced by the lack of support from the people surrounding her.

Although Luana is a qualified and experienced teacher, that is not enough for her to find a job in her field. Just before traveling back to Ireland, she has received a letter from The Irish Teaching Council with a response to her registration application, notifying her that her request has been accepted, on the condition that she present the Irish Language Requirement within three years, or she would not be able to teach at primary level. This is when her professional and personal life mingle, and her relationship with Séan, which was already going through a delicate moment, is worsened by his unsupportive attitude to her project of learning Irish and achieving the conditions to practice her profession. If Séan considers the idea of learning Irish to be a stupid one (his words), a similar line of thought can also be perceived from other people close to her, including Gabriela, her closest friend – also Brazilian. When Luana expresses her disappointment with the obligation, seeking for words of support, Gabriela replies: "Languages are weird, Luana. You know Irish is partly derived from Sanskrit?" (p. 89), and instead of offering words of support, encourages Luana to look for another job, any job which would not require this knowledge.

In "Why did you move to Ireland?", Dalsin researched the motivations of Brazilians in choosing Ireland as their destination. Her survey included questions which revealed that most of these people did not migrate for the purpose of working in their areas of expertise. All the participants reported that they were working in 'underemployment' positions, in spite of their background and socio-economic status in their own country. They also reported that they were aware of this possibility before they travelled. This was the case for Luana's friend Gabriela, who – in spite of having studied linguistics in Rio de Janeiro, "shovels French fries into cardboard boxes for the minimum wage" (p. 89) in Dublin. Luana, on the other hand, does not settle for that; she aims to get a position that will allow her to resume her career, which possibly means that – in spite of the primary reason that made her stay in Ireland – she was not willing to give up on what she had achieved up to that moment. This already shows what Meyer and Jepperson call "agency for the self" – the agentic individual's decision to exercise her potential for active mediation to promote her own purposes and interests. At the same time, in accordance with Dalsin's ideal concept of what are the elements of this type of agency, Luana's effort in pursuing her career goals in spite of the many difficulties presented both in the micro and macro instances of her experience resonates with Meyer and Jepperson's understanding that the

modern agentic subject manages goals that are thought to reside in personality, or life-course (2010, p. 106), thus "carrying responsibility not only to reflect self-interest but also the wider rationalized rules conferring agency" (p. 107).

In spite of the constraints, Luana goes deep into the journey of fulfilling the language requirement that will allow her to teach. She goes out of her way, persevering in her objective. On the very day of her naturalisation, when celebrating in the pub The Quays, grabbing some pints of Guinness, she approaches her father-in-law and asks him to teach her the Irish language, to which he replies, not taking the matter very seriously: "Oh geez, Luana… I wouldn't be a great Irish speaker now, sorry" (p. 88). Séan's sister seems to be even more condescending and uninterested when replying to Luana's request: "Ach, Luana, pet, I'd love to help you but I wouldn't have a fuckin' notion about Irish" (p. 88). The final blow to Luana's quest for assistance is given by Séan himself, whose outrageous reply demonstrates not only his lack of support, but also his disparagement of her: "Are you serious? That's hilarious, babe. Sure my Gaelic's brutal. *Cáca. Milséan. Banana*. That's all I'd remember. Fuck, it'd be nearly impossible for a … for someone from a …", at which she interjects: "how do you say 'foreigner' in Irish?" (p. 89). Luana's discouragement from her peers is the first and most striking constraint in the story, for she simply could not count on any of those who were closest to her and who, she supposed, should give her the support she needed since she was now part of their family. Luana, nonetheless, seemingly does not take their attitude personally. Instead, she sees it as a mirror of the macro rather than the micro: "how am I meant to learn Irish when hardly any Irish people can even speak it?" (p. 89).

At this moment, she realizes there is no one she can count on but herself. Thus, she embarks on this lonely journey and finds other means to reach her goal. This move also corroborates the "agency for the self" argument previously mentioned, which relates to the actor's ability to evaluate emerging contingencies and respond in accordance with future projects and interests. Luana's response is shown as follows:

> Enrol in Irish For Beginners at the Scoil Ghaeilge on Damet. Classes should begin on an October evening sweet with the fragrance of rotting leaves. Most of your classmates will be Irish retirees in search of a new hobby. If they gawk at you and ask why the feck a Brazilian girl like you is learning Gaelic, explain that you are a primary teacher with a master's in education from São Paulo University, you moved here to Ireland because you fell in love with an Irish man, and that you must learn Irish in order to teach at primary level. Notice your classmates' eyes glazing over (at this point you should probably stop speaking). Learn your first phrase in Irish, and enjoy the Gaelic words undulating on your tongue. *Tá tuirse orm*: the tiredness is on me. (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 90)

The discussion proposed by Meyer and Jepperson can be paralleled with that of the other theoreticians who are discussed in the theoretical chapter of this dissertation. “Agency for the self”, for instance, may be likened to the temporal dimensions of agency, in that “individuals do not simply passively experience time” (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 174); in these terms, actors exert their agency by shaping their time experiences, and that occurs in consonance with their personality, which is construed and reaffirmed through time – therefore, temporally. The temporal dimension of agency is aligned with external circumstances which, in their turn, require the actor’s attention since “people’s actions do not occur in a vacuum” (p. 175). In the case of the main character in O’Donnell’s story, by enrolling in the Irish language course, in spite of the many obstacles to this endeavour, she shows, too, what Elder and Hitlin describe as “life course agency”, for a person does not act solely towards temporally proximate goals, nor solely towards situational ones, they also act in terms of their own life trajectory, that is to say: a situated form of agency (the exercising of action with long-term implications), and the “self-reflective belief about one’s capacity to achieve life course goals” (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 182). By pursuing her objective of learning the Irish language, Luana is acting in accordance with the long-term goal of being able to teach in Ireland, which, in wider terms, would allow her to establish herself professionally, in her area of expertise, in the country where she has chosen to live. Such a move, as discussed previously, goes against the flow of immigrants accepting the burden of leaving behind their professional qualifications when in Ireland (as evidenced in Dalsin’s research) due to the difficulty of finding non-underemployment positions. The issue goes beyond the immigrants’ effort to pursue their own careers: it also has to do with official policies on non-EU immigrant workers, as well as with the fact that Brazilians, in their majority, entered the country in the status of students, in spite of their permission to work during the exchange. In this sense, one may not fully compare Luana’s condition with that of other Brazilian immigrants, for she has now been through the naturalisation process, which alters her status. This, though, does not change the fact that she is, still, “a foreigner”.

While studying for the exam which, if she passes, will enable her to teach at primary level, Luana receives a proposal to take a nine-month maternity-leave position at a local school, which she accepts. On a November morning, she receives the visit of an Irish inspector to the class, which needs to be taught only in Irish – as part of the assessment for the first stage of the *Scrúdú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge*[17]: “Panic. With the help of Google Translate, write out your entire thirty-minute lesson like a badly plotted film script” (O’DONNELL, 2016, p.

[17] Translated from the Irish: “the Irish language requirement”.

91). Amongst the clutter and childish fights of her six-year-old students, she manages to teach the lesson and passes the teaching aspect of the Irish Language Requirement.

She then books a course to be taken during the February half-term break, as required by the next mandatory step: complete a residential study period in the Irish-speaking Gaeltacht[18]. As if the whole situation was not distressing enough for her – since she has made little progress in learning Irish – she once again needs to face Séan's disapproval and unpleasant words to this matter: "Fuckin' ridiculous … how the hell d'ya think you're going to learn Irish, babe …? Waste of money … probably get lost anyway … stupid fuckin' idea" (p. 94).

Whilst Séan's aggressive words certainly affect her, she opts not to confront him about his attitude. The sensation the author gives is that Luana is not problematizing his demeanour, since the whole environment is already stifling enough, in all senses. After all, Séan is the closest person to her and the one she probably still leans on the most. He is the primary reason why she decided to cancel her flight back to Brazil and stay in Ireland. That does not make his attitude less problematic, though – and the fact that she does not react to it or face it properly right away must be a cause of concern. She is, however, facing a multiplicity of different challenges and difficulties simultaneously, and she possibly chooses to deal with them one at a time. Before looking more closely at Luana and Séan's relationship, let me follow her line of thought: she will deal with the Irish Language Requirement first.

Discouragement and lack of support for her professional journey is no news for Luana. Regardless of the trouble she had with her husband on the issue, in February she heads to Connemara for the residential study period at *Coláiste Loch Nualla*. Here again we see the "life course agency" debated by Hitlin and Elder, related to the individual's self-perception and which might help her/him to endure constraints: "Self-perceptions of agentic capacity have social consequences. People who perceive more agency are more likely to persevere in the face of problems, either within situations or in encountering obstacles that represent structural impediments" (2007 p. 182). Luana's agentic demeanour is already having social consequences: if, on the one hand, her faithfulness to her own journey disturbs Séan – who was at every point trying to dissuade her from persevering – she also challenges macro structures when, as a Brazilian, she goes out of her way to attempt to join the Irish job market. Her resilience in pursuing her goal, in itself, depicts life course agency; the idea of a more stable life in Ireland, not relying only on the relationship, sheds a light on who she is able to become,

[18] "The parts of Ireland where many people speak Irish Gaelic as a first language" – Cambridge Dictionary.

and, in her case, “these beliefs about possible future selves motivate current agentic choices” (p. 183).

At this point, her exasperation and impatience with the course she has to take seems to be at its limit. She drives away from Dublin, alone, to the countryside of Ireland, where she will take a one-week course, so that after it she can finally take the Irish Language Requirement exam. Driving away from Dublin means distancing herself from everything that is known to her – the place where, as an outsider, she is more comfortable: in spite of her many disputes with Séan and his reprehensible attitude, their house is still the place in Ireland that she can call home. Throughout the journey to Connemara, her stress is visible: lost, after driving for hours, she realizes her destination “isn’t even on the map” (O’DONNELL, 2016, p. 95). On the verge of a mental collapse, she leaves the car and starts reminiscing about the life she once knew in Brazil:

> Cover your face with your hands. Remember the country you left behind. Ilha de Anchieta. Where big-eyed spider monkeys perform acrobatics in the palms. Your mama’s hands. All of this you abandoned for a love as fleeting as quickly browning açai blossoms. Pick up a rock and sling it into the mutilated darkness of the bog. (p. 95)

The elements counterposed in this excerpt work as allusions to what, at that moment, both countries represented to Luana. Ilha de Anchieta, in São Paulo, is a paradisical island, an area of environmental protection due to its endangered species. The bright image of this island contrasts with that of the darkness of the bog which, in itself, overtly alludes to Ireland. The second element offered in the excerpt is Luana’s mother, the first, everlasting love she knew, which is then contrasted with that of Séan, about whom she is showing conflicted feelings. The juxtaposition of the bright, warm elements of her homeland with the dark and cold ones she experiences in Ireland leave her with an unsettling feeling of not belonging: “Sense the hostile glare of this grey-green land in which you will forever be a foreigner” (p. 95). Even so, she finds the way to the Irish school, and Connemara, where she arrives, late night, for a whole week’s immersion in the Irish language. Once again, facing “ten pairs of primary-teacher eyes staring at you like rows of politely seated orcs”, she needs to explain why a Brazilian girl is learning Irish (O’DONNELL, 2016, p. 96). Her physical and psychological exhaustion exhale through the pages: to a taunt, she replies: “I don’t know why I’m learning this stupid language at this stage”.

Luana’s endeavour in learning Irish is in direct proportion to the difficulty she experiences in studying it – which seems to become even harder as the micro and macrocosm

surrounding her are in no way conducive to boosting her motivation for the enterprise. Not understanding a word the teacher, Kathleen, a woman from the Aran Islands, says, she – on her own – seeks out other tools to help her in a minimal understanding about the language: "sneak out your mobile under the desk and try to google 'spelling patterns in Irish', but find that there is no internet signal in Loch Con Nualla. Tears should sting, making your eyeliner bleed" (p. 97). Once again, O'Donnell resorts to external elements to refer to the character's emotions: the lack of internet signal both alludes to her feeling of isolation, from this small community of primary teachers with whom she is having to coexist, and also works as a representation of the macrocosm of Irish society. Isolation and distancing are also portrayed through the ways in which she reminisces about her husband, drawing a connection between how she relates to her circumstances and to him: "Think of Séan. Imagine that your bed is a raft that has been cut adrift, and that you will float forever without reaching the shores of this night" (p. 97). "Floating without reaching the shores" gives us a sensation that this character does not know where this journey is going to take her and, to a greater extent, that such uneasy emotions will last forever. Nonetheless, Luana's actions show us that she does have a clear purpose in mind, in spite of the tiredness and exasperation she feels. She may not yet be aware of the extent to which her willpower is serving as a watershed in her path to empowerment. This may also be the case for individuals who exert the "life course" type of agency, in that "the concrete events that make up a turning point in one's life may not be immediately clear at the time" (2007, p. 183) – some events and decisions only make sense when, later, they become linked in hindsight.

Back to Dublin, after her intense Irish language immersion week in Connemara, Luana arrives home to find Séan resolved to spend a few more weeks away from her, to get his "head around" (p. 100) – and he departs. If Luana was already feeling lonely and isolated, Séan's action left her speechless: "how do you say stop talking in Irish?", she reflects, anaesthetized. She attempts a dialogue with Séan, but he is not willing to talk at this moment. Her trying to have a conversation with her husband, in spite of the significant lows they had been through, can be seen as implying that going back to the place she called home has offered her some sort of comfort; when Séan leaves, nonetheless, her world seems once again to be falling around her shoulders; the benefits of home that she expected to encounter – in spite of the many wrongs involved – were now, for good, no longer there:

> There are no words you could possibly say to Séan, in English, Irish or Portuguese. Stand in the doorway and listen to his bike chortling down the cobbled pathway of the home you once loved. After the snarl of his Vespa has faded, into a whisper, watch a fuzzy rainbow leak through a slate-grey sky. At this moment it should be sunny

> somewhere on the horizon, but it will start raining where you are. (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 100)

O'Donnell recurrently makes use of natural phenomena, as in the excerpt above and in other passages previously discussed, to hint at the main character's inner emotions, such as in the contrast of "sunny" and "rainy", which can be interpreted as translations of Luana's mood. It also reminds us that if Luana wants to move forward, in the direction of her future expectations, she needs to endure the many constraints of the here-and-now constantly being imposed on her: being a foreigner in Ireland, and all the limitations that go with that status, especially in professional terms; and the background conditions of her personal life – which are certainly not in any way motivating or cooperating with her journey. It could be argued that a mediating attitude is required from Luana which can allow her to overcome present constraints which, if not overcome, would not allow her to reach her long-term goals. Whilst her emotional and psychological challenges are indicated precisely by her environment (being an outsider) and her interpersonal relationships (first and foremost, her marriage, and to a lesser degree, her relations with friends and relatives in Ireland), there is also the concrete obstacle presented by the Irish Language Requirement certificate – if she does not get it, any possibility of her effectively achieving a job as a primary teacher in Ireland will be annihilated.

In "What is agency?", Emirbayer and Mische pinpoint that projectivity, the dimension of agency which most resonates with actors' future expectations, requires individuals to weigh, too, the iterational and practical-evaluative dimensions of the agentic demeanour – respectively, assessment of past events, and the evaluation and response of actors towards demands and contingencies of the present – since "projectivity is […] located in a critical mediating juncture between the iterational and practical-evaluative aspects of agency" (p. 984). By employing the projective type of agency, seeking to accomplish future projects, Luana is also evaluating the present constraints, characterizing the practical-evaluative dimension of agency – which seems to be the one that activates individuals' resourceful power for agentic demeanour, leading them to draw upon past and future experiences so as to make their best discernment about challenging present events. Emirbayer and Mische (p. 994) highlight that for a thorough evaluative positioning of present situations, actors are often required to adjust routine dispositions and also re-evaluate projects, desires and intentions for the future in more practical and realistic terms, in line with "real-world circumstances". A practical-evaluative conduct, in these terms, enables actors to exercise agency in a mediating fashion, which potentially gives them the agentic apparatus to challenge and transform ongoing situational contexts of action.

Even with the crisis in her personal life, Luana carries on, getting prepared for the final exam she needs to take so as finally to earn the Irish Language Requirement certificate. While listening to the virtual Irish lesson delivered by Kathleen, and still understanding little of it, she contemplates her options: “Smashing the screen of the laptop against the bedroom wall; Calling Séan.; Returning to São Paulo, where at least you wouldn’t have to learn Irish.” (O’DONNELL, 2016, p. 102). But facing the last phase of this challenging exam has seemingly become, for her – more than an official requirement for her to teach in the country – a question of honour in her own personal journey, as well as in relation to the people who have so overtly and repeatedly discouraged and discredited her. Although the options she considered for abandoning her quest were tangible, and easy to resort to, she once again demonstrates resilience, willpower and autonomy – attributes of an agentic actor. In this sense, her pathway to fully establishing herself in Irish society not merely as the wife of an Irishman but also as a professional exemplifies the link between the practical-evaluative dimension of agency (aroused by the present constraint presented by the Irish language requirement) and the projective dimension of agency (symbolizing her future plans, that is to say, her being able to exert her profession in the Irish labour market). This perspective on Luana’s journey may also be effectively understood in the following quotation from Emirbayer and Mische: “out of the anguish, uncertainty, and longing that arise from the condition of ‘becoming,’ actors necessarily ‘project’ themselves into their own possibilities of being” (p. 986).

The final step of the Irish Language Requirement consists of a recorded interview, some questions, and writing of an essay which, luckily, is on the topic that Kathleen – Luana’s Irish language teacher – has chosen for them to write in class. When the exam is finished, Luana heads to a pub to drink a couple of pints with some of the other teachers who also took the test: “by now, your head should be throbbing, your body drained and limp as a fallen leaf” (O’DONNEL, 2016, p. 104). Tipsy, Luana now invites Séan to the pub, and refuses to have a conversation with him, even with his insistence and attempts at approaching and getting intimately close to her. At this point, Gabriela, exhausted and immersed in an ocean of unsettling emotions, arrives and reveals that Luana is leaving the country:

> ‘You’re leaving?’ The amber orbs in Séan’s pond-water eyes will blur. ‘Fuck, Luana, don’t tell me you’re fuckin’ leaving?’ Before you can answer, he will hug you tightly […] Swallow hard as a gritty feeling rises in your stomach. Push away from Séan, run past Gabriela, scurry into the Ladies, lock up a cubicle door behind you and throw into the toilet bowl. Rip off a sheet of loo roll and wipe the trail of watery vomit from your chin. Run your hands through the undyed roots of your knotty hair. *Santa Maria Mãe de Deus.* (O’DONNELL, 2016, p. 104)

Before any of them can reach her, Luana leaves not only the pub, but the country she has chosen as her new home, and the life it all encompassed, including the joyful memories of her early years with Séan and the distressing process of attempting to be more than simply a naturalized Brazilian woman, married to an Irish man who showed no signs of support or goodwill in assisting her in her professional endeavour: “Don’t worry if you do not understand why you’re crying at this moment; you’re not meant to” (p. 105). Some may think Luana’s effort has gone down the drain with her departure, and some may consider that leaving demonstrates she has given up on her personal project, and even consider it a sign of weakness. I beg to differ. Luana has faced all the constraints throughout her entire journey without making a single concrete move in the direction of abdicating her goals. She has stood up, by herself, after listening to cruel things from the very people who were supposed to offer the bare minimum assistance. Virtually everyone has turned their back on this young Brazilian woman, who has bravely left her loved ones across the ocean to pursue a dream. Her strength has remained throughout the whole of her journey – which does not mean she did not feel the impact of being emotionally and physically abandoned. In spite of her personal life falling to pieces, she persisted, courageously, and proceeded in the direction of her professional fulfilment. She did everything that was in her power; and the road was tough and challenging at every single minute of this journey. After completing what she had aimed for, she had nothing else to wait for or lose. For all these reasons, leaving Ireland was, too, an act of agency.

Agency, in such terms, starts from within the actor, and her mediatory attitudes towards socially circumscribed events: even if actors’ responses are automatic, carefully considered or long-term, as explained by Hitlin and Elder, this demeanour “implicates individual action, effort, and intention” (2007, p. 175); such an outlook becomes clearer with the idea proposed by Giddens, which it is worth highlighting once again: “the actor might have done otherwise” (2014, p. 54). Originating from the self, agentic actions are embedded in a subject’s personal orientations towards past experiences and future projects, while simultaneously co-existing with self-reflexivity regarding present circumstances; each of these temporal orientations, as seen previously in Emirbayer and Mische’s writing on agency, lead to different aspects of the self within action, since “individuals shift their time horizons based on the problems that emerge within situated interaction” (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 175). Back in her home town, São Paulo, Luana refuses to talk to her mother about the reasons that made her flee from Ireland, although her demeanour signals the seriousness of the matter:

> Your mama will pour all of her concern for you into her *feijoada*, and the smoky black-bean taste will catch in your throat. Take the elevator up to the rooftop at sundown to see the skyscrapers lit up like lanterns. Watch the shifting geometry of the São Paulo skyline and wonder why your birth city no longer feels like home. (O'DONNELL, 2016, p. 105)

Instead of feeling embraced by the place she once missed, Luana apparently feels displaced and uncomfortable, becoming irritated even by the details which constitute the atmosphere of the city – "the morning smog" (p. 105), and the cultural elements from her country, specifically the ones regarding food, which – throughout the narrative – remained part of her daily life even when she was in Ireland: "you've lost your taste for *pão de queijo*, and *coxinha* seems too salty" (p. 105). Such elements work as the embodiment of the feeling of unbelonging and dislocation, which the character was not expecting to experience when returning to her birth city: "How do you say 'I'm lost' in Irish? How do you say 'I'm confused' in Irish? How do you say how you really feel in any language?" (p. 105).

"Wander" is the verb O'Donnell resorted to as a means of expressing the character's peregrination towards the reencounter with herself, in the city she once called home: "Google: 'resettling in home country after living abroad'" (p. 105); this shows that Luana did not consider her travel to São Paulo as temporary, she intended to effectively make the city her home again. The decision is, nonetheless, challenged by a new and unexpected event: she receives an envelope with a "now-familiar logo, [with] the Salmon of Knowledge" (p. 106) which – although not explicitly stated – is seemingly the final result for the Irish Language Requirement test taken in Ireland: "rip the envelope open with your shaking hands. Fling the bathroom door open and shout out 'Mama, guess what!'" (p. 106).

O'Donnell's leaves the story somehow open-ended, for it is not explicitly stated whether Luana has been approved in the test or not. However, her outburst when calling her mother and the tone employed in the expression chosen by the author gives the sensation that the result was, in the end, positive.

O'Donnell wittingly develops the plot in sections, as if the character was guiding someone into the process of learning Irish, as the title itself suggests. Via the title, "How to Learn Irish in Seventeen Steps", it may be apprehended that – although the journey was long and full of obstacles, ultimately, the main character was able to accomplish her goal, in that she is capable of "teaching" it in the steps exposed in the narrative (that is, indeed, an irony, for Luana is not teaching us how to learn the Irish language, but she is exposing the rights and

wrongs she had to face in her journey. It was a long way to the top but, apparently, she was able to make it to that pinnacle.

In these terms, learning Irish does not necessarily mean being able to communicate fluently, write, listen or read in that language. No, learning Irish means reaching the objective of being approved in the test which would grant her the permission to teach at primary level in Ireland. It is unclear whether Luana is returning to Ireland, but if she is, once again it is because she chose to do so, just as it was her choice to return to Brazil. In reference to this, it is worth citing Emirbayer and Mische as concerns the agentic actor: one must not disregard the multidimensional character of human motivations and social relationships (p. 989).

4.3 “And who do you think you are too?”: The social agency of African immigrants in “This hostel life” by Melatu Uche Okorie

> *[...] direct provision is like being in an abusive relationship. Abuse itself is homogeneous, no matter what race, class, or in this case, the hostel of the abused. […] I, like other residents, have learnt to live under these almost tyrannical conditions. After all, no one would like to be moved as the devil you know is always better than the angel you don’t. […] I was ready to endure the intimidating and bullying behaviour of some of the security men and the condescending tone of some of the staff, however, my frustration has grown so much in the past few weeks, I stopped going to the dining room in the evenings. I tried hiding away in my room and buying my own food just to avoid seeing them, but with a child and $28.70 as weekly money, I could not sustain that. (Melatu Uche Okorie, p. vii-ix)*
> *‘Who do you think you are?’ Me I hear the staff shout for Ngozi. As everybody heard the staff shout for Ngozi, everybody is quiet, and start to listen. Even Mercy is look at Ngozi like she wait for her answer to the question.*
> *‘And who do you think you are too?’ Ngozi is ask back and she is point at the staff as she is talk”. (Melatu Uche Okorie, p. 20).*

The opening epigraph to this section portrays the lives of immigrants, more specifically asylum seekers, in Direct Provision (DP) centres, provided by the State, in the Republic of Ireland, since 2000. The asylum seeker in question, whose shocking and outrageous testimonial exposes the many wrongs officially practised on these outsiders in a self-proclaimed multicultural State, is Melatu Uche Okorie, the author of the story analysed in this chapter. “This hostel life” is the title story of her debut collection, published in 2018 by Skein Press. The narrative is set in a Direct Provision Centre in Dublin – one of the many hostels for this purpose which had been spread throughout the country, operated by the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS), an administrative division of the Department of Justice.

Direct Provision was initially conceived as a short-term solution to the immigrants who sought asylum in the Irish State. The cornerstone of the DP system is to provide hostel-type accommodation for asylum seekers while they waited for an official position on their

application to stay permanently. When Direct Provision was introduced in March 2000, the then minister of Justice stated that asylum seekers would stay in these arrangements on a short-term basis – no longer than six months (O'REILLY, p. 134). The reality, though, proved to be distinct from the discourse: the average length of stay in the DP system turned out to be three years, while other immigrants – Okorie herself – stayed in these hostels for more than eight years. The delay in granting these immigrants a refugee status is explained by the growth in the number of applications in the late 1990s and early 2000s: from 31 in 1991 to the impressive number of 11,634 in 2003 (O'REILLY, p.133). The figures not only serve to explain the delayed processing of asylum seekers' claims, but also provide added clarification on how attractive the country seemed to be in the eyes of those who had no choice other than leaving their homelands. By 2002, a striking number of 13 million people had to "press the pause button" on the recording of their lives, being forced to flee their home countries, as discussed in Joan Roddy's essay "Refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland" (2002, p. 328).

In Melatu Okorie's "This hostel life", Beverlée is a Congolese woman who lives in a DP centre in Dublin among many other immigrants of various nationalities. The story is told through her point of view, while the narrative construction places her simultaneously as an observer of other people's experiences and as a central character, since she is not only a mere spectator, but also engages in many of the dynamics presented in the story. The plotline's time span is a Monday morning, the day when most of the asylum seekers collect their provisions – since on Tuesday the supplies might be finished. Mondays are a busy day in the hostel, and the collection of provisions has become a meeting point for all the dwellers. Interestingly, all of the characters who are put in the spotlight in Okorie's narrative are women, who – while queuing and waiting for the most essential items for the family's survival – would mingle, become acquainted with one another, sometimes getting along well, sometimes not. Amid the hustle and gabble in the queue, Beverlée generally assumes the position of listener, observer and pacifier, but in spite of this her thoughts bubble, establishing a direct connection between her inner feelings and the reader: on the turmoil taking place along the line, she comments: "Me I am here for collect my provision and toiletings for dis week. We collect only for Mondays and Tuesdays for the dining room in dis hostel. Dat is why there is so many humans and buggies" (OKORIE, 2018, p. 2).

Beverlée's conciliatory attitude contrasts with those of many of her peers. The unsteady atmosphere is not restricted to the relationship only between the immigrants and the hotel staff, but also that between the immigrants themselves. At the very beginning of the narrative, Beverlée joins a group of acquaintances who had arrived earlier for the provision collecting,

most of them being, seemingly, Nigerian. This is a key factor, since in the narrative it is implicitly stated that the immigrants would become members of their own national bubbles, not usually mingling with people from other countries. Beverlée, nonetheless, disrupts this pattern when she makes a point of interacting with non-Congolese peers. The narrator and central character explains that, among her compatriots, Nigerians had a reputation as troublemakers, and being close to them could possibly cause friction with the hostel's managers: "People tell me before, when I first came to this hostel: 'Be careful of Nigerias; do not make friends with Nigerias; Nigerias like to make trouble and fight too much; the management don't like Nigerias.'" (OKORIE, 2018, p. 6). In spite of this reputation, Beverlée chooses not to conform to this unstable pattern, and makes friends with Ngozi, a Nigerian woman who is her "closest Nigeria friend" (p.6), whom she admires for "she talk free like me and does not care about anybody" (p.6).

Beverlée's explanation on why she enjoys Ngozi's company says a lot about her own mindset. Her saying she likes Ngozi for not caring about other people's opinion suggests that she admires people who, like herself, come to their own conclusions and don't simply go with the flow. The attitude of Beverlée and Ngozi shows that there is room for developing autonomy, and that it starts in one's own interpersonal relations. Okorie's narrative portrays the relationships between immigrants from different nationalities as conflicted. In spite of their seemingly similar positions in the DP, and of being under the same ruling system, the connections they establish, shown by the dialogues recorded, demonstrate that their circumstances are not enough to enable them to find space for friendly, embracing relationships.

It appears that the system itself fuels suspicion between different groups: although the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) website states that asylum seekers, within Direct Provision, are provided with accommodation, meals, heat, light, laundry, TV, household maintenance, etc. – paid by the State – the atmosphere depicted in "This hostel life" indicates that the general feeling among these immigrants is of an unequal treatment between different persons and groups. That is explicit when Beverlée tells us that she had been warned not to befriend Nigerian people because their supposedly quarrelsome demeanour led the management not to like them – the inference being that by not being close to the Nigerians, the other immigrants would probably receive a better treatment from the DP managers.

There is a scene in the story where Beverlée is queuing along with her acquaintances. We already know that Beverlée's closest friend is Ngozi, who is also waiting in the line and plays an active role in the conversation; next to them is Mummy Dayo, of whom Beverlée is not very fond, due to her outwardly unpleasant commentaries on others. Mummy Dayo then

make a gesture to look inside Ngozi's "Lidl bag" (OKORIE, 2018, p. 17), to count the provisions inside; Beverlée notices Mummy Dayo's intrusion, and in an interior monologue informs the reader of the provisions she, from her position, can see inside Ngozi's bag. She observes that "maybe she want to know if Ngozi is get more provision than she" (p. 17). This is apparently usual behaviour amongst the hostel residents, as pinpointed by Beverlée: "Me I know some people come for dining room just to see what provision dis person or dat person collect, and after that, dey gonna use it for fight staff" (p.17). While the narrator opposes these attitudes, many others seem to be in accordance with them as a means of policing the management's conduct. Ngozi herself questions the staff's distribution of provisions – differing from Beverlée on this: "She say why staff not give everybody the same because everybody for equal. She say to give some persons special things is a quick way for cause trouble for a place like dis" (p. 17-18).

This is certainly a cause of trouble for the asylum seeker residents. The conflict is, again, enhanced by the system itself and the staff's apparently uneven actions. While it may be a source of disagreement between the immigrants, it becomes for them also a proof that the system is unfair and does not treat them equally. Hence some choose to discretely inspect others so as to use the results as a – reasonable – basis to quarrel with the management. Others, like Beverlée, assume a non-confrontational position for the sake of the common good – since as the story tells us, questioning the management has left many people with no provisions at all: once the staff is subjected to questioning and conflict, they simply close the office and stop all delivery of provisions, to everyone.

Beverlée witnesses conversations and attitudes that show the distrust and animosity between different groups in the story – made explicit to the reader through her interior monologue. Another tool the plot uses is flashback, as when the central character recalls Mummy Dayo's speech and attitudes to people from different nationalities. The device used to explain to readers why she is not very fond of Mummy Dayo: she doesn't "like the way Mummy Dayo look the man like fight" and for she "always say something about everybody", as in the following excerpt:

> 'Those Moslems, me I suspect dem too much o. I no follow dem do anything.'
> 'Dat Cameroon girl, she can like to do *shakara*[19]. I no know who she think she be.'
> 'Congo? Dey crazy pass Nigeria o! We Nigerias, na only mouth we get, but Congo fit take knife fight you.'

19 To show off. Commonly used amongst Nigerian youth. Source: https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Shakara

> 'Eastern Europeans dem all be fake *oyinbo*[20].'
> 'Irish people too dey cold. Whisper, whisper, all the time.' (OKORIE, 2018, p. 8)

Whereas their environment may fuel the behaviours of the DP immigrants who are already on the verge of a nervous collapse, some of them concentrate their suspicion and frustration on the Irish people who, by working in Direct Provision, somehow seem to embody the weaknesses pervading the DP conception. In "The political currency of Irish racism: 1997-2002", historian Bryan Fanning states that "growing numbers of asylum seekers signalled the arrival of a new political issue" (p.139); indeed, as has been pointed out by critics like Joan Roddy and Emily O'Reilly, the Irish Republic has failed in the way it dealt with the changes brought about from the Tiger period onwards, in terms of immigration. Unsurprisingly, it led the State to come up with fast and not well-thought-out strategies to deal with this reality. As O'Reilly puts it, the feeling is that there may be "significant blind spots in our self-appraisal as a society" (2013); and Roddy pinpoints that "the official policy seems to segregate rather than to integrate asylum seekers into the community" (2002, p.331).

The "new political issue" that emerged with the rise of the Tiger and the arrival of an impressive number of immigrants – although Ireland was not at the top of the list of nations in terms of numbers – may be seen as a two-way street. While the outsiders caused a difficulty for the Irish government, leading the locals to have a distorted impression of them, so did the State's treatment of asylum seekers. After all, how could they possibly know whether the Irish were in agreement with such a system or not? This is one of the reasons why, throughout the narrative, the asylum seekers seemed to be fearful and suspicious of the hostel's staff, as exemplified in Mercy's comment in the very first page of the story: "'Mehn,' she say, 'that grey hair really freaked me out this morning.'"

Many are the reasons why people are forced to flee home and seek asylum in other countries; they include lack of democracy, prevalence of war, ethnic and religious conflicts, famine and hunger, persecution, environmental degradation, extreme poverty, and forced displacement of peoples (RODDY, 2002, p. 129). Bryan Fanning reports that, by 2011, Africans had become 1% of the population of the Republic (2018, p. 179). In spite of the 40,000 asylum applications recorded in 1992 through 2001, as reported in Roddy's essay (p. 330), with a significant decrease in the subsequent years[21], there were 17,672 Nigerians living in Ireland in 2011 (according to that year's sensus). Fanning states that by 2005, there were at least 4.6

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[20] Nigerian (Yoruba) word for a white man. Commonly used in Pidgin English. Source: https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=oyinbo

[21] Ireland received 1,939 refugee applications in 2010, and 940 in 2012. (O'REILLY, 2013, p. 133).

million Africans living in the European Union, excluding the undocumented. Even with Ireland granting only about 5% of asylum applications in 2012, in contrast to 14% for the European Union, Ireland still struggled to process the applications made. It was the increase in the period of 2000-2004 (O'REILLY, 2013, p. 133) that led to the creation of the Direct Provision system, which has, unfortunately, only recently been publicly acknowledged as a dysfunctional (to say the least) way of dealing with the boom of asylum claims in the Republic: "Strong arguments have been made in recent years that the DP arrangements fail to protect some fundamental human rights", O'Reilly writes in her evaluation of the DP system in Ireland (2013, p. 144).

If, on an overall basis, immigrants' potentials for autonomy are constrained due to their status as "outsiders", it is not surprising that the conditions of immigrants in the category of asylum seekers, living under this regime, would be even worse, and that they should find themselves in a position of helpless disadvantage when contrasted with the reality of those who did not enter the country as refugees. The rigidity of the system,[22] as widely criticized by critics and historians, aligns with the feeling of entrapment conveyed in "This hostel life". The asylum seekers in Okorie's narrative show an unbending will to cope with the restrictions forced upon them and, in spite of the many differences between them (for people are a social and temporal construction, therefore assimilating events in a non-straightforward manner) they share one important characteristic in terms of analysis of their coping mechanisms – the environment in which they had to coexist:

> Living in a DP centre involves very little privacy, frequent overcrowding, no choice of diet, no facilities to have visitors, little scope for recreation or any meaningful activity and, not least, effectively no income. Enforced idleness and lack of engagement with wider society tend to be a feature of the lives of asylum seekers in Ireland. (O'REILLY, 2013, p. 134-135)

From this point on, the leading question is: how did these characters, with their similarities and differences, cope with such restrictions? Did they find any pathway for empowerment and, if so, how was it portrayed? Although "This hostel life" has numerous characters, I am focusing on the two central ones: Beverlée, the narrator, and Ngozi, her closest friend, who are – at different levels – given the spotlight in the story.

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[22] The Direct Provision system was one of the many aspects of Irish State policies on immigration which has been criticized by critics and historians. Bryan Fanning, in his book *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* (2002) pinpoints that the State discourse of Ireland as a multicultural country proved to be flawed in practice, and in the treatment of questions of racism and xenophobia (p. 183-186). In parallel, Steve Loyal in the book chapter *Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: racism, immigration and the state* criticizes the official discourse which publicized the "new Ireland" as a welcoming, multicultural and tourist-friendly society when, in practical terms, its pendulum had leaned to a monocultural ideology and "exclusionary forms of nationalism".

In the book "Gender and agency: reconfiguring the subject in feminist and social theory", Lois McNay emphasizes the importance of re-signifying the ideal of agentic behaviour as more than simply an attitude (or set of attitudes) of confrontation and denial. She writes: "This is not to deny the efficacy of all forms of resistance, but it is to suggest that a more precise and varied account of agency is required to explain the differing motivations and the ways in which individuals and groups struggle over, appropriate and transform cultural meanings and resources" (2000, p. 5). McNay's invitation for a reconceptualization of the understanding of agency resonates with the discussions proposed in the theoretical chapter of this dissertation, in which the authors quoted – in an effort to broaden the debate – advocate for an apprehension of the concept which may supersede simplistic and unreflective understandings of the individual's capacity, since "unacknowledged agency dynamics permeate and shape modern social structure" (MEYER; JEPPERSON, 2010, p. 110).

"This hostel life" shows that each of the immigrant characters portrayed in the narrative assimilates the conditions surrounding them differently. Some are known as troublemakers for questioning the hostel's staff when they feel wronged, while others take on what theorists would call non-confrontational behaviour. For some, this attitude could be translated as passivity and un-reflexivity: here is the whole point in recent studies, and their attempt at redefining agency beyond such a flat and closed definition, since such an appraisal no longer suits the case of modern actors who are, as expressed by Meyer and Jepperson, "a historical and ongoing cultural construction" (2000, p.101) and yet who "besides being agents for themselves do so under the condition that they are also agents for and under constructed rationalized and universalistic standards" (p. 117) – a point which, according to the authors, explains the different features of the modern actor.

Beverlée and Ngozi are characters who clearly have distinct approaches when it comes to the restrictions they live under in the Direct Provision system. The former (Beverlée) establishes a connection between the reader and the characters. In the role of narrator, she evaluates and brings to life not only the events which she considers important but also those that are in some way striking examples of her own experience in the hostel. By evaluating the other characters' posture, she reflects on which attitudes would be more or less functional in their context. This in itself demonstrates that her demeanour is the opposite of what would be taken as un-reflective and submissive; however, the means through which she chooses to externalize such insights are consonant with her own assessment on the context as lived: by disagreeing with the overtly confrontational demeanour of some of the residents, Ngozi included, she may be seen at first glance as an individual whose agentic capacity is not being

fully applied. I beg to differ from this view of Beverlée's behaviour, since there are explicit examples in the story in which her understanding of the setting presented proves otherwise. In his account on the refugee question in Ireland, Roddy criticizes the treatment granted to these immigrants by arguing that "when people live in confined space, with little money and few choices about their life, they easily become depressed, dispirited and de-skilled" (RODDY, 2002, p.331). This view is reinforced in O'Reilly's study of Direct Provision, in which she points out that "the system as it currently operates has a negative impact on mental health and the ability to lead a 'normal' life" (2013, p. 144). With this coherent and valuable criticism in mind, it would be natural to take the asylum seekers in Okorie's story as people whose helplessness prevented them from having any sort of reaction in the context of the systematic impairments applied to them. It would also be natural to think of them as individuals whose ability to acknowledge such constraints was undermined by their status as asylum seekers, whose best option was to fly home. This, though, is not the case for Beverlée, as presented in the narrative, who proves to be aware of the system being operated around her: "Dis direct provision business is all the same, you see, because even if you collect provision for every week or you collect for every month, it is still somebody dat is give you the provision. Nothing is better than when you decide something for yourself" (p. 3).

Based on the accounts above, it is clear that people living in the Direct Provision system would not have much of a choice, let alone the power of decision-making. Beverlée's sentence in the paragraph above demonstrates her awareness of this. By stating that she is being prevented from deciding something for herself, she shows that the conditions she is living under are preventing from exercising the type of agency which Hitlin and Elder call "existential agency" – which relates to the individual's capacity for "self-initiated behaviour" (p. 177) and which, in spite of being inherent to social action (although this is not always acknowledged by individuals themselves) is severely compromised by these immigrants' condition. In spite of this, Beverlée still has the sense of self-efficacy which is also intrinsic to the notion of existential agency, leading her to ponder – and here I would like to remind you once again of her observant and evaluative posture – which would be the most functional actions for her to take in that specific context.

In the essay "What is agency?", Emirbayer and Mische discuss the concept as being a temporarily embedded social process, which means that individuals' temporal orientation is an important tool for apprehending the agentic roles they assume in processes of social engagement; in other words, it is hard to separate the actor and the structure (the context) when attempting a thorough analysis of a person's actions in a context. In terms of the temporal

dimensions of the agentic demeanour, individuals' conduct may be oriented towards their past experiences, present situations or future projections, each of these having specificities which lead actors to express their reactions differently. In spite of the asylum seekers' background in Okorie's story playing an important role in the way they position themselves in response to their present constraints, the demands in the story in the present seem to call on them to use their "practical-evaluative" capabilities (as shown by Emirbayer and Mische (p. 994). This is the dimension within the "chordal triad" which mostly resonates with the actors' response to demands and contingencies of the present). The practical-evaluative dimension is seemingly the one which activates individuals' resourceful power for agentic demeanour, leading them to draw upon past experiences and future expectations so as to best discern what to do about present challenging events. As the authors also explain: "the problematization of experience in response to emergent situations thus calls for increasingly reflective and interpretive work on the part of social actors" (p. 994).

Although she states that the Direct Provision system is "all the same" (OKORIE, p. 3, 2016), in terms of its logistics and the hierarchical relationship between the asylum seekers and the staff, now and then Beverlée comments on the contrasts between the residents' relationships in each hostel. It is known, although the reasons are not shared with the readers, that she has been transferred from her previous hostel to the one in which the story takes place; through Beverlée's appraisals of and considerations about the residents' *modus operandi* in both DP centres, there is room for an analysis of her own growth during this journey, which endorses my previous argument that her attentive, evaluative posture has given her the chance of facing current and approaching constraints, which would be likely to have a more overwhelming impact on her than if she had simply unreflexively confronted them, thus working more effectively for her pathway to empowerment. I am not opposing confrontation and denial, facets of agency which had been proved successful in other contexts; what I am saying is that considering this character's background, the style that she presents to the reader seems to work better for her, taking into account the present challenges. In these terms, it is possible to argue that Beverlée's conduct demonstrates her awareness in practical and realistic terms, and that they are in line with "real-world circumstances" – this is, as Emirbayer and Misch point out, also a feature of the practical-evaluative dimension of agency (1998, p. 994). The following excerpt exemplifies the transformative journey she has been through as a Direct Provision resident, while also making explicit her reflexivity on the posture she wittingly adopts:

> It's not like dat for my last hostel where everybody do everything together. But me I still listen, and I go close to my own people, and make friends with only Congolese

> people and go only Congolese party. But now, me I know no one is good complete and no one can do you bad like your own people. So me I start to make friends with Nigerias again. And if dey do me bad, I show them I don come Europe to take shit from anybody. (OKORIE, 2018, p. 6).

This excerpt shows Beverlée's acknowledgement of the different logistics that permeate the relation between the dwellers in both hostels. Apparently, the connections in the last centre she lived in were less troublesome than in the current one, for as she has explained, now people warn her to be careful with Nigerians, since their behaviour may seem inappropriate to the hostel's staff, and thus cause problems also for the people involved with them. If in the previous hostel she was able to act freely and make friends with whoever she wished, since everyone did everything together, as she reports, the new circumstances prevent a continuation of that pattern. In relation to this, Emirbayer and Mische say that an actor's behaviour may serve to reproduce or transform social actions – the former increasing routinization, the latter problematizing experiences – and that the choice between these options also represents a feature of the agentic actor (1998, p. 973). In this excerpt we see the practical-evaluative dimension of agency in action through Beverlée's demeanour, in that the internal structure of this sort of agentic potential is translated via a set of actions which lead the individual to manifest this capacity. In the words of Emirbayer and Mische, the practical-evaluative dimension of agency comprises "problematization, decision, and execution, all of which require the contextualization of projects or of habitual practices within the concrete circumstances of the moment" (1998, p. 997).

We can see the *problematization* throughout the narrative when Beverlée questions the other residents' mindset; and *decision*, in "the resolution to act here and now in a particular way" (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 998), when she states that she is no longer endorsing such conduct. This in turn leads to the *execution*: she is making friends with Nigerians "again" (showing that previously such implicit code of conduct might have led her to question her own way of behaving); and this execution "marks a movement toward concrete action" (p. 999). By not subscribing to ongoing, although not thoroughly explicit, social norms and interactions, Beverlée is also reassuring her "sense of the self" within interactions, a feature of what Hitlin and Elder conceptualize as "identity agency", which arises as a means for the actor to maintain her role within structure in response to troublesome events. Identity agency is goal-oriented and reflects the individual's active appraisal of the conditions for adapting or sustaining identities which are, in their turn, constructed, challenged, internalized and modified in the course of social interactions. As Hitlin and Elder express it, "social interaction is a constant interplay

between internal standards and external feedback, between self-verification and self-presentation. We modify our behaviour based on feedback, and the maintenance of successful interaction relies on agentic choices" (2007, p. 180).

If Beverlée's "sense of self" enabled her to bring to the core of her actions the strength to surpass the communal *modus operandi* in the hostel, arousing in her other abilities which, in turn, allowed her to apply the capacities for reflexive, agentic actions via the identity agency dimension, it also had the effect of somehow transforming people around her: "Now all Congolese people come to me and start to say 'Please Beverlée,' for connect dem to my Nigeria friends" (OKORIE, 2018, p.6). Such achievement on her part indeed endorses and underscores the analysis of this character as an individual whose agentic capacities are being resourcefully employed, and together with the "identity agency" just mentioned, there is, too, the use of the practical-evaluative sort of agency which, when elicited in particular contexts, affects "the ability of actors to engage with, respond to, and potentially transform their structural environments" (EMIRBAYER; MISCHE, 1998, p. 1000). Beverlée is, indeed, a character whose strength relies more on her evaluative actions than in her confrontational words.

By contrast Ngozi, Beverlée's closest friend, displays a different position in response to the constraints present in the hostel. Her attitude is overtly more confrontational, even sometimes quarrelsome – although not acting as belligerently as some other characters – especially when it comes to the DP centre's staff. While the term 'agency' has been understood in various diverse *foci*, it seems – as discussed by Lois McNay – possible, overall, for one to think of it in terms of a position of denial and opposition in response to the limitations in a given context – the background conditions (Meyer and Jepperson, p. 100). In this respect Ngozi's demeanour corroborates the view that the elements of agency commonly and broadly connected in general arguments and characterizations of the agentic actor include: intentionality, purposiveness, initiative and choice (Emirbayer and Mische, p. 962). As the narrator, Beverlée informs readers on some of the events that take place in the hostel; while she is mostly reacting to her peers, Ngozi is shown as questioning and demanding positions from the hostel's staff. The following excerpt offers a clear example of the confrontational sort of agency shown by Ngozi, who is uneasy because she has asked the staff for a jar of honey, as part of her provision – leading to the following dialogue:

> "Well, that is the last honey we have and we've just given it out", the manager answer Ngozi in a way everybody can tell she is lying but there is nothing Ngozi can do about it.
> "You better find one for me o, because I'm not leaving this place until I get one". Ngozi tell her and fold her hands. (p. 21)

Ngozi's reply to the DP centre's employee leaves no room for counter-arguments on her agentic potential. She is indeed a character whose attitude of rejection and denial in face of a figure of authority exemplifies the confrontational perspective of an agentic demeanour. The argument between Ngozi and the hostel's staff is witnessed not only by Beverlée, but also by the other residents who – on this busy Monday morning – are waiting for their weekly provisions. The disagreement between the Nigerian character and the staff member continues: "Then why did she give that man honey just now when I ask for it first? This is what you people do all the time! You always pick people you want to give this or that. Why? Ngozi voice is loud now as she talk". Beverlée continues narrating the scene: "The new security man come and stand for the back of Ngozi but he no say or do anything. That make me I know he really knew. The other securities will hol and carry anybody they see for argue with staff" (p. 21).

In this passage we can infer, from the staff's positioning, that there was little or no room for inquiries on their *modus operandi*, and that anyone making a movement towards questioning it would be punished and ostracized (this has been discussed previously, when Beverlée explained that Nigerians had a bad reputation for somehow not subscribing to the norms as expected from the DP authorities).

In spite of this, Ngozi chooses not to keep silent when she felt she was being wronged and receiving unequal treatment. There is room, thus, for a deeper analysis of her demeanour, as going beyond the commonsense ideal of confrontation and denial. From among the various dimensions of agency and possible pathways and motivations for an agentic demeanour, her conduct can be recognised as having the potential for "pragmatic agency", as discussed by Hitlin and Elder in "Time, self and the curiously abstract concept of agency". "Pragmatic agency" arises when habitual responses to routine, habitual and social-patterned circumstances fail, when habits break down and are incapable of appropriately responding to and re-working events, leading actors to make choices that are not the pre-established routines that had previously guided social actions.

Re-working is a key word in Ngozi's case in that, unable to achieve her goals by using what would be acceptable in such a circumstance – since apparently discussion was not even an option – she needed to look for a means of trying to achieve it that was new (although not thoroughly functional, as in Beverlée's case). By debating the possibilities for agentic demeanour within a temporal spectrum, Hitlin and Elder argue that such potentials are situated and put into action by taking into account the actor's background (past), emergent situations (present) or future possibilities. In Ngozi's case, "pragmatic agency" occurs within present-

moment temporal orientations, embedded in given structures, not apart from them: “We are not dispassionate, analytical actors. We make choices within the flow of situated activity, and emotions and personality traits – along with idiosyncratic personal histories, moral codes and predispositions influence the choices we make in emergent situations” (HITLIN; ELDER, 2007, p. 178).

Emirbayer and Mische’s thorough discussion in “What is agency?” resonates with Hitlin and Elder’s argument that different agentic capabilities may be enacted differently, depending on the actor’s current context, background and possibilities. Among the diverse possibilities they discuss is what they call the “practical-evaluative” dimension of agency – the actors’ response to demands and contingencies of the present. Practical-evaluative conduct, in these terms, enables actors to exercise agency in a mediating fashion, potentially giving them the agentic apparatus to challenge and transform ongoing situational contexts of action. According to Emirbayer and Mische, “the primary locus of agency in its practical-evaluative dimension lies in the contextualization of social experience,” since by deliberating with others or in a self-reflexive manner, “actors gain in the capacity to make considered decisions that may challenge received patterns of action (Emirbayer and Mische 994).

By not simply accepting the staff’s reply, but questioning their actions, Ngozi makes clear her purposiveness and that she will not accept this treatment. While Beverlée’s reaction was more thoughtful, analysing her possibilities and adopting a path that was not overtly confrontational, Ngozi embodies the dimensions of agency that unfold within the present demands of these given circumstances:

> The problematization of experience in response to emergent situations thus calls for increasingly reflective and interpretive work on the part of social actors. This exercise of situationally based judgment has been variously termed practical wisdom, prudence, art, tact, discretion, application, improvisation, and intelligence; here we designate it as the *practical-evaluative* dimension of agency. (Emirbayer and Mische 994)

Whilst indeed living up to the “pragmatic” and “practical-evaluative” types of agency, it can also be stated that Ngozi exerts what Meyer and Jepperson, in “The ‘actors’ of modern society: the cultural construction of social agency”, discuss as “agency for principle”: that is, the actor acts not only on their own behalf and for their own convenience, but also employing their agentic powers in favour of their beliefs – in favour of what seems fair from their point of view. The authors argue that: “the proper modern actor assumes responsibility to act as agent of the imagined natural and moral law. Otherwise the actor risks either incompetence or

corruption" (Meyer and Jepperson 108). This is clear in Ngozi's posture towards the hostel's authorities who, from her viewpoint, and comparing to the choices made by Beverlée in her pathway for agency, presented a more serious impairment to the relationships within the DP centre than the conflicted relations amongst the residents themselves. From this point of view, although actors operate under very general rules, and regardless of the type of agency they are deploying, a respected underlying ideal or principle may be their background motivation – a higher interest, to which the actor subscribes.

In spite of the lack of consensus amongst sociologists when it comes to a definition of agency, throughout this analysis of "This hostel life" we see that individuals have imprinted on themselves the mark of structural forces – whether they acknowledge it or not – and that an agentic demeanour is strictly tied to the urgencies that society imposes on them. Individuals have the capacity to respond to, rework, creatively resist and transform social structures and social processes by employing individual or collective actions (DILLON, 2014, p. 11). What is the force that drives an actor to challenge pre-established codes of conduct, social patterns, and socially accepted behaviours? What impels someone to confront the structural forces that are historically embedded, and often officially underwritten? The answer is simultaneously simple and complex: agency.

The accounts of Emily O'Reilly and Joan Roddy, discussed in the introductory part of this essay, have demonstrated that living in a Direct Provision centre presented many hardships to the asylum seekers who arrived in Ireland in and after the Celtic Tiger era. Being forced to flee their own home is in itself an overwhelming experience, and having to endure the conditions of a system which somehow restrained many of these immigrants' basic needs can heighten the challenges of being a newcomer, and having to adapt to a new culture and all it encompasses.

What is in question is not the principal ideal of the system, which was designed to receive and accommodate the great inflow of immigrants – which was, for the Republic, also something new at the time. Theoretically, asylum seekers were supposed to stay in DP centres for an average of six months, while awaiting an official position on their asylum application – but due to the high number of applications the practice turned out to be very different. Melatu Okorie, for instance, lived in one of these centres for nearly nine years. With this in mind, Roddy contends that "in the context of these lengthy periods of waiting for a decision, the withholding from asylum seekers of a right to work needlessly re-enforces financial hardship

and isolation from the general community" (330) – certainly not, in any terms, positive features in a multicultural environment.

Published in 2018, "This hostel life", from the homonymous collection, portrays in two of its three stories the lives of immigrants in a country which, from the 1990s on, turned out to be a "home" for a large number of newcomers, attracted by the financial boom of the Celtic Tiger period. In "Multiculturalisms in Ireland", historian Bryan Fanning gives an overview of this trend in the Republic, and argues that, in contrast to official characterizations of Ireland as a plural, multicultural country, concrete efforts and policies were not reflecting this propagandized discourse (2002, p. 184). He highlights that "such acknowledgments sit uneasily with entrenched assumptions of societal monoculturalism" (p. 184), a situation that was exacerbated by the difficulties associated with defining "Irish people" as an ideological category, founded on dominant understandings and political formulations of Irishness (p. 185-186).

The Direct Provision Centre, scene of the narrative in "This hostel life", can be considered a microcosm of Irish society at the time – especially in terms of the level of multiculturalism presented in Okorie's story. Bryan Fanning discusses this in "Multiculturalism in Ireland" (2002, p. 183): since the DP Centres were the result of an official policy, created for the government to deal with the large number of asylum applications, the extent to which the State took into account the diversity and needs of these immigrants can be called into question. The hostel of the story becomes a home for people from various nationalities, some of them married, others with children, some younger, others older. But the system provides little or no room for embracing such diversity, and although the ideal is to treat them all equally, this is not what is witnessed when reading Okorie's narrative. The language, religions and cultural backgrounds of these immigrants seem not to be accounted for, neither their individualities. The system is what it is planned to be: a provisional accommodation for them. In the end, for many, it is not so provisional.

In these terms, one may consider that the multiculturalism depicted in Okorie's story stands between "over-assimilation" and "weak multiculturalism 1". While they are still waiting for their applications to be considered, it cannot even be said that the assimilation takes the form of universality of rights, but rather that their particularities are swallowed by the system they are forced to live in. In terms of "weak multiculturalism 1", it is noticeable in that the hostel's staff ostracizes some of the residents for their behaviour (Beverlée gives the example of the hostile attitude to Nigerian immigrants). Further, there is no acknowledgement of racism, nor policies to integrate these people into the wider community. On this question Roddy

remarks that “policies and practices which do not facilitate communication and social interaction are more likely to fuel than reduce prejudice and will inevitably contribute to racism” (RODDY, p.331).

“This hostel life” is set on a Monday morning, but its compelling and startling plot has a narrative power that may leave the reader confused about its timespan, such is the scale and complexity of the information provided. While introducing numerous characters, Okorie’s narrative technique is able to turn us into, almost, close friends of some of them, especially Beverlée and Ngozi, whose stories are, by themselves, extraordinary. By using the Nigerian-pidgin English dialect throughout the narrative, Melatu brings the reader close to the reality she portrays, assisting us in composing the scenes with this very specific linguistic trait which, as a resource, makes the story even more intimate and enriching than it would naturally be.

Beverlée and Ngozi are women whose agentic potentials are employed in distinct fashions. Beverlée presents a more careful, thoughtful demeanour, in line with the existential type of agency she resorts to. The urgency of these two women’s emerging situations leads them both to make use of the “practical-evaluative” type of agency, which allows actors to make their own discernment about challenging events. Ngozi also employs the “pragmatic” agency which, in a present-moment context, enables individuals to respond to and re-work situated events in new and unanticipated ways. It can thus be stated that – although in different ways – both these characters find a pathway for empowerment, in spite of the many constraints on their individual capacities, imposed by the system they are living under.

As Lois McNay exhorts in her account on agency, let us not ignore the fact that specific historical and social contexts, as well as an actor’s placement within such contexts, will have a direct influence on an individual’s assimilation, reaction, and interpretation of impairing events, leading to different ways of coping and demonstrating agency, for the ways in which individuals realize agency are distinct, and not straightforward.

5 CONCLUSION: "AGENCY IS A NECESSARY ASPECT OF ORGANISMS STRUGGLING TO ADAPT AND MAKE SENSE OF THEIR ENVIRONMENTS"[23]

> *I look at Ms Nigeria, and I don' think I'll be asking her to go with me. Not just yet. She's angry – you should see her eyes. But she's calm. It's amazing. She's a girl – she's the girl [...] But she's the only one not blabbing or crying, or both. She stares at the cop. He's not even looking at her but he feels it. Like, the rays from her eyes. They burn the arse hair off him, or something. (Doyle, p. 142)*
> *Think about the phrase 'non-national', and imagine yourself as a seed lifting on a chaotic breeze and drifting away from your home place, never to return. (O'Donnell, p. 97).*
> *And if dey do me bad, I show them I don come Europe to take shit from anybody. (Okorie, p. 6).*

I begin the final pages of this study by readdressing the corpus and some of the main topics it has discussed. Initially, I focus on the theoretical chapter (Chapter 2, above), in which I made an overview on the concepts of interculturalism and multiculturalism, explaining why I chose the latter as a supporting tool in the short stories analysed in this work. In that chapter I also presented a broad discussion on the main theoretical apparatus: the concept of social agency.

With this in mind, my main objective in this final section is to revisit some of the theoretical discussions that cause the issues of multiculturalism and social agency to intermingle, as represented in the experiences of immigrant characters in the short stories by Roddy Doyle, Roisín O'Donnel and Melatu Uche Okorie. I then offer some conclusions in relation to analysis of the characters in the seven short stories I have discussed: "The pram" and "Black hoodie", by Doyle; "How to learn Irish in seventeen steps", "How to be a billionaire" and "Crushed" by O'Donnell; and "This hostel life" and "Under the awning" by Okorie. The aim is to link my general and specific objectives, and my research hypothesis, with both the historical and the cultural aspects addressed, in an overall view specifically from the point of view of the concept of social agency. And finally, I offer some of my observations and conclusions for future research on the theme.

[23] Hitlin and Elder, 2007, p. 185

This dissertation has examined the representation of immigrants in selected short stories by three contemporary writers: Roddy Doyle and Roisín O'Donnell, both Irish-born, and Melatu Uche Okorie, a Nigerian based in Dublin since the acceptance of her asylum seeker status in 2017. I have analysed how young and women immigrants, from diverse cultural backgrounds, are portrayed in these authors' short stories. The central analytical focus was to discern whether they were displayed in the stories as having any sort of agentic potential, in the face of the severe constraints which their status invariably imposed on them. To do this, I selected as an analytical tool the concept of social agency, and more specifically the discussions proposed in three important works: "Time, self, and the curiously abstract concept of agency" (2007), by Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder, Jr.; "What is agency?" by Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische (1998); and "The 'actors' of modern society: the cultural construction of social agency" by John W. Meyer and Ronald L. Jepperson (2000).

Although the characters' exhibition of agency, or lack of it, was the central aspect, this was invariably connected to the weight of these individuals' social, educational and cultural backgrounds. With this in mind, in the second chapter of this dissertation, the theoretical one, I offered an overview and study of the terms "interculturalism" and "multiculturalism", opting to make use of the latter, due to Ireland's historical and political specificities. This decision, although it may appear minor in terms of analytical weight, was central, and was made based on observation of the levels of multiculturalism depicted in the narratives; as a result of this choice, I selected as a specific tool for this investigation Bryan Fanning's discussion in the 2000 book *Racism and the republic of Ireland*.

As noted by Heather Ingman, Irish short fiction has always been closely tied to the urgencies of Ireland's history (2009, p. 130). From what was perceived as a new era, starting during the Celtic Tiger period in the mid-1990s, a whole new configuration in economic, social, cultural and literary terms emerged in the Irish Republic: these manifestations were also a response to this new context. Before the "roar of the Tiger", Irish short fiction had already been undergoing a process of change: narratives, mostly male-written, praising the rebellious hero, widely proffered in the first two decades after independence, have given way to depictions of figures who have been under-represented in this literary genre. As from the Tiger Era, some authors started giving a voice to a new type of outlawed figure: the immigrant. One of the principal efforts in my research was to find short fiction narratives which had immigrant characters as central figures.

Roddy Doyle, although severely criticized for his supposedly too-optimistic view of the relationship between newcomers and locals, was one of the forerunners in putting the spotlight

on these characters. Back in 2008, he published *The Deportees*, which would become one of the most important examples of migrant representation in Irish short fiction. Later, in 2016, Roisín O'Donnell published *Wild quiet*, containing several short stories of the experiences of immigrant characters in post-Celtic-Tiger Ireland. Interestingly, O'Donnell's collection offers opportunity for rich appraisal, due to the variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds she brings into her narratives; in those that I selected to analyse in this dissertation, one is of a Brazilian woman living in Dublin – discussed in the second analytical chapter – and another is of two Nigerian brothers living in a socially deprived area of inner-city Dublin – these stories are analysed in the first analytical chapter. Melatu Uche Okorie, whose stories were published in the 2018 collection *This hostel life*, enriches the corpus, since she herself is a Nigerian immigrant: she started writing her stories while living in a Direct Provision Centre in Dublin, where she remained for more than nine years while waiting for her asylum request to be accepted. Many and various approaches can be taken to such stories, and this is one of the most interesting findings of this research: not only are the experiences of "non-Irish" in a newly-founded multicultural State diverse, but the experiences and struggles, and also the way the related issues can be represented, depending on the voice that is giving them the spotlight, are also many and varied.

On the question of choice of angle of view, the difference between the concepts of "interculturalism*"* and "multiculturalism*"* is central. These two terms have been broadly used to describe societies that have received large-scale inflow of immigrants. But they are separated by an important political distinction: interculturalists often disregard the role of the State in managing cultural diversity, by focusing on the micro level, that is, the relation between locals and minorities as an organic encounter, rather than attributing to the State any share in the responsibility for mediating such encounters. For this reason, I have chosen to use, in this dissertation, the term "multiculturalism", which tends to have a more inclusive view on cultural diversity and how it should be managed. Using Levey's understanding of the term, I argue that "multiculturalism" operates under a paradigm of "diversity", in which individuals and groups have equal *status* under the same *laws,* and there is "no recognition of a majority culture"; while "interculturalism" operates under a paradigm of duality, in which 'diversity' is simply regarded as describing a relationship between, on the one hand, the dominant culture, and on the other, the minority (or minorities) (2012, p. 220). Although it is a more inclusive term, "multiculturalism" functions in a variety of ways which cannot be over-generalized, because merely defining a society as multicultural does not exempt it from the various issues that may emerge from the coexistence of multiple "locals|" and "outsiders".

Ireland, indeed, has proved to be a good example on how theory may differ from practice. I have previously mentioned the Republic's extensive propaganda for attracting a labour force of migrants in the Tiger era. The official discourse "One hundred thousand welcomes", motto of the Irish Tourist Board, did not apply to each and every migrant attracted by the roar of the Celtic Tiger, especially the non-European and low-qualified labour force, who clearly endured many more struggles than workers who were European and/or highly qualified, for instance. Some of these aspects, clearly represented in the stories, are discussed further in this chapter.

In discussing the levels of multiculturalism, Bryan Fanning debates the incongruencies that a simple generalist conceptualization of term can lead to, especially in the case of Ireland, where acknowledgments of it as a multicultural country "sit uneasily with entrenched assumptions of societal monoculturalism" (p. 184). In his view, the official acknowledgements of Ireland as a plural, multicultural country were not being effectively shown in concrete efforts and policies in practice. Also, these discourses were in direct opposition to the formulations of "Irish people" as a political and ideological category, so that the ideal of "Irishness" was, somehow, turned into a barrier to the fulfilment of a role for Ireland as a multicultural society as described by multiculturalism advocates. From their point of view, multiculturalism is understood as being practicable via State policies, which then function as the core for progress of a society in management of diversity, which, in turn, is expected to transmit an impact also to the individual level.

Fanning takes a much more complex view of multiculturalism, presenting it as having four levels – which he names (a) overt assimilation, (b) weak multiculturalism 1, (c) weak multiculturalism 2, and (d) stronger multiculturalism. With the benefit of this prism, we can see that the levels of multiculturalism are distinct in the different narratives of each of the authors I investigate, and sometimes even within two stories by the same author (as in the case of O'Donnell's stories, for instance).

Although different, the stories depict Ireland as fluctuating between (a) overt assimilation and (b, c) weak multiculturalism 1 and 2. I found that (d), stronger multiculturalism, is not a feature present in any of the stories that I selected. I also noticed that more than one level of multiculturalism may be portrayed within the same story: using Fanning's parameters, both (a) overt assimilation and (b) weak multiculturalism 1 can mingle, or features of (b) and (c) – weak multiculturalism 1 and 2 – can be present, within the same narrative.

I will now present, by author and in chronological order of publication, my conclusions on the levels of multiculturalism presented in these short stories. I have noted, above, that Roddy Doyle was severely criticized for being, supposedly, "too optimistic", in his approach to the encounters of locals and outsiders at a time in which the Republic was still conceiving itself as a plural society. On the other hand, surprisingly, the societal background in the stories analysed here seems to indicate the opposite: both in "The pram" and in "Black hoodie", Doyle shows an Irish society whose model for diversity management is still underdeveloped, fluctuating strongly and relatively permanently between 'overt assimilation' and 'weak multiculturalism 1'. The latter can be clearly seen in "The pram" – in which the Polish woman is ostracized by her Irish employers precisely due to the supposed inappropriateness of her cultural background. The former is shown in "Black hoodie", where Doyle explores the racism a young Nigerian immigrant suffers on the part of Garda officers, whilst carrying out a project precisely to demonstrate racism to shopkeepers and educate them against it: racism is discussed by the immigrant character herself, but not by the police authorities in the story, who are the ones being racist. The type of multiculturalism in this story is 'overt assimilation', since the immigrant character is 'pathologized', her problems being attributed to her distinctiveness.

In O'Donnell's "How to learn Irish in seventeen steps", the weight of society on one's experiences as a newcomer is less heavy than in the other stories I analyse. Luana's experiences are less troublesome, but the issues she faces differ greatly from the ones faced by other women whose social background and immigrant status made them face stronger and more delicate struggles. She is more affected by the micro, that is to say the character relations with her peers, than by the macro, although the macro plays an important role as a trigger in the course of events. Racism is not a topic of discussion in the story, since the immigrant character is white. Still, the story can be considered to depict 'weak multiculturalism 1', since there is clearly a lack of ethnic sensitivity and cultural understanding on the part of the majority group.

The story of the Obinwanye brothers, on the other hand, is a strong example of overt assimilation, in which the minority or subcultural groups residing inside the mainstream political group have to adapt to and imitate the behaviours, values, and cultural beliefs of the dominant group. If they don't, they end up marginalized. Assimilationism is seen as the solution for their problems, while the dominant group evades its responsibility, and any share in discussing strategies to fight racism and prejudice.

The story in Okorie's *This hostel life* is set in a Direct Provision centre in Dublin, and deals with the treatment given to the immigrants living in this centre. Conceived as a short-term solution for newcomers who were waiting for the analysis of their status as refugees or asylum

seekers, Direct Provision turned out to be a long-term condition, since many of these people ended up staying for years, living under the State's sometimes disturbing and inappropriate system. In this, the Republic showed itself to be unprepared to deal with the great amount of people arriving in the country in certain particular circumstances, thus placing it in the category of 'weak multiculturalism 1', in which the reasons why immigrants flew home were at stake, rather than the State's problematic approach and conduct towards newcomers. The lack of discussion on racism also places Okorie's almost-authorial narrative in that classification. In "Under the awning", which depicts the effects of racist attitudes on the experiences of the immigrant character, an unnamed Nigerian girl, the multicultural initiatives are not carried out by the State, but by individuals independently. The story also conveys an assimilationist idea, under the concept that simply offers locals and outsiders an opportunity to mingle, rather than raise awareness as regards racism and its effects on those who suffer from it in their lives.

In these narratives, the immigrant characters deal with the constraints inherent to their status as outsiders in different ways and, it is again worth highlighting, the ways in which individuals may demonstrate agency are diverse, startling and non-straightforward. As Bourdieu notes, individual agency is always constrained, always structured, by formal education, social class, family habits, and the distinctive (and unequal) cultural codes and practices that these contexts teach us, and which we reproduce, more or less, through our everyday social relations and behaviour (DILLON, p. 446). This is the most significant finding of this research, and it endorses the scholars' argument that agency is not a single, flat term, and its diverse and startling uses call for a versatility which a closed definition may not offer. The characters' backgrounds prove to be a core factor in the ways they face and respond to challenges. Some show they are more aware of cultural impairments, while others are not so conscious of these aspects, although their agentic potentials are also severely compromised by these contextual factors. Beverlée, in "This hostel life", for instance, proves to be highly aware in relation to the restrictions imposed on her – while the Obinwanye brothers, who suffer greatly from their lack of tools to deal with Kingsley's condition, do not have as many agentic resources, at a conscious level, as Okorie's character.

Among the various types of agency discussed in the theoretical chapter of this dissertation, the one most frequently resorted to by the characters is the practical-evaluative. This is discussed by Emirbayer and Mische in "What is agency?", and it has to do with the actor's response to demands and contingencies of the present. I discuss it within the temporal dimensions of agency scope, since it is the type that activates individuals' resourceful power for agentic demeanour, leading them to draw upon past and future experiences to make the best

discernment about present challenging events. We see this possibility for agentic demeanour employed by characters of all three authors studied here: Doyle's Alina in "The pram"; Okorie's Beverlée and Ngozi in "This hostel life"; the unnamed Nigerian girl in "Under the awning"; and Kingsley in O'Donnell's "How to be a billionaire" and "Crushed". It can be concluded that the urgent and alarming experiences these characters undergo led them to resort to practical-evaluative agency as a way of coping with the constraints in present-moment circumstances, since it entails actors' potential engagement, response and transformation of the structural environment in which actions unfold.

Pragmatic agency, a term used by Hitlin and Elder and which closely resembles the practical-evaluative type, is employed by Okorie's character Ngozi in "This hostel life", and by the first-person narrator in "Under the awning". Hitlin and Elder contend that pragmatic agency arises when habitual responses to routine, habitual and social-patterned circumstances fail. When habitual actions are not capable of appropriately responding and re-working an event, the actor must make choices other than those pre-established routines that have previously been effective in guiding social actions. Also, pragmatic agency occurs within present-moment temporal orientations, embedded in given structures, not apart from them: "Our capacity to exert influence on our action is only sociologically consequential insofar as it is utilized within social situations or with social outcomes" (HITLIN; ELDER, p. 177). The social outcome is precisely what unites both characters in their quest for change – the aim to be noticed.

Concluding the thought on Okorie's work, identity and existential agency are also tools Beverlée makes use of in "This hostel life". While identity agency is guided by the attempt at reassuring the sense of the self – which she puts into action by not subscribing to ongoing, although not thoroughly explicit, social norms and interactions – existential agency is a more abstract term: it concerns a human being's inherent capacity for acting actively; though it does not mean that the individual acknowledges such capacity, and therefore it is not equivalent to self-efficacy. Beverlée clearly demonstrates that she has the capacity for self-initiated behaviour, and is aware of it; but the same is not true for Kingsley, since, as an 11-year-old boy, he has not had enough time to acquire a social repertoire and mature his understanding of the societal working mechanisms of the socially-circumscribed experiences he undergoes. In contrast to Beverlée's existential agency, his is not recognized by himself – and transformed into conscious social action.

Kingsley's power for agentic action, although he does not fully acknowledge it, also leads him to depict what Hiltin and Elder call "life course agency" (2007, p. 182), which they define as a person's attempt to shape their own life trajectory or, in his case, an instinct to

somehow survive, which can be seen through his effort to develop interpersonal relations, striving to cope with his feelings of not-belonging and rejection by the people surrounding him. “Ms Nigeria”, in “Black hoodie” by Doyle, also resorts to life course agency, but she does it in a thoroughly aware mode. Through the “Black Hoodie Solutions” project she carried out with two classmates, her main goal was, in fact, to improve living conditions for herself and her peers, in that they would remain subject to racist and prejudicial experiences in the future if nothing was done to try to change that situation and raise awareness in the present. Ms Nigeria is, therefore, employing agentic choices, working through her beliefs about “possible future selves” and experiences (HITLIN; ELDER, p. 184).

Life course agency, operating in the future time orientation, much resembles Emirbayer and Jepperson idea of “projectivity”, which can be applied to Ms. Nigeria as it is to Luana in O’Donnel’s “How to learn Irish in seventeen steps”. Projectivity has to do with actors’ capacity to creatively invent new possibilities for thought and action regarding future expectations. In this sense, actors end up moving beyond themselves into future projections, between where they are now and where they want to be. Luana’s enterprise in learning Gaelic so that she can apply for a permanent teaching position in Ireland is a crystal-clear case. Doing this, Luana also evaluates present constraints, and thus also displays the practical-evaluative dimension of agency – the one that activates individuals’ resourceful power for agentic demeanour. In its turn, this agentic dimension allows actors to draw upon past and future experiences so as to best discern about present challenging events.

As can be seen, the various types of agency often mingle with each other as individuals look for sources from which to mediate social interactions and events. As Hitlin and Elder express it, “the sociological issue is not whether agency exists, but the extent to which we exercise it and the circumstances that facilitate or hinder that exercise” (2007, p. 185). In addition, agency is fluid, since the key to grasping the several dynamic possibilities and practicing human agency is to perceive it in its core: multiple and variable orientations within the flow of time, as argued by Emirbayer and Mische (2000, p. 964).

The shift that Ireland has been through since the turn of the century has invariably turned it into an environment of constant and rapid changes, both for the Irish and the so-called “non-Irish”, leaving both of them at a crossroads as regards their and the country’s future. I have chosen the short stories, the social agency concept and the discussion on the levels of multiculturalism carefully, to enable a broader, deeper and attentive look at issues that can no longer be ignored. My reasons are fully matched and supported by the arguments of the critics and scholars that I mention. First, agency may be a slippery term when it is removed from actual

human experience (Hitlin and Elder, 2007, p. 175), so it is an appropriate aspect in analysing the representation of immigrants at a time of deep political and social change in the Republic. This in its turn helps us in apprehending the extension of this transition, since it is "linked intrinsically to the changing temporal orientations of situated actors", as pinpointed by Emirbayer and Mische (2000, p. 967). Last, but not least, the perspectives presented here on levels and types of multiculturalism are based on Bryan Fanning's concept of multiculturalism being "governed by underlying conceptions of social justice and equality" (p. 181), thus ratifying and supporting the complementary, circular and mingling analysis of the theoretical, literary and social dimensions discussed and investigated in this dissertation – appropriate, in Emirbayer and Mische's words, to:

> A rapidly changing world composed of increasingly complex and overlapping matrices of social, political, and economic relations. If we cannot control the consequences of our interventions, we can at least commit ourselves to a responsive, experimental, and deliberative attitude as we confront emergent problems and possibilities across the variety of contexts within which we act. (p 1013)

Based on all that I have set out above, I am able to conclude that both the general and the specific hypotheses I have proposed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation have proven to be accurate. My general hypothesis was that Doyle, O'Donnell and Okorie would, through their short stories, challenge the official discourse of Ireland as a welcoming and plural *milieu*, the country of "one thousand welcomes". On this point, I conclude that they have certainly re-signified the experiences of newcomers in Ireland by tackling, in their narratives, the many issues that these newcomers face, unveiling the wrongs they suffer – and with this, moved them from the outskirts to the centre of literary representation. My specific hypothesis was that these immigrant characters would, in startling and non-straightforward ways – considering their heterogeneity of background, social position, age, gender and race – depict a position of agency, regardless of the many constraints imposed on them. As I have discussed, there are many and various ways in which an individual may exert her/his agentic potentials, and indeed in this too my hypothesis is demonstrated. As a final overall comment on the nature of the parameters investigated, I can offer this short summary: Multiculturalism is a political principle or concept; social agency is the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act; and literature is a means of giving voice to those who are wandering, or confined, at the outskirts of society.

This is the tenth year of my connection with Ireland – which started in my undergraduate course, when I decided to write about Oscar Wilde, mingling literature and analysis of

discourse. This present work has come from the inspiration and passion I acquired for the Irish short story, back in my Master's research days, at a later stage of my studies. Then, going through a doctoral stage at Trinity College Dublin, in 2021, which was both intellectually and personally challenging but very enriching at all levels. I did not then know how long this journey would be, and I feel sure that this connection with Ireland and its literature is far from being concluded. This work, too, shows my own development as a researcher and the maturing process of being in touch with this literature in an increasingly sensitive way. It is the result of tough, though rewarding, years of work and commitment.

Much more is yet to come. For possible future research paths in relation to immigration and the short story, I see two major paths that could be taken: one would be to analyse the movement in the other direction – the representation of Irish nationals who have migrated, perhaps drawing a comparison between their experiences as immigrants and the experiences of newcomers in Ireland. The other could be to establish a correlation between recent migration flows in Ireland and in Brazil, as represented in the corresponding literature. I find the correlation between literary representations of migrants and the concept of social agency an enriching and fruitful area of discussion; and the relations between Brazil and Ireland have been recently strengthened both in political and academic terms.

There are several paths to be taken, and I am looking forward to a new journey.

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