



### CONFLICT OF IRISH CULTURAL IDENTITY IN BRIAN FRIEL'S *TRANSLATION* *Konflik Identitas Budaya Irlandia dalam Drama Translation Karya Brian Friel*

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#### Abstract

Having been colonized by Britain, Ireland was in a very deprived condition for a very long period, especially for poor Catholic Irish. Britain had destroyed Irish civil rights by forcing them in a massive potato plantation merely to fulfill British people's need for food, which caused the Irish in a great famine and poverty. Written by an Irish playwright in 1980, which is set in agricultural land, northern side of Ireland, Brian Friel's *Translations* illustrates clearly the suffering of Irish villagers in 19th century. By applying Homi K. Bhabha's post-colonialism theory, the dialogues from the play are analyzed to explain Irish cultural identity conflict. This play is analyzed by using a descriptive qualitative method. The result of analysis reflects the mimicry concept from Bhabha, in which it shows an ambition that Irish tradition must be vanished and replaced by British tradition. The dialogues in Brian Friel's *Translations* describe that Irish language and tradition which tells a lot of Greek mythology must be replaced with the culture of Standard English language. The translations on Irish local place names into English language are forced for the sake of British imperialism importance in the Ordnance survey.

#### INTRODUCTION

It has been known in the record of history that England and Ireland have got involved in a tense conflict for a very long time, precisely in hundred years. Geographically located close with England, Ireland as the smaller one is recognized as a very traditional and undeveloped country. Compared to Ireland, England with London as the capital city has created a prosperous condition for the country in its history. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, England has become a prominent country in Europe in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. That period which is well known as the Renaissance is considered as the enlightenment for highest achievement of English literature from the legend, Shakespeare. Then in the era of industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, England has been settled and ready to adapt with that early modern time in the reign of a Queen again, namely Queen Victoria. It is started by King Henry VII which is continued by his daughter, Queen Elizabeth I in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the conquest to Ireland is aimed at the extinction of Irish Gaelic culture. Rahman, Clarke and Byrne (2017) also express the result of their investigation and they state that The British Empire begins developing its colonization tactics in Ireland and Canada, before exporting them throughout the world.

Concerning Irish Gaelic culture, those three scholars from Manitoba University also write that Ireland's native Gael population had a clan-based political system, and a legal system

known as the Brehon laws (2017). It is not enough to extinguish Irish Gaelic culture, the huge tragedy happened in the settlement of British and Scottish Protestant in agricultural Ireland, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, precisely in Ulster. In a violent way British colonization forces Irish villagers to fulfill British people's need for food in a massive potato plantation which causes the Irish in a great famine and poverty. In defeating Irish Catholic forces, Britain has destroyed Irish civil rights by giving many prohibitions. Catholics are forbidden to present in public office, also in the legal profession, even more than that there are still many limitations to get opportunities in education and in practices of religion.

As a matter of fact, rapid industrialization in the era of industry has forced Queen Victoria to decide political policies that one of them is British imperialism. Indeed British imperialism is really a big tragedy for Ireland. As stated by Jean Adele Roth, an active genealogist with the Seattle Genealogical Society Colonization, that the British was a disaster, especially for poor Irish Catholics (Ireland's Troubling History: British Colonialism's Effect on Irish Research, 2019). British imperialism or British colonization toward many countries like India, Africa, Philippine etc. happened in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century, but for Ireland as a British neighbor country, the colonization has occurred since a very long period before it.

Brian Friel, the author of the play *Translations*, is very sensitive to depict the situation and atmosphere of Irish tragedy especially with the setting of Irish agricultural villages. Born in 1929 and educated in Derry and Belfast, Northern Ireland, Brian Friel understands exactly the suffering of the villagers. It is exactly clear which is seen on the map of Ireland that Britain has succeeded in colonizing Northern Ireland but not for Southern Ireland. From the dialogues of the characters, Brian Friel tells carefully the ideas and feelings of villagers personally. The characters in the play which are described vividly portray several characters with different personalities. Manus, Sarah, and Hugh who are very loyal villagers; Maire and Doalty who are in dilemma, since they have enjoyed the facilities of London, but they still feel missing for the harmony of nature in Ireland; and Jimmy who always likes to talk about Greek mythology without nobody have time to listen him. Their struggle to fight for their freedom is seen more clearly and may be more tragic as their region is closer than Southern Ireland.

Conflict of Irish cultural identity has been studied by many researchers, but most of them concern with investigation of facts in Irish social life and culture in modern time, it is still very rarely which takes the research on the play of Brian Friel's *Translations* that pays attention on Irish villagers' life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mairead Nic Creath, in her book *Culture and Identity Politics in Northern Ireland* (2003) traces the redefinition of aspects of Ulster-British culture and the development of a bi-cultural infrastructure in spheres such as language, media and museums. Furey, Donnelly, Hughes, and Blaylock, in their book *Interpretations of national identity in post-conflict Northern Ireland: A comparison of different school settings* (2016) get findings in their research that within the Northern Irish education system they show that children across separate Catholic, separate Protestant, and mixed Catholic and Protestant educational contexts construct and interpret identity differently. A study that discusses Brian Friel's *Translations* is found in *Linguistic Identity and The Irish Political Conflict in Brian Friel's Translations: A Cultural Perspective* (2020) written by Amal Riyadh Kitishat and Majd Alkayid. They use the methodology of New Historicism and their finding is that imperialism includes cultural aspects and language, in the so-called linguistic Imperialism as the concept from Rose and Conama (2018).

Different from the third previous study that analyzes Brian Friel's *Translations* by applying New Historicism theory from the concept of linguistic imperialism of Rose and Conama (2018), this study applies the theory of Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonialism with his concept of mimicry, that mimicry indicates the Westernization of the native cultures. In this case, the purpose of this study is to find Northern Irish cultures and to find the Westernization of native culture expressed in Brian Friel's *Translations*.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The issue of people identity is one of several topics presented in postcolonial theory in which tradition, heritage, language, aesthetics, norms and customs play a role in the construction of cultural identity (Chen, 2014 in Nurchayania & Kamila, 2021). For the discourse of postcolonial theory, two great scientists who concerns with are Homi Bhabha and Edward Said. Both postcolonialism theorists share in common point of view which reveals in different expressions. Said is recognized with his words of *Us* and *Other* in which these terms are used in his statement of artificial boundaries and stereotypical boundaries between West and East, that in his theory the colonizer sees himself as *Us* and colonized as *Other* (Aminah, Juwita, Kumaseh, 2020). Meanwhile Homi K. Bhabha is popular with his word of *mimicry* that according to him in the process of colonization, native tradition is replaced by colonizer tradition in which further he focuses on politics, emotions and values that exist in the space between Colonizer and Colonized (Aminah, Juwita, Kumaseh, 2020).

From both postcolonialism theories, the writer chooses Bhabha's postcolonialism theory of mimicry to be applied in this research. Dealing with Bhabha's cocerns on politics and emotions in the space between Colonizer and Colonized (Aminah, Juwita, Kumaseh, 2020), the theory of Max Weber about politics and power support the term of Bhabha theory of *mimicry*. Max Weber defines power as a possibility for a person to force other to conduct as his will (Weber, 2001 in Fatma, 2019). In his further explanation, Weber elaborates that human power with the form of authority means a capability to achieve certain aims that can be accepted formally by community members (Fatma, 2019). In the discourse of politics between the colonizer and colonized so the more powerful nation's authority is then constructed legitimately (Fatma, 2019).

Meanwhile Bhabha's theory of postcolonialism is used to analyze the data from the play of Brian Friel's *Translation*, the writer also applies the method of interpretative form in qualitative research, so after gathering non-numerical data she analyzes the data with interpretation (Rahayu, 2022). The analysis is conducted firstly by reading the script, then by selecting data which deal with conflict of Irish cultural identity, and finally by interpreting the selected data to find Northern Irish culture and the Westernization of native culture. By doing the analysis of this study the writer must show the conflict of culture between Irish as the native and British as the colonizer or in Bhabha's concept it is called Westerner, so there are two points which have to be answered in this study, namely Northern Irish culture and Westernization of native culture which are reflected in Brian Friel's *Translations*.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Literature is created by an author, a person with high sensitive thinking. In his creation an author faces life reality then by using language as his specific object he expresses what he sees and feels in the revelation of prose, poem and drama (Armet, Hasanuddin, Abdurahman, 2022). Further in his deep feeling and high intellectuality, an author also portrays social conflicts in relation with the world history. Yanti and Ferdinal, in their article "The Portrait of Racial Discrimination against Black American People in Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*" state that there is a correlation between historical background and the development of literature constitute. In their vision, authors could add any of their imagination to the factual story that depicts the real condition (Yanti, Ferdinal, 2021). Similarly literature and revolution are not in isolated between each other, whereas revolution can generate a literary work from an author who feels sensitive to the change happened in his age, on the other hand literary work can cause the happening of revolution on society who read it (Amiruddin, 2019).

Brian Friel's *Translations* has presented a revelation of the sorrow of Irish villagers' life. Although Friel himself does not live in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the time when the story is happened, but he can observe it from the Irish long period poverty as the impact of the British

colonization which still exists in the 1950s. Set in agricultural land of the northern side of Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the play involves 10 characters; 6 villagers, 2 villagers that help soldiers, and 2 British soldiers. Act 1 takes place at a local hedge-school, namely a donation school which is run by a local master. From the setting, Friel wants to show the condition of social life of villagers in Northern Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The hedge-school is held in a disused bam or hay-shed or byre. Along the back wall are the remains of five or six stalls—wooden posts and chains—where cows were once milked and bedded. A double door lefty large enough to allow a cart to enter. The window is right. A wooden stairway without a banister leads to the upstairs living-quarters (off) of the schoolmaster and his son. Around the room are broken and forgotten implements: a cart-wheel, some lobster-pots, farming tools, a battle of hay, a chum, etc. There are also the stools and bench-seats which the pupils use and a table and chair for the master. At the door a pail of water and a soiled towel. The room is comfortless and dusty and functional—there is no trace of a woman\*s hand. (Friel, 1981: 11)

From the quotation above it clearly explains that villagers in agricultural Ireland are really in poverty. The disused barn describes that there is no ideal empty space or building for them to learn. By reading carefully the illustration above, Friel actually has shown many factors besides bad economic factors. The barn, wooden posts and chains, all of them are tools which they used to breed their cows in the past. It shows a cultural factor, that one of agricultural Irish cultures is breeding cows. A cartwheel and farming tools in line 6 of the quotation above informs that besides breeding they also do farming as their culture. Then for the next line, the room is uncomfortable and dusty and functional, it shows that although the room condition is very bad, they still can use it to learn. Behind those limitations of the room, it explains that they do it in a hidden space, they do not want their activity to be known. It seems that there is a terror that makes them afraid, so in this case if we see from the social factor, the social life of the villagers in Northern Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is repressed by the situation.

To know the reason why the villagers of Northern Ireland get repressed, it must be searched from the history of Ireland. In this case Jean Adele Roth writes in her writing about the history of Ireland, that:

King James VI of Scotland and England gained possession of the Kingdom of Ireland. The 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century English conquest was marked by large- scale “Plantations,” in Ulster and Munster so small colonies of English settlers could provide model farming communities on confiscated lands. Six counties were involved: Armagh, Fermanagh, Cavan, Coleraine, Donegal, and Tyrone. The result was the establishment of central British control. Irish culture, law and language were replaced; and many Irish lords lost their lands and hereditary authority. Land-owning Irishmen who worked for themselves suddenly became English tenants. (Roth, 2019)

In her writing, Roth tells the situation in Ireland in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, which means that it is the situation before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The frightened condition felt by villagers in Friel’s *Translations* is the impact which still exists there. Started from their submissive feeling from the invasion of Scotland and England to the Kingdom of Ireland. Then the large scale “Plantations” in Northern which includes 6 counties as agricultural lands, and one of them is Donegal, the setting of Friel’s *Translations*. It is a disaster that the villagers are forcibly evicted from their houses for British imperialism. Not only that, British colonizers also violently influenced Irish culture, law and language with English language, even making land-owning Irishmen to become tenants.

Still in the setting of hedge-school, Friel intends to make the readers know deeply about Irish character, about how morally they behave to others although they live in poverty.

When the play opens, Manus is teaching Sarah to speak. He kneels beside her. She is sitting on a low stool, her head down, very tense, clutching a slate on her knees. He is coaxing her gently and firmly and—as with everything he does—with a kind of zeal. Manus is in his late twenties and early thirties; the master's older son. He is pale faced, lightly built, intense, and works as an unpaid assistant—a monitor—to his father. His clothes are shabby; and when he moves we see that he is lame. Sarah's speech defect is so bad that all her life she has been considered locally to be dumb and she has accepted this: when she wishes to communicate, she grunts and makes unintelligible nasal sounds. She has a waiflike appearance and could be any age from seventeen to thirty-five. (Friel, 1981: 11)

The act above tells some points about Manus and Sarah. The way Manus teaches Sarah by kneeling beside her shows that Manus teaches her patiently, then Manus with his pale face and shabby clothes reflect that he looks very poor. Besides that, Manus as the master's son, works and teaches there as a volunteer, he sacrifices himself. Meanwhile how Sarah behaves with her head down, that she receives herself with her bad speech defect and her waiflike performance, all of them refer to Sarah's character of submissiveness. From that analysis, there is a summary that although the villagers live in a deprived condition, they still can give attention to each other. Furthermore, from Manus' sacrifice to be a volunteer, it can refer to the concept of their religion to be a real Christian that also performs a good moral.

In another dialogue, Friel wants to explain how valuable is Irish culture with the belief of gods and goddesses, in this case Irish's belief derives from Greek mythology.

Jimmy: Hos ara min phamene rabdo epemassat Athene—' 'After Athene had said this, she touched Ulysses with her wand. She withered the fair skin of his supple limbs and destroyed the flaxen hair from off his head and about his limbs she put the skin of an old man . . . '! The devil! The devil! (Manus has emerged again with a bowl of milk and a piece of bread.)

Jimmy: Knuzosen de oi osse—' 'She dimmed his two eyes that were so beautiful and clothed him in a vile ragged cloak begrimed with filthy smoke . . . '! D'you see! Smoke! Smoke! D'you see! Sure look at what the same turf-smoke has done to myself! (He rapidly removes his hat to display his bald head.) Would you call that flaxen hair?

Manus: Of course I would.

Jimmy: 'And about him she cast the great skin of a filthy hind, stripped of the hair, and into his hand she thrust a staff and a wallet'! Ha-haha! Athene did that to Ulysses! Made him into a tramp! Isn't she the tight one?

Manus: You couldn't watch her, Jimmy.

Jimmy: You know what they call her?

Manus: \*Glaukopolis Athene.\*

Jimmy: That's it! The flashing-eyed Athene! By God, Manus, sir, if you had a woman like that about the house, it's not stripping a turf-bank you'd be thinking about—eh?

Manus: She was a goddess, Jimmy.

Jimmy: Better still. Sure isn't our own Grania a class of a goddess and—

Manus: Who? Jimmy: Grania—Grania—Diarmuid's Grania.

Manus: Ah. jimmy: And sure she can't gel her fill of men. (Friel, 1981: 13)

The dialogues between Jimmy and Manus in the act above gives a reflection that both are so enthusiastic to tell about Greek mythology. They discuss about Athene and Ulysses,

Ulysses is a legendary Greek King and Athen is an ancient Greek goddess. Jimmy and Manus are educated people compared to Sarah that most of her life is spent at home. From the characters of Manus and Jimmy, Friel wants to tell that although Jimmy and Manus have ever lived in a city to get education, and even though they have broad knowledge, but they still love their traditional culture. They still believe that the belief to gods is their ancestor's belief, even though they have Christian religion. In Christian they obey to God, then from their belief of Greek mythology they get practical teachings for their traditional everyday life.

The hedge-school which is held by Manus' father is really a useful space. They can talk about Greek mythology, while outside they cannot do it. For those who cannot speak English can learn English at hedge-school without feeling inferior.

Manus: Flow-ers. {Pause. Sarah does not look up.}

Manus : Say the word: flow-ers. Come on—flow-ers.

Sarah: Flowers.

Manus: You see?—you're off! (Manus leans down and kisses the top of Sarah's head.)

Manus: And they're beautiful flowers. Thank you. (Maire enters, a strong-minded, strong-bodied woman in her twenties with a head of curly hair. She is carrying a small can of milk.)

Maire: Is this all's here? Is there no school this evening?

Manus: If my father's not back, I'll take it. (Manus stands awkwardly, having been caught kissing Sarah and with the flowers almost formally at his chest.)

Jimmy: Bene! Optime!

Maire: That's the height of my Latin. Fit me better if I had even that much English.

Jimmy: English? I thought you had some English?

Maire: Three words. Wait—there was a spake I used to have off by heart. What's this it was?

*(Her accent is strange because she is speaking a foreign language and because she does not understand what she is saying.) 'In Norfolk we besport ourselves around the maypoU.' What about that!)*

Manus: Maypole.

Maire: God have mercy on my Aunt Mary—she taught me that when I was about four, whatever it means. Do you know what it means, Jimmy?

Jimmy: Sure you know I have only Irish like yourself.

Maire: And Latin. And Greek.

Jimmy: I'm telling you a lie: I know one English word.

Maire: What?

Jimmy: Bo-som. (Friel, 1981: 16)

From the quotation above, the dialogues represent Irish villagers' effort to speak English. They want to speak English well, so Manus tries to make corrections to what Maire says, then Jimmy speaks English reluctantly because he cannot lie that he loves the Irish language more than English. Even though Maire studies in Norfolk, a county of a part of England, it is seen that British imperialism also gives a bad impact to the English people especially the English people who live in agricultural land. In this case, the concept of mimicry from Bhabha's postcolonialism theory exists. In the colonialism situation, the colonizer forces the colonized (the native) violently or gently to accept the colonizer's culture to be their culture, then gradually the native's culture vanishes. That is the process of imperialism.

The hedge-school for the villagers in Brian Friel's *Translations* is indeed a peaceful place for them. They can get freedom where outside they cannot get it. British colonialism has destroyed their civil rights, they are banned to speak their language, they are prohibited to practice their religion in public areas, the most painful for them is the horrible fact that they do not have their own farming land. They cannot share anymore good memories or nostalgia of

harvest time where in that situation they can enjoy the harvest by themselves. Then finally when the Ordnance Survey comes to Ireland, it is the sign that indicates no hope anymore for them to maintain their culture.

Maire: Sweet smell! Sweet smell! Every year at this time somebody comes back with stories of the sweet smell. Sweet God, did the potatoes ever fail in Baile Beag? Well, did they ever—ever? Never! There was never blight here. Never. Never. But we're always sniffing about for it, aren't we?—looking for disaster. The rents are going to go up again—the harvest's going to be lost—the herring have gone away forever—there's going to be evictions. Honest to God, some of you people aren't happy unless you're miserable and you'll not be right content until you're dead!

Doalty: Bloody right, Maire. And sure St. Colmcille prophesied there'd never be blight here. He said: The spuds will bloom in Baile Beag. (Friel, 1981: 21)

From the dialogues said by Maire, it reflects Marie's feeling of frustration as the impact of the horrible condition of the Great Famine in Ireland. They do not have farm land any more, meanwhile for villagers farming is their main living. It means that they do not have hope for their life. Then the answer from Doalty shows that he agrees with it, so Doalty and Maire also represent the psychological feeling of Irish people in agricultural land. They miss their original home land with the prosperous potato farm.

Lancey: Swinefort.  
Owen: LisnaMuc.  
Lancey: Burnfoot.  
Owen: Bun na hAbhann.  
Lancey: Dromduff.  
Owen: DruimDubh.  
Lancey: Whiteplains.  
Owen: MachaireBan.  
Lancey: Kings Head.  
Owen: CnocnaRi. (Friel, 1981: 61)

The dialogues between Owen and Lancey above are the translation from Irish to English, that Owen says the Irish and Lancey says the translation to English. They do it for the project of Ordnance Survey ordered by British imperialism. From those translations, like from DruimDubh to become Dromduff, moreover in the word Bun nahAbhann to become Burnfoot, the translations are very different from the original ones. The colonizer does it heartlessly.

HUGH: Urbs antiqua fuit—there was an ancient city which, 'tis said, Juno loved above all the lands. And it was the goddess's aim and cherished hope that here should be the capital of all nations—should the fates perchance allow that. Yet in truth she discovered that a race was springing from Trojan blood to overthrow someday these Tyrian towers—a people *laurum regem belloque superbum*—kings of broad realms and proud in war who would come forth for Libya's downfall—such was—such was the course—such was the course ordained—ordained by fate . . . (Friel, 1981: 68)

In the end of the act Friel shows the painful feeling expressed by Hugh, the master of hedge-school. After the British army surveyors arrive to map the region, in reality it is what the Ordnance Survey of Ireland did in 1833, there is no hope anymore for their living. Hugh finally accepts the Irish downfall as their fate, like a legend of Libya's downfall in the Trojan war. Hugh's acceptance of fate represents that Irish people get wisdom from their mythology.



Postcolonialism topic still becomes a hot issue nowadays. It does not only interfere with culture, but it also becomes widened to language, like this study on Brian Friel's *Translations*, and also to psychology and gender. The impact remains permanently and it still remains mystery to be solved. Brian Friel has presented a very actual story that needs our sympathy. Imperialism has not finished their project as capitalism supports them. In this modern time, when everything becomes easy to get, the problem becomes more complex. This study of Brian Friel's *Translations* is an effort to understand that complex problem.

## CONCLUSION

British imperialism has had a very bad impact on Ireland. It has destroyed Irish civil rights, especially to Irish villagers who live in agricultural land. Brian Friel's *Translation* takes the setting in agricultural land of Northern Ireland. From the dialogues of the play, they show the painful feeling of the villagers as they gather in a disused and dusty barn where they get freedom to talk there, since outside is not safe for them. The result of the analysis as the answer of the problem statement shows that Irish traditional character is full with Greek mythology and they have Christian religion. The translation into English on Irish local place names is the Westernization to the native which is forced for British imperialism importance in Ordnance survey. It shows the reflection of mimicry that Irish tradition must be vanished and replaced by British tradition. It also shows at once a figure of rewriting Ireland and its culture which is continued into submission, and finally into nonexistence of the native culture.

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