

BROADCASTING IRISH EMIGRATION IN AN ERA OF GLOBAL MOBILITY

Professor Diane Negra,
Dr. Eleanor O'Leary
and Dr. Anthony P. McIntyre

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RESEARCH TEAM

Professor Diane Negra is Professor of Film Studies and Screen Culture at University College Dublin. A member of the Royal Irish Academy, she is the author, editor or co-editor of ten books including *What a Girl Wants?: The Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (2008) and *Extreme Weather and Global Media* (with Julia Leyda, 2015). She serves as Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Television and New Media*.

Dr. Eleanor O’Leary is a Lecturer in Media and Communications at the Institute of Technology, Carlow. Recent publications include her monograph, *Youth and Popular Culture in 1950s Ireland* (Bloomsbury, 2018). Other work includes, “Emigration, return migration and surprise home-comings in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland” (*Irish Studies Review*, 2016) co-authored with Diane Negra. The project funding for Broadcasting Irish Emigration in an Era of Global Mobility was jointly awarded to Prof. Negra and Dr. O’Leary and builds on research interests in mobility, migration, popular culture, youth and Irish studies.

Dr. Anthony P. McIntyre is a Teaching Fellow in Film and Media Studies at University College Dublin. He is co-editor of *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness* (Routledge, 2017), book reviews editor of *Television and New Media* and is currently finishing a monograph, *Millennial Tensions: Generational Affect and Contemporary Screen Cultures*.

Emma O’Brien is an independent researcher and communications consultant with a focus on policy and advocacy work. With a background in Law (UCC 2005) and a Masters in Social Policy Research (UCC 2015) she has worked for ten years in International Development. Her varied experience includes both programme and policy work in the areas of Children and Young People, Maternal Health, Environmental Protection, and Migration and Labour.

Stacy Grouden graduated with an MA in Film Studies from University College Dublin in 2013, and has since provided administrative support in a variety of units across the university, including in UCD Research and Innovation, the School of English, Drama and Film, and UCD Registry. She has also worked independently as a research assistant, aiding with editing, proofing, indexing, transcription, data analysis and literature review.

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INTRODUCTION

Emigration has been one of the most conspicuous features of post-Celtic Tiger Irish society and culture. The years following the collapse of the economy in 2008 saw a return to mass emigration, which peaked in 2013, and is only now receding to parity in terms of net Irish migration. While Ireland has a long history of emigration, this return to such high levels of emigration has occurred within a unique set of circumstances, in that it follows a period of economic buoyancy and plays out at a time when new media and digital technologies have considerably altered communication and social interactions. Mobile technologies and social media platforms have significantly destabilised traditional broadcasting paradigms and have been both lauded for enabling emerging forms of community unbound by geographical location and decried for fostering social atomisation. Simultaneously, a renewed economic uncertainty and diminished expectations created a new 'generation emigration' of globalised, dislocated citizens and communities.

This project investigates the degree to which young Irish migrants maintain their everyday existence of both being 'at home' and 'away' through new media technologies and their consumption of Irish generated popular culture. A survey entitled 'Irish Media and Irish Migration' was completed by almost 150 recent Irish migrants and examines the media usage and cultural engagement of this cohort. Industry interviews and the creation of a focus group were undertaken to capture both the wider social impact of emigration as well as how such societal changes came to be reflected in Irish broadcasting content. In the first section we examine media texts screened in the last decade which address the theme of Irish emigration as well as how such societal changes came to be reflected in Irish broadcasting content. These texts are disproportionately situated within reality and lifestyle genres and appear for the most part to frame migration as a lifestyle choice, which predominantly leads to upward mobility, increased opportunity, financial rewards and material well-being. The textual analysis section details the programmes analysed as part of this project and points to a pattern of representation within Irish popular culture that consistently downplays the social and emotional costs of emigration while elevating the benefits of being abroad. Even when there is a sense, (in some of the programmes) that sacrifices have been made, they are inevitably justified within a neoliberal framework of resilience and productivity. This new wave of migrants represent a global extension of the home state and this is facilitated more than ever by digital technologies. In the 2015 Marriage Equality Referendum, Irish migrants garnered media attention at home and abroad through a self-mobilised social media campaign wherein journeys home to vote in favour of marriage equality were documented and shared. This civic contribution on the part of dispersed Irish emigrants was significant to the success of the 'Yes' campaign and offered a cathartic moment in which the disjunctures of the previous 7 years were symbolically assuaged producing an optimistic national mood redolent of Thomas Osborne Davis' patriotic lyric 'a nation once again'. In many other ways this event provided an opportunity to consolidate an image of Ireland as a modern, globalised nation that was still thriving and more importantly still open for business.

The "home to vote" online phenomenon is a compelling example of how, as Radha Hegde (2016: 117) has rightly highlighted, migrants "create and circulate a signature global brand" to the benefit of the host nation. The positive affective and political dimensions of the marriage equality referendum and the attendant contributions from the Irish abroad provided only momentary respite for a beleaguered Irish populace in the face of ongoing political impasse as well as a succession of public scandals. However, it is a burgeoning housing crisis that has seen rental accommodation prices far surpass the exorbitant heights of the Celtic Tiger era that presents both a severe challenge for, among others, younger people in Ireland seeking independence beyond the parental home, as well as a significant obstacle to repatriation for many economic migrants of the post-2008 era, despite improved economic conditions in the larger cities of Ireland. Thus, while Ireland is once again an attractive destination for "elite mobile populations" associated with the large multinational corporations that have set up a major presence in the state, the push-pull dynamics that led so many to leave during the Great Recession, have reconfigured to present a set of new conditions wherein emigration remains an attractive option for young people while return is fraught with economic impediments. In summary, the return of mass emigration to certain sections of Irish society in the wake of the post-2008 economic crash cannot be neatly bracketed within this single economic downturn that according to some metrics has since passed, but constitutes a significant, complex and ongoing reconfiguration of the Irish population that warrants analysis from a number of perspectives, one of which is provided in the present report.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Textual Analysis

The first step in the research process was to examine through textual analysis a set of television programmes produced in the post-Celtic Tiger era that focused on the topic of emigration. Textual analysis enables academics to describe and interpret the content of media texts (i.e. a film, television programme or advertisement). Through such analytical work, patterns of meaning emerge that are then identified, interpreted and contextualized by the researcher(s). In this study, a number of television programmes, principally from the reality and lifestyle television genres, were selected for analysis. Those programmes were:

Better Off Abroad (RTÉ, 2015, 2016)

Exiles: Vancouver (RTÉ, 2015)

Garda Down Under (RTÉ, 2015)

Making it Down Under (RTÉ, 2016)

#Missing You (RTÉ, 2013, 2017)

Smalltown (TV3, 2016)

Maia Dunphy: The Truth About Breaking London (RTÉ, 2015)

Crowded House (RTÉ, 2013)

The Undocumented (RTÉ, 2017)

Tastes Like Home with Catherine Fulvio (RTÉ, 2016, 2017)

Irish in Wonderland (RTÉ, 2017)

Each text was examined on its own merits initially before all of the programmes were examined together in order to draw out common themes. This allows researchers to interpret embedded meanings that audiences engage with through the media they consume.

Audience Research

Including an aspect of audience research is an essential part of reflecting how media messages are consumed and reproduced in society. Stuart Hall (1973) has suggested that there are four stages to how meaning is encoded and decoded in media texts. These four stages are production, circulation, consumption and reproduction. While textual analysis can lead to a deep understanding of how messages are embedded (encoded) in media at the stages of production and circulation, audience research is helpful in gaining a fuller understanding of the stages of consumption and reproduction (decoding). It is through consumption that audiences actively engage with the media text i.e. watching the programmes, thinking about or commenting on what they have seen. In the reproduction stage meanings absorbed during the consumption stage shape how audiences approach, understand and sometimes act upon these meanings in everyday life. Given the amount of time and the myriad ways people now engage with media, the Irish broadcasting industry has a considerable role to play in shaping how people understand the world around them. Therefore ethnographic research methods, such as conducting focus groups or carrying out interviews, allow for a greater understanding of how audiences process real social issues, such as emigration, through their interactions with media.

Three research methods were chosen to support and enhance the textual analysis – surveying, a focus group assembly and industry interviews.

The **survey** was circulated worldwide to emigrants who had left Ireland since 2008. There were 133 respondents to the ‘Irish Migrants and Irish Media’ survey which focused on how emigrants living abroad engage with Irish media and cultural productions. There were also several questions relating to their own media use. Surveys allow for the collection of qualitative and quantitative data and we designed the Irish Migrants and Irish Media survey to capture statistics but also longer and more detailed answers from respondents. The survey provided the opportunity to hear directly from the cohort being considered in this project and to reflect their voices and concerns in the overall research.

A **focus group** was carried out to explore the wider social impact of emigration. Focus groups usually include participants who have particular experience to draw on. The focus group for this project was made up of friends, families and relations of emigrants who had left Ireland in the last ten years. In order for the focus group to be representative of the general populace the group was made up of male and female participants, ranging between 18 and 60 years of age and from a variety of social and professional backgrounds. During the focus group key clips were shown from the textual analysis and participants were asked to discuss how these representations compared with their own experiences and understandings of recent Irish emigration. Focus groups offer the opportunity for qualitative discussions that are assisted by the dynamics of the group. Focus group discussions also assist researchers in testing their research theories and approaches.

Industry interviews were carried out to examine how commercial considerations and the limitations of genre inflect the production of television shows on topics such as emigration. The interviews allowed for a greater understanding of how the production stage shaped the content of the programmes being examined in the textual analysis and focus group. For this reason interviews were carried out with stakeholders from two of the shows analysed in this research. The first interview was with George Lee, presenter of the series *Better Off Abroad* (2015, 2016). The second interview was with Karen Moran, the producer of *#Missing You* (2013, 2017). Both Lee and Moran generated the initial ideas for the programmes and were closely involved throughout the various stages of production and thus were perfectly placed to provide a detailed overview and answer questions regarding the creative and industrial ‘backstories’ of these series.

Screening Irish Emigration

SCREENING IRISH EMIGRATION

Introductory Context: Emigration on the Small Screen

Ireland is a country whose economic/social position, one might plausibly argue, has been tied to issues of mobility to a greater extent than many other nations. With its longstanding history of economically driven migration, Irishness has been culturally, socially and economically imbricated with the movement of the country’s indigenous populations. As a result of these historical circumstances, the diasporic Irish populations and hyphenated Irish national identities dispersed throughout the world belie the island nation’s relatively modest size (both in terms of land mass and population)¹. Further, the extensive history of Irish migration comprises a tangible and symbolic infrastructure ensuring that, during times of economic and social duress, a recourse to emigration is almost instinctive in the Irish populace (O’Toole, 2016). The impact of this cultural history of migration is felt both at home and away. The texts considered here indicate how the recent return to high levels of emigration have been presented and processed in Irish popular media.

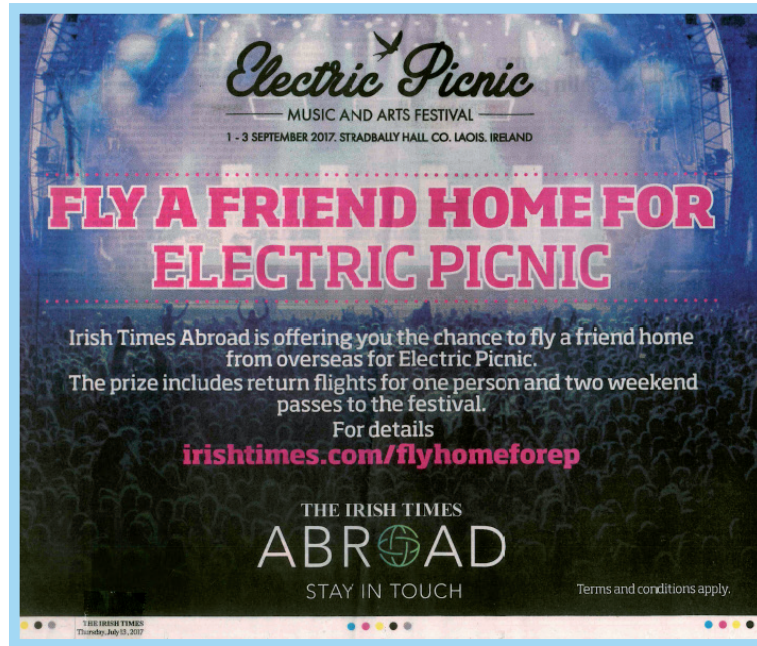
In addition to the historical factors that influence Irish emigration, it is necessary to highlight Ireland’s current position as a low corporate tax haven. Ireland has for an extended period presented itself as a gateway bridging wealthy North American corporations to the Euro zone (Lynch et al. 2017, 264). As well as being a contributor to the migratory drift of human capital, Ireland is a key site of (and facilitator for) the transnational ebb and flow of financial capital.² It is our aim in this project to draw out the connections between these various flows (of human and financial capital, of media texts) and assess the impact on shifting Irish subjectivities and notions of citizenship, both at home and abroad, primarily through a focus on non-fiction popular representations of emigration in Irish broadcasting between 2009 and 2017. The texts analysed include television programmes, advertisements and to a lesser extent viral content and media events.

Post- Celtic Tiger Emigration

Signifiers of the normalization of emigration in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland are regular and rampant in the popular culture field, indeed they are far too numerous for us to fully document here. One example, however, can be found in competition advertisement “Fly a Friend Home for Electric Picnic,” an exhortation to attendees of the popular eponymous musical festival. The implication that the gathering will be enriched by the presence of expat friends from abroad is widely directed and clearly founded on the premise (entirely justified, in our view) that the sort of young Irish people who attend Electric Picnic will inevitably have friends of that kind. It should be noted that other commercial entities ranging from supermarket Lonsdale to homewares retailer Home Store + More have modelled a mode of address that incorporates emigrants and emigration-impacted families. In the case of the former Lonsdale has produced a recipe contest as part of the second season promotion for its sponsored series *Tastes Like Home with Catherine Fulvio* (discussed below) on RTÉ which focuses on the preparation of axiomatic Irish dishes that help to hold in place the emigrant’s relation to home. Home Store + More has produced a two-minute advert depicting Mick, a grandfather who plans to mark his retirement with a visit from his family in Australia and assiduously prepares his barbecue and garden in advance of the visit. Rehearsing the surprise homecoming plot that has been detailed elsewhere (see O’Leary and Negra, 2016) the ad gives us to understand that a vague travel problem threatens to scupper the plan, but in the end Mick is delighted to find the family assembled at his home and they are then treated to a display of his barbecuing skills.

Screening Irish Emigration

Screening Irish Emigration

**Fig. 1:****Fly A Friend Home**

A “Fly a Friend Home” competition speaks to the prevalence of youth emigration in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland.

license fee (Flynn, 2017). This public funding, of course, comes with the expectation that RTÉ’s broadcast content will reflect the specific concerns of the nation, and this includes the return of mass migration and a prevalence of dislocated families. The 2016 press release for the broadcaster’s new season schedules, for instance, highlights three programs (*#Missing You*, *Making it Down Under* and *Tastes Like Home with Catherine Fulvio*) which “(follow) the Irish diaspora abroad.” However there has been a growing realisation that RTÉ’s public service commitment to the Irish nation (and its sizable diasporic population) goes beyond content and must also entail developments in technological infrastructure.

As Roddy Flynn argues in an assessment of the April 2017 restructuring inaugurated by RTÉ director general Dee Forbes, the broadcaster needs to shift from its reliance on what the media scholar terms ‘legacy media’ and embrace new technologies in combination with leveraging cultural specificity:

“The logic of hybrid media ... suggests that, to attract [declining] audiences, the quality, cultural specificity, and uniqueness of that content needs to come to the fore in a way that current funding structures but also RTÉ’s de facto (as opposed to rhetorical) performance of its priorities do not always appear to encourage or permit.” (Flynn, 2017)

RTÉ’s strategic move to a “digital first strategy” will potentially facilitate the leverage (in terms of justification of remit) and capture of an increasingly dispersed population, given the theoretical global reach of a digital platform. The RTÉ Player International (a non-domestic but, at the moment, rather limited version of the RTÉ online service) already constitutes an attempt to monetize this audience through a premium pay model and the diaspora-focused content we track in this article would have obvious appeal to such a demographic.

Irish Mobilities/Elite Mobilities

The economic exigency that has led to a sizable proportion of the Irish population departing in search of work coexists with another, culturally valorised mode of work-related movement, that of the “elite mobilities” of the wealthy. As Thomas Birtchnell and Javier Caletrio (2014: 1) elaborate “Elite mobilities inform cultures of luxury, success and ‘the good life’ and enforce a self-stylization of global elitism founded on hypermobility, meritocracy and entrepreneurial heroism.” Given its rising numbers of international finance, communications and pharmaceutical firms, greater Dublin is increasingly marked by a concentration of what Allison J. Pugh (2015: 47) has termed “high-performance, low-loyalty” professionals whose careers and lives are defined by mobility and a concomitant withdrawal from collective and communal interests. Likewise, a number of Irish expatriates fill a similar role in locations ranging from the UK and Europe to the US, Australia and (increasingly) the Middle East.

Writing about “outward mobility as upward mobility,” Erika Polson (2016: 10), among others, has taken note of a shift toward a professional, middle-class global migration. She contends that, “while the creation of national middle classes was key to the nation-building projects of modernity, the production of the global middle-class identity, through privileged mobilities, is fundamental, economically and culturally, to global corporate expansion.” We argue here that professional middle-class migration is an ambivalent, but nonetheless intensely aspirational norm in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, and a norm that is sustained in part through its overrepresentation in Irish media.

The upward distribution of wealth, characteristic of contemporary neoliberal capitalism, results in a paradox of increased glamour and the generation of ideological doxa that percolate through popular culture with the underlying message that those who have not attained such lifestyles (that is, those marked by a high degree of consumer agency) lack a sufficient level of commitment or entrepreneurial zeal. This contrast was well captured in one Sunday evening’s programming on RTÉ in November 2015 when *Better Off Abroad*, a documentary series depicting the lives of well-off Irish ex-pats screened on RTÉ1, while the state

Our analysis concentrates on the post-Celtic Tiger era of contemporary Irish life: within this timeframe of eight years, it is evident that there have been clear shifts in public feeling during this period. Even in the last three years several profound changes in the geopolitical landscape have caused major recalibrations in the cultural, financial and affective landscape of Irish life and attendant attitudes regarding migration. In particular, the emergence of an acute housing crisis within Ireland, and uncertainties regarding the legal classification of Irish migrants’ working status in countries such as the US, Australia and Britain, as well as a growing sense that Irish national fortune is tied in ambiguous ways to powerful corporate supra-national entities have all served to undermine any optimism regarding the recent economic upturn in terms of GDP and employment growth. While passage of the Marriage Equality Act of 2015 seemed to symbolize a mood of national euphoria and social hopefulness, subsequent developments including the Brexit vote, and the election of Donald Trump to the US Presidency have diminished that sense of confidence, leaving in its place a socioeconomic field marked by heightened realization of the ways in which:

“... the global plutocracy has captured the state and has been commodifying politics – making it part of the market economy, dominated by media experts, lobbyists and consultants – while making democracy ‘thinner,’ in the sense that most people now regard politics as a cynical game no longer worth joining.” (Standing, 2016: 242).

Taken together these developments provide a context in which expectations of what might constitute the good life for the Irish at home and abroad have downshifted significantly, a development that, as we demonstrate, informs a national broadcasting repertoire that has responded to demographic shifts through an increased focus on diasporic topics and themes.

RTÉ, Public Broadcasting and Emigration

In gathering a selection of media texts for analysis, we primarily chose material broadcast on RTÉ, Ireland’s public service broadcaster, due to the unrivalled agenda-setting role it plays in the national media.³ RTÉ’s public service remit is an issue of perennial debate within Ireland, and the television and radio broadcaster is regularly the subject of attack from its commercial counterparts in the national broadcasting field over what is seen as a competitive advantage due to its public funding that comes in the main through a broadcast

broadcaster's sister channel RTÉ2 showed *Dole Life*, an exploration of youth unemployment in the state. As one TV reviewer drily commented: "(S)omeone in RTÉ's scheduling department has a perverse sense of humour" (Boland, 2015).

In the face of striking levels of increasingly well-publicised wealth disparity within the state, Irish political and economic elites have maintained a notable post-2008 adherence to meritocratic ideologies and the precepts of market capitalism. This mode of operation "finds legitimate vast inequalities of wealth and poverty as long as the potential to travel through them for those savvy enough is maintained" (Littler, 2013: 62). In stark contrast to its glamorizing representation of elite mobilities, Irish popular culture typically repressed or minimized compulsory emigration by the young in the period after the global financial collapse. And that emigration has been dramatic in character: since 2009, "the number of those in their 20s in Ireland has fallen by almost a quarter" (Sweeney, 2017; see also Holland, 2015). While governmental bodies have tended not to engage with this stark demographic shift, as Tanya Sweeney (2017) has observed, estate agents have done so in part to justify de-prioritizing starter housing in a turbulent property market that in recent years has seen dramatic price escalation after a near collapse in 2008.

The flurry of programs about emigration on Irish television might be seen to have a belated quality in the context of European television at large that includes such long-running offerings as *Goodbye Deutschland* (since 2006, Germany), *A Place in the Sun* (since 2000, UK) and *Españoles en el Mundo* (since 2009, Spain). The success and longevity of those series certainly illustrates how television shows about emigration invariably have a distinctly national mode of address. This category of television in the UK for instance is capacious and includes programs that focus on second home purchase as well as ones that assess in quite detailed ways whether a family should relocate. In a study of *Wanted Down Under* Jilly Boyce Kay and Helen Wood (2017: 247) parse how a UK program about potential emigration to Australia mobilizes culturally specific expectations. They write that, "The rhetorical move in *Wanted Down Under* works to legitimize the capacity of (white) Britons to move unimpeded across the globe, which of course must be understood as part of a much longer history of empire, colonialism and domination." In his study of reality genres, Jon Kraszewski (2017) offers a model for analysing some of the ways that television normalizes the spatial management of populations under neoliberalism. He contends that US reality programs exhibit a broad commitment to the ideological management of urban expulsion, naturalizing the fact that cities like New York, Boston, San Francisco and Seattle are increasingly home to bifurcated populations of the wealthy and the poor and spaces from which the middle class has been excluded. In an analogous fashion, Irish television formats display an ongoing dedication to the affective management of emigration, depicting it on the one hand in relation to a globalized aspirationalism and on the other as a symptom of a national economy that is still insufficiently neoliberalised. In this re-writing of exigency as enterprise, internationally mobile elites must be carefully differentiated from a younger population whose sojourns abroad carry uncomfortable resonances of the past. It would be important to note, however, that various forms of Irish-inflected popular culture (from *The Lad from Old Ireland* [1910] to *The Quiet Man* [1952]) have sought to provide a guarantee that Irish emigrants and their descendants will always have physical access to their homeland and emotional access to an enduring Irishness.

The grip elite mobilities have on the public imagination is evident in recent internationally successful high-end drama series such as *The Night Manager* (BBC, 2016) and *Billions* (HBO, 2016–) to name but two. This heightened popular interest also fuels the more-modestly budgeted Irish series we analyse here, in particular *Exiles: Vancouver* (RTÉ, 2015), *Maya Dunphy: The Truth about Breaking London* (RTÉ, 2015), *Better off Abroad* (RTÉ, 2015, 2016), *Making it Down Under* (RTÉ, 2016) and *Irish in Wonderland* (RTÉ, 2017). Documenting the conspicuous consumption and aspirational lifestyles of a select minority of Irish emigrants, these series comply with Laurie Ouellette's observation (drawing on Ulrich Beck) that lifestyle television typically promotes individualization as part of a shift away from industrial collectivities. She writes that, "Lifestyle television plays an especially visible role in the process of individualization by offering TV viewers an assortment of customizable templates, models and resources for 'choosing' and assembling their identities and lifestyles."

(Ouellette, 2016: 52). The reality/lifestyle programs we analyse here strongly focus on the creative and digital industries echoing existing tropes of Silicon Valley successes and excesses and emphasising opportunities for creative exploration and career expansion which are repeatedly reinforced by the migrants themselves as unattainable in Ireland.

With a genealogy encompassing popular "scripted reality" shows such as *The Hills* (2006-10) and *The Only Way is Essex* (2010–) as well as Irish productions such as *Fade Street* (2010-11), *Exiles: Vancouver* (2015) follows a set of attractive twenty-something emigrants in the Canadian metropolis. With Canada one of the most popular destinations for young Irish emigrants, the appeal of the series presumably lies in its fantasy depiction of an internationally situated 'good life.' Participants primarily pursue career opportunities in the creative arts, in areas such as fashion styling, music, film/television production, modelling and photography. Although the opening episode of the show suggests that the 'exiles' must support themselves while in Vancouver, only one participant, who finds work as a barmaid while writing songs in her spare time, appears to have an actual income stream. The show clearly masks both the precarity of working in the creative industries and the high cost of living in Vancouver as participants appear to live a lifestyle completely at odds with the level of attainment they achieve during their stay. *Exiles: Vancouver* elevates minor successes while showcasing elite lifestyles with little or no reference to the social or emotional costs of emigration. In this way the show operates to separate the recent wave of Irish migration from its roots in economic downturn and ongoing austerity while upholding the fantasy of elite and easy mobility.

Radha S. Hegde (2016:7) has argued that '(n)ations strategically and selectively include citizens and immigrants who serve as nodes in the flow of capital and as key players in the scripts of a highly mediated global modernity'. Such strategic selectivity is evident in the RTÉ series *Better Off Abroad* (2015, 2016), where economic correspondent George Lee travels to California, Hong Kong, Dubai and London to meet Irish migrants who are model examples of neoliberal success. As he flies over London's financial district in a helicopter, Lee states that 'in the past Irish people flocked to London to escape poor conditions at home. The newest wave of educated Irish are no longer labourers, they are professionals in a city that is the largest financial exporter in the world'. Lee's assessment distorts several features of the recent wave of emigration in eliding the 'poor conditions at home' that were the primary motivation for the movement of almost 150,000 Irish people between 2007 and 2015, and in suggesting that these educated Irish migrants entered the workforce exclusively at an elevated level. With the overall series focusing on elite forms of work and lavish lifestyles including interviews on speed boats and helicopters (the showcasing of material wealth is a primary visual thematic device on the show), it is unsurprising that reviews pointed to a feeling that those who remained in Ireland during the recession had ended up with the lesser deal. In his *Irish Times* review Kevin Courtney queries 'Is RTÉ trying to make us jealous of these prosperous Paddies? Or maybe they are hoping we will up sticks and follow these emigrants to the promised lands?' (Courtney, 2016).



Fig. 2:

Better Off Abroad

Demonstrating the series' reliance on visual movement and rhetorical superlative to suggest the exhilarations of global capitalism, *Better Off Abroad's* George Lee is here pictured in Hong Kong travelling on "the longest outdoor escalator in the world."

Better Off Abroad wants to appear to evenly weigh up the pros and cons of Irish emigration. The seeming neutrality is belied, however, by its exclusive focus on wealth centres like Hong Kong, Dubai and Silicon Valley (there is no *Better Off Abroad* Alberta or *Better Off Abroad* Newcastle). High-flying careers based on canny assessments of market opportunity are heavily preferred in *Better Off Abroad*; the episode set in Dubai for instance notes that there are a number of Irish expat teachers and nurses there but they are only profiled in social settings, not work ones as the episode showcases instead a Porsche salesman and an Irish woman who opened Dubai's first 5 star pet hotel. The core idea of *Better Off Abroad* is that these urban global wealth centres are hospitable to enterprise and creativity in a way Ireland is not. This is put across through tart and reproachful commentary about Irish begrudery, pessimism and exorbitant tax regimes. As George Lee says approvingly of young Aidan Mannion, a sales executive for an American football team, because Mannion left Ireland early "He was never beaten down by an expectation that things weren't going to go well."

Better Off Abroad does acknowledge the loneliness that may accompany emigration and upholds in many ways an ideal of Ireland as a socially healthy, caring nation. (In a remarkable brief sequence in its Silicon Valley episode an interview subject speaks of the perception that an expat would want to return to Ireland if he/she were old and vulnerable while the camera cuts to a homeless man rummaging through a garbage can in California). On the whole, however, these features tend to be subordinated to the notion of a world in which new flexibilities and resiliencies are required and the reassurance that globalization is ultimately not a threat to Irishness.

Making it Down Under (2016) similarly presents a range of high end, specialist careers including flying doctors, equine vets and geologists. Narratives of adventure and opportunity inform discussions and representations of the lifestyles afforded these migrants abroad. Levels of material wealth are certainly less than those depicted on *Better Off Abroad* but both shows consistently downplay the economic necessity to emigrate, highlighting individual resilience and success, and in this way emigrants are conceptualized as extensions of national success on the global stage. In many ways it could be argued that in this context they become the ideal citizen – firstly contributing to economic recovery by leaving and no longer being economic burdens in their homeland, secondly, becoming embodiments of the nation's ability to thrive/survive by excelling in their new location. Hegde (2016: 117) points to a tendency for nations to select members of their diasporas "to create and circulate a signature global brand." Ireland has been particularly invested in this tactic, with former Taoiseach Enda Kenny highlighting during the recession the 'downright dazzling potential of the diaspora' to contribute to Ireland's economic recovery. In the opening sequence of another RTÉ series, *Crowded House*, parents near retirement age sit in their kitchen having breakfast while chatting to a son on Skype who has emigrated to live in New Zealand. From this cosy kitchen scene the parents openly discuss the disruption to their lives of having their daughter, her partner and two children move into their home because the young couple have not been able to find work or affordable accommodation to support themselves. In detailing the emotional and financial cost of this living arrangement it becomes clear the child who has attempted to stay at home has created the greater burden on the family. It is noteworthy that many of the young people who participated in the recent RTÉ documentary *The Undocumented* (2017) articulated a sense that being an illegal immigrant in America was superior to being in receipt of social welfare in Ireland.

The most recent entry to the category of emigration-related programming on Irish television is *Irish in Wonderland* (2017), whose premise is that of an overawed Irish woman trolling magical "elsewheres" of concentrated wealth overseas. In the series' opening episode these are specifically Manhattan and the Hamptons. Actress Yasmin Akram is the figurative "Alice," delighted and agog at the luxury and self-indulgence she finds in elite realms. Interviewing such Irish figures as a luxury car salesman and an "estate agent in paradise," about their proximity and value to the super-rich, Akram carefully delineates the town or county of origin of each expatriate. The series is notable for its blunt articulation of the idea that an exemplary twenty-first century Irishness is comprised of the identification with global capital and most specifically that the Irish have a particular role to play as facilitators of luxury lifestyles. Thus Akram concludes the episode by reflecting: "We can't all be millionaires, but the business of helping the super-rich spend their money, well there's something kind of priceless about that." From this we may extrapolate

two further observations: one, that such a positioning of Irishness accords precisely with the nation's own role as a low tax/no tax hub for transnational corporations and two, that in incarnating exemplary twenty-first century Irishness, Akram is a notable choice to host *Irish in Wonderland*. A Pakistani-Irish actress and comedian, she joins a cohort of high-profile biracial Irish political and economic celebrities that includes Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Oscar-nominated actress Ruth Negga and radio/tv personality Baz Ashmawy. Such biracial figures are placed to symbolize a particular Irish adaptability, released from the de rigeur Irish whiteness of previous generations and showcasing new identity hierarchies based upon the hybrid, fully commercialized self.

The consistency of these representations of the successful Irish emigrant – educated, elite, professional, resilient – helps to hold in place two distinct national narratives. The first maintains that recent high levels of Irish migration differ from other historical forms of economic migration, an ideological necessity given that immigration is a highly contested and divisive political topic. The second stipulates that any loss or cost endured as part of the process of emigration is negated and justified through the migrant's success. This second assumption is upheld through regular reference to the role of new media technologies in reducing the social and cultural distance created by emigration and the fantasy of easy return both of which are evident in the production and circulation of media texts in the Post-Celtic Tiger era.

The long-running *Irish Times* section "Generation Emigration" has been notable for its commitment to unvarnished coverage of the motivations for and experiences of emigration. In general, however, mainstream media are so idealizing in their presentation of emigration that an emotional gap has come to be filled chiefly by amateur media forms such as the surprise homecoming video (detailed in O'Leary and Negra [2016]) which in its (over)celebration of the emigrant's return exposes the previous pain of their departure. At the same time, such videos, through their centralization of a "Mammy's" frequently dramatic reaction, characteristically couch that loss as feminine and irrational, effectively minimizing its importance.

Migration Flows and Resilient Intimacy

Arguably one of the most timely texts screened in Ireland with regard to the post-crash displacement of Irish people was *#Missing You* (2013, 2017), a record of the Skype conversations (the Microsoft-owned company is thanked in the end credits) of various Irish families disrupted by emigration. The program is structured as a linked series of these calls from several different sets of displaced families, with no bridging sequences other than occasional views of still family photographs with overlaid text informing us of the family connections. Foregrounding the centrality of such videoconferencing software to the new infrastructures of intimacy that comprise contemporary "global families" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2014: 1-2) the program provides a valuable insight into the affective dimensions of contemporary migration in a number of ways. In particular, *#Missing You* reveals a tension between the efforts of the documentary-makers to impose a bittersweet narrative on the curated calls that comprise the program material (evident, for instance, in the form of non-diegetic uplifting music used throughout as well as for instance, the imposed narrative trajectory of one 2013 episode which moves toward a number of the families meeting up for Christmas) and the ambivalent feelings that manifest in such communications and which are testament to the affective disturbance such flows of human capital generate.

Depictions of post-emigration connectivity are routinely marked by digital utopianism that manifests itself in fantasies of seamless connection on demand. Such formulations neglect the complex emotional framing around communication technology. As Hegde (2016: 9) points out of emigrants: "the very object that may connect them also signals their precarity, their state of being outside the possibility of connection or communication." Moreover to anyone who has used such videoconferencing technology, an increasingly ubiquitous element of screen culture within both the workplace and the home is buffering that freezes the image and eradicates sound. Buffering itself, as theorized by Neta Alexander (2017: 1), constitutes a "brief

moment of helplessness” that offers a number of insights into the affective and infrastructural workings of neoliberal capitalism. Buffering, she argues, stands as a contradiction to the frequently utopian discursive construction of technological progress that animates neoliberal capitalist life and which occludes the deleterious impact such technologies have on the environment.⁴ A remarkable feature of the documentary given that it is almost entirely made up of such calls is the lack of buffering. Indeed, the only overt instances of such a disturbance in the program happen during the conversations between two elderly siblings, one in Ireland and the other, a priest, in Brazil. In these instances, buffering is portrayed in the context of two older people negotiating the difficulties of unfamiliar electronic devices and the implication is that any disturbance to the flow of image and sound is in part due to technological ineptitude.

However, at various points in the documentary we can detect in the physical comportment of the figures on screen the reaction to such a disturbance in communication. Alexander makes the point that buffering impacts us in multiple ways: “as a temporary emotional distress, as a disruption that triggers various bodily reactions, and as an enduring and unrecognized affective response of anxiety” (Alexander 2017: 19). This is perhaps most evident when watching the conversations between Senan (a husband and father who had to move to Perth, Australia from his native Cork in order to find work, when he lost his job after the economic downturn), and his family (two daughters, a wife and son) at home. The emotional difficulties of the conversations between Senan and, for the most part, his younger daughter Maeve, can be discerned through the excessive use of gesture both display when detailing the minutiae of their daily lives, suggesting a need to compensate through body language the unspoken intimacy that physical proximity imparts.

Arguably, the buffering that is common to contemporary screen cultures and that is an ever-intrusive presence in the intimate communications of “global families” that the Irish migrants depicted in *#Missing You* comprise, can be interpreted as a synecdoche of the affective landscape of contemporary neoliberal culture. Disruptions and fissures of this sort are indicative of a fractured connectivity, a reminder that “The social and emotional costs of involuntary emigration for individuals, families, communities and the wider society are not fully captured by economic analysis of loss or gain.” (Lynch et al, 2017: 262) Throughout the series the barriers presented to fluent and natural communication such as negotiation of different time zones, limits on the amount and quality of time spent together, etc., rise to the fore interrupting the idealization of emigration that predominates elsewhere. While video-conferencing and social media have greatly improved the quality and frequency of communication for emigrants and their families, users remain ‘electronically present but physically absent’ (Lijtmaer 2011, quoted in Banerjee and German, 2010: 26).

Home cooked meals are posited as a means of transcending the physical detachment from home in *Tastes like Home with Catherine Fulvio* (2016, 2017), an RTÉ show that combines emigrant experience with the increasingly popular genre of food programming. *Tastes like Home*’s opening titles set up the premise of loved ones being reunited through the conduit of gastronomy, specifically a meal cooked by celebrity chef Fulvio, as we are told in voiceover “When you’re living abroad there’s always something that reminds you of home... *Tastes like Home* is all about learning ... family recipes, and helping your loved ones recreate them, wherever they are.” Fulvio’s own transnational credentials have been established through her marriage to a Sicilian accountant, as well as her career on television (in programmes such as *Catherine’s Italian Kitchen* (2011) and *Catherine’s Roman Holiday* (2010)) and her guest house and cookery school business, through which she imparts the culinary skills of her husband’s homeland to the Irish. Fulvio’s broadcasting career can be contextualised within both an increased cosmopolitanism in the constitution of the Irish diet that occurred in the late 20th century in tandem with immigration trends that diversified the nation’s population (See Murphy 2014), as well as popular trends in television programming. The popularity of female-fronted cookery programmes following a template established by Nigella Lawson that pairs an attractive quasi-maternal host with cuisine that is aesthetically and rhetorically presented as “indulgent” has seen Fulvio referred to as “Ireland’s Nigella,” although in truth, her presenting style comes across as more bubbly and down-to-earth in comparison with the sultry qualities cultivated by her UK counterpart.

Tastes Like Home is part cookery programme, part foodie travelogue, as in its second half, after she has cooked the meal she will recreate for the loved one abroad, Fulvio travels to the emigrant and is taken on a tour of their new home and usually treated to typical local delicacies. In a marked similarity with shows such as *Better Off Abroad*, the ability of the Irish to thrive in these diverse locales is foregrounded throughout, and we generally see migrants who are comfortably middle class. Various exterior segments are staged to demonstrate the migrant’s mastery of the culture of their new home, such as when in episode 3, Fiona Kennedy from Ranelagh in Dublin speaks a little Basque as she shows Fulvio around the food markets of San Sebastian in Northern Spain.

Structurally, in *Tastes Like Home*, the distance between the migrant and their family and friends is symbolically negated through the celebrity chef’s successful recreation of a beloved dish. Indeed, the mild challenge that Fulvio is set in each episode to recreate the dish from home using locally sourced ingredients presents an exercise in adaptability and maintaining fidelity to one’s own national identity despite being uprooted from home soil. Fulvio’s advice to Fiona Kennedy that “It’s not always easy to exactly replicate a dish or get the same ingredients when living abroad, so sometimes you have to make a few little changes,” seems to function as metaphor for the qualities of adaptability and perseverance that come across as essential for the good migrant in this selection of texts.

While *#Missing You* and *Tastes Like Home* contrast in both their affective and generic qualities, they are united in their (inadvertent) exposure of fractures experienced by the familial and friendship groups impacted by emigration. The telling fact that in *Tastes Like Home* the migrant family member is never reunited with their family at home (only through the conduit of the celebrity chef and her re-creation of a favourite dish), and the technological disturbances that manifest in the video calls of *#Missing You* undermine the narrative of connection both texts purportedly provide. In contrast to the predominantly positive experiences recounted in emigration texts like *Better Off Abroad* such depictions betray a dawning sense that connectedness in the era of globalization may be perpetually fraught.

Permanent Liminality: The Irish Emigration Drama

While emigration and underemployment have been the subject of a set of male-focused films produced in the post-Celtic Tiger period including *Out of Here* (2013), *The Stag* (2013), *Standby* (2014), *The Omega Male* (2014) and *Get Up and Go* (2015), there has been little representation of these themes in the category of Irish television drama which has been dominated by crime series such as *Red Rock* (2015-2016), *Love/Hate* (2010-2014), *The Fall* (2013-2016) and *Clean Break* (2015). A notable exception is the TV3 mini-series *Smalltown* (2016) which is set in a rural Irish village and focuses on the impact of emigration and bereavement. *Smalltown* typifies representational efforts to fuse longstanding narrative conventions with the particular features of the post-2008 emigration landscape. Conor, the eldest son of a rural farming family, is at loose ends as the drama begins – a truculent, hungover household member in early scenes, his parents sit him down in a rehearsed scenario to essentially kick him out of the house (though his father has been coached to use the upbeat phrase “move on” he inadvertently says “move out”). Conor’s girlfriend Sarah agrees that some type of dramatic change is needed, telling him “This place is wrecking our heads. . .Conor, you’re no good here.” In an anguished departure Conor bids farewell to his parents and younger brother and emigrates to London where he does well in a debt-collection business and has a live-in girlfriend. *Smalltown* then deploys the well-worn convention of the dying Irish mother to stage and assess Conor’s predicament, several years after moving away, as his mother Mary, in the late stages of cancer, motivates his return and a tentative reconciliation with the father and brother he left behind. The series places heavy emphasis on the contrastive temporalities of cosmopolitan London and a rural Irish town that is initially represented as a site of economic and social inertia but later complicated through depictions of the loving care Mary receives from the members of her community in the end stage of her life. *Smalltown* concludes with Conor anticipating a return to London yet expressing his sense that he will always be significantly emotionally tied to the Irish

small town from which he originates. The three-hour drama then closes with an on-screen dedication: "For those who have left. Those who have returned. Those who still don't know where they belong." In this way it becomes evident that the series' most pronounced contribution to the popular culture of emigration is its emotionally searching account of the essential in-betweenness of the emigrant. In a sense *Smalltown* harkens back to Cathal Black's 1996 *Korea*, which is permeated with the dread of a young rural man's fear that he will be compelled by his father to emigrate to a Vietnam-era America that uses such immigrants as war fodder. The stakes in *Smalltown* are lower but still richly emotionally resonant. Most critically, the drama's central concern with the loss of a centralizing maternal figure acts analogously to the withdrawal of national provision for young citizens.



Fig. 3:

Smalltown

In *Smalltown* protagonist Conor is depicted as being both financially and creatively constrained by his rural home in Ireland.



Fig. 4:

Just Emigrating

The "just emigrating" sign on Conor's car in *Smalltown* conveys in a darkly humorous style the contemporary rite of passage that such departures have become in Irish rural communities.

CONCLUSION

Post-recession Ireland is characterized by a set of economic and social features including: an Irish banking oligopoly that openly exhibits hostility to its customers, a surge in Irish income volatility and a heightened tolerance for economic inequality. It is a nation marked by the pervasive financial insecurity of a majority of citizens. Flat or stagnant wages, rising transport, utility and housing costs and a scarcity mind-set have been key developments and just because many of these phenomena have been historically rehearsed doesn't make them any less impactful. The continuous emigrant exodus is increasingly overshadowed by discourses of anticipatory arrival related to Brexit with the Irish press providing a steady drumbeat of coverage announcing firms that will or may relocate to Ireland from Britain. In this way the national press for the most part continues to overvalue corporate citizenship over individual citizenship.

Under analysis, it becomes apparent that while the post-2008 displacement of people is a crucial component of many aspects of Irish broadcasting since that time, any sustained exploration of the underlying reasons for the devastation that has wreaked such havoc in the intimate and economic lives of Irish citizens is relatively side-lined. As noted, one exception to this representational pattern has been a cluster of low-budget films centring on the anguish, malaise and melancholy of young Irish males who are contemplating emigration or are attempting to return from long sojourns away. (see O'Leary and Negra, 2016). The one hit that grew out of this category, *Sing Street* (2016), notably sets itself in an earlier period of recessionary exigency and takes a more buoyant tone than most such films.

In our study of the popular culture of emigration we find that television reality and lifestyle series predominantly (and often relentlessly) uphold a commitment to neoliberal globalization as an imperative while dramas and more vernacular cultural forms are licensed to linger on the painful emotional calculus and sacrifice of leaving for abroad. Despite a tendency to de-prioritize outflow emigration in the context of national recovery, until very recently Ireland was still a nation with higher numbers of emigrants than returnees (Kenny, 2017).

While there have been documentaries such as *The Great Irish Sell Off* (RTÉ, 2017) which examine the causes and symptoms of the current crisis in Irish life, a broad swathe of Irish programming promulgates a pervasive rhetoric of resilience (a keynote of global neoliberal popular cultures) combined with a leveraging of distinctive elements of Irish culture that serve to obfuscate abiding conditions of precarity and duress. While employment-focused programming tends to foreground exotic careers largely unavailable in Ireland in a manner that recasts economic displacement as "choice," and "opportunity," other programs such as *Tastes Like Home* open up a space of nostalgic longing for displaced migrants only to demonstrate how the mobility of Irish culture, in this case, culinary, can provide an ameliorative solace. Irish culture, which, as scholars have detailed, was increasingly marketed as both mobile, lucrative and accessible to all in the 1990s and 2000s (Negra, 2006), often to hyphenated Irish populations at a (multi-)generational remove from the homeland, has thus been mobilized in the post-crash era to create a dual-address broadcasting paradigm that improbably seeks to consolidate a monolithic, cohesive and durable sense of national identity.

NOTES

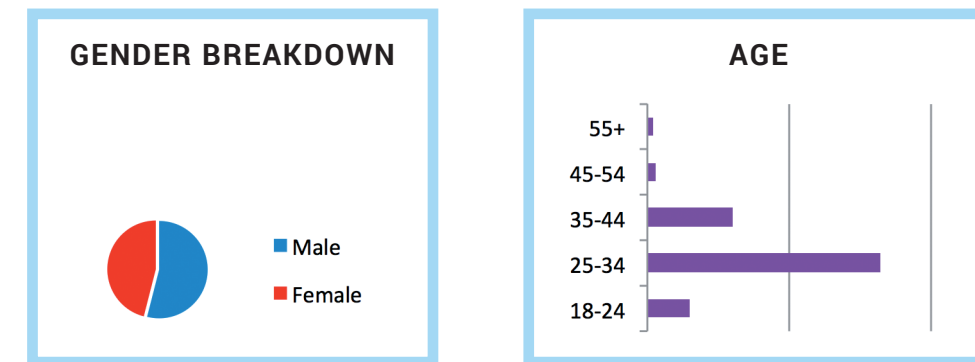
- Both historic and contemporary components of migration in Ireland, including the development of the Irish diaspora, have an extensive and growing literature within established academic disciplines such as History (Fitzgerald and Lambkin 2008), as well as interdisciplinary fields such as Diaspora Studies (Bielenberg 2000) and Irish Studies (Negra, 2006; Moynihan, 2013). In addition, a number of dedicated research institutes within Ireland (North and South) and abroad have been established with a focus on Irish migration, attesting to the scholarly interest in this topic in its various forms as well as the confluence it has with emerging critical paradigms predicated on the analysis of diverse forms of movement. Examples of such critical approaches include world systems theory and its recent offshoots such as world ecology (see, for instance Deckard [2016]), “archipelagic” modernism (Brannigan, 2015), conceptions of the black (as well as the green) Atlantic [Gilroy [2007]; O’Neill and Lloyd [2009]], and what has been termed the mobilities paradigm (Urry [2007]; Cresswell [2006]; Birtchnell and Caletrio [2015]).
- The extreme impact the 2008 global financial crisis had on Ireland has been attributed to the nation’s reliance on foreign direct investment (FDI) from such multinational corporations at the expense of more rooted Irish small to medium enterprises (SMEs). This, it has been argued, resulted in an exposure to risk significantly greater than that of countries with a more diversified employment base (Kirby 2010: 31-49).
- In a 2004 characterization that might need only slight modulation to fit the present era Farrel Corcoran observed that RTÉ “has played a major role in dominating the symbolic environment in which Irish people construct their sense of identity and weave the ‘common sense’ that underpins the everyday life of the community. RTÉ’s social role has been to find ways of ‘narrating the social’ that make sense of their society for viewers and listeners, by drawing from the available stock of frameworks and narratives and marking the boundaries of what is permissible.” (Corcoran 2004: 1)
- Writing about the centrality of the ICT industry to Ireland in the Celtic Tiger era, Sharae Deckard perceptively notes how: “the environmental costs of the concentration of IT sectors in the Tiger economy ... have been relatively invisible in the Irish context, obscured by the discursive tendency to portray the knowledge and creative economies as virtual and immaterial, or even as “green” and less energy-intensive than other forms of production.” (Deckard 2016: 158)

SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY

Demographic Details

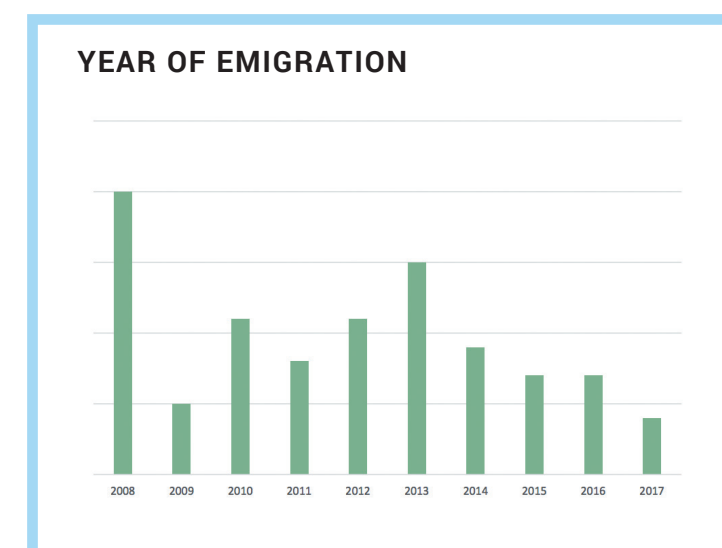
The percentage of male respondents was slightly higher: **54%** male, **46%** female.

63% of respondents were aged between 25-34 years and could be described as “millennials”.



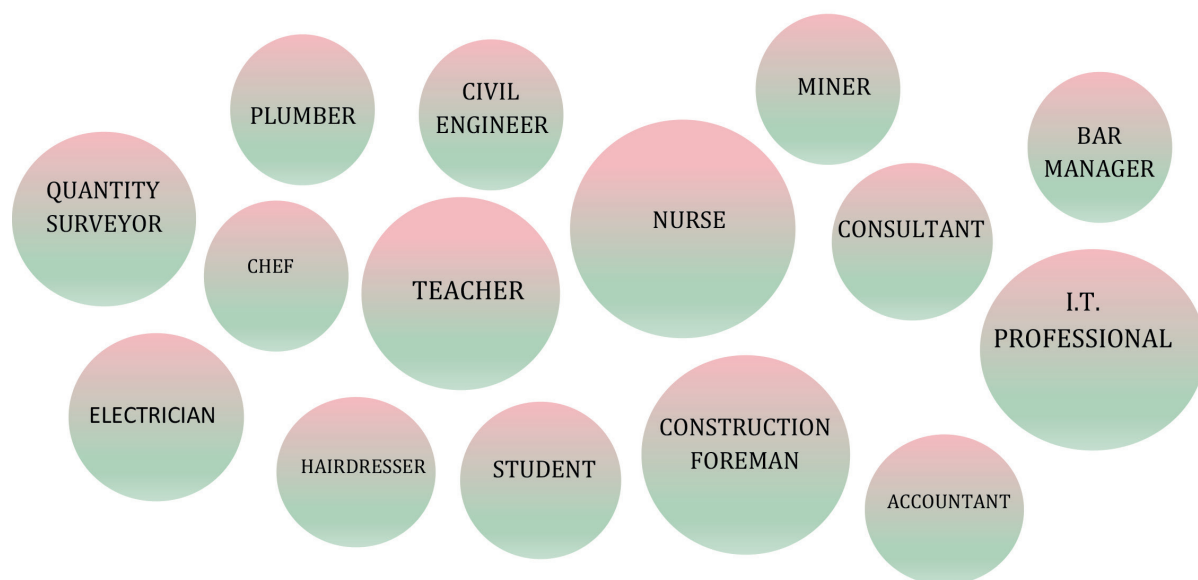
20% of respondents emigrated in 2008, coinciding with the dramatic onset of the global financial crash. 2013 saw another wave of emigration, with **15%** of respondents leaving in that year. The numbers of participating respondents gradually decline from then on, suggesting that this data is in line with narratives of ‘recovery.’

Respondents were highly educated, with **36%** having an undergraduate degree and a further **30%** having studied to Masters’ level. By contrast, less than **7%** had anything less than a Leaving Certificate qualification.

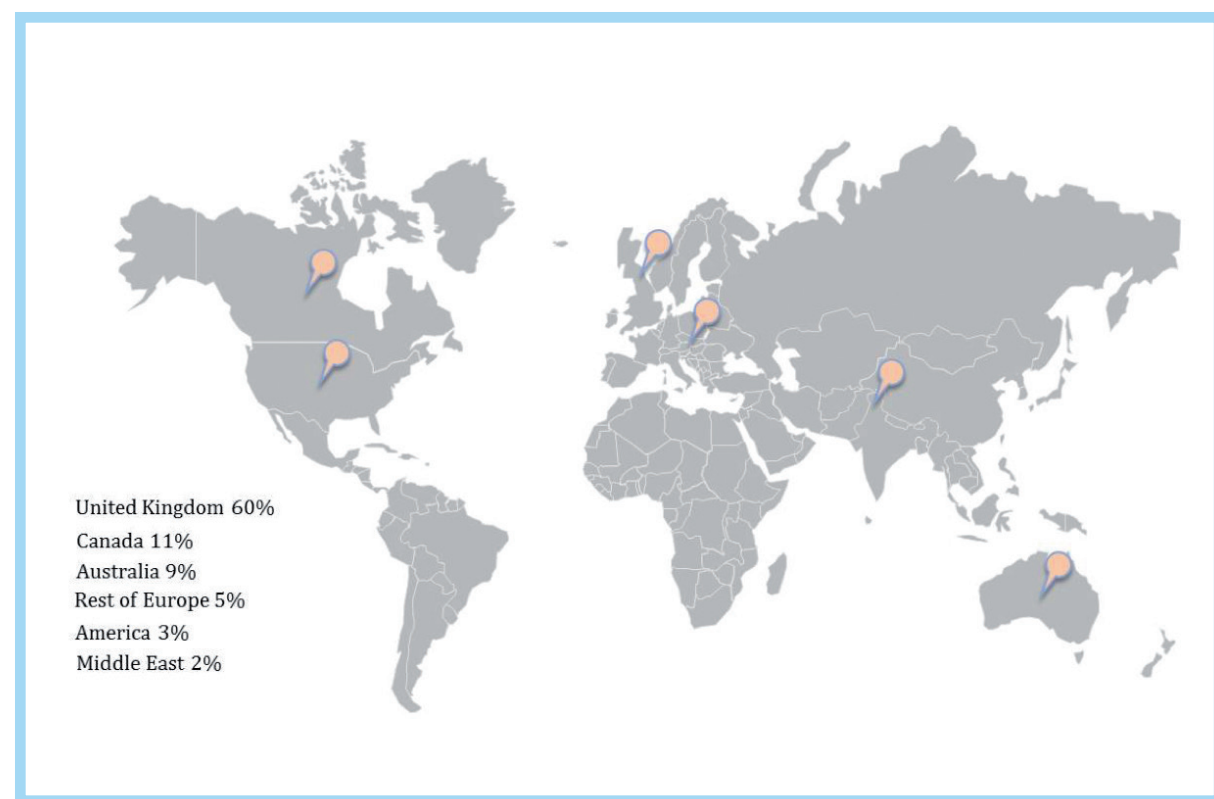


Respondents constituted a mixture of blue, white and pink-collar professionals.

The occupations most frequently cited by respondents were **teacher, nurse, student, electrician**, and **construction foreman**, while **15%** hold management positions in various fields.



The most popular destinations for emigrants were Anglophone territories – the United Kingdom (**61%**), Canada (**11%**) and Australia (**9%**). Other responses indicated that **3.5%** of respondents had travelled and moved to more than one destination since leaving Ireland.



Engagement with Irish News and Media:



All respondents said they kept up to date with Irish news and media, with **48%** reporting they did so daily. **83%** of respondents primarily use social media or other websites (**63%**) to follow Irish news and media content. **70%** also report that their friends and family keep them up-to-date.

The most commonly-used websites were *The Independent*, Joe.ie, thejournal.ie and RTÉ. Respondents engaged with *The Irish Times* site between twice and three times more often than thetimes.ie. Tabloid websites were the least-commonly used by respondents, with **70%** reporting that they never visit *The Daily Mail* site and **88%** stating they never read *The Sun*. (We take for granted in this analysis usage patterns marked by the co-consumption of Irish and UK media.)

62% of respondents use instant messaging daily to communicate with friends and family in Ireland, while **31%** of respondents use videoconferencing technologies such as Skype or the telephone at least a few times a week. **79%** of respondents say they talk about Irish media with friends or family back home, with **18%** saying Irish media is always a point of conversation.

Q. Are there particular media or cultural events which you make sure not to miss?



67% of respondents mentioned Irish sporting events. 41% specified GAA events such as the All-Ireland Final; while 30%* mentioned Irish rugby, including provincial matches and Ireland's participation in the Six Nations tournament



24% mentioned *The Late Late Toy Show*, the same number who mentioned Irish political coverage of local and national elections, referendums and campaigns for the Marriage Referendum and to Repeal the 8th amendment.

*some respondents listed more than one sporting event.

55% of respondents do not listen to any Irish podcasts. The most popular series among those who do are comedian Jarlath Regan's diaspora-themed podcast *An Irishman Abroad* (**19%**) followed by sports podcasts *The Second Captains* (**11%**) and Newstalk's *Off The Ball* (**5%**). Other series mentioned included the *Irish History Podcast*, the *Irish Times Women's Podcast*, and Matt Cooper's *The Last Word*.

The majority (**36%**) of Facebook pages/groups with which all respondents engage are localised 'Irish in' groups – with the most commonly cited group being Irish in London, with **29%** of respondents being members of this group. Respondents also named a range of Irish comedians they follow: Rubberbandits, Viper Higgins, Foil Arms and Hog; as well as more general humour pages like Hurling Banter and Oh My God What a Complete Aisling. These results largely mirror the types of podcasts that people listen to, with Irish comedy and Irish sport being the most popular/sought-out topics.

Q. In what ways do you express/maintain your Irish identity in your new location?



33% of respondents answered that they maintain/express their Irishness by having Irish friends abroad.



14% attend Irish events in their locale, with **11%** specifying that they seek out GAA clubs to play or watch matches.



9% of respondents said their Irish accent is key to expressing their identity, with **5%** also speaking the Irish language.

Inclusion/Exclusion of Emigrants from Irish Culture and Society:

26% of respondents feel included in Irish cultural and social events while abroad.

With social media and instant messaging you never feel that you are too far away from events at home.

[I feel] included because the Internet has made it so easy to hear about what's going on.

I still feel relatively connected to Irish social & cultural events. There are some instances where a "sister" event would take place in an Australian city, e.g. Paddy's Day celebration, Rose of Tralee ball, charity walks (for Pieta House for example)

However, **42%** feel excluded.

The absence of a postal vote in Elections/Referendums makes me feel excluded from the body politic

I can really only watch events/issues as an outsider looking in and don't have any say over the outcome of elections

Miss being at home for sports events. Euro 2016 springs to mind. Ok there was a good gathering of Irish people in the bar to watch the matches but at the end of the day it wasn't home!

Q. Are there ways you think recent Irish emigrants could be better included in Irish culture and society?



35% think absentee voting rights should be extended to emigrants



19% would like greater access to Irish media and dedicated news and social media sites for emigrants.



14% want more support from both the private and public sector in finding housing and employment for returning emigrants.

31% of respondents answered that they do not envision returning to Ireland at all.

28% of all respondents mentioned family as a factor in their decision:

My life is here. My children are Americans.

My children have a wonderful lifestyle here.

When I start thinking of starting a family, I would like to settle back in Ireland.

We have a 1 year old in London and would like for him to grow up closer to family and to go to school in Ireland.

37% mentioned their career as influencing their decision to stay away, or to return:

I hope to return home at some point, but it very much depends on jobs.

Canada has higher paid positions compared to Ireland currently and construction is growing rapidly.

I left Ireland because I couldn't get work, not because I wanted to.

A number of recently-returned emigrants, or those soon to return, were also among the respondents:

I have luckily just secured a job in Ireland.

Just moved back, was over with friends but they all moved back and once they left I tried to stay myself but it just wasn't the same. Home is always home

Family and friends and my dogs are in Ireland. And it's time to leave. I'm actively seeking work, and have an excellent prospect for work at home, should be back within 6 months.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The focus group took place on Saturday 25th November 2017 in the library at the Institute of Technology, Carlow. Ten participants (4 male, 6 female) ranging in age from 18 to 60 years took part. The participants were selected based on their personal experiences of emigration in their family and kinship networks. During the focus group participants were shown four media clips; 2 clips from the series *Better Off Abroad* (RTÉ, 2015, 2016), 1 advert for the retail chain Home Store + More and 1 YouTube clip featuring a UK-based Irish emigrant. Participants were first given a few minutes to write their own thoughts on each clip and to make notes of any observations they had made in relation to these media texts. The whole group then came together to share their thoughts on the clip they had just watched before we moved onto the next media text. An overall discussion was facilitated at the end of the focus group to consider all of the clips and ideas that had been shared during the session. The focus group lasted for one hour and thirty minutes.

The role of the facilitator is to create an atmosphere where the participants can critically decode meanings in media texts. Stuart Hall's (1980) theory of encoding and decoding informs this approach. In relation to how media create meaning in society Hall argues that it is 'possible (and useful) to think of this process in terms of a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments –production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction'. Both the focus group and industry interviews seek to investigate these 'linked but distinctive moments' in which media producers and media audiences interpret and create meaning through their interactions with media.

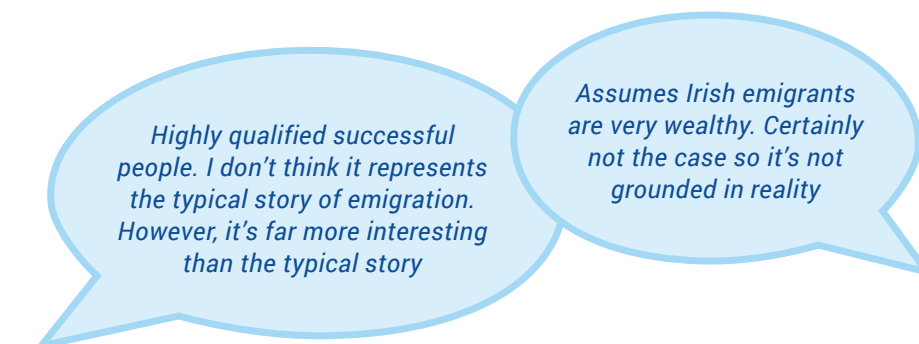
Table 1:
Viewership of the listed programmes by the focus group participants

<i>Exiles: Vancouver</i>	0
<i>Maia Dunphy: Breaking London</i>	1
<i>Better Off Abroad</i>	5
<i>Garda Down Under</i>	5
<i>Making it Down Under</i>	1
<i>Smalltown</i>	0
<i>Crowded House</i>	2
<i>The Undocumented</i>	3
<i>#Missing You</i>	2
<i>Tastes Like Home with Catherine Fulvio</i>	3
<i>Irish in Wonderland</i>	1

Better Off Abroad

Participants were shown two clips from the RTÉ series *Better Off Abroad* (RTÉ, 2015, 2016) and were asked to comment on how they felt the series represented Irish emigration in the last 10 years. The series is made up of four programmes that depict successful Irish migrants living in locations including London, Dubai and California. All of the participants agreed that the series was limited in representing the experience of the average Irish migrant and felt the series focused on an elite, wealthy business class. They enjoyed watching the extravagant lifestyles portrayed in the show and one participant compared *Better Off Abroad* (RTÉ, 2015, 2016) to popular television dramas and reality series such as *Billions* (Showtime, 2016), *The Night Manager* (BBC, 2016), *Riviera* (Sky Atlantic, 2017), *How'd You Get So Rich* (Channel 4, 2017), which showcase the lavish lifestyles of an elite globally mobile class. The group agreed that it was pleasurable to watch programmes about opulent lifestyles that were unattainable to the vast majority of people. No one in the group felt the show reflected any aspect of their experiences of emigration. One participant commented that the show failed to offer any opportunities for comparison to other migratory experiences, citing the fact that there were no teachers, nurses or people working in the service industry presented as part of the show. All of the participants agreed that the people depicted in the show would have been wealthy before they emigrated and continued with this standard of living abroad when such opportunities were more restricted in Ireland due to the recession and subsequent policies of austerity. Everyone in the group felt the title of the series *Better Off Abroad* was a statement rather than an earnest querying of that proposition given the cohort the programme focused on.

Better Off Abroad Participant Comments

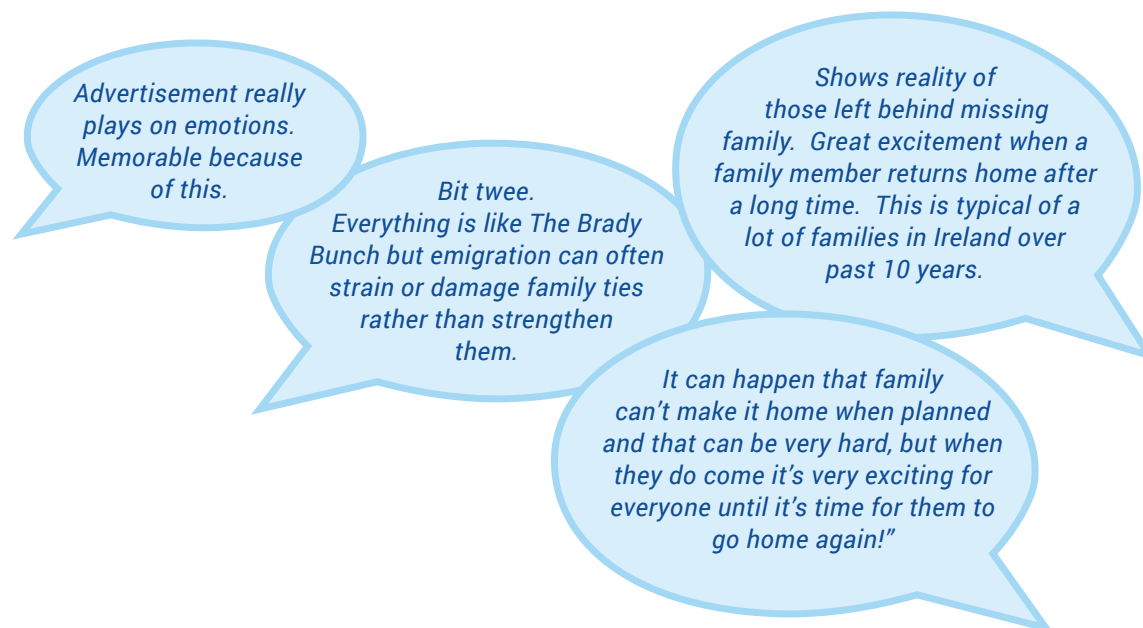


Home Store + More Advert

The second media text the group examined was an advert for the retail chain Home Store + More which was first broadcast in 2016. The advert depicts a man who is retiring from his job in a warehouse. During the advert the man is shown preparing his home and garden for a barbecue. The audience also hears him on the phone to his son in Australia. The son is arranging to come home with his family for his father's retirement party. The man's partner is absent from the advert and the audience is led to presume she has passed away as the man is shown in one scene sitting on a double bed that has only been slept in on one side. In the final sequence the father receives a phone call from his son to say that they are experiencing travel problems and the family will no longer be able to come to Ireland. We see the man sadly leave his place of work before arriving home to the surprise of his son and family all waiting for him in the garden.

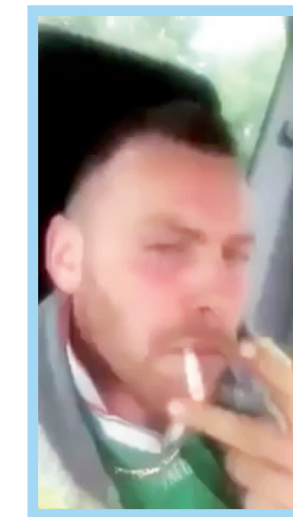
All of the focus group participants were affected by the emotional moments in the advert. They felt that this advert depicted the kind of significant moment often experienced by families who have loved ones abroad; while pointing out that reconciliations do not always take place and that emigrants do often miss family events and occasions which has a huge impact on all of the family members both at home and away. The majority of the group discussed the depiction of loneliness in the advert and felt this emotion was part of the experience of emigration for families left behind. The group discussed how this affected generations differently, with older people more likely to be left behind while younger generations remained abroad. A special mention was made of how many people in Ireland were missing out on relationships with their grandchildren or nieces/nephews who were growing up around the world at too far a distance for regular meet-ups. Everyone in the group felt this advert was relatable to their own experience of emigration especially in a huge fuss being made in the family when an emigrant returns for a visit, such as special foodstuffs being bought and prepared, parties and get-togethers being organized and emotional reunions being held.

Home Store + More Participant Comments



Apple Tax

For the third clip the group were shown a viral video entitled, 'Apple's 13 Billion euro tax bill—here's an idea—'Take it', (Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJOxFHJUb7U>). The clip features James Conway from County Sligo who has emigrated to Great Britain to find work in the construction industry. In the clip Conway delivers a monologue to camera that is directed to the Irish government. He chastises government officials for refusing to take the sum of €13 million which the European Union decreed was owed to the Irish public by the American corporation Apple as a result of illegal tax deals supported by previous governments. The Irish government is currently appealing the 2016 EU ruling, as indeed is Apple, claiming



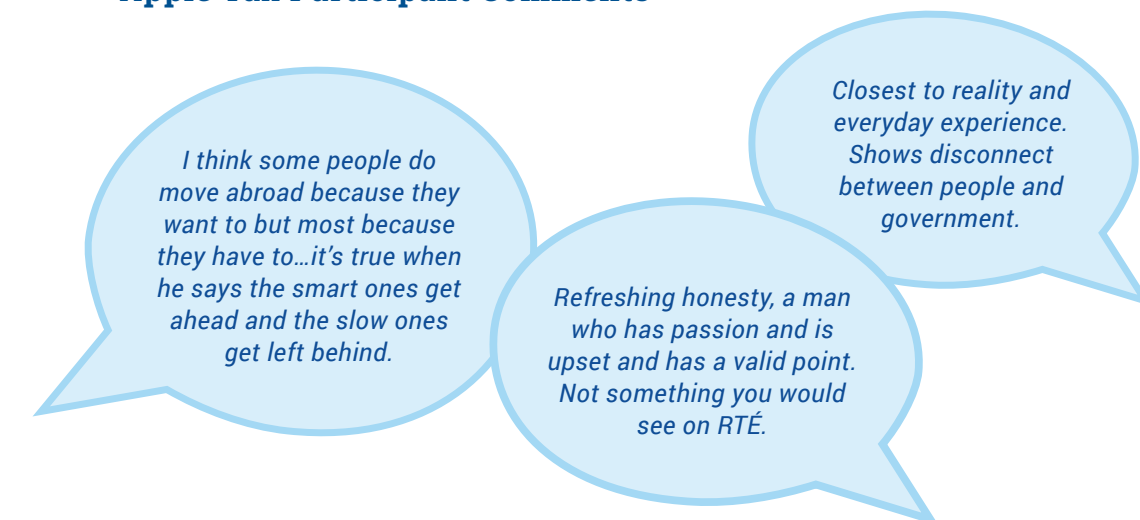
that tax arrangements with the US electronics company were not illegal. Conway asks the government to take the money and to invest it in building projects to facilitate the return of migrant construction workers and labourers who were forced to leave Ireland following the economic downturn in 2008. He delivers almost 3 minutes of an angry speech claiming that people like himself had been badly left down by a government unconcerned with people not working in the professional industries.

Fig. 5:

Sligo man James Conway's monologue directed at the Irish government in the wake of its refusal to seek collection of €13 billion in tax from US tech firm Apple.

The group felt this viral video represented many emigrants who left because they had to rather than because they were searching out better opportunities abroad. They felt such experiences were not well represented elsewhere. Many people in the group identified with the anger expressed in the video and agreed that little had been done for people who were not part of the professional class such as workers without qualifications that facilitated them in acquiring good opportunities and advancement abroad.

Apple Tax Participant Comments



INDUSTRY INTERVIEWS

In December 2017 interviews were conducted with key production personnel from two of the television programmes analysed within the project. George Lee, the presenter of *Better Off Abroad* (RTÉ, 2015, 2016) was interviewed in University College Dublin on 1st December and Karen Moran, the director and producer of *#Missing You* (RTÉ 2013, 2017), was interviewed at RTÉ in Donnybrook on 5th December.

The rationale for interviewing producers as well as audience members derives from both longstanding and emergent methodologies within the discipline of media studies. As media scholar Derek Johnson (2017) has observed, “production can be understood as the link between industry studies and audience studies that recognizes the meaning, communities, identities and above all the power involved in making culture.” (149) Given our aims in this report to investigate the response of broadcasters to the post-2008 wave of emigration within Ireland, such an approach can generate crucial insights into the production of cultural texts that reflect on the societal shifts of these years. Interviewing two production staff with very different roles can thus enhance our knowledge of the factors which shaped the “end product” that the focus groups were responding to and which are the object of analysis elsewhere in this report.

Pitching the Idea

Both Moran and Lee came up with the initial ideas for their respective programmes. *#Missing You* (RTÉ 2013, 2017) and *Better Off Abroad* (RTÉ, 2015, 2016) were very much a response to the specific conditions of the return of widespread emigration in Ireland. *#Missing You* which details the lives of families separated through emigration, was, according to Moran, inspired by her own family situation of having a brother living in Australia and another about to emigrate. George Lee stated that his initial idea for *Better Off Abroad* was to have a programme examining the “issue of the time ... emigration,” although he initially conceived it as an examination of older people who felt it was in their best interests to retire abroad.

Lee made the point that because he is employed within the news and current affairs division, his input was limited in some ways as *Better Off Abroad* was pitched to the documentaries division and therefore this division had ultimate control over the direction of the programme. As a result, the subject of the series broadened its focus from Irish retirees abroad to Irish people abroad in general. Lee acknowledges that an association with glamour and wealth that would make for compelling viewing may have been a determining factor in the choice of location for the series: initially Silicon Valley and Dubai. This corresponds to the responses of some of the focus group participants above who, while acknowledging the show wasn't representative of the vast majority of those who emigrated, did identify it as entertaining.

The more experimental form of *#Missing You*, a documentary comprising filmed Skype conversations, can in part be attributed to the limited cost of production. Moran explained how she was initially working on *#Missing You* as a side project in her own time with a “miniscule budget”, and that the programme was therefore perceived as a low risk investment for RTÉ, despite qualms from some in the broadcaster about the unorthodox approach being taken. The popularity of the initial documentary led to the more significant investment on the side of the broadcaster in making the 6-part series which aired in 2017. This, according to Boyle, took over a year to make and involved editing down over 600 hours of footage into three hours for the six 30-minute episodes.



Fig.6:

Kate, a young participant in the initial *#Missing You* documentary of 2013, video chatting from her home in West Cork to her father, Senan, in Perth, Australia, where he had moved in order to find work as a consequence of the post-2008 financial downturn.

Feedback Received on the Programmes

Both Moran and Lee suggested that the amount of official feedback on how the programmes performed was extremely limited. They both suggested that getting another series, as both *#Missing You* and *Better Off Abroad* did, was the major piece of feedback that people at RTÉ were happy with the programmes they were involved with. Another sign that the programmes did well was if they were given a repeat broadcast, as has happened with *Better Off Abroad* and the initial standalone episode of *#Missing You*. Neither of the interviewees had any sense that RTÉ were gathering their own feedback on how these programmes were being received by the Irish abroad.

While there was not any official response gathering on behalf of the broadcaster, both Moran and Lee described responses from viewers that were directly provided to them. Lee in particular mentioned that the overwhelming response he received was from people who had seen *Better Off Abroad* and who asked him why he hadn't given more attention to those who had stayed in Ireland during these years of austerity and “put the shoulder to the wheel.” In essence, the suggestion was that in celebrating those who had gone abroad and achieved success, the perseverance of those at home was being overlooked. Lee rightly pointed out that this was a fair point and worthy of a documentary, but that it would be a different programme.

Lee also pointed out that he felt that a “better off at home” programme that focused in the non-Irish who have thrived in Ireland would be a worthwhile television project and work well to outline some of the positive aspects of living and working in Ireland that are often overlooked by domestic media.

Production Methods

Moran's approach to the documentary series, as mentioned, comprised a format that the commissioning editors at RTÉ were a little uncomfortable with. *#Missing You's* reliance on the actual footage of family members video calls, and in the later series, other social media content such as WhatsApp messages, marked a departure from the usual documentary practice at RTÉ and Moran recounts having to resist suggestions that she bring a crew to the airport to get a more conventional sense of the leave-taking of these families. She makes the point that such an approach would diminish the authenticity of the piece, as “that's the relationship” these families had, through the video-conferencing technology. Her feeling was that it takes a long time for people to lose awareness of the film crew, whereas with this technology, as the people were so used to it being their standard means of communication, it was easier to access the authentic nature of the relationships between these separated loved ones.

With *Better Off Abroad*, filming technique relied on keeping the details of the interviewees from Lee in order to ensure a spontaneous reaction when the cameras were rolling. This also meant that Lee had little influence on who would be included in the documentary series, or indeed, which cities would be chosen to film in. Moran had a larger influence on the people being chosen for *#Missing You* and indeed recounted the fact that she got in touch with Clonskeagh Mosque in Dublin to query about possible participants for the series, showing a direct attempt to widen the level of representation on the programme.

Timing

The fact that the first episode of *#Missing You* appeared in 2013 and the following series four years later in 2017 meant that shifts in the emigration experience were documented. Moran detailed how the episode filmed in 2012 depicted lots of people leaving for economic reasons, while the second series often showed the impact of people who may have wanted to return but were now finding it difficult due to the conditions of their lives abroad. One particularly gendered aspect she gave as an example was the fact that women who had left and had children with partners from abroad were finding it hard to make the reverse journey. Moran reflected that this dynamic led to the 2017 series being more attuned to women's experience of emigration.

Better Off Abroad also detailed the shifting nature of emigration with its timely episode focusing on London in the wake of the Brexit referendum, when Britain voted to leave the European Union. Lee described the shock felt by the Irish people he encountered in London and the uncertainty they felt as well as the feeling of rejection that the No vote generated. He recounts interviewees telling of how people in their offices were in tears the morning after the referendum, and, as Lee puts it, “the extent to which a psychological relationship about their ownership of what they had in London was just shaken.”

Interview Summary

The sense that both of these broadcasting professionals conveyed was that they were proud of their work on these programmes they were closely involved with and that they were of the opinion these programmes constituted a cultural intervention at a time of specific change in Irish life and society. Both seemed regretful that their respective series were unlikely to be renewed again with a number of different reasons given for this, including the structural shifts currently underway within the national broadcaster, in particular the move to more outsourcing of production and a reduction in permanent employees. The fact that such “austerity measures” are being put in place at RTÉ and that this in turn will most likely impact representation of economically-driven societal change such as the emigration-based programming we examine here speaks to the complexity of the inter-relationship between cultural production and wider economic forces.

Section Conclusion

The three methods utilized in this section – surveying, focus group assembly and the conducting of interviews – have provided considerable insights into how producers and audiences shape and interpret media texts such as television programmes. Drawing the findings of all three methods together the following observations are highlighted as significant to the purposes and objectives of the project:

- National media still play a very important role in people's everyday lives including how they communicate with each other and the topics they discuss even when living abroad. For example, all of the respondents to the survey keep up-to-date with Irish news and events and almost 80% of migrants said they frequently discuss Irish media with friends and family at home, with 20% doing so daily.
- The entertainment value of the programme shaped production imperatives and audience engagement. This is indicated in the kinds of programmes emigrants chose to watch e.g. *The Late Late Toy Show* or sporting events. A clear indication of this was provided in the focus group when participants suggested that although *Better Off Abroad* (RTÉ 2015, 2016) was the most distant from their own experiences of emigration it was also the programme they were most likely to watch.
- From the responses provided in the production interviews, the national broadcaster, RTÉ, seems intent on providing the kind of entertainment value to which the focus groups responded positively. This arguably can come at the expense of a more critical viewpoint that would encompass both the effects of emigration and wider political and societal structures that have led to its significant impact on contemporary Irish lives.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The collapse of the Irish Celtic-Tiger economy in 2008 heralded an age of economic, social and cultural uncertainty. Almost a decade later, this age of uncertainty appears to entail a number of distinctive transitions. The early years of the crisis required a new vocabulary of everyday life, which spoke of bailouts, bondholders and bankers, national debt, negative equity and ghost estates. By 2011, the age of austerity had fully taken hold. Property taxes and welfare cuts were introduced, unemployment and emigration rose rapidly, and class sizes in all the educational sectors increased while special needs supports diminished; all in service of the national debt and the maintenance of a global public image stipulating that Ireland was (still) ‘open-for-business’ (and now cheaper to trade in). In 2013, The Gathering festival invited the diaspora to become tourists in their own country, an irony that cannot have been lost on the 50,000 young people who emigrated that year. By 2014, public protests over water charges, outcries over medical card cuts, homelessness and healthcare, and general public dissatisfaction with almost every aspect of Irish society were being loudly and regularly expressed. Despite the feel-good bounce of the 2015 Marriage Equality Referendum and some indications of economic recovery, the government failed to gain a majority in the 2016 general election and a political status quo is currently being maintained through a confidence and supply agreement between the country's two major parties.

In pointing to the considerable shifts playing out in the post-Celtic Tiger sociopolitical environment, we maintain that Ireland has now fully shifted into a market society governed first and foremost by the profit imperatives of global capitalism. So many changes have taken place in Ireland's circumstances and outlook that there remains a feeling that much is yet to be reconciled. In less than a decade, for instance, Ireland has gone from national discussions of ghost estates and surplus housing to a conspicuous homelessness crisis that currently stands as the greatest social challenge in the state. This situation gives rise to greater levels of bewilderment when one considers the 2016 CSO statistics which show that there are over 183,000 vacant buildings in the country (Melia and Kerrigan, 2017). Emigration has been the most consistent feature of post-Celtic Tiger society. Although there has been an overall decrease in the levels of emigration since 2014, there was a net loss of Irish nationals from the state in every year since the economic downturn began in 2008 until 2017 (CSO, 2017). The first aim of this project has been to examine how these demographic losses have been processed through popular culture. Our analysis has shown that most of this representation has appeared in reality TV genres and that programmes in that genre and some dramas have contributed to the normalisation of Irish emigration, presenting as an extension of the neoliberal values of resilience, individualism and entrepreneurship so familiar to citizens of this state. In much of the media we have analysed, patterns of representation that connect Irish emigration with elite mobility have dominated in shows like *Better Off Abroad* (2015, 2016), *Exiles: Vancouver* (2015) and *Irish in Wonderland* (2017). Glossy portraits of lifestyles in exotic locations and displays of the material wealth and career success gained through leaving Ireland, generally function to negate any sense of loss for the successful migrants represented in these shows. The social and emotional costs of emigration to the individual and society are widely downplayed. Even though shows such as *#Missing You* (2013, 2017) and *Tastes Like Home* (2016, 2017) betray the loss of loved ones through emigration, such programmes at the same time suggest that these losses can be overcome through greater technological engagement and cultural adaption. This project has demonstrated that Irish popular culture remains an important part of the lives of migrants both in terms of maintaining their Irish identity and through their everyday communication with family and friends. While technology can play a significant role in facilitating these ties to home it is limited in many ways and the research has clearly underlined that while technology allows emigrants to be ‘digitally present’ they remain for the most part ‘physically absent’ (Lijtmare 2011 quoted in Banerjee 2010: 26).

The impact of being physically absent for significant family events seeps through much of the media we have analysed. A particularly established trope is that of the surprise homecoming video which appears across viral videos, advertisements, reality television and news media (O'Leary and Negra, 2016). This

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compulsively repeated scenario allows the cathartic moment of return to eclipse the pain and disjuncture of leaving. It is perhaps significant that despite the considerable focus on the topic of return migration as the economy began to recover a programme is yet to be developed on this theme. Irish migrants and their new lives abroad on the other hand are still prominent in the commissioning and scheduling of television programmes up to the present moment. With Ireland currently ranking as the country with the highest number of its citizens living abroad among all of the OECD countries, so national television schedules are reflective of this reality for thousands of Irish families. As this situation continues and there appears to be little political will to address ongoing emigration (especially in relation to youth emigration) the second aim of this project has been to understand how broadcasting strategies in the national setting might better address this cohort of global citizens.

Responses from migrants suggest that greater access to Irish culture and political life from abroad is highly desired. Although there are some mechanisms to facilitate this, such as RTÉ International, the service is highly limited in what it offers at present. As many migrants have been forced to forfeit their right to live and work in Ireland due to limited opportunities and exorbitant living costs in Irish cities it seems to be especially remiss to exclude them from full participation in national culture where that desire is expressed. Their continued investment in the state is reflected in the popularity of Irish-themed social media content and has also been clearly expressed in those limited moments and events such as The Gathering, the Marriage Equality Referendum and the repeal of the Eighth Amendment.

The engagement of a dispersed population in domestic affairs and Irish life indicates a continued emotional investment among diasporic Irish subjects with their home nation. The following recommendations provide a means of ensuring greater reciprocity on the part of Irish broadcasters in order to nurture Irish diasporic citizenship and foster acknowledgement of the experiences of those returning from abroad:

- A greater reflection in terms of broadcast content of the diverse forms of Irish migrant experience, particularly in terms of class and race
- While we recognise the public appetite for upbeat depictions of successful migrants, a tempering of the programming trend that uncritically celebrates the wealth of a minority who have achieved financial successes abroad is necessary
- The research indicated that over 80% of migrants engage with Irish media content online. Domestic content can be difficult to access due to paywalls associated with broadcasting platforms. Further development of internet-based broadcasting would allow for greater inclusion of Irish migrants in Irish media, current affairs and cultural events which migrants have indicated are significant to them in maintaining their sense of Irishness abroad and their links to family and friends at home.
- Sustained outreach to diasporic populations from programmers detailing crucial changes in Irish political life
- An attendance to the travails and experiences of the returned migrant in the context of a highly exclusionary domestic rental and housing market

