

## Flight Risk

**Kevin Brew & Ellie Kisyombe**

Drama On One

RTÉ

Dublin, Ireland

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### Abstract

*'Flight Risk' is a radio play exploring the thoughts and fears of Elizabeth, a woman seeking asylum in Ireland, adrift and asleep on a flight bound for Dublin. Elizabeth seeks protection in the Ireland celebrated for its 'one hundred thousand welcomes'. But this bounty of welcomes is limited by immigration law. Elizabeth dreams that the pilot speaks to her directly over the tannoy, quizzing her about travel documents and tormenting her with his predictions of a swift deportation. This dramatic scenario is intercut with documentary material to describe the experience of those seeking protection in Ireland.*

*Ellie Kisyombe drew on her personal experiences to play the role of Elizabeth. The text includes her improvisations in the role. Her words merge with testimonies at protest rallies and from RTÉ Radio 1's phone-in programme, 'Liveline', presented by Joe Duffy. Felix Dzamara from Zimbabwe describes what people in his home country are running from – the violence of that country's Central Intelligence Organisation. Others describe the dehumanising conditions of the Irish Direct Provision system, where people are accommodated as they await the outcome of their asylum applications. Direct Provision was established in 2000. Since then, thousands of people have lived in this system, in some cases for periods in excess of five years, without the right to work, without the means to cook for themselves, and on a small weekly allowance.*

*The play was produced by RTÉ Drama On One, and broadcast on RTÉ Radio 1 on 29 January 2017. This coincided with President Trump's first travel ban, by chance echoing the concerns of a multitude of people taking their own 'flight risk'. 'Flight Risk' was a Gold Radio Winner in the Entertainment Best Drama Special category at the New York Festival Radio Awards in 2017.*

*The play is available as a podcast at [rte.ie/dramaonone](http://rte.ie/dramaonone).*

**Keywords:** *Direct Provision; Asylum Process; International Protection Act; Asylum Narratives; Radio Drama; Auto-Fiction; Docudrama; RTÉ Drama On One, Republic of Ireland*



Fig 1: Ellie Kisyombe in RTE studios recording 'Flight Risk'

## Flight Risk by Kevin Brew & Ellie Kisyombe

### 1. Take-Off

*Over the sound of the plane's engines we hear a montage of voices.*

#### **Voice 1:**

'The number of people displaced by the conflict is at the highest level ever recorded. It's estimated that 65.3 million people...'<sup>1</sup>

#### **Voice 2:**

'See what is happening in Zimbabwe. Their lives are in danger as we are speaking right now...'<sup>2</sup>

#### **Voice 3:**

'So he decide to come to Ireland. He thought that, this is his last chance: die - or Ireland look after him.'<sup>3</sup>

#### **Voice 4:**

'You have no right to call me bastard sir, you are a racist. (This ain't your fucking country). You are a racist, you have no right to call me a bastard.'<sup>4</sup>

#### **Voice 5:**

'The death of a young mother in the Kinsale Road Direct Provision centre in Cork on Tuesday has once again shone a spotlight on the system of accommodation which we have here for asylum seekers and their families.'<sup>5</sup>

#### **Voice 6:**

'You're not allowed to cook for yourself. We're not allowed to work. We only receive that €19.10 per week. You do that, maybe watch a little bit of TV, sleep, wake up - That's the general routine of a life in Direct Provision.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kenya TV report on UN Refugee Agency statistics (June 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Felix Dzamara on RTÉ Radio 1's Liveline, describing persecution in his home country (Sept 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Ahmed Khamal on RTÉ Radio 1, explaining why his friend came to Ireland (Nov 2016).

<sup>4</sup> An exchange recorded at an 'End Direct Provision' Protest Rally, Dublin (Nov 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Report from Cork city on the Today with Sean O'Rourke Show, RTÉ Radio 1 (Aug 2016).

## 2. Elizabeth

*The sound changes to a steady drone as the plane cruises at altitude.*

### **Elizabeth (Voiceover (VO)):**

My name is Elizabeth,  
And I'm flying at 37,000 feet,  
Hoping for a hundred thousand welcomes.

I don't know much,  
about this 'Ireland'.

At this altitude,

### **Elizabeth (VO):**

I still don't know,  
about Dublin,  
or about the 'craic',<sup>7</sup>  
even Conor McGregor,<sup>8</sup>  
or the Irish Refugee Act of 1996.  
Like anyone else in this airplane,  
I'm kind of in-between of countries.  
And I'm just so sleepy,  
Stateless and ....  
Sleepy.  
(falls asleep)

## 3. Bad Dream

### **Pilot (over Tannoy):**

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<sup>6</sup> Caller 'Diane' describes Ireland's Direct Provision system on RTÉ Radio's Liveline (Sept 2016). Since the broadcast, some conditions in Direct Provision centres have changed. The weekly allowance to adults in Direct Provision has been increased to €21.60. Some Direct Provision centres now have self-catering facilities. In 2017 the Irish Supreme Court ruled that the ban on asylum seekers joining the workforce was unconstitutional. The government subsequently introduced a new work permit system, but with multiple restrictions and requirements. In June 2018 the work permit system was revised, and by August 2018, 560 of those in Direct Provision had successfully applied for work permits. However several obstacles remain. For example, the new framework excludes many asylum seekers who are appealing decisions on their status.

<sup>7</sup> Irish slang for 'fun'.

<sup>8</sup> Irish professional mixed martial artist and former UFC Lightweight Champion.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. In about 20 minutes or so we will begin our descent. Current weather in Dublin: a light breeze. Temperatures of 15 degrees. A little cloudy. This would be a good time to use the facilities as once the fasten-your-seatbelt sign has been illuminated, you will have to remain in your seats. In the meantime, spare a thought for Elizabeth in seat 23 D. She is the only person on board with forged documents.

**Elizabeth:**

What? .... No!

**Stewardess:**

(off) Madam?

**Elizabeth:**

Please! There is nothing wrong with my papers.

**Stewardess:**

Madam? Are you ok? Did you maybe have a bad dream?

**Elizabeth:**

Listen, Madam!

**Pilot (over Tannoy):**

Those travelling without valid documents are liable to be deported under the International Protection Act.<sup>9</sup>

**Elizabeth:**

What?

**Stewardess:**

I can't hear anything.

**Pilot (over Tannoy):**

So thank you again for flying with us –

**Stewardess:**

Can I get you a glass of water?

**Pilot (over Tannoy):**

And I wish you all a very happy visit to Ireland -

**Stewardess:**

Maybe you'd like to look at our in-flight magazine?

**Pilot (over Tannoy):**

Everyone is welcome, except Elizabeth.

*As the dream intensifies, the plane's engines roar, until....*

**Elizabeth:**

[wakes up / breathes]

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<sup>9</sup> The 2015 International Protection Act which defines Irish Law regarding refugees and asylum seekers.

#### 4. Home

**Elizabeth (VO):**

I don't blame myself for having nightmares.  
I mean, I AM travelling with forged documents.  
Up high like this,  
I can look down on my problems.  
People will ask me, "What are you doing here?"  
And I'll say: "My brother, you don't understand."  
And I'll say, like the man who was on the radio:

**Radio Archive – Felix:**

You came here – you didn't come here for a holiday.<sup>10</sup>

**Elizabeth (VO):**

I didn't come here for a holiday.

**Radio Archive – Felix:**

You came here because you're fleeing persecution.

**Elizabeth (VO):**

I came here because I'm fleeing persecution.

**Radio Archive – Felix:**

In Africa, in Zimbabwe in particular.

There are what they call Central Intelligence Organisation. These are the people that works for the ruling party, but they are very vicious.

**Elizabeth (VO):**

You can't run away.....

**Radio Archive – Felix:**

You can't run away. You can't hide. Everything ...

If you speak against the ruling party, you become a threat to the government.

**Elizabeth (VO):**

I'm telling you right now...

**Radio Archive – Felix:**

I'm telling you right now.

My home, my house,  
has been burnt to ashes.

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<sup>10</sup> Excerpt from RTÉ Radio 1 programme 'Liveline with Joe Duffy': focus on Direct Provision (Sept 2016).

**Elizabeth (VO):**

(has been burnt)

I play this radio in my head,

(to ashes)

Like the other passengers watch a movie on their laptops.

**Radio Archive – Felix:**

My own cousin's brother, who was also abducted,

Up to date, it's almost.. two years now.

We don't know where he is.

Nobody has said anything about him.

**Elizabeth (VO):**

As we are speaking right now...

**Radio Archive – Felix:**

As we are speaking right now, we have got at least for the past week only, we have 120 people who were arrested and tortured, just for the past week only, because they stood against the ruling party.

**Radio Archive – Felix:**

In 2008 people were amputated.

They cut their hands.

And these are the things that people are fleeing from, they are running from.

**Elizabeth (VO):**

Their lives are in danger...

**Radio Archive – Felix:**

Their lives are in danger.

I wouldn't want to come here and seek asylum in a coffin.

I would love to come here and seek asylum while I'm still able-bodied.

That's what we are trying to do here<sup>11</sup>.

**Elizabeth (VO):**

That's what we are trying to do here.

## 5. Passport Control

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<sup>11</sup> Excerpt from the RTÉ Radio 1 programme, 'Liveline with Joe Duffy', featuring Felix Dzamara (Sept 2016).

**Pilot on Tannoy:**

[beep] This is your captain speaking. We're travelling at about 500 miles per hour, currently getting a little help from a strong tailwind.

Now the rest of you relax while I have a little chat with Elizabeth.

**Elizabeth:**

What? I must be dreaming again...

**Pilot on Tannoy:**

So what happens when you get to Passport Control?<sup>12</sup>

**Elizabeth:**

It's all arranged. A lawyer will be waiting for me.

**Pilot on Tannoy:**

So you'll tell the truth. You want to apply for Refugee Status in Ireland.

You have forged documents.

**Elizabeth:**

I had to use this, so that I can be on the plane. But I have my original documents. They are in my bag.

**Pilot on Tannoy:**

Well Elizabeth, this is what really happens:

There is no lawyer.

The man at Passport Control nods his head.

He fills in a form and puts it in a brown envelope.

He takes you for a walk down a long winding corridor.

You gradually realise,

that this corridor doesn't go to Ireland.

He's taking you to a plane,

and that plane is flying straight back,

to where you came from.

*The engine-sounds again reach a crescendo, until...*

## **6. One Hundred Thousand Welcomes**

**Elizabeth:**

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<sup>12</sup> Adapted from the article by Sorcha Pollak, Princess Khumalo: 'Direct Provision doesn't define me', *Irish Times*, 27 July 2016)

(breathing heavily)

**Stewardess:**

Are you ok there? You could take your mind off things and have a listen to one of the radio programmes...

**Elizabeth:**

Ok...

**Stewardess:**

There are earphones (reaching)...just there...

**Elizabeth:**

Thank you.

**Stewardess:**

Ok...just click the buttons there to your right to pick the channel you want.

*We hear Elizabeth reaching for the earphones.*

**Radio Archive – Joe Duffy:**

And a number of people spoke to us directly from one of the over 30 Direct Provision centres for asylum seekers. They're in the news again. The Minister said we will be taking more asylum seekers from Syria. And we heard yesterday directly from inside what the conditions are like. I have on the line Diana, you say the system is crazy...why?<sup>13</sup>

**Radio Archive – Diana:**

Well Joe, the system is crazy because it leaves people in, in that situation for a number of time that they don't know how long they're going to be in there for.

**Elizabeth (VO):**

She says it's worse than prison because you don't know the crime you've committed.

**Radio Archive – Diana:**

The centre that I particularly reside in, it's made up of, well, a few blocks that are made out of prefab materials.

**Elizabeth (VO):**

This is where you go if you're seeking asylum.

**Radio Archive – Joe Duffy:**

How long have you been in...in Ireland in Direct Provision?

**Radio Archive – Maria:**

Eight years now.

**Radio Archive – Joe Duffy:**

And where...has, has any part of your case been heard?

**Radio Archive – Maria:**

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<sup>13</sup> RTÉ Radio 1 programme 'Liveline', Sept 2016



Yeah it has been heard. Even at the moment I'm still waiting for them to reply me.

**Elizabeth (VO):**

This is where you wait for your hundred thousand welcomes.

**Radio Archive – Diana:**

The routine is more or less the same. Each and every day you wake up at a certain time. Your meals are provided 3 times a day at specific times. You're not allowed to cook for yourself, or you know...to make meals at your own time. So basically, you wake up, you go to eat, you go back to your four walls. You sit and wait for the next, for the next meal time. You go back and you do that, maybe watch a little bit of TV, sleep, wake up - that's the general routine of a life in direct provision.

*The sound of multiple voices, all in 'phone-sound', their words overlapping.*

**Elizabeth (VO):**

The radio says "Jooooe Duffy!" Another man says, "The security people are walking past you, with their Walkie radios, talking at one another. This is not a place you wish to sit down and eat".

A woman says – "these kids have never tasted the food cooked by their parents. How can people not cook for themselves? They won't allow them to make food from home or pass on food skills to the next generation".<sup>14</sup>

**Elizabeth (VO):**

These people they've lived more than 5 years, 8 years. But these parents, they've never cooked at all. I don't know what to do.

Because I love food. And the way I love to cook - I'm not sure how am I going to cope. What is this system going to do to me? I promised my children that I'm going to get them in a few months. I'm worried. I'm scared for my family.<sup>15</sup>

**Radio Archive – Felix:**

The last time I moved from the Direct Provision centre, I was staying with this other guy from another country. He has mental problems, to an extent that one day he actually beat me in the house...because he came drunk and he was singing and playing music in the room.

So he confront...I asked him to, probably just reduce the volume and the like, but he didn't take it ... I don't blame him. The guy, you can see he has a mental problem. He has been in, you know, quite long, you know. You can tell, you can see that the guy is not all right, because he's always talking to himself, always doing things that not ...proper..<sup>16</sup>

**Radio Archive – Maria:**

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<sup>14</sup> Adapted from 'What's Food Got To Do With It' by Keelin Barry – report on food experiences of those in the Direct Provision system (NASC, The Irish Immigrant Support Centre, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Improvisation by Ellie Kisyombe during studio recording of 'Flight Risk'.

<sup>16</sup> From the RTÉ Radio 1 programme, 'Liveline', Sept 2016.

Well I'm nursing a three-month-old baby. So if I go to the kitchen they normally give me small food, and it won't be enough for me because I have to have enough food so that I could produce enough milk to feed my baby....<sup>17</sup>

**Elizabeth (VO):**

Another man says:

"I'm fleeing from war

but Direct Provision is like a cold war...."<sup>18</sup>

*The plane-sound fades out. We hear a repeating phrase, the monotonous 'bing-bong' that has preceded every announcement by the pilot up to this point. The 'bing-bong' becomes louder in every repeat, before tailing off into silence.*

**7. Fragments**

**Elizabeth (VO):**

Fragments

Memories

I just miss some nsima<sup>19</sup> with some vegetables in groundnut soup<sup>20</sup>

Dreams

And my hot chicken – Oh, I've missed my Jambo,

Dread

It's a fish I used to like

Nerves

That I like most

Nightmares ...

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<sup>17</sup> From the RTÉ Radio 1 programme, 'Liveline', Sept 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Adapted from 'What's Food Got To Do With It' by Keelin Barry – report on food experiences of those in the Direct Provision system (NASC, The Irish Immigrant Support Centre, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> A dish made from maize flour in Malawi, Zambia and elsewhere in Southern Africa.

<sup>20</sup> Improvisation by Ellie Kisyombe during studio recording of 'Flight Risk'.

*The plane's engines roar again, building to a crescendo, until....*

## **8. Holding Pattern**

### **Pilot on Tannoy:**

[beep] Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. Unfortunately there is a backlog of arrivals at Dublin Airport and we are required to fly in a holding pattern until further notice. We apologize for the inconvenience.

### **Elizabeth (VO):**

A pattern,

of Boeing 737s.

Flying around the Dublin skies.

I guess that's what I'll be doing:

- a holding pattern;

In a convent in Ballyhaunis,<sup>21</sup>

Or a mobile home in Athlone,<sup>22</sup>

Travelling in no obvious direction, with someone else at the controls.

### **Elizabeth (VO):**

At least I'll be safe,

as my life goes around in circles.

I won't be worried of being raped.

I won't be worried of being tortured.<sup>23</sup>

That's what I think as my ears pop,

and the sound of engines,

changes to a rush of air.

Back home,

A man is hung from the ceiling by his feet,

While 21 other men take turns in beating him.

## **9. Permission to land.**

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<sup>21</sup> Direct Provision Centre for asylum seekers in the west of Ireland.

<sup>22</sup> Direct Provision Centre for asylum seekers in the Irish midlands.

<sup>23</sup> Improvisation by Ellie Kisyombe during studio recording of 'Flight Risk'.

**Pilot on Tannoy:**

[beep] This is your captain speaking.

Apologies again for this delay.

I've already told you about the weather on the ground, and options about car hire.

We are still waiting for permission to land....

.....

Sorry.

**Elizabeth (VO):**

I think we've been in a holding pattern for an hour now...

I pick up a newspaper: 20 June 2016.

A tiny group has gathered,

in the middle of a busy Dublin street,

In their arms a banner, for World Refugee Day.

**World Refugee Day Rally:**

Refugees are welcome here!

Refugees are welcome here!

Refugees are welcome here!

EU, EU, hear us clear!

Refugees are welcome here!<sup>24</sup>

**Elizabeth (VO):**

Maybe there's some more pain,

Waiting for me in some small room.

With this 19 euro 10 a week,

and not being allowed to cook my own food.

But this Direct Provision: It doesn't define me.<sup>25</sup>

**Protest Rally - Razan:**

Thank you for thinking of us... really,

and thank you for coming and supporting us,

because we feel we are abandoned.

No one is with us.

We just want you to be beside us.

Now I know we are maybe not a huge number,

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<sup>24</sup> Recorded in central Dublin during World Refugee Day, 20 June 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Adapted from the article by Sorcha Pollak, Princess Khumalo: 'Direct Provision doesn't define me', *Irish Times*, 27 July 2016.

but we are very powerful and very strong.<sup>26</sup>

**Elizabeth (VO):**

Maybe those people let me hold their banner.

**Protest Rally - Razan:**

Our attitude and our approach to the refugee crisis,  
or to any humanitarian crisis,  
defines who we are  
and what we stand for.

**Elizabeth (VO):**

Maybe the crowd gets bigger.

**Protest Rally:**

(cheering) One Race. The Human Race. One Race. The Human Race.

**Protest Rally - Ahmed:**

We are gathering here today to [express] our concerns ...  
regarding many disadvantage that we are facing as asylum seekers.  
We come together from around the world,  
Different religions and colours,  
And we are all united for equality and fair treatment.<sup>27</sup>

**Protest Rally - Razan:**

And refugees are the true test of humanity.  
Be the same voice, don't change,  
because we really need you.  
Thank you very much.

**Pilot on Tannoy:**

[beep] Ladies and Gentlemen, we have been granted permission to land.

**Elizabeth (VO):**

No one needs a hundred thousand welcomes.  
Just one.

## **10. Landing**

**Vukašin Nedeljković**

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<sup>26</sup> Razan Ibraheem speaking in central Dublin on World Refugee Day, 20 June 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmed Khamal speaking at a Protest Rally against Direct Provision, Dublin, Nov 2016.

Asylum seekers live in overcrowded, unhygienic conditions where families with children are often forced to share small rooms. The management controls their food intake, their movement, supply of bed linen and cleaning materials, exerting their authority, power and control.<sup>28</sup>

### **Neltah Chadamoyo**

And you're in a place where you're forced to stay in that space indefinitely, and you don't know what to do with the stuff that's in your head. I think creative people, writers and artists, understand that stuff that needs to get out of you. And there's no outlet for it. Then you end up crying all the time. It is more than depressing. Because you can see your life slipping by.<sup>29</sup>

### **Ellie Kisyombe (who plays the role of 'Elizabeth')**

People can choose to judge me the way they can think of. But you know sometimes being a refugee or being an asylum seeker, it's not like you are a poor person or you are coming from a situation whereby you were a nobody. In the middle of nowhere I become an asylum seeker and I lost all the rights - But I still have me.<sup>30</sup>

*The flight comes to an end. We hear the plane landing and the engines powering down.*

**THE END**

## **References**

*Liveline with Joe Duffy*, RTÉ Radio 1. The daily radio programme focused on living conditions in Ireland's Direct Provision system for an entire week, beginning on Monday, 19 September 2016.

Barry, Keelin. *What's Food Got To Do With It*, NASC, The Irish Immigrant Support Centre, 2014.

Pollak, Sorcha. *New to the Parish*. A series of articles in the Irish Times documenting the experiences of Ireland's immigrants. Recently published as a book: *New to the Parish' - Stories of Love, War and Adventure from Ireland's Immigrants*. New Island Books, 2018

## **Flight Risk – Broadcast Credits**

### **First Broadcast**

29th January 2017 on RTÉ Radio 1

### **Writers**

Kevin Brew with Ellie Kisyombe

### **Cast**

Ellie Kisyombe, Kathy Rose O'Brien, Dylan Tighe

### **Music**

Kevin Brew and Damian Chennells

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<sup>28</sup> 'Asylum Archive' panel discussion, National College of Art and Design, Dublin, Dec 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Speech at the launch of the 'Our Table' project, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, Nov 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with activist Ellie Kisyombe who plays Elizabeth in 'Flight Risk'.

**Sound Design and Sound Supervision**

Damian Chennells

**Featured Voices**

Joe Duffy,

The 'Liveline' callers Felix Dzamara, Diana and Maria.

Memet Uludag,

Ahmed Khamal,

Razan Ibraheem,

Vukašin Nedeljković

and Neltah Chadamoyo

**Producer\Director**

Kevin Brew

**Series Producer**

Kevin Reynolds

**Commissioning Editors**

Ann-Marie Power, Lorelei Harris.

**Duration**

18'00

**With special thanks to:**

Our Table, RTÉ's Liveline programme, Joe Duffy, Kerstin Aquaviva, Brian O'Connell, Hugh Ormond and Fergus Sweeney.

**Website:** [rte.ie/dramaonone](http://rte.ie/dramaonone)

## **Devising Flight Risk**

**Kevin Brew & Ellie Kisyombe**

Drama On One

RTÉ

Dublin, Ireland

### **Abstract**

*'Flight Risk' is a radio play exploring the thoughts and fears of Elizabeth, a woman seeking asylum in Ireland, adrift and asleep on a flight bound for Dublin. Radio producer Kevin Brew devised the piece in collaboration with activist Ellie Kisyombe, who herself has been in the Irish asylum process for over 9 years. The play was produced by RTÉ Drama On One, and broadcast on RTÉ Radio 1 on 29 January 2017.*

*Asylum narratives like 'Flight Risk' rely for their authenticity on multiple storytellers with direct experience of the traumas of displacement and the asylum process. Ellie Kisyombe performed the central role of Elizabeth. The script became more authentic when Ellie changed it into her own way of speaking. Ellie also improvised completely new elements that made the script more credible. The programme's documentary layer passed the microphone to members of the asylum-seeking community. For example, people are heard describing the restrictive conditions of the Direct Provision system on RTÉ Radio 1's phone-in programme, 'Liveline'. This asylum narrative employs a form of auto-fiction, fusing dramatic scenes and documentary elements, while inviting Ellie to perform a version of her own life story. Docudrama is also a reference point for 'Flight Risk', in that the programme fuses together factual texts to create a script. The programme aims to highlight issues in plain sight, but in the heightened form of a radio drama, in order to invite listeners to think again about social injustice in Irish life.*

## Devising Flight Risk

My name is Kevin Brew and I work as a radio producer with RTÉ, Ireland's public service broadcaster. Our radio drama department is called 'Drama On One'. We made 'Flight Risk' as part of an effort to make dramas that address social issues more directly, especially in the light of the frightening reversals in news headlines today.

'Flight Risk' aims to describe the situation of people who seek protection in Ireland. The story is told from the point of view of Elizabeth, a woman seeking asylum, who is adrift and asleep on a flight bound for Dublin.

The role of Elizabeth was performed by activist Ellie Kisyombe, who herself has been in the Irish asylum process for over nine years. Ellie is co-founder of the 'Our Table' initiative, which connects communities through pop-up food events while campaigning for the end of Direct Provision - the controversial Irish system of accommodation for people awaiting the outcome of their asylum applications.

The character, Elizabeth, has a sequence of bad dreams. These are fuelled by traumatic experiences in her home country, her fear of deportation on arrival, and dread of the asylum process that awaits her in the Irish jurisdiction. These dreams are derived from factual sources, including the *Irish Times* series 'New to the Parish',<sup>31</sup> and the report, 'What's Food Got To Do With It'.<sup>32</sup> Documentary elements are woven into the story. We hear from Felix Dzamara of Zimbabwe, who describes what people in his home country are running from – the violence of that country's Central Intelligence Organisation. "I didn't come here for a holiday", Felix says.

In Elizabeth's dreams, the pilot speaks to her directly over the tannoy, quizzing her about travel documents and tormenting her with his predictions of a swift deportation. Both the pilot and the stewardess of this flight have a cold demeanour that stands for the impersonal, dehumanising aspect of immigration legislation. This dramatised version of immigration law conflicts with Ireland's image as a land of welcomes.

Let's 'press pause' at this point to look at a few issues that arise in asylum narratives. For example - how can a radio producer born in Limerick enter the arena of this discussion and speak with any authenticity? The answer is simple: he can't – not without the help of others who have direct access to the experiences involved. There is an awareness of an authenticity gap, but that doesn't have to sink the project – instead this 'problem' leads us to create a vessel for the community to speak through.

So asylum narratives like 'Flight Risk' rely on multiple storytellers. In a way I'm the writer of 'Flight Risk' because I created the framing metaphor of the flight and I have to take the credit or the blame

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<sup>31</sup> Pollak, Sorcha. *New to the Parish*. A series of articles in the *Irish Times* documenting the experiences of Ireland's immigrants. Recently published as a book: *New to the Parish' - Stories of Love, War and Adventure from Ireland's Immigrants*.

<sup>32</sup> 'What's Food Got To Do With It' by Keelin Barry – report on food experiences of those in the Direct Provision system (NASC, The Irish Immigrant Support Centre, 2014).



for that. But really, the piece has multiple authors, including Ellie Kisiyombe, who speak directly of their experiences in their own words in a format that combines dramatic scenes with documentary material.

During the recording of 'Flight Risk', the original script became more authentic when Ellie changed it into her own way of speaking, using her wonderful voice to make the piece her own, as well as improvising completely new elements and nuances that make the script more credible. One of Ellie's improvisations dealt with a key issue: food. With some recent exceptions, people in Direct Provision have not been allowed to cook their own meals since the system began in 2000. Ellie improvised a whole scene of her own food memories of Southern Africa, and these images of pleasure contrast with the denial of freedoms in the Irish asylum process.

In the programme's documentary strand, we pass the microphone to other people from the community with direct experience of displacement and Direct Provision. We hear Memet Uludag from United Against Racism, who challenges an aggressive bystander at a protest rally in Dublin. We hear Vukašin Nedeljković, who speaks about the stringent managerial control of resources in accommodation centres like Globe House and Mount Trenchard. We hear Neltah Chadamoyo, who describes how lives are lived in the limbo of Direct Provision, with multiple impediments to human potential and creativity.

And Ellie speaks, not as Elizabeth, but as herself, at the end of the play, when she says 'I still have me'. Ellie has shown this resilience in so many ways, redeeming her own negative experiences in the Direct Provision system and channeling these experiences into art and activism. Ellie's 'Our Table' food events invite people of all communities to share a meal. These activities not only highlight issues around the Irish asylum process – they create an inclusive, friendly and welcoming model of intercultural life in Ireland. Leaders like Ellie contribute to Irish life, but this immense voluntary effort has been made with no guarantee of a formal welcome into the Irish State.

This edition of *Studies in Arts and Humanities* explores how narrative forms and storytelling can be employed in the discussion of social justice issues. A key reference point for 'Flight Risk' is the narrative form of auto-fiction. Auto-fiction blends together documentary and dramatic scenes. Often auto-fiction narratives invite an individual to perform a version of his or her own life. That mix of the real and the imaginary can build authenticity while retaining the license needed to create images – images that allow us to see social injustice from new angles. Another narrative reference point for 'Flight Risk' is Documentary Theatre. Pieces like 'My Name is Rachel Corrie'<sup>33</sup> fuse together factual sources like newspaper articles, surveys and transcripts in order to create a factual script, so that issues in plain sight are presented in a more heightened way, asking the audience to look again at social injustice in our lives.

Asylum narratives, like 'Flight Risk', depend on collaboration. You could say that the International Protection Act doesn't even want me to meet Ellie, let alone 'hang out' in a studio and make creative work together. Immigration law imposes barriers that disrupt the natural impulse that many, many people have – to make friends and share stories; to have real, conversational, nuanced, intense, even funny exchanges that transcend sterile concepts of 'integration'. Cultural sensitivities must be respected, but we shouldn't fret to the point that we don't take the tiny risk of introducing ourselves, getting to know each other and sharing projects that will weave our lives together for years to come.

Asylum narratives like 'Flight Risk' depend on performance, but Ellie Kisiyombe didn't just perform 'Flight Risk' – she transformed it. Anybody I've met who has heard the play will begin by complimenting Ellie's wonderful voice. I'd like to finish by thanking Ellie for her fantastic performance in 'Flight Risk'.

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<sup>33</sup> 'My Name is Rachel Corrie' is a play based on the diaries and emails of peace activist Rachel Corrie, who was killed, at the age of 23, in Gaza in March 2003, while protesting against the demolition of Palestinian homes.

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