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## MARTIN McDONAGH'S *THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE* AS A TALE OF DEBUNKED MOTHER MYTH, (SELF-)EXILE AND EMIGRATION\*

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### Abstract

The Irish struggled for centuries to gain their sovereignty from the English; however, after the independence that was obtained in 1948, the following problems were experienced: socio-economic problems, dislocation, fragmentation, and, as a consequence of all, problems of emigration and being exposed to being in (self-)exile. All these problems are projected in Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996) by means of the symbolic representation of mother Ireland through the old mother, Mag, who suffocates her daughter, Maureen, who tries to find a way of being freed from the suffocation of the country. In this way, McDonagh criticises the postcolonial condition of Ireland by means of debunking the mother myth of Ireland. Taking into consideration the high value of the symbols reflected in *The Beauty Queen*, the play might be regarded as the symbolic representation of Ireland as a country that has not yet been freed from the burdens of its colonial past. Within the light of these discussions and as opposed to the general criticism on McDonagh's plays that they do not reflect Irish realities and are nothing more than imaginary stories, this paper aims to discuss McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* as a play that represents the above-mentioned conditions and problems experienced in postcolonial Ireland particularly in the 1990s.

**Keywords:** *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, Postcolonial Ireland, Debunked Mother Myth, Dislocation, (Self-) Exile, Emigration.

### 1. Introduction

Martin McDonagh has always been in the foreground in the Irish literary scene since his career as a well-known playwright began with the production of his play, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, which premiered at the Town Hall Theatre in Galway on 1 February 1996. He has generally been severely criticised on the grounds he caricaturises Ireland and the Irish as mad people in his plays that deal with Ireland, which is considered by many as an insult to the nation. Moreover, in her "Gender, Sexuality and Violence in the Work of Martin McDonagh," Mária Kurdi discusses McDonagh's depiction of Western Ireland as "exaggerated" and "imaginary" (Kurdi, 2006: 99). Contrary to these arguments, however, Maria Tymoczko discusses McDonagh's plays without ignoring the social facts of Ireland reflected in them. According to her, McDonagh's Irish plays mirror the theme of "abuser and abused" as "timely analogues of the national Irish discourse at present: What is it to be really Irish? How does this image relate to the reality?" (Tymoczko, as cited in Lanters, 2000: 220-21). These discussions are reflected, and the answers to these questions are, in a way, tried to be found in McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen*. The play also projects the legacy of English imperialism to the Irish: As a natural consequence of English imperialism, English and Irish cultures have become inextricably intertwined, which brought psycho-sociological problems experienced by postcolonial selves who could not yet free themselves of the burden of the impacts of the English colonialism experienced on the island until 1948. In line with these arguments and Tymoczko's statements, this paper aims to discuss McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen* as a play which projects the socio-economic and psycho-sociological problems experienced in Ireland in the 1990s as a consequence of its colonial past.

Actually, Vandevellé's following statement proves that in the 1990s, when McDonagh's *Leenane Trilogy*, which includes his *The Beauty Queen* as well, was written, the Irish had still been experiencing social and economic problems that led them to fragmentation: The "statistics [in the 1990s] in fact reveal a devastating picture of the fragmentation of Irish social life. Suicide rates and the number of people diagnosed with depression reach alarming figures and the rural to urban migration breaks down local communities" (Vandevellé, 2000: 299). Moreover, this fragmentation and immigration have had devastating effects on the Irish such as "disruption of social ties, low marriage rates and social isolation" (Coward, 1990: 69). Although in an exaggerated manner, McDonagh's characters in his *The Beauty Queen* also mirror this depressive nature. Ireland and the problems experienced by its citizens are reflected by the problematic

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relationship between the old mother, Mag, who represents mother Ireland and her daughter, Maureen, a symbolic marker of the postcolonial Irish selves, "children"/ citizens of old mother Ireland. McDonagh depicts the Irish "children" as suffocated by "mother" Ireland entrapped in a vicious circle and the problems the country has been experiencing since its independence such as being imprisoned in a traditional way of life, emigration due to this suffocation and socio-economic problems, identity problems that emerged as a result of Ireland's colonial past and search for a whole "self."

## **2. McDonagh's Depiction of Ireland as Opposed to "the Paradise of Emerald Isle", Debunking the Mother Myth and Being in (Self-)Exile**

*The Beauty Queen of Leenane* takes place in a village in Connemara, Galway called Leenane. As Raymond Williams puts forth, "[i]n English, 'country' is both a nation and a part of a 'land'; 'the country' can be the whole society or its rural area" (Williams, 1973: 1). In a similar vein, the setting of the play, Leenane, which is in the rural countryside, not only represents the countryside but also is a symbolic marker of Ireland in general as it mirrors the problems of a wider Ireland at a microcosmic level. The chaos valid in Ireland in the postcolonial period as represented by Mag who represents Ireland is clearly observed in the play. Mag's dark shadow is cast over Maureen and the cottage as does mother Ireland cast a shadow over her citizens.

Martin McDonagh reflects real Irish socio-economic and psycho-sociological problems leading to the problem of uprooted self by debunking the mother myth of Ireland and an anti-pastoral reflection of Ireland unlike the generally accepted projection of Ireland as an idyllic pastoral site. Actually, "the rural innocence of the pastoral" (Williams, 1973: 46), the reflection of the country as a marker of "a natural bounty, a feeling of paradise in the garden" (Williams, 1973: 32) and "the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue" (Williams, 1973: 1) are not present in McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen*. Rather, the Leenane cottage, with its pee-smelling (McDonagh, 1999: 29) and unhappy atmosphere, is reflected as a signifier of chaos within domestic borders and an irritating and frightening place which lacks warm family life (which is understood from the unhealthy communication of the mother and daughter). Moreover, there is "a framed picture of John and Robert Kennedy on the wall" (McDonagh, 1999: 1), indication of violence as both of them who were of Irish origin were assassinated in the USA. Besides, "a heavy black poker beside the range" (McDonagh, 1999: 1), the most important dramatic device which is reminiscent of violence, is given in the very opening of the play. As Middeke explains, "[t]he play is set in a [...] deplorable persiflage of the myth of the idyllic country cottage of the olden days in the west of Ireland" (215). McDonagh's Ireland, as might clearly be observed, is dystopic, and it may be summarised as follows:

[It] is populated by evil mothers, bored daughters, warring brothers, and belligerent neighbours. Their antics are often narcissistic, brutal, and yet somehow mercilessly funny. Murder, thievery, and mayhem occur so often in McDonagh's Ireland that such actions appear to be normative. The town of Leenane is a place of gratuitous violence, greed, and amorality where death appears to be nothing more than a meaningless intrusion into the self-absorbed ritual of daily life. (Castleberry, 2007: 44)

McDonagh defies the fixed representation of Ireland as "the paradise of Emerald Isle." According to him, there is now an image of Ireland whose meaning is entirely unsettled. It might be observed that the definitions of Ireland have thoroughly changed throughout the journey from William Butler Yeats' times, in which Ireland was idealised, to the present: "What once preserved mythological or ritualistic value, be it unifying or dividing, now remains obsolete. [...] Family, neighbourhood, church, language, as well as places like the country kitchen, village pub, farm, land and so forth stand merely as one dimensional iconography" (Lachman, as cited in Wallace, 2006: 164). In this regard, it may be pointed out that McDonagh deconstructs and subverts the constructed meaning of Ireland through giving negative characteristics to it rather than the positive and beautiful ones. By means of this dark depiction of Ireland and the representation of Ireland through a cruel old mother, Mag, McDonagh is debunking the mother myth, "the poetic discourse of motherland" (Kearney, 1997: 108): He distorts the traditional outlook upon Ireland, which was a holy mother figure for the first wave Irish dramatists. Unlike Yeats who "offered the myth of Mother Ireland as symbolic compensation for the colonial calamities of history" (Kearney, 1997: 113), McDonagh, in a way, makes fun of this "mythological motherland [which] served as a goddess of sovereignty who, at least at the imaginary level, might restore a lost national identity" (Kearney, 1997: 113).

In the play, Mag psychologically destroys, hence, metaphorically kills her daughter, Maureen. Maureen is a woman who is unmarried due to "socio-economic" and "cultural factors that influence [...] marital status and household composition" (Coward, 1990: 72) and the profound repercussions of the country's colonial past and postcolonial present. Maureen is "trapped by Mag, who represents both an albatross hanging around Maureen's neck and a responsibility which Maureen expects to continue fulfilling 'from now and 'til doomsday'" (Diehl, 2001: 99). The play, in this sense, actually, mirrors the condition of women in Ireland where, "ideologically, women's destiny lies in subsuming their identity in, and

committing their time and energy to the 'family'" (O'Connor, 2001: 89). Similarly, Maureen, as a requirement of socio-sexual norms, is expected to be submissive to the norms of the society and metaphorically to sacrifice herself for her family, in her case, for her mother. Mag does not want her daughter's freedom. Rather, she does her best to imprison Maureen as her caretaker who is not given the chance to fulfil her psychological and sexual desires. Rebecca Wilson draws a parallel between Maureen's life and a fairy-tale image, which is very allusive: "In a tower on top of a mountain, incarcerated by an ogress-cum-wicked witch, the virgin heroine, albeit a 40-year-old resentful, frustrated and repressed virgin, waits for a lover saviour" (Wilson, as cited in Castleberry, 2007: 42). In such a place, in which it is impossible to discover any traces of a peaceful family life, Maureen is waiting for any kind of hope that will save her from her boring and depressing life, in her own words, "Of anything! [...]. Of anything. Other than this" (McDonagh, 1999: 13). The daughter's hatred towards the mother in the play is so much that the desire for killing the mother and seeing her dead is always there. When Mag mentions the man in Dublin she heard about killing an old woman he did not even know, Maureen only wishes him to come to Leenane to kill Mag as well (McDonagh, 1999: 7). Maureen's dream about her mother constitutes such a horrific image as well: "I have a dream sometimes there of you, dressed all nice and white, in your coffin there, and me all in black looking in on you" (McDonagh, 1999: 16). In fact, the play is the reflection of Maureen's, a psychologically unhealthy person's, very personal struggle for freedom against her imprisoning mother. Maureen, actually, equates killing her mother with freedom. Only when Pato, Maureen's childhood friend, comes from England does Maureen get the possibility of leaving her unhappy life behind. After the party Pato gives, to which he invites Maureen as well, their relationship becomes closer and Maureen psychologically begins to be freed from bondage.

Pato, once abroad, sends Maureen a letter in which he proposes marriage to her and invites her to the USA to live there together and suggests that they leave Mag in a nursing home so that Maureen can start a new life for herself (McDonagh, 1999: 36). Ray, Pato's brother, does not give the letter directly to Maureen and hands it to Mag, who, thinking that there will not be anybody to look after her, burns it after reading it. Mag, accidentally uttering some words from the letter to Maureen, reveals herself. This time what Mag has done to prevent Maureen's future happiness is too much for the latter, and leads to aggression. Maureen's aggression is followed by a very violent act that would psychologically compensate for her loss. She, after turning up the volume of the radio, begins to physically torture her mother by pouring boiled oil on her hand; Mag's cry of pain is heard. This is most probably not the first physical violence inflicted upon the mother by the daughter as may be understood from the stage directions in the first scene which depict Mag's left hand as "somewhat more shrivelled and red than her right" (McDonagh, 1999: 1). For Maureen, this torture is not enough; more must follow to take her revenge. The stage directions given in the eighth scene describe what happens next, which may create suspicion and anxiety in the audience and gradually prepares them for the approaching dark end, a very shocking one indeed:

The only light in the room emanates from the orange coals through the grill of the range, just illuminating the dark shapes of Mag, sitting in her rocking chair, which rocks back and forth of its own volition, her body unmoving, and Maureen, still in her black dress, who idles very slowly around the room, poker in hand. [...] The rocking-chair has stopped its motions. Mag starts to slowly lean forward at the waist until she finally topples over and falls heavily to the floor, dead. A red chunk of skull hangs from a string of skin at the side of her head. Maureen looks down at her, somewhat bored, taps her on the side with the toe of her shoe, then steps onto her back and stands there in thoughtful contemplation. (McDonagh, 1999: 49-51)

As Diehl emphasises, this murder is the most important evidence of the lack of "familial rootedness" (Diehl, 2001: 109). Besides, in this murder there is "a dark sense of irony" in that Maureen kills Mag with a fireplace poker which usually stands for "familial togetherness, warmth and security" (Diehl, 2001: 109). In this atmosphere, warmth, love and respect are replaced by screams caused by agony, hatred and violence.

As a matter of fact, this matricide, most important of all, might be interpreted as a symbolic marker of the desire of the fragmented postcolonial selves to free themselves of the burden of the suffocation that they feel in the borders of Ireland in the postcolonial era in which, even in a sovereign position, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have asserted, the country's "progressive functions all but vanish" (Hardt and Negri, as cited in McLeod, 2012: 123). Actually, as Grene aptly puts it, "[t]he dramatised experiences of the past conditioning the present have been as much those of poverty and deprivation with their consequent deformations of mind and spirit, as the oppressions of political domination" (Grene, 1999: 267). He goes on to state that necessarily, "within [Irish] drama to represent in Irish life what is symptomatic in Irish life can be attributed in general terms to the colonial/ postcolonial consciousness which leaves the question of national identity always an issue" (Grene, 1999: 267). Similarly, in *The Beauty Queen*, Maureen's self is transformed into a fragmented and dislocated one, like the "children" of Ireland. Considered in relation to

the colonial past of Ireland, Maureen's wish for escaping from mother Ireland, seeing Mag as dead and later her murdering Mag might be understood as symbolic reflections of the wish for escaping from dislocated and dislocating mother Ireland that entraps its children in a vicious circle. In fact, in this way, rather than humiliating Ireland and the Irish by means of these negative reflections, McDonagh "transform[s] a fixed conventional setting into a fluid psychological space" (Roche, 1995: 85). It would not be wrong to argue that McDonagh's Ireland suffers from economic decline; murders in the country are at the peak; the country has not yet recovered from the effects of colonialism. What Diehl points out is suggestive at this point: "By exploring the dark undertones of the every-day (i.e., murder, betrayal, resentment, envy), McDonagh spins tales of exile, isolation, and frustration [...]. These tales [...] register a keen awareness of Irish history and its consequences in the present" (Diehl, 2012: 112).

*The Beauty Queen*, therefore, has traces of McDonagh's power of observation about the Irish who live in Ireland as fragmented and isolated selves; and, Ireland, by means of Mag, is presented as a hybrid country which has not yet been away from the impacts of its colonial past. Through the conversations of the characters in the cottage, it is possible to hear the harsh historical, economic, cultural and social problems the Irish have experienced in Ireland and abroad. Maureen's and Mag's following conversation, for example, is reflective of the colonial/ postcolonial realities in Ireland such as the fact of shattered roots of Ireland, the erosion of cultural traditions which has established a sense of unease among the Irish, the question of identity, and the obligation of migration to England for the postcolonial selves:

Mag: Nothing on [the radio], anyways. An oul fella singing nonsense.

[...]

Maureen: (*pause*) It isn't nonsense anyways. Isn't it Irish?

Mag: It sounds like nonsense to me. Why can't they just speak English like everybody?

Maureen: Why should they speak English?

Mag: To know what they are saying.

Maureen: What country are you living in? [...] Ireland you are living in!

[...] So why should you be speaking English in Ireland?

Mag: I don't know why.

Maureen: It's Irish you should be speaking in Ireland. [...] 'Speaking English in Ireland.'

Mag: (*pause*) Except where would Irish get you going for a job in England? Nowhere.

Maureen: Well, isn't that the crux of the matter? [...] If it wasn't for the English stealing our language, and our land, and our God-knows-what, wouldn't it be we wouldn't need to go over there begging for jobs and for handouts? (McDonagh, 1999: 6-8)

This conversation shows that McDonagh is not indifferent to the harsh conditions of fragmented Irish people. It also reflects the fact that English has remained as a dominant language in Ireland as a result of colonial legacy, by means of which the fate of Ireland is contested. As McLeod explains, "the English language is a part of [...] colonial 'inheritance.' Its existence as the language of colonial power has complicated its status as the language of the independent nation, and there are conflicting attitudes towards English as the national language of once-colonised countries. Can it ever function as the national language of the nation after colonialism?" (McLeod, 2012: 144). The answer to this question is really difficult. Language is of utmost significance not only in terms of its being a national marker but also in relation to determining one's identity as a whole self. Once-colonised countries like Ireland are still in a dislocated condition due to this language issue as observed in the bitter criticism of Maureen who is not content with English language's still being dominant in Ireland, which reflects their obligatory exposure to English colonial culture, a reference to the destruction of "the language of origins, of Edenic wholeness" (Lee, 1995: 169). As McLeod claims, "in the years since the busy period of decolonisation there has emerged a disenchantment with the ideas of nation and nationalism. This is in many ways a consequence of the historical experience of decolonisation when several national liberation movements [...] confronted a series of often insoluble problems once formal independence was achieved" (McLeod, 2012: 122). Throughout centuries what the Irish wanted was total independence from England. Ironically, however, this desired independence in 1948 did not bring the desired peace to the country since this period was followed by identity crisis and the problem of the divided self.

As reflective of this experience, McDonagh's characters who are all the time questioning their conditions face psychological and social problems. Ireland for them has become a locale associated with a mother suffocating her children and with "distorted images of 'home'" (Arrowsmith, 2006: 240). Consequently, the characters experience a life in exile in their home lands, and their condition reflects that of "psychological and physical exile" (Boehmer, 1995: 133). As Yew puts forth, "[o]ne doesn't need to be physically removed from the 'homeland' in order to be exiled. Exile can take place in different cultural spaces, especially through processes like colonization." He goes on to state that, "in this case, by living in a

place that has become culturally transformed through colonialism, it's possible for exile to occur particularly when one realizes that a traditional language, a way of life [...] can no longer be articulated or experienced without the mediation of modernity. This sense causes a sense of loss and displacement from a traditional homeland" (Yew, 2002). Moreover, as O'Toole suggests, "[t]hat gap between place and people, between the search for a fixed national space and the existence of an unfixed, mobile population is the great contradiction of Ireland" (O'Toole, as cited in Vandeveld, 2000: 295). In this complicated atmosphere, defining what being Irish means becomes hard for the Irish.

When economic problems are added to this self-exile and dislocation, many Irish people have felt obliged to migrate to other countries such as the UK, the USA and Australia. Bruce King's following striking comments might also be suggestive in terms of mirroring the economic problems once-colonised countries experience, which lead to, this time, the problems of emigration, living in exile and racism: "Where the end of the Second World War brought a demand for national political independence to the forefront as a solution to the problems of the colonies, this was soon found to be an unrealistic hope as many new nations [...] failed to develop economically" (McLeod, 2012: 122), as observed in Ireland, as well. Considered in line with these facts, McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen* might be claimed to be the critique of the condition of postcolonial Ireland which lost many citizens to emigration as a consequence of economic issues. With all its difficulties and harshness, McDonagh's Ireland resembles a monstrous and boring location rather than a supportive one. In the play, Ray, Pato's brother, is critical of Ireland, and voices his wish to leave it in the following words:

All you have to do is look out your window to see Ireland. And it's soon bored you'd be. 'There goes a calf.' (Pause.) I be bored anyway. I be continually bored. (Pause.) London I'm thinking of going to. Aye. Thinking of it, anyways. To work, y'know. One of these days. Or else Manchester. They have a lot of more drugs in Manchester. Supposedly, anyways. (McDonagh, 1999: 53)

He also emphasises the unhappiness and boredom he experiences in the country as follows: "There are plenty of other things just as dangerous [as drugs], would kill you just easy. Maybe even easier. [...] This bastarding town for one" (McDonagh, 1999: 54). In response, Maureen says after a pause and in a sorrowful way: "Is true enough" (McDonagh, 1999: 54). Here, McDonagh implies that contemporary "governmental changes, the ever-rising rates of unemployment, the new waves of emigration, and the strong sense of entropy" have limited the chances of a good life in Ireland (Diehl, 2012: 112). Consequently, for the children fed up with the suffocating mother image of Ireland, who fails to feed her children, who prevents their happiness and who applies symbolic psychological violence, there is one way out: taking an action so as to be free of her through literally escaping from there. In this sense, it might be argued that the description of "mother Ireland" in the play is demythologised and totally different from the traditional depiction of mother in Irish mythology as "divine mother, concerned with fertility, with the protection of flocks and herds and with the security of the land and its people" (Wood, 1985: 13).

### **3. The Fact of Emigration and Being in Exile**

Although McDonagh was raised in London, he was closely connected with Irish culture and he had the chance of closely observing two real expatriates in London: his Irish mother and father who had to migrate to England as workers. His father went there as a construction worker while his mother worked as "a cleaner and part-time housekeeper" and they "met and married in the nineteen sixties, in London, where they had moved from Ireland in search of better wages" (O'Toole, as cited in Jordan, 2012: 199). As a matter of fact, as O'Sullivan notes, "what happens in Ireland is that some crisis which might, in other circumstances, have been accommodated by a move 'across the hall,' or across the city, becomes a cause of movement across the sea or the ocean" (O'Sullivan, 1995: 3).

Actually, the Irish have experienced the same kind of migrations for centuries and especially after the Second World War, there were many who chose to go to England for better opportunities; however, they faced a hostile approach there contrary to their expectations. Jordan's following statements reflect the fact that there was not much change in the difficulties that the Irish experienced in England from the 1950s to the 1990s:

After the Second World War, the sheer poverty of the country and the absence of work opportunities meant that many of its citizens were forced to emigrate. [...] For many of that generation of the Irish abroad, the issues of how they transacted, worked, schooled, communicated and socialised were shaped by a longing to return home. There was a yearning then to regain the space from which they had been banished, due to social, religious, family, economic or sexual reasons. While a small minority deliberately chose to leave Ireland, most felt they had no option but to leave. Some left to make their fortunes, some to disappear. The work that many acquired was often menial, and it is well documented that the Irish faced a vast range of prejudices in Britain from the 1950s right up to the late 1990s. (Jordan, 2012: 199)

It will also be useful to give the information that, in the 1990s, 37,400 people emigrated from Ireland (Sweeney, 2004: 8) for a chance of better life opportunities. In this sense, migration might be considered "as a metaphor for change alongside [...] as a product which is both a product and a cause of change" (O'Sullivan, 1995: 3). Actually the economic problems in Ireland continued until the mid-1990s (Sweeney, 2004: 10) when economic growth named as the Celtic Tiger economy started.

Emigration because of economic problems is explained in *The Beauty Queen* through striking and bitter expressions. Irish expatriates in the play such as Pato and, for a short while, Maureen and the ones who voluntarily plan the life of an expatriate like Ray might be regarded as symbolising the real Irish migrants for whom "emigration simply represented opportunity" (Einri, 2008: xi) but later meant "a journey into exile" (Weiss, 1992: 10). The fragmentation experienced by the Irish, the suffocating nature of life in Ireland, the feeling of belonging to nowhere, and, hence the obligatory migrations from Ireland, are, in a way, summarised in the following striking and bitter conversation between Pato and Maureen:

Maureen: England? Aye. Do you not like it there so?

Pato: (*pause*) It's money. (*Pause.*) And it's Tuesday I'll be back there again.

[...]

Maureen: That's Ireland, anyways. There's always someone leaving.

Pato: It's always the way.

[...]

(*pause*) I do ask meself, if there was good work in Leenane, would I stay in Leenane? I mean, there never will be good work, but hypothetically, I'm saying. Or even bad work. Any work. And when I'm over there in London and working in rain and it's more or less cattle I am, and the young fellas cursing over cards and drunk and sick, and the oul digs over there, all pee-stained mattresses and nothing to do but watch the clock ... when it's there I am, it's here I wish I was, of course. Who wouldn't? But when it's here I am... it isn't *there* I want to be of course not. But I know it isn't here I want to be either. (McDonagh, 1999: 21-22)

This dilemma and the feeling of alienation both abroad and in one's own country are symbolic projections of the outcome of the fragmented self's quest for the 'whole self.' These statements are also the cries of the children of old mother Ireland who are in a mood of despondency within her borders. That is why, after working for some time in England, Pato seeks his dreams for better wages and a better life in the USA, again not in Ireland. "[G]iven the collapse of traditional spaces (e.g., home, region, nation) and identities (e.g., mother, daughter, Irish citizen, emigrant)" (Lanters, as cited in Diehl, 2012: 11), life in any place that will bring hope for a better life is possible for McDonagh's characters for whom individual identity rather than national identity is important. Moreover, "[b]y reminding us of many migrant minds which make up its heritage, Irish culture reveals that the island of Ireland is without frontiers, that the surrounding seas are waterways connecting it with 'foreigners'" (Kearney, 1997: 101).

Besides, Maureen, similar to Pato and Ray, thinks that she does not belong to her "home" due to her fragmented self, the suffocating conventions in Ireland and economic depression in the country, and, as a dislocated person who wants to belong to somewhere, she migrates to England to work as a cleaner in Leeds at a young age. She deliberately chooses a life in exile with hopes for a good life and to explore her lost "self." Contrary to her expectations of belonging to somewhere, however, she experiences racial harassment, the problem experienced by many ethnic minorities/ diaspora identities, and which causes her to have serious psychological problems. In Leeds, the English swore at her (McDonagh, 1999: 31); she is not accepted as a part of the British society on the basis of her race; on the contrary, she is treated as inferior, a second-class citizen, and "the cultural other." Maureen goes to Leeds with new hopes and great expectations, longing for happiness and freedom; however, she cannot find there what she expects, and she experiences self-consciousness of being a postcolonial migrant subject, and emotional chaos. She becomes representative of "Irish migrant woman as 'muted'" (O'Sullivan, 1995: 7) as a result of discriminatory practices and racist discourse of the English. Maureen, as a consequence, is "emotionally crippled by thoughts of her experiences" (Castleberry, 2007: 46) in the past when she spent some time in a mental hospital, which can be understood by the confession made by Mag to Pato: "D'you want to know what Difford Hall is, fella? [...]. It's a nut-house! An oul nut-house in England I did have to sign her out of and promise to keep her in me care. Would you want to be seeing the papers now?" (McDonagh, 1999: 30). This confession reflects the deep psychological problems experienced by Maureen. When the psychological content of *The Beauty Queen* is taken into consideration, it may be argued that the play "constitutes an emotional roller coaster ride into the abysses of the human psyche" (Middeke, 2010: 216). In fact, Maureen's past, like a ghost, follows her to the present. This not only explains the psychosis that Maureen is experiencing now but also shows that she is also entrapped by her past which was a secret for Maureen before its selfishly being revealed by the mother,

which might signify the idea that in “mother Ireland” it is not possible for her children to forget their tragic experiences. So, the reason lying behind Maureen’s psychosis can be understood more clearly.

#### 4. Conclusion

The ending part of the play does not seem optimistic as the condition of Ireland is implied to remain the same through the symbolism hidden in the rocking chair. The disturbingly violent play ends with Maureen’s turning into what she really hated, that is to say, her mother as, after murdering Mag, she takes the place of her mother in the rocking-chair that moves back and forth but does not go forward and stays wherever it is, which may stand for the ‘vicious circle,’ a key term for *The Beauty Queen*. As Karadağ underlines, the murder of Mag by Maureen in the end is a step that she has taken unconsciously in order to be able to escape from the vicious circle that she is trapped in (Karadağ, 2011: 46). However, killing the mother does not improve the conditions for Maureen. That is why, similar to the rocking chair, she stays where she is and all her deeds turn out to be futile. What she does entraps her much more within the cottage. In the end, “[s]he becomes a veritable death-in-life image of utter paralysis” (Middeke, 2010: 215). In the last scene, Maureen is seen to be sitting in the rocking chair, “rocking slightly” (McDonagh, 1999: 60) and listening to the announcer announcing Delia Murphy’s once popular song, “The Spinning Wheel,” for Mag’s seventy-first birthday, which is dedicated to her by her daughters. As Mag is dead, the one listening to it is Maureen, who has now become just like her mother sitting in the rocking chair all day.

Moreover, the play’s heart-breaking ending with “The Spinning Wheel” is suggestive given the linguistic and historical link between the terms “spinster” and “spinning wheel.” According to the definition in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, “spinster” was “[a]ppended to the names of women, originally in order to denote their occupation, but subsequently (from the 17th century) as the proper legal designation of one still unmarried” (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1978: 611). The term “spinning wheel,” and, in relation to this, the song signify Maureen’s situation, that is her “spinsterhood.” Maureen, who is going to stay a single and barren woman, becomes the metaphor for a new version of Ireland which will not be able to create any kind of hope for anybody. The future of Ireland, as a country with a history of colonialism, is implied to be without improvement. As a result of socio-economic, psycho-sociological, socio-cultural and socio-sexual problems experienced, Maureen, as the representation of Irish citizens who are entrapped in Ireland is destined to live as a “forced prisoner” and in self-exile in the Irish countryside cottage without belonging to anywhere. The rocking chair in this last scene is also noteworthy as it serves the same aim along with symbolising Ireland, a country that stays wherever it is in the postcolonial period.

As John Peter argues, “countries that are battered, colonised, exploited, corrupt or insecure [...] tend to produce plays of conscience and self-examination. Who are we as a nation? Have we an identity? Should we be proud of it? If not, are we to blame?” (Peter, as cited in Vandeveld, 2000: 301). In a similar vein, McDonagh, although he was born and raised in England as an Irish, and, as a playwright who has roots in an ex-colony, Ireland, is not ignorant of the problems experienced by the Irish in Ireland and in the UK. By means of the character symbolism, debunking the mother myth and the reflections of Irish social, historical and economic facts albeit in an exaggerated manner, McDonagh manages to portray postcolonial Ireland in the 1990s as a nation in question and reflects the country’s colonial past as the reason of trauma for Irish people. Actually, in this way, McDonagh, in *The Beauty Queen*, raises many questions in terms of the problems experienced by not only Irish people but also many other countries with a history of colonialism.

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