



Contemporary Irish Popular Culture: Transnationalism, Regionality, and Diaspora

Anthony P. McIntyre

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“This is a beautifully written, wide-ranging, carefully historicised and theorised book that will be of great significance to anyone interested in contemporary Irish culture.”

—Sinéad Moynihan, *Associate Professor in American and Atlantic Literatures, University of Exeter, UK*

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For Maria and Annie

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Introduction—“Fractured Movement”: Transnationalism, Regionality, and Diaspora in Contemporary Irish Popular Culture

An ad for Three Business—a branch of the Irish telecommunications company Three—that was first broadcast in May 2019 presents a vivid picture of the global/local dynamics that animate the analyses within this book. Opening with picturesque images of the island in question—Arranmore, situated off the Donegal coast on the north west coast of Ireland—we hear a local man emotionally declare: “the greatest silence I hear on Arranmore, is the sound of children. It’s only when you don’t have it; The silence is deafening.” The ad goes on to detail how the island has been “decimated by emigration” with many of Arranmore’s people forced to leave to find work, rendering the island potentially moribund. Clearly on one level the small community in this ad functions as a micro-cosm of the Irish nation, that in the years following the banking crash of 2008, saw the return of economic migration, a phenomenon that disproportionately impacted younger generations. That the ad goes on to show the island is, in effect, being rescued by private business also bespeaks an Irish media culture ideologically aligned with the pro-business, neoliberal contours of the contemporary Irish state.

Capitalising upon the resonance of the return of economic migration as a scar on the national psyche, Three details through this ad how it is reinventing the island by providing fibre broadband technology infrastructure, enabling displaced workers to come home and ensuring the children of the island benefit educationally from state-of-the-art digital

communications access. Images of a “digital hub” set up on the island, where locals can access state of the art computers are cross-cut with rugged images of the Atlantic coast, the juxtaposition itself reminiscent of many contemporary discursive constructions of Ireland as at once an ancient Celtic nation, in which landscape indelibly shapes national identity, and simultaneously a forward-facing home to global tech investment and innovation. Made prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which would reshape attitudes to homeworking, the ad posits a scenario in which islanders can work from Donegal as well as if they were in New York or London, namechecking some of the hubs of global capitalism to which the island is now connected, highlighting a putative transnational reach that has been bestowed upon the small community by the communications company. The narrative presentation of an island facing economic and social stagnation being in effect resurrected through a significant infrastructural investment carries a powerful ideological charge resonant within the Ireland of the late 20th and early twenty-first century.

“The Island” can be profitably considered alongside a set of Irish television ads for EuroMillions Lottery that have been running since 2016. The premise of the campaign is that an Irishman has become so splendidly wealthy through a win on the lottery that he has bought (or is in the process of buying, depending on the ad in question) a Mediterranean island. The first advert in this series depicts a news reporter interviewing the lucky lottery winner on a beautiful sandy beach. Upon asking how the intended purchase and donation of an island would, in fact, work, the Irishman, in a laid-back and droll utterance replies, “Ah, sure we’ll figure it out.” The scrolling news text at the bottom of the faux news report signals the transnational spread of quintessentially Irish consumer preferences facilitated by the acquisition, reading: “First shipment of cheese and onion crisps leaves Ireland. Large consignment of red lemonade to follow.” The ad ends with a shot portraying a public square in small town Ireland, with crowds gathered to watch the news reports on the acquisition of the island cheering loudly. Glimpsed for a few seconds at the end of the ad, this *mise-en-abyme*, reminiscent of the type of public display of national identity associated with international sporting events in the vein of the Italia ’90 soccer World Cup, effectively sutures the viewer into the subject position of one of the enthused spectators, cheering the acquisition of a fantasy island as a “win” for an Irish national culture that seemingly thrives at a global level despite its humble stature, all while its citizens maintain a calm and laid-back demeanour.

The veracity of such a depiction as characteristic of Irish citizens post-2008 contrasts significantly with the neoliberalised working cultures and practices in place throughout Ireland. Studies showing that Irish workers reporting stress connected to their employment more than doubled between 2010 to 2015 (Russell et al. 2018) and that Irish employees work longer hours and have fewer days of paid leave than the European average (Eurofound 2017) undermine the sense of an easy-going national character that is a mainstay of media representations of the Irish, whether such depictions emanate from within or outside of Ireland. These studies, of course, were published prior to the dramatic recalibrations of working life effected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which have further exacerbated work-life imbalance in Ireland, and indeed, across the globe. One of the guiding principles of this book is that media culture is imbricated at a deep level in the hegemonic processes of sense-making that have rendered neoliberal capitalism as a ubiquitous doctrine undergirding Irish life. The lottery campaign emerged during years of state-imposed austerity (exacerbated by the state's nationalisation of banking debt), a time that laid bare some of the more stringent and indeed cruel underpinnings of neoliberal capitalism. Literary scholar Sharae Deckard (2010), in a study tracing its origins in colonial discourse and widespread contemporary proliferation, suggests that the "paradise myth" which is central to this campaign, "sublimate(s) political resistance by offering up consoling fantasies of the expanded consumer's paradise enabled by globalization" (13). In the case of the lottery campaign, which I am offering here alongside the Three ad as examples drawn from of an expansive media culture (and to which I add the primary case studies central to the following chapters in this book), we see that such a consoling fantasy is aligned with the idea that Ireland has an outsized impact beyond its own borders in relation to its modest size and is the wellspring of an abiding and coherent identity that persists and thrives in a contemporary era marked by intensive globalization.

In different ways each of these island-themed ads present a similar ideological proposition: that the ideal Irish subject is one who transcends national borders while retaining an authentic sense of Irishness rooted in and routed through the local. Both ads in their own ways correspond to Radha S. Hegde's (2016) contention that in the present era, "The very idea of a better life is visualised and experienced transnationally" (6). The notion of "fractured movement" that I see as a defining feature of so much twenty-first century Irish screen content, registers this seemingly paradoxical tension between the local and the global. This is, of course, a

trope with longstanding roots that go back to such cataclysmic events as the Irish famine in the nineteenth century and the various recessionary eras since that have undergirded the Irish diaspora. Such conditions caused citizens to depart their native land in hope of finding work; or indeed we can also add the many Irish subjects who fled a country which was, until very recently, in thrall to a Catholic orthodoxy that was openly homophobic and hostile to women's reproductive rights and labour freedoms. However, whereas in previous eras the rupture between subject and home could be more emphatic, advances in consumer mobility and communications technologies have rendered the border between home and away, the local and the transnational more porous in a manner that generates "new modalities of belonging" (Morley 2010, 3).

This sense of fractured movement that I read as a key element of these new modalities of belonging, of being simultaneously drawn away and pulled back—which we might understand through the common experience of families who are spread across the world, often due to the necessity of economic migration—persistently manifests in often indirect forms in Irish popular culture. We can detect such tensions in many media contexts, including: the discursive construction of twenty-first century Irish celebrities and stars from both sports as well as film and television; different genres of screen content such as drama and horror films; comedies both cinematic and televisual; as well as in multiple instances of advertising, as demonstrated by the two "island" ads that I have considered above. Such pronounced tropes of the local/global interdependency and conflation mirror on an ideological level the economic positioning of the Irish state in the twenty-first century, on account of its reliance on non-domestic industry due to years of aggressive pursuit of foreign direct investment. This has led to Ireland being a nation exposed to the vagaries of the global economic system, another way in which the depiction of a small island at the mercy of tumultuous elements outside of its control is a resonant and apt metaphor.

NEOLIBERAL IRELAND: MAPPING THE CONTEMPORARY CONJUNCTURE NORTH AND SOUTH

As some scholars have suggested, the metaphorical trope of the small island serves to attenuate divisions within the nation, one which "takes particular charge in countries that have experienced the long receding

wave of empire as violence, partition and the fragmentation of place as a subject of narrative" (Allen 2021, 3). In Ireland, of course, one major schism is the border that has separated the Republic of Ireland from Northern Ireland since 1921. This book takes what might be considered an all-island approach, while acknowledging the different affiliations people hold (whether to Britain or to Ireland) in the still-contested six counties in Northern Ireland. While including Northern Ireland in the present study presents some challenges at the level of word choice, particularly usage of the adjective "Irish" or the noun "Ireland," the experiences of people from that part of Ireland, are central to some of the most salient aspects of Irish diasporic experience, not least being victims of persistent anti-Irish sentiment in mainland Britain, during, but not limited to the years of The Troubles. Indeed, the fractured sense of identity that manifests in texts emanating from, or symbolically rooted in, Northern Ireland highlight in an overt way some of the broader facets of home/away disjuncture that I track across this book.

My focus on the sitcom *Derry Girls* (2018–) and the footballer James McClean in Chaps. 3 and 4, texts centred on the city of Derry/Londonderry—the obligatory dual-naming indexing the contestation over and the symbolic centrality of the city to both Nationalist and Unionist communities in the North—allows for a consideration of transnational production cultures within media industries, as well as flows of labour and capital; and a regional identity that troubles monolithic notions of national affiliation and belonging at a time when the stability of such constructs is under considerable duress. To return to word choice, I use the term "Ireland" for the most part to refer to the 26 counties, or what is otherwise known as the Republic of Ireland (though acknowledging that Ireland is the official name of the state), occasionally using the latter term to differentiate between Northern Ireland and the 26 counties; when referring to the entire 32 counties, I use phrases such as "the island of Ireland," or "Ireland, North and South"; similarly the term "Irish" is usually used to refer to the Republic of Ireland, except in instances where it denotes an apt affiliation such as "Irish footballer James McClean." I trust that the context of the writing will provide enough information to clarify the sense in which these words are being used.

Uniting Ireland, both North and South is the dominant mode of capitalism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries: neoliberalism. Cultural studies scholar Julie Wilson (2018) pithily characterises neoliberalism as "a set of social, cultural, and political-economic forces that put competition

at the center of social life” (3). It is this influence across multiple spheres, as well as the adaptability of this variant of capitalism that is key to its persistence, despite the notable social and financial catastrophes with which it has come to be associated, not least the “Great Recession” of 2007–2009 and the austerity policies that swiftly followed in its wake. Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore (2019) suggest the necessity of “confront[ing] neoliberalism as an emergent mode of regulation, one that has become cumulatively embedded across multiple sites and spaces such that it increasingly defines the rules of the game and the terrain of struggle, even if never acting alone or monopolizing that terrain.” (Peck and Theodore 2019, 246). The purpose of this book is to contribute to a growing body of Irish cultural studies scholarship that seeks to interrogate the role of popular culture in installing neoliberal values as common sense (see, for instance, Kiersey 2014; Brick and Davidson 2017; Free and Scully 2018; Negra and McIntyre 2020; McIntyre 2021).

For scholars such as Peck and Theodore, neoliberalism is never a monolithic construct, but one that is variegated. This plasticity, in their account, should act as “an invitation to conjunctural analysis, sensitive to variable (local) projects, formations, struggles, and contestations, and at the same time recognizing the openness of emergent pathways and future horizons” (246). This approach aligns with scholarship on Irish manifestations of this economic model. Geographers Rob Kitchin et al. (2012) in an influential article tracing the economic and spatial impacts of neoliberalism suggest that Ireland differed from the UK and the US, where neoliberalism was “an ideologically informed project” instigated under the premierships of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. For Kitchin et al., “Irish neoliberalism was produced through a set of short-term (intermittently reformed) deals brokered by the state with various companies, individuals, and representative bodies, which cumulatively restructured Ireland in unsustainable and geographically ‘uneven’ ways” (1306). Nevertheless, while neoliberalism may not have been imposed upon the Irish in the top-down manner of the US and the UK, the role of media figures and the culture industries more broadly was also crucial to the shifting ideological consensus that helped broker neoliberalism’s acceptance in a newly secularised Ireland and a post-conflict Northern Ireland.

Irish studies scholar Joe Cleary (2018) suggests Ireland’s reputation for “creativity”—a notable neoliberal buzzword, and one which, as I detail in Chap. 5 has been seized upon with gusto by the Irish state—combined with several other factors (a mobile, educated workforce; lack of

employment opportunities in heavy industries; a historic diaspora stretching across the globe) made the nation ripe for neoliberalization. For Cleary "the country offered not only an attractive clean slate for a neoliberal experiment in post-industrial services and new technologies sectors, but also a range of "cultural assets" useful to such experiment" (165). The neoliberal ethos was taken up wholeheartedly by home-grown companies such as Glanbia and Ryanair, the corporate values within Ireland coming to mimic those of the multinational companies attracted to Ireland. Since then, corporatism has been installed at the heart of Irish life, evident in such telling details as former Taoiseach (prime minister) Leo Varadkar's assertion on popular talk show *The Late Late Show* (1962–) while in that office that he was "chairman and CEO of the organization," or the fact that former "wolf of Wall Street" Jordan Belfort, can draw large audiences to a speaking event in the Convention Centre in Dublin (Negra and McIntyre 2020, 75). Similarly, as Cleary (2018) suggests, within the Irish cultural sector, successful acts such as U2 and Riverdance that flourished spectacularly during the Celtic Tiger era bespoke a changed entrepreneurial ethos that "brooked no distinction between symbolic and economic capital" (165) a shift further manifest in prominent cultural figures of the time such as boy band impresario Louis Walsh, Riverdance producer Moya Doherty and U2 manager Paul McGuinness.

Such acts and individuals reinforced the nascent sense within Ireland that true success was only fully realised on a transnational scale. In some ways this functioned as a symbolic reciprocal corollary to all of the multinational corporations drawn to Ireland and its 12.5% corporate tax rate and highly educated and, to begin with, low paid workers (Coulter 2019, 130), bolstering a heady sense in the pre-crash years that Ireland was coming to the world, and the world to Ireland. While the Celtic Tiger era constitutes a cultural high-water mark for Irishness as a commercialised and appealing identity with global legibility (Negra 2006), conceptions of success as predicated upon a transnational entrepreneurialism have since become axiomatic. For many of the individuals analysed in the chapters to follow, such as actor-writers Chris O'Dowd (Hot Cod Productions), Sharon Horgan (Merman Productions) and Brendan O'Carroll (BOC-PIX; BOC Productions), as well as MMA fighter Conor McGregor (McGregor Sports and Entertainment)—considered in Chaps. 2, 5, 6 and 4 respectively—having a production company that operates internationally is an essential and somewhat unremarkable component of a professional identity within the cultural industries. As success stories with a

heightened level of recognition through their high-profile stature, these performers model the entrepreneurialism that has become a common-sense aspect of neoliberal culture (Szeman 2015) while the heightened risk that attends such modes of labour usually goes unacknowledged.

In Northern Ireland, the advent of neoliberalism took a different route, tied as it was to the peace process in the 1990s that eventually resulted in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement that came into effect in 1999 and marked a symbolic end to The Troubles, the years of sectarian violence that constituted an open sore within the UK and Ireland from the late 1960s. For media scholars Stephen Baker and Greg McLaughlin (2015), two frameworks underscored the peace process: “an explicit narrative of peace and reconciliation and an implicit narrative that set about imagining Northern Ireland in terms conducive to its entry into the global free market” (108). Baker and McLaughlin posit two images as encapsulating these narratives. In one, Irish rock star and frontman of U2 Bono stands between John Hume of the Social and Democratic Labour Party and David Trimble of the Ulster Unionist Party holding their hands aloft in a picture taken just days before the referendum in 1998 to ratify the Belfast (Good Friday) agreement. The picture was seen by many as pivotal in ensuring a “yes” vote for peace. The two politicians who supplanted the moderates Hume and Trimble post-agreement are the subjects of the second picture. Taken after the installation of the new power-sharing devolved government in Northern Ireland, the picture shows two formerly hard-line figures Sinn Féin’s Martin McGuinness and the Democratic Unionist Party’s Rev. Ian Paisley seated together in multinational furniture company Ikea’s first store in the province in December 2007. The image is inadvertently captioned by Ikea’s motto of the time, “Home is the most important place in the world” in a statement that serves as ironic comment on the global and regional processes in play that the image indexes: a picture that was showing Northern Ireland as “open for business” as two erstwhile opponents in a bitter ethno-nationalist conflict smiled together on a Scandinavian sofa.

The promised “peace dividend” that politicians had promised would come to Northern Ireland, the most persistently economically deprived part of the UK, as a means of sealing the Good Friday agreement, never materialised. As Colin Coulter (2019) details, while successive Conservative governments in the UK had considered Northern Ireland “a place apart,” and withheld enforcing some of the austerity measures imposed on the rest of the UK, it took a party ostensibly of the Left, Tony Blair’s Labour,

to bring neoliberalism to Northern Ireland in earnest (127–128). The promised multinational investment in Northern Ireland though starting strong, quickly stalled and Northern Ireland maintained its position as one of the most deprived regions of the UK. The jobs that did come tended to be low-paid non-skilled positions, with a marked predominance of call centre work. Lyra McKee, the journalist whose murder at the age of 29 at the hands of Republican dissidents during a riot in Derry served as a reminder of the persistence of violence in the region, even during a time of supposed peace, wrote poignantly of being part of the “Good Friday generation, destined to never witness the horrors of war but to reap the spoils of peace.” To which she adds, “The spoils just never seemed to reach us” (McKee 2017). In Chap. 3, I place the death of McKee alongside the contemporaneous success of *Derry Girls*, finding in the sitcom (set at the end of the 1990s as Northern Ireland was transitioning to peace) a nostalgia for earlier promises, which, for many in McKee’s generation, failed to be fulfilled.

CONJUNCTURAL FLASH POINTS

The texts considered in this book emerge at a conjuncture marked by geopolitical turbulence and a rise in populist nationalism that is commonly seen as a by-product of decades of neoliberal policy. Media scholars Zala Volcic and Mark Andrejevic (2016) helpfully underline the role of the global in populist currents, stressing that “developments typically associated with the term ‘globalization’ go hand in hand with assertive and resurgent nationalisms—both enhancing and reconfiguring national identities” (1). These elements constitute the conjunctures considered in this book. A term often utilised in cultural studies scholarship, a conjunctural approach, such as the one taken herein, constitutes “the analysis of convergent and divergent tendencies shaping the totality of power relations within a given social field during a particular period of time” (Gilbert 2019, 6). Culture, in such an approach is only ever one field of contention, situated among and continually intersecting and interacting with “local, municipal, regional, national and international struggles (both institutional and extra-institutional), with economic processes and histories of technological change.” (Gilbert 2019, 16). Utilizing knowledge from a variety of disciplines is essential in carrying out such an analysis, and within this book I draw from scholarship in the critical humanities and social sciences, though the book itself is a work with a disciplinary home

in cultural studies, media studies and Irish studies. The conjunctures that this book intersects with, and which are associated in some ways with the populist currents that Volcic and Andrejevic (2016) contend are precipitated by globalist and neoliberal tendencies are Trumpism in the US, Brexit in the UK, (both of which I consider in the remainder of this section) and a post-Celtic Tiger Ireland characterised for many years by austerity and economic migration. The global COVID-19 pandemic that swept the world in 2020 is dwelt upon in the coda of this book.

The Brexit referendum of 2016 and Britain's subsequent departure from the European Union demonstrates the complex interplay between nation states. The sundering of the UK from the EU has reignited tensions in Northern Ireland given the Irish border's sudden reconfiguration as a boundary not only between Britain and Ireland, but between Britain and the EU. This momentous political recalibration has undermined the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that marked the putative end of The Troubles in Northern Ireland and the beginning of a power-sharing system underwritten by British and Irish state support. The fact that the UK has historically been the destination to which a majority of Irish emigrants depart contributes also to the fraught relations between the two nations. Certain figures and texts analysed herein (footballer McClean, *Derry Girls* [2018–]; *Mrs Brown's Boys* [2011–] in Chap. 6; sitcoms focusing on the Irish in Britain such as *Catastrophe* [2015–2019] and *This Way Up* [2019] in Chap. 5) all register in complex ways the seismic shifts under way in the second decade of the 2000s.

In particular, my examination of McClean's refusal to wear the Earl Haig poppy year on year, while playing in the English football leagues demonstrates how a personal protest informed by the player's experience of British militarism on the streets of Derry became a cultural lightning rod. In many ways McClean's protest (begun in 2012) prefigured the rise of a virulent nationalism in the UK that was tied in complex ways to notions of remembrance and the valorisation of sacrifices made in conflict, in particular the First World War, and which manifested in its most potent expression in the Brexit vote to take the UK out of the European Union. The vote has compounded uncertainties in terms of national belonging that have emerged for Irish and other national subjects in these years, uncertainties often rooted in shared and troubled histories of colonialism and migration.

It is important to clarify at this point that the transnational shifts I track in this book are for the most part related to anglophone countries, and

primarily the interplay between Ireland, the US and the UK. In many ways this is due to the triangulation of diasporic movement between these nations, as well as the dominance of both the UK and the US in terms of cultural production pertaining to Ireland. Sociologist Mary J. Hickman (2002) emphasizes this connection in her consideration of the definition and impact of the Irish diaspora, characterising it as:

sizeable, of extended reach, of long duration, [providing] much of the unskilled manual labour power for the world's two dominant economies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Britain and the USA respectively. (23)

While, of course, there have been significant migratory paths to countries such as Australia and Canada, and increasingly the Middle East both historically and in the aftermath of the post-2008 recession, migration to the US from Ireland registers highly in the national psyche, due in no small part to iconic screen representations such as *The Quiet Man* (1952)—which, as Sinead Moynihan (2019) argues, had an immediate and abiding impact on visual and touristic mythologies of Ireland (37)—as well as the prominence of Irish-American public figures in the high-profile realms of entertainment and politics.

The most significant shift in US culture during the years covered in this book finds its symbolic focus in the emergence of Donald Trump as president and the fractious public discourse that characterised the years of his presidency (as well as the pandemic era with which it overlapped). While in Ireland Trumpism was mainly held in disdain, the most high-profile Irish sporting figure of this era, MMA fighter McGregor (considered in Chap. 4) developed a public persona that fed off the racial and gendered antagonisms that the former president stoked in public discourse in the US. The pinnacle of McGregor's career—in terms of financial gain, if not professional comportment and success—was the 2017 “money fight,” his boxing debut against former champion Floyd Mayweather Jr. The racial friction that characterised the promotional tour undertaken by both fighters in anticipation of the bout indexed a restive public sphere that would ultimately erupt into the Black Lives Matter protests precipitated by the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police in May 2020 in Minneapolis. Providing a marked contrast to McGregor's race-baiting, Irish comedian, podcaster and writer Maeve Higgins' response to Trumpism (examined in Chap. 5) was a sustained consideration of the role of immigrants (Irish and

non-Irish) both past and present in the construction of US society in her podcast *Maeve in America: Immigration IRL* (2016–2017) and book *Maeve in America: Essays by a Girl from Somewhere Else* (2018). Higgins, along with other Irish figures examined in this book such as comedian and actress Aisling Bea (also Chap. 5) in her sitcom *This Way Up* (2019–), proffers a more reflective consideration of Irish identity that juxtaposes Irish whiteness and troubled pasts with those of non-white peoples who co-exist in the “diaspora spaces” (Brah 1996) in which many Irish have made their homes.

TRANSNATIONALISM, REGIONALITY AND DIASPORA: UTILIZING KEY TERMS

Guiding my analysis of contemporary Irish content is a focus on the interconnected concepts of transnationalism, regionality and diaspora. Singling out the first of these terms, transnationalism is often used to differentiate from the more general concept of globalization. As geographer Michael Kearney (1995) clarifies, “Whereas global processes are largely decentred from specific national territories and take place in a global space, transnational processes are anchored in and transcend one or more nation states” (548). In many of the chapters considered in this book, this anchoring occurs not only at a national, but often at a regional level. Thus, when depicted in individualised terms, say through actor O’Dowd’s connection to his hometown of Boyle in County Roscommon, the complexities of movement at different scalar levels in economic and labour spheres is rendered more legible and a demonstrable and abiding connection to the point of one’s origins emerges as a consoling narrative to make sense of a world characterised by at times unpredictable flux and movement across a variety of economic and social spheres.

Anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1999) locates her preference for the term transnationalism, which for her denotes “the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space” (4), over globalization in the capaciousness of the prefix “trans.” For Ong:

trans denotes both moving across space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something. Besides suggesting new relations between nation states and capital, transnationality also alludes to the transversal, the transactional, the translational, and the transgressive aspects of contemporary behaviour and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism. (4)

A consideration of the multiple changes which contemporary Ireland North and South has undergone since it was increasingly opened to global flows of people, capital and information as the Catholic church's hegemony waned and pre-existing political structures were reconfigured aligns with the multiple valences to which Ong ascribes this prefix, and the more specific concept of transnationalism.

Writing about cinema, but in terms that are applicable to the wider terrain of Irish screen culture that I assay in this book, Rosalind Galt (2016) similarly draws attention to the prefix. For Galt, the "trans" in transnational, "is not merely a bridge between more traditional national approaches, but rather it finds something quite different in that transition. The trans-national promises to transform the object of cinema. By shifting our attention to the mode of movement between things, the transnational asks us to look at cinema in terms of processes and transits rather than objects and states." Indeed, the "processes and transits" Galt writes of are an essential consideration in the chapters to follow, dealing as they do with the movement of specific people (as I track for instance the movement of public figures who perhaps would not have flourished as they did had they stayed within Ireland) or cultural flows (exemplified in the international success of highly regionalized texts such as *Derry Girls* and *The Young Offenders*). Further, the role of technological advances and increasingly globalized financial pathways in facilitating such variegated mobility in turn impact in crucial ways such forms of representation and the emergent modes of belonging they index.

A salient example of the interconnectedness and tensions that manifest when the transnational and the regional collide in contemporary Irish screen culture can be discerned in UK police series *Line of Duty* (2012–2021). While set in an unnamed city in the north of England, the series is filmed in Belfast. To contrast, the opposite production pattern is in evidence in the film *'71* (2014) which, though set in Belfast was filmed in Sheffield. These location misalignments are often related to funding structures. Media scholars Ruth McElroy and Caitriona Noonan (2019) note how policies implemented by the BBC and Channel 4 in the UK centred on regional development and decentralisation of production result in such spatial disjunctures (75–76), processes which have corollaries in film stemming from inter-regional as well as international competition to attract lucrative productions. These practices result in what film scholar Ruth Barton (2019) has termed an "uncanny recognition effect", in which what is familiar doubles for "a partially recognisable Other" (15). Large

drama productions such as *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019) and *Vikings* (2013–2020) filmed partially in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland respectively also align with this characterisation. Such uncanny experiences are in part an aesthetic by-product of complex funding and production infrastructures that are increasingly operating at a transnational scale. These processes, at different moments homogenising and disorienting, one may conjecture, might account for an appetite for regional authenticity in an increasingly globalised mediascape.

Returning to *Line of Duty*, we see the possibility of viewers experiencing both spatial disorientation and an appealing regional authenticity simultaneously. Watching the series viewers even passingly familiar with Belfast can recognise various local landmarks and the primarily mainland British accents of most of the main characters can be jarring in this context. One of the lead actors, Adrian Dunbar who plays Supt. Ted Hastings, however, is from Northern Ireland, born and raised in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh. The latitude given to Dunbar by series creator and writer Jed Mercurio has led to idiomatic expressions that the actor had heard spoken by his father in Fermanagh being regularly included in the series' scripts. Popular among these are: "Jesus, Mary and Joseph and the wee donkey," to express surprise, and "you must think I came down the Lagan in a bubble," as an indication that you are not as naïve as your interlocuter presumably believes. These regional expressions have generated a remarkable amount of good will (often expressed through memes of the more distinctive sayings) from fans of the show, who often refer to them as "Ted-isms." In an unanticipated display of homage, Horror writer and pop cultural icon Stephen King acknowledged the distinctive phrasing by tweeting "NOW WE'RE SUCKING DIESEL! If you don't get it, you missed a great series" (Toner 2021) in July 2021. The tweet was liked and shared widely among the series' cast and its enthusiastic audience, generating several press stories on *Line of Duty* and its famous fan. King's intervention highlights both the expanded reach of national television drama through emerging distribution technologies and providers and the transnational media ecology facilitated by social media platforms, as well as the capacity of regionality to pierce through an overcrowded media landscape and connect with viewers at a cultural and spatial remove.

While topography and landscape are usually the primary signifiers of region in screen texts, the popularity of Hastings' phrasing and accent might be usefully considered through the scholarly framework of critical regionality. Drawing on the work of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix

Guattari, who themselves were considering the writings of Franz Kafka, Neil Campbell (2016) summarizing this approach suggests that regionalism is an expression of "the minor," something that can destabilize the smooth-running operations of dominant "major" forms. For Campbell, "to rethink region and regionalism with this in mind understands the local and specific to be interventionist in wider, more distanced or global projects and 'languages' and yet, at the same time, refuses to allow the local to become static, nostalgic, or reductive" (3). In the case of Hastings' idiomatic phrasings, we see the regional manifest as a distinctive element that became a breakout feature in an exciting though otherwise somewhat routine police procedural. My consideration of comedies *Derry Girls* and *The Young Offenders* (initially a film before its further development into a sitcom) in Chap. 3 is informed by a critical regionality approach and seeks to assay the impact of these comedies and the disruptive potential of such expressions of regionality (through accent, language, topography and landscape) to a mediascape that tends to, unchecked, generate representational norms that align with hegemonic social and spatial formations, that is, privileging metropolitan subjects residing in higher socio-economic classes.

The role of diasporic populations amid the transnational and the regional is a central concern of this book. Much Irish studies scholarship has been devoted to considerations of the Irish diaspora (see, for instance, Bielenberg 2000; Hickman 2002; Moynihan 2013). As Sinéad Moynihan (2013, 12–13) notes, many scholars have raised questions about the usage of the word "diaspora," not least for its somewhat opportunistic deployment by an Irish state seeking to exploit for economic reasons the huge number of people who feel connected to Ireland through their family heritage. This was most evident perhaps in "The Gathering," a 2013 government-backed project aimed at promoting Ireland to its diaspora as a tourist destination. The project attracted 440,000 tourists to Ireland adding €200 million to the Irish economy, for an advertising outlay of only €3 million (Cronin 2021, 131). As Mike Cronin details, "'The Gathering' relied intensively on close community engagement and on narratives that connected the diaspora back to their deeply local roots ... channeling the message extensively through social media" (131). The centrality of emergent communications technologies to this project is thus also part of the narrative, comprising an increasingly pervasive infrastructural connection between the regional and the transnational.

A less nakedly mercenary example of diaspora engagement can be found in the “#hometovote” campaigns that emerged in tandem with the progressive referenda to legalise gay marriage in 2015 and repeal the ninth amendment, allowing for abortion within Ireland in 2018 (which I consider in more detail in Chap. 5 through an analysis of a “Together for Yes” campaign video for the 2018 referendum fronted by Horgan and Bea). Again, largely facilitated through social media postings, the Irish diasporic populations mobilised at these times were for the most part young economic migrants who had left Ireland after the crash of 2008. As Hegde (2016, 105) suggests, “While the contemporary diasporic experience still has the elements of longing, memory, and entanglements, technology and the force of global economy radically rework the transnational experience in terms of a sustained connectivity and synchronicity.” Such connectivity and synchronicity were highly in evidence during both referenda. Though, as Eleanor O’Leary and Diane Negra (2016) suggest of the 2015 campaign, while it “provided a sense of unity which was dependent on the idea of a modern, inclusive Irish identity,” the cathartic images of the returning migrants served to eclipse contemporaneous statistics showing that Irish young people were leaving rather than returning in their droves, and therefore were ideologically entangled in “a fantasy that the fabric of Irish society had not been torn apart in the intervening years of austerity” (138).

Nevertheless, the “longing, memory, and entanglements” to which Hegde alludes still persist across diasporic populations, and across generations. This is examined in Chap. 6 in my consideration of *Philomena* (2013), a comedic dramatization of the real-life experiences of Philomena Lee roughly based on journalist Martin Sixsmith’s account of the search for Lee’s child, who was taken from her when she resided in one of the state’s notorious mother and baby homes. Adding a layer of complexity to the film are the diasporic backgrounds of key creative personnel, including Steve Coogan (whose parents are Irish and who co-wrote the screenplay and starred in the film) and Dame Judi Dench, who played Lee and whose mother was Irish.

The notion of diaspora, of course, is a term that applies to different national and ethnic groupings. As Liam Kennedy cautions, “We need our diaspora (and other diasporas within our shores) not only as an economic ally, but as a mirror to our national conceptions and deceptions, and as a measure of what we mean by citizenship” (Kennedy 2015). The Celtic Tiger years saw the demographic constitution of Ireland change considerably, when for the first time in Irish history immigration outpaced emigration and a corresponding increase in racial/ethnic diversity. Sociologist