



**Joana Margarida dos  
Santos Gomes  
Wakefield**

**Mudanças Sociais na Irlanda (1922-2000) – tal como  
reflectidas no Cinema Recente**

**Social Change in Ireland (1922-2000) - as Reflected in  
Recent Cinema**



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## **o júri**

presidente

**Doutor Kenneth David Callahan**  
Professor Associado da Universidade de Aveiro

**Doutor Anthony David Barker**  
Professor Associado da Universidade de Aveiro

**Doutor Paulo Eduardo de Almeida Carvalho**  
Professor Auxiliar da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto

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**palavras-chave**

Estudos Irlandeses, Religião, Família, Cinema

**resumo**

Esta tese propõe-se a investigar a forma como as mudanças socio-históricas que afectaram a República da Irlanda entre 1922 e 2000 são representadas no cinema recente. Particular ênfase irá ser dada aos dois temas mais comuns: a Igreja Católica e a família nuclear. Será também dada atenção ao facto de haver uma grande tendência no cinema recente para retratar o passado da República da Irlanda de modo a permitir que os espectadores reflitam sobre a presente situação do país.

**keywords**

Irish Studies, Religion, Family, Cinema

**abstract**

This thesis proposes an investigation of how the socio-historic changes which occurred in Ireland between 1922 and 2000 are represented in recent cinema. Particular emphasis will be placed on its most common themes: the Catholic Church and the Irish nuclear family unit. Attention will also be given to the fact that recent cinema has a strong tendency to portray Ireland's past in a way that allows spectators to reflect on the country's current situation.

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## Introduction

Ireland has undergone major social and cultural changes since its independence in 1922 and this dissertation will analyse how these changes have been represented in recent cinema. The time of action of the films dealt with will be between 1922 and 1973 since the seeds for change were planted mostly between the country's independence and its acquisition of European Union membership. As one of the characters prophetically remarks in the first act of James Joyce's *Exiles* "If Ireland is to become a new Ireland she must first become European". Although in some cases it will be necessary to mention older films such as *The Quiet Man* (1952) to make a distinction between different approaches to films with an Irish theme most of the films which will be mentioned here were produced in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The reason for this is, I feel, that it was only then that the general population became ready to discuss and learn about the past.

In the past a poor Ireland in the old country, all too conscious of its contemporary failures, and a struggling Irish-America in the New World anxious to put its past behind it if it could, had found it very difficult to confront this profoundly difficult chapter of their distinct histories. Wealth and success in both constituencies seems to have allowed a hitherto unspoken misery to be admitted in all kinds of ways, some deeply moving, others exploitative – even crass.

(Brown, 2004: 410)

Recent films look at the past from the standpoint of the present day and consequently many films represent current Irish social problems in the ones of the past. As Martin McLoone puts it: "Films visit the recent history of Ireland to draw lessons for the present". (McLoone, 2000: 163) In order to understand the nature of change in Ireland and the reason why so many of the most recent films analyse the changes which have occurred it will be necessary to look carefully at Irish social history. After analysing the general changes that have occurred in Irish society this dissertation will focus on both the Catholic Church and the institution of the family. This will be done by looking at historical and social facts and questioning the basis on which they are presented and how they are

portrayed in film. Consideration will also be given as to how these representations correspond to present realities.

For many decades life in Ireland was completely dominated by both the Catholic Church and by the traditional family hierarchies and consequently a great part of the cinema produced about Ireland in the last decades of the twentieth century deals with either the Church or the family or both. Within the chapter about the influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland particular relevance will be given to the role of the Catholic Church in education. By controlling most of the school system in Ireland the Catholic Church attempted to indoctrinate the population and consequently guarantee that its power and influence would remain persuasive in the future. This chapter will also devote some attention to the position of Protestants in Irish society and how they are portrayed in film. However, this dissertation will not discuss the religious and political conflict in Northern Ireland since it is exclusively concerned with the Republic of Ireland. This conflict has had obvious reverberations for society in the Irish Republic however and these effects will be looked at in brief. When Ireland became independent the Catholic faith was considered by the Irish nationalists to be essential for the establishment of the difference between Ireland and Britain. However, as will be explained in this dissertation, by the middle of the century this need began to wane due to a variety of factors. By then the general population had “sought to distance themselves from Northern events by distinguishing past and present IRA violence”. (Brown, 2004: 408) Unsurprisingly, in 1998 over 94 per cent of the electorate voted in favour of the constitutional amendment (known as the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement) which removed Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution that yielded the Republic’s claim over the six counties in Northern Ireland since 1922. “The country, under the pressure of manifold change, was becoming detached from the version of national identity the Constitution had constructed” (Brown, 2004: 398). Modern Ireland accepted the partition of the island of Ireland as a reality and matured beyond the ideological position as originally set out in the 1937 constitution.

As previously mentioned particular relevance will also be given to the institution of family. Professor Martin McLoone believes that family is the major concern of recent Irish film and that a “recurring motif is the sense that the Irish family is incomplete, with either

the mother or the father missing from the drama, with disastrous results in terms of generational conflict". (McLoone, 2000: 168) Although there are examples of both missing fathers and mothers, it is quite notable that films represent far more missing fathers and in most cases mothers are portrayed in a very positive way. The reasons for what one might call 'feminisation' of Irish society will be explained by looking at Irish social history. Within this chapter, there will be a section devoted to immigration since it has affected most Irish families and played a very important role in the social changes which occurred in Ireland.

Amongst the many films which will be analysed, the film *Michael Collins* (1996) may be taken to be a special and originating text for the issue of this thesis. It deals with the Civil War and its aftermath, a very controversial time and taboo subject in Irish history, and it made the general population talk about these sensitive issues in the early history of the state. It "demonstrated that film had become the pre-eminent medium through which Ireland both examines itself and projects its image to the wider-world". (Pettitt, 2000: 258) This dissertation will culminate by reflecting on this issue, the reasons why some themes are recurrent in Irish films while others are absent and also by having a brief look at the new themes of Irish film in the twentieth-first century.

## 1. The Problematic Relationship of Cinema and History

Like a history book, a historical film – despite Hollywood desire for ‘realism’ – is not a window onto the past but a construction of a past: like a history book, a film handles evidence from that past within a certain framework of possibilities and a tradition of practice. Given its limited screen time, the film will never provide more than a fraction of the (traditional) data of a scholarly article on the same topic.

Rosenstone, 1992: 509

Historical films are often criticised for leaving important events aside, for only providing spectators with a sole reading of the past. For example, the film *Michael Collins* (1996) reads Michael Collins’ death as having been planned by Eamon De Valera and does not give spectators De Valera’s point of view on the event. Yet, it is important to note that although these films do not provide their spectators with various perspectives on an event, they allow spectators to revisit the past by emotionally engaging with historical characters and to acquire a greater familiarity with historical events. According to George Pingree in the article “Visual Evidence Reconsidered: Reflections on Film and History” historical films like historical novels (unlike history books) mix fictional events with history yet historians do not criticise historical novels as much as they criticise historical films because films tend to reach a greater audience than books and to have a greater impact on their audience’s because they produce an image of the past, which has a great sensory impact on their audiences and which perhaps makes them more influential than history books. It is important to note also that a filmmaker’s objectives and forms are very different from those of an historian and this means that the result of their work is always going to be different. The historical details presented in films are fictionalized and often changed in order to suit the film’s action, yet many people have a propensity to believe all that they see in films and start believing that the film’s version of historical events is in fact what happened. As the media holds great sway over society and relatively few people read history books, it can be argued that the media’s version of the past will have a preponderant role in future. This is particularly relevant for younger generations who had little or no contact to other versions of the facts presented in the films and will forevermore perceive those historical events as they were portrayed in films.

Films do not generally handle detail as judicially as history books do; they represent history through narrative. Consequently, filmmakers have to adapt historical facts to the fictional story the film wishes to display. Films that acknowledge doing so are seen as subjective and their historical facts are not so closely looked at as film essays, as it were. The most controversial films tend to be those who claim to be true to the historical facts because they are then analysed like historical documents and it is very hard for a film to reach the same level of scrupulous accuracy as a history book can. A film cannot say what it does not know, for example. Most films avoid claiming that all of their historical facts are accurate and seem rather to concentrate on giving a way of seeing and sensing the past or making its audience reconsider its knowledge of the past and its way of learning the truth about the past. A great number of historians argue that to be true to the historical facts films have to present the various perspectives on an event. Yet, many producers retort by saying that if a film gave multiple perspectives of an historical fact and described everything in great detail, as detailed historical studies do, a great part of the audience would find it to be boring and confusing. As producers have to please audiences in order to guarantee that their films will be profitable, their major concern is to present a subject and make audiences react to it emotionally rather than to present historical facts in great detail for their social and cultural significance. Another difficulty filmmakers have to overcome is the fact that as these films take place in the past, it is harder for the audience to understand the issues the film presents and/or find them relevant.

In order to overcome this challenge filmmakers in some cases make their films relevant by adapting the historical facts to the present and turning the film into a debate on current issues rather than on historical ones. In this case, historical truth once again comes down the list of a filmmaker's set of priorities. Another problem filmmakers are faced with is the number of characters a film would need to have in order to represent all the people - agents involved in the historical event. If they portrayed everyone, the film would become long and difficult to understand. So, filmmakers "reduce the number of characters in the story and compress time, directing audience attention to only a few individuals and events. They frame issues starkly in terms of conflicts between heroes and villains" (Toplin, 2002:16). The reduction in the number of characters is often affected by the introduction of composite characters, who have characteristics from the various characters they are

replacing. For example, the character of Ned Broy (Stephen Rea) in the film *Michael Collins* (1996) is a composite of several characters. Usually filmmakers also add romantic elements to the films, which make films more appealing and closer to the heart of a general audience. Some film critics use the fact that these alterations take place to demonstrate that filmmakers are more concerned with entertaining their audiences than educating them. For example, by portraying characters as either good or bad, filmmakers have to highlight certain facts about an historical character and eliminate others. It is easier to do this, though, when filmmakers use fictional characters as then they can invent the characters whole personality, a romantic plot, make them live through a myriad of events and take them to a range of places without having to worry about biographical facts.

It would appear, therefore, that one of the major strengths of historical films is that it can lead people to become interested in a specific matter and one of its greatest weaknesses is that it generally does not give the subjects different perspectives or details but rather presents them as definite versions of the events. Another problem of this genre is that it tends to portray characters as either as good or evil and events as being directly caused by very specific actions. By doing so films present historical facts as unambiguous and so non-thought provoking, rather than incidents within wider and ongoing processes, which is the opposite of what they should perhaps be doing. Historical films are also criticised for concentrating on fictional aspects while historians make a methodological search for the truth. However, it can be counter argued that filmmakers seek reality too by creating an image of the truth and making its audience curious enough to search for the truth for themselves.

Films use different techniques to explain the past, but the truths conveyed in images are not necessarily in conflict with the truths conveyed in words. Films may not deliver precisely the gift of understanding that we expect of the written scholarship, but they show exciting potential for providing their own insights.

Toplin, 1988:1226

Some films bring in controversial historical facts while making references to the present and leading audiences to question themselves about what they perceived as being the truth and to try to find out more about the film's subject matter. One of the films that

created great controversy over history in Ireland was *Michael Collins* (1996). This film led people to openly talk about the Irish Civil War, one of the darkest moments in the country's history, and a matter many people had refused to talk about at all. When the film was released some people argued in favour of it being banned on the grounds that it could encourage nationalist violence in Northern Ireland. While others highlighted the view that the film did not advertise violence but peace since it gave significance to Michael Collins's swift conversion from violence to political compromise. This film also led people to question how Ireland would have developed if Collins and not De Valera had led Ireland for so many years. The film was released in Ireland on 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1996 and Michael Dwyer wrote an article named "Dynamic, thrilling, epic cinema" in the edition of the *Irish Times* for that day claiming that *Michael Collins* was the most important film made in or about Ireland. In doing this he was also acknowledging the film's historical inaccuracies by saying that "Inevitably, there is some compression, omission and use of composite characters along the way, given that the film is covering six turbulent years in just two hours and 12 minutes". While he presented these historical inaccuracies as minor details, many others did not. The *Irish Times* of the following day contained many articles about the film and in most of them the film was criticised for its historical inaccuracies. One of those articles was named "An epic that pulls out all the stops" written by Professor John A. Murphy, one of Ireland's leading historians. In this article he calls his readers' attention to some of the film's historical inaccuracies and adds that,

A film-maker is entitled to take these kinds of liberties as long as he does not claim that his film is historically accurate. This film is not an educational documentary about the 1916-1923 period. The cinema is not the place for history lessons. History teachers all over the country must make this clear.

Murphy, 9 November 1996, *Irish Times*

Notwithstanding the critics, and probably even boosted by them, the film broke records at the Irish box-office. The 16th November edition of the *Irish Times* reports that many cinema multiplexes showed the film on several of their screens, that many schools took their students to the cinema to watch the film and that there were people who went to the cinema for the first time in many years to watch the film. After the film's release many books were published on the Irish Civil War and the figure of Michael Collins, and many

public debates and conferences took place on these matters all around the country. Mary Banotti, grandniece of Michael Collins, says that before the *Michael Collins* film was released few people talked about him and that he was just briefly mentioned in history books but that all of that had changed with the film's release (Keogh, 1998: 17). Films like *Michael Collins* (1996), whether they are fully accurate or not, reach wide audiences and manage to make many people interested in historical events and figures. A history book about an event or person is usually read by relatively few people and involves very small financial investment but the same cannot be said about a film. For example, it is estimated that there was more money invested in the film *Michael Collins* (1996) than the whole of history research done in Ireland since the country's independence (Keogh, 1998: 21).

*Gandhi* (1982) directed by Richard Attenborough, was another successful and controversial Biopic that portrayed the independence of a British Colony, India in the case of this film. A Biopic is a type of film that aims to tell the story of someone's life. Usually these films portray a well known and loved person and follow their career and end with their death. Biographical Films have existed since the early days of cinema (for example, *Jeanne D'Arc* by George Méliès in 1899 and *Judith of Bethulia* by D.W. Griffith in 1914) and have always been a popular form of film. In order to create an interesting plot many directors decide to make certain changes to the historical facts. However, this often leads to great controversy as people find it difficult to accept a fictionalised life story. Not surprisingly, *Gandhi's* subject matter was controversial and the investors feared that the general public would not be interested in this kind of film, it took Richard Attenborough a long time to muster all the financial support he needed to produce the film. In the book *In Search of Gandhi* (1983) Richard Attenborough describes that long twenty-year struggle. In order to succeed Attenborough had to dramatize Gandhi's life by often exaggerating what had happened and even inventing characters and events. For example, there is a scene in which the police hit Gandhi when he insists on burning both his and a few other Indians registration certificates. Yet, there is no record of the police beating him at that time and he was not surrounded by just a few Indians but by around 2,000 (Hay, 1983: 88). This scene illustrates the general tendency of the film to portray British forces as bad and Gandhi as the individual who stood against them. The latter is one of the film's greater faults:

History was never achieved single-handedly by one man. Gandhi's magnificent struggle against the British was fought with a team of revolutionaries, dedicated men and women, who were illustrious in their own right. Gandhi's unique contribution lay in uniting them, in settling their personal differences and in consolidating them as one spirit bent on achieving freedom. In the span of three hours it would not be possible for the film-makers to delineate all this, but they could have suggested it

Cooper, 1983/4: 47

The film also fails to show that Gandhi's Satyagraha (a philosophy and practice of non-violent resistance) was not simply a way of defeating the colonial oppressor but a way of life, which Gandhi wanted the whole world to embrace, which they were hardly ever likely to do.

It is very hard to define Historical Cinema since it is comprised of films whose action takes place in a myriad of eras and locations. One of the most common characteristics of this genre is that films are often presented in black and white or in an aesthetic similar to the one of the old Technicolor films, so as to look old and more authentic. For example, Steven Spielberg said that he recorded *Schindler's List* (1993) in black-and-white (there was only one exception to that during the film, the young girl in a red dress) "since our knowledge of concentration camps comes from black-and-white photographs and newsreels, a film about the Holocaust should have a documentary look as well." (Cardullo, 1995: 125). Another characteristic of this genre is that it often tells a libertarian story of hard working, but poor people who manage to defeat the rich, or of a small army who defeats a much greater army.

"Cinematic history often portrays its heroes in noble fights against oppression, exploitation, or prejudice. Audiences sense early in these stories that the heroic characters are right in their beliefs, but people in positions of authority will not listen to them and respect their ideas"

(Toplin, 2002: 34)

These heroic characters are also shown taking part in all of the relevant historical events portrayed in these films for, by centralising the action in a few characters, the film is thought to be more easily understood and enjoyed the audiences. The majority of the

Irish films, whose action takes place in the past, and indeed all of the films which will be examined in subsequent chapters, perhaps with the exception of the film *Michael Collins*, do not aim to describe specific historical events but rather “spin highly fictional tales that are loosely based on actualities. Their stories identify some real people, events or situations from the past but blend these details into invented fables.” (Toplin, 2002: 92). These films are known as fact-based films and are less subject to criticism since their references to history are not as numerous nor as precise as in historical films. However, it is important to note that although these films’ historical references are often imprecise and that they rarely show economic and social changes or differences from contemporary thinking, they still succeed in raising meaningful questions about past events and customs.

No historical interpretation is the real or the correct one; all explanations of history are constructed. The narrative itself is a construction, formed out of the interests and ideological inclinations of the storyteller. Even history texts are interpretive dramatizations.

Toplin, 2002: 161

Historical films have been controversial since their very beginning. D. W. Griffith, one of cinema’s great pioneers, believed that in the future people would learn about the past mostly through film. According to him, anyone who wanted to learn about the American Civil War would either have to read a book, which would take him/her a few days to go through or watch a film for a few hours, which would enable him/her to learn the crucial facts of the American Civil War. He tried to educate his audience about the past in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) but was heavily criticised for producing a racist film not even minimally based on historical evidence. Many directors have been criticized ever since for not being true to the facts. Oliver Stone, who claims to be a ‘cinematic historian’, has directed highly documented films like *JFK* (1991) and *Nixon* (1995), for which he wrote a 500-page text that supported the film’s facts and interpretations, but both films were also criticised for not being historically accurate (Davies, 2002: 66). For example, *JFK* presents a theory of how and why President Kennedy was murdered, yet many of the facts presented in the film are purely speculative and the film fails to present them as that, leading many spectators to believe that they are true. Despite all the criticism made of the film’s veracity, a survey carried out involving a group of spectators after they had watched the film and published by Butler, Koopman and Zimbardo in 1995 concluded that 61 per

cent believed most of what was shown in the film and 85 per cent believed that at least half of what was shown in the film was true. Moreover, in 1992 and so no long after the film's release, the House of Representatives passed a bill calling for the opening of most of the secret files on John F. Kennedy's assassination. "There is good reason to believe that the impetus for this Congressional decision came from the political fallout of widespread viewer and media reaction's to the film *JFK*" (Butler, et al, 1995: 238). Politicians use films too to get their message across and convince the greater population of the appropriacy of their policies. President Bill Clinton is one such politician. "President Clinton – mired in the enormous dilemma of how to get American public to support military action in Bosnia to stop two years of 'ethnic cleansing' urged everyone to view Spielberg's film." (Manchel, 1995: 90). Spielberg's film referred to in this quote is *Schindler's List* (1993), which portrays Nazis ethnic cleansing during the Second World War. This was a highly popular film, which is still shown nowadays in many history classes all over the world and whose scenes are now some of the most dominant public images of the Second World War, especially for what happened in Concentration Camps.

There are many photographs from Concentration Camps and records of what went on in there, however, "By projecting movement and heightened emotion, motion pictures could go far beyond still photographs in capturing the 'reality' of war and more palpably evoking the accompanying sense of danger, horror and excitement" (Chambers II, 1996: 3). Even wars such as the Vietnam War which were widely covered by television networks are often remembered by many people not for the 'real' images broadcast on news bulletins but for images from films such as *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Platoon* (1986) which only reconstructed reality. Films can never be anything but the imitation of reality since no matter how similar an actor looks to the person involved in an historical event, he/she is not that person. In fact, in many cases the actors/actresses do not look like the character they are portraying. For example, Anthony Hopkins does not look like Nixon in the film *Nixon*, neither does Liam Neeson look like Michael Collins in the film *Michael Collins*.

The Hollywood historical film will always include images that are at once invented and yet may still be considered true; true in that they symbolize, condense, or summarized larger amounts of data; true in that they carry out

the overall meaning of the past that can be verified, documented, or reasonably argued.

Rosenstone, 1992: 509

Audiences often watch historical films not to find the truth but simply because they want to be entertained by a story that takes place in the past. These stories often give just a glimpse of reality but raise important questions about the past and lead people to further investigate an historical event. Such films like *JFK* and *Michael Collins* are important not for showing the truth but for increasing the amount of historical research on a specific historical event and making the general population interested in the results of such research.

We are constantly reminded that even a film that only skirts the fringes of historicity can serve as an unmatched illustration, providing insight, posing questions, and inviting further inquiry. Obviously, there are limitations. Facts can be twisted, timelines conflated, endings revised for perceived audience's satisfaction. The bottom line in film business is not accuracy but profit.

Weinstein, 2001: 28

## 1.1 Representation of Irish social-history in film

Many of the Irish films produced over the last two decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first century represent the period between the end of the political and economic union with Britain (with the subsequent formation of the Irish Free State) and the country's entrance into the European Union, which constituted another form of economic and political union but this time it was between Ireland and several other countries, not just one and on what are generally thought to be mutually beneficial terms. Some are historical films like *Michael Collins* (1996), directed by Neil Jordan, while other films tell a fictional story set against a precise and recognisable historical background, as is the case with the film *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1998), directed by Pat O'Connor. These films' themes are varied but there are some features in them, which appear very frequently, namely: the Catholic Church's influence over society, the country's fight for independence and the consequent Civil War, families's ways of functioning, especially the tribulations of

women, the realism poverty and immigration. There are very few films whose action takes place in the 1990s and fewer still set in the new millennium, one of the few exceptions being the film *Once* (2007), which represents the Irish Diaspora paradigm on turned on its head since it deals with the issue of the influx of foreign nationals into Ireland and their interaction with the native population.

The reasons why many Irish films' actions take place in the past are wide-ranging and will be further examined in the subsequent chapters. However, in brief, it could be argued that these films want to show audiences that what is now a wealthy country was very poor for a great part of the twentieth century and how the country was able to recover from its fight for Independence and the Civil War thereafter. These films "have replaced that almost hysterical sense of the burden of history with a new confidence that the events of the past may be put behind us" (Barton, 2004: 147). When Ireland was going through economic difficulties, it was painful to talk about their past and present difficulties and the general population just wanted to bury the past. However, once Ireland became a wealthy state the general public began to be willing to talk about the problems of the past and even profit from this openness. Nowadays, for example, tourists can make trips to the areas most severely hit by the Famine. Since the 1960s the Irish have begun looking at themselves, begun to question their own history and the state and religious institutions instead of simply blaming the former colonial power for most of what went wrong. By the 1990s the country's economy was beginning to develop significantly and people began to have a better understanding about what had happened since the country's independence. This turned the 1990s into Ireland's decade of revelations as it was only then that greater numbers of people began revisiting the past and questioning it. There is another important event that led many people to begin to revisit the past in the 1990s and that was the opening of the National Archives and Military archives section on the 1960s at Cathal Brugha Barracks in Dublin. This was only possible due to the introduction of the thirty year rule by former Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave in 1976 which dictated that official State documents may only be open to public scrutiny thirty years after the events that they discuss have occurred, provided they have not been designated as secret or sensitive by order of the Government (Keogh, 1998: 11). Consequently it was only then that historians

were able to comprehensively study the all the first six decades of the twentieth century in Ireland.

Not all films whose action takes place in the past claim to be true to the historical record. Some of these films are so-called heritage films that show Ireland as an idyllic, pastoral and innocent place. According to Ruth Barton, Irish Heritage films like *The Quiet Man* are typically set in the 1950s or earlier, providing a distanced scenario – or one with significant historical reference to otherwise contemporary action – that predates changes seen to have been wrought by modernisation in the 1960s. Irish heritage film rarely criticises the past and usually the film’s action takes place in rural areas, which are portrayed as largely idyllic and innocent and where modernity is treated with disdain. These films usually portray family and rural community values as being essential while rarely referring to the contemporary political violence. Most of these films are based on novels and plays and place great emphasis on childhood. Although most heritage films are uncontroversial, some do tackle important themes such as sexuality, women’s role in society and racism, which were rarely mentioned in Irish society at the time those films were produced.

Although some films show how the country began to change in the 1950s and the 1960s, most represent Ireland before these social changes and modernization took place, and which became clearly visible in the 1960s. Heritage films do not have to refer to or portray specific historical events, they can simply represent a certain historical time by recreating the character’s clothes, homes and lifestyles. The past is represented as distinctive from the present and as no longer influencing people’s current lives. There is a connection between heritage film and heritage tourism, in which the Irish Tourism Board has invested greatly. As the Irish Tourism Board cannot advertise Ireland on the grounds that it has good weather, it does so by promoting Ireland as a green country full of tradition and hospitality. Films have been essential to the spreading of this idea since many films show long panoramic views of small Irish villages and countryside, which awake the public’s interest in visiting Ireland. One of the films that contributed most to Irish tourism industry was *The Quiet Man* (1952) distributed by Republic Pictures. Even the film location (in the town of Cong, county Mayo in the west of Ireland) became extremely

popular amongst tourists and the year of 1996 saw the opening of *The Quiet Man* Heritage Centre. The film's success commenced from the very first moment it started production. It was shot during a six-week period, during which time the local residents were thrilled by it and the local newspapers reported the event quite extensively. There was a clear intention on the part of John Ford, the film director, to advertise Ireland as a holiday destination. He states that desire in a letter he sent to Lord Killanin on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1950, "I think that we should go all over Ireland and get a bit of scenery here and a bit of scenery there and really make the thing a beautiful travelogue beside a really charming story". Ford himself had Irish ancestry and wanted to record the film in Spiddal, County Galway because both his parents lived there before immigrating to the United States of America. However, after spending sometime in Ireland, Ford decided that it would be best to record the film in Cong, which would have to undergo some changes in order for him to be able to shoot the film there. Amongst other things, the village had to be electrified and the telephone system had to be upgraded to a twenty-four-hour service. Ironically, the cause of a village's modernization was a film that praised Ireland for being a pastoral and traditional haven against modernity. Another film whose production caused great changes in the area where it was produced was *Ryan's Daughter* (1970). According to Pettitt while it was in production, many local people were employed on the set by the film company and received much higher wages than they were used to locally. By the time the film company had left, many people had become used to a standard of living based on film company wages and not wanting to return to the life they had enjoyed previously to the recording of the film, they left Ireland (Pettitt, 2000: 102).

Kevin Rocket estimates that there have been about two thousand films produced since 1900 with an Irish theme. One of the reasons there are so many films about Ireland and the Irish is that there are people of Irish extraction living in the United States of America and who represent a significant part of cinema's audience. Another reason why there are a great number of films with an Irish theme is that there are a large number of Irish actors, directors and general technicians working in Hollywood. Significantly, the first time an American company recorded a feature film abroad was when the Kalem Company recorded in Ireland in the first decade of the twentieth century. American films tend to represent Ireland as either rural, a place blighted by violence or both. Films that

show Ireland as a rural country often make audiences reflect upon the poverty felt by those who lived in rural areas and who were forced to emigrate in order to improve their living conditions. This can be seen in films such as *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1998). On the other hand, these films can also make audiences reflect upon the negative sides of urban life and look at rural areas as a place to where people can escape, as shown in *The Quiet Man* (1952). Films that show Ireland as a place blighted by violence do so by showing the ‘troubles’ in Northern Ireland, the country’s fight for independence, by presenting violence as a characteristic Irish trait or all of the above. “Communal brawling is presented as an amiable trait, fuelled by communal drinking and as much a part of Irish sensibility as poetry, music and imaginative leaps of fantasy” (McLoone, 2000: 35). This practice can for example be seen in *The Quiet Man* (1952). Characters often fight with each other but those scenes are mostly intended to be genially comic and highlight the characters’ stereotyped characteristics.

Influential Irish nationalists saw modernism and urbanism as being linked to imperialism while rural areas and the pastoral way of life were seen as part of an essentialist Irish identity. Ironically, by doing so, nationalists were accepting one of Imperialism’s stereotypes of Ireland. It was only recently that rural Ireland began to be demythologised and consequently portrayed as a place of harsh living conditions, oppressive social mores and somewhere many Irish people gladly deserted in search of a better life elsewhere. Life in rural Ireland is one of the recurrent themes of Irish films produced over the last two decades and like other recurrent themes, it is also usually dealt with by setting the action of the film in the past. Many of these films are melodramatic since the filmmakers’ primary concern was generally the film’s commercial success, which can be seen in the film *In the Name of the Father* (1993), where the spectator learns about historical events through what happens to the characters and their emotional response to it. Another recurrent theme in Irish films is the family. Martin McLoone argues that the nature of family life is the most recurrent theme of the last two decades. Irish families are frequently portrayed as being in crisis because either the father (like in *Agnes Brown*) or the mother (like in the film *Evelyn*) is missing or due to the dangerous child-abuse, the latter being representative of the scandals that came out in Irish society in the 1990s about members of the Catholic Church abusing children. Women are given particular prominence

within the family while men are often portrayed as missing or undergoing crisis themselves. This is clearly a reflection of the changing role of women in the 1990s as a driving force for modernization, which was the opposite of the role women had at the beginning of the twentieth century which consisted of following and spreading the moral precepts of the Catholic Church. Women are often portrayed as a family's sole provider either because the husband does not live up to his responsibilities, as in *Angela's Ashes* (1999), or because he is dead, as in *Agnes Brown* (1999). In both films, mothers display their survival skills and their capacities to raise a large family alone. In *Agnes Brown*, the main character is determined to raise her family without male help and so refuses Pierre's (Agnes's French admirer, who had moved to Dublin to open a shop) help to pay a loan to a ruthless moneylender. On the other hand, she always accepts help from her best friend Marion O'Dwyer and her colleagues from her workplace at Moore Street market. By doing so, the film rejects male dominance over women and offers "an idealised view of working-class community life that exudes nostalgia for a non-existent time when such organic communities offered broad mutual support and solidarity" (McLoone, 2000: 180). By and large women are shown working in the home doing all the house work, which can be seen in films such as *My Left Foot* (1989), *The Field* (1990) and *The Quiet Man* (1952). However, women are also usually characterised as forceful in those films, as they are for example in *The Quiet Man*. In this film Mary Kate (Maureen O'Hara) is a conventional wife when it comes to performing the household duties, yet, she is capable of standing up to her husband when she feels that her financial independence is at stake. Consequently, she refuses to sleep with her husband until he makes her brother pay her dowry.

Films produced prior to Ireland's economic resurgence tended to represent Ireland as an ideal place to live in and it was only when the country became more wealthy that more complex and varied critical views of the past were represented in cinema. However, even emblematic films like *The Quiet Man* hint that Ireland is prone to nostalgic and unrealistic forms of presentation. When the film's main character, Séan, arrives in Ireland and sees his family's former home he proclaims that it is beautiful, to which a local resident, Michaeleen, answers that it is just a small cottage. In this case Michaeleen gives a more grounded sense of reality while Sean gives a nostalgic and North-American view of Ireland. When Sean buys his family cottage, he paints it green, a colour which is

representative of Ireland and the local Protestant reverend and his wife comment on this fact saying that only an Irish-American would paint his house green. This is representative of the view that some Irish-Americans want to go on believing in an unrealistic view of Ireland and that believe in the persistence of traditions such as the use of green and the popularity of the Aran sweaters, when they are clearly neither popular nor important for the local community. However unimportant these and other elements are in Ireland, they are overused in films. Lance Pettitt defines the following as being the staple elements of films about Ireland or simply films with Irish characters: “the lilting music score, the Celtic cross, a cow in the shop and the comic word-play dialogue” (Pettitt, 2000: 56). Most of these elements are present in films like *The Quiet Man* (1952) and *The Luck of the Irish* (1948). Although some of these elements are related to the country’s Celtic Heritage and supposed Irish traits, their role in films far exceeds their presence in real life. However, as will be explained in following chapters, there were a number of films produced in the 1990s which did not invest in all these clichéd elements so characteristic of Irish films and there were even some films which have distorted them parodically, such as Neil Jordan’s *The Butcher Boy* (1997).

Ironically, it was just at the time when many Irish people were leaving Ireland that the country was portrayed as idyllic in film. For example, *The Quiet Man* (1952) tells the story of the Irish-American Sean Thornton (John Wayne), who returns to Ireland, where he will find the happiness he never had in America. Yet, according to the Irish Statistics Office data the 1950s were certainly not marked by the return of the Irish who had left but by the significant half a million Irish who were leaving their country, which represented about 18 per cent of the population leaving during that decade. The film “unashamedly celebrated a way of life that was actually being rejected by Ireland’s sons and daughters” (Pettitt, 2000: 64). Many films produced in the 1990s show the rejection of that Irish way of life; one such film is *Angela’s Ashes* (1999). Both *Angela’s Ashes* and *The Quiet Man* begin with the return of Irish people who had emigrated to the United States of America. In *The Quiet Man* (1952), the return has a healing effect and Sean is seen as being happier in Ireland than he was in the United States of America. In *Angela’s Ashes*, Frank McCourt and his family’s living conditions deteriorate significantly once he arrives in Ireland and he does everything in his power, including illegal activities, to get back to the United States of

America. *The Quiet Man* takes place in the small village of Innisfree, which is sunny and full of green fields and white cottages, in stark contrast to Limerick city, presented as a grim, poor place, where it is always raining in *Angela's Ashes's*. *The Quiet Man's* representation of Ireland as a mystical and beautiful place is far more frequent in Irish cinema than the image portrayed in *Angela's Ashes*. Even films like *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006), concerned with the fight for independence and the Civil War and showing a dark side of Irish history, have long shots of the green Irish landscape used by the Irish Tourism Board to advertise Ireland. Consequently, *Angela's Ashes* (1999) was heavily criticized in Ireland, especially in Limerick, for giving a far too negative view of Ireland, which according to local residents was not in keeping with the reality of the 1930s. One of the aspects the film was most criticized for was that it seems to be always raining in Limerick and that the book on which the film was based described Limerick and the McCourt family as being poorer than they really were. A Disk Jockey named Gerard Hannan, working in a local Limerick radio station, criticized the book openly on radio and received a lot of positive feedback from his listeners, which led him to write a book called *Ashes* (which sold around twenty thousand copies) in which he tries to prove that *Angela's Ashes* does not provide a truthful description of life in the city of Limerick in the first two decades after Ireland's independence. However, even though the film portrays Limerick rather negatively, travel agents and tourism promotion authorities used the film successfully to attract additional tourists to the city. Yet any tourist who embarks on such trip would be disappointed to find that the greater part of the film was recorded in a film studio and on location in Dublin and Cork and that very few scenes were actually shot in Limerick. It seems that even destitution and misery can be fodder for the tourist industry; people hoping to find in Limerick an example of preserved poverty.

*Angela's Ashes* (1999) was a controversial film because it challenged the way Ireland was portrayed in film. It was not the first film to do so but the way it portrayed poverty shocked some audiences. By the 1990s the spectator was used to seeing Irish films that portrayed religious and political divisions in the country, but was not so used to seeing the economic consequences of the country's political instability. As previously mentioned, many people doubted that living conditions were as bad as they were portrayed in *Angela's Ashes* and the film was also criticized for only showing Frank McCourt's perspective on

the events of these years. Yet, one should not forget that the action of the film takes place between the early 1930s and the 1940s, a time in which Ireland was still recovering from the Civil War, coming to terms with the fact that it was a free country and at the same time it had to deal with a world-wide economic depression, the Second World War and the so called 'economic war' with Britain. The latter, which was the consequence of the Irish Government's decision to stop collecting land annuities that had to be sent to Britain, was a decisive factor in the deterioration of Ireland's economic situation. This led to Britain's retaliation and the beginning of the so-called 'economic war'. Firstly, Britain responded by imposing sanctions on Irish cattle imports to the United Kingdom. As a counter-measure the Irish Government levied duties on British goods. During this period Irish imports fell by one-half and exports by three-fifths. This 'war' only ended in 1938 when it was agreed that Ireland would pay ten million pounds on account of the land annuities (which was far less than the hundred and four million pounds Britain claimed) and Britain would leave all the Irish ports in their charge in the hands of the Irish State. This was a positive outcome for Ireland; however, it can not be denied that this 'economic war' could not have come at a worse time. So it is possible to believe that for many Irish people, life really was as hard as was shown in *Angela's Ashes*.

Another recurrent subject in Irish films is the Catholic Church, which will be thoroughly analysed in the chapter "Religion in Irish film". In some films it is the main theme but in the great majority it is a sub-theme. Some films show how institutions were run by the Catholic Church in order to make the public aware of the inequities committed there and reappraise the Catholic Church's power in Ireland. Films like *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002), directed by Peter Mullan and *A Song for a Raggy Boy* (2003), directed by Aisling Walsh, tell real-life stories of abuse suffered at the hands of members (e.g. Priests) of the Catholic Church. These films were released at a time when the Church was coming under fire from the media and especially from the victims themselves, who took many members of the clergy to court and where they were in many instances convicted. In this context, films came to represent the increasing secularization of Ireland and asserted many people's resentment against the Catholic Church, their distrust of its running of institutions and further internationalized the scandal because it enabled foreign audiences to get a clearer idea of what had taken place. The crimes committed by officials of the Catholic

Church are not unique to Ireland since there were many crimes also committed, for example, by the clergy in United States of America. So international audiences were also given an opportunity to reflect upon the way the Catholic Church's institutions were run in their own home countries.

Another characteristic of many recent Irish films is the centrality of children. That centrality can be seen in films such as *Angela's Ashes*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Evelyn*, *The Butcher Boy* and *A Song for a Raggy Boy*. "In many cases, the children and young adults are caught up in old enmities and old traditions from which they largely manage to escape, holding out a promise for their future, our present" (Barton, 2004: 150). In most of these films children are portrayed as rather innocent and can be seen losing that innocence as life's problems begin to overtake them. Although children play a central role in these films, they cannot be categorised as children's films as they deal with themes such as the abuse of minors, poverty and emigration, which are not usually seen by the general public as appropriate for children. Equally central in many films is the role of women. The main action of many films takes place before Ireland's membership of the European Union and in those films women can usually be seen in their traditional role in the home. In most cases women do not work outside the home, as in *Angela's Ashes*, *Evelyn*, *The Field* and *My Left Foot* and even in the case of the films in which women do work they are still presented as being dependent on their husbands. Setting the films' actions in the past enables filmmakers to show women achieving their freedom, as can be seen in *Agnes Browne*, who becomes independent once her husband dies and in *Angela's Ashes*, when Angela refuses to have any more children against her husband's wishes. As will be discussed in the foregoing chapters, women are generally characterised as being good mothers, worrying about their children's well-being and going to great lengths to ensure that their children are fed and properly educated. Martin McLoone sums up the way Irish womanhood is portrayed in film by describing them as "a strong-willed, independent woman nonetheless committed to conservative social values" (McLoone, 2000: 50). An exception to this can be found in *Evelyn*, since in this film Evelyn's mother leaves her children and the family home in order to runaway with one of her husband's cousins to Scotland. While her husband was at home, she minded their children properly but when he was away she used to leave their children at home, alone and hungry, so that she could

enjoy her temporary freedom, which became permanent once she left Ireland altogether. This is in stark contrast, for example, with Mrs. Brown (Brenda Fricker) in *My Left Foot*, who is always minding her children at home and accompanying them whenever and wherever they need her. Her attitude did not change when her husband died since she continued to take care of her children, especially, Christy Browne, her physically impaired son.

This dissertation will investigate in following chapters how some of the main events in Irish social-history are portrayed in film and the reasons why filmmakers keep concentrating most action in the past, even when in most cases their main aim is arguably to make their audiences reflect on the present. It will also be argued that although many films do not tell a historically accurate story, in many cases they manage to provide its viewers with key ideas about the issues which were and are crucial to a modern nation sense of itself, such as conflicting views of religion, family and the urban/ rural divide.

## **A brief historical outline of Ireland : 1920s - 1990s**

(The twentieth-century was) a century in which the Irish had repeatedly attempted to map their identity, depending on the signposts the remembered past provided and on those of a national life which since the 1960s constantly pointed in the direction of change and fluid renewal in an international context.

Brown, 2004: 429

Ireland was controlled by the British for more than seven hundred years. The Irish had fought against this occupation since its beginning and even allied forces with England's enemies, like France, to try to gain independence. However, it was only in the nineteenth century that the struggle for Irish independence intensified as a result of the hardships of the Great Famine (1845-1851) and this took hold particularly in the form of the Land War (1879-1882), which was concerned with diminishing the power and influence of British landlordism and, by inference, British control of Ireland. These events in Ireland in the nineteenth century together with improved Irish guerrilla warfare techniques and British involvement in the First World War and the United States of America interest in Ireland made it possible for the southern part of the country to achieve independence. Ireland's independence was sealed on 6 December 1921 by the controversial Anglo-Irish treaty. Even though the treaty established that Ireland would become a Free State, with its own Parliament, army, police and which would fully control its own finances; there were many people like the future founder of the Fianna Fail party, Éamon de Valera who refused to accept it. They rejected the treaty because it did not confer the Irish full control of their country because Britain was to keep its naval bases and harbours in Ireland, the members of the Irish parliament would have to swear an oath of alliance to the British Monarch, Ireland would continue to be part of the Commonwealth and land owned by British landlords would be transferred to the Irish but the State would have to collect land annuities from the farmers twice a year and send it to Britain. The latter was to become a major political issue between the two countries when De Valera came to power. Yet, at the moment the treaty was signed the major reason why a great part of the population was so aggressively against it was that the treaty stated that the six Northern Counties would not be part of the new Free State. The treaty not only divided the country itself, as it also divided its people "between those separatists who wanted the

reality of an independence that would enable Ireland to look after its own affairs and those who wanted more, who opposed the treaty for a principle – the republic.” (Lynch in Moody, 2001: 272). Those in favour of the treaty did not agree with all aspects of the treaty but thought that it enabled them later on to achieve the complete freedom Irish people hoped for. Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith, the two men who led the delegation charged with negotiating an Anglo-Irish treaty, also believed that the treaty they signed was the best they could hope for at the time. Michael Collins was afraid that Irish forces would not be able to continue fighting the British for much longer and so believed that it was important to reach an agreement before the British forces realised that the Irish forces were close to collapse. On the other hand Arthur Griffith believed that the division of Ireland in two had begun with the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, which established that the northern six counties would have a separate parliament and that it would be impossible to undo that Act and re-establish that all the counties comprising the island of Ireland would belong to the same State and be governed by the parliament.

There is little doubt that the Treaty commanded majority support. It was favoured by all those who sought a quick return to peace and order. Those whose livelihood depended on trade were quick to support the Treaty, as well as were Church leaders of all denominations. The Treaty was also welcomed by most of the press, by former Home Rulers and by all the southern Unionists.

Murphy, 1981: 41

The Treaty was refused by those who followed De Valera, by people living in areas where there was a strong tradition of political resistance, by all of those who believed that by signing the Treaty politicians were betraying all of those who died fighting for Ireland’s independence and by those who expected Ireland to become a socialist Republic. It is important to highlight that the pro-treaty faction was not happy with the treaty either but believed that it offered the state some freedom and the means to fight for complete freedom. The anti-Treaty faction representatives in the Parliament refused to accept the explanations given by Griffith and Collins and voted against it in the Dail (the Irish name for the Parliament of Ireland). Yet not only did the treaty pass in the Dail by 64 votes to 57 but the pro-treaty parties led by Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith won comfortably the general election in 1922. Notwithstanding the majority of the population (including the

press and the Catholic Church) being in favour of the treaty and the elections being comfortably won by the pro-treaty parties that managed to elect fifty-eight candidates against the thirty-six elected by the anti-treaty faction, a civil war erupted soon after the elections. Only two months after winning the elections, Arthur Griffith, who led the pro-treaty campaign, died of a cerebral haemorrhage. He was replaced by William T. Cosgrave. Ten days later, on 22 August, Michael Collins was killed in an ambush while visiting the west of his home county Cork. During the Civil War some TDs (members of the Irish Parliament) were killed, many fields and historic houses were destroyed and public services were sabotaged by the republicans (anti-treaty faction), which led the Government to give the army the power to judge and impose the death penalty on all those who endangered the state's safety. By the end of the war more than seventy-seven were killed as a result of those measures. Most of the population agreed with the use of force to put an end to the hostilities but this was later to benefit the Republican movement. Similarly, in the decades to come de Valera was to be accused by the pro-Treaty faction of being responsible for the Irish Civil War but according to Irish historian John A. Murphy, that "has little foundation. It was the military men who set the pace with the politicians following suit. Yet, such was de Valera's prestige that had he remained aloof or withdrew his moral support from the military men, resistance must have crumbled at an early stage" (Murphy, 1981: 54). The Civil War went on until May 1923, when it was won by the pro-treaty faction, which was in Government. This war was to affect Irish history through the decades up to the 1960s

The pro-treaty faction had the very important and difficult task of organizing the country after its independence and handling the consequences of a traumatic Civil War. It is generally accepted that the William T. Cosgrave led-Government was right to base the new Irish Civil Service on the British and change what, in their belief, did not work well. One of Cosgrave's main concerns, as Chairman of the Executive Council, was to make sure that civil servants would be employed in the right numbers and according to their capacities and not political affiliations. To that end, he established independent commissions with the responsibility of recruiting staff fairly to guarantee that this would happen. It was also this Government that established the Garda Síochána (the Irish police force). One of its most distinctive characteristics is that it is an unarmed police force. One of the areas in which

this Government is more criticized is in the economic arena. Once Ireland became independent the country had several financial difficulties since there were very few native industries, the State had to support many people who did not work (old people and children) and because the country could not compete industrially with the United Kingdom, which was far more industrially developed. British products would flood the Irish market and the local products would be unable to resist the competition from the British ones. (Brown, 2004: 5) With the industrial revolution came mass-produced products, which rural craftsman could not compete against. While in other countries craftsmen took jobs in the new factories, in Ireland there were not enough factories to employ everybody and they were usually located in the cities and so far from the small villages where most craftsmen lived. Many had to leave the country because they could not earn a living in Ireland. Even those who studied to become priests, teachers or doctors were rarely able to remain living in a rural area. When it came to farmers in the 1920s, the great majority of them worked in small or medium-sized farms. To prevent these farms from being divided up between their different heirs, farms were inherited by only one of the couple's children, it was usually a son). Usually, this son would marry late so that he would have inherited the farm by then. This was not always the norm in Ireland. It only became common for people to do so after the Famine in the nineteenth century. Until then a farmer would divide his land amongst all his children and they had some freedom to get married earlier with whomever they wanted. However, after the Famine one of farmers' main priorities was to have economic security, which meant that farms were no longer split between all the children and that while one would get everything the other ones would either emigrate or remain unmarried. According to 1926 Census, eighty per cent of all males between the ages of twenty-five and thirty were single (according to Terence Brown it was the highest in any of the countries in which records were kept) but only twenty-six per cent of all males between the age of fifty-five and sixty five were single. Although many people married late, Ireland had a high fertility rate. According to the 1926 Irish census married women under forty five years old had an average of thirty six percent more children than their counterparts in Canada, seventy percent more than in the United States of America and a staggering eighty percent more than their counterparts in Britain. This was mostly a consequence of the lack of information on contraception, the immense influence of the Catholic Church in society and the country's industrial underdevelopment.

Emigration numbers are equally staggering since by the 1920s forty-three per cent of the people born in Ireland were living abroad. This was incredibly high even compared with other European countries, for example, only fourteen per cent of people born in Scotland and around fifteen of those born in Norway were living abroad at the beginning of the 1920s. “In the first two decades of independence, emigration was much less a reflection of demoralization in the countryside than a measure of continuity in Irish life and an indication of how powerful the values of the second half of the nineteenth century still held sway” (Brown, 2004: 12).

Some important measures were put into practice by Cosgrave’s government like the Consolidating Land Act of 1923, as well as the creation of the Agricultural Credit Union and the Shannon Scheme (which would supply electricity to the state). However, it was not enough and Ireland remained a poor country in which people had to face severe hardship. Social Welfare policy was almost non-existent because taxes were low and so was the State’s revenue. This, together with the decrease in army personnel from fifty-five thousand to twenty thousand and the introduction of the Intoxicating Liquor Act, led to a decline in the Government’s popularity. This government was also to introduce censorship with the strong support of the Irish Vigilance Societies and the Catholic Truth Society. Censorship of all publications, which were seen as dangerous for society was not unique to Ireland. It was quite the opposite as many other countries passed acts similar to The Irish Censorship of Publications Act of 1929. Censorship was to be expected “in a country where the mass of population was encouraged by the church to observe a peculiarly repressive sexual code, (and where many bodies) would press for a censorship policy expressing not literary and aesthetic but strict Catholic morals values” (Brown, 2004: 59). The main targets of censorship were all magazines and newspapers that advertised a liberal way of life, especially those which had texts on birth control. Ireland imported many British newspapers and magazines, which often had articles on contraception. In those cases the Censorship committee would order the removal of the pages in which that article featured. Some people even believed that the British press always had a negative influence over its Irish readers since it helped the spread of the English language at a time that Ireland was trying to revive the Irish language and that they threatened Irish national culture and values.

At the time the general population did not battle against censorship and the majority seemed to either agree with it or believe that it had no effect on their life. There were some exceptions to this and many, especially writers, voiced their disagreement but they were far too few to influence a change in the law.

The greatest crime perpetrated by censorship was not the undoubted injury done to Irish writers, not the difficulty experienced by educated men and women in getting hold of banned books, but the perpetuation of cultural poverty in the country as a whole, left without the leaven of serious contemporary literature.

(Brown, 2004: 67)

The opposition to this government was comprised of a large political party named Fianna Fáil (Soldiers of Destiny), which was led by Éamon De Valera and formed within the anti-treaty faction. This party remained outside the Dáil (Irish Parliament) until 1927 when they ran for the elections and were the second most popularly voted party. By the next elections in 1932, it became the most voted party and formed a government supported by the Labour Party. For the first time the anti-treaty faction had attained power and what many thought would be a bellicose transition of power was in fact a very peaceful one. Fianna Fáil kept its electoral promises of putting an end to the military tribunals, to release prisoners and to stop collecting the farmers' land annuities that had to be sent to Britain which has been described previously<sup>1</sup>. The whole world was going through a great economic depression and in the case of Ireland it was aggravated by such an ill-thought through public policy decision. This Government also established as its priority to make sure that the country had all the necessary institutions of a developmental nature. It encouraged private investment to create these institutions but Irish investors were conservative in their ventures and in many cases it was the Government itself which was forced to fund these institutions. That is the case of Aer Lingus (the semi-state national airline), Córas Iompair Éireann (the national authority charged with bus and railway transportation services), Bord na Móna (the Peat Board), the Irish Sugar Company, amongst others.

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<sup>1</sup> Pg. 20

The 1930s were also the decade when people living in rural areas finally started using tractors (which made agricultural work much simpler and faster) and started to buy mass produced items such as clothes. Other changes which occurred in the 1930s were the replacement of rush lights by paraffin oil lamps, the widespread use of bicycles and the beginning of the end of the custom of keeping the livestock inside the cottage near their owners. Women's roles in the 1930s were restricted to the domestic economy of the home, educating daughters till they got married or joining a religious order or emigrating, educating their sons until their first communion and being responsible for the poultry, milking and dairying. All the significant economic decisions were made by the husband, who also educated sons after their first communion. Marriages were mostly organized by matchmakers, who would evaluate the financial situation of the two people before trying to make them marry each other. Usually a man was only seen as being fit to marry once he owned a farm and that only happened when the existing farmer died or turned seventy, since he would start receiving an old age pension at that age and could then do without the farm's income. A great part of the rural population lived in overcrowded houses, which in most cases were one single storey and had three rooms: the kitchen, the sleeping area and a parlour. The kitchen occupied more space than any other room and it was there that families spent most of their time. Although life inside those houses was far from idyllic they were incorporated by some into the idyllic rural way of life and nowadays many tourists visit replicas of these houses in Bunratty's folk park and cinema glamorizes them. (Brown, 2004: 13-15)

Éamon de Valera, the leader of this government, was one of the many Irishmen who believed that "the 'ideal' Irish nation would be based on Gaelic models, consisting exclusively of Irish-speaking, Catholic, small farming communities and family businesses in a largely rural country" (Pettitt, 2000: 5). Consequently, his government's policies were to promote that way of life and promote Ireland as a sovereign and inward-looking country. This government's most well-known action took place in 1937 when a new constitution was passed by a Referendum. This constitution described Ireland as being a 'sovereign, independent, democratic state' whose head of State would be a President, democratically elected for seven years, whose role would be largely ceremonial. The following year (1938) saw Dr Douglas Hyde, who was Protestant, become the first

President under the 1937 Constitution. Irish Gaelic was also to become the state's official language (Irish was the first and English was recognised as the second official mother tongue) although this Government had not made a serious effort to restore the language in most of the parts of the country where it was not spoken. This constitution also gave women the right to vote and made all acts of sexist discrimination illegal. However, it made it clear that no marriage could be annulled by virtue of Article 41.2 which clearly settled the point that women's main role was to mind the home and have children. In Subsection 1 of the same article the State praises women for their work within the home, which was held to be vital for the country. In Subsection 2, it states that the State has to make sure that women do not have to go to work for financial reasons if that means that they have to neglect their family. Feminists complained about being discriminated against in the constitution but by and large most of the population agreed with this document and it was only in the 1960s that a great number of people began questioning it.

These kinds of conservative measures were to be the norm for the next eleven years while Fianna Fáil remained in power. One of these measures was the one of keeping Ireland militarily neutral during the Second World War (known in Ireland as "the Emergency"). These were years of true economic hardship, which led to high unemployment, emigration, rationing and other shortages of various kinds (commodities such as bread, tea, sugar and petrol were difficult to acquire from 1942). During the war, and as in many other countries, products had to be rationed. Yet, the atmosphere in Ireland was calm since the country remained neutral. However, the majority of the population backed the Government in its decision because it was their belief that economic hardship was more tolerable than war casualties and that neutrality emphasised their sovereignty. Although Ireland remained neutral throughout the whole war there were many Irish people (some estimates put the number at fifty thousand) who fought with the British army against the Nazis and there is little doubt that the general population supported the Allies.

De Valera wanted Ireland to be a self-sufficient rural country that would distance itself from industrialization and would not over-value material wealth. In the 1930s the majority of the population seemed to be behind him when he puts protectionist measures into practice. These measures were thought to be good for native industries, to create jobs

in the country and especially to be essential to winning the economic war against Britain. Censorship helped De Valera to implement his way of thinking in the country by censoring all works which contained liberal ideas. Apart from Censorship laws in 1933 the Irish Government imposed a tax on imported newspapers and magazines to attempt to diminish the number of Irish people reading the foreign press, which could distance them from the establishment mindset. The national press favoured the status quo and one of the few exceptions was the periodical *Ireland Today* which existed between 1936 and 1937 and which gave voice to those who criticized the establishment and supported the Spanish Republicans. Its political positions led to the quick extinction of the periodical.

## 2.1 Catalysts of change in Irish society

Nevertheless, social changes did occur in Ireland in the long period of 1932-1948, when de Valera was head of government. For example according to Terence Brown there were greater numbers of people buying cars than in the previous decade. In 1931 there were 4,455 new cars registered in Ireland and that number had more than doubled by 1937, when there were 10,000 new cars registered. The same happened with radio licenses since in 1930 there were 50,500 radio licenses and that number had almost doubled by 1937, when there were 100,000 radio licenses issued. (Brown, 2004: 141) Apart from this there were many people who owned radios but did not pay the license fee. Though in rural areas there were very few people who had a radio while in urban areas the opposite was the case. For example, a staggering forty percent of the licenses were issued in Dublin alone. Despite de Valera's effort in the 1940s the idea of the idyllic rural way of life started to wane. The 1946 Census revealed that eighty percent of farm houses did not have proper sanitation facilities and that only one out of every twenty farms had indoor lavatory. The situation in urban areas and in other countries was far better and people from the rural communities became aware of that thanks to cinema, radio and specially by being in contact with people who left the community to leave abroad or in an urban area. When people returned to their home town they "disturbed the balance of the social hierarchy in such towns with their assumed superiority to the small farmers who depended upon credit facilities, infecting them with the dissatisfaction that had already begun to take its toll of the countryside" (Brown, 2004: 173).

In addition, during the war years many jobs became available in Britain and people knew that if they moved to Britain they would easily find a job and improve their standard of living quite significantly. So increasing numbers of people gave up the idea of staying on the land and moved abroad, especially to Britain. Between 1936 and 1946 around 187,000 left for Britain; this number continued to rise in the following years and between 1956 and 1961, 212,000 left for Britain (five years saw more people leaving than in the ten years between 1936 and 1946). A great number of the people who emigrated came from the Irish speaking areas, which led to the beginning of the association between the Irish language and “rural impoverishment and deprivation, and with a semi-artificial folk culture that many Irish people found embarrassing if not ridiculous” (Brown, 2004: 180). Not all people who wanted to leave the countryside resorted to moving abroad. Many moved to Dublin, where in 1952 one third of its population had been born outside of the city. During the weekends many people visited their hometowns, jamming the city’s public transport system. By the 1950s “Dublin had been transformed from the elegant, colourful, and decaying colonial centre of English rule in Ireland into a modern if rather dull administrative and commercial capital” (Brown, 2004: 207). Those who moved to Dublin adapted themselves to the new situation. They had to cut ties from their extended family, who they would only visit some weekends and live with their nuclear family only. Within this nuclear family women began to taken on new responsibilities and both parents and old people lost some of their previous power. Amongst many changes, there was one thing that remained the same and that was the power of the Catholic Church. In many other countries the population that moves from rural communities to urban ones usually lose touch with their religious faith and become more and more secularized. However, at least on the surface that did not happen in Ireland and as Dublin’s population increased dramatically thirty-four churches were built between 1940 and 1965 (Brown, 2004: 209), and each of them had to have several services (some churches celebrated six masses on Sundays) in order to meet the demands of the growing number of Catholics living in Dublin.

The 1940s also saw the beginning of changes in the Education sector, as it was then that teachers began to voice their opinion against the preponderant influence of the Irish language revival on the school curriculum. It was also in the 1940s that some intellectuals

and the press, especially the *Irish Times* began to criticize censorship and argue for Ireland not to fixate solely on its past but to adapt itself to the modern world. This only began to have an effect when Fianna Fail lost the 1948 elections. After being in power for sixteen years, Fianna Fáil was again the most voted party in 1948. However, this time the party was unable to form a Government and the Fine Gael party managed to do so by forming a coalition Government with Clann na Poblachta, Clan na Talmhan and the Labour Party. The then Taoiseach, John A. Costello had to govern the country under a constitution with which his party did not fully agree and that was very different from the constitution the country had had the last time his party was in Government. One of his best known measures was to clarify it by introducing the Republic of Ireland Act (1949). This Act established Ireland as the Republic of Ireland, although it had been a *de facto* republic for some time. The British Government stated that Act represented the end of Ireland's participation in the Commonwealth. This was a great victory for the pro-treaty faction which used it as proof that the Anglo-Irish treaty (1921) had really given Ireland the means to achieve sovereignty.

The evidence available to historians confirms that the final proposals on constitutional status put forwards by the British delegation represented the limit to which any British government could at the time go. It is not only the hindsight of the historian but the foresight of Collins and Griffith which prompts the now commonplace reflection that the treaty contained all the seeds of future constitutional fulfilment.

Murphy, 1981: 37

During Costello's time in office some very important measures were introduced. Namely, the Land Rehabilitation Programme (1949), which consisted of the State helping farmers to cultivate an extra four million acres of land. It also established the Industrial Development Authority and financed hospitals to reduce the number of people that died of tuberculosis. This coalition Government was not able to serve a full term because in 1951 Minister of Health, Dr. Noel Browne of Clann na Poblachta, one of the parties in the coalition, proposed the 'mother-and-child scheme'. This scheme was to guarantee that all mothers would have free maternity assistance and children would have free care till they were sixteen without submitting people to a means test. The minister's aim was to diminish the country's high infant mortality rate and the increase children's quality of life. Both the

Catholic Church and the medical profession criticised this measure heavily. The latter was worried about losing income while the former believed that this scheme would represent the beginning of sexual education and birth control, which they always fought fiercely against. Despite being under pressure the Minister decided to go ahead with this scheme. Yet, his party leader, who was probably afraid of losing the support of the Catholic Church, forced him to resign. Not all the members of the Clann na Poblachta party agreed with their party leader's decision and some switched their political allegiances. As a result the government was deprived of their parliamentary majority and they were forced to call early elections. This was forever after seen as an example of the power the Catholic Church held over Irish governments.

The Catholic moral code had in practice been enshrined in the law in the State since the 1920s, and to the bishops the mother-and-child scheme seemed the first overt challenge to their moral domination. Northern Unionists believed the episode proved the Republic to be a theocratic State, a belief which remained unshaken long after the Catholic bishops had ceased to be the powerful influence they once were.

Murphy, 1981: 133/4

Unsurprisingly, Fianna Fáil won the early elections and formed a minority Government, which lasted three years. During this period a Social Welfare Act was introduced, which provided for employees and employers paying a weekly tax on a compulsory basis that would then enable them to receive better social assistance benefits, such as retirement pensions. This scheme was financed by the State but the benefits were so low as to be insufficient to improve people's quality of life. The following elections again saw Fine Gael able to form a coalition Government, which tried to modernise the country. Under Governments led by De Valera not much was done to modernise an extremely rural country. On the contrary, De Valera defended the principles of old Ireland and the maintenance of the rural society. His address on Radio Éireann on 17<sup>th</sup> March (St. Patrick's Day) 1943 illustrates what he wanted Ireland to be like,

That Ireland we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as the basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit – a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads. (...)

It would, in a word, be the home of a people living the life that God desires that man should live.

(Aldous, 2007: 95)

However, the new coalition government led by Fine Gael saw things differently and invested heavily in the country's modernisation. This led to an increased demand for imported goods, which in its turn led to a big deficit in the balance-of-payments. The tax system had to be restructured in order to sort this problem out and it all resulted in serious economic problems, high unemployment and massive emigration. Once again the Fine Gael-led Government was unable to serve the full term and was replaced by a Fianna Fáil one in 1957. This one was again led by De Valera but not for long as he left in 1959, at the age of seventy seven when he was almost blind, to become the President of Ireland, a position which he held for two terms of office. Seán Lemass, a serving Government Minister, then became his successor as Taoiseach. His Government published the *Programme for Economic Expansion* in 1958 (which was based on economists' T.K. Whitaker's *Economic Development* commissioned by Costello while he was in Government). Following the publication of this programme, which planned the development of the Irish economy for the coming years, the country developed at four per cent a year (an increase from the two per cent in previous years), civil service prestige increased, unemployment fell by one third, emigration was reduced, investment doubled and there was an increase in savings. Encouraged by this success, Lemass introduced the *Second Programme for Economic Expansion* in 1963 yet this one was not as successful as the first and led the country into a balance-of-payments crisis in 1965. Subsequently, a third programme was introduced but was equally unsuccessful and had to be abandoned. However, these programmes marked the beginning of a new way of making policy in Ireland, where the main concern was no longer residual issues from the Civil War but the country's economy.

The year of 1965 was a year of mixed fortune because although the country had a balance-of-payment crisis, the important Anglo-Irish trade agreement was signed. This agreement helped Ireland to trade goods with its closest neighbour and most important market. The country had by then stopped seeing Britain as the enemy and started to see it as a trading partner. The 1960s as a whole were to be considered a turning point in Irish

society. Not only had Ireland itself changed but so had the Catholic Church. Most of the changes in the Catholic Church were a consequence of the Second Vatican Council, which took place between 1962 and 1965. This council was extremely important for the Catholic Church because amongst other things it adapted and moderated the Church's way of communicating their messages in the twentieth century (for example, masses no longer had to be said in Latin). The Irish media was also transformed in the 1960s with the establishment of RTÉ (the Irish television and radio company) in 1961. From its very beginning this television channel brought important and controversial issues to a wider audience and turned out to be central to transformation of Ireland into a consumer society. Seven years after its establishment eighty per cent of urban houses had a television set, yet this number was drastically smaller in the countryside, where in some places only twenty-five percent of family homes had a television set (Brown, 2004: 248). Some of the programmes and advertisements aired on RTÉ were British in origin. This brought the two countries closer and influenced the Irish to consume more and more the same products as Britain. RTÉ was financially independent since it enjoyed revenues from commercial advertising and income from the annual television licence fee, but the Government supervised its services and government ministers had the right to access RTÉ's facilities.

As the country's economic development became a national imperative, educational sector reform became a priority. Governments believed that the country could only develop properly if its citizens were properly qualified so it was only during this decade that the state seriously invested its time and money in the educational system. Investment was made in the creation of commissions, whose aim was to write reports on higher education and primary and secondary schools' ways of functioning. The Government followed the reports advice and changed the school curricula, expanded schools, new types of schools were created, but the most popular measure of all was the introduction of free education, which led to a very significant increase in the number of students. Until then most of both Primary and Secondary schools were ran by the Catholic Church but students had to pay fees to attend secondary schools while it was free to attend primary schools. This meant that all of those who came from low-income families could not afford to attend Secondary School. This kind of educational system favoured social stagnation by means of reinforcing social stratification in that it prevented the working-class from achieving social

mobility by preventing them from securing a good education in order to reach the middle-class. The Government tried to change this situation and in 1967 fees were abolished in Vocational Schools, grants were given to the schools which did not charge fees to students and free transportation to and from school was given to all students who lived at least three miles away from their secondary school. These measures had a direct effect on the number of students attending secondary school. In the school year of 1967-1968 there were 118,807 students attending secondary schools, this number increased significantly in the following years and in the school year of 1973-1974 there were 167,309 students attending secondary schools. Reforms were also made in third level education. One of the changes which occurred was the creation of nine regional technical colleges in the 1970s. Another important change was implemented in 1973 and it consisted of putting an end to the requisite of passing the Irish language exam to obtain the Leaving Certificate (the secondary school diploma) or to apply for a position in the Irish Civil Service. At this point, Government no longer aimed at making people speak Irish instead of English but to make sure that people would have some command of the Irish language. Other changes were made in Higher Education included the expansion of the existing universities, the creation of new institutions with vocational and technological courses and an increase in universities funds. Another significant improvement in Higher Education was achieved with the help of the Catholic Church. It was with the lifting of the ban on Catholic students attending Trinity College Dublin in 1970. This was the best-known Irish university and since its foundation in 1592 by Queen Elizabeth I, it had denied entrance to Catholics. It was only in 1793 that some Catholics were allowed by the College to attend its classes after completing religious tests. These tests were abolished in 1873, although the number of Catholic students remained very low because the Catholic Church threatened excommunication on all those who attended it without the permission of their bishop and the National University of Ireland. So it was only with the foundation of University College Dublin (UCD) in 1845 by Cardinal John Henry Newman, that Catholics had access to proper higher education.

While the changes occurred in the 1950s the Irish state did not significantly challenge the Catholic Church's power and influence. The same cannot be said about the 1960s nor about the 1970s. Censorship and authoritarian control ceased to be enough to prevent the

majority of the population from being exposed to more progressive ideas. In addition to this, in 1967 Censorship laws were relaxed and the Government introduced a bill, which stated that a book could only be banned for twelve years. This meant that thousands of books were made available straight away and that Irish society gained access to liberal ideas. Together with the decrease in the Church's power came the decline in the number of vocations to join the priesthood and communities of brothers and nuns. In the case of the latter there was a decrease of eighty-three percent between 1966 and 1978. In the same period the number of male vocations decreased seventy percent. The number of vocations for the priesthood also decreased dramatically, for example, in 1966 there were 1,409 men joining the priesthood while in 1974 there were only 547. Until the 1960s some people's only prospect of getting a well-paid comfortable job consisted of joining religious institutions but afterwards alternatives started to appear and less people took the option of becoming priests, brothers or nuns. The Ireland of the 1960s began giving in to the consumer revolution and fewer and fewer people wanted to put that kind of life aside and start living a religious life, which meant two things: refusing material wealth and celibacy. At the same time younger generations began to question the Church's teachings and according to the "Survey of Religious Practices, Attitudes and Belief", in 1973-1974 thirty percent of the population in the 21-25 age groups did not attend mass every week. This number was very high if one takes into consideration that during that same period only ten percent of the total population was said not to attend mass once per week. Despite the significant decrease in the Catholic Church's influence, Ireland remained an extremely Catholic nation, since the majority of the population still attended mass and when Pope John Paul II visited Ireland in 1979 more than one million people (representing approximately a third of the population at the time) went to see him in Phoenix Park in Dublin.

## 2.2 Modernisation of Irish Society and the European Community

By the time the Catholic Church felt its power waning, the country had by then long resolved its Civil War problems and was able to take on an international role in peace keeping. The Irish United Nations missions in Congo and Cyprus were successful although some casualties were sustained. Although the country's economy had improved

considerably, unemployment was still very high and there was still a large proportion of the population that remained poor (according to Irish sociologists Tovey and Share, around twenty per cent of the population was poor) and the numbers of people leaving the country was still significant. It was the reforms that were carried out in the 1960s than enabled Ireland to join the European Economic Community in 1973. Ireland first applied for membership of the European Economic Community in 1961 together with Denmark and the United Kingdom. At the time, France then led by Charles de Gaulle vetoed the United Kingdom's entrance and in doing so cancelled all the negotiations between the union and the other two countries. It took more than ten years to resolve this disagreement and it was only in 1972 that the three countries had their membership applications approved by the European Economic Community. Ireland held a referendum on the country's entrance and eighty three per cent of the ballots were in favour of the country becoming a member of the community. At this stage the country had achieved the necessary maturity and no longer feared the loss of its political and cultural independence. The great majority of the population understood that joining a union with other countries could be beneficial and presented only limited risks.

The agricultural sector was one of the sectors most favourable to the country's entry into the European Economic Community. It is important to note that in the 1960s the agricultural sector was probably Ireland's most powerful. A third of the Irish labour force worked in this sector and it represented one-quarter of the country's Gross Domestic Product (Clancy, et al: 179). Almost a third of this sector's production was consumed by farmers' families and approximately half of the production was exported. That represented a big challenge to a country like Ireland situated on an island and whose closest neighbour was England, where agricultural products were cheap. Due to this unfavourable situation farmers' income decreased significantly despite Irish Government financial support. Both the Government and farmers realized that the European Economic Community, through the Community's Common Agricultural Policy, could be the solution to their problems. Not only would farmers gain the necessary financial help to improve their businesses and quality of life but the Government too would no longer have to invest a significant part of the annual budget in the agricultural sector. At the time of the country's entry into the European Economic Community, sixty-five percent of the agricultural sector costs were

paid by the Government while at the end of the 1980s it was only around fourteen per cent (Clancy, et al: 180). This reduction was only possible due to financial help from Europe. The agricultural sector was not the only one to receive European grants but was the first sector to fully benefit from them. Farmers were extremely well organized into several associations, the Irish Farmers Association (initially known as the National Farmers Association), founded in 1955, being by far the most influential. It ensured its great influence just a few years after its foundation, when it went on strike in 1965 for more substantial financial help. This strike was led by the leader at the time, Rickard Deasy, who understood that any farmer's strike would only be heard if it was carried out in Dublin, and so organized a huge rally of more than thirty thousand farmers and that was followed by a twenty day 'siege' of Government buildings. At first the Government refused to give in to the farmers' requests and was close to making the association illegal but the continuing strikes led the Government to acknowledge the Irish Farmers' Association's importance and it had to respond to some of the farmers' demands. This association was a strong defender of the country's membership of the European Economic Community and helped its members to benefit the most from it. One of its first steps was to establish a permanent office in Brussels that would lobby for Irish farmers' interests and advise its members on how to benefit most from the many funds available to them and also how to maximize the use of their land. The European Economic Community not only financially helped farmers but also offered them training on how to modernise their production techniques, which would both make work easier for them as well as to make it more profitable. From then on, farmers successfully applied for European funds and their income increased significantly. It is estimated that farmers' income doubled between 1970 and 1978 (Clancy, et al: 182). The industrial sector also benefited greatly with the country's entrance into the European Economic Community but its development had already started in the 1960s. It was during that decade that the incidence of small industry, whose only target was the national market, began to diminish. The Industrial Development Authority was able to attract foreign companies to Ireland and by doing so it increased and varied the country's exports and boosted the economy. Changes not only occurred in economic sectors but in Irish society as a whole. By joining the Community, Ireland had to accept Community laws and directives and put them into practice through their transposition into national legislation. This led to some positive changes in Irish society, namely waning gender and

racial discrimination. Although, discrimination continued for some years to come, the fact that it was illegal made it easier for people to fight against it.

Irish entry into the European Community was led by Jack Lynch as Taoiseach, who had replaced Seán Lemass when he retired in 1966. Yet, he was not to lead Ireland for much longer since his party did not manage to form a Government after the elections that took place just a month later. It was a Fine Gael and Labour coalition headed by Liam Cosgrave that governed the country until the 1977 elections that were then won by Fianna Fáil with a large Dáil majority (the highest ever in the history of the State for a single party in government). This saw Jack Lynch return as Taoiseach. During his second term Lynch had to face economic difficulties and pressure from his own party to harden his attitude towards the British Government and the Unionists with regard to the Northern Ireland political process. In the end the pressure made him resign at the end of 1979, which then led to a convoluted election for the Fianna Fáil leadership that Charles Haughey, a former senior Minister who Lynch had dismissed in 1970 and reappointed after the 1977 election, won by a small margin. The following election took place in 1981 and signalled the return of a coalition Government led by Taoiseach Dr Garret FitzGerald from the Fine Gael party.

It is important to note that the country was undergoing a major political transformation. Between 1965 and 1981 the country had had five different Taoiseach and went from a reasonable financial situation to an extremely difficult one. This situation was aggravated during Haughey's first Government since at a time when the country was going through a financial crisis the Government, instead of diminishing expenditure, decided to borrow a lot of money to keep the same or even a higher level of public expenditure. When Dr Garret FitzGerald took office the country's foreign debt was £ 4.8 billion, the equivalent of almost half of the then gross national product (Tovey and Share: 303). The following budget contained stern cut-backs on expenditure and did not pass in the Dáil and so new elections had to be called in February 1982, which saw the return of Haughey as Taoiseach. This Government proved unable to face the growing economic problems as it suffered a variety of scandals largely of its own making. As time went by, the national debt grew bigger, taxes went up and tax receipts fell dramatically. This situation led to a breaking point and the Haughey minority Government was forced to call for an election

once more, just a few months after winning office. The election took place in November 1982 and was clearly won by the Fine Gael-Labour coalition led by Fine Gael leader, Dr Garret FitzGerald. This government had the hard task of balancing the country's finances and putting an end to the galloping unemployment rate. At the same time this Government embarked on a quest to modernise the country and put to the people two referenda, one on the legalization of abortion and the other one on divorce. Notwithstanding Government's effort, the two referenda failed and "again, the role of the Catholic Church raised intriguing political and historical questions" (English in Moody, 2001: 316) since the Catholic Church itself was part of the coalition of forces against these referenda. By the 1980s the Catholic Church's influence over people's lives had waned (for example, very few people observed Church doctrine on the non-use of contraception) and although it was still significant (as the results of these two referenda show) it was to continue to wane in following years. The continual fall of the general population's (especially the one living in the urban areas) belief in the Catholic Church's teachings and will to follow its doctrine resulted in the profound changes which occurred in Ireland in the 1990s. A new referendum was put to the people in 1992 by a coalition Government lead by Charles Haughey of the Fianna Fáil party. This referendum was passed and gave people the right to travel abroad for an abortion and to receive information relating to abortion services outside the country. Another sign that Ireland was changing was the election of Mary Robinson as president of Ireland in 1990. It was significant that Mary Robinson, who had campaigned since the 1970s on human rights, minority issues and had fought for the right of access to contraception and family planning, managed to become Ireland's first female president and the second person to be elected without the support of Fianna Fáil (the first was Douglas Hyde). Although the President of Ireland's role is mostly a ceremonial role Mary Robinson managed to influence the country's course of development by bringing issues onto the political agenda and speaking up for the issues she had advocated since the 1970s.

The 1990s were also to be the decade in which Ireland's dream of economic development was to be impressively realised. In the 1960s many people believed that Ireland's economic problems were over but were soon to discover that they were not. The convulsive times which followed the prosperous 1960s were to change the country forever

and those changes were essential for the forging of Ireland's great economic development of the 1990s, commonly known as the phenomenon of the emergence of the 'Celtic Tiger'. Irish historian, Dermot Keogh, defines in the book *The Course of Irish History* the following as having been essential to Ireland's modernisation and financial success: European Union subsidies, the return of many Irish who had emigrated, the recruitment of foreign skilled and general labour, the publishing of allegations of corruption and bribery of leading politicians and public servants and of the crimes committed by the Catholic clergy. The latter resulted in a significant decrease in the Catholic Church's influence over Irish society and consequently in its liberalization. This was also to be the decade in which no party obtained enough votes to govern alone. In the 1989-1992 period Ireland was governed by Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrats. This government was followed by one led by Fianna Fáil and the Labour Party (1992-1994) which collapsed in late 1994 due to serious disagreement between the deputy Prime-Minister (the Labour Party leader) and Albert Reynolds, the Taoiseach over the controversial nomination of the incumbent Attorney General to fill a vacancy in the High Court. As the Taoiseach no longer commanded a majority in parliament he was no longer constitutionally empowered to ask the President to call for elections. Thus, the Dáil provided a new government comprising Fine Gael, Labour Party and the Democratic Left. The following election took place in 1997 and was won by Fianna Fáil led by Bertie Ahern who formed a coalition government with the Progressive Democrats supported by five independent deputies. This government remains in office after winning successive general elections in 2002 and 2007. However, Ahern was forced to resign in May 2008 as a result of continuing controversy regarding his private finances while serving as a Government Minister in the early 1990s, which had been uncovered recently by an investigative tribunal of enquiry set up by the Irish Parliament. His Finance Minister, Brian Cowen was named as his successor as head of party and Government. Soon after taking office Cowen was put in an unenviable position of having to explain to other European Leaders why the Lisbon Treaty Referendum failed. The Taoiseach is now faced with the challenge of finding a suitable resolution to this impasse since Ireland would stand alone as the only country not to have ratified the Lisbon treaty. The Eurobarometer survey carried out on behalf of the European Commission in Ireland on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2008 found that 22 per cent of those people who voted no cited a lack of information about the proposal as the reason for voting no, a further 12 per cent

who did so mentioned their desire to protect the Irish identity. This report also found that people held the mistaken belief that by voting no Ireland would be able to secure a better deal through renegotiation of the treaty. Despite the voters rejection of the treaty, the survey demonstrates that 80 per cent of no voters support Ireland's membership of the European Union, as do 89 per cent of the yes voters. It strikes one as somewhat selfish for the Irish to reject this European treaty after having received many billions of structural and cohesion funds and other supports from Europe. Nevertheless, we should be cognisant of the fact that had this treaty been put to the people in other European Union member states it would have also probably have failed as it did in France and Holland when the people there had their say in 2005 on a precursor to the repackaged agreement which became known as the Lisbon Treaty.

The country has come a long way since gaining independence. Back then the country had a problematic relationship with its past, which is well-described by Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" (Joyce, 2000: 42). Ireland has evolved away from this problem and has moved from being a poor agricultural economy to one of the most globalised, developed and wealthy countries in the developed world. According to the OECD, in 2005 Ireland came third in the list of Gross Domestic Product as expressed by per capita purchasing power. In that same year, *The Economist* magazine deemed Ireland to be the best place in the world to live. This was only possible because the country changed dramatically during the twentieth century and currently there is a great appetite to understand the genesis of the country's changes and the consequences of those changes. "Cinema in Ireland has been forced to take on and represent historical, political and social issues not addressed in the public realm in an open way" (Pettitt, 2000: 30).

### **3. Religion in Irish Society and Film**

#### **3.1 The influence of the Catholic Church over State Institutions**

Ireland was not always a religious country. Up to the mid nineteenth century Ireland's church attendance was only around forty percent (Clancy: 595) and folk traditions were very popular. However, by the turn of the century there was a dramatic increase in mass attendance rising to ninety per cent due to post-famine trauma, increased numbers of people joined the Church as nuns and priests and the rise of a mainly Catholic middle-class. This massive development of the Catholic Church also took place because Ireland was fighting for its independence and so it suited its countrymen's strategy to highlight the main differences between Ireland and Britain. Religious beliefs became the key differential factor. Roman Catholicism became synonymous with Irishness. The Church influenced Irish Nationalism greatly and portrayed the Protestants as materialists, utilitarians who lacked moral values. They also said that when Ireland gained its independence it would become a holy, Catholic place where people would be peaceful, rural and nature-friendly. This influence led the Irish Nationalists rarely to come up with economic and social ideas to modernise the country, which later slowed down the country's development.

When the Irish were struggling for their independence, freedom of religion was not only one of the main reasons to fight against the British but also one of the main sources of strength. Catholic priests were in many cases the most educated leaders in their communities and so their ideas were respected and in many cases even followed by the masses. England was ruled by Protestant monarchs, who favoured those that had the same religious beliefs as themselves. For centuries, Catholics were discriminated against, living hard lives because they were denied access to positions of power and the ownership of land, amongst other things. The Catholic clergy helped people to endure these difficulties and fight for independence. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Ireland had been controlled by the British for more than seven hundred years. Throughout this time the Irish had tried to establish their independence on several occasions but never came close to defeating what throughout time was the all-powerful British Military. However, British

involvement in the First World War, the United States America's interest in Ireland and the new kind of Irish guerrilla warfare led to the independence of part of the southern part of the island of Ireland.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed on 6 December 1921 and established the Irish Free State, which was based in part on constitutional mechanisms used to conduct international relations between Britain and Canada. This treaty established that Ireland would have its own Parliament, army, and police and control its customs, tariffs and finances. However, Ireland would still be part of the Commonwealth and the members of the Irish Parliament would have to swear an oath of alliance to the British monarch. Britain was also to keep some Irish naval bases and harbours and Irish farmers had to buy out their British landlords. The latter was not carried out completely straight after independence. The British Government advanced the capital costs and the Irish Government was to collect land annuities from the farmers twice a year and send them to Britain.

Even though Ireland had won its independence and it was stated in the constitution that there was to be a complete separation between the State and the Church and that everyone would be free to practice any religious faith, the Catholic Church increased considerably the authority it had had previous to Irish independence. Many Protestants remained living in Ireland but a significant percentage left the country. According to the Census of Southern Ireland in 1911, shortly before Ireland's independence, 9.92 per cent of the population of the twenty-six counties that later constituted the Republic of Ireland was Protestant. In 1926, soon after the country's independence this number decreased significantly to 6.98 per cent. The number of Protestants continued to decrease and by 1971, it was down to 4.01 per cent. The Protestant community went from being a significant minority of the population to becoming increasingly irrelevant. It is important to note however, that the power held by the Protestant community remained disproportionate to their actual percentage of the population. A great number of Protestants worked in the legal, banking and managerial professions and lived in upmarket neighbourhoods, for example, according to the 1926 Census, 33.2 percent of the population of Rathmines and Rathgar (both situated in Dublin) were Protestant and 57.4 percent of the population of Greystones (in county Wicklow, near Dublin) were also Protestant.

This reduction was mainly a consequence of low birth rates, the fact that usually when a protestant married a catholic their children would be raised as Catholic due to the pressure put upon them by society and of emigration. There are several reasons why Protestants left the Irish Free State, one of the main ones being the feeling of insecurity. The settling-up of the Irish Free State not only led them to lose a great part of their political power as it led the country into a civil war. Despite the fact that many Protestants decided to leave the country, many remained and some enjoyed prestigious positions. For example, Nobel Prize winner for Literature, William Butler Yeats and Dr. Douglas Hyde, who was also Protestant and still became the first President of independent Ireland. In fact many other Protestants fought for Ireland's well-being, as for example, Charles Stewart Parnell, the nineteenth century nationalist leader.

Although the Irish Free State Constitution provided for the separation of powers between the State and the Church, Article 44 of the 1937 Constitution allowed the Roman Catholic Church to be treated in a special manner. This enhanced the power of the Catholic Church's teaching over State and public policy. "In 1951, Sean O'Faolain complained that there were two parliaments in Ireland, one operating out of Maynooth (the Catholic priest seminary located in County Kildare), the other from Dublin. The former was not subject to the pressures of public opinion" (McCaffrey: 531). However, this provision was altered by a 1972 Constitutional Referendum that withdrew special status for the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, which became law in January 1973. This opened up the opportunity to other changes like the end of the ban on the importation of contraceptives. This alteration was only possible due to the change in attitudes that occurred in the 1960s. Previous to that, most women followed the teachings of the Catholic Church. It clearly preaches that in the ideal family the man is the breadwinner and the women minds the house and has children. Ironically, the Church was one of the very few places in which women could assert greater social power. The Church controlled most of the schools, welfare institutions and a great number of hospitals and women had the opportunity to run some of these institutions. A great number of women entered convents to become nuns (according to MacCurtain, 1997:248, in 1941 one out of every 400 women entered Convents). During the 1960's women managed to obtain power elsewhere and so they became less

subservient to Church's ideological influence. Subsequently, in the 1970s women began to officially criticise the Catholic Church in its stance on divorce, contraception and abortion, the latter being the only Catholic stance that has survived until the present day largely unchanged.

The Catholic Church controlled some of the most important national institutions, from schools to hospitals and care-homes. This control began from the nineteenth century onwards. The state financed schools through paying for school building costs, running costs, upkeep and teachers' wages, although the board of management of such schools were chaired by Catholic priests, Christian Brothers and to a lesser extent by nuns. Church lent labour, such as Nuns and Christian Brothers, were in relatively abundant supply and low-cost, thereby, giving greater ease to the Church in its expansion. As the Church controlled most of the schools, it was easy to attract young people to participate in the Church. This in turn was welcomed by the newly-formed State which could not afford to run those institutions unassisted. However, this has changed recently due to the declining number of vocations. Although a great number of the schools continue to be run by the Catholic Church very few priests become teachers. For example, in 1965-66 18.9 per cent of the trained national school teachers were priests while in 1992, they numbered only 4.6 per cent of teaching staff (Clancy: 607). Priests became the minority but retained their power even in schools, whose governing body was led by lay teachers but chaired by clergymen, who would be so influential as to exercise almost veto level persuasion in directing the operation of the school.

It was only from the 1980s onwards that some people, who were victims of abuse in these institutions, came out publicly and exposed the Church's cruel methods and maltreatment. This took the form of an international scandal due to the publication of some testimonials, as for example in the acclaimed film *The Magdalene Sisters*, directed by Peter Mullan (2002). Since then, the Church's power has waned significantly and there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of priests. For example, in 1998 there were two hundred and twenty people studying for the priesthood in the major county seminaries while twenty years previously there were six hundred in one of the seminaries alone (Tovey and Share, 2003, p. 408). Mass attendance too declined significantly between 1981 and 1998,

from around 87 per cent to 65 per cent, yet it is important to note that it is still one of the highest in Europe (Fahey, 2002, p.51).

Even nowadays, the Church still has enormous influence over the educational system in Ireland. Not only does it control a great number of schools; it also runs teachers-training centres and it also directs all the primary school teacher training centres. The national curriculum is determined by the Department of Education and Science but the Catholic Church is allowed to teach religion and to close schools on religious holidays. While in countries like Portugal people have to attend religious classes outside school time to be ready to receive the sacraments of the Eucharist, Confession, Communion and Confirmation, while in Ireland children are prepared for the same in school. Once a person attends a school run by the Catholic Church, these religion classes are compulsory, as is all the exposure to religious ideals and fears. In *Angela's Ashes* (1999), directed by Alan Parker, the spectator can see young Frank MacCourt at school and on many of those occasions he is learning Roman Catholic doctrine through the catechism. It was at school that children were prepared for the sacraments of Communion and Confirmation and where they learnt to distinguish between what was considered to be sinful and what was not. Anything remotely connected with sexual concepts were almost without an exception considered to be a sin. The preparation for these holy sacraments took up quite a considerable amount of school class time as the date for the sacraments came closer. Practice for the same would be given almost absolute priority over all other areas of the school curriculum. The preparation for the First Communion in particular was a time in which teachers would frighten their students by telling them about the terrible punishments for their sins. This can be seen not only in *Angela's Ashes*, by Frank McCourt but also in the work of other famous Irish writers like James Joyce and Frank O'Connor.

In Alan Parker's *Angela's Ashes*, the First Communion and Confirmation culminate with the main character getting sick. After the First Communion, Frank McCourt's grandmother offers him a traditional Irish breakfast. He wanted to skip the traditional breakfast and start the traditional collection of money from his neighbours (everyone did that after their First Communion). However, his grandmother forced him to eat the breakfast and as he was not used to eating so much so quickly he threw up in his

grandmother's backyard. This puts his grandmother under great distress because as Frank had recently taken the host (Our Lord) for the first time, she did not know how to clean the backyard since Our Lord was probably there. Consequently, she told Frank to go to the Church and ask a Priest what to do. In confession the Priest was astonished by the fact that the boy's grandmother was so worried about the whole situation and told the boy to tell his grandmother to simply wash it away with ordinary water. Frank's grandmother like many people at the time took literally everything that the Catholic Church preached and whenever they had any doubt they would go to a Priest immediately to ask for advice. As Frank was sick and then had to go to the Church to ask for advice, he did not have time to collect his First Communion money that would enable him to pay for the cinema ticket and buy some sweets, a tradition amongst his contemporaries. Even though he manages to go to the cinema by illegal means (by sneaking in the door under the nose of the ticket salesman), his First Communion celebration was not as joyful as it would be expected to be.

Nevertheless, it was better than what happened during his Confirmation ceremony since he collapsed in the Church when he was receiving the sacrament. He was taken to hospital where he was diagnosed with typhoid fever. He managed to survive what was at the time a deadly disease but had to spend a long time in the hospital. Coincidentally, Frank was sick after these two sacraments but there was one sacrament that did not cause any side effects on Frank and that was confession. Confession was seen as a moment to think about your self and release yourself from all the sins committed in the past. In the film the spectator can see young Frank going to Confession many times. He feared Confession but always left the Confession box happy because he believed that at that moment he was clear of all sins and that if he died then he would go straight to heaven. Even long after leaving school Frank continues to show the need to go to Confession and release himself from all the sins he committed. The main character does not show any real religious concerns apart from this need to go to Confession, which suggests that the thing young Frank interiorized the most from his teachers' religious teachings was the threat that all of those who committed sins and did not obtain remission from them would suffer and not go to heaven. He has his first sexual relationship with a seventeen-year-old girl, Theresa Carmody, who suffered from consumption. When she died he was haunted by the

idea that it was his entire fault since she died because she committed the sin of having sex before marriage. Curiously, although the Catholic Church is mostly shown as authoritarian in this film, it is at these moments shown as merciful. A Franciscan Priest, especially, is revealed as understanding and forgiving in what strongly contrasts with the aggressiveness of the school teachers preaching the dangers of sinful behaviour. He listens to all of Frank's so-called sins and not only forgives him everything but also guarantees him that it was not his fault that Theresa died and that she is surely in heaven because a priest must have been called to the hospital to listen to her sins before she died.

Even though it was compulsory to attend religious classes there was an exception made to all of those who were not Catholic. They could attend national schools and were not expected to attend religious classes. Nonetheless, the Irish language was compulsory in both primary and secondary schools, and largely remains so today. Protestants, especially those living in remote areas, attended national schools but whenever possible they attended schools run by the Protestant managers instead. A great part of schools run by Protestants could be found in Dublin, for example, in 1967 there were forty-two Protestant secondary schools in Ireland, of which twenty-two were in Dublin (Peck, 1967, 215) while other areas such as the West of Ireland had no Protestant Secondary schools whatsoever.

Apart from the schools ran by Protestants there are another two types of primary schools outside the Catholic Church's sphere of control and they have both registered an increase in the number of students in recent years. One of them is the Irish language schools (*gaelscoileanna*), which exists throughout the country. The other ones are multi-denominational schools, for which growing demands exceed capacity and also Vocational schools, which are funded indirectly by the state through Vocational Education Committees in each city and county headed by a chief Executive and a Board nominated by the local authorities such as city and county councils and the remainder by central government.

While in other countries like Portugal, the Catholic Church only runs private schools, in Ireland the Church accepted and controlled the public educational system, which was supported by state funding. The schools were run by boards constituted by

clergymen and people who would respect the clergymen's point of view, which in practice meant that it was the clergy alone, who ran the schools. The priests would often visit classes and would run all the schools' daily affairs. In the film *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1998), directed by Pat O'Connor, Father Carlin, the parish priest, sees Father Jack who recently had returned from Africa, as unsuitable and fires Kate (Father Jack's sister) from her position as teacher because of it. Parish priests had absolute power when it came to choosing schools teachers. All those who seemed to have an anti or weakly Catholic attitude or who had a close relative with dubious faith would not be hired.

Yet, throughout the twentieth century, other groups began to acquire influence over school policies. Firstly, it was the political parties in 1922, and then it was the local authorities in 1930 and the Irish National Teachers Organization in 1946. Slowly students, parents and socio-economic interests also began to pull their weight in affecting how schools functioned. Even though the Catholic Church lost some of its power, by the end of the 1970s it still fully controlled most schools. Attempts were made during the first two decades of the twentieth century to diminish this power but the Church was adamant in keeping it and so all the proposed Bills to change the situation did not get through Parliament. After independence, consecutive Governments chose to respect the Church's power since it guaranteed its support it may need for other policy proposals.

The Church believed that it was its duty to educate the population and implant religious beliefs and Catholic morality in all the students. The state had to assist the Church and to respect the rights of both the parents and the Church, which superseded the rights of the state. Up until the 1960s the state almost excused itself from educational oversight. The two main political parties in Ireland, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, failed to introduce innovative measures into the sector and the Minister for Education was not a senior figure but usually someone sympathetic to the Church's ideals. In most cases the Government showed all the important pieces of legislation to the Church authorities prior to submitting them to Parliament. Whenever there was a disagreement the Government always changed the piece of legislation to suit the Church's views. However this changed in the 1960s when the population started to demand greater educational opportunities and support. The Government responded to this pressure by passing laws which guaranteed universal free

access to education at primary and secondary levels, albeit against Church principles. Another of the measures taken was to put an end to the prohibition of Vocational Schools in teaching academic subjects and for its students to sit state exams that could give them full access to Higher Education. These schools were not run by the Church but by the Vocational Educational Committees, which meant that once this law was put into practice the Church no longer controlled almost all the schools that gave access to Higher Education. It is important to note that up to this change in the law many students were forced for solely financial reasons to go to Vocational schools, which did not give them access to Higher Education. Most students wanted to attend secondary school because they were more prestigious and allowed access to Higher Education but could not afford to pay the fees. All those who could not afford to pay the fees would ask Catholic Church institutions for assistance but this was rarely granted. This can be seen in the film *Angela's Ashes*. Mr. O'Halloran, who is Frank's teacher, advises his mother Angela to go the Christian Brothers and tell them that he said that Frank was an intelligent student, who should study at secondary school level. Angela does so but the Christian Brother that answers the door when she calls quickly dismisses her saying that they had no current vacancies. In practice, the Ireland of the time functioned as a class society, where those who were poor were left with very few alternatives. They were either resigned to having a mediocre job with low income or they immigrated. Frank O'Connor's teacher encouraged his students to take the latter alternative and immigrate to the United States of America. Frank O'Connor, like many other Irish people, did so.

In *Angela's Ashes*, Frank and his family lived in a lane and both they and their neighbours lived under terrible conditions but according to Frank McCourt no Government, City Hall or Corporation official ever went to the lane to check their living conditions. Whenever families were starving, they would rather go to the Church and ask for help rather than wait for Government assistance. While in other countries people expected the state to help them, in Ireland people instead relied upon assistance from the Catholic Church. The McCourts often went to the St. Vincent de Paul society (ran by the Catholic Church) and asked for help. In the film, this society is portrayed as austere, hard on people but helpful. In order to receive help from them, people had to beg for money and to answer all their questions no matter how ironic and insensitive they were, and all of this

was done in the presence of all the other people who would also be there begging for money. People were humiliated there. On one of the occasions in which Angela, played by Emily Watson, goes there to ask for help, the institution workers speculate on what her husband is spending the money he earns in England on, hinting that he is most probably either betraying her or spending it all on alcohol. Although it was true that Malachy Senior, played by Robert Carlyle, was spending almost all of the money he earned on drink she wanted to defend her husband. Yet, in order to receive their financial help she had to remain quiet and not refute what they were saying. Even though people working at the St. Vincent de Paul society seemed insensitive, they rarely refused to help people. Consequently, many people went there and managed to survive thanks to their help. They helped many people but only assisted them to buy the basic things, namely, tea, bread, sugar and wood or coal and not by helping people to study, which in turn would give them a chance to get a better job and improve their financial situation to the point that they would cease to depend on the Church.

Other measures taken in the 1960s to change the status quo established by the Educational system included free transportation to schools, increases in the number of scholarships available, the development of the Vocational Education and the establishment of Regional Technical Colleges. Many of these Colleges were built in places which had limited access to Higher Education such as, Athlone, Carlow, Dundalk, Sligo, Waterford. Nowadays, all of Ireland's major cities have Regional Technical Colleges, which are now called Institutes of Technology and are well regarded by society as a whole and are now legally empowered to award full Degrees and other academic titles. Influenced by the first *Programme for Economic Expansion* in 1958 and an OECD conference in 1961, the Government started to look at the Educational System as something essential for the country's economic development. So a study was undertaken on how the educational system could be changed to respond to economic needs. This study was published in 1966 under the name *Investment in Education* and it reports that there "can be seen an overriding concern with people as a productive resource and with education as a prerequisite for economic growth" (Wickham: 329) and with social and regional discrimination in the access to education.

The success of these measures gave the Government the power to resist Church pressure to discontinue educational reform. According to Ann Wickham, after the introduction of post-primary free education, there was an increase of fifteen thousand students in Secondary Schools and three thousand students in Vocational Schools. This in turn meant an increase in the number of teachers and schools, which led to a dramatic increase in expenses that had to be met by loans from the World Bank. After Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community, the country began to receive funds and educational policy guidelines. This external funding encouraged the state to put an end to social and gender inequalities in the Irish Educational system and by doing so diminished the influence of the Catholic Church over society in general.

### 3.2 The Portrayal of Religion in Film

The Catholic Church's influence was to wane during the 1960s and 1970s but it was only from the 1980s onwards that the general population started speaking out against the abuses of the Catholic Church. From then on there were many films that showed how the church exercised an unjustified power in Ireland. One of such films is *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1998) a cinematic adaptation of Brian Friel's play that was first performed in 1990. The film tells the story of five sisters, the illegitimate child of one of them, the father of that child and their brother, who is a priest who has just arrived back from Africa. Father Jack came back to the west of Ireland after serving in a leper colony in Uganda for twenty-five years. He arrives back in a bus and with a mask and hat from an African tribe. This serves as proof to others, such as Father Carlin the parish priest, that Father Jack has 'gone native'. Once he arrives home and talks with his sisters, it becomes clearer that Father Jack does not act as Catholic priests are supposed to and that he believes in the power of other faiths and traditions. He does not seem to fit into the Irish society of the time and later on in the film he tells Gerry (Michael's father) that he may go back to Africa, which will not happen as the spectator learns in the end that he dies within twelve months of his arrival. In fact, he is constantly talking about African traditions and rituals and saying native African words. Repeatedly, Father Jack forgets how to say something in English and just remembers the native African word for it. There is one thing though that Father Jack feels

at home with in Ireland and that is the Lughnasa celebrations. Lughnasa celebrated the beginning of the harvest and took place on the eve and on the first day of August in many places in Ireland, all of which had their own local customs of how to celebrate it. It was a Celtic festival and Kate described it as pagan, immoral and non-suitable for the Mundy sisters while Father Jack saw the similarities between that festival and the ones that took place in Africa. These festivals encouraged people to free themselves and have a good time in a carnival like atmosphere, which was contrary to the Catholic Church's teachings. The Catholic Church did not want that kind of freedom to exist and did not respect the fact that a priest or anyone else saw these rituals as important and stimulating. The Church succeeded in almost extinguishing these celebrations. There are records of Lughnasa celebrations taking place in the west of Ireland, however, they began to gradually die-out in the first two decades of the 1900s and were almost non-existent by the 1930s (Dean, 2003: 65). "In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Catholicism has dispensed with its celebratory ritual – its very capacity for joy, for release, for escape, for carnival (...) in their place are scrupulous piety and religious obligations" (Dean, 2003: 69). In the film there is a clear contrast between the Catholic Church and Celtic rituals, while in the latter case people are supposed to take part in the ceremonies, which take the form of a feast, and in the first case people have to passively attend a repressive ceremony, which is said in Latin, a language very few could understand. It was only with the Second Vatican Council, which took place between 1962 and 1965, that the Church changed the way it communicated its message and moderated to a certain degree the rigid ceremonial practises within the Church (e.g. it abolished the compulsory Latin mass and also allowed priests to face their congregation, rather than having their backs to it while saying mass).

However, these were not the only differences between Father Jack's morals and attitude towards life in general and the one the Catholic Church so strongly defended in Ireland. For example, Father Jack calls Michael a 'love child' when he learns that he is Christina's son and that she is not married and to Kate's horror he encourages his other sisters to also have 'love children'. At the time it was extremely rare for women to have children out-side of wed-lock. In 1933-4 the non-marital birth rate was 3.9 per cent of all births and by 1969 it was 2.6 per cent (Dean: 14). The few women that had illegitimate children would normally emigrate or be sent to a home, like the Magdalene Laundries. The

latter is portrayed in *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002), a much acclaimed film by Peter Mullan, which depicts the reasons why women were taken to the Magdalene Laundries and how their lives were in the hands of the Sisters of Mercy in 1964. The film starts by showing why three girls were sent to the Magdalene Laundries and sets the tone for the rest of the film. Margaret, played by Annie-Marie Duff, is one of the main characters and is raped by a cousin at a wedding party. Devastated and revolted by what has happened, she tells her father all about it hoping that he would punish her cousin for his immoral action. However, she is instead sent to a Magdalene Laundry in the following morning. In this case, there is a clear victimization of an innocent woman. She was seen as impure and a shame on her family and so they sent her there, with no intention of ever seeing her again. Bernadette, played by Nora-Jane Noone, another one of the film's main characters is sent to the Catholic institution because she is seen speaking with a group of boys. It was considered to be a sin to do so even though she was inside the orphanage grounds and they were outside. The third woman shown is named Patricia Rose, played by Dorothy Duffy, and she was sent there because she had a child outside of wed-lock. Her child is given up for adoption without her consent and under the condition that she would never see the child again.

These three girls arrive at the Magdalene Laundries on the same day and are introduced to its rules straight away. They had to work for most of their day, they could not speak with each other and had to pray for a good part of the day in order to pay for their sins. They could not leave the Magdalene Laundries or establish any form of contact with the outside world. However, Crispina, played by Eillen Walsh, managed to do so because her sister used to show up with Crispina's child near a field where they would hang out the clothes to dry. Crispina had the child outside of wed-lock and that was the reason why she was sent to the Magdalene Laundries. This would rarely happen in real life because in most cases families did not know which Magdalene laundry their children were sent to, and also because once girls arrived at the laundries their names were changed. The laundries' were also walled, making it almost impossible to see beyond their grounds. Apart from being kept away from her family, working very hard without being paid and being beaten, Crispina was raped by a priest. Bernadette finds out about it and decides that it would be best for Crispina if she exposed the situation. In order to do so she puts itching powder into

the priest's clothes while washing it. On that day the Magdalene sisters were to attend a public ceremony presided over by the same priest. At the ceremony both Crispina and the Priest appear very itchy and have to runaway from the ceremony while relieving themselves of their clothing. Before going away Crispina accuses the priest of not being a holy man. The Catholic Church's way of dealing with this rape was to let the priest continue with his job and to send Crispina to a lunatic asylum, where she becomes overwhelmed by the injustice and most of all by the impossibility of ever seeing her child. She eventually dies there, while still quite young.

The film does not just portray the lives of specific people but depicts the atmosphere of the Magdalene Laundries and how life was for those who lived there. Although the film takes place in 1964 it portrays an institution that existed until very recently. The last Magdalene Laundry was only closed in 1996. They started functioning in the nineteenth century and were named after Mary Magdalene, who fell from grace, was redeemed and became a close follower of Jesus. At the beginning their main aim was to rehabilitate prostitutes but later it changed to include the rehabilitation of those girls who in the eyes of the Church had committed a sin or even were simply at risk of committing one. There are no official records of how many women lived in Magdalene Laundries and the Catholic Church refuses to publish their records on the subject, but it is estimated in the tens of thousands. It was usually the family of the 'fallen' women on the instruction of the local priest that were responsible for arranging to have these women sent to these institutions. Sociologist Niall McElwee does not agree with the people that swear that they sent their children to those institutions because they did not know what was going on there. McElwee argues that all throughout of the twentieth century parents used to threaten their daughters that if they did not behave they would put them in one of the Magdalene Laundries. Thereafter, the sociologist concludes that it was well-known that these institutions were a sort of a prison where women paid for their sins. Although families were aware of this, they still sent their daughters there because they believed it was a place where women could work hard and redeem themselves.

Irish society at that time treated women at the Magdalene Laundries as incapable of raising a family, making decisions and a shame to their families. It can be argued that the

Catholic Church alone can not be blamed since families and the state were aware of part of what was going on in these institutions and did nothing to stop it. It was the state's responsibility to inspect these institutions and make sure that all women were treated fairly. In fact, once the scandal broke, the state agreed to share the costs of compensation of the victims with the Church and the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern made an apology on behalf of the Irish state to those held and abused in institutions run by the Catholic Church. Even though the Irish state agreed to accept as much as responsible as the Catholic Church for what happened it is important to note that there are no records of the state knowing at the time that abuses were taking place in these institutions. While some members of the religious orders, like David Gibson, revealed to the Child Abuse Commission that the Catholic Church was aware that children were being abused in their institutions. However, the state was ultimately responsible for checking how the Catholic Church ran its institutions. By doing this, the Government established a precedent of accepting liability for the negligence of a third party. Arguably, this bale-out principle could one day be applied to politicians themselves. Some members of the clergy were internally tried (canonical trials) and confessed to being guilty, yet they continued to be a part of the Catholic Church and neither the Department of Education nor the Gardaí (the Irish police force) were informed of the crimes committed by them.

Notwithstanding this, the deal made in 2002 between the state and the Catholic Church established that the Catholic Church would have to give a hundred and twenty million euro to the state and in return the state would have to indemnify the Church against all claims from victims seeking compensation. At the time the amount paid by the Church was believed to be half of the total amount the state would have to pay in compensation claims. However, this estimate was far from realistic since so far the state has paid circa 1.35 billion euro, which means that the Irish state ended up paying at least around ninety percent of all costs instead of the agreed fifty. Compensation to victims of institutional abuse is paid through the Residential Institution Redress Board, a body set up by the Irish Government in 2002 to take charge of compensation monies and to deal with victims directly or through their legal counsels. This Board deals not only with women held in the Magdalene Laundries but with all of those people who were victims of institutions ran by the Catholic Church, especially the victims of the Christian Brothers.

In fact, like in the case of the Magdalene Laundries, there is a film that depicts life in an institution ran by Brothers. *A Song for a Raggy Boy* (2003) depicts an Irish Reformatory School directed by the clergy in 1939 and like the film *The Magdalene Sisters* it is based on a true story. The film tells the story of William Franklin (played by Aidan Quinn), who becomes the first lay teacher of St. Jude's Reformatory School and the impact he had on the school's way of functioning. The new teacher was welcomed by some of the Brothers, who in their own words believed that it was about time the school's teaching methods changed. However, others, especially the school Principal Brother John (played by Ian Glen), seemed to believe that lay teachers should not work in that school because they could bring the seeds of change, which he so strongly fought against. Just before Mr. Franklin gave his first class in this school Father John talks with him and refers to the students as creatures, warning him not to confuse them with intelligent beings. As soon as the class starts Mr. Franklin realizes that in fact the previous teachers have treated those students as unintelligent beings since most of them were teenagers but could not read or write. From then on the teacher's main task becomes to teach those students how to read, write and have self-confidence. None of these things had been priorities to Brother John, who was only concerned about the students' behaviour. All the boys who attended the Reformatory school were sent there to be punished for crimes they had committed, in most cases for robbery. In school they were mostly treated as criminals and the spectator can often see the boys working, for example, cleaning the floors, making rosary beads and engaging in agricultural labour. They were also not referred to by their name but rather by number, Mr. Franklin was the only exception to this as he called his students by their own names. However, these were relatively minor offences when compared to the physical and sexual violence committed by some members of the clergy working at the school.

One of those offences occurred when a student accidentally burped at a student assembly. Unsure of who did it, the Principal asked one of the students whether it was him who did it. The student denied having burped but he is beaten up anyway. This is the first time that Mr. Franklin sees a child being beaten up by the school Principal and his reaction to it was to physically stop him from doing so. This marks the beginning of the power struggle between Mr. Franklin and Brother John. Immediately after this event Brother John

asked the school headmaster to fire Mr. Franklin because he questioned his authority in front of the students. The headmaster refuses to do so because in his belief Mr. Franklin was doing a very good job and introducing the necessary changes in the school way of functioning. Later in the film he reveals to Mr. Franklin that he did not want Brother John to work in St. Jude's Reformatory School but that he was allocated there by the Bishop and that only he could move Father John elsewhere. The school headmaster's conduct is a reminder that not all of the clergy agreed with the way some Catholic Church's institutions were ran and that many tried to change it.

While some tried to put an end to the crimes and offences committed by members of the Catholic Church, others made sure that the general population would not hear of those crimes because it would ruin the Catholic Church's moral authority in Ireland. This can be seen in the film when Patrick Delaney, played by Chris Newman, confesses to a priest that he was raped by Brother Mac, played by Marc Warren. This priest not only does not call the civil authorities to deal with the case, as he also tells Brother Mac what the child said in the confession box. In order to punish Patrick for having done so and to make sure he would not tell anyone else about it, Father Mac slaps him and forces him, amongst other things, to stand naked under a cold shower.

Brother John was also aware of the fact that Brother Mac raped some of the students but chose not to tell anybody about it and used it to threaten Brother Mac that if he did not support him he would tell the other members of the clergy about his crimes. Noting that Mr. Franklin spoke openly with his students and being suspicious about Mr. Franklin's involvement in the Spanish Civil War, Brother John questioned student Liam Mercier about his teacher's past. As Liam Mercier denied the idea that his teacher had fought for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War, Brother John began physically beating him. As he was doing so, a book containing Spanish Civil War poems belonging to Mr. Franklin fell from his pocket and hit the floor (he had lent it to Liam Mercier and told him that he had fought for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War), which infuriated Brother John even more and made him beat Liam Mercier to death. Naturally, this should have been reported to the civil authorities but once more the Catholic Church authorities decided to hide those crimes from the general public and to punish Father John and Father Mac

themselves. Father John was sent out to the African missions, which was a very common punishment at the time, and it was where he died in 1969. While Father Mac was simply sent to work in a North American parish, where he still lives at the time of the making of the film. Not only were these punishments far too lenient for the crimes they had committed, neither was anything done to ensure that they would not continue to commit the same crimes in Africa and the United States of America.

*Lamb* (1986) directed by Colin Gregg and based on a book by Bernard MacLaverty is another film that portrays an institution run by Christian Brothers. While in *A Song for a Raggy Boy* it is a lay teacher who disagrees with the institution's way of functioning in this film the same is done by a Brother, demonstrating that there were people within the clergy that also disagreed with the way some of the Catholic Church's institutions were run. Brother Sebastian, whose real name was Michael Lamb believed that the school punished students too harshly and that there students learnt more about fear than God. When his father died he inherited some money and decided to elope to England with Owen Kane a twelve-year-old student at the school. Brother Sebastian hoped to save Kane (the Irish for lamb) from the miserable life he thought he would have if he continued living in that religious institution. While in the beginning everything went well it all began to crumble when Brother Sebastian started running out of money and the police seemed to come closer and closer in their search for them. Brother Sebastian continued to try to help Owen and did so by allowing him to do almost everything he wanted, including smoking. Yet, Sebastian's good-will and kindness did not suffice as he did not have the means to save the boy. In the end he killed Owen believing that it was an act of love and failed in his attempt to take his own life.

Both *A Song for a Raggy Boy*, *Lamb* and *The Magdalene Sisters* portray the Catholic Church in a less-than-flattering light, which would not have been possible at the time in which the action of both films takes place. It was only in the 1980s that news started to come out in the media about the way the Catholic Church had run its institutions and how its members often did not follow the rules the Church so readily enforced upon its congregation. The scandals revealed in the 1990s refer back to the 1930s and provide an insight into the Catholic Church's way of functioning at the time. The year of 1992 saw the

first scandal to come out. It involved Eamonn Casey, then Bishop of Galway, who had to resign his position and leave the country when it became known that he had an affair in early 1970s with an American woman named Annie Murphy and that a child was to be born out of this relationship. The general population was outraged not only with the fact that he did not uphold his celibacy vows but also with the fact that he did not take care of his own child, but instead he used diocesan funds to provide for the child. Nevertheless, the scandal was to be small when compared with the others that were to come out in subsequent years.

In 1993, Father Brendan Smyth, a Catholic Priest was charged with the sexual abuse of minors by the Northern Irish police. He was released on bail and immediately fled from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland, where he remained until 1994, when he surrendered himself to the Northern Irish police force and confessed to seventeen charges that dated as far back as the 1960s. Father Smyth died the same year while incarcerated. This was to be just the tip of the iceberg because in the coming years many other members of the clergy confessed similar to crimes to the ones committed by Father Brendan Smyth. Following these scandals a number of television documentaries were made on the matter and these documentaries were to enlighten the general population about what had happened in many Catholic institutions in previous decades. One of those documentaries was broadcast in 1994 on the Ulster Television programme *Counterpoint*. This programme revealed that the Catholic Church was well aware of the crimes committed by Father Brendan Smyth but that instead of handing him in to the civil authorities, the Catholic Church decided that it would be best to move him to another parish. At the time the Catholic Church's reputation was treated as being more important than the children's well-being and safety. It is important to note that although this programme was broadcasted by a Northern Irish television channel, a great number of people were able to watch it in the Republic of Ireland. Another television programme that made scandalous revelations about the Catholic Church was *States of Fear*, which was broadcast in 1999 by the Republic of Ireland public broadcaster, RTE. This programme portrayed how the Irish industrial schools and reformatories were run by the Catholic Church over previous decades. Those institutions "were revealed in some instances to have been places of virtual slavery, of

vicious cruelty and sexual depravation. And it was clear that the state had not taken its supervisory responsibilities seriously” (Brown, 2004: 370).

Not all the scandals that came out were related to physical and sexual abuse. One of the revelations made in the 1990s about the Catholic Church was that contrary to what the Church said during most of the twentieth century, children’s work was not vital for the institutions’ financial viability. According to a report by the *Irish Independent* Newspaper of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 2006, in 1961 an Irish rural family received on average fourteen shillings a week per person as subsistence while the state paid the Church approximately thirty-nine shillings per week and per student in an industrial school. People held in Catholic Church’s institutions had to work in order to generate profit and not simply to pay for everyday expenses incurred as those were fully covered by the payments made by the state to the Church. In *A Song for a Raggy Boy* and in *The Magdalene Laundries*, the spectator can often see the main characters working. While in *A Song for a Raggy Boy*, the boys spend a great part of their time both cleaning the school and carrying out farm related duties, in *The Magdalene Laundries*, they washed and dried clothes. These clothes were taken to the institution by families and companies who at the time did not seem to question whether it was right or not that those women were cleaning their clothes for nothing and that the Catholic Church was keeping all the profits.

For decades the authority of the Catholic Church went virtually unquestioned. The general population would follow its teachings and try to live their lives according to them. However, nowadays there are many films, television documentaries and books that openly criticize the Church. If in the past the norm was that films had turn a blind eye to transgressions and to praise the Church. Now that has changed and the norm is to criticize it. A film that fits into this train of thought is *Evelyn* (2002), directed by Bruce Beresford. This film is based on the autobiographical novel with the same title by Evelyn Doyle. It tells the story of a young girl, Evelyn, whose mother leaves her, her father and brothers, to live with one of her husband’s cousins in Scotland. When Evelyn’s mother leaves, Desmond Doyle (her father), played by Pierce Brosnam is unable to pay someone to mind his children while he is working and has to agree to put them in residential schools run by the Catholic Church. Once he is in the position to have his children back living with him,

the state does not allow him to do so without the permission of his wife. In order to bring his children home without having to ask for his wife's permission, he must go to court and challenge the state's decision. The film concentrates both on this fight between a single man against the state and the Catholic Church, which are shown to be strongly related and Evelyn's life at the residential school run by nuns. In the latter there is a complete disparity between what is described in the book and what is shown in the film. In the film some of the nuns are aggressive, as one hits Evelyn and is accused of doing so while on trial and Evelyn like all the other girls living in the residential school seem not to like living there. This is in stark contrast with Evelyn Doyle's statements in her autobiography. In the book Evelyn says that she enjoys living with the nuns and even wonders whether she should leave the convent to live with her family or not. "The convent had become my home and I felt secure and safe there. Nothing bad had happened to me since I had come to live here" (Doyle, 2003: 210) There is a clear intention on the part of the film's directors to criticize the Church for the way institutions were run even though that was not expressed in the source book they used to write the script for the film. Evelyn Doyle herself does not seem to resent the Nuns for the way that they treated her but only for the fact that the Church and the state were too closely linked. In the book, Evelyn Doyle gives a voice to those who disagreed with the Catholic Church's excessive power and its relationship with the Irish state but still liked the way many of its institutions were run. Although crimes were committed in many institutions run by the Catholic Church, it is not fair to say that all institutions treated their residents in a cruel manner. Recently cinema has generally portrayed Catholic institutions in a negative way but many people have to hard feelings about the time they spent in those institutions, as Evelyn Doyle herself says in her book.

The relation between the Catholic Church and the Irish state during most of the twentieth century is largely condemned in our time. Since the formation of the Irish Free State the Catholic Church had greatly influenced the way the country was directed but after the 1937 Constitution this increased even more so. The Church controlled most schools and hospitals and had its say on Government policies. In most cases Governments chose to quietly withdraw all pieces of legislation which the Church was against. A famous

exception to that was the previously mentioned<sup>2</sup> ‘mother-and-child scheme’, which caused the fall of a coalition Government in 1951. These events are seen by many as confirmation of the Catholic Church’s power in Ireland. In Northern Ireland many understood it as the confirmation that Ireland was a theocratic state. At the time the Irish Times reported:

This is a sad day for Ireland. It is not so important that the mother-and-child scheme has been withdrawn to be replaced by an alternative project embodying a means test. (...) The most serious revelation however is that the Roman Catholic Church would seem to be the effective government of this country. (Murphy, 1981: 133)

For most of the twentieth century many people hardly distinguished between Church and state since public policy was largely driven by Roman Catholic doctrines to begin with. In Jim Sheridan’s *The Field* (1990) the interests of Church and state seem to largely coincide, much to the detriment and displeasure of the main protagonist, the Bull McCabe, played by Richard Harris. He leases a poorly cultivated field from the character Maggie and turns it into a green and fertile field. The Bull McCabe tries to buy the field several times but Maggie always refuses to sell it out. However, one day she decides to move to another town and sell her property to the highest bidder. This infuriates the Bull McCabe, who believed that after all the value he had added to that field with the work he did to it he was the only one who had any real entitlement to it. During the nineteenth century the Catholic Church had been sensitive to tenants’ rights, after the country’s independence it stood by the Government’s side. “In the Bull’s eyes, church ways are indistinguishable from state ways. And a public auction of land is merely the contemporary, government-sanctioned form of the older curse of eviction and exile” (Herr, 2002:15).

Even though the Bull McCabe was offended he believed everybody would understand that he was the only one entitled to buy the field and that no one else would dare to bid against him for it. It was true that no one that lived locally had the courage to try to buy it, yet someone that was not local demonstrated interest in purchasing it. Peter had lived for a long time in the United States of America and returned to Ireland with the

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<sup>2</sup> pg. 33

intention of buying some property. He was not sensitive to the meaning of land in rural Ireland and was not willing to respect tenants' rights. The fact that the parish priest thinks likewise is representative of the changes that started to occur in the 1960s in rural Ireland. At the beginning of the twentieth century much of public policy regarded the rural community as more important than the urban one. The main reason for that being that the majority of the population lived in rural areas and that the urban centres, especially Dublin, had been the centres from where the colonial rule was imposed on the whole country. Some like Éamon de Valera believed that modernization in the form of large urban areas was a result of colonial influence and imposition and that the real and original Ireland was rural in nature. Obviously, this view was not shared by all as there were a great number of people who moved from rural to urban areas. In 1926 the Irish population living in rural areas was 2,019,559 while in 1971 it was only 1,422,634. Simultaneously, however, population in urban areas increased and where in 1926 the population was 952,433, by 1971 it was 1,555,614. The increase owes much to Dublin, the capital city, which saw its population increase by fifty per cent in the first six decades of the twentieth century. Although, the population in general did not decrease to a great extent its geographical location did, since the rural population decreased dramatically while the urban one increased.

As people moved from rural areas to urban ones so their professional occupation's changed and, as industrial development became more of a Government priority from the 1950s onwards, even many of those who remained living in rural areas changed occupation. According to the 1926 Census there were 654,108 people who worked in the agriculture sector. This number was to decrease dramatically over the following decades. In 1946 it was down to 575,083 and twenty years later it was only 333,527. On the other hand, the industrial sector continued to expand. In 1926 there were only 158,841 people working in this sector and 208,138 in 1946. In 1966, this number increased again to 293,733. Yet, it is important to notice that amid all the Government's efforts to develop the country's industry more than forty years after independence the agricultural sector had a larger work force than the industrial sector. However, by the time the 1961 Census was taken it was no longer the biggest sector because the services sector work force had

become greater (there were 378,732 people in the agricultural sector and 414,972 in the services one).

Life in rural areas was in many cases harsh and isolated from the other country areas. Overcrowding in housing was a serious problem in rural areas (as it was in urban areas too), for example in 1926, 43 percent of the population of Mayo and 40.8 percent of the population of Donegal lived in houses that had more than two people living per room. Country roads were and remain narrow and winding. Consequently, it took a long time for people and goods to be transported from one town to another. Even nowadays, even though Ireland has now become a wealthy country the road network is minimal in its extent and poor in quality. Apart from some dual-carriageways in and around the country's biggest cities, mainly Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick, the country's road system is comprised of a single lane each way, this low capacity inevitably leads to delays. Road connections between the different country's areas have not been the priority of Governments since independence. This lack of connection could be said to help keep the main characteristics of rural areas intact even though some began to disappear in the 1960s as they are portrayed in *The Field*. From the 1960s onwards urban areas took the lead in terms of population percentage and they became a priority for Governments to come. In the population in general the idea that people should be proud of being urban and modern started to grow and it became the norm. Those like the Bull McCabe who continued to defend the old moral and rural way of life were set apart and not tolerated by the local authorities and local Catholic Church representatives. "The features once valued as rural were recast as 'peasant', 'peripheral' and 'uncivilised'" (Tovey and Share: 345). Irish tourism and film agencies continued to use rural Ireland to expand their businesses, but the population in general did not see the potential that lay in it and continued to leave rural areas and move to the urban centres.

The Catholic Church is represented quite differently in the film *The Quiet Man* (1952), directed by John Ford. In this film the local parish priest is portrayed as friendly, sympathetic with those like Sean Thornton who have a multi-generational claim to and enduring sentimentalist attitude toward the land. Father Lonergan, played by Ward Bond, is liked and trusted by everyone. The film revolves around the relationship between Mary

Kate and Sean Thornton and when they face marital problems each of them confesses those problems to the parish priest and trust in his advice. It is important to note though that this film does not attempt to be realistic but tries rather to idealize the Irish rural way of life. The priest's characterization is part of this idealization of rural life. He is a conciliatory figure of authority, who mingles with everyone in town. This role can also be found for example in the famous television series *Ballykissangel* (1996-2001), where the main character is a much loved priest and in *Ryan's Daughter*, directed by David Lean. In both the latter and in *The Quiet Man* parish priests are represented as tolerant even towards the Protestants. In *The Quiet Man* the local protestant clergyman was going to be moved elsewhere because they had a very small congregation of less than ten people. However, neither the clergyman nor local population wanted that to happen. Both the clergyman and his wife were born there, felt part of the community and did not want to leave. The local population liked and trusted them and Sean Thornton, for example, often visited the clergyman to talk about his personal life. Even the local parish Catholic priest wished him to stay and planned a way to convince the protestant authorities to let him do so. When protestant authorities came to town to pick-up both the clergyman and his wife they were welcomed by a large crowd of people, in each the parish priest was included, pretending to be protestant and asking for them not to move the clergyman elsewhere. Impressed by such a warm and numerous reception, the protestant authorities decided to let the clergyman continue his work in the village. While it is unlikely that a Catholic priest would pretend to be protestant it was very common for protestant clergy to be moved out of many places in Ireland because their congregation was too small to justify their presence.

One of the reasons why so many Protestants left Ireland was that many houses which belonged to the former Protestant Ascendancy (which were known as the Big Houses) were destroyed, "Between 6 December 1921 and 22 March 1923, 192 Big Houses were burned by incendiaries" (Brown, 2004: 99). The burning of such houses can be seen in the film *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006), directed by Ken Loach. The film's main character is Damien (played by Cillian Murphy) who becomes a doctor and decides to go to London for further training. However, when he is about to leave on the train there is an incident that makes him change his mind and remain in Ireland, as his family wanted him to do. The incident consists of the shooting of both the train's driver and guard

because they did not want to allow British army personal to board on the train. Deeply upset with the injustice, Damien decides to join the forces fighting for Irish independence. Here we have the suggestion that Damien decides to fight for Ireland not for religious reasons but because he wanted people to be free and treated fairly. The struggle for national independence could be said to be the first part of the film. The second part consists of the Civil War, which is presented as more dramatic and violent than the reality experienced in the war of independence. Irish society was divided in two. People who fought together in the war against the British were now on opposing sides. There is an uneasy relationship between Damien and his brother Teddy because while they are friendly toward one another their political ideologies are strongly divergent. This makes them mortal enemies. Teddy is in favour of the Anglo-Irish treaty while Damien is against it. Those in favour of the treaty control the government and army forces and repeal the attacks perpetrated by those against the treaty. The Civil war ends up being as bloody as the war for Independence. Those defending the treaty behaved in an authoritarian way and used the same armour, munitions and vehicles as the British had used against the Irish, as they had been inherited the arms from the outgoing British forces.

Those in favour of the treaty believed this was the best deal they could have got and that this was far better than having to continue fighting against the British. Those against the treaty wanted a real change in Ireland. They did not wish for an Irish Free State but for a Republic of Ireland that would consist of the whole island of Ireland and not just part of it. Yet, for some it was not enough for Ireland to be independent. They wanted social changes to be implemented and for the country to become a fairer place. Some believed that this could only be achieved by common ownership of the land and so destroyed the homes of wealthy families. In many cases these houses belonged to Protestant families so it is important to note that many of the Big Houses that have been previously mentioned were not burn down just for religious but also for socialist ideals.

When the Big Houses were burnt down, many Protestants left the country but others remained and resisted. Some felt that Ireland was their home country and a place they did not want to leave. For many of them the Anglo-Irish culture was a quintessential part of the country and that “the Anglo-Irish stock had contributed through their literary

and dramatic works to Irish regeneration and that a genuinely Irish literature had emerged through the fusion of the English language with Gaelic mythology” (Brown, 2004, 112). William Butler Yeats, one of the most prominent Irish writers of the twentieth century, was Protestant and agreed with this point of view. The fact that he was Protestant in a strongly Catholic country did not prevent him from either becoming famous or criticising the Catholic Church on many aspects such as refusing people’s right to divorce and supporting the 1929’s Irish Censorship of Publications Act. All of which were contrary to Protestant principle’s of individual freedom and freedom of consciousness.

Even though Yeats and many others alike fought against the Free State’s imposition of a Gaelic and conservative culture and the Catholic Church’s power, it was very hard to change a society as homogenous as the Irish one was after the country’s independence. The Catholic Church at the time represented one of the main differences between Ireland and Britain and so was an essential part of Irish identity. It also provided many people with a well-paid and respected job and gave the country a position in a commanding international institution, allowing the country to have a more significant role in the world stage. One of the ways in which the country exercised this role was by sending Irish missionaries abroad to serve the Catholic Church. As previously mentioned, some Priests went on missions abroad to pay for their mistakes and sins but a great number went because they believed that spreading the Catholic faith in other countries was a very important and honourable thing to be do. By 1970 there were six thousand Irish missionaries in Africa, Asia and South America (Brown, 2004: 28). As can be seen in the film *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1998), families were willing to make sacrifices to make sure that one of them became a missionary. It was an honourable position to hold and when missionaries came back home they were often welcomed by a big party organised by both their family and local residents. Unless their time in Africa was overshadowed by something considered scandalous in nature as was the case of Father Jack, who did not receive a warm welcome at home after working for so many years as a missionary in Africa because there were rumours that he had gone ‘native’ and so no longer professed the Catholic faith.

Another way the country used internationally to demonstrate that Ireland was a deeply Catholic country was by holding Catholic celebrations such as the 1929 celebration

of the centenary of Catholic Emancipation and congresses such as the 1932 Eucharistic Congress. The latter gathered high-ranking church dignitaries from forty countries and over a million people at a mass in the Phoenix Park in Dublin, which corresponded to a third of the then Irish population. This is representative of the central role the Catholic Church had in the Irish society. The Church “used that authoritative position in Irish society to preach a sexual morality of severe restrictiveness, conforming the mores and attitudes of a nation of farmers and shopkeepers” (Brown, 2004: 29). There was a great concern in the Catholic Church with all that could change people’s way of thinking, namely books, cinema, newspapers, fashion and even dance. Therefore the Church strongly influenced the Government to promulgate Irish Censorship of Publications Act to insure that the population would not have access to all that was contrary to Catholic Church morale.

It was only when the country started changing in the 1960s that both Censorship and Catholic Church’s power started to wane. By the time Ireland came into the European Union, Catholic Church influence over the Irish State and society had declined significantly. The end of the ban on the importation of contraceptives in 1973, although it was limited only to married couple’s right to use the same, is an example of how many more people were questioning the Church’s teachings and deciding what was best for themselves never minding the Catholic Church’s opinion on it. However, this was to be just the beginning of a long battle that ended in 1994 when all bans on contraception were lifted. Many decades separate the lifting of the ban from the 1929 prohibition on the use of contraception and even discussion of this issue. It is important to note that even though contraception only began to be legal in Ireland from the 1970s, Irish Sociologists Tovey and Share believe that a great number of people started to use contraception from the 1960s onwards as there has been a significant decrease in the number of babies being born. Until then sexual desire was seen as a sin by a large part of the population and that idea was passed from one generation to another and enforced in both school and the Church. Women respected the teachings of the Church, so many postponed marriages because they knew that once they got married they would have to have many children straight away.

Through confession the priest questioned women about their sexual feelings and practices in order to make sure that they kept seeing it as a sin. Contraception was considered a sin as was a woman refusal to perform her marital duties. Consequently, couples had to resign themselves to the fact that they would have as many children as God wanted them to have even if they could not afford to have any more children. The alternative to that was abstinence of sexual activity as no contraception was available and any information relating to it was censored. Frank McCourt sums up this in an extra of *Angela's Ashes* DVD by saying that the "Church was everywhere even in the bed" (my own transcription). In *Angela's Ashes*, this can be seen when one night Angela refuses to perform her wife's duties because she did not want to have any more children. By then many of her children had died and she continued to live without proper housing conditions and with insufficient heating and food. The more children they had, the greater their poverty became so she decides to do what she thought was best for her instead of following the Church's teachings on the matter. Once contraception was legalised, did not take long for a great part of the population to make use of it. From then on, situations like those portrayed in *Angela's Ashes* slowly were slowly eradicated. In the next section women's role in society and the living conditions of the population in general will be dealt in greater detail.

#### 4. Family Narratives in Irish Cinema

Cuchulainn's misguided fight with his own son becomes a recurrent paradigm of the impossibility of a national, civil society – that is, one which can bequeath posterity to a new generation.

(Meaney, 2006: 243)

Irish nationalists researched the country's mythological figures and tales as part of their project to give Ireland a past which was antecedent to the beginning of British control over the island of Ireland. They believed that this was essential to the creation of a "national identity premised on the real and imagined connections between people of the present and their lineage from a distant race that existed in the past, a golden age when the 'the people' constituted an social-political unit, the 'nation'" (Pettitt, 2000: 3). Cuchulainn is one of the most famous Irish mythological figures who were given a renewed and improved meaning by Irish nationalists such as William Butler Yeats. One of the best known stories concerning this mythological hero is about him killing his own son. His son Connla came to Ireland to find him but when he found his father, the latter took him for an intruder and killed him. Cuchulainn is, therefore, a hero and a symbol of Irish nationalism as well as a symbol of a failed father who kills his children while trying to be a good father. It is important to also note that as Cuchulainn kills his son so he destroys himself too and in W. B. Yeats's version of this mythological story, after his son death he loses his mind and begins fighting the sea waves. This paradigmatic story is often used in Irish cinema and literature most notably in *The Field* by John B. Keane, which was later adapted for a film of the same name by Jim Sheridan. A story in which the father, the Bull McCabe, is responsible for his son's death and fights the incoming tide in a hopeless attempt to drive the sea away from his son's dead body. The older generation's killing of a younger one is not only presented in films by the physical death of someone young but also represented by the destruction of a younger generations' future. For decades many Irish people left Ireland because of the country's challenging living conditions and lack of opportunities. Younger generations blamed the older ones for this predicament.

In *The Field* (1990), the Bull McCabe's son, Tadhg is only given a future by his father that consists of continuing to farm the same field as himself. However, Tadhg does

not want to live the same life as his father and sees emigration as an alternative to continuing his father's occupation. He intends to leave Ireland with a woman who is a 'tinker' and not with the one his father tries to arrange for him to marry. Significantly, he chooses a 'tinker', who does not respect laws nor values land, over the daughter of someone who owned land. Yet, when Tadhg was leaving town he heard from the Bird that his father in an act of madness had released his cattle and so decides to try to stop his father's cattle from falling over a cliff. However, he is not able to stop the cattle from falling as he ends up caught between them and falls over the cliff with them and dies. This becomes the third death provoked by the Bull McCabe, who has completely decimated his successors. The first death thought to have been provoked by the Bull McCabe is that of his eldest son Seimi. This death is the only one not represented on screen and consequently the one the spectator knows least about. Seamy is thought to have killed himself because he felt unable to live up to his father's expectations. The second death caused by the Bull McCabe was the one of William Dee, an Irish-American, "returning immigrant, who is a metaphor for the hope of economic development" (Kerstin Ketteman in MacKillop, 1999: 158-59).

The Bull McCabe, as his nickname would suggest, is strong but stubborn and wrong-headed. He only became a definitively weak and beaten figure with Tadhg's death.

Bull is a violent, extremely patriarchal figure who seems to have caused the death of his other son, thereby alienating his wife and remaining son, who nevertheless keep their 'family secret' and continue living with him. Bull is a leader with a strong hold on local men, almost a chief, but with a fanatic drive for land and power that maims and consumes those around him.

(Ketteman in MacKillop, 1999: 154)

Yet, it becomes clear in the film how each of the previous deaths affected him too. After William Dee's disappearance and Tadhg's announcement that he was to leave home, the Bull McCabe madness becomes more evident and his wife decides to speak with him for the first time in eighteen years. While speaking with her husband she makes him look at his reflection in a mirror. When the Bull McCabe sees his reflection in the mirror he begins questioning himself aloud whether he was looking at a mirror reflection of himself or of his late son Seimi and it becomes clear that he was deeply tormented by past events. When

Tadhg is lying dead on the beach a tormented and mad the Bull McCabe fights against the sea while both Mrs McCabe and the tinker's daughter look down on his acts from a cliff top. It is as if the patriarchal order had come to an end and "the two women lean more towards a forward-looking humanism barely emergent from the social wreckage" (Herr, 2002: 74). After all of the Bull McCabe's efforts to continue his family traditions, which included the farming of the field, he ended up destroying both the traditions and his family. Both his sons die, which means that his family line has ended and there will be no one left to inherit the field. In the end, as the Bull McCabe has gone mad, the only one left in the family is Mrs. McCabe. So even though women play a minor role in the film, it seems the future belongs to them.

This film represents Irish society of the 1930s as being patriarchal but also suggests that this has got to end and that women are to gain greater significance and influence. There are many examples in this film of the characteristics of a patriarchal society. One example of this is the problems a local Anglo-Irish widow (Frances Tomelty) had to go through in order to remain living in town and keeping her field after her husband's death. Generally, people expected all widows who did not have a male son who could work on the field to leave town. Yet, against the general population's expectations, she decided to remain living in the town and leased the field to the Bull McCabe. Tadhg and the Bird, without the Bull McCabe's knowledge, constantly tried to harass and frighten her at home, in a way similar to what secret societies did to landlords in nineteenth century Ireland and she eventually decided to leave. However, once again she does not do what the general population expected her to. Local residents expected her to sell the field to the Bull McCabe but she decides to auction it instead. All in all, apart from her own fragility which makes her have to leave town, she shows some strength by not doing what people expect and want her to do but by doing what is best for herself. There is another female character in the film that is also represented as being strong and free: the tinker's daughter. These women's freedom is representative of the freedom Irish women will have in the future.

Paradoxically, while representing this societal transition the film also shows the younger generation as being weaker than the older one. The film begins with the Bull McCabe and his son Tadhg collecting seaweed on the coastline and transporting it to their

field. While the son looks tired and seems to find the work very difficult, his father, who looks quite old, works away as if the task was light. It is possible that the son was more tired than the father because he did not like the job and was not accustomed to that kind of work, however, the idea that the younger generation is weaker than the Bull McCabe is repeated again later in the scene that takes place when Tadgh fights William Dee. During the fight the Bull McCabe exhorts his son to beat William up but Tadgh seems weaker than William and so not in a position to do what his father tells him to. After watching the two fighting and realising that his son would not manage to beat William, the Bull McCabe holds the two together making them bang each other's head and shows them that the two of them should be ashamed of themselves and that although he is old he is still stronger than them. While still controlling both William and Tadgh, he tells William that his family dishonoured Ireland by leaving the country:

His family lived around here but when the going got tough, they ran away to America, they ran away from the famine, while we stayed. Do you understand me? We stayed, we stayed. Go home, Yank. You went away to make a few dollars. Do you think that you can come back here with those dollars and buy the land that you deserted?

(My own transcription)

The Bull McCabe is enraged when saying this and in the heat of the moment kills William Dee.

The Bull is in favour of the tradition of a son continuing his father's occupation and of seeing those who leave Ireland as treacherous. He does not question himself as to whether his son wants to work in the field his whole life like he did himself and does not try to understand what leads people to search for better living conditions abroad. In the 1930s a new cultural paradigm was emerging in Irish rural areas but he made no effort to adapt himself to the changing circumstances and tried to convince his son that it was necessary to continue his work. On one of the occasions when the Bull McCabe talks with his son about the need to keep traditions, he tells him that "Our father's father's father's father's father dug that soil with their bare hands, built those walls. Our souls is buried down there. And your son's son's son's son will take care of it, boy" (my own transcription). However, the spectator soon learns that what the Bull McCabe said was mostly a myth since when the widow goes to the pub to announce that the field is going to be sold in a public auction a

man at the bar says “It was bare rock when he got it, mam” (my own transcription) and another man in the pub adds “He broke it into a lovely field” (my own transcription), meaning that he was the first one in his family to work that field. The Bull McCabe invents his forebears’ connection to the field in order to convince his son of the importance of the land and the need to own it. However, the Bull McCabe totally fails to convince his son of the need to own land and keep family traditions. Tadhg wanted to live a different life from his father and leave his family with the tinker’s daughter. These two generations, father and son, are representative of the changes occurring in Ireland. While the older generation was tied to the land the younger one wanted to search for a better life elsewhere and had to do it against the advice and threats of the older generation. The younger generation is placed under extreme pressure for not meeting the older generation’s expectations. In the film the spectator can often see Tadhg unsuccessfully trying not to let his father down. “If Bull McCabe represents the domineering treacherous patriarchy of land obsessed Ireland, then Tadhg becomes something far worse: the unstable, arguably more primitive offspring of such obsession” (Haynes, 2002: 88).

It is important to reflect on exactly which were the societal changes that the film refers to since one of the most striking differences between the film and the play is that while the action of the play takes place in 1965 the action of the film takes place in 1939. As the filmmaker set the action of the film twenty six years prior to the time of action of the play, it could be expected that traditional practices would have been portrayed as stronger than they are in the play and that modernization would not pose such a big threat to the rural way of life as it does in the play. However, even though the film was set in an earlier time than the play it draws more on the collapse of the traditional rural communities of the 1980s (which was when the film was produced) than on the changes which occurred in Irish society in either 1939 or 1965. Another difference between the play and the film is that whereas in the play the land is bought by an Irishman who had immigrated to Britain, in the film it is bought by an Irish-American. This change in the film clearly reflects the reality of the time in which the film was produced. While the play was referring to the sensitive topic of 1960s Ireland, that consisted of the great number of Irish who immigrated to Ireland’s former colonial power, where they became rich, and from where they came back to Ireland and bought land and houses. The film, on the other hand, wants to focus on

Ireland's commercial dependency on the United States of America and on the return of some Irish-Americans to Ireland to simply visit the country or to invest in it. "Ireland today has the highest level of direct US investment per manufacturing worker of any country in Europe – seven times the EU average" (Tovey, 2003: 71) and this trend was clear in the 1990 when the film was released and was to gain even greater meaning in the following years.

#### 4.1 Immigration as a response to family poverty

Immigration was a major problem for most of the first six decades of the twentieth century in Ireland and after stopping for some years in the sixties and seventies it began rising again by the end of the seventies. For example, according to migration figures made available by the Irish Statistics Office four million people left Ireland for North America between 1846 and 1925. At that time 84 per cent of emigrants went to the United States of America but that was to change mostly because of the country's hardening of the entry regulations. From then on Britain became Irish immigrants' main destination and it is estimated that between 1890 and 1990 more that two million Irish moved to Britain. This trend was to change in the 1960s, and by the 1970s there was an inflow of 104,000 people while in the eighties there was a net outflow of 208,000 people. It was only with Ireland's economic boom in the 1990s that people stopped leaving Ireland in large numbers. According to the Irish Statistics Office 70,600 people left Ireland in the year of 1989, while the year 2005 only saw the departure of 16,600 people from Ireland. It is important to note that such high levels of immigration provoked various changes in the country as it was for example "part of the process by which Ireland had been able to move from being a predominantly rural-based, agrarian society to an industrial state" (Tovey, 2003: 140). Another visible consequence of immigration was the shrinking of the Irish population. In 1840 there were 8.2 million people living in Ireland but by 1926 there were 4.2 million (Tovey, 2003: 146).

This continual trend of people leaving Ireland features in many films but the attitude taken to this theme tends to be more negative now that it has ceased to be much of a problem. Irish immigration has been portrayed in Hollywood films since the early days of

cinema, in films such as *Caught by Wireless* (1908), *Mother Machree* (1928) and *Little Nellie Kelly* (1940) and the year 1952 saw the production of *The Quiet Man*. The latter as was mentioned in the introduction portrays Sean Thornton's return to Ireland after living in the United States of America. This return turns out to have been a good choice for him because it enables him to overcome the trauma of having killed a man in a boxing tournament and to live a happier life than the one he lived in the United States of America. This is an overly-positive view of Ireland of the time, which hides the financial problems the country was going through. On the other hand, films such as *Angela's Ashes* (1999) and *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1998), which were produced at a time when immigration ceased to be a problem, offered radically different perspectives on immigration.

*Angela's Ashes* tells the story of Frank McCourt and his family. It gives a pro-immigration perspective by showing how many characters' quality of living improves once they leave Ireland and deteriorates once they return to Ireland. Frank's parents were Irish and had emigrated to the United States of America like so many other Irish people did. However, after one of their children dies Angela goes through some form of post-natal depression and the spectator is informed that her children had to feed her and ask a neighbour for food for themselves. At that point there is no sign of the father but only of a desperate mother alone with her children. It is at this point that the McCourts decide to go back to Ireland. This film is unusual in the sense that films usually portray Irish people immigrating to the United States of America or living there and in this film the characters go back to Ireland after living in the United States of America for sometime. This was a very rare thing to do since at the time there were very few jobs available in Ireland and living conditions were generally poor. Only those who failed in what was known as the land of opportunities came back and so were looked down upon by their country of birth. From the very few scenes of the film which take place in New York the spectator can estimate that the McCourt's lived there in very tough living conditions. However, their situation was to get worse (against their expectations) once they set foot in Ireland. Malachy Senior, Frank's father, was unable to find a job in Ireland and so the McCourt's spent long years living on the help given by either Frank McCourt's grandmother's, the social welfare office or Church Institutions. As time went by, the family grew bigger, more of the McCourt offspring died and their living conditions became more and more

intolerable. This situation led Angela and Malachy Senior to conclude that he had to immigrate to England like so many other men living in the lanes of Limerick had done. These men were known for being well-paid in England and sending money weekly to their families, which enabled them to have a much better quality of life. Even though emigration was a solution for many families it was not for the McCourt's since Malachy Senior only sent money once and that only happened after he came back home for Christmas. On that occasion his children humiliated him for never sending them any money, while the fathers of all the other children in the lane sent money to their families. This was to be the last time he visited his family.

Her husband had not helped much before then but it was only from then on that she is faced with the full responsibility of raising her children. According to Frank McCourt, many people advised Angela to put her children in an orphanage as some of her cousins had done but she always refused to do so either because she did not trust orphanages or for reason of pride. Apart from the severe hardship she had to endure she also had to recover from the death of three of her children within a period of a year-and-a-half. In the film the spectator rarely sees Angela smiling or experiencing a leisurely moment but can often see her rather depressed in bed in the middle of the afternoon. The McCourt's quality of life (especially that of Frank) begins to improve when Frank decides to leave school and begins working full-time. At the beginning Frank spends most of his wages buying food out and going to the cinema but soon he realises that if he keeps on doing that he would never be able to achieve much in life. It is then that he decides to save as much money as possible to be able to go back to New York. His early childhood in New York, the lack of opportunities in Ireland and his teacher Mr. O'Halloran were the decisive factors that led him to make the decision to leave Ireland. His teacher, Mr. O'Halloran was an important influence because he urged his students to leave Ireland and while doing so he enumerated the reasons which led so many Irish like Frank to leave Ireland. The reasons are clearly enumerated in this passage of the book:

It is a disgrace that boys like McCourt, Clarke, Kennedy, have to hew wood and draw water. He is disgusted by this free and independent Ireland that keeps a class foisted on us by the British, that we are throwing our talented children on the dungheap. You must get out of this country, boys. Go to America, McCourt.

(Mccourt, 2005: 338)

Soon after beginning to save money to pay for his fare to New York Frank McCourt realises that it would take him years to save all the money he needed. As he wanted to go New York at all costs he began doing everything including writing threatening letters for a lady who loaned money to many people all over Limerick, including his neighbours. This enabled him to save more money but what helped him gathering the money he needed quickly was this lady's death. He was alone when he found her dead in her own house and took all the money she kept at home and intended to give to the Church upon her death. He also stole the notebook in which the lady kept record of the people who owed her money and destroyed it. By throwing the notebook in the water, Frank tried to redeem himself from sending threatening letters to his own people. However, more importantly for him, the money he stole enabled him to buy the ticket to New York straight away. It should be noted that the idea of Frank going back to his hometown is present throughout the film, especially, through the image of the Statue of Liberty. At the beginning of the film young Frank and Malachy Junior say goodbye to the Statue of Liberty, in what is an unusual scene because normally people did not leave New York to go to Ireland but the other way round. Later on in the film the spectator can see Frank looking at a small replica of the Statue of Liberty in a local shop in Limerick. Finally, the film ends with Frank looking at the statue when he arrives back in New York. The statue symbolises the land of hope and dreams that have kept Frank going until he managed to return to the United States of America.

Before Frank left for New York he had what was commonly known in Ireland as an American Wake, which both celebrated and grieved the fact that people were leaving Ireland. Frank went to the United States of America in 1949 not knowing whether he would ever see his family again or be in Ireland ever again. In those days it was very expensive to travel between the United States of America and Ireland, consequently many people who left Ireland never came back. At the time Frank left, he like most Irish immigrants had no skills and no guarantee that he would succeed, yet he took the chance because he believed his prospects in Ireland were null. Frank McCourt says while commenting on the film based on his book that "Even in Ireland we had an American dream" (my own transcription) and that like all the other youngsters who immigrated, his main aim at the time of departure was to make a lot of money, send this money to his family and bring his family to the United

States of America. He managed to do it by becoming a teacher and financially helping his family to move back to New York. In the end both his siblings and mother moved back to New York and the only one who did not go back was his father, who died in Northern Ireland.

*Far and Away* (1992) also portrays immigration to the United States of America as a solution to many Irish people problems. This film was directed by Ron Howard, who not only claims to have Irish ancestors but also that three of his great-grandparents, like the main characters in the film, took part in the 1893 Oklahoma land race. By doing so the director tries to make the film more personal and consequently more appealing to audiences and also to enhance the fact that the Irish people who immigrated to the United States of America adapted themselves to their new country and were more successful there than they could have been in Ireland. It is one of the many Hollywood films which “chose the Irish to serve as models of assimilation for other immigrants” (McLoone, 2000: 49) Other devices used to promote the film were the use of the Super 65mm format in the film’s final scene (the land rush) one of the last films produced in that format was the famous Irish film, *Ryan’s Daughter* (1970) and the casting of the famous Hollywood couple, Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman in the role of the film’s main couple: Joseph Donnelly and Shannon Christie.

The film begins with an opening caption that establishes the film’s Irish historical background: “Western Ireland, 1892. The tenant farmers after generations of oppression and poverty have begun to rebel against the unfair rents and cruel evictions imposed upon them by their wealthy landlords”. Here, as in much of the film, there is a clear omission of the fact that the tenant farmers were Catholic while the landlords were Anglican. “*Far and Away* epitomises a tendency in some Irish-American film-makers to distort not only historical events in Ireland, but simultaneously produce a myopic representation of the Irish in the construction of the US past” (Pettitt, 2000: 130). The film overlooks this and many other historical facts in order to concentrate on the tensions between the poor and the rich and show how the United States of America gave poor immigrants a chance to be wealthy, a position which they could not aspire to in their home countries. Before dying Joseph’s father tells him that “Without land, a man is nothing. Land is a man’s very own soul” (my

own transcription) and land ownership becomes Joseph's life main goal. During his father's funeral Joseph sees his family home being burned down by people working for Daniel Christie (played by Robert Prosky), his father's landlord, because he could not afford to pay the rent. Feeling that he and his family had been treated unfairly, he swears to exact revenge on his father's landlord. In order to do so, he goes to Daniel Christie's house to kill him but fails to do so and ends up injured. Meanwhile Joseph meets Shannon, who is Daniel's daughter and longs to leave her parents home. Shannon learns that land is being given away in America and believes that to be her opportunity to become independent and live her life away from her parents. Knowing how hard it would be for a woman to escape her family home and embark on a ship for America she convinces Joseph, who was also eager to possess his own portion of land, to go with her to Boston. She tells Joseph "I'm running away because I'm modern. I'm modern and I'm going to a modern place. If I stay here, my mother will turn me into one of her stuffy old friends" (my own transcription). However, Shannon was a spoiled daughter and was not aware that at least in the beginning they would have to work very hard and endure hard living conditions. This was in fact what happened to the large majority of those who immigrated to the United States of America since most were not qualified to do any well-paid job. Much to her despair, she was robbed as soon as she arrived in Boston and had not only to pluck chickens for a living but to pretend to be Joseph's sister and share a room with him in a brothel. Although the film represents immigration as being the only solution for many Irish people, it also shows that it was not easy to be successful in America. For example, as soon as they arrive in Boston they see an Irish-American they met on the ship being shot dead and when they are thrown out of their job they wander around the city for days and everybody refuses to either help them or give them a job because they were Irish.

Soon after arriving in Boston, Shannon began writing to her father. In those letters she told him about how harsh her life was in the United States of America but warned him not to show those letters to her mother. Yet, he did so on the night that their house was burned down by Tenant Farmers, who were rebelling all over Ireland. While looking at the remains of their house Shannon's mother said "This is no longer the Ireland of my birth" and both of them agreed to move to Boston to find their daughter. Mr. Christie, who hated his unadventurous life in Ireland, was only too happy to embark to Boston hoping that he

would be able to gain his freedom there. This is representative of the few Irish who left their homeland not for financial reasons but because they found life too uneventful and dull in Ireland. These people believed that in the United States of America they would be able to take risks and live an exciting life. Shannon's parents began searching for her as soon as they arrived but it was only due to an unfortunate event that they were to be reunited with their daughter. Shannon was shot and as Joseph could not afford to get her medical treatment he had to take her to her parents and leave for the West. Yet, they were to meet again on the eve of the Oklahoma Land Rush thanks to another one of the film's many chance encounters. Here the film fails once more to give a complete account of its historical background since it does not show how a Land Rush was organized and puts great emphasis on the fact that land was given away but does not explain that the land was expropriated from the Native Americans. The only reference the film makes to this is by showing three Native Americans watching their land being expropriated in the Land Rush scene. In the end Joseph and Shannon get together and manage to claim a field that is exactly what they always wanted.

Both *Angela's Ashes* and *Far and Away* highlight the example of the tribulations of successful immigrants, yet not all of those who left Ireland saw their quality of life increase. There were many people who did not manage to find a job in their new home and ended up homeless. In *Dancing at Lughnasa* the spectator can see how immigration was seen by many as the only source of hope in their lives, yet sometimes it became a dead end itself. This film is narrated by a man named Michael and revolves around the life of his five single aunts. Although nowadays it may look unreal that five sisters remained single, at the time most people got married late and so it was perfectly natural that none of them was married. In 1936 (the year in which the action of the film takes place), 67 percent of the women between the age of 25 and 29 were unmarried. They lived alone with Michael, who was the son of one of them until their brother, Father Jack, came back after living for twenty-five years in Africa. They lived with the stigma of one of them, Christina, being a mother outside of wed-lock and not having got married after finding out that she was pregnant. This stigma was reinforced by the fact that, at the time all children born outside of wed-lock were considered to be illegitimate by virtue of the 1930 Legitimacy Act that declared that those children would only become legitimate once their parents married.

Such pieces of legislation enforced on Irish society the importance of family values and hardened society's attitudes towards those who remained single after having a child. The return of Father Jack, their brother, who was a priest, could have made society accept this situation but as was mentioned in the previous chapter Father Jack had changed while in Africa and by the time he returned to Ireland he espoused native African rituals and morale. Consequently he became the object of criticism of local society, the local Catholic Church authorities turned their back on him and fired Kate from her position as a teacher in one of the schools which they controlled. Father Jack's missionary posting in Africa is the first case of immigration mentioned in the film. It is described as positive from the point of view that Father Jack adapted himself completely to the local customs and beliefs but negative from the point of view that he was not able to adapt himself back in Ireland and that not only was he not able to improve his family's quality of living but he also became a liability to them.

There were two other main male characters in the film, Christina's son, Michael and Gerry, who is Michael's father. Michael is looked down upon by society because he is considered to be an illegitimate child and Gerry is criticized by Kate and local residents for not marrying Christina, not having a proper job, not giving Christina any financial help to raise their son and for not visiting them enough. Gerry rarely visits Christina and his son Michael and on the only such occasion portrayed in the film, Gerry tells them that he is going to leave Ireland and fight in the Spanish Civil War. Christina interrogates him as to his motives and he simply answers "Because I want to do something with my life. I want to do anything with my life. I have to" (my own transcription). Unlike Frank McCourt he did not leave Ireland for financial reasons but because he wanted to experience something different and make a significant contribution in his life. Yet, the film also shows characters who were 'forced' to leave Ireland for financial reasons. The financial situation of the Mundy's family deteriorates dramatically when Kate loses her job as a teacher and Rose and Agnes lose their job as home-based knitters when a new textile factory opens nearby. As a result Rose and Agnes decided to discretely slip-away to England, almost without a trace. Their "emigration combines self-sacrifice to preserve the family and self-assertion" (Dean, 2003:15). It was only twenty-five years later that Michael learnt about their life in England. They worked in factories, the Underground and as cleaners in public toilets. Yet,

there came a time when Rose was no longer able to get a job and Agnes's wages were not enough to pay for the expenses of the two of them. They had to sleep in parks and doorways and began drinking, which led to Agnes dying of exposure. After that Rose was sent to a hospice where she died not too long after. In the end it was harder for them to be poor in urban England than it had been in rural Ireland. While they were in Ireland they had at least a house and a field they could work in. On the other hand in England, when things went wrong they were thrown out on to the street.

It is not only unhappiness and perhaps even economic hardship that drives Rose and Agnes away. Characters often speak of the more generalised desire to 'go away'. For Rose this may mean eloping to America with Danny. For Jack, it is his desire to return to Africa; for Gerry, Spain; for Michael, manhood; for Rose and Agnes, it is finally a life of drudgery in London. Their reasons for wanting to leave are varied. For Gerry, at least as expressed in the film, it is the need to 'do something'.

Dean, 2003:19

A film like *Dancing at Lughnasa* shows both the complex reasons which have led people to emigrate as well as the multiple outcomes of their flights. Unlike films such as *Far and Away*, which distort Irish history to give a romanticised version of Ireland's importance in the construction of the United States of America, it gives a multi-faceted perspective on immigration from Ireland but the consequence itself was inevitable, namely the dispersal of the family. *Dancing at Lughnasa* also shows that Ireland's pagan rituals were liberal and in stark contrast with the oppressive morals imposed mostly by the Catholic Church in rural life. Simultaneously, the film also demonstrates how that way of life was to be changed. The radio, a constant presence throughout the film, is representative both of that and of the industrialisation and modernisation of Ireland.

There are other films which show that people did not leave Ireland solely for financial reasons. *Felicia's Journey* (1999) directed by Atom Egoyan and based on a novel by William Trevor is one such film. It tells the story of Felicia who had a wretched and hopeless life in the Republic of Ireland. When she lost her job at a meat-canning factory she began taking care of her widowed father, grandmother and brothers. Soon after this she met Johnny Lysaght who had immigrated to England and was in Ireland on a short visit to his mother. Her relationship with Johnny seemed to give her hope that her life was to get better, yet by the time he returned to England she was pregnant and did not know his

address in England. Her family was outraged by the fact that she was pregnant and that the child's father had joined the British Army and told her not to count on the family. Believing that her family would always condemn her for having an illegitimate child and without a way of contacting Johnny, Felicia decides to go to England in search of Johnny. There is a stark contrast between the small rural village where she lived in Ireland and the places she goes to in England, which are all quite industrialised. While searching for Johnny in these places which were completely unfamiliar to her she meets Mr. Hilditch, a serial-killer who pretends to help her but instead aims to kill her. Felicia leaves Ireland to escape the dull life she had there but does not get the help she hoped for in England either.

## 4.2 The maternal figure as the main protagonist

Another recurrent theme in Irish films is that of the maternal figure in Irish society. While in some films like *The Field* women only gain importance at the end of the film, in many others women have a central position from the very beginning and in many cases (such as in *Angela's Ashes* and *Agnes Brown*) the films are even named after the mother figure in the film. One of the films in which the mother figure gains extraordinary meaning is in *My Left Foot* (1989). This film is based on an autobiographical novel, written by Christy Brown (a pseudonym for Hugh O'Connor) as an adult, about his childhood and early adulthood. Christy Brown was born in 1932 with cerebral palsy, which prevented him from talking and moving properly in the first years of his life. The film shows the life of Christy Brown and his family in 1930s and 1940s Dublin. His family, especially his mother, are portrayed as central to Christy Brown's partially achieved intellectual and physical development. Christy's mother Mary (Brenda Fricker) had twenty-two children, of which thirteen survived and "is presented as such a conventional representation of the long-suffering Irish wife-and-mother that her name rings with religious symbolism" (Brode in MacKillop, 1999: 11). There is a moment in the film when it becomes clear that Mary's morals are quite different from those of her husband and children. This happens when she rejects the coal that Christy and his siblings had obtained by theft. Everyone but Mary described Christy's idea of stealing the coal from a truck that distributed it as being a great idea since they believed that as their father Paddy had lost his job, that was the only way

they could ensure that the whole family would not freeze. Although the family tried to convince Mary that it was not a sin to steal coal, they do not manage it and she leaves the room where the coal was being burnt so that she would not benefit from what she believed to be a devilish act. That is one of the few moments in the film in which Mary does not manage to impose her morals on her family.

Apart from being essential to the family's cohesion and moral standards, Mary was the first person to believe in Christy's intellectual capacities and it is significant that 'M.O.T.H.E.R' was the first word Christy wrote with his foot. From then on, both Christy's siblings and father began believing in his intellectual abilities but still continued to underestimate them. On the other hand, Mary continued her quest to improve her son's living conditions and develop his talents. One of her first priorities was to buy Christy a wheelchair as it would significantly increase his movements and independence. She saved the money to buy the wheelchair without her husband knowing since he would never agree to buy the wheelchair instead of buying necessities or alcohol. Later on, Mary was once again the first to realise the quality of Christy's paintings and the one who asked Dr. Eileen to help Christy to develop his capacities. While Christy takes up much of Mary's time, she also looks after her other children's well-being and helps them whenever they need her. For example, when Christy's sister becomes pregnant Paddy (Christy's father) becomes very upset and tells her to leave the family home. However, Mary stops this from happening and helps her daughter instead of just blaming her as Paddy had done and arranged for her to get married as soon as possible.

The theme of women being pregnant outside wed-lock is present in other films such as *The Snapper* (1993) directed by Stephen Frears and in older films such as the 1930 Alfred Hitchcock adaptation of Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*. In both films families react badly to the news and believe it will destroy their families' reputation. In *Juno and the Paycock* Mary becomes pregnant outside wed-lock and her father (Captain Boyle) tells his wife Juno that he never again wished to see his daughter. As in the case of *My Left Foot* the mother is willing to help the daughter while the father is not. Another similarity between these two fathers is the fact that they both like to drink, a characteristic often used to describe Irish fathers.

Paddy staggers in, exhausted from work or drunk from the pub. Immediately, we notice that their crippled son (Hugh O’Conor, playing Christy as a child) recoils from the father and is drawn to the mother. The near-Neanderthal male cannot relate to the one among his offspring who happens to have been born ‘different’. But his mother – with her generous, supportive mother-love for a child, however sad his condition – nurtures him, and he responds.

(Brode in MacKillop, 1999: 113)

Christy’s father (unlike his mother) is portrayed rather negatively in the film. Paddy does not help or believe in Christy’s capacities as his wife does and is often seen wasting whatever little money his family had on drink in a local pub. One of few moments when Paddy seems affective and caring takes place when he and his sons begin competing amongst themselves while building Christy a bedroom. Paddy wins the competition because Mary secretly asks her sons to let their father win because he needed it. When celebrating his victory he is nice to Christy and Mary tells Christy “That’s the nearest he will ever come to saying he loves you” (my own transcription). It is also important to note that it is when Christy is going through an emotional crisis and behaves badly, he looks more like his father. One day after he tried to commit suicide his mother tells him “You get more like your father everyday. More hard on the outside and putty on the inside. It’s here (Christy’s mother points at her own heart) that battles are won. Not in the pub, pretending to be a big fella in front of the lads” (my own transcription). An example of Christy behaving like his father takes place when Christy is having a dinner after presenting some of his work and proclaims his love for Dr. Eileen. Not only does Dr. Eileen reject his romantic overtures as she announces that she is going to marry an art dealer (Christy’s work was being exposed at this art dealer gallery). Christy reacts badly to this by becoming drunk like his father used to and by shouting at Dr. Eileen and telling her amongst other things that she was not his mother.

It is not that he will forever be cut off from the warmth of romance, destined to know only mother-love from women who will serve as surrogates for his own mother. He does not want this, absolutely refuses this, and so – with a hero’s intensity – fights to overcome this treatment as fiercely as he did the limits of his palsy.

(Brode in MacKillop, 1999: 115)

Women in general play a central role in this film. Firstly the film shows Christy Brown strongly dependent on his mother and secondly it shows him trying to transfer those feelings to Dr. Eileen, who does not return his love. Her rejection causes Christy great distress, which seems to only dissipate completely when he meets another Mary, who was his nurse at a charity event. It was only then that someone seems to love Christy Brown as a man and not as a son. When children have a strong relationship with their mothers it can often be difficult to convert it into a mature relationship with another woman. Often children remain holding onto their relationship with their mothers and do not manage to properly develop a romantic and sexual relationship with anyone or try to get a partner that replaces their mother. While at the beginning Christy Brown seemed to want to substitute his mother's love for that of Dr. Eileen, he has now changed his attitude and does not want to replace Mary the mother by Mary the nurse but to love them both, one as a mother and the other one as a wife.

*Angela's Ashes* (1999), is another film inspired by a memoir by a male author, which places the maternal figure centre-stage. Once the McCourts have arrived back in Ireland it becomes clear that Malachy Senior was despised by Angela's family because he was from Northern Ireland (Toome, County Antrim), was not able to financially sustain his family and was an alcoholic. Significantly, both women present at the train station, Angela's mother and Aggis, do not greet Malachy Senior on his arrival at Limerick but just Pat, the only man present at the scene, greets him. Angela's mother especially was an authoritative figure and looked down on Malachy Senior. Part of her power came from the fact that as the McCourts did not have any money it was she who paid for their trip back to Ireland and for their accommodation and food in Limerick in their early weeks of their residence in Ireland.

Once Angela's mother stopped giving them money, they had to live solely from subsistence allowances from the state, which was obviously not enough for such a numerous family like theirs. Malachy Senior was constantly trying to find a job but he rarely managed to get one. Whenever he did he always lost it almost straight away because he would spend most of his wage in the pub and be late or completely miss the following day's work because he would be drunk. There were a few reasons why it was so hard for

him to get a job. One was that Malachy Senior had a strong sense of honour and refused to hide his Northern Irish accent which made him stand-out while searching for a job. Another fact that made it harder for him to find a job was that he always went looking for a job wearing a suit, which was not the proper outfit for someone to be wearing when looking for a labourers' position. In the film the spectator does not see the part present in the book in which Angela speaks with her husband when he came back home from working on a farm. However, that moment embodies Malachy's code of honour and explains many of Malachy's actions in the film: "Mam says 'tis all right for her to be begging at the St. Vincent de Paul Society for a docket for food but he can't stick a few spuds in his pocket. He says it's different for a man. You have to keep the dignity. Wear your collar and tie" (McCourt: 103). Although he has no money he still acts as if he was not poor. This pride leads him not to get the coal that falls on the streets from the trucks that deliver it. In contrast his wife and children never hesitate to do so. It is as if he had never given up being a soldier for the IRA and was facing the difficulties alone and was unconcerned as to whether the rest of his family would be able to survive or not. However, his family was willing to do anything to survive. For example, Frank will steal to buy his ticket to New York and Angela will sleep with a first cousin so that he will allow both her and her children to continue living in his house.

In both *Angela's Ashes* and in *My Left Foot* the maternal figure is at the centre of the films' action which is common in Irish films. However, the manner in which such a figure is portrayed varies considerably from one interpretation to another. For example, while Mary in *My Left Foot* refuses the coal that Christy and his brothers robbed, Angela is often seen in the street collecting the coal that falls from the trucks that deliver it and above all accepts to sleep with her cousin and allows him to be cruel to her children just so that she can continue living in his house. Angela in *Angela's Ashes* is also seen questioning the Church's morale after they refused to accept Frank as an altar boy and later on refuse his entrance in a Secondary School. All in all, it could be said Mary is more of a saintly figure, who deals with harsh situations without questioning her faith in the Catholic Church and committing what in the eyes of the Church would be a sin. On the other hand, Angela suffers greatly with everything that goes wrong in her life and refuses to only do what the Catholic Church sees as moral. For example, she refuses to engage in a sexual act with her

husband because she does not want to have any more children. An example of how these two women seem to react differently to bereavements is the fact that the death of three of Angela's children is portrayed as devastating and decisive moments in Angela's life while *My Left Foot* chooses to ignore the death of nine of Mary's children.

These deaths are most probably not portrayed in the film not because they were not traumatic for Mary but because Christy just wanted to tell his life story and did not see these deaths as having any real influence on his life. It is important to note that these two films are based on autobiographical books and show reality as perceived by the writers and how they wanted the public to understand it. In *Angela's Ashes* we have an adult narrator looking back in time and telling the story of his childhood. One of the narrator's main objectives seems to be to show how McCourt's family move from the United States of America to Ireland was disastrous and how hard Frank McCourt had to work in order to get back to the United States of America. For the spectator it is evident from the film that young Frank must have done relatively well in the United States of America. So this film tends to highlight the United States of America as a good place to live while on the other hand showing Ireland's poverty and lack of opportunities for its population. Likewise, the film *My Left Foot* also shows a diffused perception of the world.

The character's entire life had to be compressed, simplified, crystallised, for the sake of a comprehensive 102 minute movie; moreover the filmmakers drew less on Brown's life as history than on the life as it had been mythologized by Brown himself and others in previous works that served as Sheridan's source material.

(Brode in MacKillop, 1999: 110)

We note that it is when Christy is in a room with Mary the nurse and she starts reading Christy's book that the spectator learns about Christy's past. It's "Christy's intense awareness of Mary reading Christy's book that causes him to selectively recall the past. In another situation, he might visualize the past incidents quite differently, might for that matter recall different incidents altogether" (Brode in MacKillop, 1999: 111). So while Mary is reading Christy autobiography he recalls the events and it is through him that the spectator visualizes his childhood and early adulthood. As is common in autobiographical works, the centre of the action is Christy himself, all events are portrayed according to

Christy's sole point of view and the spectator learns little about other characters' points of view.

As mentioned above, there are a few common characteristics between the many figures of Irish motherhood present in films, one of which is that in many cases they are widows. This situation reflected

the working conditions for the Irish immigrant, especially in the USA, were so bad that life expectancy among Irish males was poor. The Irish mother was often called upon to provide for the family as well. Survival skills were as important as the ability to act as a moral authority and in this sphere she performed the role of the father, providing the strength, resilience and practical decision-making that were necessary to survive the tribulations an uncaring world threw at the family.

(McLoone, 2000: 178)

*Agnes Brown* is one of the films in which the stereotypical self-sacrificing mother described above can be found. This film, unlike *Angela's Ashes* and *My Left Foot*, is based on a work of fiction, named *The Mammy* by Brendan O'Carroll. This film tells the story of Agnes Brown and her seven children. The action of the film starts with Agnes Brown and her best friend Marion O'Dwyer at a Social Welfare Office just a few hours after her husband's (Redser) death. Throughout the rest of the film the spectator learns how Agnes begins her new life. Right from the beginning the spectator gets the impression that Agnes Brown has adapted herself very quickly to being in the position of a widow and that her main problem is the lack of money and a malicious moneylender. She seems to feel like a free woman and to prefer that feeling to one of being married. While talking with her best friend Marion she describes her marriage as being boring and like a prison. Marion, on the other hand, does not see marriage as being so tedious and dispiriting and tells her about the two occasions on which she had sexually pleasing experiences with her husband. Agnes is embarrassed by this topic and claims that such experience never happened to her. These two women's marriages were not based on the equality between the two spouses. Men had the last word on almost everything and the main ends of sexual intercourse were procreation and men's pleasure, in that order. So this film shows that women, like men, had earned that power of decision and how possession of that power could improve their lives. Not long after her husband's death, Agnes Brown meets Pierre, who was going to open a

shop near her stall in Moore Street Market. The two agree to meet and begin to develop a romantic interest in each other. Yet, Agnes Brown is always careful about remaining independent and refuses Pierre's help to repay the money she owed to a moneylender. Agnes Brown says "I waited twenty years for my husband to come through. So I'm sorry Pierre. I can't go back to being dependent on a man. All I have now is me kids. I have to make sure they are brought up right. Frankie has to learn there are consequences. I don't want another Redser around me" (my own transcription). The film is effective in portraying Agnes Brown's need to be independent and desire to avoid the kind of life she had while she was married. Martin McLoone argues that "Although set in the past, the film evinces a distinctively 1990s optimism about the future, based on the perceptions of how the future did develop onwards from this past (...) it eliminates the father and declares that the future belongs to the women of Ireland" (McLoone, 2000: 181-2). It is true that nowadays women have far more power than they used to but it would be wrong to assume that the future belongs to women. While nowadays it is far more common than it used to be for women to hold positions of power there are a lot more men in such positions. Society in general discourages sexual discrimination and it is not now unusual to see women occupying influential positions. Yet, it is worth noting that although Ireland's current and previous Presidents are women, there has never been a female Taoiseach. It seems that the country now accepts women occupying the largely ceremonial office of the Presidency but not the executive position of Taoiseach.

Although, the film makes the statement that the Browns were poor and had to borrow money, their house was well equipped and the children reasonably dressed. Whenever Agnes Brown had a problem it ended up being resolved by some unlikely dramatic intervention. For example, it looked like she was going to be unable to repay the moneylenders the money her son Frankie had borrowed from them and that as a consequence the moneylenders would go to her house and take everything they wanted. However, she was able to pay them back on time because just before the moneylender's deadline she received a letter from the Shelbourne Hotel, where her husband worked, asking her to go to the hotel to receive a once-off £25 payment that the Union makes on the Christmas of the year of their employee's death. Thus this money will enable Agnes Brown to pay off her debts while keeping her newly gained independence from men.

Equally brave is the mother figure present in the film *Evelyn* (2002). This is one of the few Irish films in which the maternal figure not only does not have a central position, it is also portrayed rather negatively. The film is based on the autobiographical book *Evelyn* written by Evelyn Doyle and tells the story of Evelyn and her brothers who were temporarily put in state care by their father because he could not manage to work and mind them at the moment that his wife had abandoned both him and their children. Desmond Doyle went to work in Britain with the intention that on his return he could afford to have someone minding his children while he was working. However, on his return, he learns that he could not bring his children home without his wife's or the state's authorisation. He then takes the state and Church to court, which results in the Supreme Court giving him the permission to take his children home. The film suppresses and distorts many of the events which take place in the book. For example, while the book devotes its beginning to how Mrs. Doyle was careless with her children, the film only gives slight indications of such behaviour. At the beginning of the film the spectator can see Dermot Doyle playing with his children, checking how they have gone to sleep and worrying about the fact that his children were cold. On Christmas day, while Dermot minds their children, Mrs. Doyle looks at him from a distance and performs her house-keeping duties with a miserable look on her face. On the following day, Evelyn sees her mother leaving the house and getting into a car. This is the act of a mother who puts her personal interests ahead of her family, which is exactly the opposite of the stereotypical Irish mother who stands by her family at all costs and makes sure that her children have all that they need. Although this film breaks this stereotype it seems to be careful not to portray the mother figure too negatively as in fact is done in the book on which the film is based. Nowadays it is socially and culturally ill-advised to portray women negatively and so films try to stick to the good Irish mother stereotype as much as possible. In the book it is said that whenever Desmond was working away from Dublin Mrs. Doyle would not mind the house and would leave her children at home by themselves. The book also describes several accidents which took place in the Doyle's home involving their children which would have been totally preventable had Mrs. Doyle been home. However, the filmmakers choose not to show the extent of Mrs. Doyle carelessness for her children but rather to highlight the great lengths a father had to go to

to be with his children. The father figure is portrayed very positively in this film which is unusual in Irish films. For example, in *The Field*, *My Left Foot*, *Agnes Brown* and *Angela's Ashes* the father figure is represented as not being a positive factor in his children's upbringing. Whilst in *Evelyn* it is the father and not the mother who takes full responsibility for their children's education and welfare. In fact in the law the husband is always seen as the head of the family (a position a women can take on only upon the death of the husband) and so as responsible for the children's well-being. When accidents happen due to Mrs. Doyle's negligence, the police do not seek to prosecute anyone for what happened because if they had done so they would have to prosecute the father as head of the family and not Mrs. Doyle who was responsible for the accidents. This exposes this system as perverse because on the one hand it expects women to stay at home and mind the children but on the other hand it gives men full responsibility for whatever happens to the children.

Apart from highlighting a father's love for his children, the film also chooses to emphasize the fight in the courts between a poor painter and decorator from Dublin and the Government and the almighty power of the Catholic Church. Firstly, Desmond Doyle tried to get his children back through the District Court but his request was refused under the Section 10 of the Children's Act, 1941 which stated that one parent alone could commit his children to an industrial school but that a child could only leave the same institution if both parents agreed to it. Mr. Doyle then applied to the High Court and wins the case on the grounds that parents have the inalienable, God-given right to the society of their children. The film puts great emphasis on the media's role in the process and describes the case as having been highly publicised in the media. However, this is not entirely accurate. For example, the film's viewers can see Desmond Doyle being interviewed on television, yet, that did not happen since the action of the film takes place between 1954 and 1955 and Ireland's first television station only began broadcasting in 1961. Moreover, according to my research in *The Irish Times* archive this case was covered in the print media during its key moments but there were only three articles written on it before Mr. Doyle won the case in the High Court. Namely: on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 1954, 22<sup>nd</sup> January and 25<sup>th</sup> January 1955. It was only when Mr. Doyle won the case on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April that the case made it onto the front page of the newspaper. The

film clearly overplays the role of the media in the case of Evelyn and does so as it is influenced by the powerful position of the media in present day society.

Despite these and other inaccuracies, this film succeeded in showing that both the state and the Catholic Church had placed an idealised view of the family at the centre of Irish society since the country's independence. Together with the Catholic Church, the state ensured that all of those who endangered their ideal family type because they were born outside of wed-lock, or were neglected by their families or whose family was not constituted by two married parents would be put into institutional care. It is estimated that between 1900 and 1970 there were more than seventy thousand children put into industrial schools and most of them never returned to their families. Films produced in the 1990s and the beginning of the twentieth-first century show that the state and the Catholic Church regarded their rigid view of family values as being more important than the happiness and quality of life of the general population.

## Conclusion

Most of the Irish films dealt with in this dissertation are about Ireland's past and not so much about the life of the ordinary Irish person in the last twenty years. These films either rely on old stereotypes of what Irish people were said to be like or show the complexities of Irish society before the country's notable economic development of recent decades. However, it is important to note that there are many films about contemporary Ireland which deal with universal themes.

Some of the most recent low-budget independent productions from Ireland tackle contemporary society, its problems and transitional crises, including damaging marital relations, separated spouses, social exclusions based on poverty and prejudice and disenchantment with the new Ireland without its anchoring institutions.

(Pettitt, 2000: 268)

*About Adam* (2000), directed by Gerard Stembridge is one such film. This film's action takes place in Ireland but it is not determined by it. If the director was to set this film in the United States of America or the United Kingdom, he would have to introduce very few changes to the film. This fact alone reflects something important about contemporary Ireland. The country has developed greatly and Irish people's lives have become like the lives of any European or North American peoples. Irish actors, directors and screenwriters are well-known world-wide and make films which are completely unrelated to Ireland and whose action does not take place in their home country. Neil Jordan is a highly-acclaimed Irish director who worked both on films about Ireland like *Michael Collins* (1996) and *The Butcher Boy* (1997) but also directed films like *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), *The End of the Affair* (1999) and the spooky *In Dreams* (1999). Most recently Cecilia Ahern, the daughter of former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, rose to fame as a screenwriter when her highly popular book *P.S. I Love You* was adapted for the screen and was recently announced that another one of her books, entitled *If You Could See Me Now* is also going to be adapted into a film. The film *P.S. I Love You* does feature an Irish character and although the main character in this film is not Irish, she does visit the country. Despite this the film itself is not in any important sense about Ireland. This film's main action like in *Laws of Attraction* (2004), directed by Peter Howitt, takes place in the United States of

America and the few scenes which take place in Ireland are good for the promotion of Irish tourism but not for an accurate portrayal of the country.

The new generation of Irish people live a significantly different life to that of their parents. There is no wholesale subscription on their part to the teachings of the Catholic Church and even the older generation that once did subscribe, seems to believe that those days are gone and that Ireland has moved forward. If until the 1990s it was a scandal for people to have children outside wedlock, that has now become a social reality and society is more than willing to accept it. According to the Irish Central Statistics Office, of the 57,882 births registered in 2001, a total of 18,049 were from single mothers, which accounts for a third of the total number of births. While in 1980 the number of births to unmarried mothers was just 5%. However by the year 2000 this proportion had reached 32%, reflecting the changing social mores of Irish society.

The Ireland of the new millennium is very different from what it was like when it gained its independence. The Reverend Christopher Jones sums this up saying,

The Leaders of the 1916 Rebellion (...) would be disappointed by the materialism of modern Ireland. They would be very proud of the progress made. Ireland had in fifty years changed from a rural to a largely urban society, with a largely third-level education people. We have changed from being a small island on the margins of Europe, to an island that is now an integral part of Europe, which has taken on much of the social and secular values of Europe.

*Irish Independent*, 8 May 2008

It is important to add to this statement that Ireland has also been strongly influenced by the United States of America and that not only has Ireland been shaped by global culture, it has also generated new cultural hybrids such as *Riverdance*, produced by Michael Flatley, which combines Irish and international cultural elements in innovative ways. Ireland also receives immigrant flows from all over the world now and is influenced by this phenomenon. According to the Irish Central Statistics Office, in 2006 there were 109,500 people who immigrated to Ireland while 42,300 left. Ireland is now a country that receives many immigrants and exports few. It is now common to listen to different languages and see people of different ethnicities in Ireland. This change was made swiftly

and generally immigrants are welcome in the country. The oft-repeated image of the Irish immigrant could not be further from present reality. Yet, for many years this image has been a prevailing one. The first time Irish characters took part in an American film was in *Levy and Cohen – The Irish Comedians* (1903). However, one of the film's jokes is that the characters in this film are not actually Irish but two Jews pretending to be Irish. This was to be the first of many American films with Irish characters. These films usually used the Irish as avatars or touchstones for all desired immigrants. As one commentator says, "The Irish assimilated into America because they spoke English and lived according to puritanical sexual mores (...). And unlike many French and Italian Catholics, the Irish had little sense of aristocracy and were known for a firm commitment to democratic politics." (Loudeaux, 1990: 48)

Although the figure of the Irish immigrant was a prominent one in Hollywood films there were films like *The Quiet Man* and *Far and Away* which also "hint at a never-never Golden Age, a time of simple pastoral integrity, a Church – blessed community spirit, heroic faith in the Irish struggle" (Kennedy in Mackillop, 1999: 2). There are also films like *Angela's Ashes*, which deconstruct the idea of Ireland as an idyllic country by showing Ireland as a place of nightmarish poverty from which many people had to leave in order to build a better life. In order to reflect on how Irish society is portrayed in film it is necessary to take a close look at the country's history and consequently one of this dissertation's chapters has given a brief account of the country's social history. The following chapter dealt with the way religious institutions influenced to a large extent the course of Irish social development and how this is portrayed in Irish films. Religion had an influential role in the division of the island into two parts and in keeping the Irish Free State largely rural, conservative and underdeveloped. After the establishment of the Irish Free State, the Catholic Church and the state became "the self-appointed guardians of nation's moral climate" (Smith, 2004: 208). They wanted Irish society to be homogeneous and faithful to the Catholic Church's moral teaching and in order to achieve this end the state passed a series of acts such as the Censorship of Publications Act (1929), Illegitimate Children Act (1930) and the Dance Halls Act (1935). Notwithstanding all of this effort to see Irish society as pure and dominated by essentially rural models, the Carrigan Committee published a report on 20 August 1931 pointing "to a general moral degeneration, evident

both in rising illegitimacy rates and unassailable proof of sexual crimes against children” (Smith, 2004: 214). Yet, after reading this report the Catholic Church only seemed to be more concerned with visual manifestations of ‘sexual immorality’, which they blamed on popular entertainment such as radio, cinema, dance, books, automobiles and also on the lack of parental control. In contrast, little attention was paid to extra-marital sexual activities, rape, paedophilia or incest. Since this usually took place indoors, few people were aware that they had taken place. For example, many people were raped in religious institutions but the general population did not know about it since the victims had virtually no contact with the outside world and consequently were unable to talk about what happened to them.

The report also highlighted the fact that the number of women reported to have been raped was far inferior to the real number since many girls would only report having been raped if they were pregnant. Otherwise they would let the rapist walk free because they did not want to live with the stigma of no longer being ‘pure’. The number of people who had children outside of wedlock was also questioned by this report since all of those who immigrated because they were ashamed of their situation and those who lived in Catholic Rescue Homes or abroad were not taken into account in the Department of Local Government and Public Health Statistics. This report was not made public at the time and was only made available to the Catholic Church and the Government, who took into account only some of its concerns and suggestions. “By preventing public debate, the political response legitimized a stigmatization of illegitimacy and contributed to the perpetuation of oppressive conditions directly and disproportionately impinging on women while eliding male culpability” (Smith, 2004: 228). Women and children, who were sexually abused, continued to be seen as immoral and to be punished for a crime they did not commit while those who raped them were in most cases not charged with any crime for lack of evidence. For example, in 1941 a girl who had been repeatedly raped by her father between the ages of eleven and fourteen was found guilty because she was understood to have encouraged seduction and was then moved to a Magdalene Asylum (Smith, 2004: 232).

However, the Government did implement one of the report's suggestions on how to help unmarried mothers and victims of sexual abuse. That suggestion consisted of taking those women to homes and asylums, where they would be rehabilitated. Notwithstanding such efforts, this measure did not result in an improvement in those people's lives as very few were ever able to leave the institutions they were put into. The fact that they were in those institutions only made them look more like criminals, thus conforming to what was seen as a self-reinforcing stereotype. The fact that women were kept locked away in these institutions made them more invisible and perpetuated to many the idea that Irish society was pure. For decades the Catholic Church influenced many people to want Ireland to be a pure country, which was both an unattainable and absurd ambition. Yet, for a long time there was the illusion that Irish society was very pure but in the 1980s and 1990s the general population became more aware of what happened in the past. Not only had it all been grossly misleading, as the most respected institution in the country, the Catholic Church, was found to be deeply morally corrupt and obsessed with keeping its own position of power secure. The fall from grace of the Catholic Church came at a time when it was losing its influence over state affairs and the country's economy started to develop. The scandals only accelerated the Catholic Church's loss of power and influence. This loss of influence was clearly registered in the Irish family's way of functioning and these points have been examined in the chapter on "Religion in Irish and Film" as well as in the chapter on "Family Narratives in Irish Cinema".

In the latter chapter, special attention is given to both the maternal figure and to the phenomenon of immigration. Immigration is mostly portrayed as the only way many Irish people had to escape poverty. Films which deal with this topic are usually popular amongst the large number of Irish people living abroad. As there are around fifty million people living in the United States of America who claim Irish ancestry, film companies often produce films on this subject hoping that they will be profitable because Irish people living abroad will come in great numbers to see such films. One of the reasons why there are so many films about Irish family life is that great changes have occurred in it during the twentieth century. These changes had taken place many decades before in other European countries and were mostly the side-products of industrialization. In the 1930s, two Harvard anthropologists, Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball went to Ireland to study what

was believed to be the most common and influential form of social organisation in the country - the stem family. This term is understood by social theorists as meaning the nuclear family consisting of the married couple and their children as well as other family relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, grand-uncles and others of that nature living in the same household. In their report they concluded that the rural Ireland of that time was one of the few out-posts of pre-industrial Europe. They also concluded that the stem family system was the basic family form and that it worked through the selection of one child as the heir of the family's property and/or business and money. Arranged marriages were also important for the perpetuation of the Irish family's way of functioning. The money the husband's family received from the wife's dowry was used to compensate the offspring who would not inherit anything. One of the major problems of this study is that it does not show that some of the patterns described had been changing since the nineteenth century. It also failed to show how immigration played an important role in maintaining the characteristics of the families they described in their report. Immigration became an outlet for all of a family's children who did not manage to get married and/or did not inherit anything. Immigrants also perpetuated the pre-industrial family type by sending their family some money, which was in many cases essential to keep a family farm viable.

When the industrialization process began in Ireland, family structure began to change as it had changed in other European countries. Consequently, the structure of Irish families became more and more like their European counterparts. Industrial societies led families to become smaller, more focused on the married couple and their immediate progeny, cut-off from the surrounding society and more concerned with individual fulfilment. Another change which occurred was that the main aim of families ceased to be to pass on a property or a business to one of their children and began to be to ensure that their children obtained good educational qualifications. This turned children into consumers rather than producers of family income. This resulted in the increase of the cost of children to their parents in terms of commitment and money. Ultimately this led parents to want to have smaller families. As the Catholic Church was losing its power to control families, contraception became more prevalent in the private life of families. This development is evidenced in official statistics. According to the Irish Central Statistics Office, in 1965 the Total Fertility Rate in Ireland was of 4.03 but in 2005 it was only 1.88.

Although this number more than has halved in forty years, it is important to note that in 2005 Ireland still had the second highest fertility rate after France amongst the twenty-seven European Union member states.

In order to show in this dissertation the evolution of how Ireland's society has been portrayed in film, it was necessary to cite films like *Angela's Ashes* and *The Quiet Man*, which have a similar theme but present it in very different ways. Another decisive factor in the choice of the films presented in this dissertation was their popularity. Films like *Nora* (2000), directed by Pat Murphy, are in my view quite representative of Ireland but were seen by few people and so influenced a much smaller number of people in their idea of Ireland. Many of the films used in this dissertation are cinematic adaptations of works written by some of Ireland's most famous contemporary writers such as John B. Keane, Brian Friel and Frank McCourt. Yet this did not happen by choice but simply because many "Irish filmmakers have rooted their film's in the nation's literature" (MacKillop, 1999: VII) and some directors such as Neil Jordan have been writers themselves. Most of the films discussed in this dissertation were produced in the 1990s and reflect the need to come to terms with the sudden changes which have occurred in Irish society. These changes had begun in the early decades of the country's independence and these films reflect the happenings of those times. For a long time Ireland blamed the outside world for its own problems and it was only recently that the general Irish population has begun to accept its share of responsibility for the country's past and present condition. This new attitude led many Irish people to want to know more about the Irish Civil War and about other dark moments in the country's history. At the same time people also began to question the official protectors of the status quo. Both the State and the Catholic Church began to be interrogated and in the end this resulted in many scandalous revelations. The revelations about the Catholic Church have been well documented and portrayed in films such as *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002) and *A Song for a Raggy Boy* (2003), which have both been extensively mentioned in this dissertation. Even though many years have passed since the first scandals came to light, documentaries are still being made on these matters. For example, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2008 RTE1 broadcast a programme called *Flash and Blood*, which consisted of the reporter Mike Peelo talking with the journalist Harry

Browne and his mother Flavia Alaya about their life as a secret family of the Catholic priest, Father Harry Browne.

The Catholic Church itself is still suffering the consequences of these scandals. For example, the Christian Brothers-run schools are going to be handed over to a lay trust and from the next school year (2008-2009) on, it will be the trust which will run the schools. The handing-over of their ninety-six schools is a direct consequence of the publicity surrounding the scandals involving the church and the declining faith in it amongst the general population, which has amongst other things resulted in a reduced number of people joining the Christian Brothers. According to the organization itself, no one has joined the Christian Brothers for quite some time and they currently only have three hundred and twenty brothers, most of whom are over sixty-five years of age. Notwithstanding all the criticism voiced about the Christian Brothers, it cannot be denied that they have played an enormous role for good and ill in shaping the country. Amongst its thousands of students were nine of the nation's twelve taoisigh, many ministers, most of the leadership of Sinn Fein and national broadcasters such as Gay Byrne and Pat Kenny, successive presenters of the highly popular and influential show *Late Late Show*. Of those who attended their schools

few look back on their schooling by the brothers with particular fondness, but most have a measure of gratitude. Eamon De Valera summed up the importance of the schools when he declared that Ireland 'owes more than it probably will ever realise to the Christian Brothers'. Nobody can deny their influence but their ceding of control of schools is surely one of the final nails in the coffin of De Valera's Ireland.

Bielenberg, 2008: 7

On the other hand, the political and financial scandals about former Taoiseach Charles Haughey, TD (member of the Irish Parliament) Liam Lawlor or the businessman Ben Dunne were thoroughly publicised in the media but not dramatized as the scandals about the Catholic Church have been. There are some books and documentaries made about these scandals but they were mostly shown only in Ireland and are not very well known abroad. It is important to note that when many were naïvely starting to believe that corruption belonged to the past and had no place in contemporary Ireland, it made a

resurgence in 2007. Former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern was accused of receiving money from property developers and is currently being investigated on this matter by the Mahon Tribunal – a legal entity established by order of Parliament to investigate particular activities defined in its terms of reference, in this case, suspect payments to politicians and planning corruption in the Dublin area. Although he has not been found liable for anything as yet, the revelations made in the course of this ongoing investigation have led many Irish people to distrust Bertie Ahern, who ended up resigning his position as Taoiseach in April 2008.

Perhaps one day there will be a film which will embrace the theme of political corruption but for now the trend seems to be to make films about contemporary Ireland that overlook exclusively political issues. This trend has led to the production of films whose action takes place in the twentieth-first century and which deal with issues which are congruent with other modern societies. For example, the year of 2006 saw the release of *Once*, already mentioned in this dissertation's introduction and the year of 2007 saw the release of *Garage*, directed by Lenny Abrahamson. This film is about Josie (Pat Shortt) who lived a lonely life as the caretaker of a petrol station in a sleepy rural-town in Ireland. He searches in vain for meaningful friendships while others look down on him and his way of life. Although *Once* won an Oscar and both of these films have won awards in other festivals like the Sundance Film Festival and the Cannes Film Festival, they have been released in very few countries and their commercial anonymity abroad is a far cry from many of the films mentioned throughout this dissertation. The country seems to be ready to produce films which are not focused on the country's history or old stereotypes. However, world film distribution companies, especially those of the United States of America and Britain, which are Irish cinema's main markets, seem to believe that there are not enough people who want to see these kinds of film. There is a risk that a small national film industry with a reputation for quality and taking risks has been pigeonholed exclusively as the producer of either gritty "up-from-poverty" or plucky "out-of-oppression" melodramas. Let's hope that at some time in the future foreign audiences will be as ready to embrace the new Ireland and the stories it wishes to tell, both about itself and about others, as its current citizens are.

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