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Kevin Rockett, PhD, received a doctorate for his thesis, 'Cinema in Ireland', from the University of Ulster at Coleraine. He is co-author of *Cinema and Ireland* (London: Croom Helm, 1987; Routledge, 1988) and is completing a study of the reception of Anglo-American cinema in Ireland, which includes a history of institutional film censorship. He has been Chairperson of the Irish Film Institute since 1984.

Aspects of the Los Angelesation of Ireland

by Kevin Rockett

Saving the Nation 1

Within a short time of beginning his seventeen year reign as Ireland's first Film Censor in 1924 James Montgomery (1) declared that the greatest danger to Ireland came not from the Anglicization of Ireland but from the Los Angelesation of Ireland. This was a surprising admission given that Montgomery himself was closely allied with the conservative cultural and political leadership of the country which took power in 1922. During the previous four decades, especially since the foundation of the Gaelic Athletic Association in 1884 and the Gaelic League in 1893, enormous efforts had been expended in trying to establish a distinctive Irish culture behind the barriers of language, recreation and religion as a bulwark against the perceived threat of the anglicization of Ireland. The various nationalist cultural, sporting, religious and political movements which were finally focused in a united front in 1918 carried into the new state an agenda which sought to introduce through the state apparatus, especially through the school curriculum, the cultural policies of the pre-independence movements. That this approach was crude and stultifying, as well as a failure, is not in doubt. What is, perhaps, of greater interest is that rather than being a popular movement Irish cultural nationalism had served as an ideological cement in the decades prior to independence in the attempt to unite all social classes behind a non-contradictory Irishness. Thus, the middle class conservatives who took power in 1922 were only too well aware that at a popular level its cultural nationalist project was unlikely to be embraced by large sections of Irish society, especially those in urban areas. For these groups, foreign popular culture, especially the already established popular cinema, was more attractive than the limited and often repressive offerings of the regenerated 'native' Irish culture (2).

The agenda for this conflict had been set a decade and more before independence with the production of increasingly challenging dramas from both the European and American film industries. It was no coincidence that the first demands for controls on film content in Britain and Ireland originated with the production of longer dramatic films from about 1910 onwards and the reduction in importance of the earlier (and usually innocuous) travel and news films. Also, a shift occurs in audience composition in Ireland, in a reverse of the trend in Britain and the USA, from middle class patronage of films to a larger working class cinema constituency.

With American film hegemony in Europe well underway by 1912 formal film censorship began to be introduced. A voluntary system of film censorship in Dublin was formalized, ironically enough, in 1916 when Dublin Corporation appointed film censors. By then World War 1 was providing the conditions which allowed the American film industry to reach a position of dominance internationally. With the European film industry decapitalized or debilitated by war, Hollywood extended its grip on foreign markets. As Hollywood's capital base expanded, its ability to refine and develop cinematic production values allowed for increasingly sophisticated production techniques and subject matter.

Cinema brought into Ireland, a largely rural and traditionally Catholic country, images and ideas which had already been the subject of controversy in the popular print media (3). Whether it was pseudo-biblical films and their 'pagan' sexuality, or modern urban life with extra marital affairs, prostitution, crime or general decadence, cinematic drama stood in marked contrast to official religious and political attitudes as expressed through the Irish cultural nationalist movement. And while Irish film-making went through a vibrant and politically radical phase during 1916-20, Irish film-makers from this period, such as John MacDonagh and Fred O'Donovan, steered clear of cinematic subjects which reflected a modern urban sensibility.

The 1920s intensified and extended this division between Irish and foreign popular culture. The freedom and expressiveness associated with, for example, jazz or American clothing styles in the 1920s were more attractive to many Irish people compared with their Irish counterparts of traditional music and homespun yarns even if the economy did not provide the surplus to fully enjoy them. What the cinema displayed was the whole range of these officially frowned upon pleasurable activities

1. James Montgomery (1870-1943) was appointed Official Film Censor by his friend, the Minister for Home Affairs, Kevin O'Higgins, a few months after retiring from the Dublin Gas Company, where he had worked for 37 years. He had no previous involvement in film. He was also a close friend of other political leaders, especially Arthur Griffith, and Irish literary figures, including T. C. Murray, who wrote his obituary in the *Irish Press*, and Lynn Doyle, who wrote an appreciation of him in the *Irish Times* after his death.

Behind his well regarded talent as raconteur and wit lay a deeply conservative and religious man. He characterised, for example, the post-independence realist literature as 'the new lecherature'. By the time of his retirement as Film Censor in 1941 the office had acquired a position of social status and tributes were paid to Montgomery by President Hyde, politicians, literary and artistic figures, and even by members of the film trade.

2. See chapter, 'The Problem of "Evil Literature"', in Louis Cullen's *Eason & Son: A History*, (Dublin: Eason & Son, 1989), which is the most complete account to date of the progress of the anti-popular literature campaigns of the Catholic vigilance committees during the 1910s.

3. The argument is not that there is some simple dichotomy between urban and rural dwellers in their attitude to foreign popular culture. It is merely that those in urban areas had much easier access to such imports. Indeed, attempts to 'preserve' and regenerate native Irish culture did not originate within so called "traditional" communities but came from middle class urbanites, especially in Dublin.

and consumable goods.

And, as the cinema in Ireland by the early 1920s came overwhelmingly from Hollywood, Montgomery's warning against it was a timely reminder that the success of the cultural nationalist project could be fatally undermined by allowing Hollywood 'values', that is, consumerism as the new ideology of consumption in America, to challenge traditional economic and cultural interests in Ireland. As Bishop Gilmartin put it in 1927:

The cheap foreign products of machinery have taken the place of the solid and lasting work of the Irish hand. Instead of milk and porridge, we have repeated doses of strong tea and white bread. Instead of socks and stockings made of Irish wool, we have foreign importations of imitation silk to minister to the vanity of our girls. Instead of visiting and story-telling, there are cinemas and night-walking, often with disaster to virtue. Instead of Irish dances we have sensuous contortions of the body timed to a semi-barbaric music. Instead of hard, honest work there is the tendency to do little for big wages (4).

Bishop Gilmartin's strictures implied, as many other members of the Hierarchy stated explicitly, that prohibition was the preferred way to deal with these imports. As cinema was often the most visible expression of these values it was repeatedly attacked. Rather than develop an Irish national cinema as a counter-measure to Hollywood by aiding indigenous film production through the provision of facilities, production finance, quotas or a redistribution of surpluses, both profit and taxation, from film exhibition, prohibition of the imported cinema remained the primary state policy for film for many decades. As a result, Montgomery, as the agent of the state protectionist apparatus, pursued his task with great vigour such that by the time of his retirement in 1941 he had banned more than 1,800 films, more than half of all the films banned during the almost seventy years of Irish film censorship. Much to the distress of some commentators, both lay and clerical, the Film Censor's brief did not extend to restrictions of a more generalized kind such as of images of American consumerist and pleasurable values, especially when placed in an urban setting. Instead, the specific prohibitions focused on any deviation from traditional Christian morality such as divorce, illegitimacy, extra-marital relationships and abortion. In this the Film Censor was supported by members of the Censorship of Films Appeal Board, two of whose nine members have always been prominent Catholic and Protestant clergymen.

Montgomery's successors continued this cultural protectionist policy. In the post-World War II years, when more socially and sexually challenging cinemas were emanating from Europe and the USA, the new themes, (delinquency, rape and homosexuality, to name just three areas of controversy), remained suppressed until well into the 1960s. But, it was one of the peculiarities of Irish film censorship policy that it determined that all films released should be seen by all age groups. Despite bannings and cuts young Irish cinema-goers were sometimes seeing what was forbidden to their age group in other countries. Horror films in particular seem to have aroused little concern amongst censors, and films with extreme violence were treated more leniently by Irish censors than their British counterparts. On the other hand, adults were denied access until the mid-1960s to many films, especially those with any overt sexual content, readily available in Britain or the USA with over 16 or over 18 certification.

With the absence of an Irish national cinema, which is defined here within the narrow confines of continuity of indigenous fiction film-making, except for 1910s and from the mid-1970s to the present, Irish cinema experience has come overwhelmingly from Hollywood. The subject matter of Irish cinema has been restricted only in part through the limited sums available to Irish film-makers. Even when funds were available from private or state sources concern with the past took precedence over the present, as in the 1930s fiction films, *The Dawn* and *Guests of the Nation*, or interest in the rural was favoured over the urban in, for example, the accomplished documentaries of Patrick Carey. Since Irish films never accounted for more than a small fraction of the films released in Ireland, when we speak of the film culture in Ireland or the formation of an Irish national cinema, we have to examine in the first instance how Hollywood was received here (5).

It has been suggested (6) that the values displayed by Hollywood cinema were in democratic contrast to the hierarchical social organization or traditional elites seen in, for example, British films. Hollywood's attraction for British audiences was marked by an awareness of a lack of social stratification in American films and, thus, it was

4. Bishop Gilmartin, 1 August 1927, quoted, *Irish Catholic Directory*, 1928:596.

5. As Thomas Elsaesser observes ('Chronicle of a Death Retold', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 54: 641, June 1987:166): 'Hollywood can hardly be conceived, in the context of a 'national' cinema as totally other, since so much of any nation's film culture is implicitly 'Hollywood'. And Hollywood is itself far from monolithic'.

For a discussion of national cinemas in relation to cinema audiences see Andrew Highson ('The Concept of National Cinema', *Screen*, 30: 4, Autumn 1989) who argues (p.36) that 'the parameters of a national cinema should be drawn as much at the site of consumption as of production of films' and suggests a refocusing on the 'activity of national audiences'. The importance of such a project in Ireland is evident from the fact that even now 70 per cent of the films shown in Irish cinemas are American and 15 per cent British (1988). In earlier decades 90 per cent and more of the films released in Ireland were American. The rest were mostly British.

6. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith ('But do we need it?', in Martyr: Aute and Nick Roddick, (eds), *British Cinema Now*. London: BFI Publishing, 1985: 157-8) discusses the differing responses of British cinema audiences to American and British cinemas in a manner which is resonant of how Irish cinema-goers viewed both these cinemas and Irish films: The hidden history of cinema in British culture, and in popular culture in particular, has been the history of American films popular with the British public. The strength of American cinema was never just economic, and cannot be attributed to the lower cost of American product offered for export. Certainly economic strategies aimed at capturing the market played their part, but the basic reason for Hollywood's dominance was artistic and cultural. The American cinema set out in the first place to be popular in America, where it served an extremely diverse and largely immigrant public. What made it popular at home also helped make it popular abroad. The ideology of the American cinema had tended to be far more democratic than that of the cinema of other countries. This in part reflects the actual openness of American society, but it is above all a rhetorical strategy to convince the audience of the virtues and pleasures of being American. Translated into the export arena, this meant a projection of America as intensely - if distantly - appealing. When matched against American films of the same period, their British counterparts come across all too often as restrictive and stifling, subservient to middle-class artistic models and to middle- and upper-class values. Even American society comedies were made for the American masses; their British equivalents, whatever their makers' hopes, were not just about but for the upper class and were therefore esoteric to their main potential audience.

thought, in American society. The alienation felt by British working class audiences at its own cinema's upper class characters often led them to prefer Hollywood films to their own. This sense of a democratic levelling in Hollywood cinema also would have been appreciated in Ireland where British accents alone, regardless of a film's content, would have alienated a large section of the population. Nostalgia for America, where so many Irish had emigrated, would, too, have drawn an affinity with the perhaps not widely separated fantasy of the films and the popular misconceptions of the grandeur and democratic nature of the country. Hollywood provided an image of America, no matter how far removed from social reality, which, nevertheless, served as a powerful contrast to the lives of want and misery of a great many Irish people in the decades after independence. The Bishops were only too well aware of the potential for social disharmony in the imported cinema but they sought to use it for other ends.

If we listen to the often crude formulations of the Irish Catholic Hierarchy, as articulated through their Lenten Pastorals, the cinema was to be blamed for anything from a lowering of morality to emigration. However, we need to look more closely at the Bishops' statements and seek a primary motive for their opposition to foreign cinema in Ireland. Before independence all Ireland's wrongs could be displaced on the external enemy, the imperial power. After independence when there was an economically distressed society, civil war and post-independence disillusionment, foreign popular culture and the cinema in particular came to fill the void as the new external target. As we have seen, the seeds for such a campaign had been sown long before independence. In the Free State the cinema could now serve a particular function. If it was characterized as adversely affecting a renewal of Irish nationality and culture, as the Bishops alleged, then it could be deemed a threat and serve to unite all social groups. In this way, as in the pre-independence period, internal homogeneity could perhaps be re-established and internal contradictions papered over. Of course, the Catholic Hierarchy, which drew its references from the most conservative anti-modernist and reactionary ideologies, was opposed to cinema per se.

Despite the Bishops' protestations and the severity of Irish film censorship at particular junctures, especially from the 1920s to the 1950s, it is probably true that Hollywood cinema provided an attractive and perhaps liberating alternative to official ideologies for Irish audiences. Indeed, the experience of cinema-going, i.e. Hollywood cinema-going, was so central to many people's lives that what most people know about Irish cinema history is that the Irish were the greatest cinema-goers in the world. This image of Irish cinema-going is a myth, as it is not borne out by the statistical data on Irish cinema audiences available since the 1920s. Whether we compare per capita cinema-going in Ireland with Britain, Australia or the USA, to choose three English language countries, we find at the peak of the popularity of the cinema that Ireland was way down the league table for audience visits. Even if we examine Dublin, which accounted for up to 60 per cent of Irish cinema box office, it too compares unfavourably with many similar cities. The sad fact is that the famous Dublin cinema queue was often for the cheapest priced tickets, as the depressed economic conditions of the Dublin working class precluded them from admission to the more expensive seats. Yet, cinema-going was the feature of the lives of a great many people as is attested to by both oral and written testimonies.

What Irish cinema-goers saw and as importantly did not see defines the nature of film culture in Ireland from the 1920s to the 1960s. Despite the prohibitions there still remained an excess of meaning and of pleasure in these mutilated Hollywood films. Here was a life, albeit of 'fantasy', cyclically relayed in familiar genre films, which was as much a part of an Irish Cinema as those indigenous artisanal and semi-professional films which only very rarely reached Irish cinema screens after the advent of sound, and before new production parameters emerged in the 1970s. Here were aspects of modernity denied in the official culture: the fast-paced excitement of an urban car chase in a 1930s gangster film only needs to be contrasted with the idealization of the rural world, which was such a feature of official ideology during the early decades of independence, to realize that urban dwellers in particular were more likely to identify with the former before the latter. These issues can now be related to film production policy in Ireland.

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Cultural protectionism predated economic protectionism, which was the central feature of Irish economic policy in the 1930s. It was in large measure the failure of Irish capital to develop an indigenous industrial base despite protectionism which led to the embracing of foreign capital by the administrative and political apparatus by the 1950s, at the time the internationalization of capital and the creation of the global market was gathering pace. The policy of attracting foreign capital to develop an Irish

film industry had evolved much earlier: from the late 1930s. However, in the 1930s and 1940s cultural protectionist concerns impeded this development. As early as 1930 even Irish film producers choosing to shoot in Ireland were obliged to submit to the Revenue Commissioners a 'complete copy' of the scenario, details of shooting schedules, including locations and contents of films, before negative cinema film could be imported. Any alteration in the 'proposed itinerary or scenic order' was to be 'promptly notified' to the Commissioners (7). These regulations were ostensibly for assessing the conditions to be complied with by an Irish film production company or individual making a film with Irish citizens domiciled in Ireland when negative cinema film was imported, (Ireland had no factory for producing negative film or, indeed, a processing laboratory), but the extent of the regulations indicate a strong interest in the content of films shot in Ireland even by Irish people. Foreigners were treated with even greater suspicion.

In 1937 the Abbey Theatre sought to build on the success of the Abbey Players in the two John Ford films, *The Informer* (1935) and *The Plough and the Stars* (1936). While on tour in America, New York's biggest theatrical group, Shuberts, proposed making films in Ireland with the Abbey Players. The Abbey sought assistance from the Irish Government but President Eamon de Valera cautioned against the proposal in an internal memorandum:

What will be necessary to keep carefully in mind in reaching a decision is the type of film which will be produced. We must guard against the danger of the enterprise being used for the production of plays which would be regarded as hurtful from the national point of view (8).

No Synge or O'Casey, please. T.C. Murray, perhaps; after all he was a member of the Censorship of Films Appeal Board.

A decade later Bernard Shaw and film producer Gabriel Pascal teamed up unsuccessfully to try to establish a film studio in Ireland. Pascal agreed not only to accept a nominee of Archbishop McQuaid of Dublin to be appointed to the proposed studio's board but offered the power of veto to the Irish state and other local representatives over the content of films to be made at the studio (9). It was an inauspicious beginning for a project seeking to attract foreign film producers to Ireland, but at least it recognised the local political and ideological realities.

This cultural protectionist approach to film-making in Ireland was in marked contrast to the non-ideological, internationalist, employment-generating and export-earning function of a film studio as promoted by the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Sean Lemass, since the mid-1930s. In this contradictory context of potential Irish film production Lemass's commitment to a mixture of private and state investment in a film studio proved impossible to achieve until the complete dominance of the policy of embracing foreign capital at a national level in the late 1950s. Thus, in 1958, when he opened Ardmore Studios, Lemass highlighted the export earnings and employment potential of the studios (10). By then cinema was in decline and the original policy of the new studios was to make films for television. When television provided insufficient work for the studio facilities financial incentives were introduced to encourage foreign film producers to make feature films in Ireland. Thus, the production context at Ardmore conformed to the model of an off-shore industry with little or no benefits for an indigenous film industry or Irish culture. With the exception of the six year period 1981-87 during which the Irish Film Board was in existence, this has remained the policy for film production of all Irish governments.

It was not until the 1970s that indigenous film-makers began to set part of the institutional agenda in the social and cultural spaces opened up by the new internationalism. As a result, they began to produce, on 16mm initially, what they perceived as cinema films, or films which sought to engage with a cinematic sensibility (11). With the establishment of the Film Board in 1981, almost exactly sixty years after the foundation of the Irish state, the first significant sums were allocated by a state agency to indigenous film-makers. And what did they do with that money? Many of them made socially and formally critical films which pandered neither to the traditional image of Ireland as a rural idyll or the established cinematic forms of mainstream commercial cinema. They, in effect, bit the hand that fed them. And for that they paid dearly with the abolition of the Film Board in 1987. Though this decision has been characterized by the Taoiseach and others as a response to the poor financial return on investments by the Board, there can be little doubt but that antipathy to the films supported by the Board played an important part in the decision. Indeed, the Taoiseach reported that the more 'commercially-minded' film producers supported the

7. *Statutory Rules and Orders*, 1930, no 49, issued 3 June 1930, by order of the Revenue Commissioners.

8. Eamon de Valera to Sean MacEntee, Minister for Finance, 25 November 1937. Correspondence in Department of Taoiseach file S13914A, State paper Office.

9. For a discussion of the Shaw/Pascal and other studio proposals see chapter 4 in Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill, *Cinema and Ireland* (Croom Helm, 1987; Routledge, 1988).

10. As the *Irish Independent* (13 May 1958:2) put it in a headline: 'Minister Opens Films Studios; Aimed at Export Market'.

Let it be thought that Sean Lemass was anything other than a cultural conservative, despite his abandonment of economic protectionism, it is worth recalling what he told the *Fianna Fail Ard Fheis* in November 1959, less than five months after becoming Taoiseach in succession to de Valera. In opposing a motion favouring the grading of films, he said that

'We regard these (film and book censorship) regulations as being exactly in the same category as other regulations which prevent the sale of putrid meat and contaminated milk.' (Quoted, *Irish Times*, 12 November 1959).

So much for the great moderniser!

11. See *Cinema and Ireland*, op. cit., chapter 5, for a discussion of the independent fiction films made in Ireland from the mid-1970s onwards.

move. We should note, however, the parallel with RTE in the debate on the Broadcasting Bill, 1990, and recall how the much-abused metaphor of the surface of a playing field was used both to support 'commercially-minded' broadcasters, while simultaneously seeking to gut RTE for its often independent assessment of national social and political policies.

In place of the Film Board has come some limited tax concessions to Irish corporations as an inducement to invest in films. More likely sources of film finance are British and American producers. While there is nothing new about this the films supported by foreign film producers have not in the past and are unlikely in the future to include the type of challenging films made in the 1980s. Irish corporations are unlikely to be any different. Indeed we find that projects are being abandoned or modified to conform to the new regime. How long has it been since some Irish film-makers made features films? Pat Murphy in 1984; Joe Comerford in 1988; Cathal Black in 1984 ... It is censorship by another name.

There has been an important philosophical change in Irish society in recent decades which is underpinning these and other cultural transformations. The inward-looking cultural nationalism of earlier decades is being replaced by a form of outward-looking liberal humanism. Occasionally as debilitating as previous versions of Irish nationality and culture, the earlier concerns are replaced by a universalism which, too, seeks to excise internal social, cultural and economic difference. Behind the apparently 'modern' facade of a commitment to equality, liberalism and a censorship-free society, not to mention European integration, lies another means of reinforcing the status quo. In this process the task of saving the nation has undergone a significant transformation.

Just as in the past economic and cultural protectionism was promoted as the means of saving the nation, so, too, in a complete reversal since the 1950s, has the embracing of foreign capital in Ireland been deemed the means whereby the nation is saved (12). What we see in this process is that the previous attempts to disguise our dependence on the metropolitan centres have been stripped away. And, while at earlier periods the Los Angelesation of Ireland was to be welcomed as a cultural liberation, such has not been the case in recent decades, as the repressive ideologies of Hollywood reinforce our own home grown ones. Behind Hollywood's 'democratic' values may lie sexist, racist, and other misrepresentations.

The national celebrations which greeted the success of *My Left Foot* at the Academy Awards was both understandable and instructive given Ireland's long dependence on Hollywood cinema. Yet, a national cinema built on the adulation of Hollywood, as was the case in early 1990, is one of which people in a peripheral society such as Ireland should be deeply suspicious. Indeed, the centre, in this case Hollywood, is re-generated from the periphery where the production of very particular types of 'universal' narratives are used to re-confirm the dominance of the centre. Thus, an Irish film which travels largely with the aid of British finance (13) to Hollywood and is embraced by it must necessarily leave its social and cultural specificity at home. Indeed, if criticism is to be accorded not so much to *My Left Foot* but to its reception both as a film and awards-winner, it is that little attention was paid (beyond commending the 'brilliance' of the acting, direction and script) as to why it won two Oscars. To accept its success as worthy is not in doubt. The more interesting and intriguing questions are: Why this film? Why Ireland? Why 1990?

To answer these questions further queries need to be raised about its win and its reception in Ireland: Does the film present views of Ireland which liberal humanists think represent the country as a modern European society? Or is it merely the celebration of an Irish-international film success at last? Or does it do something else from the perspective of the centre? Does it, for example, reinforce an image of Ireland (gritty, optimistic, for sure) but which is also backward, (retarded!), and which confirms Ireland's peripheral status even in the modern world. Those members of the Motion Picture Academy who voted for *My Left Foot* did so with the brilliance of Daniel Day Lewis' and Brenda Fricker's acting in mind, but, at another level, they were aware that there was a less flattering image of Ireland which *My Left Foot* reinforced.

The film does, however, illustrate the sea change in national ideology during the past three decades. Its universalist sensibility helps confirm the replacement of the earlier inward-looking cultural and political nationalism with an outward-looking liberal humanist ideology. This allows, as in so many aspects of Irish life in recent decades, for a displacement of what is particular to the Irish social formation on to a non-specific universalism. As a result, with British and American investment in Irish films replacing Irish money, we are likely to see more sanitized or neutral versions of Ireland produced for cinema and television. All, of course, in the name of

12. For a discussion of how Lemass justified the economic and ideological u-turns made by Fianna Fail following the embracing by that party of 'internationalisation' see Susan Baker, 'Nationalist ideology and the industrial policy of Fianna Fail: The evidence of the Irish Press 1955-72', *Irish Political Studies*, 1, 1986. In this paper Baker shows that

'Sean Lemass's argument in favour of the (1958 economic) programme, because it was fundamentally a nationalist argument, involved both him and his party in a major contradiction. This required the use of a nationalist ideology, including appeals to patriotism, anti-partitionism, and the language movement, to justify an anti-nationalist policy rooted in the notion of free trade' (p.66).

13. The origin of the funds for *My Left Foot* was the subject of considerable misinformation at the time of its Oscar success. The Taoiseach declared in the Dail that 'it was not British financed. The British, as is usual, are claiming that it was British financed, but in fact it was not' (21 February 1990). The Taoiseach went on to state that the film's producer, Noel Pearson, was the source of his information: 'He expressed to me his considerable indignation that the British were not alone claiming that it was British financed but that it was, in fact, a British film' (ibid).

If a majority of the funds come from one particular country then a film can rightly be claimed to be from that country. Economic power can and does determine anything from a film's script to its distribution pattern. In the case of *My Left Foot* at least 60 per cent of the film's budget was British, while all of the cost of the second Noel Pearson/Jim Sheridan film, *The Field* (1990), was British. To ignore or obscure the national origin of a film's budget is to deny that crucial connection between the material basis of film production and the nature of the film projects supported. This is especially important in the relationship between metropolitan film producers and those on the periphery. The deliberate obfuscation surrounding the funding of *My Left Foot* only served to allow the Irish state to abdicate responsibility for film support as it hid behind the mask of 'the more professional and commercial approach' to film-making, as the Taoiseach characterised the post-Film Board regime (ibid).

'commercialism'. In this way, Ireland will be more fully integrated within the international English-language commercial cinema and television market. For whereas Hollywood was the *bête noir* of earlier decades we are now told at the highest level that we should emulate Hollywood, even, God forbid, rediscover our missionary role and change it.

I have argued that the popular cultural products of the metropolitan heartlands can have, in certain circumstances, a positive impact on a cathartic society, while at another juncture, such as the present, the opposite may be the case. We remain reminded that those on the periphery continue to be in a subordinate position to the core. And, a dependent society is always vulnerable to buffeting from the centre. At the same time I have been suggesting that the exploration of internal contradictions is always a fruitful area of investigation but that the displacement of a country's 'wrongs' on to an external enemy can prove inhibiting in a peripheral society. In this regard the recent practice of engaging with a 'universalist' sensibility often reconfirms earlier nationalist ideologies of displacement. The practice for alternative film-makers in peripheral societies must be to engage in what is necessarily a subversive culture of deconstruction which is aimed as much at their own societies as those of the filmic products of the metropolitan centres.

Note: A shorter version of this paper was presented to the International Communication Association Conference held in Trinity College, Dublin in June 1990.