



REACTION TO BRITISH INTERNAL COLONIALISM IN TOM PAULIN'S "THE RIOT ACT"

TOM PAULIN'İN "THE RIOT ACT" OYUNUNDA BRİTANYA İÇ-
KOLONYALİZMİNE TEPKİ

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Abstract

Lasting for more than three decades and causing the death of thousands of Irish people, the Troubles is a notorious historical event that took place in Northern Ireland between the 1960s and 1998. Behind the Troubles lie many social and political problems that surrounded the region for almost a millennium. These problems revolved around the conflict between England -and later Britain- and Ireland. However, different from the long lasting Britain and Ireland conflict, the Troubles made Irish people confront themselves and kill each other. The inner-conflict in Northern Ireland depended on the deep-rooted and diversified sociopolitical demarcations that resulted from English involvement in Ireland. The two sides of the conflict were Catholic nationalists and Ulster Protestant unionists. While there are many literary works and films that deal with the Troubles, this article examines the Troubles through Tom Paulin's play *The Riot Act* (1985). The play is written as an alternative version of Sophocles' *Antigone*, and it offers no dramatic differences from the original text of *Antigone*. Nonetheless, the cultural, political, and historical contexts behind *The Riot Act* suggest that it is a political allegory that deals with the problems in Northern Ireland and the issue of Irishness. Yet, the political undertone of Paulin's work hardly received the scholarly attention that is necessary to provide a new outlook towards the Troubles. Therefore, this paper argues that *The Riot Act* is a political allegory that satirises British internal colonialism and its policy of divide and rule, which initiated alienation, grudge, and animosity among Irish people and caused instability in Northern Ireland. To support its claim, this study grounds its theoretical foundation on Michael Hechter's theory of internal colonialism and Jurgen Osterhammel's theoretical overview of colonialism.

Öz

Kuzey İrlanda tarihinde kötü şöhreti ile bilinen Troubles Dönemi, 1960'lardan 1998'e kadar sürmüş ve binlerce İrlandalı'nın ölümüne sebep olmuştur. Troubles Döneminin temelinde bölgeyi neredeyse bin yıldır kuşatan birçok sosyal ve siyasi problem yatmaktadır. Bu problemler İngiltere -sonradan Britanya- ve İrlanda arasındaki çatışma çevresinde dönmüştür. Fakat Troubles Dönemi Britanya ve İrlanda çatışmasından farklı olarak İrlanda halkını birbirleri ile karşı karşıya getirmiş ve birbirlerini öldürmelerine neden olmuştur. Bu iç çatışma İrlanda'daki İngiliz müdahalesinden kaynaklanan köklü ve çeşitli sosyopolitik ayrışmalara dayanmaktadır. İç çatışmanın tarafları ise Katolik milliyetçiler ve birlikçi Ulster Protestanlarıdır. Troubles Dönemini ele alan birçok edebi eser ve film bulunmakla birlikte bu makalede Tom Paulin'in *The Riot Act* (1985) adlı oyunu üzerinden dönemin okuması yapılacaktır. Paulin'in oyunu Sofokles'in *Antigone* trajedisinin alternatif bir versiyonu olarak yazılmıştır ve orijinal metinden belirgin bir farklılık sunmamaktadır. Buna rağmen, *The Riot Act* eserin ardındaki kültürel, politik ve tarihsel bağlamlar, eserin Kuzey İrlanda'nın problemlerini ve İrlanda kimliği meselesini ele alan politik bir alegori olduğunu işaret etmektedir. Paulin'in eserin siyasi yönü ve döneme dair anlatımı ne kadar önem taşısa da Troubles Dönemine yeni bir bakış açısı sağlamak için gerekli olan akademik merakın gösterilmediği gözlemlenmiştir. Dolayısıyla, bu makale *The Riot Act* oyununun İrlanda insanları arasında yabancılaşma, kin ve düşmanlık başlatan ve Kuzey İrlanda'da istikrarsızlık yaratan Britanya iç-kolonyalizmini ve böl-yönet politikasını hicveden bir siyasi bir alegori olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Çalışma bu alegorik yapıyı tartışırken teorik temellerini Michael Hechter'in iç-kolonyalizm teorisine ve Jurgen Osterhammel'in kolonyalizme olan teorik bakışına dayandırmaktadır.

Introduction

In the late twentieth century, Northern Ireland witnessed a long phase of bloody events. As an upheaval that made Irishmen kill Irishmen -with the involvement of British troops- The Troubles depended on a mixture of religious, social, and political issues. The mixed motifs behind the Troubles offer a blurred ideological area in which one questions whether religion was a façade over politics or vice versa. In any case, it can be considered as a blow to British internal colonialism because of its damage on the unionist status quo of Ulster Protestants (Munck, 1992, p. 219). Yet, the inhuman aspects and consequences of the Troubles make it ethically challenging to comment upon. The bloody and grim historical realities of the event may even set limitations on its consideration as an artistic or academic subject. Nonetheless, Tom Paulin (1949 – present), a child of Belfast, overcomes such challenges and limitations by producing a version of *Antigone* that deals with the Troubles with delicate attention to ethical boundaries, serving “as part of a shared community of knowledge” for the Irishmen (Sanders, 2006, p. 97). In *The Riot Act* (1985), Paulin combines a wide range of topics such as politics, religion, humanism, kinship, and nationalism. The play neither undermines the inhumanity and destructive consequences of the Troubles nor alleviates its central message and satire. By drawing upon Michel Hechter’s theory of internal colonialism, and Jurgen Osterhammel’s *Colonialism* (1995), this essay argues that Paulin’s *The Riot Act* is a political allegory that satirises Britain’s internal colonialism over Northern Ireland as Britain’s policy of divide and rule drove Irish people towards the feelings of alienation, grudge, and animosity towards each other.

Having spent the majority of his life in Belfast, Tom Paulin is an Irish poet, playwright, essayist, and scholar born in Leeds, England. As a result of his father finding a new job as a headmaster of a school, Paulin family moved to Belfast when he was only four years old (Hufstader, 1999, p. 190). He grew up among political discussions in his family about the Ulster politicians, and praised the 1960s Belfast as a good place for children to grow up (Wroe, 2022). As the positive memories of childhood gave way to the trauma of the Troubles, Paulin aspired to deal with the themes of Irishness, sectarian conflict, nationalism, unionism, and Celtic culture with the poetical influence of Seamus Heaney (Wroe, 2022). He published many poetry collections, various translations and two adaptations of Greek drama with “deliberate political intent,” a few anthologies, and several essay collections (Bortolotti and Hutcheon, 2007, p. 450).

Along with such names as Brien Friel, Stephen Rea -who were the initiators of the project-, Seamus Deane, and Seamus Heaney, Paulin was one of the founding directors in Field Day Theatre Company, which aimed to introduce the modern Irish theatre to the

country and have an impact in shaping up a national identity. Furthermore, through Field Day Theatre Company, the important literary figures above aimed to, in Deane's (1999) words, examine "*a political crisis produces a clash of loyalties that is analyzable but irresolvable*" (p. 14). Paulin shared such negative outlook of the centuries old crisis in Ireland with Deane. Placed in an ambivalent ideological position,

Paulin's own outrage, a fire maintained by the friction between his democratic ideals and the base politics of the world in which he lives, often consumes itself in congested anger over past betrayals of Ireland by England and a hopelessness about the future of Ulster Protestantism ... [And therefore,] Paulin cannot decide which angers him most—the way Britain deals with Protestant Ulster or the way Ulster Protestants themselves behave (Hufstader, 1999, pp. 189-90).

The duality of his anger towards British internal colonialism and resentment towards the fact that unionists welcomed it shows that his reaction is, in fact, initially directed towards Britain. Accordingly, it is reported by various acquaintances of Paulin that the Belfast playwright was intolerable to any kind of injustice (Wroe, 2022). Combined with such view, his sympathy towards United Irishmen engendered in him a sense that overarched sectarianism or the duality of republicanism and unionism (Hufstader, 1999, p.190). Consequently, what anguished him the most about the Troubles was the fact that it disunited Irishmen into a major bloody conflict, a message which is analysed in *The Riot Act* further in this study. Accordingly, in the play, Paulin (1985) scolds the fate that has always been cast upon Ireland by referring to the Sisyphus Myth: "*Generation after generation has suffered, and every time we think to get free of what happened before and will surely happen after, then we find there's something in our road, like a ramp maybe, that we can never get over, that we can never push past*" (p. 35). In accordance with the continuous and generational nature of the Irish conflicts, it is tough to introduce the Troubles merely as a thirty year religious and political turmoil.

The Eternal Fate of Ireland

The deep rooted tensions, which existed since the twelfth century, in the Irish region range from religious to social ones; and from political to economic ones. Mostly, it has been the long British rule and interference that governed the dynamics, problems, and solutions in the region. The British involvement in Irish matters started with Henry II's interference in 1171. Strikingly, the mighty English King settled into Irish territory by taking advantage of the power struggles among the regional leaders in Ireland (Grant, Kay, Kerrigan, Parker, 2011, p. 81). Since then, -and thus far- England, and later Britain, has always managed to

create crisis and take advantage of it in Ireland up until the Troubles. In a study of this scope, the issue is tended with specific attention to twentieth century background of the events. From this perspective, the Easter Rising, an Irish rebellion that took place in 1916 and suppressed by the British army, can be considered as the event that started to boil up the tension that exploded in the 1960s. After the Eastern Rising events and the Partition of Ireland¹ in 1921, Britain achieved to establish a relatively firm status quo, by means of “*Unionism's monolithic strength,*” in Northern Ireland only until the 1960s (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p. 6). Until then, the 1960s, the segregation of Catholic people was normalized and unionist agenda of Ulster Protestants became more robust and powerful.

The economic, residential, religious, educative, and occupational segregation of Catholic people in Northern Ireland lasted without a major rebellion only until the Civil Rights Movement that emerged in the mid-1960s. Soon after the start of the Civil Rights Movement, tension started to boil up. During the demonstrations in Belfast and Derry, people started to get injured or killed. In fact, it was the unionists who made the first kill as they killed an elderly Catholic widow (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p. 35). It is among the reports that many people were not aware that the movement would turn out to be a violent catastrophe of this extent. One witness of the events expresses such unawareness as follows: “*if I had realised that the potential was there on either side for a sectarian war I wouldn't have gone*” (Munck, 1992, p. 222). Finally, fears of large scale sectarian conflict were realised in 1968 with the violent protests known as the Battle of Bogside in Derry. The violent acts were interchanged between Catholics, who were not a minority in Derry as they were in Belfast, and Protestant unionists (Munck, 1992, p. 214). Moreover, it was in 1968 that British troops became involved in the Troubles.

Naturally, the involvement of British military force gave Irish Republican Army (IRA) the reason and justification to be involved. Ronnie Munck presents a perspective that sees the successive involvement of two opposing blocs as a conspiracy. If the Troubles can be analysed as a conspiracy that allowed IRA to make moves towards Irish nationalism, the same can be applied to Ulster unionists as “*it was Paisley's Ulster Protestant Volunteers who had called a counter-demonstration in Dungannon which led the RUC² to bar the civil rights march from the town centre*” (Munck, 1992, p. 218). Following the involvement of both parts, the violence increased with shootings, bombings, and assassinations. In 1979, for instance, Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) killed Airey Neave, who was considered by Thatcher

¹ Britain recognised both Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland as two separate and autonomous political entities.

² Royal Ulster Constabulary.

a significant figure in her campaign (White, 1987, p. 191). Despite the British attempt to grant the Irish Republic license to have a say in Northern Ireland matters through the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, the Troubles and its destructive effects lasted until the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. According to Élise Féron (2014), who examines the everlasting conflict in Ireland through an anticolonial perspective, the Troubles was a final proof that showed “*the apparent incapacity of the British government to manage the situation ... [and] solve the conflict between the catholic and protestant communities of Ireland*” (p. 101). Regardless of the truth of this assessment, it is open to question whether Britain aimed to solve the conflict at all or inflame it as per its internal colonial agenda.

One major achievement of the British, through its involvement in Irish matters, was a full-fledged radical hybrid identity; namely, unionist Ulster Protestant identity. A minority group, Catholics -with the same ethnic background as the majority- being treated as second class citizens signalled the problematic sociopolitical strata of Northern Ireland. Religion was indeed a central factor that must never be undermined in the Troubles. Notwithstanding, Britain’s agenda to hinder the unification of Irishmen is as central as -if not more- religion in forging the sharp demarcation between two Irish sociopolitical and religious entities. On one hand, there is a unionist community with an unbent and embedded eagerness to be a part of Britain (Féron, 2014, p. 103). Theirs was such a strong urge that the Ulster unionists prioritised being British over their Irishness. On the other hand, there are oppressed Catholics and nationalist Irishmen, who were united during the Troubles by means of unique circumstances that surrounded the 1960s Northern Ireland. Notably, along with these entities, there was The Republic of Ireland, which reached the total recognition of its Irishness and prioritised Irish identity over British rule through nationalistic feelings during 1910s all the way up to 1937, when they managed to become a totally independent state (Hechter, 1977, pp. 10-11). Contrary to the well-established national organisation in South, unionist Northern Ireland enjoyed being a part of Britain and cherished Britishness at the expense of their sense of belonging to Irishness.

Internal Colonial Theory and the Troubles

Viewing the Troubles through the perspective of internal colonialism is not a comparatively new approach as “*the colonial paradigm*” was started to be “*used for framing the conflict in Northern Ireland*” in the 1970s, “*when anti-colonial discourses gained popularity in Ireland and began to constitute a powerful political resource*” (Féron, 2014, p.

96). The oppressive and exploitative practices of Britain³ over Ireland is also historically deep-rooted as

The 16th and 17th centuries were the years of the direct appropriation of Irish lands by the English settlers and landlords ... After the repeal of Corn Laws in 1846 and the introduction of free trade in agricultural products, there was increasing oppression, expropriation and eviction of cultivation (Chandra, 1977, pp. 639-640).

As such, in light of the long history of English involvement in Irish land and matters, Michael Hechter analysed the matter through his internal colonial theory in 1975. Drawing upon the concept of colonial situation, Hechter (1977) asserts that *“the internal colonial model posits an altogether different relationship between”* superordinate and subordinate (p. 9). He builds the model upon the conflict of the core and periphery with *“the core is seen to dominate the periphery politically and to exploit it materially,”* and thus *“the internal colonial model does not predict national development”* of the peripheral culture (Hechter, 1977, p. 9). In accordance with the centre and periphery interactions that are put forth by Hechter as an essential characteristic of internal colonialism, *“the essence of colonialism in Ireland ... was the subordination of Irish economy to the British economy and the transformation of Ireland into an agrarian appendage of industrial Britain”* (Chandra, 1977, p. 642). In context of the internal colonisation of Northern Ireland, the peripheral culture of their own is abandoned by Northern Ireland for a unionist value system.

In the conflict of Irish nationalists -most of whom are Catholics- and Ulster unionists -most of whom are protestants-, unionists are guided by the British ideology, which shows the successful outcome of British internal colonialism. To clarify, the success of British internal colonialism is the creation of two polarised identities out of one ethnic group. Therefore, Britain achieved to heterogenize the Irish people into two different socio-political entities; perpetually obstructing their path towards forming a homogenous sense of Irishness. Accordingly, utilising and interpreting Hechter’s theory, Katherine Verdery (1979) makes an additional claim that *“an analysis of internal colonialism should discuss juxtaposed spatial entities in terms of their contrasting internal social arrangements, identifying who were the critical actors in the system and what interests they represented”* (p. 379). She intends to measure the reaction of different sub-groups or communities towards their subjugation by an external political entity. Concordantly, the interplay of

³ In order to avoid repetition, it must be underlined that Henry II’s involvement in Ireland in the twelfth century was in form of invasion. The practices mentioned here belong to the colonial context. Thus, there appear two completely different forms of expansion practiced by England, and later Britain.

external interference and internal reaction constituted the internal colonial power dynamics in Northern Ireland. Concerning the internal colonial power dynamics that functioned in Northern Ireland, Hechter (1977) designates “one of the defining characteristics of the colonial situation,” which initially inspires internal colonialism, as “the interaction of at least two cultures -that of the conquering metropolitan elite ... and of the indigenes (native culture)- and that the former is promulgated by the colonial authorities as being vastly superior for the realization of universal ends” (p. 73). In this conflict, Irishness makes up the native culture whereas Ulster unionism stands for the metropolitan culture with its unconditional support to Britain. Such unremitting support derives from Britain’s successful “creation of a burgeoning social group, acting as a free-floating resource” (Hechter, 1977, p. 65).

Subsequently, British internal colonialism over Northern Ireland is neither an expansionist one nor a settler colonial one. With regard to Osterhammel’s (2004) classification of the types of colonial rule, it is “quasi-colonial control,” under which Northern Ireland “remains intact as an independent polity with its own political system” but the “indigenous office holders are powerless marionettes” (p. 20). Likewise, Hechter’s theory of internal colonialism is adjacent with Osterhammel’s (2004) quasi-colonial control as the former argues that the “political conflict between core and peripheral group” is “mediated by the central government,” or metropolitan political entity (p. 32). In accordance with these views, “between 1937 and 1968 ... thirteen sitting Unionist MPs were appointed judges, moving effortlessly from making laws to administering them,” consolidating the indirect rule of Britain, which utilised the Irish politicians who carried with them the British colonial agenda in symbiotic manner (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p. 11). Similar to its indirect control over India, Britain controlled Irish people by virtue of “London politicians, who in any case tended to have a strong instinct to keep matters Irish at arm’s length” (McKittrick and McVea, 2002, p. 10). In fact, Paul Hadfield (1984), a theatre columnist of 1980s, speculates that Creon in *The Riot Act* represented Douglas Hurd, who was closely linked with Thatcherian government and was appointed by Thatcher the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at the time (p. 29). In accordance with distant indirect control, the central aspect that made British internal colonialism possible was the “advisory capacity” of London over Northern Ireland, “to have a say in everyday political matters” (Osterhammel, 2004, p. 52).

The split and rule strategy of colonialism comes to foreground in the problematisation of the position of Irish people in midst of such sharp sociopolitical demarcation. The initial problem was “a unity of purpose and political coherence which simply did not exist” between Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists (Munck, 1992, p. 215). The lack of unity between the

Irish was the continuing legacy of Britain's internal colonialism, which sought to create among the Irish "*political dependence, social inferiority, residential segregation, economic subjection, and juridical incapacity*" (Hind, 1984, p. 548). In a first-hand account they provide in their book about the Troubles, McKittrick and McVea (2002) emphasise this point as a Catholic Irish person reports the following in a melancholy tone:

If there is one thing which I have learned in my 30-40 odd years as a community social worker it is this: that, broadly speaking, two communities have lived side by side in Northern Ireland without really knowing each other, or without making any real honest, sincere and conscious effort to bridge the communications gap (p. 18).

Alienated from his or her own blood, this Irish community social worker seems to be confused from his or her inherent unwillingness or inability to bond with compatriots. Thus, his retrospective melancholy reflects "*the decisive social divisions*" that are created by the British involvement in Irish society (Hind, 1984, p. 545).

Allegorical Representations of Internal Colonial Situation in Northern Ireland

In *The Riot Act*, Tom Paulin puts the big-scale sociopolitical incompatibility among Irish people, which leads to tragedy both in real life and in the play, into perspective in an objective manner by utilising the "ability of adaptation to respond or write back to an informing original from a new or revised political and cultural position" (Sanders, 2006, p. 98). Considering the allegorical dimension of the play, two brothers -Eteocles and Polynices- slaying each other alludes to fellow Irishmen killing each other during the Troubles. Another parallelism is that, historically, the original riot act was the Civil Rights Movement that sought justice. In the play, too, the tragedy is triggered by Antigone's search for justice between two brothers (Paulin, 1985, pp. 9-11). The coexistent themes of justice and resistance in both *Antigone* and *The Riot Act* demonstrate the latter's "degree of proximity to the adapted work" (Bortolotti and Hutcheon, 2007, p. 445). Prior to examining Antigone as the allegory of resistance and riot, Creon must be examined so as to understand how oppression and internal colonialism are allegorised in the play by an unjust, segregative, tyrannical outsider figure who managed to infiltrate into the matters of the state.

As Creon constantly "*watches, sometimes impassive, sometimes looking one to the other in a manner that is vigilant, cynical, judicial,*" he allegorises "*England's involvement with Ireland,*" which was "*older and more intrusive than with the other Celtic lands*" (Hechter, 1977, p. 72; Paulin, 1985, p. 31). There are several indications in the play that demonstrate Creon as the embodiment of the oppressive and intrusive Britain. One indication is, as observed in the stage direction above, his constant surveillance of other characters and the

whole situation. As the new advisory force that emerges in Theban state, Creon superintends the country rather than democratically ruling it. In other words, he manages every situation arbitrarily without resorting to any legislative, executive, or judicial organ. Such method of administration brings about another indication, which is Creon's monological rule. One of the victims of such monology is his son, Haemon, who complains to him in a cautionary manner: *"You'd speak, you'd mock; but you never, never listen"* (Paulin, 1985, p. 42). Another suggestive element concerning Creon's allegory is his monopolisation of religion. After arbitrarily forbidding the burial of Polynices, one of Antigone's two brothers who killed each other in a fight, Creon is warned by the chorus leader who tries to persuade him by saying that perhaps it was the Gods who covered Polynices' body (Paulin, 1985, p. 21). Accordingly, the chorus leader suggests that it might not be a good idea and proper manners to deprive Polynices of a proper burial. Nonetheless, Creon manipulates religion for his political agenda by answering the chorus leader as follows: *"Old man, d'you know what they call that? Blasphemy ... What god was it took the least care of him ever?"* (Paulin, 1985, p. 21). So, Creon thwarts religion arbitrarily in order to legitimise his decision.

Another indication of Creon representing Britain and its oppression over the Irish is that he is not a natural king of Thebes. That is to say, he seizes the throne by taking advantage of the crisis, the two brothers being killed. Subsequently, he makes clear the terms and conditions of his administration. According to internal colonial theory, the colonising entity *"seeks to stabilize and monopolize its advantages through policies aiming at the institutionalization and perpetuation of the existing stratification system"* (Hechter, 1977, p. 39). In other words, the colonising entity tends to build an inherently oppressive and repressive status quo, and it acts ambitiously to preserve that status quo. At the very beginning of his rule, Creon reveals in the excerpt below that he is going to establish a new status quo and repress any objection:

It ... gives me great pleasure to report that public confidence and order are now fully restored, and, if I may, I would further like to take this opportunity of thanking each and every one of you for your ... most exceptional loyalty ... since that time both of Oedipus's sons have died in battle ... For purely technical and legal reasons -kinship to the dead and so on- the office of king therefore devolves upon me. Such a position brings with it a very, very heavy responsibility, and it is probably true that no one who has not at some time or other assumed the burdens of public office can ever really reveal the full range of their abilities ... I have always held that one of the soundest maxims of good government is: always listen to the very best advice. And in the coming

months I shall be doing a very great deal of listening, sounding opinions and so forth. However, let me say this, and say it plainly right at the very outset, that if ever any man here should find himself faced with a choice between betraying his country and betraying his friend, then he must swiftly place that friend in the hands of the authorities (Paulin, 1985, pp. 15-16).

There are three significant points to make about Creon's address to his subjects. Firstly, Creon begins by presenting himself like a saviour on whom peace and order depends. Not only he presumes that there is order in Thebes, but also he presumes that everyone is loyal to him. Similarly, the coloniser presumes an "*ordained mandate to*" rule over the colonised (Osterhammel, 2004, p. 17). A historically parallel presumption is Britain's claim that it stabilized Irish matters through partition; a presumption that has turned out to be dramatically inaccurate during and after the Troubles.

Secondly, Creon is aware of his unjust seizure of the throne. Creon's humorously portrayed justification of becoming the king out of nowhere reflects Paulin's satire of Britain; "*for purely technical and legal reasons -kinship to the dead and so on⁴- the office of king therefore devolves upon me*" (Paulin, 1985, p. 16). In the face of this new establishment, Antigone seeks justice. Similarly, the Civil Rights Movement sought justice and "*wanted to change Northern Ireland to make it a more normal place to live, that didn't have to rely on the Special Powers Act, and where Derry could be cleaned up from the slum that it was of gerrymandering and discrimination*" (Munck, 1992, p. 216). What turned Northern Ireland into a hub of discrimination and a slum was the lasting impact of British internal colonialism, which tends to shake the fundamental structure of the target country or groups of peoples to the core as

the impact of English domination on the people of Ireland had been disastrous. Ireland had been ruined and artificially impoverished ... The people were deteriorating physically; and their character was being ruined. In administration, the colonial regime followed extremely corrupt and repressive methods (Chandra, 1977, p. 641).

Correspondingly, like Britain -as the outsider- was initially not supposed to interfere with Irish people's destiny, Creon in the play is the outsider that harms Thebes. Richard Jones addresses this issue of Creon being slightly detached from Thebes through a linguistic perspective. Most probably hinting the overseas presence, Jones (1997) claims that "*whereas Sophocles' Creon is very much a Theban, Paulin's Creon serves in linguistic*

⁴ The evasive tone of Creon is attention grabbing. Evidently, he does not have a legit justification concerning how he became the King all of a sudden.

terms as an intermediary between the ‘Thebes’ we see before us on stage and, apparently, an externally located locus of power, one which most dominates his discourse in his most public moments,” such as the speech above (p. 237). As an outside force, Creon shakes Thebes to the core with the whole family ending up dead and the state ending up destabilised.

Thirdly, after the paternal, soothing, and protective tone with which Creon starts his speech, he concludes with intimidation, which again suggests a monological rule to which no one can object. Correspondingly, parallel with Britain’s worry during the Troubles “*that there was a situation of concern to be dealt with in the United Kingdom, and which deserved an appropriate internal answer*⁵,” Creon immediately takes action upon sensing the threat behind Antigone’s duty of loyalty to her brother (Féron, 2014, p. 98). Even though Creon acts confident that “*no one in Thebes will follow*” Antigone, he admits that “*being rid of her ‘ll satisfy*” him (Paulin, 1985, p. 28). The sheer reason behind the immediate decision to kill Antigone is Creon’s concern that she will disrupt the political status quo.

Emblematising resistance and riot against oppression and injustice, Antigone addresses the issues of heritage, kinship, and legacy in *The Riot Act*. Michael Hechter (1977) designates one of the most proximate methods for the colonised to resist as “*cultural similarity, or the perception of a distinctive ethnic identity in the peripheral group*” (p. 34). Hence, Antigone, too, stresses a sense of ethnic unity several times in the play. She questions the issue of loyalty and to whom loyalty must be shown: “*It was never Zeus made that law. Down in the dark earth there’s no law says, ‘Break with your own kin, go lick the state.’ We’re bound to the dead: we must be loyal to them*” (Paulin, 1985, p. 27). Building her case on kinship and legacy, Antigone separates the entities of ethnicity and state. Therefore, it is suggested by Paulin that Irishness can never be integrated with a unionist state that is under the quasi-control of Britain. Reiterating her connection to her brothers, Antigone tells Ismene that Creon has “*no right, ever, to keep ... [her] ... from ... [her] own*” (Paulin, 1985, p. 11). The motif of one’s attachment to one’s countrymen is articulated in form of kinship.

Another important aspect to mention about Antigone’s riot is the impact of her tragic sacrifice on the Theban public. In consequence of Antigone’s punishment, the tension builds in the city as the word is spread. The growing tension can be inferred from the warnings of not only Haemon but also Tiresias to Creon. Both warnings are posed to Creon prior to Antigone’s death. Firstly, Haemon explains to his father the art of ruling in a mild

⁵ The internal answer was eventually sending British military to Belfast and Derry in 1968.

fashion, concluding that otherwise *“the people of Thebes would contradict”* him (Paulin, 1985, p. 39). Nonetheless, he is dismissed, just as Tiresias the prophet, who professes that Thebes deserved a better leader (Paulin, 1985, p. 50). As an overt warning sign, Tiresias adds that Creon is *“right on the edge”* (Paulin, 1985, p. 50). Although the exemplary dialogues are those between Creon and his dissenters, the underlying tension depends on Antigone’s riot act. Just as the Civil Rights Movement that contradicted the status quo built by Britain in Northern Ireland, Antigone’s action holds the *“capacity to destabilize an ossified state”* (Munck, 1992, p. 219). Likewise, Conor O’Brien (1972) assesses Antigone as *“an ethical and religious force ... uncompromising ... [and] as dangerous in her way as Creon, whom she perpetually challenges and provokes”* (p. 158). In short, Antigone’s act poses threat against a tyrant, ignites a search for justice, and brings about a change in the status quo.

At another instance, similar to Paulin, who *“identifies his own political ideals with the originally Protestant nationalism of the United Irishmen, but sees ... [the] fatal compromises”* made for that cause, Antigone stresses her sacrifice in the face of her territorial sense of belonging to Thebes (Hufstader, 1999, p. 198). Referring to her probable death for the sake of justice, she helplessly complains: *“This city’s sacred to me, but you’d sneer at anyone would love, yet leave it”* (Paulin, 1985, p. 45). Notably, Paulin himself left Belfast and moved to London after being disillusioned from the struggle against the British as a result of the catastrophic effects of the Troubles (Wroe, 2022). Yet again, Antigone becomes the mouthpiece of Paulin (1985) when she remonstrates against the hesitance of Ismene as the former tells the latter that the latter is *“sour on everything that’s sacred ... it’s my own soul and honour I can nor bend nor sell”* (p. 14). Antigone’s reproach against Ismene alludes to Paulin, who, *“before telling his wrath to England ... tells it to his own Protestant culture of Northern Ireland”* (Hufstader, 1999, p. 191).

Reproached by Antigone and allegorised as the ideology of Ulster Protestant unionism, Ismene chooses to yield to authority over her own flesh and blood. Notably, her degree of activity is lower in *The Riot Act* compared to the original tragedy, in which she is nearly killed for her passionate claim that she collaborated with Antigone. In Paulin’s version, Ismene is a very hesitant figure who is fearful for her stable position. Towards her indifference to heritage and legacy, Antigone is somewhere in-between angry and considerate. From the very beginning, in fact, Antigone does not believe, anyways, that Ismene is going to support her as the former confesses this to the latter: *“You won’t link hands with me, not now, not ever. That’s your nature”* (Paulin, 1985, p. 12). One such political allusion demonstrates the degree of embeddedness Britain has achieved over Ulster

unionists. Willing and eager to yield to British domination that Ulster unionists never aspired for a national identity or a nationhood apart from Britishness. Parallel with his anger towards his Protestant compatriots, Paulin (1985) antagonizes Ismene in the following dialogue: *“ISMENE And how could I bide here with you gone. ANTIGONE You may ask Creon that: deep down, it’s him you care for ... Save your own skin. I wouldn’t blame you”* (pp. 31-32).

Notably, O’Brien (1972) offers a different approach to Ismene’s stance. In an empathetical and somehow pragmatic manner, he argues that *“Ismene’s common sense and feeling for the living may be the more needful, if less spectacular element in ‘human dignity’”* (p. 159). Correspondingly, one such approach immediately brings into mind the scene when Ismene analogises principles with corpses, telling Antigone that *“you burn for them, but they’re cold things, principles”* (Paulin, 1985, p. 13). In this perspective, it is not hard to understand why O’Brien established a milder outlook towards the character. Parallel with the Ulster unionists who are passionately content with the British status quo, Ismene holds up a passive and content position in a system where *“enforced order always defeats the Antigones, the defenders of principle”* (Hufstader, 1999, pp. 191-192).

Conclusion

Conclusively, Tom Paulin’s *The Riot Act*, which allegorises the Troubles as “an act of revision in itself,” reacts to a tyrannical, unresponsive, and irresponsible administration (Sanders, 2006, p. 18). Simultaneously, the play is argued by this study as an opposition to the deeds of British internal colonialism and the consequences of those deeds. As previously argued through Hechter’s ideas along with other scholarly opinions, the Civil Rights Movement was the accumulated result of the sociopolitical instability constructed by British internal colonialism in Northern Ireland over the centuries. Together with this, the Civil Rights Movement got out of control because of the lack of action on the part of the Northern Ireland. *“By failing to cope with a reformist movement, the state was creating revolutionaries,”* just like Creon who cannot fulfill his promise of listening to his subjects (Munck, 1992, p. 221; Paulin, 1985, p. 39). The play’s destructive but hopeful ending, when Creon expresses his regret, is the *“yoking of allegory with a historical meditation on what might have been but was not”* because Britain never re-considered its involvement in Ireland’s political matters (Hufstader, 1999, p. 197). Paulin seeks an end to the everlasting and recurrent conflict. According to Marx and Engels, as Chadra (1977) claims, the sole cure to the internal colonial problem was *“overthrow of colonialism through the repeal of the Union of 1801 and the voluntary or forcible liquidation of British domination. Little could be changed or improved till this was accomplished”* (p. 643). Yet, complementary to Creon’s

realisation, it was perhaps a fulfilling response to this cautionary narrative that “*Britain has learned to envisage its future without Northern Ireland*” in the 2000s and now (Féron, 2014, p. 109). Yet again, perhaps at one point Irish peoples will be able to establish a holistic and inclusive national culture that would perpetually counter the embedded British influence over themselves.

Summary

The Troubles, which took place in Northern Ireland in the late twentieth century, is a dismal event that caused the death of many Irish people. Starting in the 1960s and ending in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement, the Troubles resulted from manifold religious, social, and political issues and conflicts. The motifs behind these conflicts were very mixed. Hence, the Troubles offer a blurred ideological area in which one questions whether religion was a façade over politics or vice versa. In his play *The Riot Act* (1985), Tom Paulin offers “A Version of Antigone” that deals with the Troubles with delicate attention to ethic boundaries that surround the bloody event. *The Riot Act* presents a wide range of topics such as politics, religion, humanism, kinship, and nationalism with regard to the issues of Northern Ireland conflicts and Irishness. This paper argues that Paulin’s *The Riot Act* is a political allegory that satirises Britain’s internal colonialism over Northern Ireland as Britain’s policy of divide and rule drove Irish people towards the feelings of alienation, grudge, and animosity towards each other. The theoretical foundation of the study is grounded on Michael Hechter’s theory of internal colonialism and Jurgen Osterhammel’s theoretical overview of colonialism.

In the play, Paulin simultaneously reacts to British internal colonialism and expresses his anger towards Irish people for not uniting among themselves. The duality of his anger and resentment towards the unionists who welcomed Britain domination means that his reaction is initially directed towards British expansionist policy. The deep rooted domination and tensions in the region date back to the twelfth century when The British involvement in Irish matters started with Henry II’s interference in 1171. The long British rule and interference governed the dynamics, problems, and solutions in the region. Most importantly, Britain’s policy of divide and rule created a polarised sociopolitical climate that hindered the unity of Irishmen, forging a sharp demarcation between two Irish sociopolitical and religious entities. On one hand, there exist a unionist community that is eager to be a part of Britain. On the other hand, there are oppressed Catholic nationalists. The central anguish expressed through Antigone’s bitter fate in Paulin’s play is the fact that the Troubles further disunited Irishmen into a major bloody conflict.

The long history of English involvement in Irish land and matters is analysed by Michael Hechter through his internal colonial theory. Additionally, the long history of Britain’s expansionist policy towards Ireland is a matter that can be explained through Jurgen Osterhammel’s theoretical approach to colonialism. In the conflict of Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists, unionists are guided by the British ideology, which is a successful outcome of British internal colonialism. The success the creation of two polarised identities out of one ethnic group. Subsequently, British internal colonialism over Northern Ireland is neither an expansionist one nor a settler colonial one. With regard to Osterhammel’s classification of the types of colonial rule, it is quasi-colonial control.

The Riot Act puts sociopolitical demarcation between Irishmen, which leads to tragedy both in real life and in the play, into perspective. Therefore, this study considers the play as a political allegory with regard to its characters, who represents different sociopolitical entities that partook in the Troubles. Considering the allegorical dimension of the play, two brothers -Eteocles and Polynices- killing each other alludes to fellow Irishmen killing each other during the Troubles. Another parallelism is that, historically, the original riot act was the Civil Rights Movement that sought justice. In the play, too, the tragedy is triggered by Antigone’s search for justice between two brothers.

Creon is examined in the play as an unjust, segregative, tyrannical outsider figure who managed to infiltrate into the matters of the state. Paulin shows through Creon how oppression and internal colonialism functioned in Ireland. Thus, Creon is the embodiment of the oppressive and intrusive Britain in *The Riot Act*. There are several indications and aspects in the play that suggest so. Some aspects can be listed as surveillance, unjust seizure of power, and evoking fear through intimidation.

In the face of the tyrannical figure of Creon, Antigone emblematises resistance and riot against oppression and injustice. In the play, she addresses the issues of heritage, kinship, and legacy, all of which are related to the issue of Irishness. Similar to the Civil Rights Movement that disrupted the political status quo that backed up the unionist spirit in Northern Ireland, Antigone's riot and tragic sacrifice shake the Theban public to the core in the play. Antigone is the social, cultural, and political mouthpiece of Paulin in reacting to oppression and injustice.

Reproached by Antigone for her passivity, Ismene is allegorised as the ideology of Ulster Protestant unionism. In *The Riot Act*, she chooses without question to yield to authority. She remains indifferent to the injustices committed towards her own flesh and blood. Correspondingly, Paulin depicts her degree of activity much lower in *The Riot Act* compared to the original tragedy of Sophocles. In Sophocles' tragedy, she is nearly killed for her passionate claim that she collaborated with Antigone. In Paulin's version, Ismene is a very hesitant figure who is fearful for her stable position.

This study concludes that Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* allegorises the Troubles, and reacts to a tyrannical, unresponsive, and irresponsible administration. Simultaneously, it finds that Paulin's play is an opposition to the deeds of British internal colonialism and the consequences of those deeds. Along with its reactionary nature, Paulin's play, with its hopeful ending, contemplates whether at some point Irish peoples will be able to establish a holistic and inclusive national culture that would perpetually counter the embedded British influence over themselves.

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