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Irish Intolerance: Exploring Its Roots in Irish Cinema

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I very strongly believe that a lot of what has been going on in this country for the last year, to me it's an offence to common decency actually. I think that it's an offence to ourselves and to our own self respect as people ... the kind of unpleasant and insinuating remarks that people, the kind of deep suspicion, and it is not what I know Irish people to be and yet we suddenly find ourselves confronted with this awful thing and finding a part of us exposed ... (Gerry Stembridge)

These comments were made by Irish film director Gerry Stembridge during an interview concerning his TV drama *A Black Day at Black Rock* (2001) on the popular RTE talk show *The Late Late Show* in January 2001. *A Black Day at Black Rock* is set in the fictional Irish village of Black Rock, many of whose residents react with fear and “deep suspicion” when they are informed that thirty asylum seekers are to be housed in a hostel in their community. Stembridge described, in the same interview, the inspiration for the film as developing “around last April I seem to remember there seemed to be any amount of town hall meetings, interviews on the radio and people turning up on television ...”. Indeed, in April 2000 there was just such a town hall meeting of local residents of the County Clare village of Corofin that shared many similarities with the central scene in *A Black Day at Black Rock*, in which various racist accusations are made against the refugees to be placed in the village. The following report appeared in *The Irish Times* following the Corofin meeting regarding a group of twenty asylum-seekers that the Department of Justice wished to place in the local tourist hostel:

As the hall steadily filled with people of all ages, the local priest stood at the back [...]. The battle-weary officials [...] took their positions behind a table, and braced themselves for yet another outpouring of anger, cynicism, and suspicion that the meeting was just a PR exercise. The questions came thick and fast [...].

“What health checks have been done on these people?” demanded one woman.

“What do we know about the criminal backgrounds?” said another. There were boos when one of the officials, Tom Ryan, said health screening was done on a voluntary basis and could not be forced on anyone.

“Ridiculous”, shouted a blonde woman dressed in jeans near the front [...].

Tom's colleague, Colette Moray, stood with her arms folded across her chest as she detailed the housing crisis facing the State. “We are not trying to force large numbers of people on communities”, she said. “We are just trying to put roofs over people's heads”. (Haughey 8)

These narrow-minded reactions towards immigrants in Irish society are reminiscent of an insular and prejudiced Irish identity that developed in Ireland following independence, an identity that has been explored in contemporary Irish film as Irish directors have sought to uncover the roots of contemporary resistance towards the changing nature of the Irish ethnic landscape.

The change in Irish economic policies during the late 1950s and early 1960s brought a major shift in the understanding of who and what it is to be 'Irish'. While the economic and culturally nationalist policies of post-independence governments had emphasised a reductionist approach to Irishness, such an approach could no longer be sustained in light of an increasingly open Irish economy and society. Indeed, by the year 2000 Ireland was so successful in attracting such foreign capital that Irish government agencies had to go abroad to invite foreign workers to meet the shortfall in labour in Ireland (Beesley 16). According to a study entitled *Labour Migration into Ireland* published in October 2003 by the Immigrant Council of Ireland, "up to 200,000 foreign immigrants have come here since 1996, comprising five per cent of the population ... Only Luxembourg has a higher rate within the European Union" ("Scale" 19). However, the increased international exposure that Ireland received due to the economic miracle of the 'Celtic Tiger' also attracted thousands of asylum-seekers (such as those alluded to in *A Black Day at Black Rock*) to Ireland in search of a better life.

Arjun Appadurai has referred to these flows of people across the globe as "ethnoscapes" or the "landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers and other moving groups and individuals" (33). As global technologies and finance become increasingly mobile and the world appears ever smaller through media such as film, TV, and the internet, the old stabilities of place and people are more and more "shot through with" what Appadurai calls "the woof of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move, or fantasies of wanting to move" (33). This brings us to what Appadurai calls "one of the central forces of the modern world" (37): "deterritorialization", a term which applies not just to technology and finance, but equally to "ethnic groups, sectarian movements, and political formations, which increasingly operate in ways that transcend specific territorial boundaries and identities" (49).

When one considers the subject of the increasing deterritorialisation of the planet, it seems that the Irish experience has much to offer. There can be little doubt that an important determinant of the content of Irish film today is the existence of the huge Irish diaspora abroad. Indeed, the Wicklow Film Commission has claimed that Hollywood itself in southern California, the home of the American film industry and the origin of most films in Irish cinemas (and often of much of the funding for films made in Ireland), was actually named after Hollywood in West Wicklow (Linehan, "Movie Trail" 38). Kevin Rockett has highlighted, in *The Irish Filmography*, the large

numbers of films made by US studios and filmmakers in Ireland during the twentieth century. Out of a total of over 2,000 Irish themed films listed in the filmography, Rockett could find “not much more than one-tenth” that were actually made in Ireland (i).¹ This trend has continued since the publication of the filmography in 1995, so much so that by 2003 Ireland had become “one of six preferred locations for regular productions by US financiers and producers” (Screen Producers Ireland 22). While Irish filmmakers have their own reasons for exploring Ireland’s past, reasons I will return to shortly, one of the consequences of American funding of Irish films is that often such films, like much Irish-American cinema of the ‘old country’, display “a mostly romantic, revisionist view of Ireland’s past, with little relation to the identity or reality of Irish people in the twentieth century” (Mulkerns 50). As Appadurai notes in *Modernity at Large*,

deterritorialization creates new markets for film companies [...]. But the homeland is partly invented, existing only in the imagination of the deterritorialized groups, and it can sometimes become so fantastic and one-sided that it provides the fuel for new ethnic conflicts. (49)

While Irish people have, as a consequence of emigration, formed ethnic communities throughout the world, sometimes enduring hardship in these situations and environments, Ireland during the Celtic Tiger years faced the unusual situation that not only did Irish people no longer have to emigrate out of necessity, but Ireland was attracting many thousands of immigrants every year in search of work. However, not all Irish people, as *A Black Day at Black Rock* suggests, were willing to accept these new immigrants as part of Irish society. While there has been some notable short film work which engaged with the immigrant experience and contemporary reactions, such as Alan Gilsean’s *Zulu 9* (2001), Darragh O’Connell’s *Racism* (2001) and Graham Cantwell’s *Fáilte go hÉireann* (2005), *A Black Day at Black Rock* was one of the first contemporary dramas that engaged directly with controversial issues associated with Ireland’s changing ethnoscape, albeit through the medium of TV. Another early example is Kieron J. Walsh’s *When Brendan Met Trudy* (2000), which features a Nigerian refugee, Edgar (Maynard Eziashi), as one of the film’s characters. It presents a somewhat more positive picture, however, than *A Black Day at Black Rock*, in so far as in this portrayal local residents and the film’s male lead Brendan (Peter McDonald) are supportive of the refugee and are depicted protesting vociferously as Edgar is dragged to the back of a Garda van to be deported. While the refugee issue is a relatively minor aspect of the film as a whole, one feels that Walsh and the film’s screenwriter, Roddy Doyle, are cautiously exploring a problem that existed in Irish society at that time.² These tentative initial engagements with this issue have given way to more in-depth and at times deeply unsettling depictions of discrimination and sometimes abuse of immigrants evident in later Irish films, including *Capital Letters* (2004; dir. Ciaran

O'Connor), *The Front Line* (2007; dir. David Gleeson) and *W.C.* (2007; dir. Liam Ó Mochain), some of which are discussed elsewhere in this collection. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I will be focusing on themes apparent in Irish film just before and during the Celtic Tiger period itself, usually associated with the years 1995–2007. In particular, I am concerned with exploring how Irish filmmakers sought to identify the roots of contemporary racism through an exploration of intolerance in Ireland's past and towards long-resident minorities within Irish society, including the Traveller community and homosexuals. While successive Bord Fáilte campaigns abroad have emphasised Ireland's 'friendliness' and 'openness' to foreigners,³ the reality is not always as advertised. In 2003, for example, racism complaints outnumbered sex discrimination complaints taken under the Employment Equality Act in the Republic (Healy 5), while a report published on 26 February 2004 on behalf of the Irish Government funded "Know Racism" campaign by Millward Brown IMS found that Travellers and asylum-seekers were the minorities viewed most negatively by the majority population in Ireland. According to the report, 54 per cent of people believed most asylum-seekers were bogus, while a fifth said Travellers should not have the same rights as the settled community (Holland 12)

Peter Cassells, the former General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, suggested in 2000 that "the ugly monster of racism [...] has been lurking in the shadows of Irish society" and was finally becoming "manifest on our streets" (Kelly 7). *Irish Times* journalist John Waters had anticipated and developed this point in 1998 arguing that racism in Ireland "is the expression of the sense of inferiority which has been imparted by the colonial experience". He contended that Ireland's colonial history had given many Irish people an inferiority complex which they were now, with the unfamiliar influx of immigrants, offloading onto a third party they felt superior to. Waters borrowed heavily from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (180) when he argued that in Ireland

precisely because we are white, this process was compounded by a confused effort to distinguish ourselves from our erstwhile masters, while paradoxically identifying with them all the more. The condition became full-blown on independence. Once Pearse and the other 1916 leaders had been executed, and their grasp of the subtleties of freedom thereby eliminated, it was inevitable that the initial years of independence would be characterized by cultural protectionism and a backlash against everything 'alien'. A simplistic notion of 'Irishness', forged as the inverted image of 'Englishness', was let loose in the land (16)

This insular cultural protectionism that characterised Irish society after independence has been portrayed in a significant number of Irish films over the past fifteen years. Indeed, the former Chief Executive of the Irish Film Board, Rod Stoneman, revealed in an interview in the mid-1990s his curiosity regarding "the preponderance of projects [received] that are set in the 50s. It's a particular

moment of Irish history”, Stoneman continued, “which quite a lot of films seem to circle around and I’m interested in the reasons behind that” (Linehan, “The Story”). John Hill has argued that such Irish films are “in a sense, in a displaced form dealing with current concerns”. It is a comment reminiscent of Edward Said, who described appeals to the past as “among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals”, Said continues, “is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past is really past, over and concluded or whether it continues albeit in different forms perhaps” (1).

Director Kevin Liddy echoed these sentiments in an interview when he asserted that “you can’t push the past away and say it never happened. You have to have retrospective knowledge before you can go on” (Fennell 15). Liddy’s film *Country* (2000) is a powerful portrayal of the consequences of intolerance. Liddy has indicated that his film goes back to his childhood in Ireland, “where expressing yourself or having an interest in the finer things of life like music or art would have been viewed with suspicion” (Fennell 15). He could well be describing the society portrayed in another Irish film from the 1990s, Suri Krishnama’s *A Man of No Importance* (1995), which features an early-1960s Dublin suspicious of the lead character Alfie Byrne’s (Albert Finney) interest in literature and these finer things in life. Alfie is a bus conductor, amateur theatre producer and lover of the works of Oscar Wilde. However, he is also a homosexual in an Ireland that still considered homosexuality immoral and illegal: “The love that dare not speak his name”, Alfie remarks at one point in the film. Carney (Michael Gambon), Alfred’s neighbour and butcher, describes it as “the unspeakable sin ... homeopathy”, illustrating both his homophobia and ignorance. Alfie has fallen in love with the driver of his bus Robbie (Rufus Sewell), whom he refers to as Bosie, but he can never reveal his love. Ireland was not yet ready to accept homosexuals as equals. Alfie must confine his homosexuality to his musings in front of the mirror, dressed in a silk bathrobe and with his hair styled in a Wildean fashion. However, he feels the need to tell people about himself, particularly his “Bosie”, but this need is balanced by his certain knowledge that it could only lead to rejection. Eventually he comes out in a local pub. Dressed in floppy hat, flamboyant pink scarf, makeup and flower, he asks a young man for “a cuddle”. However his efforts only leave him robbed and beaten on the street. His coming out does reveal, though, his true friends, who accept him as the man they have always liked, rather than the pervert society would wish to portray him as. The goodness of ordinary people is shown to be superior to the narrow-mindedness of Church and State.

It is this narrow-mindedness that hinders Alfie’s production of a version of Wilde’s play *Salomé*. Alfie meets with firm opposition from the local Sodality of the Sacred Heart, of which Carney is a member. Carney considers the play to be “salacious stuff ... nothing but smut”, while the Sodality

apparently disapproves of “immodest dancing”. Meanwhile Alfie’s sister, Lily (Brenda Fricker), and Carney attempt to break into Alfie’s room as they distrust the fact that he has so many books: “I’ll find those books of his and have them destroyed”, Lily threatens at one stage. Lily is equally distrustful of the unwelcome “foreign” meals that Alfie makes for her. Overall, we are presented with a picture of Ireland that may be developing economically and industrially, but culturally and intellectually is very much clinging to the values of a rural and Catholic society, a society unprepared for the changes ahead.

Cathal Black’s *Korea* (1995) (based on a short story of the same title by John McGahern) is also a searing indictment of narrow-mindedness, though this time in rural Ireland of the 1950s. Its central characters are John Doyle (Donal Donnelly) and his son Eamon (Andrew Scott), who are the last to fish the local lake in County Cavan for their living. However, the tide of modernity in the form of yet another “ethnoscape”, this time tourism, means that John is to lose his fishing rights to protect stocks for the tourists.

The shadow of the United States hangs heavily over *Korea*. Its place and importance in Irish life is the dynamic that drives the film. The film’s name itself refers to the Korean War, in which the United States played a pivotal role. One of the central images features a coffin draped in the stars and stripes moving across an Irish lake, to be buried on an island graveyard. Emigration which ravaged Ireland during the 1950s, a decade in which over 400,000 people left the country, has taken Luke Moran, the son of John Doyle’s affluent neighbour, Ben Moran, to America. While there, like many other emigrants of the time, he was conscripted into the US forces and sent to fight in Korea where he was killed. It is Luke’s death and its aftermath which lead to the film’s climax.

The central conflict in Black’s film is one between an insular and xenophobic localism versus an all-embracing global culture, a conflict that is equally important in Ireland today. John Doyle recognises that tourists have become more important than the fishermen. As he remarks at one point in the film: “We impoverish the fishing for the tourists”. As the policy of attracting foreign investment and consequently foreign culture became primary, indigenous cultural practices, such as fishing for one’s living on the lake, suffered. But while this policy may have changed indigenous ways of life, it also highlighted the cultural insularity that was encouraged before, and after, independence, as Ireland sought to define her own unique identity. John Doyle fears and resents change. He scoffs at the electricity being brought into rural Ireland. “The electric”, he asks at one stage, “what do we need it for?”.

Likewise, John finds it very difficult to let go of the past. He has never lost his bitterness over the civil war. As Eamon says at one point: “His civil war gun had hung on the wall for years, a reminder, he said, of a country he had fought for but was stolen from him”. John can’t forget the war and is haunted by images of a young man being executed. This darkness that gave birth to the

nation has darkened his soul. It has turned him in on himself. It has made him mean and overprotective of everything he regards as his own, including his son. He forbids Eamon to see Una Moran (Fiona Molony), the sister of the dead soldier Luke, because she is the daughter of Ben Moran (Vass Anderson). Moran accepted the Anglo-Irish Treaty that established the Irish Free State in 1922 and fought for it against John, and it is Moran whom John confronts after his licence to fish has been taken away, accusing him of “being on the side of the traitors. But now you’ve sold everything, everything”.

Una Moran represents in John’s mind a betrayal and his son being with her another loss. He would prefer at the end of the film for his son to go to the US, and even to die there, than be with her. Indeed, we see again in this aspect of the story the strong presence of the United States, as it has also encouraged great greed locally. When Ben Moran loses his son Luke in the Korean War, it is not his loss that neighbours discuss and mourn, but rather the fact that he will gain financially in compensation. At the funeral one local saunters up to John Doyle to remark: “They say Ben Moran will do well out of the compensation”. And so John buys the ticket for Eamon to go the States, not just to keep Ben Moran’s daughter from being with his son, but equally in the hope of the money Eamon might send home, even the reputed \$10,000 he might receive if Eamon is killed with the US army.

The darkness that John Doyle holds within him is reflected in the cinematography of Director of Photography Nic Morris. Throughout the film the Irish landscape is portrayed as a dark, wet, suffocating environment. The inter-cutting of shots of eels in a cage underwater with shots of the landscape accentuates the suffocating nature of the world that John and Eamon Doyle inhabit.

Maurice O’Callaghan’s *Broken Harvest* (1995) shares many similarities with *Korea*. While the film concerns the legacy of the Irish Civil War, it does so, however, from the standpoint of a man in the United States. The film opens in present-day New York and moves from there back in time through a man’s memories to the 1950s, an Ireland where the bitterness and suffering of the War of Independence and the subsequent Civil War were still fresh in people’s minds.

Arthur O’Leary (Colin Lane), the central character in *Broken Harvest*, is a man clinging to the memories and traditions of an older Ireland rapidly being replaced through foreign cultural influences and technologies. As the film’s narrator says in the film’s opening scenes, “My father was obsessed with the past”. O’Leary never accepted Ireland as it developed after independence or the Anglo-Irish Treaty that had established it and which he fought against in the Civil War. He forbids his son Jimmy (Darren McHugh) from bringing English comics into the house as they are “British propaganda” and “foreign trash”. Throughout the film, his farming techniques and machinery, including his pride and joy, his horse, are contrasted with those of his neighbour, Josie Hogan (Niall O’Brien), who fought to defend the Treaty and has embraced modernity. In the scene

that gives the film its name we see Josie save his harvest with the aid of the modern tractor. Arthur's horse, however, is too slow and the harvest is "broken" as he fails to save his crop before the rains come.

Arthur O'Leary's refusal to accept modernity reflects his fear and distrust of what is new or "foreign". It is this distrust that turns "harmless things" (as Josie calls them) like comics into symbols of British oppression. Indeed, it is Jimmy's theft of "thrupence" from Josie's dues money to the priest in order to buy the "British Propaganda" Tiger comic that is the catalyst in the film for the reopening of old civil war animosities between Arthur and Josie. When Josie's name is read from the pulpit as having paid only 19 shillings, rather than the £1 he gave Jimmy to pass on to the priest, he accuses Jimmy of stealing from him. When Arthur denies that Jimmy did such a thing, what begins as an argument over whether or not Jimmy took the price of a comic becomes an argument over the rights and wrongs of accepting the Treaty. Later when Jimmy admits to taking the money, Arthur reprimands him by saying, "I thought I told you to get that foreign trash out of this house".

This theme of intolerance within Irish society is also explored in Kevin Liddy's *Country* (2000). Liddy returns again to the 1950s and a rural Ireland in which people are unprepared for the changes just around the corner. The film revolves around the experiences of the Murphy household. It is a home where the atmosphere is thickened with the unspoken sins of the past. Frank Murphy (Des Cave) is a recovering alcoholic and widower who lives with his young son Jack (Dean Pritchard) and older son Conn (Gary Lydon). Following the death of Jack's uncle Jimmy, his aunt Miriam (Lisa Harrow) comes to stay with the family for a while, and her feminine presence brings some stability and hope to the Murphy household. However, in a cathartic scene, Conn reveals his father's involvement in his mother's death to Miriam's horror and the 'family' disintegrates. As *Irish Times* critic, Michael Dwyer, has noted, *Country* contrasts "images of freedom in nature with the confinement and repression of human lives as it authentically captures an atmosphere of suspicion, curiosity and emotional stiflement [sic] among characters haunted by the spell of the past" (54).

In *Country* we are presented with an Ireland of the 1950s where Travellers are regarded by many as second-class citizens. There is a clear sense of fear and distrust expressed in this film towards this community, and it is significant that its period of production and release coincided with a time in Ireland that witnessed significant ethnic unrest, not just towards Travellers but also towards other minorities in Irish society. Indeed, the fact that a local County Councillor in May 1998, when *Country* was in pre-production, could call for the tagging of Travellers in order for authorities to keep track of them is indicative of an undercurrent of intolerance in Irish society that has never dissipated (Tynan 13). While in *Country* an attack on a Travellers' site is one of the film's central

scenes, such attacks have continued into the twenty-first century including a similar serious attack on a Travellers' site in Ennis, Co. Clare, in December 2003 (Deegan and Barnes 2). Furthermore, concerns have continued to be expressed in the Irish media regarding ongoing racism towards Travellers over the past decade (Smyth 40).

In *Country* this intolerance is personified in the figure of Mike Clifford (Pat Laffan), whose bigotry is outlined in one scene when he advises Jack, who has befriended a Traveller, that it must be "like with like, Murphy. If people stuck with their own kind there'd be a lot less trouble". It is Clifford's prejudice that is the catalyst that eventually incites the beer-fuelled locals to attack and destroy the Travellers' encampment in order to force them to move on.⁴

Brian Friel has said of his own theatrical work that "the only merit in looking back is to understand how you are and where you are at this moment" (Friel). His play *Dancing at Lughnasa*, which was adapted by Frank McGuinness in 1998 for Pat O'Connor's film of the same name, looks back to Ireland in 1936 and features a country unprepared for the changes to come in its society. In the figure of Father Jack (Michael Gambon), the film features the return to Ireland of a missionary seduced by the exotic culture of the Ugandan tribes with whom he has lived for some twenty-five years. However, his return to Ballybeg is viewed with concern by the local clergy, who fear his impact on the local community. As his bus rolls into the village, it is watched carefully by the local parish priest. Marks of the foreign culture with which he has lived, such as a tribal facemask, are looked upon with disgust by Fr. Carolan (John Kavanagh), when Fr. Jack's case falls to the ground. Fr. Carolan's appearance in the film represents a significant change to Friel's original text where the unnamed priest never actually appears on stage. He is central to the disintegration of the Mundy household as it is Fr. Carolan who removes Kate (Meryl Streep), the main provider in the Mundy household, from her teaching position due to Fr. Jack's presence in the Mundy household. These episodes in the film in particular are indicative of this society's fear of the foreign culture which Fr. Jack represents.

Dancing at Lughnasa is but one of several films (including Neil Jordan's *The Butcher Boy* (1997), Syd McCartney's *A Love Divided* (1999), Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002) and Aisling Walsh's *Song for a Raggy Boy* (2003)) which are set between the 1930s and 1960s and explore the powerful role of the Catholic Church and its relationship to abuse and intolerance in Ireland's past. *A Love Divided* (1999) is based on an actual incident: the Fethard-on-Sea boycott of 1957. Sheila (Orla Brady), a Protestant, is married to Sean Cloney (Liam Cunningham), a Catholic. Following their wedding, Sheila had signed the "Ne Temere" pledge, obligatory for all Protestants marrying Catholics at that time, which required her to raise her children as Catholics. This included giving them a Catholic schooling. However, when it is time to send her children to school, Sheila wishes to choose with Sean their children's form of education, rather than having the local priest choose for

them. When Sean insists, under pressure from the local parish priest Fr. Stafford (Tony Doyle), that they will have to go to the local Catholic school, Sheila flees with her children to Belfast and from there to Scotland. In Fethard-on-Sea, all Protestants are blamed for Sheila leaving with her children, and Fr. Stafford calls for the people to impose a boycott on all Protestant businesses. Eventually violent acts are also perpetrated against the local Protestants, including an arson attack on Sheila's father's farm. In common with other contemporary Irish films, *A Love Divided* is keen to point out that beneath "the picturesque surface of Irish small village life something very nasty was just waiting to break out" (Barton 36). As Sean explains to Sheila before their reconciliation towards the end of the film, "It's not over you. It's always been there under the surface, waiting for an excuse". Religious intolerance is also featured in David Keating's *The Last of the High Kings* (1996),⁵ particularly in the character of Cathleen, played by the American actress Catherine O'Hara (probably best known for her role as the mother in the *Home Alone* film series) in one of the most over-the-top performances in contemporary Irish film. O'Hara plays an obsessive Catholic Nationalist and Fianna Fáil supporter in 1977 Dublin (on the eve of a general election) who believes that her children are direct descendants of the High Kings of Tara. She clearly associates Irish identity with religion, and intolerance, throughout the film. In one scene she berates the neighbouring Protestant family for asking her daughter to get down off a dividing wall between their two houses: "These are Griffin children, pure Irish blood descended from the High Kings of Ireland. They can walk their Celtic wall anytime ... we're a free people now ... Why don't you hump off back to Britain". Despite the neighbour's protestations that he is in fact Irish, Cathleen insists, "You're a prody, aren't ya ... I'm not about to let our sovereignty be undermined by a bunch of blowins ... this is one family you'll never conquer you prody bloodsucker". This final line also illustrates the fear associated with such insular nationalism. This fear is such that Cathleen cannot bear to have her son, Frankie (Jared Leto), go out with a Protestant girl. In fact even talking to Protestants is forbidden: "Do you know what those two girls are?", she asks Frankie at one point in the film, "Protestants. You stay away from them. There's an international conspiracy between Communists and Protestants and I'm not having you in the middle of it". Later in the film, when Frankie returns home late one night after his first sexual adventure with one of these "Protestant" girls, Jane (Lorraine Pilkington), Cathleen confronts him on the stairs: "You are not running around with a Protestant as long as you're living under my roof", she insists, "I forbid it ... Did you commit sex with a Protestant? ... go and stay with your prody slut if she'll have you, you're no son of mine".

Cathleen's solution to this situation is to call in the local priest, apparently to try to talk some sense into Frankie. Frankie, though, is unapologetic and points out the hypocrisy of Cathleen's politics. Cathleen asks Frankie to "think about Parnell, and Wolfe Tone and poor old Robert Emmet and

now you've become a prody lover". However, Frankie's response reflects a changing attitude among the younger generation towards previous insular understandings of Irishness: "Most of the Irish revolutionaries were Protestant: Emmet, Parnell, Wolfe Tone - all Protestant. Half of the so-called heroes who you think of as having noble blood were Protestant".

Rock music is an important aspect of Frankie's identity in *The Last of the High Kings*, particularly the tunes of one of the most successful Irish rock bands of the 1970s, Thin Lizzy, a number of whose songs grace the film's soundtrack. His mother's opinion of his taste in music is probably best illustrated in one scene in which we see her throw his record collection out the second-storey window of their home. While Irish film uncovers some of the roots of contemporary intolerance in Ireland, it also recognises the important role global cultural flows, such as rock music, have played in mobilising Irish youth and Irish society to change. Hollywood, as Kevin Rockett has argued ("Aspects" 20), offered liberating alternatives to the repressive ideologies of Church and State in Ireland post-independence, but British punk music plays a similar role for the youth of 1970s Dublin in Johnny Gogan's *The Last Bus Home* (1997). Gogan's film is set in 1979 among the teenage generation who are searching for an identity through their music and their sexuality in an Ireland not very tolerant to either. The day the Pope comes to Ireland, Reena (Annie Ryan) is one of the few who is not interested in going to see him. She stays at home but quickly gets bored as almost all have gone to the Phoenix Park, scene of the Papal mass. However, she meets up with Paul Jessop (Brian F. O'Byrne), who wants to form a band, and Reena offers to manage it. Gogan uses the experiences of the members of this band, the "Dead Patriots", to examine the changing landscape of Ireland in the 1970s, changes that still reverberate in Ireland today.

In common with Alfie Byrne in *A Man of No Importance*, the band's drummer Petie (Anthony Brophy) is homosexual, but he fears people's reactions if he is to 'come out'. Despite the fact that Ireland is changing, homosexuality is still considered illegal by the state and immoral by the Catholic Church and many Irish citizens. Indeed, in one scene Paul and Reena rescue Petie from being beaten up by a group of homophobic skinheads. However, later in the film Petie is devastated by his parents' condemnation of him when he reveals his homosexuality to them, and following his cruel 'outing' by Paul during a gig, he appears to commit suicide by walking into the path of the last bus home.

Following the disintegration of the band, Reena leaves Ireland in search of work in the US. While packing her suitcase, her Granny tells her of Reena's parents' experiences on first moving to the area Reena grew up in:

Your grandfather used to tease your parents when they moved out here. He said they were like the first settlers in America huddled in fear waiting for the ingens to swarm down from

the hills and rob their homesteads. He and I grew up in a young country full of ideals and so much to fight for.

However, the goals and concerns of Reena and many of her generation have changed. The very name of the band, “The Dead Patriots”, and the juxtaposition of Paul’s picture on the poster surrounded by the signatories of the 1916 proclamation makes it clear that they are making their own proclamation, one of independence from the repressive society that went before.

This type of suffocating society is also condemned by the writer James Joyce in Pat Murphy’s *Nora* (2000), a film set in Dublin and on the continent prior to Irish independence. *Nora* charts the early stages of the relationship of Nora Barnacle and her husband, James Joyce. During the film, Murphy emphasises Joyce’s frustration with the fear and repression he experiences in Irish society. In one scene Joyce (Ewan McGregor) declares to Nora (Susan Lynch) that

this country – there’s nothing natural about it, nothing free and open. People paralysed by fear, frightened of the Church ... do you know what I do Nora on the nights that I’m not with you? I go to whores to cleanse myself of the squalor and pretence that passes for normal life in this country

The economic and cultural changes in Irish society particularly since the late 1950s have required a reevaluation of understandings of Irishness itself. The importance of this undertaking has been increased with the fear and mistrust expressed by some Irish people towards the thousands of immigrants, particularly asylum-seekers, who came to Ireland predominantly during the so-called “Celtic Tiger” years. Through its examination of the country’s past, contemporary Irish film has uncovered some of the origins of this intolerance. It was proper that in the centenary year of Bloomsday, one of Joyce’s most eloquent and convincing critiques of intolerance, Leopold Bloom, was featured in an adaptation of Joyce’s *Ulysses, Bloom* (2004), directed by Seán Walsh. The film addresses bigotry towards the Jewish community, of which Bloom is a member, particularly in the figure of Stephen Dedalus’s Headmaster, Mr. Deasy, and the nationalist known as “The Citizen”. Walsh somewhat truncates Bloom’s famous speech to “The Citizen” (from the “Cyclops” episode of the original text) but manages to preserve the spirit while adding to the contemporary resonance. Responding to “The Citizen’s” question of “What is your nation?”, Bloom replies in the film, “Ireland, I was born here. Ireland. And I belong to a race too that is hated and persecuted. Also now this very moment, this very instant, robbed, plundered, insulted, persecuted ...”. When John Wyse, one of the regulars in Barney Kiernan’s tavern where this scene takes place, encourages Bloom to “stand up to it then with the force like men”, Bloom replies, “Its no use, force, hatred, history, all that – that’s not life for men and women – insult and hatred and everybody knows that it’s the very opposite of that that is really life – love ...”. As this scene ends with Bloom’s continued defence of

his Jewish heritage against the taunting of “The Citizen” (with Bloom reminding all present that their saviour, Jesus Christ, was himself a Jew), there is a significant addition by Walsh to the original text. As the camera pans down from a shot of the sky over Dublin to an exterior shot of the church where the next scene will take place, the soundtrack includes the continued accusations of “The Citizen”: “Foreigners coming in here, stealing our wives, stealing our work”, a comment sadly reminiscent of some of the racist remarks which have been the unfortunate reactions of some Irish people towards the changing nature of the country’s ethnoscape.

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Endnotes

¹ Furthermore, a considerable proportion of this one-tenth was made by foreign directors and production companies.

² Roddy Doyle would explore the immigrant experience in Ireland in considerably more depth in subsequent work, in particular his short story collection *The Deportees and Other Stories* (Viking Adult, 2008) and the short film *New Boy* (2008; dir. Steph Green), for which he wrote the screenplay.

³ Indeed, the bi-monthly official magazine of Bord Fáilte, published since 1952, is called *Ireland of the Welcomes* <<http://www.irelandofthewelcomes.com/0107/default.asp>> (accessed 15 July 2009).

⁴ The concerns apparent in Liddy’s film are also evident in Perry Ogden’s 2005 work *Pavee Lackeen: The Traveller Girl* concerned with contemporary challenges facing the Traveller community. *Pavee Lackeen* is the story of Winnie Maughan, a ten year old girl who shares a dilapidated caravan with her mother and ten brothers and sisters on the outskirts of Dublin. Significantly, in *Pavee Lackeen*, Ogden draws clear, but significant parallels between the Traveller and immigrant communities in Dublin. As Winnie makes her way through the streets of Dublin to fill her time after being suspended from school for fighting, all of those she meets represent some of the major immigrant groups in Ireland, including women of Russian, African and Asian origin. While the almost total non-appearance of any other Irish people (apart from council officials and social workers) in the film appears sometimes overly contrived, the message is clear and similar to that identified in other films in this chapter: if Irish society cannot treat her own indigenous minorities with respect how can it hope to embrace the diverse immigrant groups that increasingly make up the country.

⁵ *The Last of the High Kings* is based on Ferdia Mac Anna’s semi-autobiographical novel of the same name.