

# Cinemas of Ireland



# Cinemas of Ireland

Edited by

Isabelle le Corff and Estelle Epinoux

**CAMBRIDGE**  
**SCHOLARS**  

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

Cinemas of Ireland, Edited by Isabelle le Corff and Estelle Epinoux

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## INTRODUCTION

The idea behind the conference that was held in Limoges on November 22 and 23 2007, emerged from our shared observation that very little attention had so far been devoted to Irish Film Studies in the French academic field, and our seminar was the first one ever to take place in France on the subject. Our aim was therefore to host a conference that would provide an international forum in which to assess and question various perspectives on contemporary Irish film.

The early 1980s could be considered as a landmark period in the history of Irish cinema since substantial and consistent film production started to emerge with *Poitín* (Bob Quinn, 1978), *Traveller* (Joe Comerford, 1981) and *Angel* (Neil Jordan, 1982), initiating the so-called new wave of Irish cinema. What assessment could be made of Irish film production twenty five years later? The recent flowering of Irish cinema being linked to the nation's emergence into a global economy, we thought it important to question such changes and to study this new Irish cinemascap, not only from an Irish perspective but also from a European perspective. Let us also mention *Estudios irlandeses* which has largely contributed these past three years to the exchange between European scholars on Irish Studies globally and on Irish cinema more specifically.

The response to our call for papers revealed a genuine interest in the debate in different parts of Europe and enabled us to exchange, share and confront our ideas from our respective national standpoints.

Indeed it is necessary that Irish cinema be discussed from various points of view. To exist as such, a nation must be in communication with its neighbours. A national cinema can only be acknowledged if it has an existence abroad, and it is the same for academic research. Internal debates are necessary and so are external debates. As Rosa González puts it, “[...] in our audio-visual age films exercise a significant influence on people's historical consciousness and perceptions of other countries”.

This volume of essays emanates largely but not exclusively from the papers delivered at the Limoges conference. Building on the aforementioned

perceptions of Irish culture and identity from within and outside Ireland, our book aims at defining how Irishness has evolved in film. In an era of globalisation, the concept of Irishness is inevitably being modified. Whether we celebrate or lament the changes that result from globalisation, it is undeniable that they are part of the representations of the nation and it is also true to say that they modify these very representations of cultural production. Cinema is a reflection of a society at the same time as it influences that society. As an illustration, we take it as given that the reception of films such as *Michael Collins* (1996) or *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006) did not and could not have the same impact in and outside Ireland. The political debates such films have triggered in Ireland have considerably added to the making and to the acceptance of a shared history. They have also contributed to the production of an Irish cinema and to its international recognition. A number of essays propose a global approach to Irish cinema while others deal with specific contemporary Irish films within the context of the first wave or of the Celtic Tiger. Irish cinema's relationship to Hollywood is also a recurring issue in the following pages.

This collection of essays is aimed at scholars of Irish cinema and the students and academics who are interested in discovering contemporary Irish cinema, its evolution and the issues it tackles. It has three main objectives: to contribute to international debate by bringing academics together on the question of Irish cinema; to update the research in this field and to link this recent work to existing work on the topic. For instance, section four dedicated to gender and Irish Film takes its inspiration from discussions raised at the important international conference hosted at the University of British Columbia on Genre and Irish Cinema in March 2005.<sup>1</sup> Many of those who attended the conference in British Columbia and contributed to Brian McIlroy's edited volume on the question have also contributed to this edition: for example Dervila Layden, Barry Monahan, Ruth Barton and Martin McLoone. Indeed, this volume is in many ways indebted to the pioneering work of Martin McLoone. Indeed, many of the issues that are examined in the following essays were first raised in his books and most papers refer to his previous works and discuss, contradict and deepen our understanding of them.

Throughout the volume, Irish cinema is explored within its economic, social, political and cultural dimensions and from different perspectives

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<sup>1</sup> Brian McIlroy (ed.), *Genre and Cinema, Ireland and Transnationalism*, Routledge, New York 2007, 284 pages

ranging from Irish studies, film studies, gender studies, political and historical studies.

In Part I, **Irish Cinema and Globalisation**, Martin McLoone in “National Cinema and Global Culture: the Case of Irish Cinema” reflects on the possibility of the existence of an Irish cinema in a global culture. Even though the fear of American domination is not new, the fear that the small filmmaking countries of the world are under threat from a market-driven globalisation spearheaded by the economic might of Hollywood is real. Therefore the best that the rest of the world can hope for is to “live with” Hollywood rather than attempt to compete with it. However, the cultural flows between Ireland, Britain and the USA are so deeply embedded and so intertwined that they inevitably influence the production of Irish cinema. McLoone asserts that the importance of maintaining an indigenous identity - of including the local within the global - is part of the very fabric of the cinema itself, and he is therefore convinced that the concept of national cinema still holds a certain validity. A careful negotiation of this local/global dichotomy must thus be at the core of any attempt to define the characteristics of a national cinema.

The second paper by Nathalie Dupont entitled “The Hollywood Majors and Ireland: a Financially Interesting Relationship?” questions the recent cinematographic relationship between Ireland and Hollywood from an economic point of view. Indeed, the Republic of Ireland is the country that has most benefited from the American presence as the financial incentives provided by the Irish government not only proved a decisive asset in attracting the Hollywood studios but also generated further financial benefits. Ireland sells itself as a unique landscape that provides an interesting backdrop for filmmakers looking for different and original settings with a modern touch, and the Irish crew are efficient and English-speaking. Ireland has also benefited from this exchange in its own film productions thanks to the equipment and better infrastructures bought and developed to welcome American film productions, and Irish technicians have benefited from their collaboration with their American counterparts. However, Dupont makes it clear that Ireland has strong competitors in the thriving business of international film production. Increasing global competition has thus revealed that the financial relationship between Ireland and Hollywood has not been constantly beneficial to Ireland. While things are not going to be easy for Ireland in the context of globalisation that has led to constantly new emerging opportunities for Hollywood studios, it definitely has its card to play.

Section Two, **Irish Cinema within a National Context**, opens with Rosa González's essay "Can Irish Cinema be both National and International?" in which she reflects on the ongoing debate about the direction of contemporary Irish film-making. Assessing a radically changed notion of Irishness and the criteria about what defines a national culture, she explores how this changed notion of Irishness, and more specifically the noticeable shift from exclusivity to inclusivity will affect the politics of representation in Irish cinema. Questioning the representational function of art she queries whether the accumulated demands made on contemporary Irish cinema can be financially viable and at the same time whether catering for local and foreign audiences might not run counter to the interests and demands for self-representation among Irish audiences.

Ruth Barton in "The Bums on the Seats – Irish Films and the Overseas Market" looks in detail at the admission figures for a range of current Irish films. This essay updates her previous work published in *Irish National Cinema*. It also offers directions for further research. Pointing out that many of the Irish films she is analysing performed better in Continental Europe than in Ireland and the United Kingdom, or even in the United States, she wonders why the press reports the successful release of an Irish film in the United States but ignores a potentially even more successful European release. She goes on to suggest that, film being an industry as well as an art form, it would surely make sense for Irish producers to take the European market into consideration and to explore its potential.

Barry Monahan in "The Pedagogical Culture of Irish Film Production: a Short History" assesses the growth of the Irish short as a filmmaking practice that blossomed between 1987 and 1993 after the demise of the Irish Film Board. The context of production had been established by the older filmmakers who had laid the foundations for a national film culture in the mid-1970s. According to the author, the emergence of this film culture had three immediate and interrelated consequences: producers were made more financially aware, filmmakers became more sensitive to audiences and it brought about a desire among film practitioners to make films that spoke about cinema. With the removal of financial support, directors and producers developed new strategies to finance their films. The student filmmakers created a cinema oppositional in style to the films made by the 'first wave' directors. The author describes some of the features of the short film and more particularly of its structural and temporal restrictions, referring to the parallel which can be drawn between the short film and the short story. He highlights how short films deal

differently with genre, formal qualities and the conventions of mainstream film, setting up a meta-cinematic framing.

Section three, **Defining Irishness in Film**, proposes a reflection on specific Irish films in an attempt to define the shifting concept of Irishness. Coinín Moore in “Ireland and Hollywood Standards” takes the controversial position that in recent years there has been a definite move away from the picturesque and the beautiful to the more gruesome and the brash in Irish Film. “As a nation that is apparently becoming more advanced and progressive in the domain of cinema, have we not become preoccupied with affirming how brash and vulgar we are, or have we merely become accustomed to the Hollywood model?”, she asks. By restricting audiences to specific genres and endorsing only one form of mainstream aesthetics, Moore wonders whether Irish filmmakers are not creating a situation whereby only certain forms of film or, more to the point, ‘entertainment’ are desired and therefore expected. She explores Neil Jordan’s *The Butcher Boy* (1997) and argues that it shows a nationalistic flavour despite its production and distribution values. But, she argues, the film is such a subtle work of art that it also conveys in hindsight that the country, despite its recent economic success, is now a post-colonial nation trying to come to terms with the evils of capitalism, individualism, industrialisation and urbanisation all in the name of a hypothetical search for liberation. Coinín Moore also looks at film director Bob Quinn whose work constantly challenges the existence of the colonized mind and ventures on the exploration of Ireland’s present government policies. Analysing briefly Lenny Abrahamson’s *Garage* (2007), she uses it as proof that a creative Irish cinema can exist and that the persistent gauging of artistic success by Hollywood standards is a short-sighted approach to the advancement and autonomy of Irish cinema.

Isabelle Le Corff, in “*The Brave One*, Anything to Do with Irish Film?”, argues that a cinema that uses a commercial format can serve as a vehicle for recurring Irish signifiers abroad as well as raise national and international questions. Asserting on the one hand that the meaning of a film is not determined by its moment and conditions of production and on the other hand that Neil Jordan’s films are all imbued with references to Ireland, the author goes on to provide a textual reading of *The Brave One* and sheds light on the cinematic forms at work. Indeed the film may well be a vigilante story, but it is predictable that as in all of Jordan’s films it has many layers of meaning and “defies any single reading”. Le Corff brings to the fore the extremely stylised images of the opening sequence,

the complex editing of the scene relating Erica's transformation into a different body or Erica's visualised hallucinations as proof that the comparison with many of Jordan's other films is relevant in terms of style as well as the films' political and social implications. She argues that a better understanding of *The Brave One* may thus contribute to a wider and more up to date definition of Irishness in film.

In Part Two, devoted to Irish Film in Ireland, section four proposes a reflection on **Gender and the Irish Film**.

Dervila Layden in "Gender and the Social Outsider in Contemporary Irish Comedy" considers comedy as a particularly relevant genre in a changing Irish society since it allows the audience to laugh at both change and the refusal to change. As a great number of these comedies focus on masculinity or male protagonists, she suggests that the prevalence of this genre offers an apt response to a crisis of identity. Studying *Intermission* (2003), a crime caper comedy and *Adam and Paul* (2004), a stylized downbeat comedy, she observes that Irish masculine identity is coded as that of outsider whereas feminine identity is seen as family oriented. While presenting and working through various male identities, *Intermission* displays excessive violence towards women as well as a certain objectification of the female. In contrast, violence towards men is perpetrated by other men in the public arena. Such portrayals of masculine and feminine identities tend to reject imposed national stereotypes and explore modern Ireland. Yet the author warns about the danger of replacing old stereotypes with another equally debilitating set.

Conn Holohan, in his essay entitled "Queering the Green: The Limitations of Sexuality as Metaphor in Recent Irish Film", explores the representation of private and public spaces in recent Irish cinema, arguing that the distinction between these categories has dissolved as both private and public spheres have increasingly become spaces of sexual encounter. He examines the forms of identity which traditional spatial divides supported and the effect of these spatial shifts upon national and gender identities. Acknowledging that the representations of gender and sexual identities within Ireland have been intrinsically bound to issues of nation, Holohan states that even in films which offer a far more complex interweaving of the sexual and the national, such as Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992) or *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005), the uncertain sexual identities within the films are eloquent expressions of a more fundamental breakdown of certainties within Irish social and political life. Holohan

points at the danger of using sexual identities as symbols because, he believes, their representations become detached from any sense of the “real” to which they supposedly relate. Taking under scrutiny two recent Irish films, *About Adam* and *Goldfish Memory*, he reveals the underlying conservatism in the depiction of non-heterosexuality and regrets that whilst the films of Celtic Tiger Ireland may radically re-imagine the parameters of Irish cultural identity, they continue to engage with sexual subject matter in a fundamentally conservative way.

Françoise Barbé-Petit in “From Visibility to Self-Effacement, a Masculinity in Transformation in Neil Jordan’s Hollywood Films.” questions the representation of masculinity *We’re no Angels* (1989) and *Interview with the Vampire* (1994). In both films the couples try to outsmart the laws of justice by either masquerading as priests or by becoming vampires. In order to survive the transgression, the protagonists disappear as such and trade their first identities for fake ones. In *We’re No Angels*, the two convicts on the run, Ned (De Niro) and Jim (Penn), do so by crossing new borders either physically or mentally. In the vampire movie, Louis sheds his humanity to be absorbed reluctantly by the dark side and his real self disappears to be replaced by a body invaded by a malevolent force. In other words the two movies marshal dissonant personalities. Barbé Petit asks whether these films might best be situated within the tradition of sexual male bonding or rather if they are attempting to display individual masculine crises through unstable and shifting identities. In these films, she explains, Jordan challenges in reality what is merely an appearance. All fixed identities are being questioned and become mutable as the protagonists challenge both gender boundaries and political- geographical borders.

In section five dealing with **Irish History on Screen**, Raita Merovirta in “Brother against Brother, Green against Green: The Irish Civil War on the Screen” argues that if both films stand out in their depiction of the civil war, the conflict in *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* seems much less personal than it does in *Michael Collins*. She goes through each film’s narrative in order to show that choices were made and claims that the civil war in *Michael Collins* is essentially a struggle between Eamon de Valera and Michael Collins, between the fanatic and the pragmatist whereas in *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* the focus shifts to some extent from the issue of different interpretations of nationalism and the means to achieve an Irish Republic to the issues of class and Irish society.

Estelle Epinoux in “British Newspaper Reviews of Ken Loach’s *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* or the other side of a Palme d’Or” considers many of the British reviews that were published in newspapers after the release of Loach’s award winning film. These reviews, taken from a wide range of quality broadsheets as well as from tabloids, reveal that the film was at the centre of an enormous controversy which stemmed from the widely different political perspectives on the representation of the Irish war of independence. The reviews tend to leave aside aesthetic considerations of the film to focus on the political message it conveys on colonialism and imperialism. Loach’s representation being considered as a partisan one most reviewers did not read the film as “a learning opportunity” to question Anglo-Irish history or Anglo-Irish relations.

Section six opens the discussion to the links between **Irish Film and other Arts**. In “Celtic Tiger Cinema: Irish Dramatists and/as Filmmakers” Werner Huber draws a parallel between cinema and theatre. He reflects on Irish identity and on the transformations and reversals wrought by the Celtic Tiger. Two aspects are of interest according to him: the concentration by playwrights/filmmakers on the theme of the tiger’s underbelly and a take on Irish film from the perspective of contemporary drama. He describes Irish culture as a “collision culture”. Examining the pessimism that is voiced regarding the representation of contemporary Ireland, he alleges that it is obviously exaggerated and that there is sufficient evidence for the engagement of Irish film – and Irish drama – with the phenomenon of the Celtic Tiger, especially with the darker aspects of its ‘underbelly’. According to Werner Huber, contemporary Irish drama and film are adequate indicators of a cultural schizophrenia that was brought to a crisis by the Celtic Tiger but which extends well beyond the economic sphere. There may be a sense of liberation from traditional thematic constraints or from being obsessed with Irish identity crises, but the dilemmas and aporias of the global versus the local still linger – even if it is merely a question of genre and poetics.

In “From Page to Screen: *The Butcher Boy* (1997) and *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005), Rewritings by Neil Jordan and Patrick McCabe”, Mathias Lebargy looks at the “financial, economic, professional, and artistic constraints that are dictated by the film industry” and focuses on what he calls “the alterations” that have been carried out on the adaptations of the two novels. His objective is not to provide a comparative analysis of film and novel but rather to explore McCabe’s specific contribution to the film. He first highlights that McCabe has always been attracted to film and that this medium particularly fits his creative schemes. Indeed his writings are

peppered with extracts from western or science fiction films, and the film medium easily allows the integration of various songs, music, films and comic strips to which the novels refer. Moreover the two films by Neil Jordan are not confined to the diegesis of the source novels but also condense fundamental elements from McCabe's whole work. However Lebargy asserts that the films contradict McCabe's writing schemes in different ways. While the films emphasize the continuity of the plots, the novels tend to fracture this continuity. The films omit certain scenes as well as of a large number of introspective passages. More widely, their optimism stands in stark opposition to the novels' blackness. As a spectator, Mathias Lebargy misses the more bitter, if not more shocking tone of the novels. His training being literary, he does not engage in a study of the films' impact on the panorama of Irish cinema or in an inquiry into the director's creative choices but concludes that the fundamental changes made in the films must result from a compromise between the author and the films' producers and that it must be the reason why McCabe was so disappointed that he decided he did not want to write for cinema any longer.

If most sections in the volume are concerned with recent fictional representations of Ireland, the works on Irish cinema that have preceded are abundantly referenced. We hope that this volume will offer a whole range of new perspectives and that it will help the reader in his knowledge of a shifting Irish cinemascape.

**Isabelle Le Corff / Estelle Epinoux**



# **PART ONE**



# 1. IRISH CINEMA AND GLOBALISATION

# NATIONAL CINEMA AND GLOBAL CULTURE: THE CASE OF IRISH CINEMA

MARTIN MCLOONE

If globalisation is ruled merely by the laws of the market applied to suit the powerful, the consequences cannot but be negative. These are, for example, the absolutising of the economy, unemployment, the reduction and deterioration of public services, the destruction of the environment and natural resources, the growing distance between rich and poor, unfair competition which puts poor nations in a situation of ever increasing inferiority (quoted in Martin, 1999).

These sentiments may very well read like the frustrated ratings of a radical left-wing communist lamenting the consolidation of neo-liberal economics on a global scale. The fact that they were uttered by that scourge of communism, Pope John Paul II, during his visit to Mexico City in January 1999 is perhaps a little surprising. Of course, as one might expect, the pope's real target was the growing consumerism and secularisation that he perceives to be the inevitable result of global capitalism but the worries expressed here – about labour rights, poverty, the environment, the decline of a public sphere, the growing disparity of wealth in and between nations – would find echo in the surging anti-globalisation protests of the radical Left. There is, it would appear, a shared agenda right across the political spectrum about what globalisation means and what it brings in its wake. The growing disparity between the developed north dealing with the problems brought on by consumerism and indulgence and the developing south where uncontaminated drinking water is a luxury merely illustrates the scale of the problem.

The concern here is with culture flows within a global system now almost entirely governed by the laws of the market. In terms of cinema, the issue is precisely that of 'unfair competition which puts poor nations in a situation of ever increasing poverty'. The fear is that the small filmmaking countries of the world, poor in financial terms but representing a rich diversity of national cinemas, are under threat from a market-driven

globalisation spearheaded in this instance by the economic might of Hollywood.

We have, of course, been here before.

Back in 1993, Hollywood's growing global dominance became the surprising stumbling block in the negotiations over the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) involving the world's leading industrial nations. GATT was an attempt to establish the principles of free trade among nations and to end government subsidies or tariffs that could lead to an unfair advantage for one nation over another in the export of goods and services. The negotiations took over seven years to conclude and very nearly failed because of disagreements over films and television programmes. The Americans considered audio-visual artefacts as 'product', commodities like any other covered by the trade agreement, and demanded an end to all European subsidies and quotas that were established to support various indigenous film and television industries.

However, the Europeans (led by the French) sought to exempt these industries from the terms of the GATT agreement on the grounds that these were not commodities, like washing machines and fridges, but were cultural industries supremely important to national expression and cultural identity. Given the economic and cultural muscle of the American film and television industries, and the manner in which they dominate the screens of the world, the subsidies and support systems in place in Europe for indigenous production were and continue to be a matter of cultural survival and not a measure of unfair competition. In the end, film and television were exempted from the 1993 agreement, much to the relief of the Europeans and to the considerable chagrin of the Americans (including some high profile American directors like Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese who had been enlisted by the American negotiators to bolster their position and who, perhaps, should have known better).

It has to be said that the French opposition to the Americans during the GATT negotiations was scarcely acknowledged or supported at the time by the Irish (or indeed the British) except for a small lobby of academics and filmmakers which existed below the radar of popular consciousness. However, in a sense the French were fighting a battle on behalf of the rest of the world and especially on behalf of small filmmaking nations everywhere. Looking back from 2008, one can see in the GATT controversy an example of the kind of low-level, generalised anti-

American feeling that is a characteristic of much of Europe, especially of France and which was fanned into widespread protests by the American and British invasion of Iraq in 2003. (In 2007, the recently elected French president, Nicolas Sarkozy visited George Bush in Washington and made very public gestures of good will, support and reconciliation. For many in Europe, however, it is a much healthier political and cultural situation when the Americans rail against 'French intransigence' or dismiss the French insultingly as 'cheese-eating surrender monkeys').

French and European anti-Americanism results from a widely-held belief that American foreign and economic policy is fundamentally concerned with the interests of the USA and is woefully blind to the impact that this might have on other nations and other cultures. In terms of GATT the kind of unfettered 'free trade' among partners which the Americans envisaged, when one partner is so overwhelmingly dominant in the field, is impossible without, as the pope warned in Mexico City, the complete domination of the weak by the strong. In its adherence to the 'laws of the market' the American position within the GATT negotiations represented the negative aspects global capitalism and highlighted the dangers for most of the world in the concept of a global market-place.

The American audio-visual industry is now so powerful and so globally dominant that the best that the rest of the world can hope for is to 'live with' Hollywood rather than attempt to compete with it. It is the nature of this 'living with' relationship that is of most concern to the future of Irish cinema. The experience of Ireland and her highly state-subsidised film and television industry is an exemplar of a more general condition. A number of preliminary points might usefully be made about the issues that Hollywood raises.

First, the term 'Hollywood' often indicates American popular culture in general as well as referring specifically to American global cinema. Indeed, since the end of the Second World War, American culture of all kinds - music, comics, television, films, clothes, fast food - have come to dominate indigenous cultures on a global scale. In Ireland, as in many parts of the world, we are accustomed to hearing terms like the 'Los Angelesization' or the 'Hollywoodization' or the 'McDonaldization' of culture used as pejorative terms to refer to the impact that the culture of the USA has had on the rest of the world. In this, creeping Americanisation seems to be the very essence of globalisation.

Second, the fear of American domination is not new. The concept of 'cultural imperialism' was first developed in the 1960s specifically to address the cultural power of the USA but in other forms, this argument was familiar to generations of Irish nationalists in relation to the cultural domination of Ireland by imperial Britain. The cultural imperialism thesis is basically a simple one. Despite the evidence of Afghanistan and Iraq (and latent fears about American intentions in Iran) the USA does not usually need to resort to its overwhelming military power to dominate the rest of the world. It does this more effectively through *cultural* domination, legitimising an American 'narrative' of the way things are and inculcating American values and American ideologies through its popular culture. These values represent the values of capitalist consumerism and commercialism and validate a cult of 'possessive individualism' against a sense of communal belonging. In the process, American cultural imperialism suppresses the indigenous cultural forms that might provide alternative forms and narratives or offer opposing values and ideologies. Hollywood cinema, in other words, is only one form of cinematic style, - an action-based and narrative-driven form that imposes a particular world-view - but such is its dominance and its hold on public consciousness that all other forms of cinematic expression are being increasingly marginalised.

American cultural imperialism encourages a form of cultural amnesia as well and denigrates the cultural achievements and heritage of other cultures across the globe (in this case, one remembers former Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld's dismissal of those countries opposed to his invasion of Iraq - France, Germany and Russia - as the 'old Europe'). Linked to this as well, is the fear that the diversity of human culture is itself under threat and what Hollywood has come to symbolise is the homogenisation of culture globally in which the rich diversity of cultures is replaced by a grey American monoculture.

There is in this lack of diversity an added problem that is perceived as a major worry now by America's critics across the globe. Such has been the concentration of ownership of the audio-visual media and the supremacy of limited forms of expression through so few outlets that the American public itself is deprived of other voices and other perspectives. This has resulted among Americans in an increasing ignorance of and lack of empathy with other cultures and a severe disabling of American political culture internally. The average American has been accustomed to seeing the world in terms of US and them. Given its huge military, economic and

cultural dominance in the world, this narrow perspective is extremely dangerous. There are, of course, counter arguments to all this and it is worth rehearsing some of these the better to appreciate the contradictory nature of the local/global problem.

What proponents of the cultural imperialism thesis forget is that American popular culture is already deeply imbued with the influences of so many diverse cultures from across the globe. It is already a rich tapestry of cultural influences, a hybrid of multiple influences that reflects global cultural interchange rather than cultural domination. Successive waves of European immigrants, fleeing poverty and oppression at home, brought with them their own traditions and cultures that subsequently enriched the development of American culture. The Irish were one of the most numerous of these immigrant groups throughout the nineteenth century and their musical and cultural traditions greatly enriched American popular music and vaudeville. The Irish in the past played and continue to play a small but significant role in the success of Hollywood as a global cinema. In other words, because of the large scale emigration of the Irish to the USA and the consequent cultural and even family ties between the two countries, it could be argued that Ireland and the USA enjoy a 'special relationship' that renders the notion of American cultural imperialism absurd.

The cultural imperialism thesis also fails to account for the popularity of American culture in general or Hollywood cinema in particular. After all, no one is marched to the cinema with a gun at his or her back. American culture offers real pleasures to diverse audiences across the globe and is popular in and of itself. In its diverse influences and its 'democratic address' Hollywood cinema often provided national audiences with real pleasures in escaping the narrow confines of their own often restrictive national cultures (and this was certainly the case with Ireland in the 1930s-60s when the national culture was dominated by an overbearing censorious Catholicism). Indeed, it might be better to see Hollywood, not as an American cinema at all (after all large sectors of it are owned by the Japanese, the Australians and the Europeans) but as a global cinema that happens, for historical and cost effective reasons, to be based in the USA. American cinema is part of the cultural experience of so many cultures now and has been the dominant global cinema for so long that it is now part of every other culture's experience. Indigenous cultures, and indeed indigenous cinemas, are at their best when they respond, in their own idiom, to the presence of Hollywood within their cultural nexus. Thus the

French (ironically) were the first to recognise the artistic and cultural achievements of Hollywood cinema and the French 'nouvelle vague' cinema of the late 1950s and 1960s, now regarded as one of the high points of European national cinema, was in part an homage to American film.

The question of a national cinema is crucial here and perhaps one of the ironies of globalisation in general and global cinema in particular is the fact that nations and national cinemas, despite the pressures exerted by transnational capital flows, refuse to fade away. As Dudley Andrew has argued:

We still parse the world by nations. Film festivals identify entries by country, college courses are labelled 'Japanese Cinema', 'French Film', and textbooks are coming off the presses with titles such as 'Screening Ireland', 'Screening China', 'Italian National Cinema', and so on (Dudley Andrew, 2006).

It might be noted that we don't often get books called 'American National Cinema' or 'Screening the USA' so that the parsing of world cinema by nations does not seemingly include the home of the most powerful cinema industry. Nonetheless, the implication is clearly that the concept of national cinema still holds a certain validity, despite the global nature of the finance capital that sustains it. Indeed, in its pursuit of new markets and new ways to 'niche market' it might be argued that globalisation actually encourages and promotes cultural diversity, rather than undermines it and that it liberates national formations internally by encouraging minority sub-national groupings to emerge into the global market-place. In this formulation, Hollywood's global presence provides the necessary model against which we both recognise and celebrate diverse national 'others'.

We have, then, contradictory ways of looking at globalisation in general and global cinema in particular. What then of the Irish experience? Looking at Irish cinema through the filter of the global one can locate the same kind of contradictory pressures at work and can identify the same set of positive and negative implications.

### **Irish Cinema as National Cinema**

Irish cinema is essentially an Anglophone cinema just as much of Irish culture in the twentieth century was essentially a postcolonial culture. In

other words, a lot of Irish political and cultural energy in the twentieth century was expended in pursuing a sense of Irish *différence* from the former colonial rulers. Irish cultural identity was constructed in opposition to Britishness (or Englishness) but like many other anti-colonial nationalisms, the Irish were forced to adopt and adapt the language and culture of their colonial masters to mount this opposition. The Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe notes a similar process in relation to the African experience. 'We chose English not because the British desired it, but because, having tacitly accepted the new nationalities into which colonialism had grouped us, we needed its language to transact our business, including the business of overthrowing colonialism itself in the fullness of time' (Achebe, 1990: 32).

Certainly, Irish nationalism rejected British identity by also appealing to the vestiges of an ancient native culture. In validating and reawakening older Gaelic culture and traditions and in constructing an idealised Gaelic past Irish nationalism also rejected the modernity of the British Empire. Nonetheless, when Ireland re-entered the mainstream of European modernity from the 1970s onwards, it did so as a small Anglophone culture firmly embedded within a global Anglo-American hegemony. One might argue that Ireland's position as a small colonised culture within the large imperialist formation of nineteenth century Britain prepared Irish culture well for its position in the early twenty-first century as a small peripheral culture on the margins of the globalised Anglo-American market-place. Perhaps as well this explains why Ireland seems sometimes to have 'over-achieved' culturally within this Anglo-American sphere, especially in terms of literature, drama and popular music. For despite its long and single-minded pursuit of cultural distinctiveness Ireland, ironically, shares with Britain (and the USA) large elements of a common culture. The cultural flows among Ireland, Britain and the USA are so deeply embedded and so intertwined it is inevitable that these influence the production of Irish cinema.

We can see one way in which this manifests itself by looking at two of the most commercially successful films at the Irish box-office in recent years, Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* (1996) and Ken Loach's *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006). In its cinema run back in 1996, Jordan's film took over IR£4 million and by the end of 2006, Loach's film had passed €3.7 million. Both films deal with a controversial and bitterly contested period in twentieth century Irish history – the War of Independence and the ensuing civil war – and their success suggests that there is an audience

for films which directly address complex social, political and historical realities. Indeed, the capacity to address local concerns – to develop an indigenous address - is surely fundamental to any definition of a national cinema and the popular reaction to these two films suggests that an Irish national cinema is as much a process of national questioning and exploration as it is of celebration. Irish audiences, it would also appear, are prepared to grapple with films that challenge and provoke as well as entertain. However, as exemplars of an exploratory national cinema, both films also present some ontological difficulties. The production profile of both films, for example, seriously complicates the very notion of the national to begin with.

The budget for *Michael Collins* was US\$27m, a huge budget in 1996 and still a colossal budget in terms of Irish filmmaking today. The epic scale of the film and its impressive set-pieces were only possible because of the high level of support Neil Jordan achieved from the centre of the Hollywood machine itself in the form of the Geffen Company and Warner Bros. The film featured two A-list stars in Liam Neeson and Julia Roberts and was promoted in all respects as a high profile, Hollywood production. The success of *Michael Collins* with the Irish audience was not, however, repeated in the USA where the film performed very poorly at the box-office (perhaps because Warner Bros lost confidence in the film after the breakdown of the 1995 IRA ceasefire in Northern Ireland and failed to give it the kind of high-promotion release in the US that its budget would have suggested). Loach's film, on the other hand, is a complex multi-national co-production involving Ireland, the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain and Switzerland. Within this complex internationalism, the film's budget of approximately €6.5m came from State-funded agencies (the Irish Film Board and the UK Film Council) supra-state funding (the MEDIA programme of the European Community) and a mixture of other European sources - state, private and regional - including funding from Ireland's commercial television channel, TV3. It is surely ironic that this complex mix of funding sources facilitated an 'Irish' film written and directed by two of contemporary British cinema's most celebrated creative talents (Loach and writer, Paul Laverty), a film which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2006 'for Britain' and a film which takes its place within the oeuvre of one of British cinema's most celebrated and enduring auteurs (Loach). *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* may well have connected with Irish audiences in a particularly resonant manner. However, it belongs just as assuredly to the national cinema of Britain as it does to Ireland (even if,

as with *Michael Collins*, its success with the Irish audience was not repeated in Britain, the film's 'home' territory).

The production details of these two 'Irish' films suggest both the complexity and the ambiguities inherent in discussing the concept of a national cinema in a small, post-colonial, Anglophone culture like Ireland's. This is a culture caught on the cusp of rapid economic and social change, poised between Britain and America, locked into a dependent, if economically beneficial, relationship with its European neighbours and influenced by its own past history of national (and nationalist) struggle. If, however, the complexity of funding arrangements and the ambiguities in the nationality of both films raise fundamental issues about what constitutes the 'Irishness' of an Irish film, then there is less doubt about the manner in which both the films have intervened in an ongoing national debate about Irish history and the nature of 'Irishness' itself. The production details also reflect well the complex way in which film is financed within the global economy so that it is rare to find any production that is or could be funded totally by native capital investment. These two films have an indigenous address even if they represent international capital. In a sense, they are 'double-coded'.

Indigenous Irish cinema developed only in the last two decades of the twentieth century and it manifests this same characteristic of cultural 'double-coding.' As a small national cinema it exists in the space between the local and the global, between the national and the transnational, between its own national cultural traditions (whether historical or 'invented') and the influences of external global forces. This cultural space is, like globalisation itself, a contradictory one, offering both great opportunities and considerable risks. Thus, as an English-language cinema with the example of Irish literature, drama and popular music to emulate, there is always the possibility that Irish cinema (or at least various individual films) will break out from its national base and find fame, fortune and critical approval in the wider global market-place. This prospect is seemingly reinforced by the ease with which Irish creative personnel (Neil Jordan, Jim Sheridan, Colin Farrell, Liam Neeson) manage to find positions of some influence within the Hollywood machine.

Equally, though, as a weak and relatively under-financed cinema its marginal status might well be maintained within this more powerful Anglo-American industry. Thus, having escaped the oppression of British imperialism in the past, Irish culture, especially Irish cinema, now runs the