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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST COLONIAL OPPRESSION IN IRELAND AND INDIA THROUGH THE PRISM OF LIAM O'FLAHERTY AND KAMALA MARKANDAYA

Abstract: Ireland and India, even though geographically and ethnically distant countries, still possess many similarities, mostly related to the fact that they both used to be colonies of the British Empire. Before gaining independence, similarly marked by Partition in both countries, they were battlefields of colonial confrontation, depicted in many literary works. The purpose of this article is to make a comparison by analysing selected novels written by Liam O'Flaherty from Ireland and the Indian-born Kamala Markandaya, which focus on the clash between the coloniser and the colonised in these two countries. The most important point revealed by comparative analysis is that neither O'Flaherty nor Markandaya blindly accuse the coloniser alone for the misery and sufferings of the Irish/Indian people, since they also find fault with their respective governments, aware that progress in their countries can be achieved only as a result of the joint efforts of their governments and peoples.

Keywords: Ireland, India, British Empire, postcolonialism, Liam O'Flaherty, Kamala Markandaya.

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1. Introduction: Origins and a brief history of the British Empire

1.1 Colonisation of Ireland

Although it is usually considered that the British Empire originated with the foundation of the *East India Company* at the very end of the 16th century, its origins can in fact be traced to a much older period, when England had just started with its practice of colonisation. As early as in the Middle Ages, the so-called “Norman invasion of Ireland” began when the English king Henry II was granted permission to invade this country by Pope Adrian IV. This permit, published in 1155 under the name of the “Papal Bull *Laudabiliter*”, called for the introduction of reforms in both Irish church and governance, and it started the English (later British) colonisation of Ireland which would last for almost eight centuries. King Henry II sent Norman knights to Ireland in 1167, went there himself in 1171, and then awarded the title of “Lord of Ireland” to his son John Lackland in 1177. When John became King of England upon the death of his brother Richard in 1199, as a result of the English lordship granted to him by his father, Ireland fell under direct rule of the Crown of England, and was no longer a separate country.

Ireland remained the lordship of English monarchs until 1542, when King Henry VIII transformed it into a kingdom and proclaimed himself King of Ireland by the Crown of Ireland Act. Henry VIII had several reasons to become the first English King of Ireland, mostly related to his excommunication by the Pope in 1538. First of all, as the Lordship of Ireland was granted to his predecessors by the Papacy, he was afraid that they would withdraw this title since he had severed his ties to the Catholic Church. On the other hand, the Irish people still considered that the Lord of Ireland was only a representative of “their overlord”, that is, the Pope, whom they regarded as the utmost head of Ireland, which was in fact true because that title had been granted in the 12th century to English kings by the Papacy, under their overlordship. And last but not least, Henry VIII was a wise ruler who wanted to ensure that his subjects from the conquered Irish lands would remain loyal to him and to England, and for this reason he even established the Royal Irish Army.

During the rule of Henry VIII, another phenomenon also started, later to become known as “plantations of Ireland”. The immigration of people from England to Ireland had already begun in the 12th century, though on a much smaller scale, and its result was the creation of a Hiberno Norman society. However, during the 16th and 17th centuries, the land in Ireland was officially confiscated by the English Crown and given to new settlers, the so-called “planters” (meaning

colonists) from England primarily, but later on also from Scotland and Wales. This settlement, which was planned by the English government, developed into mass-scale immigration in the second half of the 17th century, when the land confiscated from Irish landowners was granted to thousands and thousands of Parliamentary soldiers. That process had an enormous impact on many aspects of life in Ireland, starting from its physical features and all the way to demographic, social and cultural changes. Until the period of the plantations, Ireland was a rural, agricultural community with plenty of woodland and pastures. However, the planters cut the wood extensively because they could earn a lot by selling it to the shipbuilding industry, which greatly developed at that time due to England's becoming an important naval force. That is why most of the population moved to towns, while agriculture was giving way to trade and market economy, along with this process of urbanisation. On the other hand, the growing British (English, Welsh and Scottish) community not only changed the demographic pattern of Ireland, but also brought a new, Protestant religion and a new, British identity of the people, especially those who belonged to the ruling class that used to be Irish and Catholic.

Thus, during the plantations, the English were slowly but steadily imposing their religion, language and culture to the native Irish population. The old Gaelic traditions and culture were dying out, while the Irish Gaelic language was being replaced by the coloniser's English, which was at first dominant only in official circumstances, but after the Great Irish Famine (1845–49), when millions of people either died of starvation or emigrated, became widespread and entered general use. Therefore, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2007:p.28) draw attention to the process of renaming, reinscribing and remapping spaces, which 'was a long-standing feature of colonialism and not restricted to distant unknown lands' – such as, for instance, India as both distant and unknown when it became an English colony. As one of the most striking examples for this practice, they highlight 'the mapping and renaming of the West of Ireland by the English army in the nineteenth century, a process in which the native Irish (Gaelic) culture is literally overwritten by English imperialism' (p.28). The imminent result of this process was that 'British imperial power consolidated itself over Ireland's Gaelic speaking west by renaming the Gaelic place names, thus suppressing the existence of a flourishing and highly literate Gaelic culture' (p.159).

Related to the concept of plantations, there exists a linguistic idiosyncrasy, which is found to be of utmost importance for the purposes of this article. Namely, two words are of interest here: *colonist* and *planter*, both being synonymous to settler. The word colonist was derived from *colōnus*, the meaning of which was settler,

husbandman or farmer, and it was derived from the Latin *colere*, which meant to cultivate, like in agriculture. This means that the word *culture* has exactly the same origin as *colonist*, because they have as their root the Latin term *colere*. On the other hand, the word planter means “one who sows seeds”, and the British were famous for planting/sowing the seeds of discord/dissension/strife in both Ireland and India – two countries that they partitioned. Therefore, as will be seen later on, it was inherent to British *culture* at that time to *colonise* other lands and *plant* there the seeds of future conflicts, some of which have lasted to this very day.

The Kingdom of Ireland itself existed from 1542 to 1800, when it merged with Great Britain to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. After the Irish War of Independence (1919–21), the largest part of Ireland – apart from six counties that remained part of the UK as Northern Ireland, seceded from it, and the Irish Free State was established in 1922. It continued being a Dominion within the British Commonwealth of Nations until it became a fully sovereign and independent state – the Republic of Ireland, in 1937. In this way, due to English colonisation, Ireland was divided/partitioned into two separate parts.

1.2 Colonisation of India

Unlike Ireland, India became an English colony much later, within the colonisation process during which, in the 15th and 16th centuries England began to establish colonies and trade networks in the Americas and Asia. The colonisation of the Indian Subcontinent was the result of the economic struggle between the then greatest colonial powers in the world: the Portuguese, the French, the Dutch and the English, aimed at supplying the European markets with certain invaluable goods from the Orient, such as spices, tea, silk and cotton. Having defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588, the English navy gained supremacy in the overseas trade, and, at the onset of the 17th century, Queen Elizabeth I signed the Charter on the foundation of the *East India Company* in order to fulfill the English economic, but also political goals, by acquiring a monopoly over a large number of products from Southeast Asia, which they managed to preserve until the 19th century.

However, despite having come to India for the reason of trade, the English quickly began to use their established warehouses, which had a non-territorial status, to implement their own laws and establish administrative zones in which they also expressed their political power. These areas around their factories in the current metropolises – such as Madras (now Chennai), Calcutta and Bombay (now Mumbai) – were called “White towns”, while local residents lived and worked in distant parts of the cities, known as “Black towns”. This division was not only a

result of the expression of the legislative and political will of the colonisers, but also the mirror of their cultural and social influences on the indigenous nation. It should be noted that Christian missionaries also played a significant role in the propagation of western ideas and culture, not only by spreading their religion, but also by introducing the English system of education that is still largely represented in India. All of this reflected the opinion expressed by many Europeans: that their mission was to civilise the indigenous peoples and keep them under their authority until the citizens of the colonies were able to manage their own countries, and the English in particular were convinced that they had the duty to awaken the Indians' intellectual consciousness by imposing their educational system and cultural values. This is what Edward Said (1994) calls 'the idea of Western salvation and redemption through its "civilising mission"' (p.131), while Homi Bhabha (1994) – discussing the impact of Charles Grant (1746–1823), a prominent British politician and Chairman of the *East India Company* – concludes that:

'Grant's dream of an evangelical system of mission education conducted uncompromisingly in the English language was partly a belief in political reform along Christian lines and partly an awareness that the expansion of company rule in India required a system of subject formation – a reform of manners, as Grant put it – that would provide the colonial with 'a sense of personal identity as we know it'. Caught between the desire for religious reform and the fear that the Indians might become turbulent for liberty, Grant paradoxically implies that it is the "partial" diffusion of Christianity, and the "partial" influence of moral improvements which will construct a particularly appropriate form of colonial subjectivity.' (p.87)

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the British rule in India was expanded in several ways: the *East India Company* acquired sovereign administrative rights over several Indian provinces, inhabited by a total of about 25 million people; the British army defeated some Hindi and Muslim rulers and occupied their territories; a system called "Subsidiary Alliance" or "Pax Britannica" was introduced, according to which many Indian rulers gave up their rights of their own will and agreed to support the British power in India, but in return regained some degree of sovereignty. Though the British Parliament tried, by passing a series of laws, to restrict *East India Company's* rights and impose a more humane treatment of the indigenous people, the Company's employees were often misusing their power and increasing taxes, so that hunger and epidemics started spreading throughout India. That is why in 1857 the "Great Rebellion" started in Central India, first amidst the Indian soldiers in the British army (called "sepoys", whereas this insurrection is often

called “Sepoy Mutiny”), but then spreading to masses of ordinary people. Although the uprising was quenched in blood the following year, it was still successful in a way, since the power of the *East India Company* was abolished and the British government placed India under its direct administration. The promises made by Queen Victoria that the people of India would become equal in the face of the applicable British laws resulted, however, only in minor administrative changes which did not at all ameliorate the economic and legislative situation of the natives.

Consequently, India would have to wait for its independence for another 90 years, until 1947. Nevertheless, in line with the British policy of “divide and rule”, the liberation of the country also led to its division into two parts: the Indian Union, mostly populated by Hindus, and Pakistan, with a predominantly Muslim population. This division – known simply as Partition, caused terrible suffering of as many as ten million people and death of more than half a million of those who had to escape from India to Pakistan and vice versa, depending on their creed. But that was not all, because this division of the country also caused many new conflicts, some of which have continued to this day, the fiercest ones being in Kashmir, Punjab and Bengal, with many more casualties to come. Here again a parallel can be drawn with conflicts caused by the partition of Ireland, and this is only one of the numerous facts which prove that Karl Marx (2013) was right when he claimed that ‘Hindustan is [...] the Ireland of the East’ (p.122).

1.3 Fall of the British Empire

Ireland and India were the first two countries to quit the British Empire, upon which they became members of the Commonwealth of Nations. At the peak of power, right after World War One, “the Empire on which the Sun never sets” comprised almost a fourth (23%) of the Earth’s land surface and a quarter (24%) of the world population. At that time, the British Empire was the largest (geographically) and the most powerful state in the world, dominant in industrial production, foreign trade and global economic relations. After World War Two, however, the pressure for independence of many British colonies kept growing, and so with their liberation and decolonisation the decline of the Empire started. It is usually considered that the British Empire was dissolved at the end of the 1970s, after India, Pakistan and many African countries had gained independence, but its final end was certainly in 1997, when Hong Kong was taken over by China.

Nevertheless, the legacy of the Empire still persists in many of its former colonies, due to linguistic, religious, cultural and economic influences by the coloniser that could not be severed once they gained independence, given that these were

mostly developing countries and, as such, were susceptible to impacts by the Great Powers, which led to the rise of cultural colonialism and economic imperialism. Thus, Ania Loomba (1998) underlines that 'the dismantling of colonial rule did not automatically bring about changes for the better' (p.12), and that the result of this state of affairs is that 'many people living in both once-colonised and once colonising countries are still subject to the oppressions put into place by colonialism' (p.13). Furthermore, in their analysis of Markandaya's novels *The Coffer Dams* and *Pleasure City*, Shyamala Narayan and Jon Mee (2003:p.255) point to the fact that 'in the first novel, British firms build a huge dam, in the second, a luxury holiday resort; in both Markandaya shows how the effects of these developments amount to a kind of neo-colonialism'.

Another feature of cultural colonialism that persists to this very day is that English is still one of the two official languages in both Ireland and India – together with Irish and Hindi, respectively, in spite of the fact that it used to be the coloniser's language. The novels analysed in this article were also written in English, by the Irish author Liam O'Flaherty and the Indian author Kamala Markandaya, and their focus is on the clash between the coloniser and the colonised in these two countries, as well as the consequences of their colonisation.

2. Analysis of the corpus

2.1 About Liam O'Flaherty and Kamala Markandaya

Although these two authors do not belong to the same generation, since Markandaya was born almost three decades after O'Flaherty and published her first novel likewise thirty years after him (1954 and 1923, respectively), the works of both authors still belong to the so-called "postcolonial literature". Also, both of them were born in the colonial period of their respective countries, whose independence was then gained during their lifetimes (Ireland's in 1922, and India's in 1947). Nevertheless, this claim requires additional clarification.

In its broadest sense, the term *postcolonial* includes 'the study of the interactions between European nations and the societies they colonised in the modern period' (Mukhopadhyay, 2007:p.274), retaining control over those areas for several centuries. The term *postcolonialism*, therefore, cannot be related exclusively to the second half of the 20th century, as the period that follows the end of the era of colonialism, though theoretically it could be argued that postcolonialism started only after most of the former European colonies had gained independence. Although this chronological meaning of the term is quite clear and obvious in

its historical sense, in literary criticism it is used to denote a much wider period, since 'it is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism' (Loomba, 1998:p.12). The same sense of this term is found in the famous book *The Empire Writes Back*, whose authors clarify its meaning by stating that it covers 'all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression' (Ashcroft et al., 2004:p.2). They also suggest that this term should be used in such a way to include 'the world as it exists during and after the period of European imperial domination and the effects of this on contemporary literatures' (p.2).

As to the territorial coverage, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007:p.168) claim that the term postcolonialism is 'widely used to signify the political, linguistic and cultural experience of societies that were former European colonies', and that it refers to and includes 'both pre- and post-independence nations and communities' (p.169). This possibility of a much wider geographical connotation of the term is further substantiated by their statement that:

'the notion of a "post-colonial reading" need not be restricted to interrogating a body of works (for example, documents dealing with the European history of an area) nor to rereading and rewriting individual texts. A post-colonial rereading of, for instance, English literary history would (hypothetically) involve far greater stress on colonial relations between England and Scotland, Ireland and Wales, and the historical and contemporary effects of these relations on literary production and representation.' (p.173)

Therefore, we can rightly claim that both O'Flaherty and Markandaya are postcolonial authors in this sense.

Liam O'Flaherty (1896–1984) was born on the island of Inishmore and died in Dublin, so he was a true Irish novelist and short-story writer, as well as a key figure of the literary movement aimed at revitalising Irish cultural heritage, known as the Irish Renaissance. Having fought and been injured in World War One, he travelled widely all over the world for three years – from South America and Canada, to the United States and even Russia, working different odd jobs to support himself. After a political incident in Ireland, he settled in England for several years, and later moved to the United States, after which he shared his time between Ireland, England and the States. He wrote copiously and published 36 books, including 16 novels and many short-story collections and autobiographic volumes. Out of these,

his most famous works are: his first novel which achieved immediate success – *Thy Neighbour's Wife* (1923), *The Black Soul* (1924), *The Informer* (1925), *Skerrett* (1932), *Famine* (1937), *Land* (1946) and *Insurrection* (1950).

Kamala Markandaya (1924–2004), whose real name was Kamala Purnaiya Taylor, was born in Mysore, in India, but married an Englishman, and moved to Britain after India gained independence. She lived in London as of 1948 until the end of her life. Having graduated from Madras University, she worked as a journalist, and also published the following ten novels: her first and most popular book – *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffey Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) and *Pleasure City* (1982, American title *Shalimar*). Her works mostly present the conflict between the eastern (Indian) culture, which is rural and traditional, with its spiritual values, and those cultures which are predominantly materialistic and pertinent to the western (British) urbanised and modern world.

Although O'Flaherty and Markandaya do not belong exactly to the same literary period and do not write about the same country and people, there are certain points in their oeuvres that link them inseparably. First of all, the common feature of their works is their literary style, which is realistic but at the same time strangely evocative. They are extremely sensitive and manage to describe convincingly the feelings and emotions of their characters, who also successfully represent their entire nations, Irish and Indian on the one hand, and English on the other. Secondly, they are preoccupied by the same issues, so therefore the topics that are recurrent in their works are alike and can be summarised as the following: the harsh life and suffering of peasants in their respective countries, burdened by the coloniser's oppression. And the last similarity is their attitude towards that very coloniser, in both cases the British, as will be demonstrated in this article.

2.2 Comparing the topics in selected novels written by Liam O'Flaherty and Kamala Markandaya

In many of their novels, both O'Flaherty and Markandaya deal with social injustice and exploitation of degraded and impoverished people in rural society. Unlike Britain – which was the first industrialised country in the world (marked by modern industrial technologies with high productivity), both Ireland and India were at that time still conservative and underdeveloped societies with predominantly agricultural economies (relying mostly on traditional farming methods with low

productivity). Exploited by the coloniser, the rural population was sometimes driven to utter poverty and even hunger, which is a common and recurrent theme in all of these novels. The position of poor peasants is best described by Kamala Markandaya (1996) in her novel *Nectar in a Sieve*:

‘To those who live by the land there must always come times of hardship, of fear and of hunger, even as there are years of plenty. This is one of the truths of our existence as those who live by the land know: that sometimes we eat and sometimes we starve. We live by our labours from one harvest to the next, there is no certain telling whether we shall be able to feed ourselves and our children, and if bad times are prolonged we know we must see the weak surrender their lives and this fact, too, is within our experience. In our lives there is no margin for misfortune.’ (p.136)

Indeed, in this novel, one of the main protagonists, Nathan, dies of starvation, while his wife Rukmani also suffers because of hunger. In another novel, *A Handful of Rice*, due to a rice shortage intentionally caused by grain merchants, masses of people starve, including the large family of the protagonist Ravi, but in spite of such a position he can neither become a criminal nor take part in the raid of the granaries, even after his only son dies of hunger. A similar example is found in O’Flaherty’s novel *Famine*, when the local shopkeeper, Johnny Hynes, profits from the villagers’ misfortune by selling them food at a high price in order to earn more.

Furthermore, in Markandaya’s novel *Possession*, the main protagonist Valmiki was sold by his father to Lady Caroline in an attempt to prevent the death of his other children from hunger, while another character, not even a peasant but an educated man – Ravishankar, is forced to try smuggling because his family lacks food. The same motivation to protect her five children’s lives forces Kitty Hernon in O’Flaherty’s *Famine* to beg the Coburn family to take her two youngest ones, which would not only save them from starving but also help her provide for her other children.

Obviously, this topic is most substantially described in O’Flaherty’s novel which is entirely devoted to the Great Irish Famine and even bears the eponymous title: *Famine*. The fact that this novel was written in 1937, which was coincidentally the year when the Republic of Ireland was founded, is of extreme importance because it is symbolic of O’Flaherty’s opinion that his people should fight for freedom and strive to transform their society if they want to progress. The horrible consequences of the Irish famine in the 1840s (1845–49), which decimated the Irish population, killing more than a million people, while another million was forced to emigrate due to extreme poverty, are succinctly envisaged by a single sentence in the novel: ‘The hunger is upon us father’ (O’Flaherty, 2002:p.322).

The author's attitude towards this tragic situation is voiced by his protagonist Mary Kilmartin, who refuses to passively succumb to poverty and struggles to overcome the disaster by hard work, so she bravely declares: 'I'm not going to die of hunger, nor my child either, while I have a pair of hands' (2002:p.337). Young and ambitious, Mary is willing to change the life in the household of her in-laws, and she thus represents for O'Flaherty the symbol of an energetic new Irish (wo)man who can change the entire country: "There's no use trying to get rid of dirt in this house," she said. "The poor were born to be dirty." "Well! I mean to get rich," said Mary. "And this dirt is the first thing that I find in the way." (2002:p.113). Such a young woman in the role of the herald of a new and stronger society is also the protagonist of several Indian novels, for instance Mulk Raj Anand's *Gauri* (1960) and Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* (1966), but the Indian women in these novels – Gauri and Rukmani, respectively – had to undergo a complex process of transforming themselves from initially being submissive and passive individuals, burdened by tradition and religious constraints, in order to eventually become strong and efficient personalities, who can really bring an enormous change to the modern Indian society.

Upon comparing the selected novels by O'Flaherty and Markandaya, the following three crucial factors that are responsible for the horrible life of peasants have been pinpointed: the role of landowners, the negative impact of progress/industrialisation, and the poor people's reconciliation with destiny. The colonists (planters) in Ireland became large landowners, represented by their agents, who tormented the tenants in order to gain as much money as possible – for instance, in O'Flaherty's *Famine* this role is played by Chadwick. Of course, such a system is protected by the authorities because it suits them: 'We have seen how the feudal government acted with brutal force when the interests of the landowner were threatened, even to the extent of plundering the poor people's property' (O'Flaherty, 2002:p.325). In *Famine*, even before the plot takes place, Mary's family was evicted from their household when she was a child, which probably contributed to her being so defiant and combative. The same happened in India, where the landowners – called *zamindars* – had their agents who treated the peasants in a similar way, like Sivaji in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*: after thirty years of hard work, Nathan is dispossessed of his land on which his sons also worked with him, when the zamindar's agent sells it to the tannery, leaving Nathan and many other peasants without the land which was their sole source of food.

The fact that Nathan's land was sold to the tannery shows the interrelation between the first two factors, as the Indian peasants were deprived of their land which then became industrial property, so therefore: "Rukmini and Nathan, the

peasant couple in a South Indian village, are the victims of the two evils: *Zamindari* system and the industrial economy” (Bhatnagar, 1995:p.125). In Markandaya’s novels *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice*, the conflict between the east and the west is not presented only on the individual level (as the conflict between the eastern and the western cultures) but also as the clash of the old traditional agricultural society with new modern industrial life. This conflict is best described by Marx’s statement that ‘England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating – the annihilation of the Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia’ (1973:pp.306–307).

However, Markandaya is not wholly against the progress, so stubbornly refused by some of her protagonists, since she ‘seems to suggest that preserving outdated traditions that perpetuate dehumanising poverty is as futile as jumping on the bandwagon of technological advancement simply for the sake of change’ (Kumar, 1987:p.87). A similar critique of the Irish society, in which people are not willing to accept changes that lead to social progress and a new way of life, is found in O’Flaherty’s *Famine*, through the old characters, such as Brian Kilmartin, who reject any form of modernisation, aimed at by Mary. Thus, the family is also “partitioned”, like the entire country, among the old and the young – representing the tradition and modernity/progress, respectively. A comparable “partition of family” is depicted in Markandaya’s novel *Some Inner Fury*, where Premla – as a traditional Indian woman – represents what is old and backward, while her husband Kit is a symbol of the modern and necessary changes.

And yet, the key factor responsible for the plight of both the Irish and the Indians, criticised by both authors in the selected corpus, is certainly their own passiveness, resignation and reconciliation with destiny, which is to some extent related to the old generation, but even more to religious denomination. In O’Flaherty’s *Famine*, this attitude of peasants is prompted by the representatives of the Catholic Church, such as Father Roche, while in Markandaya’s novels most of the characters, above all the female ones, simply follow the principles of the Hindu religion which preaches docility and obedience. Of course, not all of the protagonists are the prey of such religious narrow-mindedness, which is witnessed in O’Flaherty’s *Famine* by Mary and another friar of the Catholic Church, Father Geelan, who incites the peasants to take matters in their hands: ‘I have decided to call upon the people to fight for their rights’ (2002:p.322), and then justifies his action by the following reason: ‘If the Church can’t lead her flock to battle in the cause of justice and liberty, then she must make room for those who can, for those who look upon the sword as a sacred weapon in defence of justice’ (p.322).

2.3 Comparing the attitude of O'Flaherty and Markandaya regarding the coloniser

Nevertheless, the greatest similarity in the literary works of these two authors was found in the fact that neither O'Flaherty nor Markandaya blindly accuse the coloniser alone, because – though they obviously sympathise with their own peoples – they also find fault with the respective governments, who should share a part of the blame, too, as well as with their compatriots themselves.

In Ireland, the Great Famine was certainly the consequence of the blight – which is indisputably a natural disaster, but it also gained such horrible proportions due to the fact that about four million inhabitants relied on potatoes as their staple food. Furthermore, most authors who wrote about the Famine presented their opinion that it was caused by the English, claiming it was a kind of genocide and thus deliberate:

'Up through the early 1950s, historical writing on the Famine was dominated by a nationalist interpretation which held the British government and the landlord class responsible for mass death and largescale emigration. This view was eventually challenged by so-called revisionist historians who defended the establishment and dismissed the nationalist interpretation as too politically and emotionally charged to warrant credibility.' (Bexar, 2007:p.65)

For instance, John Mitchel (2005) in his well-known *Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* claims that the coloniser's economic policy was a 'diabolical scheme' aimed at wiping out the Irish, because 'the Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the famine' (p.219). This side of human responsibility is evident even in O'Flaherty's *Famine*, as witnessed by the following words of Father Geelan, who claims that the English government is "eager to destroy us as a race" (2002:p.119): 'The people's grain and their pigs and their oats are gone over the sea, to fill broad English bellies' (2002:p.120), and then explains the reason for this pillage: "There isn't enough food in England to feed the English so Ireland is kept as a granary and a butchery next door. Isn't that their Policy?" (2002:p.120).

This clearly proves that 'O'Flaherty does not exculpate the British government' (Bexar, 2007:p.81), however, he realises that this is not the only element of truth and that the responsibility issue is much more complex, so 'his approach is quite different from Mitchel's in conveying a sense of uncertainty, clearly allowing for the possibility that to blame the English alone may be too simplistic' (Bexar, 2007:p.66). The validity of such an argument is evident in his development of Mary Kilmartin's character, aimed at praising the people who want to bring about changes in their

society, but also at criticising those who do not want to fight for survival and also future progress of the country. Gunilla Bexar (2007) asserts that O’Flaherty is obviously aware that ‘there are also tyrants among his own people’ (p.78), so she highlights three key factors which point to the fact that the proportions of Famine were not only the coloniser’s responsibility (pp.76–81), namely:

- the *political factor*, that is, the inactivity of Irish leaders (represented by Daniel O’Connell in the novel) who – as O’Flaherty writes – ‘only talk’ (2002:p.102) instead of really helping their people;
- the *cultural factor*, i.e. religion, or in other words the clash between the representatives of the Catholic Church, personalised in the parish priest Father Roche, on the one hand, and of the Protestant Church, represented by the parson, minister Coburn, on the other – as all the efforts of Mr. Coburn to aid the villagers are thwarted by Fr. Roche whom they fear and who persuades them to destroy the parson’s relief centre and his model garden in which he grew cereals in order to show the peasants how they can improve their sustenance; and
- the *social factor*, or – as Bexar calls it – “social injustice” revealed through the fact that O’Flaherty ‘also holds the social system responsible, because the upper classes can exploit the poor and leave them with no means to improve their situation’ (2007:p.78), which is clearly shown in his representation of both the gentry and the shopkeeper, finally underlined when poor Sally asks how God can ‘let the poor die of hunger while there’s so much riches?’ (O’Flaherty, 2002:p.340).

Markandaya, on the other hand, voices the critique of her own people in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* through the English missionary and social worker in the village where Nathan and Rukmani live, Doctor Kennington, who despises the backwardness of the Indian people, resigned to all ills because this is how they gain redemption according to their religion. It is evident that Markandaya

‘shows deep intimacy with the British as can be seen from her numerous detailed and vivid portraits. She does unmask their hypocrisy and arrogance and related faults in a bold and forthright manner, but does so as someone who deeply loves. Her partiality towards her own people is obvious, but she does not overlook the limitations and weakness.’ (Balan, 2013:p.433)

Nonetheless, Markandaya does not present her attitude using only the observations of an Englishman, i.e. a coloniser, as this same opinion is reiterated by her Indian protagonist Ravi in *A Handful of Rice*. Ravi is angry at the peasants

because of 'the way people accepted their lot and even thanked God it was no worse' (1985:p.49) and he rebels against their 'wholesale acceptance of life as a culture for the breeding of suffering' (p.49). He considers that behind such a passive surrender to destiny, no matter how cruel it might be, there lies 'a conspiracy of old men to keep young men content with their lot, because they wanted no rebels in their midst' (p.182). Here also we can see a parallel with the generation gap represented in O'Flaherty's *Famine* between the old and the young, above all Brian and Mary Kilmartin.

3. Conclusion

As can be seen from this article, there are many similarities between these two authors, who both published their works in mid-20th century and, having shared to a certain extent the experience of colonialism, belong to the realm of (post) colonial literature. However, unlike many other writers of that period, they show an unquestionable degree of self-consciousness regarding the relation between the coloniser and the colonised. A significant factor in this shift of attitude was that they both travelled a lot, which helped them keep an open mind, widen their horizons and develop a different way of looking at things, together with a keen sense of observation. They both even settled for some time in the coloniser's country, experiencing life from the other side. Indeed, Prem Kumar draws attention to Markandaya's 'experience as an expatriate who inherited Indian values by birth and acquired Western values by choosing to live in England' (1987:p.84).

The greatest similarity between the two authors is that, instead of focusing on the blame for the misery of their peoples, and therefore accusing only the colonisers, they dedicate their attention to the way out of the horrible situation and the progress that can be achieved in their respective countries, but only as a result of the joint efforts of their governments and peoples. They do not criticise the Irish/Indian people in a negative way, but constructively propose a solution for the future, aware that it is not enough to get rid of the colonisers, because after gaining independence their own respective peoples have to progress and develop in order to overcome the problems that riddled their past – or, as the title of a chapter from Lisa Lowe's book *The intimacies of four continents* suggests: their 'freedoms [are] yet to come' (2015:p.135).

That is precisely the kind of responsibility both O'Flaherty and Markandaya have in mind – not only their nations' responsibility towards the past and the present, but also with regards to the future life of their countrymen, once liberated

and free. Strangely enough, both writers quit their countries of origin just after they gained independence, so it can be said that Otherness is something they lived through and experienced on their own skin. This is what resulted in the binarity of their thought, since they were at the same time still committed to the cause of their compatriots but at a distance necessary for objectively viewing the situation, and what led them to the conclusion that it is not only the Other who is responsible because, to paraphrase what Said says in his seminal work *Culture and Imperialism*: There are two sides to it.

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KOMPARATIVNA ANALIZA PRIKAZA BORBE PROTIV KOLONIJALOG UGNJETAVANJA U IRSKOJ I INDIJI U DELIMA LIJAMA O'FLAERTIJA I KAMALE MARKANDAJE

Rezime

Premda su geografski i etnički udaljene zemlje, Irska i Indija ipak imaju mnogo sličnosti, koje većinom potiču od činjenice da su obe ove države nekada bile kolonije Britanskog carstva. Pre sticanja nezavisnosti, na sličan način obeležene podelom zemlje, i Irska i Indija bile su bojišta kolonijalnih sukobljavanja, što je opisano u mnogobrojnim književnim delima. Cilj ovog rada je komparativna analiza odabranih romana irskog pisca Lijama O'Flaertija i indijske spisateljice Kamale Markandaje, u kojima je prikazan sukob između kolonizatora i kolonizovanih u te dve zemlje. Najvažnija činjenica do koje se dolazi takvim poređenjem ovih dela jeste da ni O'Flaerti ni Markandaja za bedu i patnje svog naroda ne optužuju nerazumno samo kolonizatora, budući da takođe okrivljuju i vladajuće strukture u svojim zemljama, svesni da njihov napredak može biti dostignut isključivo kao rezultat zajedničkih napora njihovih vlada i naroda.

► **Ključne reči:** Irska, Indija, Britansko carstvo, postkolonijalizam, Lijam O'Flaerti, Kamala Markandaja.

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