Introduction

In October 2015, *The Lobster* (Yorgos Lanthimos, 2015) opened in Irish cinemas. Owing presumably to its starry cast – Colin Farrell, Rachel Weisz, John C. Reilly, Léa Seydoux, Ben Whishaw and Olivia Colman – and film festival success (it won the Jury Prize at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival), what was evidently a challenging art film played nationally in multiplexes as well as the more predictable Irish Film Institute and Lighthouse cinemas in Dublin. The gambit paid off, with the film being tipped to exceed a box office take of €1million by the end of its second week (RTÉ Ten, 2015). Shot in Sneem, County Kerry, with interiors at the luxury Parknasilla Resort, *The Lobster* is unmistakably a co-production. Its director is Greek and its cast multinational; its setting may be Irish, although Ireland is never named as its location. It was produced by Element Pictures (Ireland), Scarlet Films (UK), Faliro House (Greece), Haut et Court (France), Lemming Film (Netherlands) and Limp (UK). It was financed in part by the Irish Film Board.[1]

To pose the question as to whether *The Lobster* is an Irish film is, under these circumstances, laughable. In earlier critical times, a work such as this would have been written off as a 'europudding', that is, the indigestible outcome of mixing up multiple European funding sources with little or no investment in cultural engagement, and a dilution of the project of building a distinctive national cinema. Writing in 1987 in the seminal *Cinema and Ireland*, Kevin Rockett, for instance, warned of the 'necessary compromises of international co-productions' (Rockett, Gibbons and Hill, 1987: 143). Now, co-productions are the backbone of the Irish film industry and the understanding of what constitutes a national cinema is ever more elusive. Theories of transnationalism provide a positive way out of the damning 'europudding', while theorists of globalisation warn against the continued dilution of the local in the face of the global.

No research exists to prove it, but one may guess that another of the draws for Irish audiences of *The Lobster* was that it was, in some way, Irish. Colin Farrell promoted the film widely in the Irish media, and much was made of the local experience of its shoot.

Figure 1 Colin Farrell in *The Lobster*

Or maybe not? Perhaps because *The Lobster* made no pretence of containing its identity within the boundaries of the national, it did not provoke anything like the furore that followed the release of John Michael McDonagh's *Calvary* in 2014. It is unlikely that much attention would have been paid to that film's qualities of Irishness had its director not stated the following in an interview (Associated Press, 2014):

> I'm not a big fan of Irish movies. I don't find them to be technically that accomplished. I don't find them that intelligent. So, I'm trying to get away from the description of the movie as an Irish film … It's not an Irish film. It's just set in Ireland with lots of Irish characters … So when you're making a film there, you're trying to convince the Irish audience, no it's not like all those terrible Irish movies you've seen before.

McDonagh's interview provoked national outrage as well as some considerable soul-searching. I was one of a number of writers on Irish film contacted to comment on his words (Shortall, 2014). What was an Irish film, indeed? According to Michael Phillips, a film critic at the *Chicago Tribune*, the American idea of an Irish film is 'a story that's full of fantastically voluble and cheerily fatalistic characters' (Shortall, 2014). Such comments only serve to remind readers of the transatlantic divide – it would be unimaginable for a local Irish writer to have offered the same definition. No one else, myself included, ventured anything more substantial. Several filmmakers, however, agreed with McDonagh, suggesting that Irish audiences undervalue their own cinema and it takes success in overseas markets to persuade them of its merits. Perhaps, then, it is incorrect to guess that Irish audiences particularly want to see Irish films. They may just want to see good films, or populist films, which is largely what Irish cinemas show.

The cream of non-Hollywood film production is exported, often only showing outside their home territories at film festivals. In this way, canons that may exclude much local work are formed. Hollywood itself is reliant on the export market for profit (and on selling on its product to other platforms). Irish audiences, accustomed to see the most populist or best of other industry's films, find themselves faced, at home, with all Irish films. Of those, they are most likely to select, particularly in the cinema, the releases that most conform to the films they enjoy from other territories. Others they may catch up with on television or alternative domestic viewing platforms. Outside of Ireland, by contrast, the perception of what constitutes Irish cinema largely depends on a limited choice of popular or award-winning releases.

This leaves Irish filmmakers with a conundrum that is far from new. They are much more likely to win audiences if they make films that closely resemble global product.[2] They may have to stand by and watch filmmakers from other markets tell Irish stories that Irish audiences embrace, whereas their own films remain unwatched. Success for Irish filmmakers may be in other markets, working on non-Irish films. Neil Jordan, Jim Sheridan and Lenny Abrahamson all know this. Of these three, Jordan to date has managed best to make one for himself and one for the bank; he has also enjoyed most success with the move into long-form television even if *The Borgias* series (Showtime, 2011–13), which he created, was withdrawn before its final season. The wider Irish audiovisual industry is, as the tables in the Appendix demonstrate, largely geared towards foreign television shows. In years when major television dramas are shot in Ireland (*Penny Dreadful* (Showtime, 2014–16), *Ripper Street* (BBC/Amazon Video, 2012–16), *The Tudors* (Showtime, 2007–10)), foreign direct investment can be in excess of nine times that of local investment. Irish-made films are a small percentage of the industry, as is animation, and Irish documentaries an even smaller percentage. Audiovisual production in Ireland is therefore part of a global industry that is, in the main part, uninterested in local and national affiliations.

The globalisation of Irish production has been matched by the globalisation of Irish talent. Not just Irish actors, but directors and production personnel move easily between territories and cultures. In many ways, this has been a liberating process, and to be celebrated. It also challenges us to find new ways of talking about Irish film and to locate, within this whirlwind of competing voices, something to hold on to that is still national, local and meaningful. All this activity has taken place against a massive transformation of Irish society occasioned by the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger.

The Celtic Tiger and Irish cinema

In terms of chronology, this book takes up where *Irish National Cinema* (Barton, 2004) left off, in the early years of the twenty-first century. By then, the Celtic Tiger was already the defining influence on Irish life. The period of the Celtic Tiger is usually taken to describe the years from the mid-1990s to 2008, during which there was an unprecedented accumulation of wealth in a country otherwise associated with extremes of poverty and depopulation. In fact, by 2001, the real growth was over and a property bubble followed, which burst with the global economic collapse of 2008. During the Celtic Tiger years, the Irish economy was the marvel of not just Europe but much of the rest of the world. As Peader Kirby (2010: 2) has written:

> During the 1990s, Ireland's economy grew at an annual average rate of around 7.5 per cent and in some years towards the end of the decade surpassed ten per cent growth. Not only was this more than three times the average of European countries at the time but it made Ireland one of the most economically successful countries in the world, rivaling the growth of China.

The Celtic Tiger economy soon came to describe a lifestyle of conspicuous consumption, much of it ascribed to the property developers whose bank borrowings ultimately were part of the reason for the country's crash, when it came. The banking sector in particular came under intense public scrutiny as it turned out to have been dependent on unsustainable loans. The crash and the subsequent International Monetary Fund (IMF) series of bailouts plunged Ireland into austerity, returned it to mass emigration, and threw into the public domain a discourse of resentment and despair. Much of this found a focus in the election of anti-government independent candidates to local councils and the Dáil (Parliament), and a turn to left-wing politics, whose platform coalesced around anti-austerity marches and opposition to the imposition of water charges. In 2013, Ireland returned to economic growth, but the scars of the preceding years were evident, notably in a massive housing crisis, a public health crisis and a crisis in education. Where the Irish situation remains somewhat distinctive is that the national question remains that of the border (between Northern Ireland and the Republic). In other territories, a new political swing has seen the rise of far-right groupings and the often unpredicted articulation of a disenchanted nationalism that culminated in the election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States in 2016 and the British vote to leave the European Union (Brexit) in the same year. Irish politics remain dominated by the two major Civil War (1922–23) parties – Fianna Fáil (centre-left) and Fine Gael (centre-right). Both tend to be moderately socially progressive and fiscally conservative. Even the rise of Sinn Féin, the left-wing Republican party, has done little to stoke any major upsurge in nationalist sentiments.

Analyses of the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath abound, with most agreeing that the rising tide did not 'lift all ships', but instead exacerbated the gap between wealth and poverty in Irish society. It was during this period too that the defining influence on Irish life, the Catholic Church, also collapsed, not least because of its association with institutional abuse. This period from the Celtic Tiger onwards thus witnessed a radical change in the make-up of Irish life. The economic boom heralded in the first substantial wave of immigration, transforming the ethnic composition of the country. At the same time, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 saw in the end of the Northern 'Troubles' and the decline in the national question as another of the defining aspects of Irish life. Perhaps the most obvious watershed for the way in which Ireland imagined itself was none of these events, but the passing of the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland, widely known as the Marriage Equality referendum, of 2015, thus legalising same-sex marriage. At this moment, it seemed that the country had at last shaken off its old inhibitions and embraced modernity (a moment of optimism that overlooked the continuing ban on abortion as well as widespread social inequality and the conservative implications of marriage as an institution). In 2018, in another defining moment, the country voted by a vast majority in favour of removing the ban on abortion.

In the same Associated Press (2014) interview that provided McDonagh with the platform to air his opinions on Irish cinema, *Calvary*'s star Brendan Gleeson offered his perspective on the film's meaning and subtext:

> Obviously, I live in Ireland and that too has been central to what the film is exploring, in terms of feelings of betrayal, feelings of disillusionment, and detachment, and feeling there's no particular optimism called for at this point in terms of who you put your faith in any more.

> People can rage about various bonuses being given to bankers who have catapulted the country and the people into vast amounts of debt and awarded themselves bonuses and people are talking about the paedophile priests and things like that. So, there's a rage but it tends to be muted and a little bit repressed and kept down. People aren't marching in the streets and burning buildings down the way maybe the Greeks let off steam about their situation.

This commentary on the film chimes with the dominant critical approach to analysing Irish cinema, that is, societal. At some point, most writers in the field, myself included, have asked: what does Irish cinema tell us about Irish society? While the 'cinema as social mirror' model now seems simplistic, we can argue instead that the relationship between cinema and society is based on fantasies and projections of the social order. Gleeson's reading of *Calvary* highlights in particular two of the determining tropes of contemporary Irish cultural discourse – the loss of Church authority following the abuse revelations, and the excesses of the Celtic Tiger.

National cinemas in context

When I wrote my first overview of Irish cinema, *Irish National Cinema,* the abuse revelations were already well publicised, even though more were to come. The Celtic Tiger was still new and the Troubles were apparently over. Digital cinema was making early incursions into film practice and the two dominant auteurs were Neil Jordan and Jim Sheridan. Since then, so much has changed (just as so much has remained the same), so many more films have been made, and so much more has been written on Irish film, that I welcome the opportunity to start over with this new volume. This means not least updating my own thoughts on what constitutes a national cinema.

My monograph, *Irish National Cinema,* was part of a Routledge series on national cinemas that was published from the 1990s into the early years of this millennium (Hayward, 1993; O'Regan, 1996; Street, 1997, etc.). Together, they provided a vital questioning of the concept of the national and its relationship to a cultural medium, that is, cinema. The tensions between film as an industry and as an artform constituted one platform for debate, while the part played by cinema in the production of identities constituted another. National subsidies for film further raised the question as to what extent cinema was being promoted as a tool for articulating certain hierarchies of national belonging. Writing towards the end of this highly productive set of debates around the idea of a national cinema, Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (2006: 7) concluded that

> the economic forces sustaining any given film do not necessarily mobilise the available narrative stock in the directions preferred by the state. In other words, films may and may not reflect the ideological trajectory dominant within the nation at any one time. The reason for this potential lack of a reflective fit is that the cinematic strategies on which the hegemony of a political configuration depend always also remain available to, and can be activated by, non-dominant power blocs.

To what extent those non-dominant power blocs (if one could even categorise them so positively) have acquired a voice in Irish cinema is one of the guiding questions of this publication. *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-first Century* also fits in with more recent considerations of the place of 'minor' cinemas within a globalised production and consumption environment. Although the case of Irish cinema is fundamentally different to its Danish equivalent, not least because Irish cinema is at once postcolonial and English-language based, Mette Hjort's (2005: 33) identification of Danish cinema as a 'cultural site par excellence for the negotiation of globalizing processes' resonates with my own analysis of the Irish position.

Indeed, it is exactly the challenges of globalisation, particularly to small nations, that distinguish recent writings on national cinemas from the earlier wave of Routledge publications. Here we might also include the edited collection *The Cinema of Small Nations* (Hjort and Petrie, 2007) and *Scotland: Global Cinema* (Martin-Jones, 2009). As both these latter publications recognise, globalisation may threaten small industries, but the influx of investment by major production companies can often facilitate the making of films whose budgets would have otherwise been prohibitive in the limited funding environments of small national industries.

In his polemical *The Myth of an Irish Cinema,* Michael Patrick Gillespie (2008: 28) advocated a rejection 'of the hegemonic implications of a national cinema without ignoring the importance of Irish identity'. Yet Gillespie himself ignores the very nuanced definitions of an Irish national cinema that have gone before him. Following this line of thought, one might as well ask what an Irish identity is. Despite living in what is currently recognised as the most globalised country in the world (Statista, 2015), or perhaps because of this, what it means to be Irish, and how that is represented by us and to us, is still a hotly contested subject. 'Contemporary Ireland', David Fitzpatrick (2015) observed,

> revels in its novel reputation as the cosmopolitan hub of a 'global', 'trans-national' and 'imagined community' of those choosing, among other identities, to define themselves as 'Irish'. Being 'Irish' entails flexibility, ambivalence, self-parody, unpredictability and just a dash of the old hypocrisy. (Vote Yes for gay marriage, Yes for marriage as the foundation of the family, Yes for the family as a moral institution antecedent and superior to all positive law.)

While it would be uncommon now for any voice on the topic to limit a definition of who is Irish to those who live in Ireland (and ignore the diaspora), the question of who is entitled to consider themselves Irish was unsettlingly resolved in the referendum of 2004 that amended the 2001 Citizenship Act, which had granted Irish citizenship to all children born on the island of Ireland. Under the provisions of the 2004 Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act (Citizens Information, n.d.),

> children born of other foreign national parents in the island of Ireland on or after 1 January 2005 are not automatically entitled to Irish citizenship. These parents must prove that they have a *genuine* link to Ireland. This will be evidenced by their having 3 out of the previous 4 years reckonable residence in the island of Ireland immediately before the birth of the child. On proof of a genuine link to Ireland their child will be entitled to Irish citizenship and can apply for a certificate of nationality. (emphasis in original)

As will be discussed, questions of Irish identity/identities, whether gendered, racial, ethnic, class determined, place-specific or informed by sexual orientation, remain at the heart of most analyses of Irish films.

In this book, I seek to build on the invigorating new critical approaches to the discipline articulated by a range of scholars, while focusing on my own particular concerns around gender representation, history, and the dynamics of place. One of the most contested of these critical approaches revolves around the deployment of genre in Irish filmmaking, and it is useful to revisit briefly the key arguments around this topic.

Irish cinema and genre

Much of the recent work on Irish cinema has focused on its relationship with genre. Genre filmmaking is not entirely new – Jim Sheridan's *The Boxer* (1997), for instance borrows productively from the conventions of the boxing film, while the gangster film – *Nothing Personal* (Thaddeus O'Sullivan, 1995), for instance, and *The General* (John Boorman, 1998) – provided the means through which to discuss both the political divisions of the Troubles and Dublin criminality in the 1990s (Barton, 2002: 99–122; Monahan, 2007: 45–57; Pettitt, 2004: 25–38). The early years of the Celtic Tiger saw a rise in Dublin-based romantic comedies with the making of *About Adam* (Gerard Stembridge, 2000), *When Brendan Met Trudy* (Kieron J. Walsh, 2000) and *Goldfish Memory* (Elizabeth Gill, 2003), and the romantic comedy genre has continued to flourish with releases such as *Leap Year* (Anand Tucker, 2010), *The Stag* (aka *The Bachelor Weekend*, John Butler, 2013) and *Standby* (Ronan Burke, Rob Burke, 2014). What is new is the sudden proliferation of horror films, which now rate as the most popular genre for Irish filmmakers. This increase in genre filmmaking provided the material for Brian McIlroy's edited collection, *Genre and Cinema, Ireland and Transnationalism* (2007). In her introductory essay in that volume, Christine Gledhill (2007) reminds us that Hollywood genre filmmaking bears a double association, as at once socially conservative and as the medium through which global audiences engaged with modernity. This has been amply demonstrated by cinema historians, notably Rockett, whose *Irish Film Censorship* (2004) catalogues the relentless campaign by the policy-makers of the new Irish state against popular Hollywood cinema for fear of its contaminating modernity. On the other hand, as numerous writers have noted, the tradition of representing the Troubles through the prism of the thriller significantly diminished the potential for any nuanced exploration of the politics of the period (Barton, 2004: 157–8; McLoone, 2000: 64–8). National cinemas, Gledhill (2007: 17) further argues, have consistently drawn on, only to appropriate, generic conventions as a mode of address to local audiences:

> Hollywood's traditional genres are increasingly destabilized in their encounter with other national cinemas. It seems as if genericity has broken free from the master genres to create an international pool of protagonists, actions, icons, and performances, capable of multiple configurations and effects to which the genrified 'national' now contributes.[3]

In an Irish context, then, Irish genre cinema draws on familiar generic tropes, which it then tailors to a local context. This practice has the double function of providing the recognition factor discussed above but also of cuing Irish audiences (and scholars) to recognise in them specific local references: 'In this respect, the public nature of the "generic" – and its operation on the borders between cultural recognition and entertainment, between social objectives and subjective experience – may be particularly useful for a culture that is in the process of remaking itself' (Gledhill, 2007: 3).

Gledhill's intervention is helpful in demonstrating that genre filmmaking is neither a betrayal of avant-garde or political filmmaking, nor of an imagined 'pure' national cinema, which is a position echoed by many of the contributors to that volume and since. In an essay on Irish horror filmmaking, Emma Radley (2013: 113), for instance, argues that these films, 'do not just copy or mimic generic codes, they resignify them, transforming the monologic and monolithic "body" of Irish cinema as they go'. It is hard to know just why Radley considers Irish cinema before the arrival of the horror genre to be either monologic or monolithic; certainly by the time of her writing it was far from this. Still, it is certainly an important argument. Another useful essay written from the perspective of a scholar/filmmaker, Neasa Hardiman's '"*Once* Won't Happen Twice"' makes the case for understanding the global success of John Carney's *Once* (2007) as successfully playing up its peripherality while still conforming to certain of the generic requirements of the musical. This, she argues, is what *About Adam, When Brendan Met Trudy* and *Goldfish Memory* failed to achieve: 'Despite their poster campaigns, these films are not frothy, optimistic romances with happy endings. In this regard, they deviate significantly from genre type, a factor which may have contributed to their lack of international success' (Hardiman, 2011: 83). In other words, Irish filmmakers may so alter generic conventions that they alienate global audiences; they may be *too* Irish. This is also Diog O'Connell's argument. In her *New Irish Storytellers*, O'Connell (2010: 10) discusses the structures of narrative such films display:

> Irish film-makers appropriate devices from a range of sources – mainstream Hollywood, Independent American cinema and/or European films – and then merge them with idiosyncratic and local approaches to telling stories, creating hybrids which define an evolutionary and developmental phase in contemporary Irish cinema.

In her chapter on the Irish road movie, she focuses on three films: *I Went Down* (Paddy Breathnach, 1997)*, Accelerator* (Vinny Murphy, 2000) and *Disco Pigs* (Kirsten Sheridan, 2001). Of these, Breathnach's film played best with Irish audiences and critics but failed to make any impact on the international market. As a road movie, it defied generic expectations in certain key ways. For one, the central characters travelled from one point (Dublin) to another (Cork) but then they returned to Dublin again. As she notes, Irish topography does not lend itself to lengthy road trips, but the conventions of the road movie insist that the destination be the final point of the narrative as well as the journey. In addition, *I Went Down* did not depict its characters' inner, psychological journey, but insisted on viewing them from the outside, distancing itself through comedy. That humour, O'Connell further argued (2010: 56), was too local for exogenous audiences to 'get': 'The phrase "in the bath fella" resounds locally and through the enunciation of internationally recognized actor Brendan Gleeson, but is this enough to appeal further afield?'

The answer to this is more complicated than it seems. Several years after *I Went Down,* Gleeson starred in *The Guard* (John Michael McDonagh, 2011), a police procedural that ripped through generic conventions with comic gusto. Not only did it become the top-grossing Irish film to date with a local box office take of over €4.13m, *The Guard* enjoyed considerable financial success overseas, grossing $5,360,274 in the United States, and $14,200,000 globally (IFB/BSÉ, 2011; Box Office Mojo, 2011). The reason that *The Guard* succeeded overseas, whereas *I Went Down* and another of Breathnach's genre films, *Shrooms* (2007), failed, is not only to do with local humour, but indicates just how difficult it is to find a formula that will appeal to local and global audiences simultaneously. What is certain is that Breathnach's experience of the market is much more representative of Irish filmmaking in general than McDonagh's. Humour is, of course, notoriously difficult to communicate. National audiences may reject local jokes as swiftly as do their overseas equivalents. Yet, for certain local filmmakers, comedy is a distinctively national mode of expression. As the next chapter notes, Irish audiences are assumed to favour this mode as well. In discussing his *You're Ugly Too* (2015), the director Mark Noonan (2015) responded to a comment about his characters (that they don't like to say what they are thinking and keep things buried) as follows: 'This quality I think of as a particularly Irish quality, not saying exactly what's on your mind … Humour is the conduit to get to these true feelings.'

Globalisation and transnationalism

The critical perspectives outlined above are inevitably informed by debates around the global and the local. The two defining economic events of the period covered by this book brought home these issues in a forceful manner. The first was the Celtic Tiger and the second was the economic collapse, which was followed by a recession. Publications such as Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien's (2014) edited collection, *From Prosperity to Austerity: A Socio-cultural Critique of the Celtic Tiger and Its Aftermath* and Conn Holohan and Tony Tracy's (2014) *Masculinity and Irish Popular Culture: Tiger's Tales* have begun the process of looking back on this period of boom and bust through the cultural productions that both reflected and shaped it.

The turn towards theories of transnationalism as a critical term is in part a recognition of the need to reposition the national under conditions of globalisation.

Adrian Athique (2013: 5–6) usefully distinguishes between the two terms:

> Globalization is a term which denotes increasing interactivity and exchange and the collapse of the barriers of distance and ideology which have previously served to frustrate the triumph of a universal capitalist order. The transnational, on the other hand, is seen to denote cultural practices that take place across the national boundaries, which have structured the discussion of human geography for much of the twentieth century. Transnational phenomena do not of themselves necessarily infer, as does the term globalization, any particular ideological cohesion or historical volition.

He continues (2013: 6) that 'it is equally clear that national imaginaries continue to provide key staging grounds for transnational politics'. The concept of the transnational is an important one, in so far as it acknowledges that global cultural exchange is not always a relationship of unequal power, but is just as often defined by straightforward mobility. What, after all, are *The Lobster* or Lenny Abrahamson's *Room* (2016) but transnational films, as the latter originated in Ireland by an Irish creative team (which will be discussed further in the next chapter), but is set in North America? The transnational is particularly useful to this book's project, which aims to recognise the continuing validity of the cinematic national imaginary within the global flow of finance and production.

The spatial turn

In *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination*, Gerry Smyth (2001: xvi) opened his analysis of the cultural and spatial reconfigurations of the new Ireland of emigrants, the euro, globalisation and sudden wealth, with the observation that: 'Whether it be the Tallaght housewife or the Belfast businesswoman, the Clare farmer or the Donegal musician, the Kerry politician or the Cork hurler, issues of space bear visibly upon Irish people's lives to a greater extent than at any point in the past.'

Irish Studies has followed other disciplines in applying theories of space and place to analyses of identity politics, while film studies usefully has intertwined ideas of the social production of space with the cinematic. In 1977, Yi-Fu Tuan (1977: 6) influentially proposed the following distinction:

> 'Space' is more abstract than 'place.' What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value … The ideas 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat

> of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.

As this book will argue, within the Ireland that contemporary cinema evokes, place is increasingly contingent. Who may make their own place in the national space or how they can do so is a fraught dynamic that calls into play factors of class, gender and race.

The first writer on Irish film to foreground issues of spatiality was Conn Holohan in *Cinema on the Periphery: Contemporary Irish and Spanish Film* (2010). Holohan notes that, unlike imperial and colonial centres, Ireland is noticeable for a lack of monumentality. Dublin is, literally, short of national monuments (with no Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, Colosseum or statue of Lenin) by which the centre announces its identity. Those public buildings and monuments that do exist largely date back to the colonial administration, and thus are no longer valid as expressions of power or national identity. The monument, according to Henri Lefebvre (1991: 220), conventionally both reflected and constructed a collective identity. The monument is not just a concrete articulation of power, but also functions as public control (monumental space). The modern city, Lefebvre argues, is laid out in such as way as to keep separate the various social strata and classes:

> Strategic space makes it possible simultaneously to force worrisome groups, the workers among others, out towards the periphery; to make available spaces near the centres scarcer, so increasing their value; to organize the centre as locus of decision, wealth, power and information; to find allies for the hegemonic class within the middle strata and within the 'elite'; to plan production and flows from the spatial point of view; and so on. (Lefebvre, 1991: 384).

Thus, power and space are inextricably linked. By contrast, Holohan has argued, Dublin's lack of monumentality has opened up its spaces to multiple claims and counter-claims of ownership. Further, the lack of any fixed imagery of the city centre means that it is fundamentally unrecognisable, and many Dublin-set films (*Last Days in Dublin* (Lance Daly, 2001), *Adam & Paul* (Lenny Abrahamson, 2004)) ignore the city's actual topography as they move their characters between periphery and centre. Indeed, most fail to fix the centre as the locus of power and control:

> Thus, the city space, with its weakened central control, can be represented as a space of disorder and danger. However, this weakened control is

> also celebrated in many films as an opportunity to break down inherited meanings and imagine new and unexpected alliances within the urban space. (Holohan, 2010: 115)

Rural Ireland by contrast, has conventionally been marked by the institutional expression of power, and rural-based films such as *Korea* (Cathal Black, 1996), *The Ballroom of Romance* (Pat O'Connor, 1982) and *This is My Father* (Paul Quinn, 1998) 'portray a world where space is rigidly ordered by the institutions of church, state and family so as to regulate behaviour according to the expectations of Catholic morality' (Holohan, 2010: 114–15). The rural is equally a place identified with pastness. As John Agnew (2011: 319) writes: 'Place is often associated with the world of the past and location/space with the world of the present and future. From one perspective, place is therefore nostalgic, regressive even reactionary, and space is progressive and radical.' Even these binaries offer no clear ideological fixity, for somewhere between the pastness of place and the intangible of space come what Marc Augé (1995) has defined as non-places – the anonymous shopping mall or architecturally interchangeable airport duty-free area.

As the above terms also reflect, space intersects with time. In their monograph, *Mapping Irish Theatre*, Chris Morash and Shaun Richards underline the importance of understanding perceptions and representations of Ireland as existing in different time/spaces. Thus, the West of Ireland is frequently understood as a 'chronotope', existing out of time, or in another time (outside of modernity) (Morash and Richards, 2013: 41–2). It is, in another familiar theoretical trope, a Foucaultian 'heterotopia', that is, an imagined, idealised site within a given culture. Foucault, they remind us, offered a number of possible meanings for his concept, including (Foucault in Morash and Richards, 2013: 41) that 'their [heterotopias] role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and jumbled'. In this manner, audiences for the early Abbey Theatre peasant plays could experience on stage what in reality was a vanishing place and way of life. The same paradigms transfer easily to cinema, most particularly in the tourist films, which will be discussed in Chapter 7. Overall, these theoretical configurations offer new opportunities to consider how Irish filmmakers have used space, particularly that of the rural and small-town Ireland, to problematise traditional understandings of authority (which will be discussed further in Chapter 7); and in the case of urban films to explore questions of mobility and identity construction (Chapter 8).

Morash and Richards (2013: 122–44) suggest that Irish theatre no longer represents a place or a space, but a concept, that is, 'Ireland' not Ireland, to paraphrase. Their alternative is site-specific theatre that engages very directly with its locations. In cinema, as this book will argue, Ireland too becomes 'Ireland', as its physical geography and spatial co-ordinates are reimagined from production to production. On a very simple level, financial incentives that encourage runaway productions to use Ireland as a location for non-Irish-set films provide audiences with an uncanny recognition effect, with what is familiar now doubling for a partially recognisable Other. In other instances, filmmakers reorganise the space of the city, or shoot rural Ireland, so as to disorient the viewer, creating visual associations between these and other non-indigenous films that again create a similar uncanny doubling between here and not-here. This is a recurrent trope of the Irish horror film, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Questions of space, identity and belonging are all integral to representations of Ireland's new immigrant populations. The sole dedicated monograph on Irish cinema and black identities is Zélie Asava's *The Black Irish Onscreen* (2013), which argues that Irish screen culture in general has struggled with the conflation of blackness and Irishness, insisting instead that to be black is to be a foreigner. Also of interest in widening out this discussion is Sinéad Moynihan's *Other People's Diasporas* (2013), which is an interrogation of the unspoken diktat that the new Irish would be understood best through recourse to old narratives of Irish emigration to the United States. As I will argue in this book, in contemporary Irish cinema, the racial and ethnic Other is defined primarily in relation to the indigenous white population. They are seldom viewed for who they are, rather more for how they can illustrate certain characteristics of white Irish identities.

The past in the present

One of the striking features of the Celtic Tiger cinema was its abandonment of history films. Where the productions of the pre-Celtic Tiger years abounded with historical themes, often as a response to concerns around the origins of nationalism, the gradual ending of the Troubles following the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 signalled the decline of nationalism as a defining trope of Irish filmmaking. Even more, it seemed that, for the new generation of Irish filmmakers, concerns about the past were a thing of the past and it was the Ireland of the present that engaged their attention. Instead, then, as Chapter 5 considers, films about Irish history became dominated by British filmmakers, including

Ken Loach, Stephen Frears, Alan Parker and Peter Mullan. Only in Northern Ireland (Chapter 6) has history remained a live theme, with a number of films revisiting the hunger strikes and other historical events. Yet, as this book will argue, Irish history and the Irish past cannot be ignored, and themes of history and pastness imbue all modes of Irish cinema, including horror films, documentaries, and animation. One of the questions that haunted the Celtic Tiger, no more so than following its demise, was whether 'we' had 'lost the run of ourselves'. Had we been so besotted with materialism that we had lost sight of who 'we' were? This is a hugely problematic discourse that hinges on some 'authentic' pre-Celtic Tiger identity that 'we' shared, yet it is interesting to note that certain films (*What Richard Did* (Lenny Abrahamson, 2012), for instance) consider incidents from the Celtic Tiger as having their origins in much older histories (of class and privilege). This film and many other of the productions discussed presently are indebted to discourses of trauma and post-trauma. For obvious reasons these include any number of the Northern Ireland-set narratives. In even more general terms, as I began to detect in *Irish National Cinema*, Ireland has come to stand in for an all-purpose traumatic space, an idea that will be explored in more detail in the chapters to follow.

Gender and Irish cinema

These arguments intersect with issues around gender, race and difference. In his writings on space and national identities, Holohan has traced a movement away from a vision of rural Ireland as an emblematic home space to one where horror resides, and from the city (most commonly Dublin) as the locale for the playing out of fluid sexualities to one where (Holohan, 2015: 3): 'the disenfranchisement of the Irish male caused by economic recession is directly expressed through an image of precarious habitation'. In this sense, the failure to create place from space is as significant as the alternative. His argument mirrors a further shift, that is, from seeing Ireland as emblematically female (Mother Ireland) to one in which masculinity emerges as the marker of national identity. The volume of writings on Irish masculinity in recent years is testament to the vitality of this sub-discipline. In 2013, Debbie Ging published *Men and Masculinities in Irish Cinema* and Joseph Moser published *Irish Masculinity on Screen: The Pugilists and Peacemakers of John Ford, Jim Sheridan and Paul Greengrass*. Other more general but related works are: Fintan Walsh's *Male Trouble: Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis* (2010), Caroline Magennis and Raymond Mullen's edited collection, *Irish Masculinities: Critical Reflections on*

Literature and Culture (2011), Joseph Valente's *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture, 1880–1922* (2011) and Holohan and Tracy's *Masculinity and Irish Popular Culture: Tiger's Tales* (2014). No comparable body of work has been devoted to issues of Irish women and femininities.

In the autumn of 2015, a storm of protest engulfed the Irish theatre world when the director of the Abbey Theatre, Fiach Mac Conghail, announced the programme for the National Theatre's 2016 centenary celebrations. Titled 'Waking the Nation', the line-up included eighteen men and only two women in the selection of directors and writers. Little had been learned, it seemed, in the twenty-five years since the editors of the Field Day project published their encyclopaedic collection of Irish writing *The Field Day Anthology*, volumes I–III, only to find their efforts diminished by fury over the underrepresentation of women authors. The immediate response to Mac Conghail's error of judgement was an online campaign tagged #wakingthefeminists and a public discussion, hosted by the now contrite director, to air the issues around representation that his decision had raised. In the letters page of the *Irish Times,* Susan Liddy (2015) widened the debate out to the film industry, pointing to her own research findings with regard to the low level of female participation in Irish filmmaking and adding that 'only 24 per cent of all produced films from 1993 to 2011 with a male writer had a female character at the heart of the narrative. In comparison, 63 per cent of produced films with a female writer lead with a female protagonist.' The IFB followed with a statement issued on 12 November (IFTN, 2015) that promised the following:

> Gender inequality is an area of major concern to current board members and has been the subject of discussion at our recent meetings and in a number of external fora, including at the Galway Film Fleadh in July 2015. The IFB is currently developing a new strategy which will declare its strong and heartfelt commitment to gender equality and diversity as a strategic priority.

Liddy has since (2016) published more detailed research on this issue and, as we shall see in the next chapter, the IFB has introduced financial incentives to encourage more work by women writers and directors. Responding to studies such as this, Ging (2013: 13) has argued that male domination of the Irish film industry has not served to promote a patriarchal agenda, but rather its opposite: 'Irish cinema, in spite of being so heavily male-dominated and male-themed, has collectively produced some of the most astutely observed and gender-progressive accounts of Irish men and masculinity available outside of academic research.'

Furthermore, Irish films of the past thirty years have 'eschewed heroic, patriotic and successful male figures in favour of male subjects who are socially marginalised, criminal and underclass, depressed, suicidal, abused, forced into exile, gay, queer or transsexual, violent and variously conflicted or in crisis' (Ging, 2013: 16). Ging's nuanced study of Irish masculinities amply justifies her assertion. It also serves to highlight even more the consequences of a failure to address female subjectivities in the same manner. Why has Irish cinema not attempted to create a corresponding discourse around femininities?

Male filmmakers can, of course, tell female-centred stories (Joss Whedon and Paul Feig are often cited as exemplary in this regard). Female directors, Katherine Bigelow for instance, may favour male-dominated action films. Yet, just placing women at the centre of a narrative, or giving female characters equal narrative weight to male characters, is not enough. If it were, Irish cinema would not be particularly deficient. A survey of feature films supported by the Irish Film Board between 1994 and 2015 (listed on their website) reveals no small amount of such titles. Yet, on closer inspection, many are romcoms, general ensemble pieces and horror films. Films that actually foreground female subjectivities in a complex, thought-provoking manner are few and far between. Carmel Winters' *Snap* (2010) is one; other examples come from documentarians: *His & Hers* (Ken Wardrop, 2009) and *Pyjama Girls* (Maya Derrington, 2010). As this book will further explore, this is a complex issue related to cultural attitudes as much as funding strategies. The Abbey Theatre and Field Day controversies illustrate that white male hegemony remains blind to its own dominance. However, if the argument that film can shape discourse has any traction, then the positioning of women in Irish cinema is a matter of serious concern.

Irish cinema: a political cinema?

As the above examples illustrate, contemporary Irish cinema is above all engaged with identity politics. These may not be the big questions (what does it mean to be Irish?) but certainly reflects concerns around generation, gender and belonging. Few of the films that I will be covering in this volume are either formally or politically radical. In a discussion following the twentieth anniversary screening of *Irish Cinema: Ourselves Alone* (Donald Taylor-Black, 1995) at the Irish Film Institute in November 2015, Kevin Rockett challenged Irish filmmakers to create a more politically engaged cinema in the tradition of the ground-breaking generation of the late 1970s and early 1980s – Cathal Black, Joe Comerford, Pat Murphy and Bob Quinn. This he argued would engage younger audiences in the way in which the writings of Eimear McBride (2014) had reawakened interest in contemporary Irish writing, or experimental plays continued to attract theatre-goers.[4] In a similar vein, McLoone (2015: xiv) has written that it is no longer viable to consider Irish cinema as a national cinema, but rather we should see it as part of an international screen culture: 'the ending of the splendid isolation of the image that characterized much of the 20th century'. Local Irish screen culture thus lives within the international rather than outside of it and (McLoone, 2015): 'It seems impossible now to envisage any way in which the more experimental, politically engaged cinema of the 1970s and 1980s could be accommodated within this culture.'

I am not so sure that Irish cinema is no longer a national cinema. Flynn and Tracy (2017) usefully point to the internationalisation of the industry, both in terms of films part funded in Ireland, such as *The Lobster* and *Room*, but also Paddy Breathnach's *Viva* (2015) a Spanish-language film set in Cuba, written by Mark O'Halloran, and nominated as Ireland's entry for Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards, and films with little Irish thematic content co-produced by Irish production companies. As they argue (which will be discussed in the next chapter), this kind of internationalisation is now clearly official Irish funding policy. Eye-catching as such releases are, the majority of Irish-made films remain Irish set and Irish themed. Many of these films are too flimsy to bear the weight of analysis as emblematic of anything in particular; nevertheless, as I hope to argue in the following chapters, taken together, as a layering of representations, they do indeed provide a fascinating way of measuring how Irishness has been culturally configured on film in this century. Hence, the usefulness of the concept of the transnational, espoused by Flynn and Tracy as best describing the industry, and the possibilities that this term offers for retrieving, rather than dismissing, the national.

To do so, I will be drawing on and developing the issues of globalisation, transnationalism, gender formations, the construction of place and of the past that have informed theoretical approaches to Irish cinema in recent years. For reasons of space, I am confining my analyses (except in my discussion of emigration narratives in Chapter 5) to films made in and about the island of Ireland and reluctantly putting aside recent developments in images of Irish America, or the very compelling images of Irishness in films such as *The Proposition* (John Hilcoat, 2005) or *Jindabyne* (Ray Lawrence, 2006). My opening chapter will place Irish filmmaking within the context of the Irish film industry. Following that, I devote chapters to animation, the horror genre, documentary filmmaking, Irish history on film, post-Troubles cinema, images of the countryside and images of the city. I decided against dedicating one chapter to questions of gender;

it is, however, my intention to foreground representations of women in contemporary Irish filmmaking throughout this book. I have interspersed chapters with a brief analysis of a short film.

I cannot discuss all films made in the period under examination – from the Celtic Tiger through the recession to the recovery – and my selection is intended as representative rather than comprehensive. My omissions are therefore multiple, not least my omission of the vast output of the experimental film sector led by filmmakers such as Claire Langan, Maximilian Le Cain and Rouzbeh Rashidi. Their work follows on the tradition of art cinema associated with the pioneering feminist filmmaker, Vivienne Dick, and the reader is directed to the comprehensive discussion of Dick's films in the edited collection, *Between Truth and Fiction: The Films of Vivienne Dick* (O'Brien et al., 2009).

Finally, I want to air a concern that has been creeping into how I see the debates on Irish cinema outlined above and in the following chapters relating to public discourse. That concern is that Irish cinema lacks a robust critical culture. The demise of the journal *Film West*, the fluctuating publication of *Film Ireland*, the supplanting of analysis with interviews, particularly with stars under contractual obligation to promote the film, and the influence of aggregator sites, have seriously diminished the space available to analyse Irish films and film culture in any depth. Without Tony Tracy (and latterly Roddy Flynn's) invaluable 'Year in Review' section in *Estudios Irlandeses*, whose reviews I have cited throughout, no open-access site would exist to catalogue and analyse Irish film releases. Without a critical culture, Irish films are being released into a void and filmmakers remain divorced from their audiences. The politics of neoliberalism sidelined cultural pleasure in favour of a model that advocated that every artefact has, first and foremost, a monetary value. I return to the utilitarian argument in the next chapter; this book, however, reflects my own pleasure and engagement in Irish cinema and if it gives rise to some debate on the film culture out of which it arises, then something will have come of it.

Notes

1 On 18 June 2018, the name of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/the Irish Film Board was changed to Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland.

2 For more detailed box office figures, see the Appendix. The box office is analysed in more detail in Chapter 1.

3 The term 'genericity' was coined by Jim Collins in: 'Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the New Sincerity', in Collins, Collins and Radner (1993: 242–63).

4 The screening and discussion were held on 5 November 2015 at the Irish Film Institute, Dublin.

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