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Three Kings: Migrant masculinities in Irish social Practice, theoretical perspective and theatre performance

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Abstract

This article examines deprived male migrants' conceptions and performative expressions of hegemonic masculinity in Ireland. It explores their widespread propensity to develop hypermasculine self-images based on ideals of cultural loyalty and economic prosperity that are, in fact, compensatory for their sense of emasculation, marginalization and social failure as a result of economic difficulties within their host societies. The first section surveys perceptions and preconceptions about migrant men and young male immigrants in a variety of Irish media, political and social discourses. The second section considers recent research and the development of theoretical perspectives about migrant masculinity in Ireland. In the third section, it is argued that these broad discourses and preconceptions are accentuated and encapsulated in a corpus of Irish theatre and film productions, such as Jimmy Murphy's play about Irish emigrants in London, *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* (2001), which was subsequently adapted by Tom Collins in the Irish language film *Kings* (2007). Bisi Adigun's Arambe Productions has appropriated and complicated the *Kings of the Kilburn High Road* storyline in turn. Adigun reenacted the play with West African immigrants rather than Irish emigrants in London (2006). He subsequently adapted its storyline to a contemporary London setting in *Home, Sweet Home* (performed in Lagos, 2010), and then he reset the play in Dublin with an African-Irish immigrant cast in *The Paddies of Parnell Street* (2013). In these different versions of the *Kings* plotline, ideals of migrant masculinity, the image of the "alien" and the meaning of the play/film perceptibly shift depending on whether it is performed by an English-speaking Irish cast, a cast of Irish-language speakers, or an African immigrant cast in Arambe's productions. Yet, together, these works suggest that immigrants to Ireland and returning Irish emigrants, as well as marginalized Gaelic speakers, face similar gender specific constraints in achieving recognition and gaining acceptance in modern Irish society. Each version is based on competing conceptions and performances of hegemonic masculinity that come into conflict at the culmination of the plot's development. Both on stage and on screen, they give expression to migrant masculine ideals in Ireland that are defined by wider political and social tensions which they seek to resolve in their respective performances.

Key words: Irish immigrants; emigrants; integration; migration; masculinity; media; memory; performance studies; theatre.

Introduction

A return visit to Ireland is a “per-fuckin’-formance! That’s the word... performance,” declares Jap Kavanagh, an Irish emigrant in Jimmy Murphy’s play *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* (2001, p. 17). His performance is based on a self-image of hegemonic masculinity that is, in fact, compensatory for his feelings of disempowerment, emasculation and marginalization as an impoverished migrant labourer in London. This article will examine such performative expressions of migrant masculinity in Ireland as well as the gender specific challenges male migrants face. More broadly, it will consider the emasculating effects of unemployment and underemployment for male immigrants in Ireland, both during the rise and after the collapse of the Celtic Tiger economy. The article will explore the increasing constraints on their personal, occupational and social mobility, and the ways in which they are internalized in terms of their loss of self-esteem and sense of self-worth. It will also analyse their experiences in relation to studies (Sinetti et al., 2013; Donaldson & Howson, 2009) that suggest that male migrants tend to compensate for their feelings of disempowerment and loss of status by developing hegemonic, hyper-masculine types of identity. Indeed, they form preconceptions about economic success as a measure of self-worth and social standing which they seek to project both in their host societies and countries of origin. In consequence, deprived male migrants frequently suffer from a sense of cognitive dissonance when they fail to meet their gendered expectations of economic success implicit within their hyper-masculine self-image. These feelings of emasculation are especially pronounced amongst immigrants in Ireland from African countries of origin (Coakley and Mac Éinri, 2007).

Hence, this article argues that such vulnerable male immigrants often exhibit and perform a hegemonic masculine self-image to compensate for their marginal social status. According to R.W. Connell in his ground breaking study *Masculinities*:

At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 1995, p. 77).

Connell insists that hegemonic masculine ideals tend to shift rather than remain static and that not all men subscribe to them, even if they benefit from a “patriarchal dividend” (p. 79). More recently, Donaldson and Howson (2009, p. 210) have questioned whether “migrant men (successfully or unsuccessfully) renegotiate the hegemonic masculine identifications, practices and sensibilities embedded in their ‘old’ gender relations” as a result of their experience of moving abroad? It is also important to emphasize that “migrant men” are by no means a monolithic or uniform social category. Significant differences between their age, citizenship, employment status, marital and family status, ethnicity, nationality, and social class all inflect and shape the conceptions of masculinity and gender identities of migrant men. Nevertheless, African male immigrants have been consistently identified as the most marginalized group in Celtic Tiger Ireland and

afterwards (McGinnity et al., 2014), and their conceptions of hegemonic masculinity will be the primary focus here.

These migrant men frequently struggle to reconcile self-images of immigrant success with their often disadvantaged circumstances. Their attempts to overcome various forms of economic adversity shape their conceptions of migrant masculinity, as reflected in media, political and social discourses as well as more specific theatre and film productions. The first section of the article surveys perceptions and preconceptions about migrant men and young male immigrants in a variety of these broader Irish media, political and social discourses. The second section considers recent research and the development of theoretical perspectives about migrant masculinity in Ireland. In the third section, it is argued that these broad discourses and preconceptions are accentuated and encapsulated in a corpus of Irish theatre and film productions, such as Jimmy Murphy's play *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* (2001) about Irish emigrants in London, which was subsequently adapted by Tom Collins in the Irish-language film *Kings* (2007). Bisi Adigun's Arambe Productions has appropriated and complicated the *Kings of the Kilburn High Road* storyline in turn. Adigun reenacted the play with West African immigrants rather than Irish emigrants in London (2006). He subsequently adapted its storyline to a contemporary London setting in *Home, Sweet Home* (performed in Lagos, 2010), and then he reset the play in Dublin with an African-Irish immigrant cast in *The Paddies of Parnell Street* (2013). In these different versions of the *Kings*, plotline, ideals of migrant masculinity, the image of the "alien" and the meaning of the play/film perceptibly shift depending on whether it is performed by an English speaking Irish cast, a cast of Irish language speakers (as in the film *Kings*), or an African immigrant cast in Arambe's productions. Yet, together, these works suggest that immigrants to Ireland and returning Irish emigrants, as well as marginalized Gaelic speakers, face similar gender specific constraints in achieving recognition and gaining acceptance in modern Irish society. Each version of the play and film is based on competing conceptions and performances of hegemonic masculinity that come into conflict at the culmination of the plot's development. Both on stage and on screen, they give expression to migrant masculine ideals in Ireland that are defined by wider political and social tensions which they seek to resolve in their respective performances.

Cultural, political and social discourses of migrant masculinity in Ireland

Irish cultural, political and social discourses about male immigrants appear relatively understated in comparison with other European countries. There has also been little academic research on preconceptions about their masculinity in Ireland, although recently this has begun to change (Garrett, 2012). In general, public perceptions of immigrant youth in Ireland tend to remain muted in mainstream media and political debates for a variety of reasons. It is often pointed out that the relatively recent nature of mass immigration into Ireland in the late 1990s has meant that it has not yet experienced the same social problems that have occurred in other European countries, especially with regard to disadvantaged second-generation youth from immigrant backgrounds. While male immigrants are certainly often marginalized in Irish society, they are not generally perceived to be prone to anti-social behaviour, predisposed to political unrest or to be over-represented in crime statistics to the same extent as elsewhere in Europe (NíLaoire, Carpena-Méndez, Tyrrell &

White, 2011). There have been no race riots in Ireland, multicultural backlash, rise of far right, anti-immigrant movements and political parties, extreme segregation in ethnic ghettos, or heightened public anxieties about the radicalization of young male immigrants from Islamic backgrounds that are commonplace in Western Europe (Garner, 2007). Indeed, the issue of immigration received little attention in Ireland's 2014 European and local election campaigns, and was at most a secondary concern for the vast majority of Irish voters. At the time of writing, the ongoing European migration crisis of 2015-2016, the Paris attacks of 7 January and 13 November 2015, and the collective sexual assaults in Cologne on December 31 2015 – 1 January 2016 have had no discernible impact on Irish public opinion; nor did immigration feature as an issue during the 2016 Irish general election campaign. Immigrants themselves have remained largely invisible in Irish political debates and rarely feature in mainstream media and public discourse.

Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence of the economic, political and social marginalization of male immigrants in Ireland. The study of Irish immigrant masculinity remains in its infancy for three main reasons. Most of the recent academic research on migrants in Ireland has tended to concentrate on the experiences of women rather than men, as is common elsewhere (Sinatti, 2013; Datta et al., 2008). In the Irish case, however, the primary emphasis on female migrants was exacerbated by their extraordinary prominence in political debates and public perception during the 2004 Citizenship Referendum, which rescinded the rights of children born to non-Irish nationals of their automatic entitlement to Irish citizenship on the *jus soli* basis of their birth in the country (Shandy, 2008; Luibhéid, 2004). Ten years after the Citizenship Referendum, public anxieties about female migrants have abated but immigrant men remain largely invisible in political and public perception.

Secondly, media, political, and social discourses about male migrants in Ireland are overwhelmingly influenced and shaped by the historical experiences of Irish emigrants rather than more recent arrivals into the country. Hegemonic notions of Irish migrant masculinity remain primarily defined in relation to historical figures such as the nineteenth-century famine migrants, Irish industrial workers in the United States, and the “navvy” manual labourers in Great Britain. While there is now a substantial body of research on gender and emigration from Ireland, few studies have been carried out specifically on Ireland's male immigrants.

Third, the resurgence of emigration from Ireland as a result of the Eurozone crisis has diminished media coverage and public interest in the country's immigrants. Since 2010, Ireland has been transformed from an immigrant receiving to an emigrant sending society once again, and the majority of people who are leaving the country are young Irish nationals (Glynn, Kelly & MacÉinri, 2013). After the onset of the Eurozone crisis, the unemployment rate in Ireland rose rapidly from under 5% to almost 15%, although it has subsequently declined. During this period, Irish net migration figures were reversed so that emigrants began to outnumber immigrants, with well over eighty thousand people leaving Ireland in 2012. According to Glynn, Kelly and MacÉinri (2013), Ireland has experienced “significantly higher levels of emigration per capita than other Western European countries affected by the Eurozone crisis” (pp. 8-9), despite the fact that its unemployment rate is

considerably lower than that of Spain or Greece. “The vast majority, over 70%, of emigrants are aged in their twenties when they depart” (p. ii). As a result, mainstream Irish media and political discourses are now preoccupied with the emigration of Irish youth rather than the plight of immigrants in the country.

Nevertheless, Mary Gilmartin (2013, p. 17) cautions “that recent stories of an exodus of young people from Ireland are exaggerated,” and that they distract attention from “the consequences of longer term social and economic marginalization” of Ireland’s immigrants. Indeed, she argues that “there is an apparent unwillingness to tackle these issues” of immigrant exclusion “with the political and policy focus now on the perceived problem mobility of Irish citizens” (ibid, p. 17). The renewed emphasis on emigration has side-lined the issue of integration in Irish policy debate, she suggests.

This displacement of immigrants by the resurgence of emigrants has transformed them into marginal figures in Irish media, and political and public discourses (Villar-Argáiz and King). Recent research has found that Irish public opinion has hardened against immigration over the course of the Eurozone crisis, but not to the extent that it was regarded as an important issue or pressing matter by most people surveyed. Kevin Denny and Cormac O Grada have concluded that “not surprisingly, the economic downturn after 2007 had a negative impact on attitudes to immigration” (2013, p. 18).

There is little evidence to indicate, however, that this hardening of Irish public opinion against immigration has been spurred by media and political discourses. In fact, media coverage of immigration has diminished considerably since the Citizenship Referendum in 2004. As Villar-Argáiz notes, “the intense and often contested debates on migration that dominated the headlines of Irish newspapers and broadcast media have inevitably dissipated, and the focus inevitably shifts away to other heated concerns of contemporary Ireland, particularly the dire economic recession of the country” (2014, p. 24). The plight of youthful Irish emigrants rather than Ireland’s immigrants now predominates in media coverage of the Eurozone crisis.

Although young immigrant men have been severely affected by unemployment and experienced widespread feelings of disempowerment and emasculation, their predicament has attracted relatively little media attention or political interest to date. Recent academic studies, however, make clear the scale of deterioration in their socio-economic position since the onset of the Great Recession. More specifically, in 2014, the Economic and Social Research Institute released a report by McGinnity et al. entitled *Winners and Losers? The Equality Impact of the Great Recession in Ireland* that examines the effects of the Eurozone crisis on male immigrants in considerable detail. The authors contend that immigrant men have been more vulnerable to job loss than immigrant women because of their concentration in low skilled occupational sectors that have borne the brunt of economic contraction. They also find that “overall, non-Irish nationals are more likely to be unemployed than Irish nationals... [and] that the net unemployment rate for non-Irish nationals increased from 6 per cent in 2007 to 20 per cent in 2012” (ibid, p. 34); moreover, “Africans recorded the lowest employment rate compared with Irish individuals” (ibid, p.

27). They conclude that “in 2011 just under one-third of the non-Irish nationals experienced basic deprivation compared with one-quarter of Irish nationals..., up from 22 per cent and 11 per cent in 2007 respectively” (ibid, p. 69).

The economic impact of the crash on Ireland’s immigrants has thus been quite profound, but they have also experienced its political repercussions in terms of declining participation rates in local elections. Although Irish public opinion has hardened against immigration, anti-immigrant sentiment has not been given political expression. As noted above, the vast majority of Irish voters do not regard it as an important issue or pressing matter; the question of immigration barely surfaced in Ireland’s 2014 European and local and 2016 general election campaigns. The absence of anti-immigrant far right parties and movements has been a perennial feature of the Irish political landscape, and the onset of the Eurozone crisis has not provided any impetus for their emergence, as in other European countries. The fact that the Irish political spectrum is not divided along a traditional left-right axis, but rather is largely defined by allegiances that date back to the country’s civil war in the early 1920s, is one significant factor in explaining the lack of far right parties. Furthermore, Garner (2007, p. 110) attributes this absence of any “meaningful far right political mobilization” to increasingly restrictive Irish immigration policies and the 2004 Citizenship Referendum. Since then, the collapse of the Irish Celtic Tiger economy has further hardened public opinion against immigration, but not sufficiently to give it political traction. In fact, its failure to emerge as a significant issue during the 2014 and 2016 election campaigns appears quite remarkable in a comparative context.

The invisibility of immigrants in Irish political discourse is also reflected in their declining participation rates in local elections in which they have the right to vote. There has been significant clustering of non-Irish nationals in parts of Dublin, other urban areas, and rural communities that in theory should confer electoral advantage on political parties that could mobilize their support. Nevertheless, recent research indicates that Irish political parties have made less effort than in the past during the 2014 local election campaign to field candidates and attract voters from immigrant communities. According to Emmanuel AnuliOkigbo (2014), immigrants of African origin appear to be particularly underrepresented in Irish political discourse. Moreover, in a 2014 report entitled “Inclusive Politics for a Diverse Republic”, Bryan Fanning, Neil O’Boyle and Viola Di Bucchianico observe that, although twelve percent of the Irish population is comprised of immigrants with citizenship, the country’s political parties do not adequately reflect the nation’s diversity. Ultimately, the limited participation of immigrants in Irish politics reinforces their marginal presence in the country.

Research on migrant masculinities in Ireland

There has been very little research on immigrant men and masculinities in Ireland. Nevertheless, research on migrant masculinity in other national contexts is often corroborated by the experiences of Irish immigrant men. According to Connell/Messerschmidt(2005, p. 832, cited in Sinatti,2013, p. 218), “hegemonic masculinity is defined ‘as the currently most honoured way of being a man... [;] it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimates the

global subordination of women to men". As Donaldson and Howson (2009, p. 209) note, "migrating men do not arrive in their new homeland bereft of notions about their own manliness. To the contrary, they usually bring with them firm beliefs and well-established practices about manhood and gender relations." They also contend "that there is very little evidence to note what happens to their sense of hegemonic masculinity and whether it is eroded or fortified by their active engagement in migration and resettlement" (ibid). This question is especially pressing in helping to frame the scant research that does exist on male immigrants and their conceptions of masculinity in Ireland.

The dominant theme that emerges in the few extant studies is of the emasculating effects of unemployment and underemployment for male migrants. There is overwhelming evidence that the collapse of Ireland's Celtic Tiger economy in 2008 had a devastating and disproportionate effect on immigrant men, who were especially vulnerable to the downturn because of their concentration in sectors such as construction which experienced the highest levels of job losses (Krings et al., 2011). Barrett and Kelly (2012, p. 98) suggest that there has been "a surge in unemployment among immigrants relative to natives" in most sectors of the Irish economy, and that even those who had been settled in Ireland for lengthy periods of time were no less likely to lose their jobs than more recent arrivals, despite expectations that they would be better integrated. They add that "the lessons appear to be that the labour market disadvantage which immigrants experienced in the boom, in terms of lower wages and occupational downgrading, manifested itself in rapid job losses in the recession" (ibid, p. 109). In particular, the inability to achieve or maintain "breadwinner" status fundamentally inhibits and undermines migrant ideals of hegemonic masculinity in Ireland.

There is some consensus in the international literature on migrant masculinities that they often appear compensatory and exaggerated to offset men's feelings of disempowerment and loss of status in their host society (Datta et al., 2008). "They strongly adhere to the ethos of the breadwinner, the notion of the '*pater familias*,' a belief in 'natural' gender differences and a gendered division of labour," observe Donaldson and Howson (2009, p. 214). Yet their frequent experiences of unemployment, underemployment and low paid work often obviate the possibility of upholding these beliefs. Conversely, economic setbacks are internalized by deprived male migrants in terms of their diminished and emasculated sense of self. Datta et al. (2008, p. 4) note that "research also highlights the attempts by men to present themselves as 'successful' migrants which may involve the performance of a hyper-masculine self that portrays their position as victor over adversity and abundant provider". Indeed, "they exhibit a strong desire to return home as successes" (ibid, p. 27). In consequence, their hyper-masculine self-image is often based upon an irreconcilable contradiction between their gendered expectations of economic success and straightened circumstances, which leads to a debilitating sense of cognitive dissonance. Moreover, this pressure to succeed is not limited to male immigrants but often extends to the whole family. NíLaoire et al. (2011) have observed that immigrant children in Ireland adapt their self-images and preconceptions about migration to fit with their parents' dreams of "transnational social mobility" even when all of the evidence suggests that it is downwards rather than upwards. They become complicit in self-deception, helping

maintain a narrative of immigrant success in which “global illusions and local realities” clash with one another based on “practicing mutual pretense” (ibid, p. 109).

As mentioned above, this sense of emasculation is especially pronounced amongst immigrants in Ireland from African countries of origin. The most detailed study of “The Integration Experiences of African Families in Ireland” was carried out by Coakley and Mac Éinri before the Eurozone Crisis when the Irish economy was near full employment in 2007. Nevertheless, the vast majority of their participant interviewees remained dependent on social welfare because they were unable to obtain waged work in “a closed labour market” (2007, p. 89). Coakley and Mac Éinri find that:

[A] lack of success here can lead people to question their own worth, especially those who have families. Loss of status is experienced within the family unit and male research participants, the traditional authority figures in an African family, were particularly vocal about the impact that unemployment was having on their own sense of self-esteem and the impact that it has on both their children and on the power structures present within the family unit (ibid, p. 13).

Their difficulties were further compounded by a lack of access to extended family support networks in their host society.

Coakley and Mac Éinri conducted in depth interviews with male and female African migrants who gave voice to their feelings of disempowerment and emasculation as a result of their economic marginalization. They quote at length from “JP1, an unemployed medical doctor from central Africa” who “explicitly refers to the role that success in the waged labour force plays in determining i) his sense of himself and ii) his feelings of integration in Ireland” (ibid, p. 48). In his own words, “to feel integrated in a country, work is among the most important elements. Do you understand? If you work, first of all work gives you some security, gives you self-esteem; you are proud of yourself. You say to yourself you are important, you produce. You are not there to wait” (ibid, p. 48). Yet his failure to find secure employment after five years has significantly diminished his self-esteem and sense of “inner pride”. Coakley and Mac Éinri (ibid, p. 50) emphasize that such frustration is common for male African immigrants in Ireland.

It is not only male immigrants, however, who suffer from a sense of emasculation because of their economic marginalization. The experience of migration to Ireland can serve to invert and undermine traditional gender roles and preconceptions about the division of labour which in other contexts might be regarded as emancipatory for immigrant women; but often male unemployment in Ireland is experienced as disempowering and disorienting for the whole family. Coakley and Mac Éinri (ibid, p. 50) quote “LC11, an employed worker with an unemployed husband” who states that “in Africa men will go to work, women they stay at home. This other way is not good. You will never see a man be happy that the wife work alone. Sitting at home”. Thus, the loss of status experienced by male migrants as breadwinners and parental role models does not so much challenge traditional

gender norms as consolidate unequal power relations in which they remain consigned to the bottom of racial and social hierarchies.

The gendered expectations that male migrants face in trying to achieve a sense of self-worth through economic success is further compounded by pressures that are put upon them to also provide for extended family networks in their countries of origin. Once again, Coakley and Mac Éinri document that this obligation to send remittances is most prevalent in African-Irish migrant communities. They explain that:

[...] this responsibility isn't straight-forward and tensions can arise, particularly in financial terms. While they continue to value the primary familial relationship, some immigrants feel that they are placed under undue pressure to maintain this relationship through a pattern of financial support when the conditions of their lives cannot sustain it. People are imbued with status by virtue of the fact that they have emigrated from their country to a western European economy but they are aware of the fact that the reality of their lives in Ireland does not necessarily tally with the perceptions of their relatives in their country of origin.

Indeed, Coakley (2013, p. 136) has further developed this research and found more evidence that "migrants from Africa experiencing financial hardship in Ireland often seek to support family members in their country of origin." The very illusion of prosperity abroad "causes stress" for those immigrants "who may not be experiencing a level of material success equivalent to the perceptions of those still resident 'at home'" (ibid, p. 137). In sum, male migrants in Ireland feel the weight of personal, familial, and transnational expectations to achieve economic success and the hegemonic masculine ideal of being a breadwinner and abundant provider, while they often struggle with the emasculating effects and loss of self-respect resulting from unemployment, underemployment and economic inactivity.

Performative expressions of Irish migrant masculinity

These pressures tend to be internalized by male migrants who compensate for their anxieties through performative expressions of hegemonic masculinity. Their compensatory self-image is a defensive reaction engendered by feelings of disempowerment and emasculation that is registered not only in academic studies and interviews discussed above. Elsewhere I have argued that theatre has provided a vehicle and forum for the exploration of intercultural encounters between recently arrived immigrants and members of the Irish host society (King, 2005), as well as the marginalization of migrant and minority artists, like Bisi Adigun, in Ireland since the economic collapse (King, 2016). Here I want to extend that analysis further to consider the role of theatre and film in helping to shape migrant masculine identities in Ireland, especially as reflected in Jimmy Murphy's, Tom Collins's, and Bisi Adigun's three different versions of *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road*. In each of their productions, narrative tension is developed around competing conceptions of migrant masculinity that clash in their moment of climax.

The premise of *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* is that five long term Irish labourers in London have gathered to mourn the loss of their friend, Jackie Flavin, who was killed in an accident on the London Underground. As the plot develops, tensions arise while they drink to Jackie's memory in a pub, and gradually reveal their struggles with alcoholism, domestic violence, ethnic and racial discrimination, varying degrees of poverty and poor living conditions. They also harbor illusions about returning to Ireland, which they left decades ago. The two alpha males in the play are Jap Kavanagh, who is accused of leading his friends astray to London to "make our fortune" (Murphy, 2001, p. 58), and Joe Mullen, the only one of them to achieve prosperity by breaking their fellowship to strike out on his own many years beforehand. The play's climax is precipitated by the revelation that Jackie Flavin's death was, in fact, not accidental, which leads to mutual recriminations and a final confrontation between Jap Kavanagh and Joe Mullen, who declares: "God forgive me but I wish it was you that went under that fuckin' train" (ibid, p. 61). Both of them are revealed to be failed mentors for Jackie Flavin – a point that is made explicit in 2007 Collins' film *Kings* – and Jap Kavanagh, in particular, overcompensates for his sense of social failure through forced bravado and self-assertion that only partially mask his utter destitution. In *Kings*, his rivalry with Joe Mullen is accentuated by the fact that they are all Irish-speaking emigrants from the Connemara Gaeltacht who had pledged to speak Gaelic to one another, except for the latter, whose abandonment of the language is compounded by his drug abuse and conspicuous consumption to make him a particularly unsympathetic character, a "Paddy Englishman."

Thus, the characters in *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* and *Kings* embody competing conceptions of hegemonic masculinity marked by cultural loyalty and economic prosperity that come into conflict at the culmination of the plot's development. Throughout the play, their performative expressions oscillate between highly sentimental and cynical feelings about their Irish origins. Their need to create the illusion of success proves to be the biggest obstacle to their repatriation. A visit back to Ireland requires conspicuous displays of prosperity, putting "on a good show... a bit of a performance," claims the character Git (Murphy, 2001, p. 17). Yet "pretendin' you're loaded,... playin' the big shot" and "coddin' you're a big success" (ibid, p. 18) only reinforces a sense of social failure for those migrants who have not become affluent, notes his fellow emigrant, Maurteen. On the contrary, their inability to achieve a modicum of success leaves them feeling emasculated and embittered in England. Their frustration is channeled into delusions of grandeur or more sullen feelings of acceptance and resignation. As Shay tells Jap, "here's home now... We've even been livin' here longer than we did in Ireland." The conversation goes on as follows:

JAP: You tryin' to say that because I've been over here longer than I were in Ireland that I'm a Brit?

SHAY: More English than the English themselves.

JAP: Hey. Hey-fuckin'-hey, ain't no Brit me...

SHAY: Just sayin', far as I'm concerned, here's my home, s'all. Have a nice little council flat, a dog, sure my kids'd be aliens back over there, aliens.(ibid, p. 47)

Shay's renunciation of the "pigsty" he left behind in Ireland is pitted against Jap's self-deception about the possibility of return; yet all of them have become irrevocably estranged from their homeland in which they would be regarded as "aliens" even more than in England. Furthermore, their sense of estrangement is sublimated in expressions of hegemonic masculinity and mediated in their relations with English women. Thus, Maurteen attributes his propensity to alcoholism and domestic abuse to his wife, that "English fuckin' bitch!" who "kept me here... got pregnant" (ibid, p. 64). He contends that frustration explains his perpetration of violence against her.

These outbursts of emigrant bravado and hyper-masculine performances are ironically reversed in Bisi Adigun's and Arambe's versions of *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* (2006). As noted, Adigun recast the play with West African immigrants in Ireland reenacting the roles of Irish emigrants in London. "By producing this play we hoped," claims Adigun (2007, pp. 63-64):

[...] that it would remind Irish people that many immigrants who had recently arrived in Ireland would rather have remained in their country of origin. On the other hand, it was our hope that the play would remind our African brothers and sisters why they left home in the first place, by borrowing a leaf from Joe Mullen, the only character in the play who becomes successful in London, because he refuses to be distracted from achieving his personal goals.

Thus, the character of Joe Mullen becomes more of an exemplary figure and masculine role model than a culprit in Arambe's version of the play. His resilience, ruthlessness, and refusal to countenance the idea of failure at the expense of cultural, familial and social ties stand in stark contrast with his fellow migrant characters. Whether African or Irish, the migrant must struggle mightily to succeed rather than wallow in self-pity to achieve a hegemonic masculine ideal, Adigun (ibid) suggests.

Arambe's version of *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* appears most powerful, however, in its reversal of the setting of immigrant adversity from England to Ireland. Elsewhere I have suggested that it was the sheer incongruity of West African immigrants in Irish emigrant garb that disrupted the play's naturalist illusion and gave it what Brecht described as the "force of what is startling" (King, 2005, p. 31). Indeed, when Liberian actor Sam Bray in the role of Shay declared that in Ireland they would be considered "aliens" (Murphy, 2001, p. 47), the audience could not know if he was speaking in or out of character. Other critics were struck by the play's reproduction of Irish racism, especially when Maurteen lashes out and calls Jap's black girlfriend a "coon" and "big black nigger bitch" (ibid, p. 30). According to Brian Singleton (2011, p. 150), "the most potent moment came when the spectators could not suspend their disbelief and retain their color blindness when one of the 'Irish' characters Jap Kavanagh is mocked for having a black girlfriend, and the 'African' performance retained the racist slurs of the original." From a gender perspective, the play reveals that "African masculinities in Ireland are marked almost exclusively by color as signs of 'non-national' status that masks their social and economic potential" (ibid, p. 151), he adds.

Yet the characters' performative expressions of compensatory masculinity and racist misogyny appear to transfer seamlessly from the play's original storyline to Adigun's adaptations, which subsequently featured West African immigrant characters in London, in *Home, Sweet Home* (2010), and in Dublin, in *The Paddies of Parnell Street* (2013). No longer impersonating Irish emigrants on stage, the West African casts in these latter productions enact their compatriots' rival displays of machismo in England and Ireland. Indeed, the play's one departure from naturalist convention disappears when it is recast with disillusioned African immigrants recalling their arrival in Dublin in the late 1990s. Its setting in a London Irish pub is also subtly transformed in *Home, Sweet Home* and *The Paddies of Parnell Street* into "the interior of an African restaurant/bar" (Adigun, 2013, p. 2). When *Home, Sweet Home* was performed in Lagos in 2010, Maurteen Rodgers became Tayo, whose "drinking problem... made him turn his Jamaican wife Franchesca into a punching bag" (Nigeriang, 2010). Tom Collins's "Paddy Englishman," Joe Mullen, was transformed into Juwon in *Home, Sweet Home* and then Victor in *The Paddies of Parnell Street*, a successful "business man who prefers hiring Pakistanis over Nigerians" (ibid). Similarly, Jap Kavanagh was recast as Dapo, or Daps, who believes "that a visit home to Nigeria from London must be planned from start to finish" (ibid). Indeed, his nostalgia for Nigeria in *The Paddies of Parnell Street* appears no less intense than the yearning for Ireland expressed in *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road*. "It brings tears to my eyes guys, each and every time I catch a glimpse of the Lagos landscape," Daps declares, with "its unmistakeable trademark of beautiful rusty roofs from high above. That is how I know we're into Naija airspace and the motherland is awaiting the grand arrival of one of her beloved sons" (Adigun, 2013, p. 10).

Nevertheless, the prospect of return for these Nigerian characters to their "motherland" seems no less remote than that of their Irish predecessors in *Kings*. "Woe betide the day we were forced to abandon our country of birth to become second class citizens in Ireland" (ibid, p. 55), declares Pete. He also debates with his compatriots about whether Ireland or Nigeria is now their permanent home. Like Jap Kavanagh in *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road*, Daps reacts incredulously to the idea that his migration is irreversible. After asking in indignation, "Are you saying that because I have lived in Ireland for fifteen years, I am now a paddy?" (ibid, p. 46), he adds:

The palmgrove tree may dwell in the river, that does not make it a crocodile. So because you think you are Irish does not mean you are Irish, if you know what I mean.

Pete: That's true. You can take a Nigerian out of Nigeria but you can't take Nigeria out of a Nigerian.

Frank: Just saying as far as I am concerned, here is my home that's all. I have my own flat close to the Luas, complete with a cat. I am self-employed and have another job with pension. Sure, my kids would be like poultry chicken back over there... bloody JJC. I mean 'half castes', that's what they will be. (ibid).

Thus, the stigmatization of interracial relationships in *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* is inverted in *The Paddies of Parnell Street*. Like Frank, Daps also expresses his fear of

having “half-caste” (ibid, p. 15) children, while Motayo labels his Irish wife “white trash” (ibid, p. 25), a “shapeless-fat-white-amoeba-bitch” (ibid, p. 26). Motayo is also no more respectful of his own wife, whom he labels a “good for nothing Edo bitch. She was the one that kept me here,... kept getting pregnant” (ibid, p. 62). Their misogyny is symptomatic of their feelings of emasculation and frustration, which stand in stark contrast with the hegemonic masculine ideals of migrant success they have failed to achieve.

These compensatory behaviours are transformed though from symptoms of Irish migrants’ downtrodden condition in *Kings* into clear character defects which inhibit their upward mobility in *The Paddies of Parnell Street*. The most significant change that Adigun makes to the *Kings of the Kilburn High Road* storyline is his alteration of the ending and the genre of the play from a tragic lament for Irish migrants in London into a cautionary tale about immigrant self-assertion and community formation. Thus, he changes the jaded successful entrepreneur and “Paddy Englishman” Joe Mullen into an unambiguous mentor and role model in Victor, who learns from the misfortunes of his Nigerian compatriots to lend them a helping hand and find employment. Indeed, whereas the Irish emigrant characters at the end of the *Kings of the Kilburn High Road* wallow in self-pity and lament their fate, *The Paddies of Parnell Street* concludes with Victor offering Dapo a job as a “General Manager for a branch that [he plans] to open in Blanchardstown” (ibid, p. 65). His sense of compassion for his fellow migrants counterpoints Joe Mullen’s repudiation of them in *Kings*. Victor does recognize the reality of Irish racism, but insists that it is not an insurmountable barrier to success: “As a black man in Ireland you must always double, triple, or quadruple your effort to get the same result as your Irish colleagues” (ibid, p. 57), he avows. His compatriots learn to follow his example of resilience and self-reliance, and instead of succumbing to self-pity and despair like the characters in *Kings*, they renew their determination to struggle to succeed. Ultimately, whereas their Irish predecessors ruefully acknowledge that they have no home left outside of London, Adigun’s African characters embrace Ireland as their “home, sweet home” (ibid, p. 66).

Conclusion

In each of the three versions of *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* by Jimmy Murphy, Tom Collins and Bisi Adigun, performative expressions of Irish migrant masculinity appear compensatory for the plight of displaced manual labourers in London and Dublin. Whether the characters are Irish emigrants who left in the 1970s, Gaelic speakers from Connemara, or West African immigrants, their stories are based on competing conceptions of hegemonic masculine ideals defined by cultural loyalty and achieving economic prosperity that come into conflict in the course of their plots’ development. On the surface, their overlapping and layered stories might be regarded as examples of what Ric Knowles (2010, p. 60) terms “new intercultural theatre”, “in which Indigenous and immigrant minoritized populations are working performatively to forge diasporic identities in relation not to the dominant culture – or not to the dominant cultural alone – but to one another”. Yet their paths never fully cross one another to bring these Irish emigrants, Gaelic speakers, and African immigrants together within the same dramaturgical frame, perhaps confirming their mutual isolation and shared marginalization.

Nevertheless, Bisi Adigun (in personal communication, November 3, 2014) claims that he was drawn to the *Kings* script because it is one of “the most dramaturgically malleable in intercultural and transnational terms”. He significantly revised that script though to represent such compensatory behaviours of hegemonic masculinity and racist misogyny not as inevitable symptoms of social failure but as surmountable barriers to immigrant success. Indeed, the most important changes that Adigun and Arambe wrought to the *Kings of the Kilburn High Road* occurred offstage rather than on. Their adaptation of *The Paddies of Parnell Street* provided a vehicle for the development of migrant and minority ethnic community theatre that created positive male role models within a context of emasculation and despair. Their reclamation of Irish stories of migration also inscribed the figure of the immigrant rather than the departed emigrant at the centre of contemporary Irish theatre in contrast with current media, political and social discourses. Several of the actors in the play had been unaccompanied minors or child asylum seekers in Calypso’s “Tower of Babel” youth theatre group in the previous decade (see King, 2007) who were now cast in the roles of long settled West African residents of Dublin rather than impersonating Irish emigrants abroad. More broadly, these different versions of the *Kings* storyline accentuate and encapsulate the wider cultural, political, and social tensions that inform the discourses and help shape the expressions of migrant masculinities in Ireland. Their numerous varieties of social practice and theoretical perspectives are showcased in theatre performance and all three versions of the *Kings* plot.

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