The International Conference on Interdisciplinary Humanities and Communication Studies
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/5/20220696

The Identity Crisis in Post-agreement Northern Ireland: Evidence from the Theatre Production Cyprus Avenue

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Abstract: Historical issues led to "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland, which lasted for almost 30 years. The impact of this protracted struggle on society and its citizens was significant, even if the two sides of the dispute were ultimately able to come to an understanding. As a symbol of a person's link to society, identity plays a significant part in this process. Due to their poor environmental adaption in the post-conflict era, many people may experience identity crises because they are unsure of their original identities. This essay will look into the reasons for this issue and attempt to offer solutions for the identity crisis following the conflict. Since theatre can effectively represent several social concerns, this article will take a case study method and select a specific play, "*Cyprus Avenue*," by David Ireland, from 2016, as a case study to evaluate the primary causes of the identity crisis. It was determined that the reasons for the identity crisis were the limitations of their identity-building strategies and the changes in the social environment.

Keywords: Identity crisis, Northern Ireland, social change

1. Introduction

Northern Ireland has been in a state of conflict and tension for a long time, and the conflict in Northern Ireland is due to its historical legacy. It is stated that the problem of identity was evident from the start of the British invasion of Ireland and led to the employment of political and social means to exclude others or enforce conformity [1]. As a result, it is clear how crucial identity is to politics and society. People are social beings, and because of this, they establish groups through interactions with others, and the shared pursuits and standardized behaviors they develop as a group produce a culture [2]. In a sense, a person's identification with their own social identity already constrains the idea of a shared cultural identity, and it may be argued that this cultural identification is a crucial component of identity.

Savansukha highlights the opinions of Buckley-Zistel and Martha Minow, who contend that civil conflicts have a growing impact on civilians and that the aftermath of the fight has an impact on victims' emotions and societal memory in addition to their physical suffering [3]. Moreover, some academics contend that post-war trauma impacts a person's conception of identity, intensifying the perception of conflict with preexisting identities [4]. Thus, it is clear that the topic of human identity is significant during and after conflicts, and many academics who have long studied peace and conflict issues concur that identity is a crucial element in finding a solution [5].

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Theatre has frequently been singled apart from other forms of creativity by historical and contemporary philosophers due to its political and social relevance [6]. Northern Irish playwrights from this era have been critical in their thinking throughout the post-conflict period, exposing the new tensions that occurred at the time and reflecting on them. This article uses a 2016 play by David Ireland, Cyprus Avenue, which tells the tragic tale of a man who, fearful of the political shifts occurring in the wake of a conflict, starts to lose his mind and experience hallucinations. Eventually, he experiences a mental breakdown and commits horrific crimes against his family members.

This article will examine the reasons behind the protagonist's identity crisis and anxiety based on the plot and backdrop of the novel and the theoretical underpinnings of cultural identification. The case study analysis offers insight into potential solutions for identity crises that develop for persons in such circumstances.

2. Theoretical Foundation

A crucial component of psychosocial functioning is identity. Erikson defined identity as the self's unity and harmony, along with a persistent sense of one's existence. In his research, he consistently claims that identity is created through the interaction of the self and society. In other words, one's self, or the content of one's mind, is influenced by the social environment in which they are raised, and any identity crisis that may occur in a person's life cannot be wholly dissociated from the political changes that they may experience as a result of the development of society [7]. These two elements interact and mutually support one another.

Schwartz, Zamboanga, and Weisskirch analyze identity through two aspects, one is personal identity and the other is cultural identity [8]. Personal identity shows more of an aspect of the self, focusing more on the values and beliefs of the individual, as a person who thinks to prove himself or herself "who am I?"

Cultural identity can be seen as an extension of personal identity, which includes not only the values and beliefs of the self but also how the individual perceives his or her ethnic or cultural group, at the same time, some scholars argue that race and culture should also be an area of personal identity development [9]. Cultural identity goes further than personal identity in that it defines the individual within an ethnic or cultural group and incorporates the values of the group into the values of the self. In other words, in this analysis, the group to which one belongs is prioritized and a prerequisite is set to consider the group to which one belongs before considering the part of the self. In contrast to personal identity, which is simply a question of "who am I?" in the context of the larger society, cultural identity further limits identity to the group to which one belongs before considering the self, that is, "Who am I as a member of this group, in this society?" [10]

The crucial aspect of cultural identity is that it is a collective identity developed by people from the same ethnic background. This also shows that culture has a strong connection with the nation and the two are inseparable. Woods mentions that Smith (Anthony D. Smith) believes that every nationalism has a cultural dimension [11]. In this way, culture is also an external expression of the nation, and similarly, the nation-building process emphasizes the significance of cultural identity.

Nationalism emerged as a cultural product expressing the individual's sense of belonging to a "nation" [12]. The Troubles in Northern Ireland are the result of a long-standing historical legacy and revolve around two groups, the Unionists and the Republicans. An important factor in the conflict in Northern Ireland is the difference between the religious backgrounds of the two parties, which has created different cultural identities and, for historical reasons, makes it difficult to distinguish clearly between the self and the other in this area. For historical reasons and due to the social circumstances, these two different identities have generated two completely different types of ideologies in Northern Ireland: opposition and complicity, both of which are clearly in a state of hostility, and because of the long duration of the conflict, it is difficult to eliminate the perception of the other as "enemy".

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Especially for those who experienced and participated in the conflict and the period in which they were born. In analyzing Northern Ireland, it is important to take into account the differences in cultural identities that arise as a result of nationalism, and the fact that these differences are simultaneous, which means that both sides should be analyzed in a time-based manner to understand the origins of the conflict and contribute to peacebuilding.

3. Case Study

3.1. Case Description

A brand-new production of Cyprus Avenue by David Ireland, a contemporary dramatist from Northern Ireland, was presented in 2016 at the Abbey Theatre. In this play, Eric Miller, a more than 60-year-old United Protestant man, is described as feeling anxious and overwhelmed by the current political climate. He begins to lose his mind and develop hallucinations, believing that his recently born granddaughter is Gerry Adams, the former leader of his rival party, the republican Sinn Fẻin. He gave his granddaughter plastic glasses and created a beard on her face with a black marker to confirm his theories. As he was gradually losing his mind, Eric also got into a fight with his family, hitting and strangling his daughter Julie. He later went on to conduct atrocities against his family as a result of a mental breakdown, beating his granddaughter to death in a garbage bag.

3.2. Case Analysis

By reviewing the whole plot of this play, we can determine that Eric's concern over his identity crisis is what drives him to madness. The following three primary reasons for Eric's concern regarding his identity crisis are listed through an analysis of the plot (Table 1), and the concepts listed in Table 1 are utilized to further examine how Eric's anxiety is caused.

Table 1: A theoretical framework for analyzing the cause of Eric’s identity crisis.

Reason for anxiety about identity crisis	Strategy of identifying	Use hostile relationship
		Create enemies and use hatred of enemies to define himself
	Social change	Unable accept social change
		It threaten the theoretical basis of his cultural identity
		Did not find a new theoretical basis for his cultural identity
	Paranoia about his cultural identity	Constantly emphasize his identity
		Can not accept others questioning his identity

3.2.1. Anxiety about Identity Crisis

The dark comedy shows the state of anxiety provoked by the ideology of nationalism, the two different ideologies created by the long division of Northern Ireland, and the continuation of this dichotomy due to the political changes in the post-Agreement era that led to great anxiety among

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some of the Protestant Unionists. In a way, the nature of this dichotomy ultimately formed the basis of the identity [13].

3.2.2. Strategy of Identifying

Wallace highlights Ahmed's argument in *"The Cultural Politics of Emotion"* that in the negotiation between self and other, where the other exists as a threat, hate is used as "a passion closely linked to love" [14]. Eric's use of the Fenian as an "other" to limit his own identity is in line with a logic he has always used for his own identity - the use of hate to achieve the identity of his own culture. And all of his hate-based activities were justifiable once he overcome his doubts and anxieties about his identity.

In the play, Eric uses a hostile relationship to identify with himself, i.e., he sets up an enemy of his own and uses his hatred of the enemy to achieve cultural identity for himself. This strategy of identifying oneself through the enemy and our side is applicable in all situations where all factions are separated, and Eric, the play's main character, uses it to define himself. As he said, *"And because of where I came from, I had no choice but to hate Catholics. Because they're so easy to hate"* [15]. For his own culture, Eric talks of a lack of love and instead exploits animosity toward one another to establish his identity as a Unionist by positioning himself as the antithesis of the fictitious foe.

3.2.3. Anxiety about Cultural Identity Caused by Social Change

Rogers summarizes Erikson's argument that people react to negative identities in society when environments such as social culture are providing a poor basis for positive identities [16]. In this play, the main character Eric, as a member of a Protestant group, is not a vulnerable and marginalized group in Northern Ireland. However, this social and political change has made these people feel that they were in a strong position and now their position is gradually declining, making them feel anxious and fearful. This is because of the increase in republican employees in the Northern Ireland government after the signing of the "Good Friday Agreement" in 1998 and the gradual removal of symbols representing Britain in some institutions.

It has already been mentioned that Eric is identifying himself by the way of hateful antagonism. The "Good Friday Agreement" has been signed successfully in the story's background, indicating that the two sides have already reconciled politically and that the social climate has started to shift as a result of there being no longer hostility between them. Eric was devastated by this since his identification with his own identity was built on his hatred of the adversary and the creation of made-up foes to express his cultural identity. This idea of Eric's identity started to fall apart due to the shift in the social climate, and as a result, Eric started to feel uneasy about his own identity.

At the same time, the influence of Irish culture became stronger and stronger during this period, with Riverdance, U2, and many other Irish art forms becoming more and more popular around the world. The Unionists' unease and concern about the political developments rose as a result of the expansion of cultural influence, and this unease made them more antagonistic toward the opposing side since they thought it was continuously undermining their authority. Eric became more incensed by this development and thought that it was because of the two sides' reconciliation that Irish culture had gained more sway. As a result, he turned more antagonistic toward the opposition, but societal changes were warning him that his attitude to his identity was flawed. Eric becomes confused by this contradiction and is unable to come up with another theory of a new cultural identity that he can accept. He believes that the course of history will change who he is, and he is unwilling to accept this because he is unclear on how to accept himself as he will be after the change.

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3.2.4. Paranoia about His Cultural Identity

In a way, his reluctance to historical change has created paranoia about his cultural identity. Eric tries to maintain his cultural identity by defending his own beliefs and behaviors [17]. He frequently highlights his Unionist identity and his Britishness. Because Eric derives his identity from his opponents, the Republicans, his hatred for them reaches a very high level. The British would not have bothered to distinguish between Unionists and Republicans long ago in a more culturally diverse setting. But he would not accept anyone questioning his British identity and was shocked and outraged when he was thought to be Irish in the pub.

"My grandfather was killed in the Battle of the Somme. My father died at Dunkirk. And I too would die for my right to be British. My British identity, my culture, my, our way of life, ours, our heritage and being, our very, our being. Every summer I parade with the Orange. I fly the flag of the Union from the rooftop of our house. I worked for Her Majesty's Government to combat the relentless campaign of genocide conducted by the IRA against the Protestant people of Ulster over the course of three decades. I am anything but Irish. I am British. I am exclusively and non-negotiable British. I am not nor never have been nor never will be Irish" [18].

This is what Eric says when his British identity is misunderstood, from which you can see various stereotypes and cultural symbols. It can be said that Eric's insistence on his British identity has almost reached the point of paranoia; he will not allow anyone to question his British identity, and when he is thought to be Irish, he becomes extremely angry. Eric finds himself in a predicament where he is unable to accept historical change and his own cultural identity is suffering as a result. He has also been unable to find a theory that can both accept change and allow him to accept his cultural identity. Eric's sole option in this condition of bewilderment is to constantly underline his own identity in order to calm his identity crisis anxiousness. As a result, he becomes increasingly insistent on his cultural identity to the point of near-paranoia, which allows him to identify with his own identity in this contradictory state but also causes him to gradually lose his sanity.

4. Discussion

Two opposing ideologies have emerged in society as a result of the long-standing division that has led to the conflicts in Northern Ireland. Eric, the main character in *"Cyprus Avenue"*, creates his own cultural identity based on these conflicting social circumstances, and even though he is aware of many stereotypes and even harmful components in his perceptions, he is unable to let them go because they are the foundation of who he is [19]. Eric's sense of himself has also been altered by the shifts in social authorities. It is argued that when people feel like they belong to a group, their social identity is influenced, which in turn influences how they perceive themselves [20]. Eric derives his sense of himself from his hatred of his enemies, the republicans, in the context of a society like Northern Ireland, which saw a lengthy era of the bipartisan split. This implies that the way he views himself is that he is an enemy of the republicans and must despise them.

The community as a whole was engaged in a peace-building process following the signing of the peace deal, pushing for amicable coexistence between the two opposed parties. The "minority" republicans in Northern Ireland have more employment options available to them, and Irish culture is becoming increasingly well-known worldwide. Additionally, society in general, and British culture in particular, has long been unconcerned with whether or not a person belongs to the Unionist or Republican side given the cultural diversity of today's world. These changes in society made Eric realize that the theoretical basis of his current constitution of self-identity seemed unsustainable in the current social formations that promoted mutual respect and peaceful coexistence, threatening the theoretical basis of Eric's cultural identity and making it impossible for Eric to accept such social changes. Eric, however, did not discover a theoretical foundation that would enable him to acquire

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self-identity during this societal transformation. Eric could only have a sense of belonging in society in this conflicting position by repeatedly highlighting his identity. I believe that this is the reason why Eric is anxious about his own cultural identity. Because this is the only way he can feel his belonging, this worry causes him to become nearly neurotic about his own identity.

This study focuses on the play's context in terms of the cultural identity caused by nationalism to uncover the causes of the protagonist's identity crisis, which is only an extreme example of an identity crisis in the post-agreement era but serves as a reminder that this issue needs to be taken seriously. However, the drama deftly blurs the lines between nationalism and mental illness, and its impact undoubtedly goes far beyond the specific Northern Ireland setting, which is not covered in detail in this research [21].

Wallace refers to Heidemann's assertion that theatrical productions of the post-protocol era incorporate the paradox of the Northern progressive narrative [22]. This play is full of an expression of negative marginality, demonstrating anxiety generated by identity and presents the audience with more extreme pessimism and impactful and violent performance, which can have an extremely profound effect on the audience that may persist into their lives, making them aware of identity issues and how to cope with the fears caused by the changing social environment and anxiety caused by changes in the social environment, so that they can think about how they can solve similar problems more peacefully.

5. Conclusion

Based on the aforementioned instance, it can be shown that the main factor contributing to identity crises in the post-conflict age is the alteration of the social environment through the study of the identity strategy and environment of the main character. The two sides in the conflict have reconciled, changing the way they have been living in a state of hostility, in the post-conflict era when all parties in society have agreed on peacebuilding. People like the case's protagonist, who utilized the hostile relationship to forge an identity, become confused by the changes in the current social context as a result of the hostile relationship's transition, and they eventually develop paranoia or even go insane.

"Cyprus Avenue" is a tragic story of an identity crisis in the post-conflict era, and although the ending of the story is extreme, the case also shows the negative impact on the people living in Northern Ireland after the signing of the "good Friday agreement" due to the long-standing conflict situation. This story illustrates how alterations in the social environment can result in uneasiness over one's identity. Although it is simple to employ animosity as a tactic for identity construction, it is crucial to steer clear of it in today's more diverse world. Creating a multicultural space for communication where people can temporarily put their identities aside will help people who have used hostile relationships to shape their identities for a long time due to historical reasons gradually overcome their identity crisis and be better able to adapt to changes in the broader social environment.

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